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

KAREN JO McISAAC

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial Interview Date: September 9, 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Entered Foreign Service	1984
Consulate Maracaibo, Venezuela Vice Consul	1985-1986
Economic Bureau, Department of State Economic/Commercial Officer Food Policy	1986-1987
Economic Bureau, Department of State International Economist Energy	1987-1989
Russian Language Training, Foreign Service Institute	1989-1990
Operations Center, Department of State Watch Officer Nuclear Risk Reduction Center	1990-1991
Embassy Moscow, Soviet Union Political Officer	1991-1993
Bureau of African Affairs, Department of State International Relations Officer East African Affairs Somalia Task Force	1993
Bureau of Intelligence & Research, Department of State Analyst West African Affairs France & the Benelux	1993-1995
Bureau of Political Military Affairs, Department of State	1995-1997

Political Military Affairs Officer Foreign Military Sales and Financing	
Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor, Department of State International Relations Officer Human Rights	1997-1999
Consulate General Guayaquil, Ecuador Consul	1999-2000
Nonproliferation and Arms Control, Department of State Political Military Affairs Officer	2001
Haiti Desk Officer, Department of State	2001-2002
Dominican Republic Desk Officer, Department of State	2002-2005
Venezuela Desk Officer, Department of State	2005-2006
Embassy Grenada, Grenada Principal Officer	2006-2009
Tobago Desk Officer, Department of State	2009-2012
Retirement	2012

INTERVIEW

Q: Where did you hear about us?

McISAAC: About six months ago one of the people I was working with told me that she had heard about an oral history project for Foreign Service officers but did not know anything more. I considered looking into it at that time but got busy with other things and forgot. But when I went into the retirement and job search program Chris Sibilla from ADST was one of the speakers. I followed up after I retired.

When I was chief of mission in Grenada, I started an oral history project with several of the local schools though it really did not take off until after I left post. I convinced St. George's University to donate 45 recorders. They weren't expensive ones but were a boon as the Public Affairs Officer at Embassy Bridgetown was dismissive of the idea and declined to provide funding. At one school, several students did not return the recorders. When I left Grenada, I was rather discouraged as I had spent a year and a half with little visible result. But after I left, according to the locally employed staff working with me on the project, students in one of the schools completed a whole series of interviews. George

Grant, the local journalist enlisted to download the interviews from the recorders to save them and to play them on his show – he streams on the radio, every Sunday morning for three hours – played a sampling of them. I'm not sure of the technology he uses.

Q: I understand. These things have gotten beyond me.

McISAAC: The airing of the interviews reportedly generated a lively community response. Grenada does not teach the history of its revolution in its schools. As a result, the younger generation tends to be ignorant of the who, what, and why of it. When I started the project, I focused on other issues, encouraging students to speak with their elders about all manner of issues, to learn more about Grenada's past. I thought dealing with other issues and working their way up to the revolutionary period would be easier. But ultimately, the students took the bull by the horns and asked pointed questions about the 1979 – 1983 revolution. So, the project did what I hoped it would, to generate a discussion and educate young Grenadians. How much follow up will take place will depend on subsequent chiefs of mission.

Q: When you were there, we will get to this later, but I am just curious. Had the New Jewel Movement, it was dead by this time.

McISAAC: Yes, the New Jewel Movement, or NJM, was gone. It died with Maurice Bishop on October 19, 1983. That said, the politics in Grenada are fascinating for such a small country, and continue to be informed by NJM's actions in the 1970's and 1980's. The politics of the revolutionary period actually inform current politics. In fact at the moment[1] the government is falling apart because of the two feuding factions within the ruling party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC). What was interesting to me, arriving in Grenada in 2006, and listening to the political discussion, with its direct references to slights and quarrels dating from the revolutionary period, was to hear a perspective we do not get in the United States. Our focus was, and continues to be, invariably on why Reagan initiated military action in Grenada. The United States didn't need to go in as there was no visible threat to us, though theories abound about the possible importation of Soviet missiles and other threats. U.S. discussion of the revolution is centered on U.S. politics when in fact Grenadians didn't start down the revolutionary road because of us. They traveled down it because of their own internal political realities. Even the CIA Fact Book gets it wrong which annoys me. I tried to get the language corrected for three years. In the Fact Book they actually ignore that there was a coup d'état in 1979. The Fact Book's text states that in 1983 a bunch of communists took over Grenada and therefore, Reagan called for military action to get rid of them. It was clear that no one at the CIA bothered to look at the actual history of Grenada; they never changed the text. The reality was far more complex and local.

Q: Yeah, because I mean there is quite a bit of history before that, there was some pretty nasty stuff.

[1] This portion of the history was recorded prior to the February 2013 election, in which the opposition swept all seats, tossing the feuding factions out on their ears.

McISAAC: Oh yes. Another interesting fact that I had not known was the existence of MJM mutual support groups in the other Caribbean countries. I recently spoke with a former labor leader from Dominica, no from St. Vincent and the Grenadines. He worked in Dominica. He told me that based on New Jewel Movement activities in Grenada, former Prime Minister Patrick John in 1981 unsuccessfully attempted to foment a coup, against the then sitting Prime Minister, Eugenia Charles, with the aid of U.S. mercenaries. In 1983, Charles was supportive of U.S. military action in Grenada.

Q: Oh yes, she was. She is dead now.

McISAAC: Yes she passed away, but she was supportive because of what nearly happened to her. There is a lot more to the history of Grenada's revolution than we in the United States appreciate.

Q: Well what I want to do is you find I work quite deliberately.

McISAAC: Which is a good way to do it.

Q: When we started this thing we did what every group does. OK, you were born so and so, and when you became ambassador what did you do. And all that other stuff. Now that other stuff is an integral part of what we do. But I do want to get when we get to Grenada, let's talk about the whole history that you are familiar with about what happened there. We will get that so if someone is really interested they can come and get your account.

McISAAC: While I was in Grenada, the Grenadians re-opened the sentencing of the guys who were "on the hill" as they call it, in prison for involvement in planning the killing of Bishop. That was a huge controversy while I was there, but there are a lot of different aspects to it. But yes, I mean starting from the beginning is appropriate.

Q: OK, well as we go, and when I get you into it, it is an important piece of our interest in the area and well worth going into. Anyway as I go through this we will go from A to B to C to D in your life. If we are at D and all of a sudden you remember something you have forgotten back in A, you can say oh yes and I forgot to mention. In other words because this can all be rearranged later. In fact you will be given the task of rearranging it. We will send you the transcript usually via computer and you can fiddle with it any way you like. But we do hope that what you will do is expand. Because in oral history except for maybe family members or something most people aren't going to read the whole thing. They are going to be interested in sections of it including your early life. People looking at growing up in the 20th century so we try to get as much as we can. We have got 1700 of these things already. It means an awful lot of people talking about what they did as kids.

Today is 9 September 2012. Interview with Karen Jo McIsaac. And you go by people call you Karen Jo.

McISAAC: Yes.

Q: OK, Karen Jo, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

McISAAC: I was born December 19, 1954 in Glen Cove, Long Island. We actually lived in Huntington, but I gather the doctor used the hospital in Glen Cove, so that is where I was born.

Q: OK, let's talk about your family. Your family name is…

McISAAC: It is McIsaac. I am married but I did not take my husband's name. I married late and it seemed far more complicated to change at that point. My husband's name is Oscar Torres. One of my uncles suggested we change our last names to McTorres, though nothing has come of that.

Q: Ok, let's take the McIsaac's first and then your other side. What do you know about them?

McISAAC: Well some of it is myth. Some of it is fact as far as I can tell. That is one of the things I have done a little bit of research on, and I want to do more. My father's family was originally from Scotland. My mother found several old pieces of embroidery stitched by family members.

Q: God bless our home.

McISAAC: That sort of thing but the name on them is McKissock. This is where we get into myth because I have been told my great grandfather was the one who came to the U.S. from Scotland. The story goes that since he was a minister, he took Isaac from the Bible and put the Mc in front of it. My own rudimentary research into our family tree seems to indicate that it was my great-great grandfather who moved to the United States from Scotland, but I need to do more digging. Regardless of who migrated, we appear to have several different names floating around. It may be that something happened where either clans intermarried or for some other reason the name changed. I don't know for sure. The family settled in the Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania area where my great grandfather worked as a minister as well as a gentleman farmer.

Q: And the Presbyterian faith?

McISAAC: Sort of a precursor to the Presbyterian faith. The family ended up as Presbyterians but from what my father told me it sounded like it was a little more Calvinist than the modern Presbyterian faith. My great grandfather and great grandmother had three or four sons. My father's mother did not keep in touch with the family after my father's father died. I did not even know the extent of that branch of the family until I was in my teens when I started asking questions. As a result, I have only a sketchy knowledge of it. My grandfather died in 1930 when my father was four years old. They lived in New York City. My father was born in Brooklyn in 1926. His father, Robert Milton McIsaac,

who was called Milton, worked for Morgan Bank. In 1929 they were in the process of merging Morgan Bank and Guaranty Trust. There was an outbreak of influenza and my grandfather died of that. His coworkers took his pension and invested it for my grandmother, June Zatella McIsaac. They had three children. My father, Paul, was the youngest, Robert was the middle, and Maude was the oldest. Zatella also raised two of her nieces when one of her sisters died. She wound up with five children and raised them on whatever she received from the investments. She also taught piano and German until World War II when she had to drop the German as it was not politic to admit to speaking the language.

Q: Do you have any knowledge of the education? Did your grandfather or grandmother go beyond normal school or not?

McISAAC: They all had a college education. My father's family on sides focused on education, both for girls and boys. Zatella's father at one point was a professor at Keuka College on Keuka Lake, which is one of the Finger Lakes in upstate New York. I'm not sure where my grandfather Milton went to school. Again, this is something I want to explore further. Milton was actually born in Selma, Alabama because in the summers my great grandfather taught at an academy for African American children there. While Milton went into banking, at least one of his brothers, Archibald, was a professor, first at Princeton and then at Syracuse. That is one thing in my family, on both sides, higher education was considered important for any family member to pursue. I know that it was expected that my siblings and I would go to college; it was understood that our parents would pay for undergraduate education and if we went further, we were expected to pay for it.

Q: But your grandmother was the one who ended up raising all these kids.

McISAAC: Yes. She moved them to Ithaca, New York because, according to my father, she felt that with Cornell University and Ithaca College both located there she also would be able to find students to teach piano. Of course, it was cheaper than living in New York City. She also tutored in German.

Q: Where did she pick up the German?

McISAAC: Her family were from some part of German speaking Europe, I think. Again this is something I hope to research more now that I am retired. Her maiden name was Barrus, which doesn't really give much of a hint to where they were originally from. But she had the German and so she taught until WWII when people looked askance at anybody who spoke it.

Q: We needed people to deal with Germany.

McISAAC: Zatella was an interesting character. She was also one of the most difficult people I have ever met in my life. She had to have a lot of guts and courage to pick up and move five kids, two of whom weren't her own, to a place she had never been to and

then to work to earn enough money to survive. My understanding was that she did not work while Milton was alive. She bought an apartment building in Ithaca. The family lived in one apartment and rented out the other three.

Q: I take it your recollections of your working with her were not warm and cuddly.

McISAAC: No. some of it I learned as I got older, some of it happened at the time. Zatella was very unpleasant to my mother. We moved from Long Island to Ithaca in 1960 because my father, who was an electrical engineer working at Sperry Corporation, very much wanted to teach. He was offered a position as an associate professor at Cornell University. My mother told me later that she asked my father not to take the position, but did not insist, something she considered a mistake on her part. She did not want to live in such close proximity with my grandmother. However, we ended up living in Zatella's apartment building for about a year until my parents found a house they could afford.

It was awhile before I was old enough to begin to appreciate what was going on. My grandmother would arrive in time for dinner, but she wouldn't help my mother prepare it. There were four kids in the family within a five year range, and my younger brother and sister are twins. So you have all these kids and my mother is trying to make dinner, and her mother-in-law has just invited herself to join, but expects to be entertained as a guest, not pitching in to help. My father would come home and expect everything to be prepared.

I began to see the problem when I reached teens. Zatella never thanked anybody for anything. She was hyper-critical of all of us except my older sister. I must have been in the Foreign Service by the time I really understood how negative her behavior was. I was home on leave and saw my mother packing up items, including a rather valuable reproduction of Nefertiti's head, that I always thought Zatella had given to the family. When I asked my mother what she was doing, she said, "I am sending them to Wendy," my older sister. She explained that Zatella only gave presents to Wendy. She never gave anything to the rest of us. What my parents did was say the gift was to the family and then give each of us five dollars "from grandma". I learned from cousins that there was similar dynamic with their families. The first child in the family was golden. I'm not sure what the rest of us were, but apparently we were "de trop". I tried very hard over the years to do what she wanted, to be the good child. I went to church with her, even as I got older and became disillusioned with religious institutions. But it became very hard because nothing I did was ever quite good enough.

Even when Zatella was in a nursing home I would visit and was the only one of us kids who did. My father just wanted to avoid it. He did her bills and taxes and took her to the grocery store when she was still mobile. As she was less able to function independently, my father let my mother take over interaction with the home about her care. At the same time, Zatella told Dad's brother Bob that our family never did anything for her. That we ignored her, never visited, and that my father never raised a finger on her behalf. It created huge tension within the family which persists to this day. Bob wrote nasty letters to Dad. I saw one of the letters that was open on the kitchen table. When I asked Mother,

she told me what Zatella had been telling Bob. Mother was angry, though Dad refused to say anything to Bob. The two families stopped talking. Even when Bob's family came to Ithaca to visit Grandma, Mother refused to invite them to the house – despite hints. That visceral anger continues remains. Although Mother did not want to invite Bob to Dad's funeral in 2010, in the end she relented but she would not talk to him, nor he to her. It's rather sad. I spent some time with Bob and Carol, his second wife afterwards, where Mother would not see.

Q: Did you ever, I mean later on as you got more mature try to figure out what the hell made this happen.

McISAAC: I have thought about it but I don't know enough about her upbringing and about what happened to her, if that is what she saw within her own family. She lived to be 99 years old, giving credit to my mother's theory that if you are too nasty you don't die.

Q: When one thinks of Scottish Presbyterianism it can be pretty strict. Did that creep in there do you think?

McISAAC: She was not from the Scottish side of it, though she did go to the Presbyterian Church. I just can't figure it out. We ended up accommodating the issue, but I think it colored a lot of relationships within our family. My father is an avoider, or was. So he would never say anything to her even if she was going after my mother. That built resentment I think between my parents as well.

Q: How about your mother's side? What do you know about taking that back?

McISAAC: I know a little bit more. Again there are some myths along with some family stories. The family started out as farmers, and settled primarily in the Ohio valley area. By the time I was born they were pretty much concentrated around the Akron/Canton area. Some in the family remained farmers, but others moved into the city and became handymen, electricians, that kind of profession. There is talk and again not I am not able to absolutely confirm it, that my mother's family originally was Amish, and that they had left the Order for unknown reasons in the early 1900s. My grandfather was Carl Heldenbrand. My mother's maiden name was Heldenbrand or "holy fire".

Q: Sounds like the Pennsylvania Dutch or that whole grouping.

McISAAC: Mother's family ended up in Pennsylvania but started out in Ohio. It's quite possible that the Ohio branch grew out of an older branch in Pennsylvania. Regardless, they were definitely German speaking. One of my Aunts has the family bible which dates from the early 1800's; it is in High German. There were some letters from the late 1700's or early 1800's tucked into it which seem to confirm the idea that they may have been Amish, just how they are written and the way they talk about religion and death. My mother's father was born in 1902 so he was too young for WWI and too old for WWII. He also went to college although I believe his was the first generation that went beyond

high school. If they were Amish they would finish school at eighth grade. But he went to college, working on the family farm at the same time. He earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. According to my mother during the depression her father simultaneously worked a number of different jobs. His primary job was at the Goodrich Company. Many members of our family worked at Goodrich, great-uncles, uncles, second and third cousins. Carl worked on a number of different projects including the development of Kapok for life preservers, the coating for projector screens, and things like that.

Then when my mother was 11 years old, Carl moved the family to Royersford, Pennsylvania, which is about 30 miles southwest of Philadelphia, not far from Valley Forge. He worked for the Spring Company located in Spring City, on the Schuylkill River directly across the river from Royersford where he built a home. My mother talks some about the Ohio, but seems to remember more about the Royersford era, perhaps because she went to high school there and was very active in the school.

My grandfather married Olive Davy. There is not a whole lot of information available about the Davy family but I continue to search. We always referred to my grandfather as Daddy Carl. He did not want to be called Grandpa as it made him feel old. When his children had kids, he became Daddy Carl and Olive became Grand Ollie. They had four children. Actually they had five, but the second child, named Josephine, died when she was only three or four days old. My uncle Ladd was the oldest, my mother was the second surviving child and has two younger sisters, Polly and Sallylee. My mother wanted to name me after Josephine, but her mother was upset. That is why my name is Karen Jo, not Josephine or Johanna. My mother is Mary Lou, though she goes by Lou. The youngest child, Sallylee, who is about 10 years younger than my mother, ended up being raised by other people because by that time, Olive was unable to care for the children.

When she was in her 40's, Grand Ollie began to show signs of dementia, and eventually was institutionalized. Because there was no place for somebody suffering from dementia, she wound up in a Pennsylvania mental asylum. I remember seeing her only once. Children were not allowed into the building, so we sat out in the garden and Daddy Carl brought her out to us. I must have been five or six years old. By that time, she did not recognize anyone in the family. She passed away in 1961. My grandfather requested an autopsy which was not normally done for someone in an insane asylum. The autopsy uncovered plaque in the brain so for many years we thought she died of Alzheimer's, early onset Alzheimer's disease. There was an effort to track the family and nobody else has shown signs of the disease. About ten years ago, we learned that there was a plant fertilizer that causes the development of plaque in the brain similar to Alzheimer's disease plaque. It is no longer legal in the United States. According to my mother, Grand Ollie grew roses and did not use gloves when handling the fertilizer. So there is a possibility that her dementia resulted from the fertilizer getting into her blood stream through the skin. We do not know for sure and likely never will.

As a result of Grand Ollie's institutionalization, I believe from what my mother says, that Daddy Carl treated her as a surrogate wife, talking to her about issues that he did not tell the younger girls, including the many times their brother lost money and was bailed out by Daddy Carl. He did allow her to complete her education. She earned a bachelor's degree in music from Ithaca College.

Q: She was the oldest?

McISAAC: She was the oldest girl. She had an older brother, but he was not expected to help out with the younger siblings. So I think she ended up in this role whether she liked it or not. My uncle Ladd was very highly educated, becoming a Veterinarian. He was also a veteran of the Army Air Corps during WWII. But he wanted to get rich, and he had a lot of get rich quick schemes. My grandfather bailed him out two or three times. Ladd got permission from the city of Portland, Maine to put pigs in the dump to eat the garbage; it didn't end well, I gather. Next, his partner in a veterinarian practice ran off with all of the equipment and took it across the state line to sell, which I gather complicated its recovery. They never did get it back. My grandfather bailed him out. Ladd's wife, who was the daughter of the original owner of the Spring Company, and was quite wealthy in her own right, also bailed him out on occasion. Eventually, in his late 50's, he had a success as an early entrant into the documents shredding business. He had trucks traveling up and down the east coast picking up documents to shred. The company also provided secure storage for medical and attorney records. Though he was doing fine as a veterinarian, he finally got his big thing. He died about eight or nine years ago after refusing treatment for prostate cancer. I don't know why he made that decision, but my mother was very angry with him for a while. She said, "You know he is a vet. He has actually had medical training. He knows." She commented that Ladd and others in her family, including her sister Polly, practiced denial about things they did not like or were afraid of.

But going back to the way my grandfather interacted with my mother: Mother went back to work when I was in junior high school as an elementary school teacher. While she trained as a music teacher, she decided to move into a more stable position as an elementary school teacher. She ended her career as a kindergarten teacher because she said she wanted to "get them early before anyone has spoiled them". Daddy Carl would show up in Ithaca without notice and expect her drop everything to look after him. We would all be running in different directions and he would be very angry. One time I overheard him tell Mother, "Well Polly always makes time for me." Polly did not work outside the home. Despite that, he was a dynamic and creative individual.

My mother's family was far more social than my father's family. While Daddy Carl was alive the family, all the kids and grand kids and a few close friends would get together four times a year. This included the three big holidays of Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving. The fourth time was usually during summer vacation. The visits were rotated between the families' homes, in Ohio, Pennsylvania, upstate New York, and Maine. Or, we would all meet at a campground, such as on Lake Wallenpaupack (the junction of the Wallen and Paupack Rivers) in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania.

Everyone would all be in one house or when we were in Royersford in two as Sallylee and her family lived next door to Daddy Carl. It was a very open, very gregarious family. But I think it was hard on my mother playing the surrogate spouse role.

Q: How did you, were you a little mouse in the corner big ears, big eyes watching everything, or did you get off and hide in the bushes to get away from this or something? How did you feel about all of this?

McISAAC: I was socially awkward from a very early age. I didn't like being around a lot of people. My family has lots of pictures of me disappearing, face turned away from the camera. Because in my mother's family there was lots of hugging, kissing, and loud voices, I tended to creep away. I was the observer. I observed from around the edges. I wasn't like my brother who would go off into the woods for hours. That wasn't my thing. I liked to read, write, I have been knitting since I was five years old. I had very well dressed dolls when I was a girl. I would design clothes and sew for them. But when we had these big get-togethers they would put all the girls in one room and all the boys in another room. There were four to five girls in one bed. By the time I was seven I started to refuse to participate. I wouldn't go to bed. Eventually I found other places to sleep, such as on a cot set up in the basement. Another time I slept in the loft over Daddy Carl's garage. Once, at Polly's house in Ohio I slept in their camping trailer next to the garage. What I remember most about that year was that two of her kids had chicken pox, which my mother was trying to expose us to and a crow that woke me up every morning, hopping around the roof of the trailer, cawing.

I may not have liked having all those people around me, but I loved to watch people, particularly grownups. I tried to figure out what was going on. I wanted to know. I listened to the conversations around me. I also liked to ask questions. The questions eventually got me in trouble in school, because I didn't know when to stop, when questions were unwelcome. If I didn't like the answer I kept asking, and didn't realize until much later that probably wasn't always wise. Most people do not like continued questions if they don't know or they were never interested enough in the first place to learn the details of an issue. I have always wanted to know "why."

Q: In all this how important was religion, or was it at all important?

McISAAC: My mother tried. When I was younger it was important to me. The family, up until I was in sixth or seventh grade, went to church every Sunday. Until I was in third grade I was in a Sunday school. That ended when I had a Sunday school teacher who talked to the class about going into the closet with his Aunt May to look at her bible. He was in his 40's or 50's and to me he seemed like a very old man. He had some strange stories about the closet and Aunt May's Bible. After I repeated a couple of these stories to my mother, she pulled me out of the class. He could have been perfectly harmless. But I was uncomfortable with it and my mother was horrified. That year I graduated to sitting in the main sanctuary. I found a kind of community there. I think it was mostly the music which snagged my attention. I joined the church choir. But by the time I was in sixth or seventh grade everybody else kind of fell off. My older sister would say she had to keep

the dog company. The younger two wouldn't want to get out of bed, and my father would go if forced but seemed to rather not. My mother finally gave up trying to take the family. I continued to go to church on my own.

We were not baptized as infants. My mother believed that we should make the decision ourselves when we were old enough to understand what we were doing. That harkens back to the Anabaptist concept of the Amish. It really irked my father's mother that we had not been baptized. She repeatedly dropped hints to my mother that we ought to be baptized. She convinced Maude, my father's older sister, to call Mother to push the idea. My mother's family was not happy either.

I decided on my own when I was about 14 or 15 that I was going to be baptized and go through communion. The ministers were fine with it though other members of the church were not sure what to do with a teenager being baptized, without her parents. Someone forgot to tell the woman who was assigned to accompany me it that I not an infant. That caused a bit of a scramble. The woman arrived and told me, "I am supposed to take you to the nursery afterward." We had a good laugh about it.

When I was 17 and getting ready to go to college, the church imploded. I have never seen anything like it. I mean I have read about disputes within congregations, but to be involved was very difficult. This was my community. I sang in the choir; I was having a good time. The First Presbyterian Church in Ithaca was a large church at the time, with about 2000 members. It was not a poor church. There people from all different walks of life, but still it was a fairly well to do church. There were three ministers and a music director on staff. There was a faction in the church that didn't like the lead minister who had been elected to the position three years earlier. He was very progressive and an intellectual. His sermons and teachings were published nationwide. In my opinion they were lucky to get him. He gave challenging sermons. This was the first time I sat in church and was challenged to think about faith. His sermons taught me to question and think through what I did. Because of the challenge to his leadership, the church called a special meeting to resolve the issues. Once an objection was raised, the floodgates opened. One minister who worked mostly with senior citizens was 63 years old and he was fired. Why they could not have waited until he could get social security I don't know. It basically killed him. He became the manager of an assisted living facility, though his wife did most of the work as he appeared to give up. From what one of his son's told me, I think he was very depressed. He was out, the lead minister was out, and the challengers told the third minister that he had to take on all three portfolios. The latter sensibly turned the position down, responding that they were destroying the community of the church. The music director backed him up and so suddenly there were no ministers at all. The viciousness…

Q: Well nothing is more vicious than a small religious community when it goes bad.

McISAAC: Yes. As a result, when asked about religion, I usually say I am a lapsed Presbyterian. That experience was the end of organized religion for me. I think it was the community that attracted me, and the music. We had the best organ in town which had

been built specifically for that sanctuary. Professors and students from Ithaca College came to play it as it was so well suited to its surroundings. I went back to the church a few more times after that only because my grandmother asked me to go with her. The minister hired to replace the three who left was a very evangelical, anti-intellectual even. I took Grandma to church a couple of times but I had trouble sitting through the sermons. One of the criticisms of the head minister who had been run out was that he was too theatrical. His replacement tried for dramatic and only achieved melodramatic, shallow sermons. I'm more agnostic now than anything, I guess. I periodically think about trying other churches and I have been to a variety of houses of worship since then, including Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, high and low Episcopalian, and even several synagogues. I think I am afraid if I commit to one church again, the same kind of vicious, nasty behavior would be repeated.

Q: Did your family subscribe to a particular political party or not?

McISAAC: Both sides of the family were pretty conservative, except for my parents. They were registered as Republicans. More the Nelson Rockefeller version of Republicanism than the current Tea Party version.

Q: A more liberal form.

McISAAC: Yes, and quite socially liberal. Their families however, were much further to the right. My mother's family in particular was highly conservative, and were still upset in the 80's about the impeachment of Nixon in the 70's. Nixon was not that far right in hindsight but it was the idea. He was a Republican. In fact politics set our nuclear family apart from the rest of the larger family. We watched, well we didn't have a TV at home until 1968 because my parents thought there was nothing on. We got a TV so we could watch the conventions in 1968 which turned into quite an education. At the beginning we were only allowed to watch two hours a week. I picked the Smothers Brothers and the news. More recently after the 1980's with Reagan and the rightward march of the Republican Party, my mother told me she thought the party had walked away from them.

Q: Reading. As a kid were you a reader?

McISAAC: Yes.

Q: Can you think about some of the early books or series of books that you enjoyed and also influenced you?

McISAAC: Well I taught myself to read when I was three. My older sister was learning in school, and my mother said I was determined that I was going to do it too. I couldn't write. I didn't have the hand and eye coordination for it, but I learned to read. My father was a Rotary Scholar in Leeds in England in 1952. My mother studied early childhood education while they lived there. She brought back a bunch of British schoolbooks. These were housed on the bottom shelf in my father's study. I started with those books, I guess because I could reach them. I had to re-learn how to spell when I got to school because I

learned British spellings from those books. I read so many different things. There wasn't a particular book or series. I would get three or four books out of the library and I would start reading them all at the same time. I would be part way through one and then I would start the other. I read many books from a biography of American hero's series in the public library. The books had an orange binding. I remember reading about Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, and Clara Barton. That sort of thing. I also periodically read parts of the encyclopedia. My parents decided they needed two different encyclopedias. The Compton which was shorter, easier for young kids, and the American Heritage Encyclopedia. I used to pick subjects out that appealed to me to read. I would also read the dictionary once in awhile. We had a Webster's unabridged dictionary that must have been more than six inches thick. Every once in awhile I would look through it to find words I liked. When I was seven years old, a word I found that I tried to use, rather unsuccessfully, was Ai, pile of earth. I really liked Robert Frost an anthology of whose poems I found on my father's shelves. Dad was a big murder mystery fan. I read a lot of Agatha Christie before I really understood what the stories were about, but I just wanted to read and I could reach those books.

Q: When school started, how long were you in Ithaca?

McISAAC: We moved to Ithaca when I was four and a half. Because I was born after December 15, I was required to start with the 1955 class rather than the 1954 one. I went to pre-school on Long Island but I repeated it in Ithaca because I couldn't go into Kindergarten that first year. I attended a nursery school in the basement of Forest Home Chapel, the neighborhood church. My parents bought a house in Forest Home, a small neighborhood which is surrounded by Cornell University property, in the Town of Ithaca, not the City of Ithaca. We moved there from my grandmother's apartment house in 1960.

Forest Home is one of the originally settled villages in the area. The Ithaca area was settled starting up on the hill rather than down in the valley next to Cayuga Lake. The area was originally part of the Revolutionary War Land tracts, the plots of land offered to soldiers who had served in the revolutionary army for at least three years. Fall Creek runs through it, emptying first into Beebe Lake at the top of the hill and then cascading down through a striking ice age gorge to Cayuga Lake. There were a number of mills along Fall Creek some of the ruins are still visible. The population subsequently settled down the hills onto the valley floor at the end of the lake. This may have been delayed because much of the low lying land is just above the water table and regularly floods. I imagine that it was pretty swampy prior to development.

So I started Kindergarten at five years old. Forest Home did not have a Kindergarten in the local school so I rode a bus to a different neighborhood to Belle Sherman Elementary School. I remember being bored since I was already reading and the teacher, though very nice, did not want me to be ahead of the others. For first grade, I went to the Forest Home School. The building, which was owned by Cornell University and leased by the Ithaca City School district, had three classrooms and a larger room that served as the cafeteria for those who brought their lunch and as the gymnasium in bad weather. First and second grade were in one room with one teacher, third and fourth in another, fifth and sixth in

the third one. There were about 80 students when I went there. The school was located less than a block from our house so my older sister and I went home for lunch. Tradition in the school was that parents invited the teachers to lunch on a regular basis so they were well known to our families. When I was in third grade, the school district decided not to renew the lease and thus for fourth grade, I was bussed to an elementary school in Cayuga Heights, a wealthy incorporated village. I'm not sure why we were not sent to Belle Sherman, but we weren't. It was not an entirely pleasant experience as the Cayuga Heights community was not happy to receive us. Many in the Forest Home community were Cornell professors or staff and their families. We were on average poorer than the primarily business people and wealthy professors who lived in Cayuga Heights.

Q: How was the composition of the early student body? Were there black or Asians or was in Ithaca there wasn't much.

McISAAC: There were a few Asians. Cornell University attracts a wide population, ensuring that Ithaca is not limited to its farming roots. The small African American population tended to live in the city, downtown. There was one black family, the Blandfords, who lived in Forest Home, several blocks from us. They had three children with one girl my age, Ardella who I played with. When the Thompsons moved into a house two down from us, I made friends with their eldest, Alice. However, her parents did not want her to play with Ardie because she was black. Eventually I made clear that I would continue to play with Ardie and Alice could join or not. It was rocky at first, but eventually they became very good friends. But my mother is very social and made a point of befriending Mrs. Blandford when the family first moved in. My parents taught us to treat everyone as equals, with dignity. To engage.

Q: This is the time of civil rights up north and all that. But the racial difficulties were not confined just to the South. But in your experience did you see any of this?

McISAAC: Not so much at the elementary level or I was not so aware of it. There were threats against the black population and crosses burned in people's yards. At the same time, there were threats against several departments at Cornell University, including against the Electrical Engineering Department where my father was a professor. Incendiary devices were hurled into several laboratories, destroying expensive equipment. I remember Dad staying in his lab overnight several times to protect the equipment, though I'm not sure what the professors would have done if anyone had actually broken in.

I was in Ithaca High School when racial disparities created open conflict. The black population of Ithaca was primarily in the city as opposed to neighborhoods in the Town of Ithaca and so we felt little of the friction. There was also a poor white population in the city and surrounding areas. The elementary schools fed into two junior high schools, both in town, where the populations became more diverse. Everyone then went to Ithaca High School, which had the most diverse population. There was a wide range of backgrounds all converging into the one school, from city kids to farm kids to professors' kids. There was tension based on socio-economic status as well as on educational differences. There

were well defined groups like the jocks, the greasers, the academic weenies – nerd wasn't a word used much at the time.

There was racially-tinged unrest at the high school and one riot. I remember walking into a restroom once where four or five black girls were smoking. Their spokeswoman told to turn my white ass around and walk right back out. I did not challenge their swagger and left the room.

I was in tenth grade when during a mandatory general assembly with a program for Black History Month, the presentation turned into a diatribe by primarily female black students against male black students. The girls accused black male students of impregnating black girls and then dropping them to date white girls. The pregnant girls were forced to leave schools – true whether the girl was black or white (and there were several of both races when I was in high school); the environment was more conservative and the movement to ensure girls complete their education regardless yet to come. That tension within the black student body transferred to the larger community and the administrators lost control of the situation. I remember crouch down on the floor of the auditorium, then crawling on my hands and knees to get out because things were being thrown, including chairs from the stage. Punches were thrown, including by people not on stage. The violence came off the stage into the auditorium. We never had another required general assembly again the whole time I was in high school. They were always optional after that.

The group on the stage went on a rampage throughout the school, smashing windows and a small indoor pond, which several of the teachers had constructed. The school had large plate glass windows which broke quite nicely when chairs were thrown through them. The other thing I remember is that the rampaging group beat up anyone who got in their way. Several male black students appeared to have been targeted for especially savage beatings. We all tried to get to rooms where we would be safe. I remember thinking it odd as I was trying to get from the auditorium to a separate building where my next class was which was as far from the auditorium as I could get, that the school's vice principle, who was black, was leaning against a wall watching a group demolish the pond without saying anything. The violence appeared to last a very long time, but it was probably no more than 30 or 40 minutes followed by a tense standoff of several hours as the school locked down and we waited to see what would happen. We were told to get back into the classrooms and stay put.

The principal did something very smart: he reached out to Ithaca College and said send me the biggest bulkiest gym students that you have. The Ithaca City police tried to enter the school, but the principal declined to invite them in. Ithaca College physical education students did their student teaching at Ithaca High School which meant that many of them were known to the high school students. The IC students were a diverse bunch. They brought these guys and had them patrol the corridors. There were several confrontations, but the presence of this group in their gym uniforms (IC sweat suits) tamped down further violence, allowing tempers to cool. Several male black students were walked home by some of the phys-ed students after they were threatened. There was a rage against the white community, but also a rage within the black community itself. That was

an eye opener. This was around the same time there was trouble at Cornell. Remember in 1968 there was the takeover of the student union on campus.

Q: Was it at Cornell where you had this famous picture of this guy on the chair and the gun and all that?

McISAAC: Yes. A lot filters down to the high school from the university. You know, you can't really separate it.

Q: Let's go back to elementary and high school. How did you find courses? What things grabbed you and what things didn't grab you?

McISAAC: High school was not a happy time for me. I actually want to go back to further for a moment because there was something that happened coming out of elementary school that colored my school experience. Fourth grade, as I've said, we were bussed to a new school, in a neighborhood that did not want us. The adjustment was hard, but my best friend from Forest Home School, Mimi Pendleton, was there so it was not terrible. However, during recess one day, I slipped on an apple lying on the ground and hurt my foot. I couldn't put pressure on it and hopped up the hill to the school. When I asked to go to the nurse, Mrs. Nungazer, our teacher told me I was faking injury and refused. She grabbed my leg and forced my foot onto the ground. She also would not let me go downstairs early to get on the bus but Mimi asked the bus driver to wait so I did not miss it. When I got home, my left side of my foot was swollen to twice its size. Turned out I had cracked several bones. Forcing me to put weight on the foot had pushed a chip up into my little toe. Mrs. Nungazer was flustered when I reappeared two days later with a cast and crutches but did not say much. I saw her again years later and she was always pleasant and said what a good student I was. I wish she had told me that when I was in her class.

We went Sweden when I was in fifth grade when my father took a sabbatical. We lived in Gothenburg and we four kids attended the local elementary school. Within two months, I learned Swedish. I did however have to learn to speak English with a British accent because our main teacher – who was also the school's Rector – insisted that he did not want the others corrupted by my terrible American accent. It was a formative experience. Though homesick at first, I was fascinated by the differences in culture and traditions.

I got a U-4 in second grade in writing because my handwriting was so terrible. In Sweden we were taught penmanship and I came out of that experience with lovely penmanship, writing that everyone could decipher. Returning to Cayuga Heights School for sixth grade was tough. In Sweden, kids do not divide by gender until much later. In the United States, that happens during fifth grade. When I showed up in Cayuga Heights School, I was viewed with suspicion since I hadn't been around for the split. Kids I had played with before that year away would no longer willing to talk to me. I didn't learn until much later about re-entry culture shock. My teacher, Mrs. Farnum and I did not get along very well though I was never clear on why. The most humiliating thing she did was to make me stand in front of the class after writing on the board several phrases she dictated

and made fun of my handwriting, in particular the way I wrote ‘t’s. My mother’s comment when I told her was “boy she should have seen your handwriting before.” I thought when I went to junior high school I was rid of her, but as it turned out that was not the case.

At Boynton Junior High School I was put into seventh grade classes that were really easy. I started tutoring some of the other kids in math class which is pretty amazing since math was not my strongest subject. I was bored to tears. I really liked English and reading but I was reading well beyond the texts we were assigned. I do not remember why I ended up talking to the guidance counselor, but I will never forget what she told me. She said I was put into the lower level, non-regents, class (i.e., not college bound), because my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Farnum, said I was too mature for my age and I needed to be in with less mature students. She showed me the note that Farnum had written to that effect, which surprised me since I didn’t think I was supposed to see it. She also told me that since my parents were college educated, I should be too. The irony that the school put me in a non-regents, non-college bound classes seemed lost on her as she lectured me. I was stung by Farnum’s letter. Even at that age, I realized it was inappropriate for me to see the letter. I told the counselor I was going to college to be a bum and stomped out, near tears. When I told my mother about the conversation, she was furious. She marched down to confront the guidance counselor and confirmed the fact of Mrs. Farnum’s note. The school administrators had put me in the non-college bound group of courses for students not expected to able to achieve the regent’s diploma which New York requires to attend college. Nothing was said about the fact that test scores showed I was reading well above grade level, at the 12th grade level in seventh grade.

Q: I have heard of tracking but this is de-tracking, derailing.

McISAAC: I think Farnum got it all wrong. I don’t think I was mature for my age. At the time I probably thought I was, but looking back on it, I was merely quiet and shy. I was not always cooperative. I asked too many questions. Some people don’t like to be questioned. I can only speculate why Mrs. Farnum would put something like that in my record.

As a result of that kerfuffle, when I entered eighth grade they put me into the level of courses I should have been all along. After a year of not having to study and getting an A anyway, it was hard to go back to having to work really hard. School was tough. I liked band. I played the flute in the band and the orchestra. I played the bass recorder one year in the annual talent show. I enjoyed learning German. My German teacher was a bit of a character but generally kind. She was going deaf and when she was facing the blackboard, she couldn’t hear what was happening behind her. One time, the class had so many paper airplanes in the air it looked like a blizzard, but they all landed before she turned back. That year I had an operation to remove a benign tumor located on my right eye, which I was born with. When I was 12 it started to grow so the eye doctor took it off. I wore an eye patch for two weeks. The first day back, my mother drew an eye on the patch and my German teacher threw me out of class because she was spooked by the large unblinking eye staring at her.

I studied hard. I think I was trying to live up to my parents' expectations. Education was important. Dad helped us with our homework but he wasn't engaged much in our lives otherwise. Looking back on it, I worked particularly hard on English which was easier for me. I struggled with math until the tenth grade. Then I had a really good teacher who was able to explain things in ways I could relate to. I have never accepted easily someone telling me: here is the formula, don't ask why. I wanted to know how they reached that formula and why it worked. So I struggled a lot. Not so much that ultimately I could not do the work. In addition to the teachers who were disliked the challenge of questions, I had several teachers who were not threatened. They were really good teachers. I think that is what made a difference to me in education. The social studies teacher in eighth grade who was fascinated by the Civil War and really knew how to make it come alive. The math teacher in tenth grade geometry who really liked her subject and wanted us to understand and so was willing to take the time to be sure we got it. The tenth grade English teacher who was just amazing. She let me take over the class when we were studying Shakespeare's "Taming of the Shrew" and put together a dramatic reading of the play by the class.

My parents took us to the theatre. Not to the movie theatre but to plays at Cornell, including Shakespeare. There is a group, the Cornell Savoyards, who perform Gilbert and Sullivan, usually twice a year and we always went because my parents loved the operettas. So to me, we were reading this exciting play, and I could tell the rest of the class was bored to tears. I asked the teacher if we could act out the parts. She let me organize it. Looking back on it, for the teacher to let one student actually drive the direction of the class was pretty amazing. I had a marvelous time and I think others did as well. There were a couple of kids who didn't really want to admit that they liked it because then they wouldn't be cool, but if they had to read the part then hey, that was great! I got a lot out of it. I hope they did as well. I studied hard and I tried to do my best at everything but a few engaged teachers made a huge difference to my experience of the classes.

My older sister graduated a year early. When I discovered that I was going to have a 12th grade year for gym and English, I decided to take English in summer school and skip eleventh grade. Because I wasn't math or science oriented, there were no other courses for me to take. I took chemistry and biology. My biology teacher used to disappear in the back room with the chemistry teacher and if we knocked on the door we were given demerits. I don't know what they did back there. I did really well in those parts of the course I was really interested in like dinosaurs and other sections where I was more familiar with the topics, but in the areas where I could have used someone actually teaching, I did not do so well. I was concerned that I was not going to be prepared for the biology Regents exam and I complained to the guidance counselor. When he asked why I thought I wasn't going to do well, I responded that we had not seen our teacher for a while. "There is no teacher." "What do you mean there is no teacher?" "She goes into the back room there and we get demerits if we knock on the door." Suddenly for the last five weeks going into the Regents exam, the biology teacher was in the classroom full time."

Q: You screwed up a wonderful relationship.

McISAAC: I guess I did. Both of them did not return to Ithaca High School the next year. I don't know exactly what happened.

Q: They might have been working on a formula, who knows?

McISAAC: Having tea, who knows? I had to get a waiver to not take phys-ed and I took eleventh grade English in summer school so I could graduate a year early. I had done everything I was going to do. The summer school English teacher supposedly had a Ph. D., and I think he probably did. He was better educated than any of the other high school teachers. The rumor was that he had been asked to leave a college where he worked. He was a drunk, but he was incredibly knowledgeable. However, the class included all levels, from remedial to the highly engaged. He could not deal with the less well prepared students. He was really intolerant of people who weren't as smart as he was. He was verbally abusive to the less prepared students to such an extent that three of us tried to distract his attention from them when we could. Sometimes he would come in hung over and refuse to teach or he would throw the books into the garbage can and march out or not show up at all. We sat there for three hours because to get credit we had to. But I remember that class vividly because when we were studying Shakespeare's Macbeth, I challenged his interpretation of Banquo's ghost. I don't remember exactly why I did that. But I insisted that there was a different interpretation and gamely tried to make my case. He made everyone else move their chairs out of the way and it was just him and me head to head for about an hour and a half. He made me defend my thesis. By the end of it I was sweating and shaking, but I think it was a really good experience for me because he took me seriously. He didn't just say you don't know what you are talking about. He said, "OK, if you think that is what it is, then you explain to me why you think that and support it from the text." Despite the teacher's ups and downs, I got more out of that class than many others I had taken. I would not have wanted to have him for a whole semester or a whole year, but for that three hours every day for six weeks, I learned a lot and I also learned how to take something that I thought, put together an analysis of the facts, and create a defense. He was teaching me to think, to analyze, and to explain. It was very good experience.

Q: High school, what was the social pattern, the dating pattern boys and all of that? Was there much of a social life?

McISAAC: For my older sister and me, we were not allowed to date until we were 17. The rules changed for the younger siblings. I think my parents were tired by that time. But even with that nobody asked me out. I was not, I wasn't pretty. I wasn't popular. I was quiet. I was studious. I was one of the nerds. I realize now that skipping a year actually wasn't good for me socially.

Q: Oh no, a year is so important at that age.

McISAAC: And I was resented by the group I ended up in when I skipped a year because when they ranked the class I ended up ranking higher than a couple of people who thought that they were smarter than I was and should have ranked above me. They may have been right, I don't know. I didn't have as many years in school as they did and in fact I'm not sure I should have been ranked at all, as I vaguely remember the rules. I ranked 41 in a graduating class of 588. I went immediately into college, unlike my sister who took a year off and spent time in England living with friends of our parents. What I found was the people I left behind didn't want anything to do with me. I had one really good friend, Mimi Pendleton, but that was it. There were other people I knew and did things with, but I was not a tremendously social person. Nor was I seen as that by my peers. I think that is also my position in the family. I am the one who is supposed to remain behind the scenes making sure everything gets done. I am not supposed to want attention for myself. I graduated from high school in 1972 and went to Cornell that August.

Q: Well you are sitting practically on the campus of a really major university. What were you pointed towards?

McISAAC: At the time, I really wanted not to go to Cornell, but because my father was a professor we were told if we got into Cornell we would go to Cornell because they would pay the tuition. My father still had to pay fees which were not light. My older sister is a year older than me. My younger brother and sister are three years younger. We were all headed to college at the same time. I wanted to get out of town. I wanted to leave, and I wanted to do something else. Cornell does not have a legacy program so you compete with everybody. My younger sister did not get into Cornell initially. My older sister did, but then she stayed for only two years. She went to England to the School of Archaeology in London. I did apply to and get into lots of other schools, but my parents said if they did not provide financial aid I would have to go to Cornell if I was accepted. None offered financial aid because my father made too much. Schools did not take into account that he had two in college with two more entering on a professor's salary. So I ended up at Cornell. Quite frankly looking back on it, I probably got the best education I was ever going to get anywhere. Cornell is a very good school but I did not appreciate it at the time. My parents let me live in a dorm the first year but when my younger sister did not get into Cornell, I had to move home. So Kathy went to SUNY Oneonta and I moved home.

Q: That separated you didn't it from the college spirit or whatever you want to call it.

McISAAC: Yes, it did put a damper on things. Forest Home is rather like Cornell property. My father walked to work since it took about 15 to 20 minutes to reach his office. So it was not that far. But when you are going to somebody's home it is different from visiting a dorm or an apartment.

Q: What courses were you taking? Did you have a major at the time?

McISAAC: It took me awhile to figure out exactly what I wanted to do. Cornell actually never got rid of the two year requirement unlike Harvard and others, so there was some time to figure it out. There was required composition, English, science, social sciences, math, etc. Those requirements consumed the first two years. I think that was good for me because it took me awhile to really focus. I was interested in lots of subjects, but figuring out what I was good at took time.

Q: I think it is a very good thing rather than send you into a cafeteria and pick up something that sounds like cartooning as a sense of the times or something like that.

McISAAC: What was interesting was watching the press covering when Harvard did away with the two year requirements and all the rest of that; it was trendy not to have them. Other schools followed suit. Cornell never did. And then Harvard changed its mind and reinstituted the requirements which I for one thought was funny. But that two year grounding in the basics gives you time to try different things and see where you want to be. I took things I was interested in but some of them were way over my head. For a hard science I took astronomy. That was before the University offered a course for non-physics majors. I struggled through that thing and by God I got a C+ but I worked hard for that C+. You know I had Carl Sagan as a professor. Also Frank Drake, who ran the Arecibo telescope facility in Puerto Rico. These were amazing people. Many students in the class complained about Sagan and Drake because they didn't really teach; they just liked to tell stories. However, being exciting story tellers is not the same as being great teachers.

Q: Sagan made a tremendous name for himself presenting science on TV.

McISAAC: Yes, and he did the same in the classroom. That was his great strength: his ability to explain science to the lay person. But our tests had nothing to do with anything he or Drake talked about, leading to the complaints. For once I was not one of them. For the last six weeks of the spring semester they brought in another professor, Houpt, who was very much a nuts and bolts teacher. He was junior to the other two but a much better teacher. He sat us down and said we are going to get through this final exam and walked us through everything we would need. So I did pass. Like I said it was hard work, but I learned a lot.

Cornell had an independent major program developed by Dale Corson, Cornell's president at the time. Corson was brought in as president after the very difficult period Cornell went through in the late 1960s with the takeover of the student union and other unrest. He was a professor of physics and participated in the Manhattan project. He passed away in 2013 at 93. The Quakers created senior living communities, called Kendal, built with independent living space, as well as assisted living care, and a nursing home. They built one in Ithaca and my parents moved there in the late 90's. Dale Corson and his wife, Nellie, moved there as well. I had the opportunity to speak with him several years ago after my father had a stroke and was in the assisted living section, where Corson was, and we spoke about the major. He developed the independent major

program to allow students who wanted to develop their own major. There was a competition and they picked ten students a year to participate.

I started college in 1972 and graduated in 1976. By that time I realized the reading was leading to something. I was writing and writing a lot. I had written some pretty juvenile poetry when I was younger, but I switched to prose fiction, something I was much better at. I also liked to act. I was never going to be great, but it was fun and it was a way to get outside of myself. So I applied for the program, at the end of my sophomore year and won a slot. I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Creative and Dramatic Writing. With the help of a professor of Comparative Literature, visiting from NYU, I put together a comprehensive program that included English, comparative literature, theatre arts, and the courses of a classics major I could take without having to know either Greek or Latin. I wanted to take Latin in high school but the year before I got there they dropped both Latin and Greek. The year after I graduated they reinstated the courses. So I never got to take it. I did learn some Latin through singing in the Cornell Chorus, mostly church Latin. That and studying German helped me with English as well because I was in that generation when schools stopped teaching grammar. I learned English grammar indirectly. I was part of the cohort that transitioned from old math to new math as well. Studying a foreign language, as well as living in Sweden and speaking Swedish and studying Swedish grammar (which is closer to English grammar than German grammar) really helped me with English and with my writing. My junior and senior years I focused on taking the courses I needed.

Q: I want to go back to Sweden at some point, but let us continue on. What did you see for yourself? In the first place did foreign affairs cross your radar at all?

McISAAC: In a way and in part because of Sweden. I wasn't quite sure what to do with myself, but I knew I wanted to write. I applied for and was accepted into the writing program at Indiana University in Bloomington, with a scholarship.

Q: That is probably the pre-eminent writing program in the U.S.

McISAAC: It is one of them. Iowa is another. The program led to a Master of Arts degree, a two year professional masters. This type of master's degree does not have a PhD beyond it – there are a very few universities that offer creative PhDs anyway – and recipients are qualified to teach at the college level. I was on the English Department committee working to get Indiana University to change the degree earned to an MFA, a master of fine arts so it would match what the other writing programs awarded. It did ultimately change but not while I was at IU. I received a scholarship to attend which included teaching plus a stipend. I was an associate instructor (AI). I taught creative writing for two years while working on the degree. It was a real change for me because Indiana University unlike Cornell is huge. There were about 33,000 students in Bloomington, while Cornell University had between ten and 15,000 students. Cornell at the upper levels of the undergraduate curriculum combines coursework, so when you are a senior you are in classes with graduate students not just other seniors which is challenging. At Indiana these were two separate worlds. Cornell professors must teach

both undergraduate and graduate courses. At Indiana a professor could teach only graduate courses or were limited to only undergraduate courses. There were some fantastic professors in the graduate school but in the undergraduate school students might not see a professor for the first two years, as many classes were taught by graduate students. Lots of teaching assistants or associate instructors. If I had not been an AI, I wouldn't have appreciated just how separate the two groups were. But it was a good experience for me because it was a much more mixed bag. IU accepted anyone who graduated from high school, leading to greater diversity within the student body. At Cornell everybody is bright. You are competing at a different level. So I think it was a good experience for me.

Q: Well now both Cornell and Indiana this is still a period of social unrest and the Vietnam War. Was there any of that playing at Cornell or had the civil rights thing pretty well played out.

McISAAC: By the time I got to Indiana in 1978 the unrest was pretty much played out. The Viet Nam war was over. Indiana was a much more conservative state than New York (which is saying something since upstate New York tends toward conservatism). The thing about Indiana University at the time was that if you didn't belong to a fraternity or a sorority there wasn't a great on campus social life. That was another very big distinction. At Cornell there are fraternities and sororities, but they are not on campus, and they are not encouraged to be the social life of the campus. By the time I got to Cornell in 1972 there was pressure to get rid of ROTC. I don't think the University ever did close down ROTC, unlike some other schools. There were remnants of the anti-war and civil rights unrest of the 60s but a lot of the energy had been played out. Another thing was the change in president of the university by the trustees to try to calm the campus. Dale R. Corson was named president in 1969. He was professor of physics at Cornell. The president before him, James A. Perkins, got himself into a difficult position vis-a-vis the students and the trustees were trying to calm things down and get the school back on the academic track. That was one thing that Mr. Corson was very good at. He had a very calm presence, very quiet, and well respected by students and faculty alike. Cornell is different from most universities in that it is part private and part state-governed; tuition is different depending upon whether one is studying in one of the private colleges or in one of the state colleges. There is always some tension between the public and private colleges because of course New York State wants to dictate what the entire university can do. There was talk at one point of the state taking over the private colleges, but it came to nothing. Cornell's president must juggle the competing interests. The agriculture school, the vet school, human ecology, that whole area is state run. The arts college, the engineering school and a bunch of others are private. So it is a balancing act for whoever is trying to manage it.

Q: OK, let's talk about Sweden for a minute. How did that come about? When did it happen?

McISAAC: That was when I was going into fifth grade, in 1965. My father was a professor and had the option to take a sabbatical. You don't have to take it. However,

Professor Sven Olving, from Sweden worked at Cornell in the early 1960s on an exchange. My parents befriended him and his wife. When my parents were considering whether to take a sabbatical, Olving offered to get Dad a position at Chalmers University in Gothenberg. He and Dad worked out an exchange between the universities. Although I was going into fifth grade in the United States, I was put into the fourth class in Sweden. Swedes start school a year later than we do, at seven rather than at six. My parents took all the fifth grade school books along just in case, but my siblings and I went into a local Swedish school. My parents found someone who tutored them in Swedish before we went over. I looked at my parents' books had but it wasn't until we arrived in Sweden that I really learned the language. I was speaking Swedish and participating in class in about a month and a half or so. Being tossed in without a net will do that and as a kid, it was easier.

We lived in a row house in the Bö section of Gothenburg. It seemed far from the center and the port area of the city, but when I visited in 1981, I realized that the neighborhood was much closer to the center than I had thought as a child. Our house was the first of a row of attached townhomes in a leafy neighborhood. We were within walking distance of the school which was good because in the winter you went to school in the dark and you came home in the dark. The sun would rise between nine and ten in the morning and start going down between two and three in the afternoon. I became good friends with a small group of girls and boys. There was one girl in particular, Anita Bylin, who spent a lot of time in our home. I was required to take English while I was there because the head teacher for my group insisted that I learn to speak English with a British accent, so I would not corrupt the other kids. Of course my best friend ended up with an American accent because she was around our family so much. I looked her up in 1981 and she said that her accent was problematic for her throughout school, though her knowledge of English was much better than the other students because of the experience.

The other thing that was different about Sweden from the U.S. was they didn't separate out by gender until much later. I was homesick for a few months after we arrived, but coming back was much more difficult because the sexes were divided out. When I left the United States, everybody was a still in one group. There were five boys and three other girls my age in my neighborhood. We all hung out together before fifth grade. It was a shock to return and find out that I belonged nowhere. I wasn't ready for that. I didn't know what to do with it. I only learned later about reverse culture shock. I was miserable.

Sweden was pivotal for me. I enjoyed learning another language, and I liked learning about a whole new culture. After looking at their bakeries I decided I had to learn to make those things, the pepparkakor or spice cookies, Mazariner, cardamom coffee cake, etc. My mother taught us to cook basic things. Her big thing was to take brownies whenever we went anywhere and she taught the four of us to make them. Suddenly there was this whole new and different palate. The Swedes use a lot of cardamom as well as almond paste. Mother found a cookbook, a Swedish baking cookbook in English and I started learning to make the different recipes. I had been knitting since I was five, mostly doll clothes since I liked to design and make clothes for my dolls. I continued to knit, but it was in Sweden where I really learned how to knit properly. Home economics in

Sweden at my level focused on knitting and sewing. The teachers were very good. My mother learned to weave, attending a weaving school while we were there. She still weaves a bit, though not as much as she would like and she has done some pretty interesting rugs and tapestries. She is very good at combining colors in ways I cannot. We traveled around the country as well as in Norway, Denmark, Belgium, and England during holidays. Actually, 1965 to 1966 was an interesting year. Do you remember the hostage situation in Stockholm in 1972?

Q: Oh yes the Stockholm syndrome.

McISAAC: Yes. One of the terrorists' demands was that a prisoner named Jan Olaf be released from prison. During the summer of 1966, near the start of the school year in August, for a few weeks police walked school kids to school because the police were searching for Jan Olaf. That summer, he went on a rampage, first killing members of his family, including his mother and a brother. He was loose in Gothenberg. There were sightings but the police could not find him. The authorities instituted a city-wide search and finally, closed down the city. No one was allowed in or out of Gothenburg, the airport closed, all the roads were closed. This was shortly before we were to return to the United States.

The first I learned about it was when I was playing with my friend Anita Bylin and some other kids outside the apartment building where her family lived. Several police officers approached and told us to get into the building immediately because they thought they had spotted Olaf in the area. So we trooped into the building and eventually Mr. Bylin walked me home. I told my mother about the search as I thought it was exciting, not really understanding the serious nature of the manhunt. My mother accused me of making up stories.

Gothenburg had an amusement park called Liseberg. We went shortly after we arrived in town in 1965. Though I and my siblings had lobbied hard, we did not go back during the year. Mother promised that before we left Sweden, we would go again. Several weeks after I had reported the police sighting of Olaf near the Bylin's apartment, the six of us were on our way to the tram to go to Liseberg. As we passed the small park on the corner, one of my friends came out and asked if I had heard that Olaf was seen in the church in our neighborhood, a big Lutheran church. According to my friend, the priest had lied to the police and reported that Olaf was not there and so he escaped. My mother still insisted that we were making up stories but when we were almost to the tram station, two policemen zoomed past on a motorcycle. They were not in uniform and the man on the back was dressed like a ninja in all black and had a machine gun. Mother turned us around and marched us back to the house. That night there were helicopters flying very low, with strong search lights, all over the area. They didn't find Olaf. One morning several days later I was up first and found the front door wide open when I went downstairs. I was convinced that someone had been in the house. The thing was that all the row houses were connected at the attic level. So if somebody got on top of one they could get into the others. The police came and looked around but there was nobody there. Most likely, we had not latched the door properly the night before.

We returned to the United States by ship from Gothenberg to New York on the Swedish American line, the last voyage of the original SS Gripsholm (it was replaced by a much larger ship, also called the SS Gripsholm, later that year). Given that the city was still closed down, I am surprised the boat was allowed to sail, but it was. We left in late August 1966. Several days out, Professor Olving telegraphed my father that the authorities caught Olaf in our neighborhood.

The year in Sweden was a good year for me because it got me out of my own little space. I had to learn a new language. I had to learn to communicate with other people, be in a place that was different, appreciate cultural differences, and explain the United States to others, even in the fifth grade.

Q: Were you getting any flak from the Swedes about Vietnam?

McISAAC: Oh yes, there were regular protests and the newspaper reporting about the war was quite critical. In fact there was a U.S. consulate at the time in Gothenberg. Every month or so there were big protests. At 10 years old, I didn't appreciate the seriousness of the issue. Unlike in the United States, we did have a television in Sweden, but the Swedes did not show the level of violence that Americans saw, including about the war. We had to see *The Sound of Music* in Norway because kids under 12 were not allowed in in Swedish movie theatres because of the violence.

Our television was an old model: a huge cabinet with an 8 inch screen. I did read the newspaper. There was a lot of anti-Americanism. The Swedes can be quite sure of themselves and very self-righteous. They condemned American slums and civil rights with a sense of superiority. They did not have slums, but it occurred to me later that it was easy for them to be that way in the 1960's because they were a very homogeneous society; outsiders were not especially welcome. There was still corporal punishment in the schools in the mid-1960s. I remember teachers whacking students with rulers. Our religion teacher almost killed one student by taking him by the neck and cutting off the blood flow to the brain. So they were not perfect, but they were judgmental. It was very interesting to see how much had changed when I spent my R&R from Moscow in Stockholm in 1992. Over the years, especially since the Viet Nam War, Sweden took in lots of refugees, draft dodgers, and others and built public housing for them, to house them apart from native Swedes. By 1992, much of that housing had degenerated into slums. So they created what in the 60s they castigated the United States for. I am not excusing the United States for our mistakes, but I realized it also meant that the Swedes were criticizing perhaps from a position of ignorance and/or superiority but had not had to deal with these issues themselves until much later. A Swedish diplomat I knew in Moscow said the country was struggling with how to undo the damage that had been done.

Q: Now we will finish up. I was just looking at the time, the university thing. You graduated form Indiana when?

McISAAC: 1978.

Indiana University – Bloomington is a huge state school. It was very different from Cornell, though the city of Bloomington was about the same size as Ithaca, around 30,000 population. I taught creative writing to undergraduate students. Students thought it would be an easy course. The students in my section were disabused of that idea from the start. The reactions to being held accountable were interesting. One student threatened to kill me when I gave him a 'B'. I reported him to the campus police who indicated he had a history of this type of threat. Another student, a very wealthy one, proposed; he was a bit surprised when I asked what he would do if I accepted. It was an education for me. I enjoyed the adult education course I taught the second year, since the majority of the students chose to be there, most were not just filling an academic requirement.

There was a big coal strike in 1977 – 1978 that badly impacted IU since the university burned coal to generate heat. By the beginning of 1978, the school was running low on coal and what they had was frozen. Even jack hammers could not break through the frozen coal and they were dangerous to operate under those conditions. Eventually the school closed and all students who could leave were required to so that most buildings could be closed down. However, the all-important basketball season was upon us so the closure was delayed for three weeks through the end of the season. The basketball building was the only building with heat for those three weeks and the school put guards on it so non-basketball students could not sneak in to warm up. It was a cold winter. I remember carrying blankets and extra scarves to class to keep warm.

Q: Where were you headed; what did you see yourself doing?

McISAAC: Well I originally saw myself teaching. Then I started to look at the job market. I had friends who earned Ph.D.'s but could not find work. I did apply for a number of different positions, but universities and colleges could get a Ph. D. for the same price that they had previously hired an MFA or an MA. Among the colleges I applied to was a small Catholic college in Steubenville, Ohio, which advertised for an English teacher and was looking for the cheaper MA/MFA. The human resources (HR) officer called me in for an interview. At that time I didn't have a car so my mother and I drove through Pennsylvania to Ohio coal country, and I went in for an interview. The English department head was very positive. The HR person also seemed positive. Then I was interviewed by the president of the college. The first thing he said to me was that he thought all the professors in his English department were stupid. He said he didn't understand how anyone could waste their time on "that sort of thing". I was shocked. The president laughed and added that he held all of his staff meetings in the men's steam room. He was quite proud of himself. It was also clear that he held nothing but contempt for me. At that point I figured I would not get the job. At the same time, I was trying to figure out how I could get out of the room without further embarrassment. The HR guy was beet red, shrinking into the floor and no help. I finally thanked the president for his time and walked out. No one had the courtesy to call me or write. Finally, knowing I wasn't getting the job, I called the HR guy and told him that he at least owed me a

response, at least a yes or a no. He stammered a bit and then said he would have to speak with his boss, but of course, I did not get the job. I never did get a letter or anything.

At that point I went back to work at Triangle Book Shop. I worked through college at the independent bookstore. Triangle sold textbooks for Cornell courses, in competition with the Cornell Campus Store. From 1973 on, I worked very summer and every rush, the first month of each semester, as well as some Christmas vacations. The owner of the store took me back again, so I worked there in the summer of 1978 while I continued to apply for jobs.

In the fall of 1978, I landed a job at Cornell in the graduate library, Olin Library, in the History of Science and Icelandic collections. It was two part jobs. In the Icelandic collection, I was a library cataloguer. I learned how to determine the index numbers for books in the collection which involves a lot of research. At that time, when the library index was not computerized, this meant a lot of wandering around the building to the various source books to come up with the correct classifications. Cornell was left the collection by the Icelandic gentleman who decided it would be better cared for at Cornell University. I got the job because I spoke Swedish. They wanted someone with a master's degree and a modern Scandinavian language. I learned to read the Icelandic alphabet. Because so many texts in the collection were unique, we were creating numbers, not just using numbers already assigned. After determining the correct number, we entered into the Library of Congress system for use should any other copies of these texts show up. It was very dry, but very interesting work. The curator of the collection was a very dignified, reserved man. However, the assistant curator, Louis (whose last name I do not remember), drove everyone nuts.

There were three of us on the staff. The most senior cataloguer used to have screaming fights with Louis. This is in the library proper. When things got really loud, someone from the administrative office, on the same floor but on the other side of the building, would come down to our section to tell them to knock it off. I felt really sorry for the curator who didn't know how to deal with Louis. He left that up to the personnel office, which thought the world of Louis who had started in the library in a different collection. Louis was really good at kissing up and had the personnel office, or at least the one personnel staff member who counted, convinced of his brilliance. Louis decided that after my probationary period was up that I should remain on probation. It didn't make sense to me and Louis gave no reason. Personnel finally told me after questioning that Louis said I asked too many questions. Because I could not get a guarantee out of the personnel people that the same thing would not happen again after another three months, I decided to leave that position. Leaving during the probationary period was not supposed to disadvantage me. Little did I know. Five other people were hired and left that job in the space of a year before personnel finally figured out that Louis was the problem and not the people working for him. He was moved to a non-supervisory position elsewhere in the library, but the damage was done. The grant money for the project was cut off because it was so delayed by the constant turnover of personnel.

At this point, I did a variety of jobs. I worked for Manpower. I was a secretary. I continued to apply for various jobs but it was finally when I applied for a job at IBM, for a sales job that I realized I needed to do something more drastic. I taught myself to type in high school and bought a second hand Selectric II typewriter. I learned to strip it and clean it from watching the professionals do it; it was a lot less expensive if I could do it myself. I figured I was qualified to sell the thing. Nearly the first question the interviewer asked me was: "you have such a nice English background, wouldn't you rather be a secretary?" I responded that I had not applied for a secretarial job. And their response was that they would only consider me for a secretarial position. So, I went back to school. I decided Dammit! If employers do not consider me qualified then I'm going to get the qualifications for what I want to do. I enrolled in the business school at Cornell and earned a master of public administration. I had the opportunity to study in Belgium and I got a License première in applied economics from the Catholic University of Louvain at Louvain-la-Neuve on an exchange program. I received a scholarship for the program from the Belgian school. Of the six American students in the exchange program, I was one of the three who actually finished the coursework and thesis to earn a degree there; with distinction.

I figured if employers were not going to consider me qualified with the education I had, then I needed to make myself qualified. In the mean time I took the Foreign Service exam in 1979 before I started in the business school. That same summer, I went to Stanford University for a professional publishing course. I graduated in 1982 from Cornell with an MPA, a Master of Public Administration.

Q: Did you see as you were going through these things, were you seeing an elimination being a woman, on jobs. Was this part of the equation?

McISAAC: Yes, it was part of it. And it is one of the things I think of now when I look at what is going on. When I came out of college the first time there was a lot of talk about women and work; it was not the first time women went to college, but it was the largest cohort of women going to college up to that time. We were 30% to 40% of the college community whereas the percentage of women was lower before then. We were told that the work world would change because there are so many young women graduating and looking for jobs. Experts predicted that businesses would accommodate women. We were told businesses would understand the importance of women working, and they would accommodate. There was a lot of talk about child care for women; not being pigeonholed into things like being the secretary and getting the coffee; and so on. Now at the end of my career I think one of the most horrifying and saddest things for me, even though we have come a very long way in many ways, society still does not welcome women as equals in the work force. During the 1970s, 1980s, and even today, they outsourced to poorly paid foreigners, they insourced with the H-1 visa. Anything they could do not to accommodate the swelling female work force. And we are still having the same conversations today as when I started in the 70's about how to find affordable health care. How to accommodate someone who has a kid or two or three, and then returns to the work force. We still discriminate, and to me that is one of the hardest things to swallow at 58 years of age, having worked full or part time since I was 17, is all the positive ideas

from the 70's, while not a deliberate lie, was ignored by businesses, government, and even by universities and colleges. There was hope and it was destroyed. I don't think women who are younger appreciate just how bad it truly is. I mean they do have a lot more advantages. They can do a lot more things. But they also don't seem to feel they have to really fight for anything and they don't seem to see we are back at that point because we have not figured out how to provide health care, well health care is one, but child care so that women can return to the work world and be sure that their children are OK. Not on a large scale. You see little pockets here and there. Of course the State Department was very late in getting to that as well. When it is mentioned it is like why do you want that? So that is one of the most striking things to me.

Q: Well I think this is probably a good place to stop. This is what, '82?

McISAAC: 1982, yes.

Q: And you say you had the Foreign Service been at all part of your thinking at any time?

McISAAC: I took the Foreign Service exam in 1979 before I went back to school. I thought I would try it. I was also considering working on humanitarian assistance at a non-governmental organization or at one of the UN agencies. I was not entirely sure.

I passed the exam, but I never was called back for the oral exam. I did not think anything of it. I was in Belgium from August 1980 through August 1981. I spent one year at Cornell, '79 to '80, and then '80 to '81 in Belgium. In '82 I was back at Cornell and graduated in '82. I received a letter while I was in Belgium stating many of us who took it actually passed the exam in 1979. The Department sets the passing grade based on how many spaces they think they will have, so the cutoff varies. In 1979, far more people passed than expected but the Department did not follow its own rules on calling everyone who passed the written exam in for the oral. One of the group read the fine print that said, if you pass the written exam, the Department must invite you to take the oral exam, and sued the Department. So they reached out to all of us who had passed but not been called in and told us we could either use the 1979 score or take the exam again and use the higher of the two scores. Either way, please come take the oral exam. Since I was overseas and you can only take the oral in the United States, I took the exam again in the U.S. embassy in Brussels. I took the oral exam here in Washington after I returned. I passed and was placed on the register. I was on the register almost two years before they called me up.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions on the oral exam?

McISAAC: Yes I do. There was a group exercise for which they divided us into four groups. They gave each group a problem, such as determining how much funding each section of the embassy should receive with justifications. We were given the total budget number and told to determine who received what and why. Each participant represented an embassy section, e.g., political section, economic section, administrative, section, and so on. Each individual was also given instructions the rest of the group did not see, on

how to behave. Some were cooperative and others were not. We were told to sort out the budget in discussion within the group. About 20 minutes into the exercise, we were told that we had five more minutes and oh, by the way, your budget was just cut by 20 percent. I remember there was lots of arguing, but that in our group there were two of us who divided the leadership role between us without any overt discussion. We pulled our group together and came to a conclusion. The other group was still arguing as they left the room. I've always thought that was a big part of the reason I passed.

The individual interview was kind of funny in my case because of what happened. Two people conducted the interview. They were in two chairs facing me with nothing between us. One of the men wanted coffee so he told the other guy to start without him. There was a list of around 20 questions from which they picked several to ask. We were given the list about five minutes before the interview started. The first question I was asked was about what I would do if I was in an embassy and the embassy in the country next door had an emergency and had to evacuate. I thought about it and said, well first off I would find out exactly what it is they are asking for, etc. I was finishing the response about five minutes later when the second interviewer returned with his coffee and sat down. The first interviewer told him to ask the next question. But he picked the same question. I knew I had just answered that question in great detail, including answering follow up questions, but I thought I better not say anything. Instead of just saying "hey I already asked that question" I realized the first interviewer was kicking the second one. There was no table or anything to mask his attempt to get the other guy's attention. I was convinced that this was going to kill my chances. Eventually, they decided to communicate verbally and moved on to another question. I have never forgotten that. There were a lot of questions about organization of embassies, offices, and budgets. Not much on policy-related issues.

Q: I take it they were doing conal things. You were in the management side.

McISAAC: Well that is the other thing Department did. When they actually offered me a job they put me in the computer in two different cones. I didn't know that was possible. I was put into the administrative – now management – cone and also into the economic cone. When I spoke with my career development officer (CDO) about it, he was surprised at the double-coning and told me I couldn't be in two, as if I had done it to myself. Ultimately, he told me that I didn't want to be a management officer and that was how I became an economic officer. I later added the political cone. But I don't think he did me any favor, looking back on it. I liked being a political and economic officer. I had the background for those two cones, no question, but I think now that I am actually coming out of the foreign service and looking for a job, it would have been easier if I had been a management officer. But I did management work at times throughout my career. I did a little bit of everything. But I became an economic officer initially because my CDO was an economic officer.

Q: CDO is,

McISAAC: Career development officer. I think they call them CDA's now.

Q: OK, we will pick this up the next time and you are coming into the Foreign Service. We will talk about your A-100 course and go on from there.

Q: All right, and today is 11 September 2012. We are with Karen Jo McIsaac. You mentioned two things that we mentioned before and you thought we would fit it into the civil rights thing.

McISAAC: What part civil rights played in my life? As I said my father got his dream job, teaching job at Cornell University, and we moved to Ithaca, New York, in 1960 from Long Island. He was an associate professor of electrical engineering in the College of Engineering. He and my mother volunteered to be host family to foreign students. Originally, in 1961 or 1962, a student was assigned to them for the following summer. However, the head of Cornell's host family program called at about 11:00 on Christmas Eve to say that seven young men from Africa were at the Ithaca airport and the people who were supposed to pick up one of them, Stephen Machuka, didn't show. So my father put on his coat and went out to the airport to pick him up. He was the first person in his village in Kenya to leave the village to go to high school. He was a tremendous runner. In fact that is partially how he got a scholarship. He told us stories about how he had to run from the village to get to high school on time in the morning since it was a good distance, ten miles or so. He had trouble adjusting during his first semester at Cornell. Obviously it was pretty traumatic and alien to be dumped in Ithaca, New York in the middle of a snow storm in the middle of the winter with no winter clothing. After the first semester, my mother decided that the best thing to do was to move him in with the family. We each had our own bedrooms. To accommodate Steven, my older sister Wendy and I were doubled up in my bedroom, and Steven moved into my brother's room while Hugh moved into Wendy's room. My younger sister Kathy was the only one who didn't move. And for the next six to eight months Steven lived with us as part of the family. I can remember, I mean I don't know if an 18 or 19 year old really wanted to play with little kids. My mother has pictures of him playing with us in the yard. This was exposure to a totally different culture and race at a time when there was only one African-American family living in the neighborhood.

I remember being fascinated when he asked my mother to buy limes which in upstate New York in the winter were not easy to find, to squeeze into a glass of milk so he could digest it. I think because the way my parents treated his presence as a perfectly normal thing, there was never any question that he wasn't part of the family. He remained very close to the family for the rest of the time he was at Cornell. He corresponded with my parents for 15 or 16 years afterwards but then the letters stopped. He married an African-American woman while in the United States. She moved to Kenya with him and they had several children. Then in the early 1990s, a colleague of my brother's at Cornell's pigeon loft, where they did research on pigeon navigation, Irene Brown, went to Kenya to support a colleague studying the bee-eater birds there. My mother gave Brown Machuka's name and the last address she had. Brown was able to find Machuka while she was in Kenya. He was fairly high up in the ministry of education in Kenya at the

time. He had divorced his first wife, Betty, who had returned to the U.S. He was remarried to a local woman.

Another thing that made a great impression on me with regard to civil rights and indeed human rights, happened when I was 16, when I applied to the Rotary Exchange high school exchange program. My father had been a Rotary Fellow in the early 1950's at the University of Leeds. I made it to the final regional competition. Both of my parents went with me to the final interview. One of the forms parents had to sign contained a line on it asking whether parents to sign that they could not object to their child going to South Africa in order for the child to remain in the competition. Apartheid was very much in force in South Africa at the time. I remember my father giving a very eloquent explanation for why he could not sign off on having any of his children sent to a country that treated any of its citizens as second class citizens. One of the people in the Rotary club that he knew well later told him that that was one of the reasons I was taken out of the running. To this day I remember that is one of the most important things my parents taught me.

Q: Well this is very good example to have in the family. Now you graduated from high school and went to college.

McISAAC: I went to Cornell in 1972 and graduated in 1976 with an independent major, titled: Creative & Dramatic Writing. We did talk about that. I went to the Indiana University in Bloomington's writing program where I earned a Master of Arts in 1978. I returned to college in 1979, after finding that businesses and companies were very quick to pigeonhole me into secretarial positions. I earned a Master of Public Administration from Cornell University and a one-year degree, premier license, from the Catholic University of Louvain in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, in applied economics.

Q: In your writing were you looking for fiction or factual writing. What were you thinking about?

McISAAC: My interest was primarily in writing fiction. I read a lot, following in my father's footsteps. My father read a lot of murder mysteries. Dad also belonged to the American Heritage book club and had some nice editions of the masters, Victor Hugo, Cato, and all the rest. So books were easily accessible in the house. I read everything I could get my hands on. There were books and magazines about science as well that I did not completely comprehend, but I plowed through them anyway. When I started writing, I tried different styles. Historical fiction and science fiction were the two that stuck. I won the 1977 Indiana University writing competition with a short story about the preservation of knowledge by monks in medieval Europe; fiction but based on research. I also tried a lot of different writing styles. That was one of the criticisms of me in the writing program. I didn't have "a style" that defined me. I wasn't categorizable. I just liked to try different ways of looking at the world and of presenting the world I was creating.

Q: I am curious. Ok, you have a class of writing. How do they break it down and say ok today you will write a short story and tomorrow you will write an exposition drinking thrift water or something. I mean how do they work this?

McISAAC: I am sure every school is different. In our case there was only one professor of writing fiction. There were several who taught poetry but I was in the fiction side of it. It was more or less go away and write something and come back. They weren't telling us to write a novel because of course that would have taken far longer, although one could have written a chapter or two; in one of my writing courses at Cornell, I did write a novel over the course of the semester. But the first assignment the professor at IU gave us was to go to the library and I forget what the Library of Congress symbol is, P or P-something where fiction starts, and start reading. Make your way through the canon. So that was the way it started. Then it was write something and bring an example in. Everyone did different things. I found in short fiction I was more comfortable with intermediate, not three pages, but not 75, so something in between. I also, I would read things and decide ok let me see if I can write that way. That was where I ran afoul of expectations.

In class, everybody sat around a table, copies were made, and everybody critiqued everybody else's writing. Then the professor would actually go through and critique as well. The professor wasn't very happy with me because he could not fit me into a nice, neat little box. He was highly critical, often in ways that were not very constructive; I was left trying to figure out what to do with his criticism since it was mostly in the vein of "I don't like historical fiction/science fiction". When it came time, I did not pick him as one of my thesis advisors. I picked one of the other English professors, well both English professors but one who taught in the undergraduate school and then another one who taught graduate courses but who did not teaching creative writing, because I wanted somebody with a different perspective and a more open mind.

I discovered in my second year in the program that that particular professor made a habit of singling out one student every year to be hypercritical of. When I was in my second year, one of the first year students, a woman who lived several doors down from me in the dorm, came to me in tears, asking, "What do you know about this guy; what can you tell me?" When she told me what he had said to her and showed me what he wrote on her work, I realized how similar the criticisms were. He was doing to her exactly what he did to me. Because of his behavior, by the end of the first year most of the class, if they couldn't agree on anything else, they could agree that I was no good, and that my writing was no good. It was a very unfortunate thing. By April, I just stopped writing. I had already handed in the number of pages required to complete the semester, but in late April, the professor sent me a letter, in which he wrote that he was going to give me an incomplete and asked whether I was going to hand anything else in... At that point, I was very discouraged and wrote back that since I had handed in more than enough work to meet the requirements of the course, he should not be giving me an incomplete; he should give me a grade. I also asked him to tell me what I had done so badly. He never answered directly. He gave me an A, so I still can only speculate about what his problem was. I was most upset by his poisoning the atmosphere against me with the rest of the class.

One of my favorite things at IU was the choir I sang in. I auditioned for the Singing Hoosiers, a group which sings all over the country on behalf of the university. At the final creative writing class, there was a party. I figured I should show my face, but I left early because the Singing Hoosiers were performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the university orchestra. As I left, I heard somebody running down the stairs after me and yelling my name. It was the professor chasing me down the hallway to apologize for not talking to me and asking how I was doing, what my plans were for the following year. It was the first time he had shown any interest in getting to know me. I was floored.

The second year I focused on my thesis, which was two medium-length stories. Because I was on scholarship and continued to teach. Instead of an undergraduate course, the second year I was assigned an evening adult continuing education course. It was more fun than the undergraduates since the students were there because they wanted to be, not because they had to be. I think that was a good experience for me.

Q: I am sure it was.

McISAAC: Being able to work with other people and having to develop my own curriculum was a challenge. Creative writing instruction often is not very structured, which can lead to frustration for students and teachers alike. I tried to combine required reading with exercises as well as letting the students pick their projects. I made the students edit their work and we spent a lot of time on remedial English. One of the students had a problem with my comments on his work. They were required to return the page with comments on it with the new version. He always rubbed out the comments with a black crayon, sorting of like he was scrubbing me off his page.

Among the poetry exercises I tried, was one I learned from a man who taught creative writing in the Ithaca public schools – I met him through a professor at Cornell. The students are given 10 words from which they must create a poem. I filled a sheet of paper with words of all kinds and then cut them into strips which I kept in an old Sucrets tin which I still have somewhere. The students pulled ten of the strips out and wrote down the words. The surprise for me was how well some of the students who were not adept with words on their own could take these words and create amazing poetry. One student in particular I remember was on the wrestling team. I actually received a call from the coach threatening me with dire consequences if he didn't pass. I was annoyed since I was going to give the kid a B. Though not a great writer, he always came to class prepared and completed every assignment. The coach seemed to be thrown off balance when I told him as much. But I was surprised to be threatened before the grades went out. Another student, who I knew was from a wealthy family because he informed the class at the beginning of the semester, was quite lazy and didn't do a lot of work. About the middle of the term, he asked if I would give him an A if he married me. My response was what would you do if I took you up on it? His face was priceless because he clearly had not expected me to respond that way. He earned a C and I know he was not happy. However, I saw him in town several months into the spring semester. He chased me down the street to thank me for giving him the C; he acknowledged that he did not put any effort into the

course. I was pleasantly surprised. The most difficult case was the student who threatened to kill me.

Q: Well that is nice. It adds a little something to the course dynamics.

McISAAC: I reported that incident to the campus police. I had given the student a "B", which I thought was a decent grade. When I told the campus police, they said, "Oh we know about him." It made me wonder what he was doing going to classes if he was problematic. He disappeared shortly after that. I don't know if they threw him out or if he left on his own. That was kind of scary. I had several stellar students as well, students I could push to do more than they thought they could and do it well, which balanced out the difficult ones. As I say it was a good experience to go through, particularly coming from Cornell University which was in a totally different universe than Indiana University.

Q: Well what were you thinking? Whither?

McISAAC: Well at that point I really wasn't sure about what I was going to do. A lot of the people I knew who were getting Ph.D.'s were taking jobs that someone with a professional MA, the type of degree I earned, would have taken prior to that. There were just too many students graduating with Ph.D.'s in English, and not earning very much. I expected to teach three or four undergraduate courses and make around $15,000 a year. But because of the surplus of higher degrees, colleges and universities were hiring the Ph.D.'s, not masters degrees. Having taught for two years, I was a bit ambivalent about going into teaching full time. I am not my parents who both have an avocation to teach. I can do it and I think I am creative enough to do it well, but it's not as fulfilling for me as it is for them.

I also wanted to do something with the foreign affairs community. I had thought about the United Nations, but I wasn't quite sure how to get there. So I looked more locally. I ended up doing a number of different jobs. I went back to working at the bookstore where I worked when I was an undergraduate at Cornell. Triangle Book Shop was an off campus private book store that catered to CU students, selling textbooks and school supplies in addition to the normal bookstore offerings. I worked there every summer and also at the beginning of each semester during "rush". Then I was a library cataloguer for a while at Cornell's graduate library, Olin Library. Even if the job I applied for was not secretarial, the vast majority of interviewers would ask "wouldn't you rather be a secretary?" based on my English background. Employers often are very literal and narrow minded in that way rather than seeing the possibilities that a good grounding in English and writing would provide for nearly any position. Eventually, I decided that if they thought I was not qualified, I was going to become qualified and I went back to school. I attended the business school at Cornell and earned a Master of Public Administration. I went to Belgium on an exchange program and completed the coursework and thesis to earn a premier license in applied economics.

Q: You were pretty well set on a management career by then.

McISAAC: Management or government. At the business school, we were supposed to do an internship between the two years. A lot of the people in school did government internships. I decided to be different and also because I was curious, I applied to businesses. I ended up as a paid intern for the St. Regis Paper Company's lobbying office in DC.

Q: About St. Regis, what were they like?

McISAAC: St. Regis was a paper/forest products company. They had nurseries all over the country. One of the biggest ones was near Mount Saint Helens which blew up that summer. Weyerhaeuser was the company that had the largest nursery on the mountain, but St. Regis had some properties in the area. 1980 was an interesting summer to be in Washington, DC. The election campaign was in full swing. I saw Ronald Reagan in person at a campaign stop outside the Republican national headquarters. He looked much older in person than on TV, his skin was grayish, in contrast to the dyed black hair. It was the first time his age was real to me.

In the St. Regis office were the primary lobbyist, the vice president for public affairs, the secretary, and myself. The first thing the lobbyist did was to hand me a report which was probably about an inch thick with the instruction to summarize the entire report in one page. I swallowed hard and went off and read that report and did a one page synopsis of it. I wasn't quite sure if I had gotten it right. It was a small office with the individual offices very close together. I was just waiting for someone to scream that I had done it terribly. The lobbyist, Tim, was not someone who lavished praise. But he said loudly enough for me to hear, "Gee, she did it." My job in that office was to attend meetings, hearings in Congress, mark ups of bills, on topics of interest to the lobbyist, and then to write a report he could use when he went out to buttonhole congress people and senators. Every report could not exceed one page. It was the best writing class I ever had. I had to learn how to condense complex issues, observed over several days or weeks, into something comprehensible on just one page. Tim told me as a lobbyist, he had 17 seconds to get the congressperson's attention.

Great experience. Even with Tim's eccentricities, the entire group was great to work with. I was lucky that it was a paid internship so I didn't have to borrow money to live. I rented a room in the basement of a friend of a friend's house on Chain Bridge Road, near Nebraska Avenue in north west DC. The owner was wealthy, an heiress to the Paine family of Paine Webber. She was very active with a Catholic organization assisting refugees from Ethiopia. I gained exposure to private industry and to the forest products group that St. Regis belonged to that I never had before.

I learned more about Congress and how it functions – or doesn't – than I had learned in school. I mean there were some meetings where I thought, oh god, this is my Congress? I got to see who was good, who was terrible. Who never showed up or showed up unprepared. In fact there was one committee on the creation of the Superfund for cleanup of toxic spills that I was assigned to track. The committee chairman Senator Ervin periodically mentioned that Senator Nunn never showed up to committee meetings. He

would look around the room and ask, “Where is Senator Nunn? Does anyone know where Senator Nunn is?” I also had the opportunity to hear George Mitchell. At the time I only knew that he replaced Senator Muskie when the latter left the Senate to run for president. Mitchell usually sat very quietly in the hearings and didn’t say anything. The chairman repeatedly invited him to speak, saying once, “Mr. Mitchell, you can talk you know. You can say something.” Mitchell responded, “When I have something to say I will let you know.” One day Alan Simpson argued vociferously about a particular topic and ended by declaring “I know the law and this is what it is.” George Mitchell sat up straight and said, “Mr. Chairman,” and once recognized, he went through all the applicable case law, very quietly and very politely, case name and date. He simply shredded Simpson’s argument. It was the most amazing performance of sheer intellectual firepower. By the end, Simpson was bright red and huffing, but could not come up with a counter argument. Then there were the discouraging days, such as when Senator DeConcini proposed an amendment – which he had not read – to a bill – which he had not read – and viciously turned on his cowering staff when the other members of the committee asked him questions he could not answer. The staff clearly feared him. He flounced out in a huff with his staff scrambling to follow.

I had been thinking about finding a job related to foreign affairs, but I wasn’t sure how to get there. I was not sure about the government, how to get a job. In my family public service was considered an honorable profession and was encouraged. So in 1979, I took the Foreign Service exam for the first time, received a passing grade but was not called for the oral interview. I assumed that meant I did not pass. In the meantime, I went back to school to Cornell University’s School of Administration and Management. I applied for and received a scholarship to go to the Catholic University of Louvain in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium on a one-year joint Cornell University – Chicago University exchange program. When I applied, the university officials said we would love to send you, but could you learn French? The exchange was with the two sides of the Catholic University of Louvain/Leuven. I asked for Leuven since they teach in English in the business school there. So of course most of the applicants for the program apply for that part. I was asked if I was willing to learn French. So in January of 1980 I found someone to teach me French, a French student in the Modern Languages Department at Cornell. I learned enough French to get myself into the program, although I did continue to take lessons while I was in Belgium. I was the only one of the three Cornell University people on the exchange that year who completed the degree there. Two of the three Chicago students completed it. I earned the Première license, with distinction. When I received the results, a piece of paper with the list of courses you took and your thesis, I thought oh my God, I failed. There was a big D stamped across the paper. It wasn’t until I got to the bottom when I read “avec Distinction”, that I realized I received the degree and did well.

Q: Oh boy, I can imagine.

McISAAC: Coming back to Cornell for my second year was not easy. All the students I entered with in 1979 had graduated, and I was with a completely new bunch of students. I discovered, as I had when I returned home from Sweden at age 11, even in my 20’s, I would suffer culture shock. I hadn’t really thought it through, but when I expressed

dismay to one of my professors, Fredrick Bent, a great teacher by the way, he sat me down and explained the process in a way that nobody had ever done before. That people left behind have moved on with their lives in a different direction. I had done something very different, something that they perhaps couldn't do or were afraid to do. His words gave me a way to handle the reactions I got from other students when I spoke about what my year abroad. The explanation proved there wasn't something wrong with me but it was something I was going to have to figure out how to work to accommodate. Because I expressed an interest in foreign affairs and in the United Nations, Bent assigned me related paper topics, including researching UN-related information at Olin Library, since Cornell University is a repository for UN documents. Bent ran a course using students as consultants with local companies and non-profits. I worked on a major review of the local hospice organization with two other students. We researched the hospice work in the area and made recommendations to the Ithaca group. It was a very interesting experience. I came away with great admiration for the hospice workers. Unfortunately, Bent was diagnosed with a particularly virulent prostate cancer and died about a year later.

Q: How did you find government? Excuse me I was thinking of public administration. Did foreign affairs cross your radar much or not in this time?

McISAAC: A little bit. I studied public administration, which is government at different levels, though I also took many of the business administration courses. I took the Foreign Service exam in 1979. Interesting thing happened. Someone who took the written exam when I did actually read the fine print and sued the State Department. Turns out that if you passed the written exam, they were required to call you in for the oral exam. I received a letter while I was in Belgium informing me that as I had passed, I could use the grade from before or retake the written exam and take the higher of the two grades and then take the oral exam. The oral exam can only be taken in the United States. Since I was overseas, I took the written exam again, at the U.S. Embassy in Brussels and took the oral when I came back. I passed but my name was put on the list and then nothing happened. I was still interested, but I needed to move on and try to figure out what I was going to do with my life because maybe they wouldn't call me.

Q: Yeah, well this is the thing about the Foreign Service. We have all been through it I guess. Had you been talking to people who had been in the Foreign Service?

McISAAC: I never met anybody who had been in the Foreign Service or at least who admitted to it. I talked to someone from the United Nations while I was at the business school. Because I was interested in foreign affairs Professor Bent introduced me to a gentleman whose name I don't remember who worked at the United Nations in peace keeping. He was British and had been doing peace keeping work in Africa with plans to return to another mission after that. He came to Cornell to give a lecture, though not at the business school. The business school had a small art gallery and the two of us went there because it was quiet with a small conference room. We finished about 8 pm and discovered we were locked in. At that time unlike now where most places have a push bar so you can get out in case of emergency, we couldn't get out of the art gallery. So we beat on the glass until one of the students still downstairs heard the ruckus and eventually

found a janitor to open the door and let us out. The guy was clearly uncomfortable and I was tremendously embarrassed. But that was my first direct interaction with anyone working in foreign affairs. I met a professor and students from other countries and my family continued to be a host family for foreign students at Cornell. We were host to a woman from Hong Kong for a number of years who also kept in touch with the family for many years afterwards. Following her, there was an upper caste Indian gentleman who expected my mother to go to his dorm room and fix his meals for him. My mother was working at that time and tried to teach him to cook without success. He eventually found a girl friend to take care of him. That was the last student my parents took on.

I graduated in 1982 into a full blown recession. I had a job lined up to work at an insurance company. I didn't go directly there but two months later they informed me that they did not have the money for the position. So sorry, kid. I was lucky in a way that I hadn't moved to New Jersey before the position was cancelled. A lot of students in my graduating class were in a job for two or three months and then lost it because of the economy. It was a bad year. Triangle Book Shop did not need me full time, so I went to work for Manpower. I was a secretary in a number of places and also did other stranger things. I had one job at National Cash Register when they were moving offices but did not yet have all the phone lines and office equipment moved. I sat on the floor of an almost empty office – the chairs and desks were gone – and babysat the Xerox machine. The phone was on the floor next to me.

Q: Did you keep an eye on the Xerox machine?

McISAAC: A very sharp eye. And I hope it was a very happy Xerox machine. I had a short stint at the Tompkins County Community Bank (TC3). The bank acquired a new machine to count checks and put them in envelopes but weren't sure it could be trusted. I was hired to check the count, which meant that I was counting the checks as well, racing the machine. It was only a one day job which is good. I do not think I could have handled a second day. Amazingly, I beat the machine. The bank employees were really impressed but the machine broke down partway through the day and rather than stop and wait for it to be fixed, I kept counting. I moved ahead of the machine and was able to stay ahead for the rest of the day. Ultimately TC3 decided that they were going to trust the machine anyway.

I worked at a variety of companies and Cornell offices for Manpower. Finally, in 1983, I landed a full time job at the Banker's Trust of South Carolina Mortgage bank in Florence, South Carolina. They had a short management program where you worked in every section of the bank, and then you were assigned to a full time management position in the bank. So for about three months I worked in all the sections of the mortgage bank. The only think I was not allowed to do was adjudicate a loan. I did everything else, and then was assigned to head five servicing departments in the bank: assumptions, payoffs, special interest rates, escrow analysis, and customer service. That job lasted for almost a year. In 1984, Bankers Mortgage was bought by Fleet Financial Group of Rhode Island. As is usual, they cleared out the entire management staff, but at the same time the merger was underway, I received two letters from the State Department offering me a job, one as

a management officer, one as an economic officer. I accepted the first one, and then I got the other one and said to myself well I thought I already responded to this, but ok I had better respond just in case, so I did. I did notice that they were for two different things, but did not understand that they were actually different offers.

I was the first person to join the Foreign Service out of South Carolina in a number of years resulting in a lot of back and forth with the department over movers. The Department requires the mover to meet international packing standards. There was no mover in Florence who could do that. I had to go to Columbia, South Carolina, which was more than 90 miles away, and the Department just couldn't wrap its head around that for a long time, it issued a waiver so I could pack out. I had a very high long-distance phone bill over the issue, including explaining that I was on my own and could not simply put off packing out or have a spouse do all the work. Finally the packers came and my stuff went off to storage and I loaded the car up. I remember driving to Washington with a really terrible migraine headache, thinking I was not going to be able to make it. I have a long history of horrible migraines – the first one I remember was when I was seven years old. The medicine used at the times made me sick as a dog. That trip north was awful.

On June 26, 1984, I officially entered the Foreign Service. And going back to those two different letters, I discovered when I arrived in Washington I was actually assigned to two different cones: administrative and economic. My CDO who was an economic officer said, "Well you can't be in two cones. You don't want to be an admin officer so you can be an economic officer." I think 28 years later it might have been better to be an administrative officer because it is easier to find a job now. But I did not know better at the time.

Q: No, we are all caught up whatever happens to be at hand you are an immediate expert in doing something.

McISAAC: So I entered the A-100 course June 26, 1984.

Q: OK, how would you describe the composition of the A-100?

McISAAC: We were the largest class to enter up to that point. It seems strange now when they are bringing in classes of 100 or more, but we had 54 people in our class, and that was considered huge and unwieldy. .

Q: When I came in it was 30.

McISAAC: There were only had nine women in the class.

Q: That is surprising.

McISAAC: It surprised the people who ran the class as well. Kathy Peterson was one of the two coordinators for our class. I think we were number 22 in the new numbering after

the 1982 act. She said later that she thought the paucity of women explained the dynamics of the group. We had many dominant personalities and, as a result, it was not a particularly cohesive class. I think it was just too large with too many people wanting to be in charge.

Q: Yeah maybe it can't be that big.

McISAAC: We wound up with little sub-groups that socialized and remained in touch, but the larger group never cohered. There was a wide range of backgrounds which also impacted the dynamics. There was a descendant of Charles Dickens who let us know very early on that his family had dined with secretaries of state for years. It was his first real job at 30 or 31; he had done his own thing but hadn't held a real job. To him the Foreign Service was a gentleman's profession, therefore not beneath him. We had another heir to something who talked about his Queen Anne chairs and how much they were worth. They were the real thing too apparently and he was concerned about how they would travel. So we had the very upper crust as well as people from less advantaged backgrounds from all over the country.

Q: How did you feel you fit in that?

McISAAC: I didn't really. You know, I tend to be an observer. Well I was painfully shy as a child. I still am somewhat socially awkward, not outgoing. Although many Foreign Service officers are not.

Q: I really have all the stuff to be a little reserved particularly in large crowds.

McISAAC: Not atypical for an FSO. We were told when class started that we could only look at the list of jobs provided to us, that we could not talk to anyone outside of the junior officer HR office to get something different. One member of the group, Carey Cavanaugh, who taught history I think, kept insisting that he was too valuable to be sent to a hardship post, and promptly went to the German desk to make his argument and secured himself a position in Berlin. Another one had already set up a job for himself in Beijing, even before the class started. He had been working in Beijing and apparently the ambassador promised him a position. So there were people who did not play by the rules and were rewarded, which bothered me. Actually that is how you get ahead in the Foreign Service despite all the talk of fairness and openness: you cheat.

One thing I proposed, and which apparently continues today, is that everybody donate one passport picture to be posted on a board with their names. I typed up the names and glued the photos on. It seemed a good way to keep track of the 54 people. Despite that, it was not a cohesive group. We didn't go out and do things together all that much, outside of the official stuff. There were cliques within the larger group and an awful lot of one-upmanship.

One of the places they took us to during training was in Warrenton. I will never forget this; it is pretty embarrassing. We each had our own bedroom but shared a bathroom

between two rooms. The woman I shared the bathroom with locked it on the inside the first night. I had to go to the bathroom that about two am but the bathroom door was locked. I went outside in the bushes behind the swimming pool because I was desperate. The other off-site was at an old inn in Harper's Ferry where we were supposed to run an embassy. Each person was given a role and we were being watched by several retired ambassadors. The only problem was that the Olympics were going on at the same time which meant that people were sneaking off to watch the games on television. I was the ambassador in the exercise. It got so bad that when Kathy Peterson started openly watching television, with the majority of the others, I closed down the exercise. I'm not fond of role playing exercises as it is, but this one was such a fraud. Peterson and the other supervisor were not happy with me, but one of the retired ambassadors who was there as an observer (I don't remember the name now) congratulated me on recognizing a losing proposition. The best part of the training for me was all the people who came and talked to us. Ambassador Perkins swore us in. Being in the State Department for the first time was pretty neat, including seeing in person all those flags that I had only ever seen on TV.

Q: Were you picking up, I mean technically you were an economic officer. Did you feel at this time that is what you wanted to be doing?

McISAAC: I found it interesting. One thing I did not like and I still find artificial is the separation of the political and economic spheres. You don't have the political power if you don't control money. And access to money is greater with political power, so the separation is artificial. Obviously there is a need a few hard core quants in Washington; it is a way of viewing the world. But as an economic officer abroad, what is needed is not the nerds but officers able to understand the different types of economies and their upsides and downsides. We can call on other agencies as needed, though cooperation has gotten less over the years as agencies like Treasury and Energy try to work around the State Department abroad, either by stationing people overseas or by extensive travel and an unwillingness to cooperate with our embassies and consulates.

I had the opportunity to add the political cone to my skill codes in the early 1990s. I sought and received permission to keep the economic skill code as well. The Department expected me to take the political cone and drop everything else. However, the Economic Bureau agreed because I had already performed well in three economic jobs that I legitimately could be considered an economic officer as well. I continued to do jobs in both cones throughout my career, including jobs that were strictly "political," or strictly "economic". I also served in positions where having the background in both was instrumental in me doing my job well. Now, though, looking back on this, given that I am out of the service and looking for work, I realize that I probably should have taken the admin cone. I didn't know enough at the time to challenge the CDO's assertion that I wouldn't want to be an admin officer.

Q: Did you looking at this thing, sort of foreign service, did you get the feel that this was an adventure that you were setting forth on?

McISAAC: It was an adventure, but it was also a struggle. You know how some people float through life and everything seems wonderful and it always seems that way. Then there are those of us who have to really push to get things going. It was an adventure. It was the furthest I had ever gone from home and it was foreign to most of the people I grew up with. I was not married at the time. My first 13 years at State I was not married. When I entered the Service, there still were not that many women coming in already married. There was also a different attitude towards women at that time, which has changed some, though not enough. During A-100 we had a class on etiquette. This lady came in and told us which silverware to use and so on. One of the guys in the class who was younger than I was at the time raised his hand and asked whether single men could ask the women officers to come and cook the dinner for them? The woman said, "Yes." I was horrified. My thought was he could hire a cook; I am not going to come and cook your dinner for you. But I didn't have the nerve at the time to stand up and say it. Now I would. Nor did anyone else challenge the message. In some ways I felt like I was moving backwards because the State Department really is behind the times in many ways. While it has moved forward, it remains caught somewhat behind American society in general.

My first tour was in Maracaibo, Venezuela at the Consulate General. There was a principal officer, two junior officers, and one USIA officer. My first boss, Arlen Wilson insisted that the other junior officer and I arrive at the same time. That meant that I got a lot less time learning Spanish but still was expected to reach the same level as someone getting the full 26 weeks. That put a lot of pressure on me. I reached the required mark in the 10 weeks I had but I was stressed out. Another interesting note on competitiveness: there were officers in the class I was assigned to who claimed to never have studied or been exposed to Spanish, but who knew an awful lot of words and pronunciation, grammar, etc. Turned out, they were lying. The biggest offender not only had studied Spanish, his family was from Spain and he spent summers there as a child growing up.

The two of us flew on the same plane from Miami to Caracas and then together to Maracaibo. Fredericka Schmadel-Herd and her husband soon tired of their son so they sent him up to sit with me since there was an empty seat. When the seven year old plopped himself in the seat next to me and said, "Mommy says you are going to entertain me," I did not have the heart to tell the kid that Mommy lied. So I had him for nearly two hours of the three hour flight to Caracas. I filled out the customs forms for him and had everything organized. They took him off the plane. Fredericka was insecure and sometimes was friendly and other times, incredibly angry. I think if I had arrived after she had time to establish herself, she would not have been so difficult. Maybe. She also did not like that we were essentially equal, even though the job she was in had a higher rank than the one I was in. Arlen Wilson was a good Foreign Service officer and decent manager with some strange quirks. Once in the car with him, he would start talking about his sexual fantasies. He never acted on them.

Q: I am just trying to think. I don't think I ever talked about that to anyone. I had plenty of them but it was never a subject I feel I could raise.

McISAAC: Well under normal circumstances most people wouldn't. He did. Again I did not, something like that now I would say something, but at the time I was 28 years old and just starting out. I was uncomfortable but I did not know how to handle it without angering the boss, so I just let it happen.

Q: Which is probably just as well frankly because you are dealing with people who are really not that sensitive or smoothed down to society and take offense. I mean maybe it just isn't worth it.

McISAAC: At the time I didn't react. He and his wife had two adopted children. I think he wanted the children but she didn't really. So she was sort of absent emotionally. They would go on trips and leave the two kids, a boy about 10 and a girl around 8 with the maid. On several occasions, I received a call from the local American school demanding that I come pick up the boy as he was being suspended. I would pick him up and take him to the house. The family's maid was afraid of him. So she would say, "Oh my god you can't leave him here, Senora McIsaac, no, no." I would stay at the house for a while, get everybody calmed down and talk to him. He was essentially a good kid, very bright but with little direction. He was bored by the school's strict academics. I learned many years later that he became a successful chef. I overlapped with the Wilsons for about six months in 1985.

On the work side of things, Arlen Wilson was a good manager and FSO. He taught me how to draft a cable. He didn't know the consular work particularly well, but he knew how to manage consular work. There had been all sorts of irregularities at that post prior to his arrival. INS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, found some forged Consulate General Maracaibo visas with an authentic slug line being used to try to enter the U.S. I was assigned the task of investigating the fraud. A long-time FSN, Foreign Service national, ultimately was fired for cause. I don't think he made much money from the fraudulent visas, rather paid for extras for his family. There was very little oversight of the local employees so he had an easy time of it. It turned out, he simply told the FS officer that he had cancelled the visas, but was actually stamping the visa into different passports. The officers did not check the visa cancellations at all. His largest single clientele was the Chinese population. There was a large resident Chinese population that had been there since the 1800's. The more recent illegal population was cycling through the country, hiding among the long-term Chinese population. He seemed to take payment in kind a lot. His daughter's 15th birthday party – quinceñera – was organized and catered by the Chinese. I discovered in the course of the investigation that he had also withheld derogatory information from my predecessor who unwittingly issued a visa to a terrorist, someone who was involved with the bombing of the Aero Cubana flight in the 1970's. I had to do the work when no one else was there. I worked after hours and on weekends. During the week, I would go home at closing time with everyone else and then come back later so the FSN's did not know what I was doing. Of course we had AVLOS, the Automated Visa Lookout System, which was sort of like teletype. It had these huge keys and you had to really punch them to get anything out of it.

Q: So you were working at the teletype machine.

McISAAC: Well something similar to teletype. AVLOS was the precursor to the Consular Lookout and Support System or CLASS which is the consular system for maintaining a list of hits: the derogatory information entered by consular officers worldwide. I adjudicated and issued passports and did a lot of overseas citizen work, particularly social security applications. Before Venezuela nationalized the oil business in 1979, there were over 10,000 Americans working in the Lake Maracaibo region. By the time I arrived in 1985, that population had dwindled to around 3,000 or so, with oil folks moving on to new fields. There were those who retired in the area, having worked in Venezuela for many years. We had a pretty large workload. One of my first assignments was to go through the over 20,000 cards and winnow out those who had pretty clearly passed on – like the 120 year old – and/or moved away. It was a massive task but we needed a more accurate count of Americans resident in the consular district for the F-77 report. That report, produced by every consular post in the world every year, provides the Department with an approximate number of Americans living and visiting abroad. There is usually a serious undercount as many people decline to let embassies and consulates know they are there. I also compiled the consular package on the teletype – people complain about it today when it's all computerized, but back then, it was by hand and then entered into the teletype machine.

Beyond consular work, Wilson encouraged me to make local contacts in order to do economic reporting. Since he was a political officer, he was happy that I was economic. I got to know people in the banking community and the energy business, both oil and non-oil. He had us accompany him to meetings to take notes and was a good editor of the reports we drafted. Fredericka did not like that part of the job and increasingly, I was the one who went with Wilson as note taker. As a result of the contacts I made, I learned about a huge coal deposit in Venezuela that had been discovered in the Guajira Peninsula, which Venezuela shares with Colombia and is home to the Guajira Indians. The government was trying to figure out how to develop the field. Wilson encouraged me to speak with the bankers, local Zulia State politicians, and fuel companies involved and try to find out more and begin the process of writing it up. That report would eventually become an air gram. I worked with the economic officer in Caracas who had the federal government angle on it and together we drafted the report. It was really good training for my future jobs. But then Wilson left post and new principal officer arrived, Michael Malinowski.

Malinowski really did not want to be in Maracaibo. He did not respond to calls and letters from Wilson, who by the time he left post was fed up Malinowski's disinterest. Eventually the Deputy Chief of Mission, Kim Flowers sent the Western Hemisphere Affairs bureau a cable demanding to know what this guy was doing, when he was going to show up. Caracas sent a second tour officer down to fill in for a while. Inevitably, Malinowski did show up. He had served in Mexico for his first tour but his Spanish was rusty and he didn't like to use it. He had been in Asia since then and he really preferred it to Latin America. I don't know whether he was identified for the position or what happened, but he and his wife made clear they did not like Maracaibo. It showed.

His wife's first name is Karen. My first name is Karen Jo. The name of the USIA officer's wife was Karen. Karen Malinowski arrived and informed Karen and me that we must change our names because there was only going to be one Karen at Post. I unwisely said, "I am Karen Jo, and if people say the name properly, nobody will not confuse us." She didn't like that. My tour was 18 months and Malinowski was there for the final year of that time. He didn't like that I went out and met with local businesspeople and bankers, that I had contacts. Eventually, he forbade me to leave the consulate. At that point I started inviting my contacts into the consulate. I invited Malinowski to sit in, but he usually declined, especially if the conversations were in Spanish. Finally I was told that I wasn't allowed to talk to anybody.

Q: He was your superior?

McISAAC: Yes, he was. I completed my part of the air gram and I showed it to him. He refused to clear and send it to Caracas and just sat on it. Emile Castro, the economic officer in Caracas, started bugging me about it as time dragged on. I had to tell Castro that Malinowski refused to send it on.

Q: What kind of air gram was it?

McISAAC: This was about the coal discovery. There was a huge coal deposit of very high quality, low sulfur coal that would burn very cleanly. As junior officers Schmadel-Herd and I were supposed to go to Caracas periodically to check in with the DCM. Malinowski forbad us. He announced that he was the only one who would go, for staff meetings once a month. After several months, I decided I would go to Caracas for vacation and take the report with me. I also took the F-77 report because there were some problems with the teletype breaking down and Consular Affairs was insisting we send it in. I handed the air gram to Emile Castro and told him the copy I gave him was under the table. I had not told anyone in Maracaibo that was I going to Caracas and I asked Castro not to tell anyone. I also dropped the F-77 report off with the consular section during that non-official visit. I did in fact spend several days seeing the city as well. I asked Castro to put Malinowski's name on the final report to avoid trouble. Caracas ultimately sent the air gram into Washington and sent us a copy. It had my name on it and no mention of Malinowski. He was furious, of course, which didn't help me very much.

I made an effort to get to know people outside the work connections. When I wasn't dealing with the internal tensions and office politics, I had a really good time. I reconnected with a family that had been closely connected with our next door neighbor in Ithaca when I was growing up, Maria O. Barrus. She was the Puerto Rican maid of Professor Mortier Franklin Barrus and his wife; he married her when his wife passed away. I am not quite sure what the connection was, but she knew a Venezuelan family from Maracaibo. The kids spent many summers with her. When I was assigned to Maracaibo, I asked my older sister and my mother about the last name of the Venezuelans; I remembered Claudio, the oldest and Sylvia who was only a few years older than me. My sister, Wendy, remembered the name as Pons. Once I was in Maracaibo, I started looking and found them. They were an outlet for me that wasn't

connected with work and that helped me to survive the tour. I got out into the community. Sylvia invited me over for Christmas and New Year's. It was a lot of fun and I got to know many people I would not normally come into contact with. I also learned more about the culture than I would have otherwise.

Q: Let's pull back here. Maracaibo, what was the role of Maracaibo as I am thinking of our embassy and consular work and all that? How important was it?

McISAAC: By the time I was in Maracaibo, the consulate was not perceived as at all important, vis-à-vis U.S. policy and for consular work. I worked at the consulate January 1985 – July 1986. By 1992, I think, it was closed for good. Ironically, in the mid-"oughts", the Department wanted to open a facility there again. Because the area is in fact economically and politically important and we should never have closed the consulate in the first place. Of course, Chávez said no. Maracaibo is located in Zulia State, a traditionally politically independent area. Even when I was there, locals joked that Zulia would secede from Venezuela and the principal officer at our consulate would become the ambassador to the new country. Zulia was where the oil business started in Venezuela, though more recently the Oronoco area has become the primary focus. In addition, a large proportion of the cattle ranches were located in the southern portion of the state, along with coffee, chocolate, and fruit and vegetable production. The coal deposit was in the western part of the state. Zulia produced the majority of the foreign currency earnings of Venezuela.

Lake Maracaibo had been the center of the oil business for years. In fact Venezuela was the United States' back up oil supplier during WWII. The canal extending from Lake Maracaibo into the Gulf of Venezuela is kept dug out as a shipping lane. I used to watch the barge as it went back and forth, back and forth, dredging sand up to keep the lane open. Enough sand was dug up to create a number of artificial islands. But that canal is a way for ships to get out of the heavy seas into the calmer lake. The Gulf of Venezuela is quite rough because it is fairly shallow. The lake was a potential sanctuary for ships during WWII. Venezuela was a supplier of oil and of course gas because of the refineries located in Cabimas, across the lake from Maracaibo. The city of Maracaibo is on the west coast of Lake Maracaibo, and the oil industry is located on its eastern coast. American and Dutch and British companies owned the oil companies until 1979 when the industry was nationalized. There were thousands of Americans who traveled in and out of Maracaibo because of the oil industry. Sometime after complete nationalization, the government began to allow foreigners into the oil supply business. Some American companies moved back but most of their employees were now local, not imported. By the time I arrived in January of 1985 most of the Americans were gone. There was a substantial number of American citizen retirees in the region, about 3,000, and shrinking as these retirees grew older and passed away. A few families remained, but their kids usually bailed for the United States when it was time to go to college and few returned for good. We handled a lot of social security issues with retirement checks to be handed out. There were many passport issues as well.

During my tour, the consulate issued about 8,000 non-immigrant visas per year, but up until 1984, in fact, just prior to when I arrived, the issue rate was much, much higher. This was because, during the boom times, the Government of Venezuela kept its currency, the Bolivar, at an exchange rate of 4.3 bolivares to the dollar. So Venezuelans, even relatively non-wealthy Venezuelans, went shopping in Miami every month. The consulate, with just two consular officers, issued thousands of visas a year. That was when the fraud became rampant because they were just churning these things out. Any effort at adequate oversight and control went out the window. Arlen Wilson reestablished controls when he arrived, but a substantial amount of our time was spent cleaning up the mess. We fired one FSN for cause and I was convinced that at least one other FSN knew what was going on, but we could not prove the latter beyond a shadow of a doubt. The Department wanted to put the episode behind it. I even think the FSN we fired had the combination to the safe because it hadn't been changed in years when I arrived.

Q: How were relations with Venezuela at the time?

McISAAC: Relations were very good. A lot of the problems that led up to Hugo Chávez being elected president were there at the time. The political parties did not pay attention to the average citizen. The wealthy literally could get away with murder. There was a friend of the consulate who was a multimillionaire, who befriended each principal officer. His first name was Freddy; I don't remember the last name. He kept a baseball bat in his car. I asked about it at one point and his response was that it was for self-defense, "in case my workers attack me." I visited a swine farm where the pigs lived in better conditions than the people. So whether it was Chávez or someone else, the political turmoil was bound to happen at some point. The conditions for the vast majority of people were very bad. The well to do lived very well because they didn't have to pay people a living wage and they all cheated on their taxes. The politicians simply ignored the poor and near poor even while using them as props in their political campaigning. Venezuela was a society with a lot of potential for conflict. It was also a very high crime society.

Q: Still is.

McISAAC: Yes, it is endemic. Zulia State, where Maracaibo is, is the Wild West. We issued approximately 8,000 non-immigrant visas a year. Caracas issued 50,000 a year. In Maracaibo, we took away three to four times the number of weapons at the door from applicants than Caracas did. I mean they had guns on ankles, in the back of their pants, in purses designed for men, in pockets. Many women were armed. As a result, it was an anarchic, anything goes environment. Maracaibo at the time had the highest per capita vehicular accident rate in the world, and 69% of them had a fatality. Part of that fatality number was from the weapons that were drawn after people crashed into each other.

My experience of crime in Maracaibo was minimal but I was impacted. Someone tried to break into my apartment. I was sent to an admin counselors' conference by Malinowski who wanted me out of Maracaibo for an upcoming ship visit. I don't know why on earth or how the Department would allow a first tour junior officer into the course, but it did

not stop me. Malinowski actually told me he did not want me there. Malinowski then turned around and requested additional assistance from Caracas. The ship visit was to include a flag officer change for the regional fleet which was pretty important. The DCM, Kim Flowers called to find out where we all were. Josephina Rincon, the senior local employee answered the phone and told him I was in the U.S. for the week. Flowers ordered Malinowski to bring me back for the visit. So I got a call telling me to return. I had gone from the course to Ithaca to visit my parents. I cut the visit short and arranged to fly back to Maracaibo.

Turned out to be an exciting trip, because the plane from Ithaca to Kennedy airport in New York City lost its ability to steer. The plane started to roll from wing tip to wing tip, with food trays flying all over since it started right after the stewardesses served breakfast. There was complete silence in the plane. It must have happened suddenly because the stewardesses disappeared to strap in, leaving the trays and carts and everything unsecured. We arrived over New York City and the pilot tried to turn again and the plane started to roll again as we passed over one of the bridges. It looked like we were close enough for a wing to hit the bridge, which would have brought the plane down. The pilot was pretty amazing. He managed to get the plan under control again and we landed. It wasn't until we were on the ground that I realized that we hadn't landed on a normal runway, we landed across several runways. The airport moved everybody out of the way and there were fire vehicles and ambulances near where we landed. But we were fine. The other odd thing was that the crew never said anything to us, no "keep your seatbelts fastened," nothing. The plane pulled up to one of those exit chutes, the door opened, and the entire flight crew ran out of the airplane, leaving the passengers. It was still very quiet, we were just looking at each other, a sort of well what do we do now moment. Then, still silently, one by one we began gathering our things and leaving the aircraft. There was nobody from the airline at the door either. It was the weirdest thing.

I had several hours before I had to get on a flight to Miami. Then there would be a flight from Miami to Maracaibo. I debated with myself the entire time whether or not I was going to get on that airplane. I didn't know if I was going to until the very last possible moment. Eventually I decided I had to. I was expected in Maracaibo. The next two flights were perfectly normal. On the flight from Miami, I was seated next to someone I knew. He must have thought I was out of my mind since I talked incessantly throughout the next two flights, from New York to Miami and then Miami to Maracaibo.

We landed in Maracaibo at about 11:00 pm. I retrieved my car from the parking lot, drove home, threw my stuff down on the living room floor, and collapsed on the bed. I left Ithaca at 5:00 that morning. At about 1:30 am, I was sitting straight up in bed because the alarm went off. I realized my purse and everything else was in the living room. The bedroom area was separated from the living area by a door. The consulate was supposed put a lock on it between the two sections while I was out of the country but did not do so. If someone got through the front door and gate, they had access to the entire apartment. I had put a list of everyone at the consulate and their phone numbers in the bedroom, but could not find it that morning. I think the maid must have tossed it, not realizing what it was. If I went to the living room to get my purse which had my address book in it with all

the numbers, I would have to pass the front door. The alarm was still sounding. Since I couldn't remember the phone numbers and didn't have the list, I called the one number I could remember: my parents, who I had given all the relevant numbers. My mother answered and I told her, "Don't say a word. I need Michael Malinowski's phone number. Just give me the phone number and I will call you back later and tell you what is going on." She could hear the alarm in the background. But bless her heart she had the phone number. She gave it to me and I tried to call Malinowski. I got a message that the phone was disconnected. I tried using the radio, without success – though the radios were always iffy because although the consulate was promised a unique frequency by the government, we appeared to share it with a taxi service. Nothing worked. I couldn't get through. I did remember the main Embassy number in Caracas and they had Marines so I knew someone would answer. I called the embassy and told the Marine who answered that I had a problem that someone tried to get into the apartment, the very noisy alarm still going off in the background. I asked if he could give me Malinowski or Schmadel-Herd's numbers. He responded politely, "Well I am sorry ma'am, I cannot give out the telephone numbers." I said, "Fine. Can you please call Mike Malinowski or Frederica Schmadel-Herd or David Bustamante?" To which he responded, "I am sorry, ma'am. I don't have any of those numbers." I thanked him and hung up.

At that point I pulled myself together and left the bedroom to find out what happened. I went into each room. I checked every room and worked my way around to the door. When I reached the door, I realized what had happened. There was a metal grille outside the wooden door, with three keys to get in. Whoever it was had managed to open the outside metal grille. On the wooden door, they had gotten the bottom lock open, the local lock. The Yale lock was loose in a too large hole. The would-be thief had pushed the wooden door enough to set off the alarm but could not pick the Yale lock. I sat in the living room for the rest of the night. I did call my mother back to tell her I was all right, that no one had gotten in. Even though I had had only a few hours' sleep, I went into work the next day because of the ship visit. It was a frightening experience. That said, the ship visit went well.

Q: What kind of ship was it?

McISAAC: A navy ship. We had two Navy ship visits while I was there. One was the USS Bainbridge, a destroyer which had to stand off from the pier to avoid damaging its solar array. The other one, the USS Conyngham, also a destroyer, was able to dock at the pier. This visit was the Conyngham. One thing that Malinowski did before he forbad me to leave the consulate at all was that he started listening to my phone calls and directed his favorite FSN, Beatrice (I do not remember her last name) to listen in. The problem was I could hear them breathing. So I knew somebody was listening and figured out pretty quickly who it was.

Q: What was the reason? Were you suspected of fraud?

McISAAC: I think he didn't trust me though I don't know why. It was probably because he expected me to ignore his order to not contact anyone. On the other hand, I couldn't

not answer the telephone since much of consular work is responding to calls from the public as well as to calls from Washington. Malinowski never said anything that to me about it so all I know is he told me I was not allowed to talk to people; I was not allowed to meet with people. Schmadel-Herd was also forbidden to leave the consulate, but she was ok with it as far as I could tell.

For the next ship visit, the Bainbridge, Malinowski did not dare send me away again. First he told me I was in charge of the visit. Then he told Beatrice that she would be in charge. I told him and Beatrice that was fine, she should make the arrangements and I would review them. Of course, I ended up making the arrangements working with the Defense Attaché (DATT) office in Caracas, because she didn't know what to do or who to call and things were not getting done. The DATT was getting increasingly upset as the visit came closer and nothing was ready. Beatrice had no experience with arranging visits. The senior FSN, Josefina Rincon, know how to do it but she refused to help Beatrice. That was when I realized that Malinowski was not just playing head games with Schmadel-Herd and I but also with the local employees.

The visit's big event was tours of the ship for the public. On the dock the morning of the tours, Malinowski told me, in front of her, that Beatrice was in charge of the loading of the small boats to go out to the ship, I stepped back and watched. Maraven, which runs the tankers for Venezuela's oil company, PDVSA (Petroleos de Venezuela, SA) offered us the use of its launches – and the pilots – which they used to transport their workers daily from Maracaibo to Cabimas. The launches each held about 20 people safely.

The Venezuelans as a rule did not line up particularly well so there was a mob of people pushing to get onto these little boats. I realized Beatrice was taking her friends to the front of the group and letting them crowd on first. This meant not only many frustrated people being pushed further back even though they had been there longer, but also increased the risk that someone might be pushed off the dock into the water as elbows flew. Ultimately, one of the launches wound up with way too many people on it. The back end began to sink a few feet from the dock. The driver backed the boat up and said, "Look somebody has got to get off. I am not going to sink." Beatrice harangued him, trying to force him to go regardless of the risk; she refused to take any of her friends off.

At that point I decided I had better do something. So I marched up and pointing at individuals told them, "You and you and you are off the boat, and we are not moving until you do get off the boat." I made myself highly unpopular. The Bainbridge loaned us several sailors to help with crowd control, but they didn't pick anybody who spoke Spanish. They were just hanging around watching. Eventually I cajoled everyone off that boat. And then I turned around and started yelling, "you are going to line up two by two and nobody is getting on the boat until I see a line." It took about 20 minutes. I had the sailors stand on each side at the front of the line since we didn't have any ropes to keep the crowd in check. One Venezuelan tried to run around me and when I stepped in front of him, he punched me in the chest and snarled that I was "mal creada", badly brought up because I forced him to respect the line. Unlike Beatrice, I would not let anyone cut in line. A number of people thanked me then and afterward for making the process orderly.

We managed to shift 1100 people on and off the Bainbridge in about six hours. So I am very proud of what I did but Malinowski wasn't happy with me because Beatrice was furious. That was a difficult year for me.

Q: I imagine it would be. Who was the ambassador?

McISAAC: We did not have an ambassador at that point so the DCM was Chargé d'Affaires. Ambassador Landau left post as he had reached 65 years of ages and the Administration must have decided not to extend his tenure. Senator Helms held up a group of Ambassadors for South and Central America at the time, including Otto Reich who had been picked for Venezuela. The hold was not released until after I left post in the summer of 1986. So Kim Flowers was the Chargé for a lengthy period. I have discovered over time that small posts like Maracaibo don't necessarily get the kind of oversight or management they need. Even in embassies ambassadors can create their little fiefdoms without much fear that anyone in Washington will notice or object. The Department, as an institution, allows this to happen.

In fact, from Maracaibo for consular purposes we covered half the country: five different states in Venezuela in the western part, and we were supposed to visit them periodically. I actually did manage one prison visit to Tachira State when Arlen Wilson was principle officer. An American citizen requested a consular visit. We wouldn't have known he was there if he had not contacted the consulate directly as Venezuela's prison authorities often did not let us know when they arrested or imprisoned an American citizen. And in this case, I think the guy, who was of Venezuelan descent, probably entered Venezuela on a non-U.S. id, though he did have a U.S. passport, which surprised me. I flew to Tachira and rented a car and driver at the airport. We drove several hours to the prison where I was told he was being held. When we arrived, the prison warden told me there was nobody there by that name and advised me to go to the other prison. So we drove for another hour. This is in the Andes so the road was a two-lane twisting roller coaster ride. The prisoner was not in the other prison. The warden there told me that he was in the prison I had come from. I thought about giving up. However, we drove back to the other prison where the warden, chuckling, admitted that the kid was in fact there. I talked to him. He tried to smuggle cocaine across from Colombia. He was caught because there was a cordon around the city. All taxis, and a lot of cars, were stopped and searched. Of course they found the cocaine. The prisoner was sorry he called the consulate and told me not tell anyone about him being in Venezuela because he was on parole in the U.S. Traveling to Venezuela was a violation of his parole. He added that his family was going to pay off the prison authorities with $10,000 and get him out, so he was going to be just fine. I did notify the parole board that he was in Venezuela and not where he was supposed to be once I was back in the office. I was surprised that his passport had not been cancelled when he was jailed in the United States, but perhaps he did not admit to having one. Three months later that we found out for sure what happened. We couldn't get the Venezuelans to let us talk to him again. It turned out that his family did pay the $10,000 bribe to the Venezuelans and he was released and arrived in the United States in time to report to his parole board as required. Venezuelan prison conditions were

horrible; prisoners had to pay to get a mattress to sleep on, to get edible food. There were several prisons spread around our consular district with Americans scattered among them.

Malinowski didn't see the need to travel. Schmadel-Herd was supposed to go on the next prison visit. The defense attaché in Caracas had a plane accredited to Venezuela, and since he needed to keep his mileage up, he often offered to fly official Americans around the country. It would have been a great opportunity because traveling on the local airlines was hair-raising. Malinowski did not allow Schmadel-Herd to do the visit. As a result, she was reprimanded by Washington for missing the required consular visit, which seemed pretty unreasonable under the circumstances.

I realized the principal officer's residence needed a lot of work, given Maracaibo's climate which was very hot and very humid, with salt in the air, when it became my turn to handle the management portfolio. The first crisis came when the primary air conditioner, located on the roof, stopped working. The roof was accessed through the main bedroom and apparently, the Malinowski's did not allow anyone to go up that way. We did not have a ladder tall enough to reach the roof on the outside. When the administrative FSN told me we needed to send the repair people to fix it, I checked when they had gone out the last time, because I had a vague recollection of hearing about the company being called less than a month before. I reviewed the bills for the last six months and discovered that the consulate had paid a company to fix it at least once a month over that time period. That raised the question as to whether anyone actually fixed the machine. I spoke with the last person to supposedly fix it and discovered he had not even gone up on the roof. At that point, I went to the residence and, apologizing to Karen, told her we really needed to get up on the roof. She bristled but allowed me to climb up on a small chair to reach the trap door to the roof.

The compressor was on a metal plate which vibrated fairly strongly when the machine was in operation. I found that one edge of the metal plate was completely detached from the frame and was bouncing up and down with each rotation of the blade. There was a growing pile of metal shavings underneath. With the salt in the air from Lake Maracaibo, which is salt water as far south as the city of Maracaibo, the metal was rusted through. At some point, the rest of the plate was going to disintegrate and dump the compressor onto the roof itself. In addition, I noticed a carpet of leaves from an overhanging tree with about six inches of standing water on the roof. The roof was flat and eventually, the water was going to eat through the roof and there would be a major leak. It did not rain often in Maracaibo, but when it did, there was flooding and incredible amounts of water coming down in a very short period. The roof was a disaster waiting to happen. I reported the problems to the Malinowski's. They knew about the leaves but told me they were not going to pay for gloves for the gardener. The gardener refused to touch the leaves without gloves because the leaves had spikes. Apparently, Malinowski and Caracas had been fighting over whether he should purchase gloves or the USG should provide them. I talked Caracas into paying for the gloves, though the FSN involved kept insisting that "the Malinowski's are supposed to provide the gloves". My response was that I understood but that it was far more important to get rid of the leaves before the USG had to replace the entire roof. I also had to fight with Caracas to get emergency permission to

replace the air conditioner. It turned out there were clogs in a number of the pipes but the repairman couldn't tell which ones. With the rusting metal, it was a mess. We ended up spending around $5,000 on top of the six months of paying for fixes that were never done. The cost was much higher than it would have been if the machine had been properly maintained all along,

My second fun project with the residence was repainting/papering the interior walls. Because of the heat and humidity, if the air conditioning was not on all the time mold and mildew grew on the walls, not to mention on clothes and particularly leather shoes. And of course, the air conditioner had not been working properly. The Malinowski's wanted wallpaper, so I arranged to get three estimates. She decided on silk wallpaper, including in the kitchen. With permission from Malinowski, I sent the first guy over. Mrs. Malinowski threw him out of the house because without telling me or any of the FSN's, she had already chosen her own decorator. The total bill was $3,000. She insisted that I rubber stamp her decision. My mistake was to continue to insist that we needed three estimates. When I asked the GSO in Caracas about taking the one bid, I was told in no uncertain terms to get more estimates. At that point Malinowski ordered me to sign off on the $3,000. I refused because my authorized limit was $220.00. He was furious. She was furious. When I turned to the GSO in Caracas, he told me to sign off on it. I continued to refuse since I clearly did not have the legal authority. Finally, I asked the GSO what he would do to me if I signed for $3,000 worth of wall paper when my limit was $220.00. His response was that he would report me to the Department. I suggested he sign off on it instead. Eventually, when the GSO and the Malinowski's figured out that I would not be bullied into breaking the rules, the request was sent to the Department via cable for adjudication. I think if I had been younger and with no work experience, I might have let myself be pushed into doing something because it was uncomfortable. It bothered me that they were all pushing me, as the most junior officer, to do something they all knew was wrong. The Department agreed with me that wallpaper was not appropriate in a kitchen, but agreed to do the rest of the house without additional estimates. They had to paint the kitchen.

Last story about the Malinowskis. I have quite a few. His parents came to visit. The day they were going home, he and his wife took them to the airport in separate cars so that she could go home and he could come to work. Mrs. Malinowski went directly home. Malinowski went AWOL.

I was called to the window by the senior FSN to handle a very obnoxious wealthy Venezuelan who wanted to apply for a visa without submitting either a form or a picture. There was a way to do that but I was way to junior to exempt him. I insisted he complete the form and submit a picture. While I was explaining that, the senior FSN, Josephina, poked me in the shoulder and asked, "Do you know where Mr. Malinowski is? Mrs. Malinowski is on the phone." My response was that he was at the airport with his parents and I assumed he was on his way back. "Just tell her that." We hadn't seen him yet and I wanted to finish with the applicant. I knew if I just ignored him or worse yet, walked away from him, he would only get louder, more belligerent, and abusive. I had dealt with him before. A few minutes later, Alicia, another FSN came to me and told me Karen

Malinowski was on the phone and wanted to know where Mr. Malinowski was. I told her he was probably on his way back. It was a 20 minute drive. Another few minutes went by and I realized that three female FSN's are standing behind me in hysterics. He had been kidnapped. He had been killed. He had been god knows what. The Venezuelan was still at the window yelling at me that I did not understand just how important he was. Three hysterical women, the Venezuelan yelling, and Malinowski waltzes in the door as if nothing was wrong. I stood there for a moment and then carefully asked him where he had been. He shrugged, saying he decided to get his hair cut. I suggested he call his wife. The FSN's fawned over Malinowski, exclaiming oh my God he is all right, he is all right, very emotional. He in turn became angry with me that I had suggested he call his wife to let her know he was safe. Finally, I turned the angry Venezuelan over to Malinowski to deal with. Once they went into Malinowski's office, I called Mrs. Malinowski to tell her he had showed up safe and sound. She didn't thank me or say anything all, just hung up the phone. It was strange time.

Q: Whatever happened to them?

McISAAC: They went back to Asia where they really wanted to be. He eventually was appointed ambassador to Nepal. I don't think he ever came back to the western hemisphere. Then I assume he retired but I don't know for sure. It was an experience. I left in July of 1986 and then I went to the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs or EB.

Q: OK did you I mean your experience is there. Obviously they weren't basically very positive with it. What did you think about the Foreign Service as a career versus society or culture?

McISAAC: At the time I hoped Maracaibo was an aberration, because I didn't know enough about the Department or the Foreign Service. I just figured I had gotten stuck with a particularly strange bunch. I'm also stubborn, and if people make things difficult for me, I work harder to succeed. I am not sure that is necessarily a good trait, but I also didn't want people to think I had failed. I didn't want to fail. I had worked very hard to get into the Foreign Service and waited a long time as well. I liked living abroad. I enjoyed the work and I would like to think that I was good at it, as I learned more. I liked being out there, in a new culture, new experiences. I liked the Venezuelans. I think by the time I realized the Foreign Service was not a healthy environment I had put too much time and energy into it to quit. I don't think I really admitted to myself until much later that maybe I should have looked at the behavior of the officers and the Department itself and said wait a minute this is not a good environment to be in. But I liked the work: the admin side of the job, the reporting work, and even the consular work.

Q: Did you get any feel for a different foreign service by talking to people at the embassy and all?

McISAAC: Some. Not so much with the junior officers but with the economic officer who I worked with on the coal project. I didn't spend a lot of time in Caracas, but yeah

they were having a great time. They were out playing tennis and going to the theatre. I had learned how to play tennis when I was working at Bankers Mortgage. I thought I would continue to play in Maracaibo, but discovered that at the club where we were members, they did not allow women on the tennis courts before 8:00 am or after 5:00 pm because women were only allowed on the courts when men were working. So unless my boss took me, and Wilson did a couple of times (Malinowski was a different story), I didn't get to play tennis because I was working during the hours women were allowed to play. That wasn't quite what I expected. I did use the swimming pool. It was quite nice. However, it was also set apart from the general population because it was very exclusive and expensive. If you actually paid the freight for it, the full cost of a membership was $25,000, and then $700 or $800 a month. The club gave the tiny diplomatic corps honorary memberships for the time we were there. So we didn't pay as much as the Venezuelans. But it was nice to have it available because the lake was too polluted to swim in.

Q: Well this is probably a good place to stop. We will pick this up the next time. You left in '86?

McISAAC: I left there in the summer of '86.

Q: And you went to Washington.

McISAAC: Yes I came back to Washington.

Q: To the bureau.

McISAAC: Yes, to EB.

Q: We will pick it up then.

McISAAC: OK, sounds good.

Q: OK Today is 26 September 2012 with Karen Jo McIsaac. Karen Jo, we are a little unsure of where we left off last time so let's take it you came into the foreign service when?

McISAAC: My entry date was June 26, 1983. I am sorry, '84. I don't know why I am saying '83. No, it was '84.

Q: What was your a-100 course like, the composition of the class?

McISAAC: It was the largest class in the new numbering which started after the passage of the 1980 Foreign Service Act. We were number 22.

Q: Just to give a feel, I was in class 1 of the old numbering.

McISAAC: Oh heavens.

Q: Yeah, this goes back to the Paleozoic period. We are the glacial reporters.

McISAAC: Well then, we were up to the Cro-Magnon I guess by the time I entered. So we were the largest class State ever had up to that point. It seems funny because now they are bringing in hundreds at a time. Our class had 54 members. We spoke of this before. The makeup was unusual as well, according to Kathy Peterson who was one of the two coordinators for our group. She has since been ambassador and head of FSI. There were only nine women among the 54. There were people from all different walks of life. I had been working in a mortgage bank as an operations manager; note, the women were all operations managers regardless of experience and the men were all junior vice presidents. That was the way it was. Then we had one person who came in, no two who had been professors before joining the Foreign Service: one in Florida and I forget where the other guy was. There was another guy who came in and it appeared that this was his first real job. He was 31. He had apparently dabbled in business. He informed us that he was descended from Charles Dickens and that his family had dined with secretaries of state for generations. So we ranged from people who had worked very hard to get into college and to pay for it to the incredibly wealthy dilettante. The latter gentleman went to England to find a wife and complained extensively about transportation being hard on his many antiques. There was another officer from a very wealthy family who was far less obnoxious about it, though he did mention he was concerned his Queen Anne chairs might suffer damaged in shipping. Most of the rest of us would not have known what a Queen Anne chair was if it bit us. But he was a really sweet man. There was quite a range, including one woman who came in married to a Soviet refugee. I ran into them again later.

Q: Do you remember who that was?

McISAAC: No, I am not good at names. Her first name was Rebecca, but I do not remember the last name.

Q: Is she still in now do you think?

McISAAC: I'm not sure. She could be. She remarried. There was a problem in Moscow when we were both there.

Q: I would think so.

McISAAC: I heard a rumor that the Department was not going to send them to Moscow because of his status but she threatened to sue, so they backed off. I do not know the truth of it. But it became a problem in Moscow. I was there at the time. She returned to the United States and divorced him and then married somebody else. I don't know her new name either. So we had a wide range of people. It was a not very cohesive group.

Q: I was going to say while you were doing this some groups sort of ingather and all. I think it is probably easier now during the days of E-mail and tweeting and all that. But even earlier on some groups did. Yours didn't I take it

McISAAC: No. Or rather, only small groups within the larger group did. That was one thing that Kathy Peterson commented on even much later. She tried to get us together about five or six years ago, at least the people who were working in Washington and only four of us showed up. There were a lot more in Washington at the time. It just wasn't a group that kept in touch, didn't have a lot to do with each other. It just was – I hate to say it was an unfriendly group because people individually were certainly OK, but we clearly didn't click.

Q: The chemistry just wasn't there.

McISAAC: And I know of other groups that came in around the same time who still exchange Christmas cards, get together as a group, and so on. But for our group that wasn't the case.

Q: Well as you came in and took a look around how did you view these people because all of us when we come into the foreign service practically, the Foreign Service is something pretty exotic for most of us. This is not just you know going to work for a bank or something. Do I fit in? How did you feel about yourself and the people you were meeting?

McISAAC: Well I didn't feel that I fit in particularly well. On the other hand there was a lot of pushing and elbowing for position as well as asserting ones privilege. Like the guy who told us he was descended from Charles Dickens. I mean, there is an underlying reason for telling people your family has dined with Secretaries of State for generations. You are separating yourself from the people around you, marking yourself as "special" in some way. I was a little bit older than many in the class. I was 28 at the time. There was a substantial group that was under 24, so there was this distance. The oldest member of the class was 54. She was one of the oldest that had joined the Foreign Service up to that time. A really neat lady. A former history professor who had spent her life taking care of her mother. When her mother passed away, she joined the Foreign Service. She was quite deaf, so I don't know how she did consular work, but she had tremendous energy. I got along with her better I think than some of the others did. But I grew up in a family where many generations mingled. I also have friends who are five or 10 years or older than I am. Perhaps also the academic background gave us common ground. We talked a lot and did things together. Everybody had their own life. This is the other part of it.

I was not helped by the schedule I was assigned. For whatever reason, my training was reversed from the norm of having language training first and then consular training. I went to consular training first and then language training. This meant that I was not in class with any of the members of my A-100 class. There is another aspect of the Foreign Service that many new officers pick up very quickly; it's taken me a long time to figure out what I think about it. There are a lot of people who make friends very fast and then

they drop them just as quickly, when you are no longer in the same place or are not going to be around. Then there are other people who take a little more time as well as those who never really engage. But our group as a whole never really gelled, which is unfortunate since there were so many interesting people, a lot of interesting backgrounds. I'm not sure what I had expected.

Q: How about the classes that were taught. What were your impressions?

McISAAC: Some of the classes were very good and very helpful. Some of them were appalling. I had to step back and remind myself that I was a beginner when instructors were condescending and rude. I had managed five servicing sections in a mortgage bank. I had managed 25-30 people. I entered the Foreign Service and was treated like I was in kindergarten. I had to step back and not get mad about that. I admitted that I knew nothing about this new world and reminded myself that there was a lot to learn to be successful. Some instructors appreciated this role reversal, others reveled in rubbing our noses in our inexperience and lack of knowledge of the FS life.

When I started out, we were much closer in time to the institutionalized discrimination than we are today. In the late 1980's, I joined the Women's Action Organization (WAO) at State. The group promoted the improvement of women's position at State, including increasing promotion of women to positions of authority. Secretary Schultz was receptive to the group's goals and assigned his deputy, John C. Whitehead to engage with us. With his help, we were able to get information that the personnel office refused to provide, including women by rank, time in service, and so on. On my own initiative, I did a statistical analysis of women in the Foreign Service which showed just how painfully slow progress was for women in the Foreign Service. When I entered in 1984 women made up 17% of the Foreign Service. That was one percent more than in 1971.

Q: Wow it really moved ahead hadn't it.

McISAAC: Women still were not an important proportion of the work force. That is one thing I noticed about the State Department. I have always attributed it to the fact that when people work overseas for extended periods; they tend to take on the coloring of the places they live in. I think the State Department traditionally has been about 20 years behind U.S. society in terms of treatment of women and minorities. There has been a lot of change more recently, starting really in the mid to late 1990's. In the 1980's, change was just beginning.

Q: Well as you got into this did you feel that you are going to be constricted as to what you can do compared to the male officers?

McISAAC: I certainly thought there might be problems, yes, but remember I came from banking. I came from an environment that was very male dominated. So I knew what to expect to some extent. I think, looking back on it, what is most disappointing to me was that when I graduated from college the first time around in the early 1970s, we were told that because women were starting to enter college in large numbers companies,

businesses, and institutions were going to change to accommodate women because they were going to be such a large part of the work force. Looking back from this vantage point, in 2012, that restructuring to accommodate and promote women simply hasn't happened. The companies, business, institutions, and even the government, all outsource, they insource with contractors. But they have not accommodated the large influx particularly of women, but also of minorities as opportunities have expanded. It didn't happen because those in charge, which includes a very few women as well as men, really weren't interested. There are a lot of women in the work force now but no real change in the hierarchy. I think that is especially true with the State Department.

I was unmarried when I entered the service. My first 13 years at State I was single. I watched the spouses of the officers struggle to figure out how to live within the constraints the Department put on them: did they simply want to focus on family or did they want to find a job. Many had a tough time of it. Older spouses treated the younger ones pretty badly as well. The former were required to provide free labor to the Department when they were younger and many really resented the fact that the rules had changed for the younger spouses. Because the Department still hasn't figured that out, even with all the thrashing around and the various initiatives for spousal employment. It was and remains a very male dominated organization. But I also was still naive enough to think that if I just worked hard enough I would show people that I was as good as anybody out there, male, female or otherwise. Now that I am a lot older and looking back, I don't think that was ever true.

Q: Well I think the thing that you were coming in and many of the others did not have, you had been running things. I mean you think about somebody who is coming out of academia or is a professor. They are not running a damn thing except a class in which they are god, and that is it. I came in with no, I mean I had been an enlisted man. In fact it didn't help the time we all got up to introduce ourselves and I blithely said I was an Air Force first class and I served in this squadron and all. The guy next to me got up and said, I was an officer in one of those squadrons.

McISAAC: Oh dear. But you know one of the best officers I ever worked with had been a mechanic in the army and decided to take the Foreign Service exam. He was actually very good.

Q: Well I think this again is the other side of the coin. We take people from such a variety of backgrounds I think is a great strength, because you really have people, all of a sudden you are with somebody who really knows something or is able to contribute.

McISAAC: Yes, though I still believe that is more the exception than the rule. I think we are getting away from that a little bit. Every year HR holds a session where they bring in Foreign Service officers from the different cones to examine proposed new FS exam questions and figure out if they appropriate or is it not. I did it once, and was so disgusted I never volunteered again. What bothered me were the officers insisting that only those with advanced degrees should be able to join. That the questions should require advanced training to answer. I tried to counter with the fact that there is no requirement to have a

college education, just that the applicant be 21 and be an American citizen. The Department can train them if they want them to know that high level stuff. Or bring in civil servants with the specialized training as needed. Mostly we don't use the very academic aspects of any field; we are generalists. The test passers may be great at higher mathematics or be econometricians, but can they manage a motor pool? IQ is not commonsense. And State has little enough of that.

Q: I remember sitting in on, I was with the board of examiners doing an oral exam and finding some people who were academically accredited, I mean really knew Mongolia or something like that, but they obviously had no concept of how to deal with people or anything of that nature. No it is a mixed bag. Well as you are going through this process obviously. You knew what you wanted to do, you were an economist. You wanted to have something to do with either money or commodities or something like that. But did you have any idea of where you wanted to go or what particular type of economics to play with?

McISAAC: My focus in economics was on development. So I was really looking at the third world. My experience living abroad had been in Europe, in Belgium and Sweden. Belgium was where I did research on Rwanda. My thesis was on the use of multi-criteria analysis in development programming. The answer I came up with is garbage in – garbage out. Most of these countries do not have really good statistics gathering regimes. You can't just plug in the government's numbers and come out with anything coherent or real. You have to be on the ground and gather statistics yourself which is very time consuming and difficult without a large team. Sometimes statistics are classified secret by governments that don't want anyone to know how they are doing, good or bad. Governments would say our economy will grow three percent next year. When asked what that figure was based on, they could not say. It was fascinating. So I thought perhaps Africa or Latin America, since it was closer to home. But I didn't really know. I tend to follow instructions. We were pushed in certain directions and told that we could not speak with anyone about the jobs on the list they gave us. We had to take whatever was given to us. Which turned out to be absurd and wrong.

Q: It is absurd. And I didn't really know this at the time. I just sort of took what I got, but as I have done these oral histories I realized My God there is a whole different way of going around and talking to people and all that. There it is.

McISAAC: Well we had two who did not follow instructions. One came out of China, where he had been working for a business. He apparently asked the Ambassador for help convincing embassy Beijing to create a job for him and the Department gave it to him. The other guy, Cary Cavanaugh announced that he was far too valuable to be sent to any diddly-squat little country somewhere. So we had one job in I think it was Berlin. He announced that he was going to get the job and by God he did. Then we had one poor soul who said that she would go anywhere but she didn't want to go to Ciudad Juarez. Well even though it was not on her bid list, of course they assigned her to Ciudad Juarez. I ended up in Maracaibo, Venezuela. It was on my bid list. They didn't really take it as a bid list. I mean they had more or less already decided where we were going to go. I really

would have liked to go to Norway which was on the list because I speak Swedish. Of course, I did not get it. And those initial jobs determine which parts of the world you are going to be stuck in for the rest of your career.

Q: You said something and I am just curious because I have got you trapped here. You said you are interested in the third world. What is the second world?

McISAAC: The second world is countries, places at the time certainly Greece, Spain, Italy to some extent, the southern part of Italy. I mean the second world to me is made up of countries that are halfway through the process of becoming whatever it is they are going to become. Nowadays you might even put Brazil in that category and to some extent China. But at the time, Southern Europe was really not in good shape. But they are countries that we give assistance to. The Caribbean where I came from most recently is also in that category. Obviously the United States is a big part of the World Bank, but the World Bank has decided that they are going to use per capita income as a measure for whether a country is developed or not. So if the per capita income is of a certain level you are considered no longer to be developing. You are a middle income or a high income country. A high per capita income can mask a huge amount of poverty. My favorite is St. Vincent and the Grenadines. It is actually 34 islands, only five of which are inhabited. SVG has a per capita of over $10,000 U.S. dollars per year, but 80% of their people live below the poverty line. Now how that happens is people like big movie stars or other wealthy individuals use the country as a tax haven. In addition, there is a population of Vincentians who worked in the United Kingdom, England in particular, after WWII. Caribbean peoples were invited to be the janitors, the teachers, the taxi drivers, the bus drivers, to replace those killed or maimed in the war. This group started retiring back to the Caribbean with British pensions, starting in the 1960s and 70s, a reverse migration that continues to this day. Since the 70's and 80's a majority of Caribbean immigration has been to the U.S. Well if they live and work here legally they get social security. They retire to their Caribbean homeland with the social security income, often much higher than the local average income. And this population skews the average income. In addition, it masks a lot, especially the high levels of poverty and rural poverty. You could even say there is a fourth world which encompasses countries like Haiti which have substantial structural issues and a lack of strong institutions combined with extreme levels of corruption and poor social cohesion.

Q: Well we have got you going to Maracaibo. You were there from when to when.

McISAAC: I took the consular course, Spanish language, and that was exciting. I had to get to the same level in ten weeks that everybody else had 24 weeks for because my future boss announced that I and Frederica Schmadel-Herd had to arrive at the same time. She had been in language longer than I had which meant I had ten weeks, and I had to get a 2+,2+, and I did it. I don't think it was healthy but I did it. I wasn't happy because though I worked very hard at it and I did OK, I still wished they had given me the full amount of time, to absorb and learn.

Q: Well there is this Foreign Service thing of hurry up get there and then often when you do you realize they could have given you more time.

McISAAC: Yes, and in fact that was the case. The person I replaced had already left post. But the other guy was still there. It was very tiny place. There were three State officers, well four, one was USIS, the U.S. Information Service, and then the three of us at the consulate.

Q: Who were the three at the consulate?

McISAAC: Arlen Wilson was the principal officer, myself and then Frederica Schmadel-Herd was the other junior officer (JO). We, the two JO's took turns, I mean we both did consular work, but one was put in charge of the consulate for a six month period and the other did the administrative/management work and then we switched. I have to tell you Wilson was a very good Foreign Service officer though he was a little strange. I remember now we did actually talk about this, because he used to get me in the car and then he would talk about his sexual fantasies.

Q: Oh yes, I remember that. You would never forget that sort of thing

McISAAC: No you don't, but he was very good as an officer. He made sure that we learned how to report. You have to learn how to go out and talk to people. He would include us in meetings he had so that we could begin to learn the business. Of course, we were working on Selectric IIIs because there were no computers. Wilson made a big stink about it because the Department was using Wang computers and European posts were starting to get the Wang and he wanted one. He left post before it arrived, so we put up a little sign on it once it finally came saying "This is the Arlen Wilson Memorial Computer." But what happened first was the Department had Paramaribo send us their "spare" computer. We received a box about 2 ½ feet by 2 feet from Paramaribo. The telegraph person in Caracas called up and said OK, open the box and tell me what is in it. Well Paramaribo had thrown all their spare parts into the box. I started pulling out plastic bags, "Well, I have a plastic bag full of little plastic black circles. Then there is something that looks like a board with some wiring on it. Maybe this is the mother board." It went on like that as I pulled out bag after bag. There was not a whole anything in the box. Caracas had us tape the box back up. I was in Maracaibo for 18 months. The week before I left Caracas brought in a computer. They didn't try to use the spare parts. So I never actually used the computer in Maracaibo.

Q: Well we might as well keep going this way because we are packing up stuff I know we didn't talk about. So looking at it economically how stood Venezuela at that time?

McISAAC: Venezuela is the most amazingly natural resources rich country with horrible management. They had oil. Venezuela was our major backup oil and gas provider for WWII, because there was a sheltered place to go. The original oil development started in the Lake Maracaibo region and then moved to the Orinoco River where the river basin and delta off the coast are rich in minerals and oil. They have gold; they have diamonds;

they have high-quality coal. According to one banker I knew, Mr. Winter, the government of Venezuela was breaking the international Gold Cartel by selling the stuff out into the market because they wanted the money. The Venezuelans were incredibly corrupt. Among the political class there was one politician who stole so much money and parked it offshore that allegedly he could take a million dollars a month out of the account and not touch the principal. There was a big scandal when I was there over the misappropriation of a naval ship by one of their former presidents. It was parked in a river somewhere because it was too conspicuous. Just incredible corruption and it wasn't just the politicians. The entire society was permeated by corruption.

They didn't maintain infrastructure outside of Caracas, roads, bridges, sculptures, parks. The government paid to have sculpture by Venezuelan artists exhibited in town squares and parks across the country. But outside of Caracas, where the central park was immaculately maintained in the 80's, a lot of it was disintegrating. In Maracaibo there was one such piece that I was told I had to see, but when I got to the park, I had trouble finding it. The grass was taller than the sculpture.

All the tax money flowed to the central government in Caracas and very little went back out to the regions. Mind you, very few people paid what they were supposed to. In the consulate, we used to see the tax returns of some of the wealthiest locals and it looked like they were just barely making ends meet, though they might be draped in lots of gold and gemstones. Lots of tax evasion.

Venezuela was the Wild West. Maracaibo in particular but the entire country was very heavily armed. The plantation owners did not treat their workers particularly well or pay them a living wage. You know a lot of the problems that we in the U.S. attribute to Chávez actually predated him. A big part of the reason he was successful was that the elite class treated the regular guy abominably. There was an incredible disparity between what the wealthy and the poor. It is not surprising that somebody like Chávez would come along. What he said made sense to those Venezuelans who were otherwise powerless.

Q: For somebody reading this as we speak Hugo Chávez has been running things and taken a very strong anti American stance although our business ties remain about the same.

McISAAC: He does that because nobody would pay any attention if he didn't go after the U.S. But in the 1980's when I was there, the disparities were already glaring.

Q: Were we sitting there and looking at this thing and saying this thing is going to rise up and bite them and us or were we thinking just keep on?

McISAAC: I didn't have a lot of access to what Caracas was thinking because Maracaibo was an unclassified facility. I don't think the United States took it seriously enough but that is based on what I read in the newspapers. I did not see the United States pushing Venezuela, but that might have been taking place in Caracas, quietly on the diplomatic

circuit. Obviously we were concerned about corruption. We had less leverage because it was a wealthy country. We were not providing programs to help reduce the levels of corruption or anything like that as the country did not qualify. I am hopeful that Caracas was trying to get them to be a little more democratic and a little less corrupt, but I don't know.

Q: Ok, what were you doing?

McISAAC: My first thing, three weeks into my tour I was sent to Coro which is to the East of Maracaibo. There is a little piece of land that sticks up. It is a very thin strip of land, with a square at the end, sort of like a very long, thin neck holding up a squarish head. Right next to it on the continental part is an honest to God sand dune desert. It is only about a mile square, but it is desert sand. The city of Coro, founded in 1527 is right before you go up there. By the way, Maracaibo was founded in 1499 – it's one of the oldest European cities in South America. Anyway, the causeway runs along the top of this narrow strip of land out to Punto Fijo. There may be a few feet on either side of the roadway and then the water. But if the wind is right the wind blows the sand off the desert and makes this a very dangerous road. There was a man who told everybody he was an American citizen who passed away and I was sent to Coro to try to determine if in fact he was and if so, to take care of his possessions. A local employee, Aulio, was instructed to go with me as this was my first death case. Aulio's wife did not want him to go with me. She was afraid he was going to fall into my clutches I guess. So she sent her daughter along. There I am in the car with Aulio and his daughter, driving to Coro. I asked Wilson to intervene, but he declined, saying he "was not going to get in the middle of this." We went to the police station to let the chief of police know we were there and that we were going to go into the house. Well of course, I think if we had gone right to the house directly we could have gotten in immediately, whereas once we told the police the red tape started accumulating. The police chief called a lawyer friend of his and then a judge, and by the time we arrived at the building where this guy lived, I had an entourage of about nine people. It was a very narrow little place, and he was a hoarder. The floor was about a foot deep in garbage. We had to wade through the garbage down narrow paths lined with floor to ceiling shelves. The paths were only about a foot wide. On the shelves were baby food jars, hundreds and hundreds of baby food jars. He had kept every paper he had ever read. I hate to say this but I am glad they buried him before I got there. He had a growth on the back of his neck that he would cover with a plastic bag. He then tied the bag around his neck because he was afraid to have the growth, which weighed about 2 kilos, surgically removed. The bed was taken out back and burned. Holding up the mattress were hundreds of old magazines. I tried to find a passport, a will, a birth certificate, anything that would tell us he was legitimately an American citizen. I also tried to keep everybody else in the entourage from going through things with limited success. I did finally convince Aulio to keep his daughter outside. We never did find anything there though we spent over half a day digging. Someone brought alcohol to wash with. At the hotel afterwards, I took my clothes off and put them in a plastic bag, not the suitcase. It was really awful. He had told a friend, who I met, that he had worked for Proctor and Gamble. The good thing about that was I was able to check

with Proctor and Gamble, a privately owned company. The company had no record of employing him.

Before returning to Maracaibo, I went back to the police to explain the next steps. We locked and sealed the residence, and his friend promised to watch over it. So I started talking to the police chief and I thought, gee, I am doing pretty well. I've only been in Venezuela for three weeks. Then I realized the police chief who was very polite was looking at me like I was out of my mind. I stopped and thought over what I had just said and realized I had been speaking French for the last five minutes. So I apologized for the confusion and we started over and I did the whole thing in Spanish. Aulio refused to help; when I asked him to translate he refused. He just sat there silently behind me listening to me struggle. I was furious but could not do anything.

Q: Why didn't he want to do it? I mean did he prove to be ____ later on too?

McISAAC: He was the one who we eventually proved to be engaged in fraud and fired. The previous set of officers had not been very meticulous about maintaining rules and structure. The local employees were given incredible power, including canceling visas in passports, without any oversight by the officers. The racket was that Aulio would tell the officer that a visa had misspelled information on it or didn't print correctly so he cancelled the visa. The officer apparently never checked. Aulio then stamped the visa into a passport that he brought in so there was no record of the person who received it. He would then issue the real visa to the applicant the officer had approved. He had a lucrative little side business going, primarily the Chinese, but anyone who would pay, including a terrorist – one of the people who bombed the Cuban Air plane in the 1970's.

As I said, there was one officer still there, Mark – I forget his last name. He had made great friends in the Chinese community. He took me to meet them at their Chinese New Year's party. One of Mark's best friends stood up and introduced me as "their" vice consul, and I thought "this doesn't sound good". But I figured that Mark had been their contact and so maybe it was nothing more than an awkward choice of words. But members of the community began to call, wanting favors, one man in particular. I tried to put them off, declining to grant favors. At one point they actually offered to furnish my apartment because my household effects didn't come for three months. That is when I realized this could be real trouble if I let myself be dragged in. So I lied to them and said I have got stuff. Don't worry about it.

For the first few months I adjudicated a lot of Chinese visa applicants. Once when I was examining a passport, I told Aulio that the person in the picture was not the person standing in front of me. He began to get really nervous and tried to make a joke of it, saying that all Chinese look alike. My response was that no, human beings look different, and if you look more closely, you can see differences. Suddenly, I stopped seeing Chinese applicants. At the time I thought nothing of it, perhaps there were fewer Chinese visa applicants. I didn't realize until I was assigned the fraud investigation about a month after that that Aulio starting directing the Chinese applicants to the other JO, because I was too suspicious.

Wilson started the investigation only because he received word from Washington that there was a genuine signature slug being used on clearly fake Maracaibo visas. We were using the old visa machine for which the letters, numbers, and signature were all on metal plates. The signature was changed to reflect the officer adjudicating the visa. The dates were also changed that way as well as the terms of the visa, such as length of validity, number of entries, and so on. INS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the precursor to Immigrations and Customs enforcement or ICE, subsequently discovered a Chinese marriage ring moving people from Venezuela into Puerto Rico. Wilson was instructed that Maracaibo had a problem and we should look into it. I ended up doing the investigation. It became clear that Aulio likely had the combination to at least one of the two consular safes.

When Wilson arrived at post, several years earlier, he had cracked down on the lax oversight. Aulio's nearly fool proof system was no longer possible but I think he couldn't let go and had found other ways to sell visas. It all broke down completely five days after I arrived in the country because the locks of both of the consular safes broke. One lock broke with its safe closed; the other broke with its safe open. We were able to fit all the stuff from the open safe into Wilson's safe, and we issued visas with the same date on them for three days until somebody finally showed up to fix the safe. I was pretty sure that at least two of the other FSNs had some inkling of what Aulio was doing, if not the extent of it, but could not prove their involvement or that they had benefited. Aulio was fired and the locks were changed over the lunch hour. The other FSN's had to wait to return to work until he had left the premises. Only one appeared shocked about the firing.

I handled another death case that was really sad. It turned out that an American living in Punto Fijo was stealing from the American citizen who died. The son of the deceased lived in Colombia and refused to return to Venezuela. What remained of his possessions was still in a large paper envelope in the safe when I left post. The American stole World War II memorabilia, medals, and was trying to steal a plot of land. I took the title with me and put it with the rest but who knows what happened to it.

Q: Did you have any problems with going out at night with all these people armed and all of that?

McISAAC: We collected accident stories, car accident stories. I didn't go out a lot at night because I wasn't into the club scene particularly. Other than that there wasn't a whole lot to do. Maracaibo did have a good symphony orchestra, and I used to go to concerts. Mostly it didn't bother me. I'm a big reader. We worried about car accidents because the drivers were crazy.

Q: Were these people just driving too fast?

McISAAC: Fast and with no regard for common sense or traffic laws. There was one road that bisected nearly the entire town, starting near the lake and moving outward. There were a lot of little cross streets. At some point, the authorities decided to put in

stoplights on it to replace the stop signs. Well, local practice was if there is a stoplight, even if it is not working, I have the right of way. This is true for everybody. The new street light system was built shortly before I got there, but they didn't actually turn it on until just before I left, 18 months later. All during that time because everybody said, hey I have the right of way, the number of accidents was skyrocketed. There were certain streets I avoided. You could see people driving backwards on one way streets so it would look like the car wasn't going the wrong direction. I mean there were all these strange things. At the time I read somewhere they had the highest accident rate per capita in the world, and about 69% of the accidents had fatalities, including from the shootouts after the accidents. It was wild. Traffic calmed down as you left the city. And although officers in Caracas complained about traffic, the driving was never as bad as it was in Maracaibo.

Q: Well what about social life. Did you find that a single woman in a lot of these places it is often overlooked but it is usually more difficult than for a guy?

McISAAC: It was also more difficult because our cars weren't delivered right away. Wilson was good letting whichever of us was on duty drive the official car. He had his own car and he drove that. So Schmadel-Herd and I shared the car for a while; going shopping together and generally getting around as a pair. That stopped when her husband almost started a fight in a grocery store. But Schmadel-Herd was insistent that I should entertain her family. I didn't realize how bad it was until I went to the embassy in Caracas and the DCM told me that she complained to him. He said, "You realize she has said you refuse to do things with her." My response was that I had tried and described the incident in the grocery store. We were in the grocery store together that day as I had the car and offered to take them. But her husband (last name Herd, I forget his first name) who was a bit paranoid, got angry at the person in back of him for bumping him with his cart. In Latin America, people push in line, if they line up at all, and they push you. But instead of asking the guy to stop pushing, Herd turned around, grabbed the guy's cart and pulled back and pushed it as hard as he could into this other guy's stomach. The other guy started to puff out his chest. I don't remember exactly how we got out of there in one piece but we did. Herd had trouble adapting, which looking back on it really was not surprising. To suddenly be in a foreign country with no job or any realistic expectation of a job, is difficult. He did not speak Spanish. I was perhaps not as patient as I might have been, at least in part because his aggression scared me. If he had been less aggressive and obnoxious, perhaps I would have handled it better. It got to the point where he was opening the door to their apartment in his underwear and wasn't shaving or bathing. I mean he was seriously depressed, something I did not recognize at the time. The child started fights at school as he also had trouble adapting. His step-father didn't help; at one point Herd told me he was telling the kid to stand up for himself and to fight back. Eventually, the embassy suggested it would be better if he went back to the U.S., which was difficult for his wife. He had been in the military but apparently didn't get renewed, not sure why. He was the typical military wannabe. He pretended he was security for any of our high level visitors. We had several run-ins with Diplomatic Security because of his behavior when we had high-level visitors. It was just an unfortunate situation. FS life is hard on all spouses. As I've said before the Department has yet to figure out a

consistently constructive way to deal with spousal issues. In the 1980's the Department was barely trying.

As I got to know some people I was invited out on my own more and more. There was the North American Venezuelan friendship society which we referred to as the Pat and Eddie show since Pat Lyons and Eddie Guerrera had been in charge of this group for 30 years, she as secretary and he as president. I got to know Pat Lyons very well and she invited me to do things with her and her husband. In addition, as I said before, I also found the Pons family, whose children spent summers with Maria Barrus, next door in Ithaca, when I was growing up. It turned out the Pons family was one of the five controlling families of Maracaibo. Alicia, the junior FSN, located Sylvia Pons de Ruega. I called her up and asked if she remembered the McIsaacs who lived next door to Maria Barris in Forest Home? She responded that she did. And that was how I developed an independent social life. It was fun. I got to them better, including her parents and lots of cousins. She was married with four children. The family invited me for Christmas 1985 and New Year's 1986. Looking back on it, I can see how Schmadel-Herd may have felt that I was ignoring her. Which of course to some extent I was. Perhaps I could have done a better job of engaging with her and her family, but I also expected her to create her own life and not to expect to live mine.

Q: What happened to them?

McISAAC: Well she eventually divorced him. She was in an unfortunate situation. Her father was a lawyer, local town lawyer and actually had a case that went all the way to the Supreme Court. That was his claim to fame. The child was not Herd's child. There was a previous husband and apparently her parents joined the child's father in a lawsuit to keep her from taking the child out of the country. She was in a really difficult spot, and I felt sorry for her, but I was afraid of Herd and what he might do and what trouble he might get into.

Q: How about did the embassy keep an eye on you do you feel or not?

McISAAC: No. I think I may have mentioned this the last time. I had an incident where I was trying to get hold of the embassy early in the morning when someone tried to break into my apartment. The Marine said, "I am sorry ma'am we don't have any of the phone numbers for anybody in Maracaibo." The Marines of course reported it to the regional security office. The following day we were inundated with phone calls from every section of the embassy asking for our phone numbers. As a result of that incident, I also discovered that my second boss, Mike Malinowski, actually turned the residence's phone off at night which explained why I could not get hold of him. When I asked their maid if the phone was working, she said, "Oh they broke it." When I asked what she meant by "broke it," she responded that at night "they break it." Which I realized meant that they turned it off at night and back on during the day. So nobody could get a hold of him. This predates the ubiquitous cell phone.

I was quite happy to leave.

Q: I imagine you were. Well you left there when?

McISAAC: In the summer of 1986.

Q: Then where did you go?

McISAAC: I came back to Washington. At the time I was an economic officer and there were very few positions overseas open for which I already had the language. Because they gave me 10 weeks of Spanish, I was told I would not get any more language training. There was only one position in South America on our bid list, in Peru, and I didn't get that. At that time, the Department was beginning to bring a lot of jobs back to DC rather than have them overseas because it is expensive to move folks around. So I was in the economic bureau in the Office of Food Policy on the food aid side. The other section of the office dealt with agricultural trade policy. That was the larger section. The food aid section was made up of three FSOs and a Civil Service secretary.

Q: Well food assistance programs, would this be Somalia, Ethiopia, famine places?

McISAAC: Yes, but not just famine places, although those are obvious targets, but also food assistance worldwide. This was the PL-480 program, started in 1954. Title one was a loan program, title two, a grant program. Later, the USG developed title III as a monetization program. Of course, it's all different now and USDA pretty much runs the program by itself. In the 1980's, Egypt had a humungous program of $800,000/year: the balance to the $1 billion/year we gave to Israel. The United States was trying to close down the Morocco program until Treasury Secretary George Baker was invited to the king's anniversary party one year and wanted to have a deliverable. Food assistance was managed by a five agency committee which decided how to divide up the pie. The committee was made up of State, USAID, USDA, Treasury, and OMB. The group had to reach consensus, which sometimes was very hard. In the case of Morocco, everyone agreed that the country was too wealthy and did not need any food aid, and indeed was wasting the food aid it was already getting, hence the phase out. But Baker wanted a deliverable, by God, and no other type of funding was available. The committee had to pull $10 million worth of wheat out of other countries' programs to extend the Morocco program because a politician needed a deliverable.

The whole system has been changed since then, but at the time there were levels of quote/unquote need and depending where in the ranking a country sat, they would get more or less assistance. There was the Israel – Egypt balancing act, a large portion of which was food assistance to Egypt (the Egyptians wanted more weapons and other stuff, but were mostly getting food aid; there was a bit of a scandal over them feeding bread made with our wheat to their donkeys). Then there were the base rights countries, so at the time it was the Philippines, and wherever else we had military bases. After that were the countries with angels in Congress, who often wrote their food assistance into law in order to remove discretion from the Administration. Haiti was always in that category because Senator Leahy was big on Haiti, even though Haiti had a serious absorptive

capacity problem because of storage and distribution issues. At this point, we're down to the last few million dollars that had to be divided among 30 or 40 countries. It was always a scramble and the bureaus were vociferous in their attempts to get food aid, mostly because, whether it was needed or not, they couldn't get more ESF (economic support funds) or other types of money. This led to some very spirited discussion. I remember Tip O'Neil's daughter, Rosemary, insisting on U.S. food assistance to Tunisia being used to set up their social security system; our office objected vociferously since if we did, we could never cut off the assistance without collapsing their social security system. In addition, Tunisia didn't need more food assistance. It needed economic support funds (ESF) which were in short supply.

At one point, I was convoked to an ARA, now WHA, meeting with Assistant Secretary Elliot Abrams to hear his demand for more food aid for Latin America. He was actually quite polite – I had heard horror stories about him and so was not sure what to expect. Mostly I remember he had these squinty little eyes. Otherwise, he seemed nice enough. My role was to sit there and be lectured. I promised to take his concerns back to my boss, which I did. Charlie Billo just rolled his eyes when I reported on the meeting to him.

OMB would not allow the committee to program its money in the first part of the fiscal year, preferring to use the funds to mask the growing budget deficit. They would try to hold onto as much money as possible for as long as possible until the third quarter or later, which then meant a mad scramble at the end of the fiscal year to allocate the funds and get the money locked in by September 30. It was a game we were forced to play every year.

Q: For years we had a huge program with India because Indians were depositing Rupees for the food we were giving them and you couldn't spend them anywhere else. At one point the Rupee fund was the equivalent to the complete budget of the country.

McISAAC: Well we have learned our lesson on that, and in fact that is part of why PL480 Title I has gone away. The loans were 30 year loans at very low interest rates. But you can't have countries going into debt for a commodity people consume immediately. It just doesn't work long term. As you say, the countries wind up with a huge amount of debt. Some countries are still paying off the older loans. When I was doing food aid, India refused all but nonfat dry milk because by then, they were Soviet clients. The tensions were so bad that the two countries were not talking to each other very well in any area. But I was responsible for Latin America and the Caribbean, the latter area at that time encompassed only Jamaica, Haiti, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. Mexico refused all but nonfat dry milk so it was a rather small program. I also handled the small Eastern Europe program in which we sent nonfat dry milk to Poland. In addition, I handled the Middle East and South Asia. I had so many countries because the other FSO, Ross Qwan, announced on his arrival that he was doing China. That was all he wanted to do. Charlie Billo, our boss, told him that if he wanted China he would also have Africa.

The position was a good experience in terms of learning how the inter-agency works and to some extent how the department works. Billo was an excellent officer. If you showed initiative and worked hard he would show you how to do the important things, like preparing papers of different kinds for upper level officials. I could write, but I didn't have a clue about Department papers and communication. He was also good at reviewing and editing and explaining why, which I find very few FSOs want to do or try to do. I learned a lot from him.

Q: So what was your impression of the inter-departmental system as viewed from your particular perspective?

McISAAC: It was very cumbersome. USAID pretended it was never part of the State Department system, even though it and USIA only "administratively" separate. A lot of time and energy was – and still is – wasted on internecine quarrels over control both in Washington and abroad. USAID officers were very prickly about their "differentness" from State. Dealing with Treasury and OMB was also a learning experience for me. I had never worked in government, so I didn't have any idea what the different agencies' roles were or how they might play well together or not play together at all. I got to know a couple of the people from OMB and Treasury quite well through the committee meetings on food assistance. Which helped me later on because by then I had developed contacts who I could approach to gain a better understanding of the other agencies and to meet other contacts. For the food aid job itself, having an understanding of each agencies' imperatives helped me gain perspective on why other agencies voted as they did on particular countries. With the contacts in those agencies, I was able to convey their concerns to the regional bureaus I dealt with, improving our chances of finding common ground. Then Billo was assigned to Vienna and curtailed by six months to go to FSI for German language training. His replacement, Charles Jacobini, arrived shortly thereafter. Jacobini decided that I should not attend any committee meetings or be involved in any of the country-specific discussions. Basically, I was only allowed to send the notification letters of food aid shipments, something I had, with Charlie Billo's blessing, been training our secretary to do since she kept complaining of being bored.

Q: Do you have any reason for that?

McISAAC: Not for sure, though I do have some theories. For one thing, I think he didn't like working with women. Jacobini – he pronounced his last name the Italian way with the J as a Y – came in and immediately, everything I said was wrong and everything I said was stupid. Right off the bat; he didn't know me from Adam at that point. The other FSO, Ross Qwan, could do no wrong. After working for Charlie Billow, a very good boss and recovering some of my self-confidence which was badly shaken by Mike Malinowski in Maracaibo, it was a shock suddenly to be working for someone so openly negative and rude.

At the beginning of his tenure, I attended several of the committee meetings as I always had. Then one day after he had used me to introduce him to all the players, he demanded to know where I thought I was going. When I told him to the meeting, he told me that I

was no longer welcome at the meetings. They were too important for someone of my rank. At that point, I said, “OK.” I stopped attending the committee meetings and focused on the paper work. We were shipping out a lot of commodities and we had to send notifications to governments and to different agencies about how much food was going to which countries. All of which took about two hours of my day, after which I sat twiddling my thumbs. There was no internet to surf.

Finally it became uncomfortable for me to go into his office for any reason. As soon as I knocked on his door, he would simply start reading the newspaper. He might not have been reading it when I knocked but he would pull it out quick to try to look busy. He refused to look at me. He was neither smooth nor polite about his actions; it was very clear that he was finding anything to do to avoid dealing with me. He would tell me to go away and leave him alone. Eventually I decided I would not put up with his demeaning behavior. I went to my CDO, Career Development Officer, with all my documentation. I had been writing reports of conversations, collecting documents with his rude comments on them. Something I had learned to do before. A friend of my parents had experience with discrimination cases at Cornell University in the 1970’s. She told my mother, who passed the advice onto me, to document everything. Courts will accept the documentation as evidence. So as with Mike Malinowski, I documented everything. I took the file to my CDO, my not so little notebook. I told him I didn’t know what to do and asked for his advice. I explained that I had been doing the job for a year without problems. I did not understand why Jacobini was browbeating me. The CDO seemed surprised but advised me to speak with Jacobini’s boss, Carl Cundiff. I really did not want to make waves but I also did not know how I could continue to deal with Jacobini without losing my temper. I sat down with Cundiff with a list of issues I put together in an aide memoire. To his credit though he was not happy, he said he would handle it. Several days later, about ten minutes after Jacobini was called into Cundiff’s office, he stormed into my office and tried to slam the office door shut. I had an extension cord coiled outside the door because I accessed electricity in the outer suite. When the larger suite was divided into smaller offices, the workmen forgot to put in any outlets in my admittedly tiny office. When I complained since it was an interior office with no window and no place to plug in a lamp or a computer, the admin folks gave me a 50-foot fluorescent orange cord to power the desk light and the computer. It tripped everybody entering the office, including me a number of times. The door could not be fully closed with the cord there. So when Jacobini tried to slam the door shut of course it came flying back at him. It was pretty funny, despite how angry he was. However, at that point, Jacobini, who was a big guy, was leaning over the desk, yelling at me that I had gotten him in trouble and demanding how dare I? He insisted that he never discriminated against anybody, ever. I pointed out that he refused to talk to me, that he would not even look at me when I tried to ask a question or offer an opinion. I also pointed out that he did not treat my male colleague the same way. He cordially conversed with Qwan throughout the day. Needless to say, Jacobini stormed out of the room. I reported the conversation to my CDO, who encouraged me to let Cundiff take the lead on it. The CDO wanted me to stay in the office and continue to document if necessary.

I lasted another month and a half. Jacobini had changed but if anything, his behavior became worse. Things did not improve but by God I stayed. I documented. I filled a two inches thick notebook. Every single thing that happened went into that notebook. I didn't keep it in the office because I did not want anyone finding it. I carried it back and forth with me every day. At one point I'm pretty sure Jacobini tried to find the notebook. I caught him in my office, looking through papers and drawers. I don't know why else he would be there going through my desk though he was not very subtle about it. At that point, I went back to the CDO and said, "Look I just can't. I mentally cannot handle this." I thought the CDO would be angry. I was surprised when he thanked me for doing what I had been told to do. It was not the reaction I expected. But I guess many FSOs don't do as they are told. There was a vacant position also in the economic bureau in a different office that I could move to immediately.

In late 1987 I moved from food policy to the Energy Consumer Country Affairs office in EB. It was an interesting job. I dealt with the strategic petroleum reserve and the international energy emergency preparedness system, managed by the International Energy Agency (IEA). Every two or three months I traveled to Paris to IEA meetings. I was solely responsible for creating the briefing books and drafting papers and rewriting the Department of Energy papers for those meetings. At the same time, I contributed papers to briefing books for the office's other high level meetings. My focus was preparing for the possibility of a cut off, full or partial, of the world's oil supply. The issue gained traction after the first oil embargo as the OPEC countries flexed their muscles and cut supply to the United States and other in the early 1970's and the 1979 spike in oil prices.

Q: Everybody got caught short.

McISAAC: The deputy director of the office, Stuart Allen, assigned me the task of finding out how Morocco had behaved in the 1970's and particularly during the first oil embargo. For obvious reasons, one of the major policy issues in the 1970's for the Economic Bureau was how the U.S. should deal with the OPEC countries after the 1973 embargo. There were many knowledgeable people in the Department and in other government agencies. My first step was to speak with the cognoscenti in the Departments of Energy, Treasury, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and put together a report. Morocco was not a player nor was it a member of OPEC. Allen didn't believe that. He told me the report, which took me the better part of two weeks to research and complete, wasn't good enough and instructed me to dig further. So I went to FAIM, which was the part of State handling the retirement of files to the National Archives. I think the acronym stands for Foreign Affairs Information Management. I filled out the form asking to see the files for the period around the 1973 oil embargo. I thought it would be a few boxes perhaps. I received a call a couple of weeks later to the effect that we have your files but we can't bring them to you. When asked why not, I was told that the bureaus did not retire the files correctly. The relevant file folders were scattered among many boxes. Would I please come downstairs?

There were 16 boxes of files. FAIM set up a corner for me among its many cubicles. For a week, I spent hours every day going through 16 boxes and never found anything about Morocco being party to any oil embargo. But it was not wasted time. I learned a lot about energy and the Middle East, reading those papers and cables. One item in particular was fascinating and I would not have seen it if I hadn't had to plow through all those files. In one of the boxes, there was a copy of the verbatim transcript of Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State chewing out the French Foreign Minister because France tried to throw the United States under the bus during the 1972 embargo. The French told the Arabs that the United States was the country to punish, not France. That was my first exposure to diplomacy and a useful lesson on the use of strategic anger.

Q: How long did you keep this?

McISAAC: I stayed there until, well I did the rest of the tour, so it was '88. I am trying to think, I really should bring my PAR with me. But I started in the office in late 1987, November, I think, and left in '89. So it was a year and a half.

Q: Well given your problems at the beginning of this thing did you run into any difficulty in tenuring?

McISAAC: I did not get tenure, but not because of me per se. They let you read why they decide you are not going to get tenure. In my case it was because I "had too many bosses". Per the reviewers, I was never with one boss long enough to develop a relationship. When I thought about it, I realized that yes, I had lots of bosses, perhaps "too many" as the tenuring committee wrote, but only one of the changes was at my insistence. I had two bosses in an 18 month period in Maracaibo. I had two in basically a year's period in EB's Office of Food Policy. So in the first two and a half years in the Foreign Service, I had four bosses. Then I asked to change to get away from Jacobini, but in the energy office I had three different bosses. The panel's reasoning was that I was never with one boss long enough to show progress, in other words to get more than one evaluation. Something I just remembered is that Malinowski who was supposed to write three evaluations for both Schmadel-Herd and me since we were JO's, refused to do more than one. He did not even want to do that, but Shirley Grewe, the personnel officer in Caracas at the time, requested guidance from Washington and he had to write the one. If he had done his job properly, I would have had more than one from him. I'm not sure that would have been a good thing, but still …

I did eventually get tenure. Looking back on it I probably should have walked out the door at that point. But I am stubborn. When somebody tells me that I can't do something and I know that I can, and I know that I am good at what I am doing, I have a tendency to dig in my heels and say I am going to do this, and you can't tell me that I am not. Maybe that is not a wise thing.

Q: It really depends on the person. Are you satisfied beating the system or beating the circumstances?

McISAAC: Not sure. Partially I fought because I really liked the job. One of the most appealing things about the Foreign Service to me is that one changes jobs periodically. When I was in the mortgage bank I was looking at 30 – 40 years doing the same thing over and over again every year. The thought of that appalled me.

Q: Of course that is the delight of the Foreign Service. If you don't like what you are doing, or they don't like you one or the other of us will be moving on in a year or two.

McISAAC: Yes. It is also the down side of the Foreign Service because nobody fixes anything, they just pass the problem along.

Q: Right. What did you do next after you left?

McISAAC: I had a friend who warned me never to go near the Soviet desk. I did not follow her advice. I decided I really wanted to know more about Russia, the Soviet Union, and there was an effort by the Department at the time, like now with Iraq and Afghanistan, to encourage people to go there; they were having trouble getting enough bidders to fill all the positions. There was this thing called the Nuclear Risk Reduction Center or NRRC which was set up in 1988 as a confidence building measure during the period of the INF treaty negotiations. A tour there offered an opportunity to learn Russian. It was the only language designated position in the United States. I applied and was accepted. I took Russian for nine months at the Foreign Service Institute in Rosslyn. Then I went to work in the NRRC.

Q: First of all how did you find Russian?

McISAAC: I am OK with Romance languages but the Slavic languages are hard. I did OK on the speaking part. I got a three in speaking and three in reading, but I was always better at speaking than reading, which is backwards. Most people read better than they can speak and that is true for me in the romance languages. Not in Russian.

I worked very hard. So hard, I ended up in the hospital one night suffering from exhaustion. I was in class six hours a day and then studying an additional nine hours a day. It was the only language I had ever studied where I was not comfortable reading. I could do it but I really wasn't comfortable. My speaking was a lot better than my reading which to me was interesting because with the other languages I have studied, I can go back and read even when I can no longer speak them very well. I am confident that I can pull things back if I need to. With Russian not so much.

When I started Russian I didn't even know the alphabet. So I was really starting from zero. I was assigned to a group where I quickly realized that every one of them not only knew the alphabet, but they also already knew some Russian. I and another officer, Kerry Weiner, had no background in the language. His wife, Sharon, was in the same class we started in. She was hyper-competitive, including with her husband. She was nasty to everybody on top of that. At a certain point I asked to be taken out of the class. I knew I was not going to learn anything living in fear of vicious taunting directed my way by

Sharon and others. Kerry also asked to move as well. We wound up stuck in our own little class of two for the nine months.

The year I took Russian was the one time that FSI tried to bring in outside students. About 15 FBI agents studied at FSI that year. Our classes were not mixed together but the Kent Street building, where Russian was taught was fairly small and we shared the central area and conference room. I made friends with several of the agents. Not close. They are not a group that hung out with outsiders, non-agents. But I learned a bit about their work and culture. In one of the funnier incidents, one of the women brought her gun to class one day. Her father gave her the gun for her birthday, and she wanted to show it off. We were supposed to have security in the building but she just waltzed right in with the box it was in. No one challenged her or looked in the box. She opened the box up on the table in the central common area.

That was a tough nine months.

Q: Let's talk abut the job.

McISAAC: The NRRC originally was located in the Secretary's office so it was S/NRRC at the time. It is now in the Political Military Affairs Bureau (PM). The NRRC had two spaces in the Operations Center, the watch standers in the main room and the computer specialist in an adjacent secure room from which the messages were sent and received. We had a little station in the back of the room, and whenever it rained, water dripped onto our station. We put out little paper cups to catch the rain water. It was not exciting shift work. The NRRC originally used the same schedule as the ops center which was three days on, three days off. One of the NRRC watch standers pushed very hard to get the schedule changed to a more humane one. She researched alternatives and documented experiments that proved that shift work, particularly as one ages, it tends to take a chunk out of your life because the body can't handle the stress of the constant changes. Our boss, Hal Kowalski, suggested the entire Ops Center change, but they declined. Macho response. But Hal did change the NRRC's schedule and we had six days on a shift and then four days off which was more humane, though we still did shifts in each of three time periods. It was still grueling and about eight months in we all started to hit a wall and started to make the same mistakes we had in the beginning.

Every two hours there was a scheduled check of the communications system. The watch stander exchanged messages with the Russian side. Our NRRC is in the State Department. The Russian's NRRC is in their defense Ministry. The messages were different things, crossword puzzles or recipes, or if no one could think of anything creative, a standard pre-agreed upon form message. Once in a while there would be something a little different. We would inform the Russians beforehand any time NASA sent up a satellite or a shuttle launch. As I said, not exciting but useful because I was using the Russian language training. That year, the Department began adding several other treaties to the NRRC system. I helped by drafting the computer system templates for standard messages for the new treaties.

What made the year most interesting was that we were sitting in the Operations Center and could hear everything that was happening as it happened. We had one exciting evening when the Secretary, James Baker at the time, was flying to England and the British were mad at us for some reason I do not remember. The British air traffic control would not give permission for Baker's plane to land at either Heathrow or Gatwick. They claimed they were not properly notified of his travel. It was fascinating how the tempo in the Ops Center spikes with the urgency of the situation. After an initial bout of in-house swearing, the senior watch officer calmly picked up the phone to contact the U.S. Air Force. The USAF Operations Center insisted they had requested and received clearance to land. She then got her equivalent at the British Embassy on the line, demanding that the Secretary's plane be allowed to land. There was not enough fuel for the plane to turn around and fly all the way back to the United States. Eventually the RAF (Royal Air Force) gave permission for the Secretary's plane to land at an air base 70 miles north of London. The London air traffic controllers never relented. That was scary. Granted it was the U.S. Air Force flying the plane so he was probably in good hands but it was touch and go with the British for about 30 minutes.

I was in the NRRC from 1990 to 1991, and that was the time of the buildup to the first Iraq war. The buildup started in August. It is also when I realized that CNN had very little to say around the clock for 24 hours a day. There were three television screens in the Ops Center. They were usually tuned to different news programs all the time – except during the midnight shift when one was sometimes tuned to a movie channel. From midnight on there is almost nothing on, just repeats of news first reported the previous evening, repeated ad nauseam until the news was updated at seven or eight am. After a couple of months, CNN started a program in which they would show day by day from the beginning of the buildup what that buildup entailed. It had to be the most boring programming I had ever seen, but there really wasn't anything exciting happening in the region. Mind you, they ignored news in other parts of the world. The U.S. government was not any more forthcoming, including for those of us not directly involved with the region.

I remember that all the embassies in the region and around its edges were told to sit tight. Queries about ordered departure came in but the Administration told everyone to stay put so it didn't look like we were running away. I don't remember all the dates exactly but I was on duty and it was late at night when the Ops Center took a call from the U.S. embassy in Somalia. You could hear by the Ambassador Bishop's voice that he was panicking. He described Somalis coming over the walls, the RSO and the marines shooting, not at people but up in the air. The Somali invaders stole embassy cars. There were two safe havens that could not communicate with each other. The Ops Center began calling up the right people. Finally, Ambassador Davidow who was a Deputy Assistant Secretary in the African Affairs (AF) Bureau came in.

Q: It was AF. I know because I am interviewing him by phone right now.

McISAAC: Oh, Ok. He came in, sat down, leaned back, and very relaxed despite the urgency of the situation on the ground. H informed Bishop that there were no boats that

could turn around for several days to go to Somalia. The ships were all headed to the Middle East during the buildup for the first Iraq War. Davidow told Bishop he would just need to hold on for a few days, maybe three days. Not to worry. I could hear from his voice that Bishop was past the point of not worrying. Davidow promised to "talk to some people and get back to you in a little while". The Ops Center kept the line open because they weren't sure if they hung up, they would be able to get him back. It was nearly three hours later that Davidow came back. There was no sense of urgency about Somalia in Washington as far as I could tell. As I said, the Administration did not want to look like we were panicking by bringing family members home or closing embassies. Which meant that now there were families at risk in Somalia in an openly threatening situation. But it was clearly not important to policy makers at home because it was not connected to either Iraq or Kuwait. There was just no common sense used to any of this. I was told later by an acquaintance in INR's (Intelligence and Research Bureau) Middle East division that the ambassador had asked about closing the facility the week before and had been told no, to just put. The fact was that the Ambassador could have overridden Washington, by regulation ambassadors are the ones on the ground with the best and most current knowledge and can force Washington's hand. Bishop did not do that. So now there was a situation where they were going to have to bring in the Marines and the extraction would put even more people at risk. I also learned that the Administration had sent in sufficient chemicals to kill all the pets, so they were aware of the potential for problems, but still refused to allow for ordered departure. That, I think, is what finally made me very angry. It was also the first time that I really thought about my value to my government. Pretty much not much value at all. Officers and their families are pawns abroad. Things were still unresolved when I went off shift, so I missed the rest of the drama. It wasn't three days, it was more like two days, to get the Marines to Somalia. By the time they carried out the extraction, no commercial planes were flying in and things were pretty chaotic on the ground.

Q: Well actually there were Marines on the way to the Iraq buildup. They were just within helicopter range to land and that got kind of exciting because when they briefed them the Marines on the ship they are saying well you land here and there. One Marine raised his hand and said, "I was a marine guard and they moved the embassy to a different compound. We are landing at the wrong compound."

McISAAC: Well that would complicate things. The Department knew there was a problem in Somalia with the lack of a coherent government and more and more violence on the ground. They should have taken the people out or at least allowed the families out early on. Having not done that and having also missed the last of the European flights out of the country, then State officials were forced to take very dangerous actions, waiting for the ship to get close enough to bring the helicopters in – and with enough fuel to get them out again. Everybody was focused on Iraq and did not want to be bothered by anything else. This is where the lack of common sense and planning at the Department of State amazes me; where political necessity overrides human compassion, common sense, and normal human behavior. Families could have gotten on those last European flights and the embassy could have been down to a couple of officers and a communicator to run things. The Department could have pulled everyone out and not had to divert the Marines

or risked so many lives as they did. Then when I came back on duty, then we were really getting into the buildup on the Iraq War because that was going to be in early January or mid-January. The 16th sticks in my head, but I don't remember exactly which day was the start date.

Speaking of scary moments, at one point in early January, I received a mind-blowing wrong number call from DIA wanting to know the address of the embassy in Kuwait. I thought you have got to be kidding. You don't know the address of the embassy in Kuwait, and you have been sitting there for six months staring at maps and planning this operation. I found the right number so that he could talk to somebody involved in the planning process. But I was dumbfounded that like you say, they have got the wrong place.

I was on duty the night when a final message from Saddam Hussein came in, sent by Hussein to the Russians. The message was in Russian. It came to the Ops Center at about 11:00 pm. The senior watch officer looked at me and asked, "Do you speak Russian?" To which I responded, "Yes." He held the piece of paper out and said, "Here, translate this." There was a one-paragraph message in Cyrillic text on it. As a result, mine was the first translation of the final Saddam Hussein message trying to avert war. I agonized over that one because it was important to get right, though it wasn't very difficult in the end. When I finished, I told the SWO that it was just a first draft translation and that they really ought to roust a real translator for the final version. Then I went home to bed, and the war started.

Q: All right I am looking at the time. I think this might be a good place to end up.

McISAAC: Yes.

Q: And we will pick up your time in Ops Center beginning with the Iraq War.

***

Q: Today is 23 January 2013. This is an interview with Karen Jo McIsaac. Karen Jo, we left you in the Operations Center. You had gotten the final message, helped translate the final message from Gorbachev to…

McISAAC: From Saddam Hussein to Gorbachev for the Western allies.

Q: Saddam Hussein. Anyway, what happened in your experiences in the Ops Center during the…

McISAAC: The NRRC was Secretary George Schultz's baby. He created and nurtured it. We were located in the Ops Center and some in the Ops Center's management did not appreciate hosting us.

Q: Why? Was it you were just sort of _____

McISAAC: We were taking up their space. I am not entirely sure why but since we did not report to the office running Ops, I think it was a matter of competition and control. Kristie Kenney – now ambassador – occasionally would escort groups of junior officers in to explain what the Ops Center was. She would stand in the front of our corner, introduce everybody else, explaining what the various positions were responsible for and totally ignore us. Invariably, someone would turn around and ask what we did, since Kenney would not introduce us. To her we did not exist. Other officers introduced us when they led the tours.

Q: Well you get an ambassador and higher level.

McISAAC: She wasn't ambassador at the time.

Q: Ok was there fairly free exchange with the rest of the people?

McISAAC: Oh yes. We interacted all the time. We were on a different schedule than the Ops Center's watch officers. While I was on the NRRC there was the buildup to the Iraq war. We talked a bit about Somalia. I would like to add a little more about the build up to the Iraq War.

Q: I can't remember; why don't we talk about it.

McISAAC: Because the buildup to the first Iraq war was really quite extensive. It started in August, I think. It went month by month as the Bush administration gained more allies. The war didn't start until January, but there was this steady buildup. In December, I think it was December. I am not remembering the dates exactly, but we were very close to the point where it was beginning to look and sound like the war was going to start. Everyone was on tenterhooks, including in the Ops Center, from which we could see a lot of the pieces coming together, both by watching television news, but also hearing conversations and seeing cables. They were getting permission from Saudi Arabia to bring in people and equipment. Ships were moving towards the Gulf region. All of our embassies in the Gulf region and eastern Africa had been told there was no authorized departure. There was no ordered departure. They were supposed to hunker down so it didn't look like the United States was running away. Even though war was going to start and there was an expectation of unrest in places like Saudi Arabia and Jordan. In Jordan it turned out to be true, a lot of anti-American unrest. There was a very real danger of attacks on Americans because of what was going to happen in the Gulf, but everybody was told to stay in place.

That time period was educational for me, offering a window on upper level planning and the cold-eyed political calculation of policy makers. It was the first time that the need to plan for every eventuality was brought home to me in stark terms. I realized that if I ever found myself in a similar situation, I must have my own evacuation plans. Make sure I had enough money on hand. Though I was not married, I was traveling with a pet. Would I want to say, OK I will just kill the dog because the Department says you can't take him out. Well perhaps not. Maybe what I would do, if I something coming, would be to pay to

ship him out of the country to a family member. But it was made very clear that the Department's interests were not necessarily my interests and I had to do better advance planning and preparation.

Q: The department you know it changes from time to time after protests.

McISAAC: I have another story, not about Somalia but about the buildup and going into Kuwait. If you're smart, you learn little lessons about what your personal responsibility is to keep yourself safe. I don't know why these things always happens late at night, but they seem to. Late one evening at the beginning of January 1991, the NRRC's STU-3, the old version of the secure phone, rang. Someone in the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) wanted me to give him the address of the U.S. embassy in Kuwait City. I was flabbergasted since there we were almost at the point of war with forces massed on the Saudi Arabian – Kuwaiti border to invade and DIA asked me for the address to the embassy in Kuwait. My reaction was: shouldn't you have figured that out last August when we started down the road to war? I managed to find him the right phone number for the desk – this was before online phone lists; we had an old paper phone book – and gave him the number for the Ops Center's secure line. It was a jaw dropper. All of a sudden you realize a major component of the U. S. government, a major component of the buildup to a war where they are supposed to go in and rescue Kuwait, doesn't know where our embassy is. And yet there is a little agency that makes little models of all of our posts and supposedly knows where everybody is. But clearly we don't talk enough to each other during normal times to be ready for emergencies.

Q: Now you are watching nuclear things. Did you have points of interest or what have you regarding nuclear stuff? This is before we had the second war with Iraq where this was raised to a much higher level.

McISAAC: All of the steps for the NRRC were negotiated beforehand, so there was little that was unexpected. There was a provision for snap over flight inspections, though we had to give a certain amount of warning time, when a satellite would be trained on one of the other side's named sites. Quite often, when we tried that there was heavy cloud cover over the Soviet Union sites and the pass was canceled – we sent that message as well. Because of the delay between notification and actual over flight, if somebody was really cagey about it, they might be able to move something. It was a lot of ground to cover since this was not just Russia, it was the Soviet Union. A large number of their missiles were in other republics, including Kazakhstan and the Ukraine. The space program is still pretty much in Kazakhstan. While I was there, there were some games being played, but pretty much everybody was destroying at the time they said they were going to and recording it properly.

Q: We weren't concerned about Saddam Hussein's Iraq being a potentially nuclear threat.

McISAAC: The issue was out there, but it wasn't the primary concern. In the first gulf war the big thing was Iraq annexing Kuwait, declaring the country its 19th province. The

U.S. was more focused on that than on the potential for nuclear weapons. People were aware that there was a nuclear program but as I recall, the discussions remained more within the IAEA; we trusted the inspectors at the time. That was one of the things I think behind the idea that we would not leave Kuwait within Iraq because that really upset the Saudis. That would move Iraq closer to them and enable the nukes and other major non-nuclear weapons systems to be stationed on the new border.

Q: Well what did you do? The war started and continued on, on the oral history side.

McISAAC: Well I was at the NRRC until June 1991. After translating Saddam Hussein's last message there was little related to the war that I was involved in. For me the war was mostly what I saw on television. Of course CNN was always on in the Ops Center. Late in the day they would leave one TV on CNN and put movies or other good things on the other ones when it was particularly slow.

When I started in the NRRC I was not scheduled to go to Moscow. Because I indicated an interest in serving in Moscow, the personnel system went to bat for me. EUR had identified for the position somebody who didn't have the language and wasn't at the rank and HR was unhappy about it. I have to say it wasn't the brightest thing I ever did, though I do not regret having been to Moscow with regard to the work. I do regret serving there because of the horribleness of many of the officers there when I was.

I spent the summer of 1991, after leaving the NRRC at FSI working on my Russian. Because I had done a lot of reading while in the NRRC, along with the translating of messages, I had improved my comprehension. I had not been speaking Russian in the NRRC, so I engaged a tutor. I discovered that having done that, even though the guy was an American citizen, I had to report my interaction with him to DS. The Soviet Union was considered a criteria country at the time. When you were assigned to Moscow a secondary security check was done even if you had just had your regular one updated. The tutor taught at American University and sometimes he put me with his college students. I realized that while we complain about it, FSI's system works. The college students had a better overall grasp of the language in terms of the vocabulary and reading. However, I could speak better than they could. So the idea of providing training to prepare us to arrive at post and immediately start working is true. I was impressed.

Q: All right, you went to it was Russia.

McISAAC: It was the Soviet Union in 1991.

Q: You were there from when to when?

McISAAC: I arrived in August of 1991. Getting a Soviet visa was excruciating to begin with, taking weeks or months, depending on the state of the relationship. Then, we were all on hold for a while because of the attempted coup d'état. The one where Boris Yeltsin jumped up on the tank and waved his shirt around, calling on the provinces to withhold money from Moscow. So I didn't get there until the end of August after the attempted

coup fell apart. Domestic politics were still pretty messy but the Department decided everyone should continue on to Moscow.

Q: August '91 until when?

McISAAC: Until March of '93.

Q: OK, what was your job, and what were you doing?

McISAAC: Pushing to go to Moscow was not my brightest career move. When I arrived in Moscow, it turned out the position I was assigned to had no job connected to it. EUR did not want to lose the position so parked it in Moscow. I started out in the political external section. There really wasn't anything for me to do. It was a lesson in being careful what you wish for. I became the Latin America/Africa watcher. I mostly engaged with the Soviets on Cuba, which was not a happy topic for them. We did hundreds of demarches. Jackson McDonald coined a name for us: "Demarchemallows".

Q: You might explain what a demarche is.

McISAAC: Of course. Demarche is a French word referring to a government to government communication, a message from the U.S. government to some part of the foreign government. The diplomat goes in and says, "I have a message for you," and may or may not leave a piece of paper with the information on it, often called a white paper or non-paper since there are no headings or other identification of the sender on it. It is just a white piece of paper with points on it. If it is really sensitive the diplomat will relay the message orally but will not leave any paper behind. Generally, the receiving government will respond to the demarche message via demarche. Every outgoing and incoming demarche is numbered, by the senders. Responses contain language referring to the incoming demarche's number for identification purposes. Of course, governments do not always respond in writing, nor even get back to the sender at all. The usual initial response is in the vein of "I will get back to you," or as happened to me in one case, "Hell no." I developed quite a relationship with the Foreign Ministry's Cuba desk. There was one gentleman on the Cuba desk who hated dealing with U.S. diplomats and who was always rude. He eventually refused to meet with me. The last time we met, after I finished my talking points, he sat back and said, 'You Americans have too many women in your foreign service and you are all bitches." His rant went downhill from there. I sat through it smiling because I didn't have any choice though I did not understand everything he said. His face got quite red as he shouted and I smiled at him.

Q: I recall calling bitches sukasin isn't it?

McISAAC: Perhaps. I've forgotten most of my Russian. He had a couple of other words I didn't know. I had to ask my colleagues when I returned to the embassy. Then he ran out of the room. I was left sitting there debating whether I should show myself out. I needed an escort since we were not allowed to wander around the Foreign Ministry alone. After a while, one of the secretaries stuck her head into the room and I asked for her assistance;

she got the head of the desk to escort me out. I never saw the desk officer again though the demarches kept coming. In the end, I enjoyed a very good relationship with his boss with whom I could discuss what was going on in Cuba from the Soviet perspective. Obviously I couldn't come out and say that I didn't think the U.S. Cuba policy was working, but despite our limitations, we developed a good working relationship and had some interesting discussions. Whereas with his subordinate it was an ideological thing. I learned a lot more about Cuba, from the Soviet perspective, than I had known.

Q: What could you explain as an officer sitting in Moscow, Russia and Cuba were as close as the Chinese used to say lips and teeth? What was the situation as we saw it, why were we talking to the Russians?

McISAAC: We knew the Russians were economically supporting the Cubans. They did not do it directly. They had a number of three cornered arrangements where they gave something to Spain who gave it to Cuba who sold something to Russia. There was a question of a Soviet radar array in Cuba focused on the United States. Gorbachev promised the United States that he would close it down and pull the Soviet soldiers out of Cuba. Despite the promise, the facility did not close down for some time. We continued to watch it.

Q: At one time there was a mechanized brigade.

McISAAC: One of the issues surrounding the presence of radar and Soviet soldiers was whether this might allow the USSR to once again try to put missiles into Cuba. We had gone through the Cuban missile crisis in the 1960's. But with the radar array and military experts in place, there is a readymade platform. There was also a lot of pressure on the U.S. government by Mas Canosa's Cuban exile group in Miami to demand that the Soviets abandon their Cuban clients.

Q: Cuban refugees. Very powerful politically.

McISAAC: Yes. Now his son has taken over and is not as powerful. But I think generationally ideas shift and the younger generation is not as hard-core anti-Castro. However, because of these groups in the United States, there was a lot of pressure on politicians in Washington to push hard on the Soviets over Cuba. But at the same time this was happening Yeltsin was pushing Gorbachev. There were some interesting parallels.

While I was in Moscow, Chechnya and Ingushetia began to clamor for independence.

Q: This is a Caucasian dissident area.

McISAAC: Yes. At the time Ingushetia and Chechnya appeared to be working in concert against Moscow so we generally talked about them in the same breath. But over time, the Ingush seemed to resolve their issues and Chechnya became the main focus. Nagorno-Karabakh was an ongoing dispute as well between the Soviet republics of Armenia and

Azerbaijan. Gorbachev refused to send the Soviet military in to put down the unrest. The Russians were in all of the provinces as the controlling factor as well as being the border guard for all the Soviet republics. He refused to order the Soviet military to fire on Russian citizens. His refusal was seen as weak by the Soviet populace and the political and military elite in particular and gave Yeltsin a real opportunity to push him aside.

By the end of 1991 the Soviet Union was falling apart. We were instructed to say it "devolved" into first the CIS, then the NIS, and finally into the former Soviet Union or FSU. There were attempts by the various provinces to have some kind of association even after the Soviet Union fell apart. But they were less and less successful and eventually the whole thing disintegrated. By the end of 1991, Yeltsin was in charge. He didn't have any qualms about firing on Russian citizens. Once he took power, he did send the military into Chechnya. I don't know whether if Gorbachev had hung on whether he could have sorted out the situation without force, but he was gone. At that point the SSR's, the Soviet republics, were quasi-independent. The embassy had a group of people who traveled to the various republics anyway, called circuit riders. Once the Soviet Union was no more, the U.S. government had to determine how best to handle the newly independent countries.

In Moscow, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, almost overnight, threw out the Soviet – non-Russian – staff and brought in all Russians. At the embassy we all had to develop relations with an entirely new set of actors, including at several newly created ministries. It was a chaotic and complicated time as many of the Russian officials coming in had little or no experience dealing with foreign governments.

The holidays over Christmas of '91 were stretched out as Russian officials tried to figure out what to do. The Soviet Union did not celebrate Christmas because that was a religious thing, so they had Father Frost, but at that point the government began to allow the Russian Orthodox Church to reclaim its position in society and reopen churches which had been closed for decades. The government set up a holiday for Christmas and then the officials were not sure when to reopen the government, so the holiday was extended. We wound up with almost two weeks of on and off again holidays, not knowing what was going on. Holidays were announced and taken away and re-announced. It was very confusing and finally Washington informed the embassy that it could not give all of the officers the whole two weeks off because they wanted us working, even after being told that we had no Russian interlocutors to work with. The switch also meant a reduction in work for me as the Russians closed a large number of their embassies in Latin America and Africa.

Q: Your focus was Russian relations with other countries.

McISAAC: With Latin America and Africa. There were some interesting events. Charles Taylor in Liberia grabbed a fishing boat with Soviet sailors on it, primarily from the Baltic States. He demanded a $1 million dollar ransom. Because the Russians didn't have a facility in Liberia at that point, I worked with the Africa bureau in Washington and with our embassy in Liberia to help get the sailors released. The effort ultimately proved

successful and the sailors were released and flew home. There was an upsurge of violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo while I was in Moscow. There was a fairly large group of Russians caught on the wrong side of the river.

Q: That is Brazzaville.

McISAAC: Yes. Since we were already sending boats up the river to take out Americans and Western Europeans, I worked with EUR and AF to include the Russians as well. But after that, because Russia closed down something like nine or eleven of their embassies in Latin America or Africa, my workload dropped dramatically. The inexperience of the Russian MFA officials became clear pretty quickly, even to the Russians. Over the next year the Soviet experts filtered back into the MFA and other ministries.

The United States with the Europeans organized a massive push of international assistance to the former Soviet republics in January and February of 1992. Russian officials in particular were not happy to receive assistance, though the population was very happy about it. The officials were particularly prickly with U.S. officials. They preferred the Germans, and in fact, there was an incident when the Russians had promised us the diplomatic reception hall at Sheremetyevo 2 Airport but then turned around and gave it to the Germans. Ambassador Strauss and party were rather unceremoniously thrown out of the building. The German diplomats crowed about the fact that their incoming officials were more important than ours. At least it was not the Secretary of State, but it was still embarrassing and Strauss was furious. I am convinced the "misunderstanding" was organized by the Russians as they were gloating as well. I had a contact in the German embassy who I worked with on a number of issues, but after this event, the relationship cooled as she told me her colleagues were unhappy that we were working together.

The Germans were taken down a peg eventually when the Russian Orthodox Church walked off with a trainload of humanitarian assistance. The Germans emptied out their emergency stores from Berlin and sent the train forward. They apparently expected to distribute the items once it arrived, but the Church simply took the stuff and locked it up in their own warehouses. The Church remained a very difficult interlocutor, being highly insular and xenophobic, as well as desiring to maintain a monopoly as the only religion of Russia. At this point in the early 1990s, non-governmental organizations were exerting outsize influence in the United States on Congress and on successive administrations. The idea that government was incompetent pervaded much of development policy as it does today. The push to provide humanitarian assistance to Russia and the other republics was not exempt from this. A number of small NGOs with only domestic U.S. experience were chosen to provide some of the assistance despite their lack of both overseas and Russia experience. One religious organization, which ignored all advice to maintain its independence from the Russian church, lost control of the items it had collected and that the U.S. government had shipped to Russia at significant cost. I was working in the economic section by this time, dealing with aid issues (and was the control officer for USAID when it arrived in country) and was asked by USDA to sit in on a meeting the NGO had demanded. The group spent nearly an hour accusing the USDA head and other

embassy officials of stealing their assistance. USDA had advised the group from the beginning to partner with a larger American or European NGO to store their assistance since they did not have the capability to do so themselves. I've forgotten the USDA official's last name but his first name was David. David was gracious in the face of this religious group's increasingly vicious attacks. He pointed out that the Russian Orthodox Church had a history of wresting control of assistance from aid groups and governments. There was nothing he could do at that point to change the outcome.

But going back to January of 1992: I was assigned to accompany the humanitarian assistance going to Armenia. We used military transport to carry the assistance but our military by law cannot own food aid. I took ownership of the assistance on behalf of the U.S. embassy and then signed it over to the Government of Armenia once we arrived in Yerevan. The problem was there was no jet fuel getting into Moscow at this point. The Russians had not paid their bills and fuel deliveries were cut off. In order to fly planes the Russians siphoned gas from incoming flights until they had enough fuel to power a flight back out. Domestic flights were very low priority for fuel. I tried to get on the one flight that was supposed to go to Armenia the week the aid was to arrive, but Aeroflot could not guarantee that it would fly. I looked into taking a train, but that would take several days. Eventually, the Embassy put me on a Lufthansa flight to Frankfurt, Germany and then out to Istanbul, Turkey. From Istanbul, I flew to Incirlik where there is a NATO airbase where I linked up with the U.S. team. The entire trip was fascinating.

I had never been in that part of the world. It was strange to go into an airport bookshop in Istanbul and find only books about Atatürk or other approved texts. Censorship became real to me after browsing there. I finally found an official who spoke some English and seemed to understand where I wanted to go. He instructed me to take the bus to the domestic terminal, so I gathered my stuff and found the bus; fortunately, I had enough U.S. dollars to pay for it. It was funny because the domestic airport was not that far from the international terminal, but we went around in circles to get there. I probably could have walked across to it, but there were no sidewalks, only a long, looping highway. Security was far tighter than anything I had experienced up to that point. Before being allowed into the waiting room, we had to put our bags on a table and the Customs officials opened all the suitcases and spread everything out. This happened to everyone as far as I could tell. Of course, I had a small duffle bag and had packed very carefully to get everything to fit. Getting it all back in was not so easy and was made even harder as the male officials and bystanders gathered around to watch! Then there was a physical search. Men and women went through different doors. The rooms where searches were done were very dark and tiny. Finally, I was allowed into the waiting area. There were very few chairs, all taken, and the cigarette smoke! Everyone smoked. The plane was late, but finally we were called to the bus to take us out to where it was parked. Although everyone rushed forward, pushing to get on first, the guards pushed back and about six of us were called by name to go out first. The bus took us out and then returned for the rest of the planeload. I guess because I was a diplomat, I was among the select. No one had warned me.

Turkish Air had the best food I had ever had on an airplane. Lufthansa was certainly better than most of the American companies, but Turkish Air had them all beat. But it was a nail biting flight. As we took off, I could smell something burning. I panicked, thinking, Oh my God there is something wrong with this airplane, there's a fire onboard, we're going to crash. Nobody else seemed at all concerned. Then the smell suddenly disappeared. I learned later from the Air Force folks that the Turks didn't pressurize the cabin until they had to because keeping the cabin pressurized took too much energy. It was a fuel cost issue. It was at that point that I realized that the overwhelming smell pervading the country, other than cigarette smoke, was from the ubiquitous charcoal braziers used for cooking.

Q: I was thinking that was when they started cooking the shish Ka-bob or whatever.

McISAAC: The plane pressurized around 10,000 feet or whatever the limit is or we would have been knocked unconscious. I hoped the cockpit was pressurized so the pilots wouldn't pass out if they miscalculated. As I said, once we were in the air it was fine. I was met at the Incirlik airport by someone from the Air Force. We waited for several different flights to arrive, in order to collect the entire team before driving to the Air Base. It was at that base I first saw a C-5. I had seen C-130's and C-140's. I had never seen a C-5.

Q: These are three story aircraft. They are a huge plane. Major transport planes for the military.

McISAAC: Yeah, and there were a bunch of them parked on the ramp, surrounded by a bunch of smaller aircraft, geese with goslings.

We flew into Armenia over the mountains between Turkey and Armenia. I was allowed to sit in the forward cabin with the extra air crew and the State official who came from Washington for the occasion. Literally you climb a ladder up three flights carrying everything to get into it. The bulk of the plane is simply a large empty space to be reconfigured as needed. In our case, there were pallets of food and other humanitarian assistance, though filling less than a quarter of the available space.

There was another passenger space at the same level in the back, not connected to the front cabin. There were another 25 people in that space, from the Armenian-American community, including a church official and his entourage. I don't remember if he was the Archbishop but he was some big muckety-muck from the Armenian Orthodox Church. I didn't meet him before we took off so had no opportunity to explain the process to him. An exception was made for this particular flight because under normal circumstances the U.S. Air Force is not allowed to transport civilians. No other group was allowed to accompany the flights of assistance to any of the other republics, so it was a very special exception.

Q: When politics are concerned and Armenian politics especially, basically you can point to the city of Glendale in California which I think was Nancy Pelosi's home ground. But when Armenian politics are concerned the rule book goes out the window.

McISAAC: I learned that. The Administration also allowed an American to run for an Armenian political position. Everywhere else if someone does that we take their citizenship from them, but the rules were clearly different for the Armenians.

Even though we flew in during the daytime, there was no electricity at the airport and so in mid-winter it was pretty dark. We were supposed to fly in and out during daylight. In February that is a fairly short window. Nobody from the Air Force had flown into Armenia in anybody's memory which meant that according to USAF rules, a high-ranking pilot must be at the helm. Our pilot was a full colonel. In addition to those onboard to deliver assistance, there were a bunch of other U.S. Air Force officers who flew along to boost their flying hours but had no other function; several did not bring winter clothes or boots and so could not get off the plane.

Many of the USAF personnel did not have individual passports, common enough in the military. There was a crew manifest with all the names, including some hangers on written in by hand. I was the only Russian speaker on the plane. The border guards were Russian. At that point, even though Armenia was an independent republic, changes to the border guards and other originally internal but by then international structures had not yet taken place. The two border guards entered the aircraft to check passports and the manifest. I explained what we were doing and why there were so many people onboard. The border guards did not like the hangers on, even though their names were on the manifest, and gave me a hard time about it. At that point we had been on the ground for about 15 minutes. Ten or eleven of the group from the back of the plane, who were met by local church officials who took care of the border issues for them, decided that I was not moving fast enough, so they came marching up into the cabin as well. They demanded that we all get off the airplane and that the food be immediately distributed. I was accused of delaying the Archbishop which was unthinkable, and so on. I refused to budge. I was not going to authorize the transfer until I knew the crew was going to be OK. I asked the Armenian-Americans to be patient, and we would be ready as soon as possible. At one point, the leader of the group, an American, grabbed my arm and shouted in English, "You are insulting the church." I told him to let go of my arm. I told him I would not think of insulting the church, but that I needed to know that everything for the plane and crew was legal before I authorized the transfer. I still "owned" the assistance which meant it wasn't going anywhere without me.

The Colonel had assured me it would not take very long to offload the assistance. Worst case scenario, the crew could shove the pallets off the plane and leave them if it would take too long to unpack the aid and reload the pallets. It took about 30 minutes total to satisfy the border guards, but eventually everything was worked out. The Colonel stood beside me the entire time, looking more and more worried. He wouldn't give me a straight answer as to when exactly he needed to have the plane in the air, which annoyed

me a bit, but he did not want to appear uncooperative. The Armenian-Americans were an arrogant bunch, all well connected with the White House.

Q: Well there is nothing more important than somebody who has gotten special dispensation. They want to show their…

McISAAC: Right. They threatened to tell my boss, to tell the Ambassador that I was delaying the delivery without reason. My thought was sure, go ahead, he's in Moscow. Go right head and delay it even further.

Once everyone was legally in the country, we all trouped over to the airport where the local Armenian officials had set up a big table. In the dark because there was no electricity we held a ceremony with lot of speeches. The Archbishop gave a flowery speech; the Armenians gave a flowery speech. I said a few words and we signed the documents transferring the food from me to them. Then it was a process of getting the pallets off the plane. The Armenians had trucks lined up but there was no order and men were darting in and grabbing things off the plane. After about ten minutes of this, and a complaint from the Colonel that the lack of order was dangerous, I spoke with the Archbishop's assistant, explained that I didn't speak Armenian and asked for his help in getting the truck drivers and loaders to line up in order. The Colonel was worried someone might try to climb into the aircraft. With the assistant's help we finally established a bit better order. The FSO from Washington, who also knew no Armenian, got control of the truck drivers. The process settled into a rhythm that worked.

I was running around checking off lists of things when I turned around and realized I had a line of about six or seven guys following me. I had been careful about what I wore in order not offend anyone. I had on a skirt that fell below my knees. I had on heavy duty winter boots to my knees and was so wrapped up on top of all that that nobody could really see me. Only one of the men spoke Russian; he invited me to come home with him and when I declined gave me his name and his address. I took it to be polite but they wouldn't go away. So everywhere I went, they were right behind. I lost them only when I had to go to the restroom. You could smell the toilets even before you got to them. They were just holes in the floor.

Q: Yeah they were called Turkish toilets.

McISAAC: We finished up about 3:00 in the afternoon as the sky began to darken. The Colonel was pacing around. Every time I asked him, "Are you OK, do we have to leave? You are the one who has to tell me," he was non-committal, saying, "I don't want to upset anybody." It was frustrating. My final comment to him was, "OK, but if you need to leave, you tell me." He didn't want to be the one to say let's cut it off but we really did need to get moving because it was going to be dark by 4:30 pm. So at about 3:30 pm, I asked him, "OK, do you want to call it?" This time his response was, "Yeah, we really need to." The crew pushed the last few pallets out. They left those pallets with the Armenians. We all trooped back onto the aircraft. The Armenian-American delegation that flew in with us had already left the airport.

We were all was strapped into our seats and the engines were running, when one of the cabin crew came back and tapped me on the shoulder and said, “Could you come to the front. We can’t understand the tower.” There were a number of planes lined up along the side of the airport building, including one that was bound for Paris, whose pilot had visited the C-5 earlier in the day. The passengers were on the plane all day as it waited to get enough fuel in order to take off. Our crew showed its pilot the C-5 cockpit. His English was excellent. He was tickled to be allowed up. He was also well pickled. The smell of liquor preceded him into the aircraft. I was glad I was not flying on his airplane.

As we prepared to leave, our pilot couldn’t see how he was going to turn the C-5 without taking out all of those smaller aircraft with his wing. It was just too big and there was not a lot of room. We were faced the wrong way for takeoff. There was a runway extension with a keyhole-shaped thing. I started talking to the tower in a mixture of English and Russian since I was hazy on some of the aviation terms. Towers worldwide are supposed to be able to speak English, which I had found not to be true in Venezuela, and was increasingly apparent was not true in Armenia either. The tower spoke a weird mixture of Russian and Armenian. I would get off a few sentences in Russian and then whoever was handling communications in the tow would let loose with a stream of animated, with one or two Russian words mixed in. I didn’t completely understand everything but figured out he was talking about a runway extension of some kind. After about 20 minutes of our back and forth with the tower, the pilot of the plane waiting to go to Paris broke in and in impeccable English told us that if we turned to the left in about X number of meters we could circle around the extension/keyhole shaped runway, and reorient the plane for takeoff without hitting the other planes. That’s how we left as the sun set behind the mountains.

We flew back to Incirlik and spent the night there. Instead of retracing my route in, I flew on the C-5, which was headed back to Dover in Maryland, via the air bases in Sicily and Frankfurt. Going into Sicily was fascinating. We flew over part of Mount Etna. I could see the lava bubbling up quite nicely. I was a little surprised that we were so close to the crater as I assumed the air currents were affected by the lava activity, but we made it OK. The air base is pretty close to the volcano. Since Sicily is a volcanic island, I suppose there is limited level space for a heavy duty runway. I would not want to be there is Etna decided to blow its top. After a brief refueling stop, we flew onto Frankfurt. There, we stayed at the crew hotel where the bathrooms were shared. I got my own room as the only woman, but shared a bathroom with the six crewmen in the room next door. It was an interesting experience but at least they weren’t too messy or noisy. And they did not lock me out of the bathroom.

The following day, I flew Lufthansa back to Moscow, arriving in a heavy snow storm. The flight was delayed while the airline debated flying in the heavy weather, but ultimately, we took off. We had a really good pilot. The flight zigged and zagged around the weather. As soon as it became the least bit bumpy, we changed course. It seemed an odd way to fly, but we avoided the worst of the storm, until we arrived in Moscow. Flying into the Moscow airports was always exciting as the Russians – and the Soviets

before them – wanted to limit what travelers would see on the way in as there were some military installations nearby. Under normal circumstances, there was no smooth descent, rather a kind of 'now we go in' feeling which was hard on the eardrums as the plane dropped quickly to the runway. On this particular occasion, we were flying into blizzard conditions by the time we reached Moscow around 11:00 pm. The pilot warned it would get really bumpy and he was right. However, despite the wind and the snow in the air and on the runway, the pilot executed a perfect three point landing. I remember looking out the window and seeing three snowplows barely visible in the driving snow, chugging along behind us, staggered across the runway to more efficiently clear the entire width.

When I returned from Armenia, humanitarian assistance was just arriving for the Moscow region. There was quite a lot of activity around Moscow. Embassy officers were divided into teams and we worked with the Canadians and the International Red Cross to identify orphanages, mental hospitals, and other places where people were pretty much abandoned and were not being adequately fed or taken care of. Each team came up with a list of appropriate recipient institutions and organizations in the section of Moscow we had researched. The lists were then combined and winnowed down to the number to match the assistance available. I was not involved as much in the delivery though I went to one orphanage with a shipment. This was a major effort with quite a few planes coming in. One of the defense attaches was upset because he wasn't in the Iraq war, because being there would more likely earn him a promotion. Instead, he declared that this humanitarian assistance effort was "his war". The logistics alone were amazing, particularly since the Russians were no more helpful than the Soviets had been about giving visas to Americans to enter the country. They continued to control where foreigners could go. There was very little relaxation of internal controls. That was February of 1992.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

McISAAC: The ambassador when I arrived was Robert Strauss.

McISAAC: He arrived at post shortly before I did. I think when the balance of power in Russia shifted from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, Strauss' reason for being Ambassador went away. He was appointed to the Soviet Union because we were going to do business there. The United States took Gorbachev at his word on glasnost and perestroika – openness and economic restructuring – and Strauss was there to take advantage of the opportunities that would arise. Part of our job was to encourage possible U.S. investors to take a chance on Russia and the other former Soviet Republics. But once it became an issue of Yeltsin and Gorbachev jockeying for political power, Strauss appeared to be at a loss on what to do. He stayed about a year; I remember the fourth of July party was huge, with some 3000 invitees, but he only stayed on the receiving line for a short time. Eventually, he made clear he did not want to go through another Moscow winter and left. A fascinating guy. As a result of his early departure, James Collins became the Chargé d'affaires.

Management is not the Department of State's strong suit, but Strauss really took the lack to its extreme. As an example, he decided he was going to have dinner for "his people".

So he had two dinners. He only invited the economic and the political sections. He did not consider the management or the consular sections to be "his people" apparently. Consular and management officers were only able to go as the spouse of a political or economic officer. I don't remember which group the public affairs staff fell into. Moscow was a vicious place to work anyway and the Ambassador created enormous additional ill will. People were at each other's throats.

Q: Excuse me for a moment, I have to go make a call.
We are beginning a time that is really unique when the Soviet Union is collapsing. Russia was evolving, and really the western powers particularly the United States were really supporting it. Here we had been in a cold war and now we are trying to hold this place together. It worked. Now Putin has taken a step backwards but Russia has come a long way and probably in time will move up the line if we don't try to turn. It is one of these things where we really have to maintain sort of both our goodwill and our steadiness and not revert to posturing and all. This is what I am afraid of. The last election I was concerned about this. There was a real effort on the part of many to turn this into real posturing and I am more of a man than you are and all that. OK, well you were talking about within the embassy. I mean Strauss was not dealing with the whole embassy. He was dealing with his group or something like that.

McISAAC: I came to the conclusion, after dealing with his secretary. He had his personal assistant there as well.

Q: Yeah I have met her, and have interviewed her.

McISAAC: She is very nice. And very good at her job.

Q: She is still with him.

McISAAC: That does not surprise me. She had been with him for something on the order of 25 years when he went to Moscow. However, they were using the office in ways that were questionable. I have learned over the years that wealthy people remain wealthy by using other people's money for things. He was an operator. He seemed like a decent enough person, but I didn't have a lot of dealings directly with him. I dealt mostly with his staff. But going back to the dinners, I think from the way his staff talked, he really considered the management and consular officers as he might his servants: they are meant to keep the place running, but one does not hobnob with them. That attitude created a divide. Embassies are always ready to divide into little cliques anyway. When you have somebody at the top who actively promotes the division, those on down the hierarchy mimic the behavior in hopes of currying favor, leading to a real mess. Existing tensions at post were aggravated by the events.

There was an inspection while I was at post. I told the HR inspector that there was no real job for my position. In addition, with the 1992 closure of many Soviet embassies and consulates in Africa and Latin America, what work I had was greatly reduced. I helped others with their work and I volunteered to do demarches for other officers. My favorite

demarche was an IO, International Organizations Bureau demarche about a United Nations technical issue. It was a three full pages, an incomprehensibly wordy masterpiece of legalistic language. That is, legal language drafted by a committee whose first language was not English. I could barely understand it in English and I was trying to explain it in Russian. I was speaking with a group of people I didn't normally deal with so none of us knew each other. After about ten minutes of me trying to explain what it was about and why it was important, we all burst out laughing. Finally I said, "Look, just take it, read it. If you have any comment let me know," and we all went away laughing.

Q: At the UN you will have bitter debates over commas.

McISAAC: Yes, indeed. But at that point, I….

Q: By the way, parenthetically put in maybe a date or something but talk about in a way it is not just political appointees who don't see the difference between economic and consular. I had the honor you might say to be chief of the consular section in an embassy run by one George F. Kennan. I finally got him at Christmas time to step away from the elevator, walk ten feet and go into the consular section. Every day he came twice a day to the elevator and went up. He just never went in to the consular section. He represented supposedly the best of the Foreign Service.

McISAAC: I would not argue with you on that. I have had my experiences with career officers who are too important for the hoi polloi when they reach the top.

Q: I had my reservations about him and this didn't help.

McISAAC: Well I think we have some people who become the so-called water walkers. Not all of them belong there. Somebody liked them and gave them an advantage at a particular point in their careers. Were they the best person, maybe not, but they are the ones that are still there. I mean you have the Burns boys now. It repeats itself. I agree.

Q: Was it a happy ship would you say?

McISAAC: Moscow? No, not at all. In fact we had a personnel person visit because there were a number of tough issues that required careful handling. Two teenagers attempted suicide – at different times and for different reasons. When that type of thing happens, the entire family is taken out of country. In one case the family went happily, and in the other case the father turned around and accused the child of trying to ruin his life and it became very public and very nasty. Another example of the lack of collegiality was the woman who burned her contact list as she departed post so her successor could not have it. In another case, my immediate boss, Tom Lynch, took several of the cables I drafted, took my name off as drafter and put his on. Three times that I confirmed, though there could have been more.

Q: This is to gain credit.

McISAAC: Yes, to gain credit for the reporting. I was the first person in a while to dig into Africa's relationship with the Soviet Union. I visited several institutes, one I remember had no heat and they took my coat at the door. My teeth chattered throughout the interview, taking notes while my body shook. I engaged with Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well. Ultimately, I drafted a long cable about the Soviets' interests in Africa and as much as I could find explaining their engagement in certain countries. Lynch substituted his name for mine as drafter. There were two other times I confirmed. One of the secretaries told me about another instance that I drafted but was sent out after I moved to the economic section.

I learned the hard way when I sent a message via the APER Channel (human resources communications), which you are supposed to be able to do with on the HR counselor's approval, that the entire front office read all the APER traffic. We did not have much telephone contact with the U.S. at that time as the Soviets limited the number of telephone lines the embassy could access. Several of those were set aside for the personal use of the Ambassador and his staff and family. I went to the personnel officer and told her, "I want to talk to my CDO about curtailing because there is no job here anymore." I had discussed other jobs at the embassy, but the only one that the front office was interested in was circuit rider, which would have meant traveling two to three weeks every month. I declined since I had a dog with me. If I hadn't had Tyr, I might have done it, but it was not my first or second choice. I signed up for a Moscow job – the circuit rider positions were identified as such on the bid list and I avoided them on purpose. The day after the cable went out, the management counselor came running up to me waving the cable, demanding to know what I thought I was doing, sending such a cable.

One thing I didn't mention, I was in Moscow from 1991 to 1993. It was just after the second big fire in the old embassy building. We were not allowed to be in the office space of the new compound because of all the bugs thanks to the Nixon Administration's decision to allow the Russians to build the new compound. We were underground in the new compound in converted space. The political section was in the auditorium. The economic section was in what had been a dark room. The defense attaché's section was in a bowling alley. And so on.

Q: This was sort of in the recreation and in architectural terms the recreational area of the new embassy, which the Soviets hadn't bothered to bug particularly because the real stuff is going on above. They were dispirited when we moved down to the recreational place.

McISAAC: I imagine so. At any rate, we were there because we couldn't be in the old building either due to the fire. There was still a lot of renovation required to make it habitable. In the underground portion of the new embassy, we worked on desks made of plywood laid across saw horses. Eventually little dividers were put in. But it was an open space with no acoustics to speak of so when everyone was on the telephone, the cacophony was overwhelming. The only advantage we had over some of the others in the political section was we actually had bathrooms right next to our space. Everybody else had to trek through our space to get to them.

Q: You didn't have out houses.

McISAAC: Not quite, though if management had been able to get away with it, we probably would have. I want to circle back a moment. I was put into the Rubliovskaya housing complex when I arrived. This was a settlement of high rises for foreigners outside the city. I didn't take a car with me because I was told by the embassy and the overseas briefing center that there was ample transportation. What they didn't tell me was that they put me out in this place where you had to walk across a construction yard with the Soviet Army building more housing. After the yard, I had to cross a large field to a little path under a bridge. The construction site and field were churned up mud and rocks. The path under the bridge had lights, but all of them were out and no light bulbs were not replaced while I was there. After the bridge, there was a path through some woods and only then did I get to the closest train station. There were other housing complexes closer to main roads and transportation, but Rubliovskaya was not one of them.

At that time, the Soviets still didn't allow foreigners to live with Russians. I was on the tenth floor of a high-rise with Arabs, Africans, Canadians, and Europeans. Because I was single and all the other Americans in the building were married, it was an isolating experience. Because I had a dog, I walked outside around the area several times a day. One day I returned to the building with Tyr, my miniature schnauzer, to find about 15 or 16 teenaged Arab boys waiting. They surrounded me just outside the door, menacing with knives they jabbed at me. I didn't know what was going on as I did not understand any of what they were saying. They egged each other on, the tension escalating and I was trapped. Fortunately for me, Tyr, who at that time was about a year old, decided he wanted to get a little closer look so he leapt at one of the guys. His movement broke the group apart as they scrambled to get away from him and I was able to get into the building and get onto the elevator before they could think to come after me. The outside doors weren't locked. Despite the embassy's assurances, there was little to no security. It was at that point that I requested to be moved onto the new compound. The residences were being used in addition to the underground space. Eventually, the embassy housing committee did assign me to a one bedroom apartment, which was more than enough for me. There were people living in the old building as well though most of them were contractors. PA&E (Pacific Architects & Engineers) provided staff for most of the work normally done by locally employed staff. The Russians had pulled all the FSNs several years before this.

Shortly before I arrived in Moscow, several U.S. military officers were beaten up by KGB agents in St. Petersburg. We were warned the Russians likely would enter our apartments and would cause mischief. I was in fact followed at least once and approached several times. And one time, someone entered my apartment. Our apartments were made of two smaller apartments connected to make one, so they were oddly shaped, facing out on both sides of the building. There was a living room and dining room on one side that I very rarely used. I had a teeny tiny little balcony with a ladder down to the next level balcony which repeated the pattern down the entire face of the building. I left the curtains closed in the dining room and living room as I very rarely used them. One night I came

home, walked the dog, had dinner, and went to bed. I opened the window in the bedroom because I wanted fresh air and on the 10th floor, the wind was usually pretty stiff. A couple of hours later I sat straight up in bed. I realized there was a cascading slamming of windows and/or doors on the other side of the apartment that woke me. I discovered that somebody had been in the apartment earlier in the day who had opened every door and every window on the other side of the apartment but left the curtains closed. I didn't notice anything when I looked in those rooms before going to bed. When I opened the bedroom window, I created a cross current and everything slammed shut at the same time.

There were approaches. I never figured it out until afterwards. I didn't automatically think that someone was trying to recruit me. My reaction was why are you talking to me? I used the local telephone exchange in Rubliovskaya to call my sister in London or if I was lucky enough to get a line to the United States, to my parents in Ithaca. The Soviets would not allow long distance calls from our residences. We were allotted 15 minutes a week by embassy management when we could use the embassy phones. You had to sign up well in advance. The ambassador would sometimes take all the lines so even if you signed up for a slot, you might find the Ambassador and/or his family were on the line and you lost your time. It was another morale issue. Strauss very nearly lost the APO for us because he wanted to use the military planes for his own transportation. I was used to using telephone exchanges when I studied in Belgium, where many people did not have private phones, in the early 1980's. I figured why not in Moscow as long as I did not talk about work-related issues. There was one telephone office near my residence from which I could call my older sister in London. That was the easiest and she could get a message to our parents if needed. In order to call the United States, after one time at the local exchange, I was told I had to go to the main office downtown. I discovered this was highly unusual for an American diplomat. One day I came out of the main telephone-telegraph office, which was in a nice old fashioned building. As I walked down the steps, I was accosted by a big guy on the bottom step who started talking to me in German. I studied German in high school and junior high school so I recognized the language but at that point, I retained only a few words and phrases. Finally in Russian, I said to him, "I do not speak German." He snapped back at me in Russian, "You look German; you ought to speak German."

Q: Well of course.

McISAAC: That surprised me. He didn't want to let go of me. I tried to get away and still be polite. Each time I edged away a bit, he would start talking more rapidly. And then he switched to English with almost no accent, which should have given me a clue as to who he was. Having been at FSI with some of the Russian teachers who were former spies, I knew KGB officers were well trained, many with excellent language skills. Anyway, this guy started speaking to me in English about his brother in Chicago. I told him I was not from Chicago, did not know anything about Chicago. He wanted to give me the guy's phone number. So I said. "Fine, give me the phone number." It wasn't until I got away from him that I realized that this was probably deliberate. At the time I was thinking this

is a really weird conversation. I wasn't thinking this is somebody who is trying to pull me into anything. But I let the RSO know.

There was another incident later. One of the reasons I left in March and not in the summer was I became quite ill. I suffered from respiratory problems and at one point was on antibiotics for about six months. In February, 1993 the embassy doctor said, "Look, you really don't have to try to make it to the end of the tour. You really need to go where you can get everything fixed." I was medically curtailed to March. And then spent the next ten years trying to recover; I still have regular sinus infections. I never had a sinus infection in my life until I worked in Moscow. I was sent to an Israeli-American doctor who worked in a neighborhood of Moscow. I took the subway to get there. One day, I realized that I was being followed as a man at the top of the escalator motioned to someone behind me with a cigarette in his hand that he had me. I had been handed off. I don't know how to describe it, I just knew. It took all my willpower to walk out of that station and down the street without looking back to see if I was right and that he was following me.

Q: Well moving back to somebody signing your telegrams. Did you sort of within the Foreign Service your telegrams there is almost a copyright thing. Putting somebody else's name on it not the drafters is not done. I mean did that ever, did you ever clear that one up?

McISAAC: Not satisfactorily. When I spoke with Collins, the DCM, about it, he didn't want to get involved. When I sent the APER Channel telegram the management counselor Geisel demanded, "How dare you do this?" and threatened, "Don't you ever do that again." That is when I discovered even private correspondence that we are guaranteed in the FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual) is not in truth private. Nowadays with e-mail and telephone things are a bit different, but at that time we had to use the cable system. My CDO, Kathleen Allegrone told me I was not allowed to curtail, and I think she and Geisel had talked before she would take my phone call since it took a while for me to get through to her. Then the inspectors arrived and I spoke with the HR lead as well as with the ambassador leading investigation, whose name I don't remember. After they were all done he came back and told me, "You know you are absolutely right, there is no job attached to the position you are in. EUR is keeping it hidden so the Department would not take it away, but there is nothing I can do about it." Nobody was prepared to do anything. I think because of what my boss had done by taking the cables Collins was willing to let me move to another position but curtailing was out, unfortunately.

Collins was very careful not to do anything that might ruffle feathers in Washington. He was very focused on becoming Ambassador and did not want to be sidetracked. He would never send a cable in without having sent it back channel to the department first asking whether it was ok to send it in. Collins' Russian was excellent. He had really good connections. He was a joy to take notes for. But he was not at all an independent thinker or actor. Washington determined policy on Russia in a kind of echo chamber since Embassy Moscow tried always to reflect Washington's views and did not offer independent insights. The question we had to answer was, "Does Washington want to

hear this?" The official U.S. view focused on Yeltsin was God's gift to Russia. There was no willingness to consider any downside to his rule, despite some warning signs. As a result, I do not believe that we were sending in the best original or most accurate reporting. We also had, and it is interesting because Victoria Nuland is now the spokesperson talking about somebody who was sort of put on the pedestal early on and as a result went very far. We had a lot of people in that section who were very good, whose Russian was as good as hers. Mine was not, because I was not a lifelong speaker. However, she was married to a former Republican political appointee, Robert Kagan. Collins deferred to her on everything about Yeltsin and Russia more generally. She had a little clique that followed her everywhere. If you did not agree with her, you were not welcome.

Q: What was her name?

McISAAC: Victoria Nuland. Collins deferred to her on everything because of the political connection. She was invited to meetings and representational events out of her area of responsibility because, as I overheard Collins tell the political counselor Louie Sell one day when I was waiting outside Collins' office to take notes at an official meeting, he was afraid that Kagan, her husband, would become bored and upset and perhaps complain. Nuland had excellent Russian language skills and was a very bright person, but was she necessarily the best officer in the section? There were a number of very bright, mid-level officers in Moscow at that time, some with more experience in the country than her. But the political connection trumped any other considerations. That kind of advantage stays with a person throughout their career as they gain access that most officers can only dream of.

Q: I think it is interesting because it shows you how moods shift. At one point Gorbachev and Yeltsin were both vying. Gorbachev was our buddy and Yeltsin was being demeaned here in Washington.

McISAAC: But as Yeltsin gained in power and Gorbachev lost, our politicians were trying to make sure they backed the "winning horse" so to speak.

Q: You now this is sometimes the leadership of the country between as it often is conservatives and liberals or whatever in any country, sometimes you pick favorites.

McISAAC: When we shouldn't necessarily.

Q: It is not always the best policy. In fact I remember one man whose name I can't remember right now, but who was the Labor attaché in London during WWII. We were in bed with the conservative party Churchill and all of that when Labor came in, all of a sudden our Labor attaché knew all of these folks and the embassy didn't. He went far because he had those connections. We tend to sometimes cut off communications with you might say the other side when we should you might say play both sides.

McISAAC: Yes, and that was my feeling about it at the time. I wasn't an expert on Yeltsin, but I was watching his behavior. It felt to me that we were pushing that one side as opposed to stepping back and letting the Russians figure out what they were going to do, even if it was messy. It became clear that Yeltsin was going to win and was demeaning Gorbachev at every opportunity as the two men tried to get through the fall in concert. What we tend to forget is before he got up on that tank and pushed into the front of the pack, Yeltsin was running around the countryside telling the provinces not to send money to the center. His message was "Starve the center." Once he was in power that policy didn't look so good. But the provinces had learned that particular lesson well and keeping their money, leaving the central government struggling to pay for programs, staff, etc. It was a cautionary tale of be careful what you wish for. But I do think we, the U.S., lost our objectivity to our detriment. But that is water under the bridge.

So ultimately I moved from the political section to the economic section to work on Russian external economic policy, a whole new area as the Russians worked to figure out what their policies were going to be. I also covered economic development issues and was control officer for the U.S. Agency for International Development team that arrived that spring. The team did not request country clearance from the embassy and that is the only occasion that I have seen a post actually turn an unannounced group around and not let them enter the country. They had to fly back to Helsinki and wait for the embassy to agree to their arrival.

Despite the change in section, there was no change in the very negative environment. There was a woman in the economic section whose husband was in my A-100 class, Mary Ruth Coleman; she had joined the Foreign Service several years after he started. He was in the political section. Because it was a new environment, and different ministries, I spoke with other officers to find out what work they were doing and where I might start. Coleman's response was oh I don't know anybody over there; I can't help you. What was funny about this was that we were in a very small shared space. There were no offices, no closed doors to ensure privacy. A few days after made my request, I was sitting at my desk and heard her telling Roman Wasilewski, another A-100 classmate, about all of her contacts at the Ministry. All I wanted was one name to start with. I wasn't going to be competing with her as my focus was outward while hers was on internal economic issues. It was a nasty place to work and I was left with very little respect for most of the people I worked with. There were the exception here and there. I made friends with some of the contractors, one of the consular officers, and several of the military attachés. I also went to the theatre, especially the musical theatre, which I liked better than the opera. I saw a number of Offenbach and other operettas. The audiences were great as well, singing along on certain songs or finishing the jokes in some of the bits. There wasn't a lot of new stuff, but they clearly enjoyed the repetitions of the pieces they knew. I gave up on the Bolshoi opera after attending a Marriage of Figaro production where Figaro had obviously outgrown his knit pants, though they stuffed him into them and there were holes in the scrims. The performance was so-so.

I enjoyed the country and people. I expected the Russians to be difficult. I did not expect the viciousness I found at the embassy among the Americans. What was also interesting

as I left post, was the differential treatment the Department gave those of us who learned Russian specifically to go to Moscow, and those officers who were native speakers. This is a complaint to those I heard from officers who went to Iraq and were promised the moon and felt they were not rewarded as promised. We were promised a lot to convince us to go to Moscow – you'll get your dream assignment afterward, anywhere you want to go – and for those of us in the former group, the Department did not deliver. More have been rewarded for going to Iraq but it has been at the expense of their health. Many believe they were given short shrift afterwards. Rewards were short lived or non-existent. It will be interesting to see how these officers fare down the road. The Iraq and Afghanistan staffing policy has certainly skewed the promotion and assignment processes, though the Department won't admit that.

In March 1993, I was medically curtailed out of Moscow. Once I knew I had to return to Washington, because I was losing my medical clearance, I found a job in INR. Leaving early meant I had to find an interim job for about four months when I got back. I went through a lot of medical appointments and poking and prodding, but since I could function I needed to work. Several of the other guys who like me were not Russian experts came back from Moscow without onward assignments, despite all the happy talk and extravagant promises, and were miserable. The entire experience was wearing, emotionally and physically.

Q: Ok well this is a good place to stop I think. But where, we will put at the end here. Where did you go in was it '92?

McISAAC: It was '93. My onward assignment was to INR as the France Benelux analyst. Because I had some months in between departure from Moscow and arrival in INR, I would up on the east Africa desk as the Sudan desk officer and part time Somalia desk officer.

Q: Ok, well we will take all this off on the INR side of the Sudan and side of things and then France Benelux.

McISAAC: France Benelux.

Q: OK, and this would be '93.

McISAAC: Yep.

Q: Today is February 4, 2013 with Karen Jo McIsaac. Karen Jo, before we move on I just got an E-mail from the Ambassador in Mexico.

McISAAC: Currently? Davidow?

Q: Jeff Davidow.

McISAAC: I sent you an e-mail on that. He wasn't the one in Iraq. It was Harry Thomas who was DG at the time. It wasn't Davidow.

Q: OK so let's just move on. You have left Moscow and this is in '93. Then let's take it from there.

McISAAC: OK. I was medically curtailed out of Moscow in February of 1993. We were warned that breathing Moscow's air was like smoking three packs of cigarettes a day. The pollution was very bad.

Q: They are having trouble right now. Worse than even China.

McISAAC: Oh I am sure it is even worse because they have so many more cars than they used to, though I imagine the Chinese will catch up. On top of increased car exhaust, the Russian population was very unhealthy. It was a combination of medicines not being available in concert with poor sanitation, air and water pollution, leading to a generally sicker population. The Department warned us that if we took public transportation, we would be exposed to more illnesses and of course crime. I didn't take a car with me and took public transportation all over. I was on a street car one time where I realized after I was already on and it was moving that the entire back window had a thick sheet of partially dried blood running down. It was a lot of blood. Then there were the people would spit or blow their nose out on the street.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia, this was way back. I never saw so much spitting.

McISAAC: Muscovites did not use handkerchiefs or Kleenex. It was really gross. People would hold one side of their noses and blow out the other. With all that gunk in the air, it's not surprising the population was sick.

Q: Yeah well it is one of those things one doesn't think of.

McISAAC: Anyway when I ended up having to take antibiotics for nearly six months and the resident doctor recommended that I return to the United States to deal with my health issues, I bid on all Washington assignments. I tried to stick it out to the end, but the doctor advised that I didn't have to prove that I could slog my way through the final four months of my tour. He told me, "Go home, get a second opinion, figure it out and get things sorted out." I lost my medical clearance. I was given 10 days to pack out and depart. Without the help of several friends, I would never have made it. Everything was such an effort. The movers came from Germany. Because of high-jacking on the roads, they went by ship to Helsinki and then drove non-stop overland from Finland to Moscow. There were three men so someone was always awake. They arrived in Moscow late at night and the next morning early, they showed up on my doorstep and packed everything up in one day. By nightfall, they were on their way back to Finland to take ship to Germany. Fastest pack out ever.

I was scheduled to start in the INR European group in September of 1993. When I arrived in Washington, I went through a battery of medical tests. At first, I was told I couldn't work and was put under physician care. Finally, by the end of March, beginning of April, the medical unit decided I could work. I found a short-term position pretty quickly, in the Bureau of African Affairs.

I do have to tell you the story of the plane ride back from Moscow. It was an experience I will never forget. At that time in 1993 the United States was still accepting refugees from Russia. Many were Jewish, but there were others as well, including Pentecostal or other religions whose members were persecuted. When I flew back to the United States about a third of the passengers on the Delta flight from Moscow to New York City were refugees. The flight stopped in Frankfurt where we transferred from one plane to another. The airline had not arranged for many Russian speakers to meet the plane. So a couple of us who spoke Russian guided the refugees who spoke no English and no German through the transfer process. Finally we were on the flight to New York and off.

As we neared North America, the weather worsened along the eastern seaboard. It got really bad, and there was, I think we were off Boston when the pilot announced that we should all be in our seats and strap in because it was going to be really bumpy. There was a lot of turbulence. We had been given dinner, but the attendants took the trays away from us as the turbulence worsened. The people sitting next to me were an elderly couple, and I had been talking to them, in Russian, mostly to his wife, but the man sat there grunting at appropriate moments. In the meals there was a sandwich and one of those little cheeses that have the wax around them, baby bells or something like that. I realized that the husband picked his up and not knowing what it was, was biting down through the wax and into the cheese. I suggested that he take the wax off first. Right about then, the attendants came and took the food away since they were going to close the plane down and strap themselves in as it was so rough. During the flight, including after we were told to strap in, several Russians decided to smoke in the bathrooms, which of course set off alarms. The stewards dragged people out of the bathrooms and got them back to their seats. Fortunately, there was no fire.

By then, the crew just wanted us in our seats and strapped in. At first the purser made the announcements in English and Russian. Please return to your seats, put your seat belts on. After about 15 minutes, they were only making the announcements in Russian because the rest of us were sitting, strapped in our seats just like we were supposed to. The Russians were doing what Russians do when they fly and that is stand up for the landing. It's like being on a bus. I flew several times while in Russia but swore off Aeroflot after a couple of interesting incidents. I requested permission to take trains and saw more of the countryside as a result. Towards the end of a plane flight, Russians stand up, collect their stuff from under the seat and overhead bins and move to the front of the airplane for the landing. The Delta stewards were not happy. They would get one person back down in their seat and somebody would pop up elsewhere. And all the while, the plane was being shoved sideways and up and down by the wind and turbulent air currents.

I don't know why we didn't land in Boston. We were probably the last plane to land in New York at Kennedy Airport that afternoon. They wouldn't even let the plane approach the terminal for at least 30 minutes which makes me think they decided to get us out of the air because of the bad weather. When we came in over Long Island it was even more exciting. I don't know if you have recently flown into Kennedy. You go out over the water. You actually make this loop to come back in, and of course the worst, most turbulent place is where the water and the land meet. So at this point the plane was wobbling all over the place and there were still Russians standing up trying to get through the aisles – this is an almost full 747, by the way. There were things falling out of the overhead bins, some of which were popped open by the force of the turbulence. Of course at a certain point the stewards gave up and strapped themselves in. They were no longer trying to help anybody. I have no idea what happened in the first class cabin, but in the tourist section it was wild. As we flew in, I looked out the window and as the plane tilted over to turn, I could see the water. I was thinking, geez, don't roll quite so much. All of a sudden, you know the motion that happens if somebody cracks a whip or takes a towel and snaps it? That up and down motion is exactly what the plane did. I mean we went way up and came down hard. About two minutes later we hit the runway. The wind was just stiff. The pilots were awesome to get us through that and to land the aircraft on its wheels, somewhat hard, but still a good landing.

Once we were on the ground, we taxied to a spot near other parked planes, away from the terminal. We sat for half an hour or so, I think waiting for a chute to open up. All the time, the plane was going bumpety-bump-bump back and forth and side to side, pushed by the wind. Once we finally pulled up to the terminal, the steward or purser announced that we could now get our things from the overhead bin. Some of it was scattered around the plane because the bins had opened in flight. It took a while to straighten out. I had put most of my stuff in my suitcases – we used to get three for official transfers – and only had several bags and my purse under the seat so I did not have to wander around the plane searching for items as some people did. My parents came from Ithaca to meet me. I had left my car in the U.S. with them in part because we had been told that people stole everything off western cars but also because it was rear wheel drive and I didn't think it would work well in Russian winters. Although I would not get any home leave since I curtailed, I spent a week in Ithaca and then returned to Washington.

I had bought a co-op apartment before I left for Moscow. My parents visited periodically and used it as a place to stay while visiting the museums. So I had a place to move into which was a relief. But I think it was two days after I arrived in DC in mid- to late-March, when the worst snow storm to hit this region in many years slammed into the city. There was close to three feet of snow. We had more in Russia that winter but it was funny to come out of Russia and be hit so hard in DC.

Q: Washington is not exactly the snow capital. It does not get much.

McISAAC: Normally not. I went through about two or three weeks worth of doctor's appointments going to the medical unit trying to resolve my medical issues. At the same time I needed to find an interim job since the INR job didn't start until September. The

medical unit cleared me to work, though I lost my medical clearance and spent the next six years working to get it back. There was a position in the Africa bureau in the office of East Africa, which handles Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Djibouti. Nowadays, there is Eritrea, which was not yet a country at that time.

Q: Yes, Eritrea.

McISAAC: Eritrea was in the offing. The Sudan desk officer left his position early to go to a different position. There was an on again off again Somali task force that the office wanted help with as well. I was paneled into a Y-tour of four months. It was an interesting office because you had a bit of a power struggle going on. Martin Cheshes was the office director. The deputy director was Robert Parsons. He used to disappear for two or three hours at a time. I finally figured out what was going on when I was headed for a meeting at one of the IMF's offices in the middle of the afternoon. The Fund has several buildings and I remember passing the complex where Tower Records used to be. I saw Parsons exiting a bar. So I think he drank during his extensive disappearances. In addition to the normal office hierarchy, there were two ambassadorial rank special representatives. Ambassador David Shin ran the Somalia task force, and Ambassador Francis Cook was assigned to be the coordinator or representative, I forget which, for the Sudan. With this quad of powerful people, there was no clear chain of command in the office and there was a lot of fighting among the rest of the staff over who worked for whom. You know when the elephants fight the rest of us have to scuttle out of the way or risk be badly injured. I had worked on Africa a bit when I was doing food assistance in the late 80's, but my focus in terms of politics and economics since then was primarily Latin America and of course Russia. So it was an interesting detour.

Q: Well what were some of the issues dealing with the horn of Africa?

McISAAC: The big issue was how to handle Sudan. The United States and some of the allies went into Somalia to stop the rebels from stopping humanitarian assistance flows. The rebels burned trucks with food aid resulting in a man-made famine in Somalia. There was one school of thought that argued that the United States must replicate in Sudan what was done in Somalia. We have to go in and we have to save the people, a laudable goal. And then there was the other more realistic school of argument that acknowledged that Sudan was not Somalia. It had a government. It was not the disorganized, chaotic place that parts of Somalia were. There was an active civil war with multiple players in Sudan, including a slew of opposition fighters, all claiming to represent the southern population. None of the opposition groups were very savory and we needed to think long and hard about whether we wanted to work with them. The most powerful opposition leader at that time was John Garang and by all accounts he was not completely sane. He was one of the main opponents to the Arab North, but he was literally crazy, according to officers in the Department who knew him. I met him when he came to Washington that summer. He had contacts on the Hill but the Administration wasn't sure that the Department should meet with him. The Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the time was Ambassador Moose – I forget his first name.

Q: Was it George Moose?

McISAAC: I'm not sure, because there have been two Moose's in Department hierarchy.

Q: I don't know which one but George Moose, both have been associated with Africa.

McISAAC: I think it was George Moose because I looked up his dates and he was Assistant Secretary for African Affairs from April 1993 through 1997. I was told by Cheshes that Moose was unreliable in meetings, they never knew what he might say or promise to do. In order to ensure nothing untoward happened, the U.S. side had a huge contingent to meet the one man, something like ten people on our side of the table.

Q: Watching each other.

McISAAC: Mostly watching Moose, but watching each other as well. I was the note taker so I was sitting in the back trying to hear what was said. With so many high ranking officers insisting on sitting close to the two main interlocutors, I was pushed to the back of the room, near the door, not an ideal position from which to take notes. The conversation was interesting as I recall. Garang was very bright. He had a Ph. D. from one of the Ivies, Harvard as I recall. He wanted the United States to supply his group with weapons, and he had some support on the Hill for that. The U.S. wanted him to work with the other opposition groups, to coordinate. He didn't think he needed to do that. As the conversation went along, Garang went from normal conversational mode to a creepy pleasure when he brought up killing people. Something about him was off. And his ego was huge. The conversation ended with no resolution, but that was really what we had been hoping for. Whether all those people discouraged Moose from doing anything other than follow the current policy, I don't know, but we ended up where we needed to be politically.

I worked closely with USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, OFDA, on Sudan. The United States tried to provide humanitarian assistance to the people in southern Sudan who were starving in large numbers. The problem was the acute insecurity on the ground. The insecurity was caused by the various factions, including from Garang's forces, stealing food assistance for their soldiers. Garang was not at all concerned about civilians starving to death, though these were the people he purported to want to lead. Also because of the insecurity on the ground, the U.S. food assistance to Sudan was funneled through the United Nations. It was not our initiative, which meant increased issues of donor coordination. There were times when everyone involved agreed it was too unsafe and assistance was not delivered, when no one wanted to ask the helicopter pilots to fly in or aid workers to attempt to enter on the ground.

Periodic overflights carrying food on drop palettes identified refugee camps, mostly large groups of people gathering spontaneously or where assistance was delivered in the past. The planes would fly over the same area a few months later and everybody would be dead or they would all be gone. It was very hard to pinpoint where people were at any given time. There was a lot of work done trying to reach agreement with the opposition

groups and the government on safe areas, corridors where aid workers could safely move about the country. As a result, most of the aid, at least while I was involved with it, was done through air drops. Despite Garang's promises, he did not work well with the other opposition leaders and they did not trust him. The assistance effort was based in Kenya.

Q: There was the word no matter what don't put boots on the ground like we did in Somalia.

McISAAC: There was a bit of that, though not quite that language, and it wasn't so much the military saying hell no as a recognition that the two situations were very different. The internal policy discussion itself was open and free flowing about whether we could do anything constructive on the ground. Given what ultimately happened in Somalia, the U.S. military was not keen on sending a force in. The United States was not the only country leery of military intervention; the Europeans as well recognized the differences between Sudan and Somalia. The discussion never reached the critical juncture where a decision to enter had to be made or everything would stop because everyone recognized the differences between the two countries/situations. Although the various rebel groups stole food assistance when they could, they were not burning trucks as happened in Somalia. Mostly the discussion was about how we could make sure people did not starve in a way that does not endanger the population. Concentrating the population in one place was dangerous for everyone. Garang was not to be relied upon. He would kill his own people if it served his purpose or if he wanted their food. Like I said he was not a nice guy. It was not like he was building a viable political opposition. He was in the fight because he wanted the power and would get rid of anybody in his path.

Now the interesting thing about that period for me, besides the ongoing competition between Cook and Shin and Cheshes and Parsons over who would set the agenda for the office, was the discussion about naming Sudan a state sponsor of terrorism. I was directed to draft the paperwork to put the case in front of the Secretary of State, Warren Christopher at the time, whether to designate Sudan a state sponsor of terrorism. The drafting and clearance process were pretty onerous as everyone wanted a piece of this decision. The one aspect of it that bothered me the most was that there did not appear to be an exit strategy. We had a mechanism to name a country a state sponsor of terrorism but at the time, there was no mechanism to take anyone off the list.

As the paperwork was completed and ready to begin its march upstairs to the Secretary, the Carter Center raised its hand and objected. I assume that in whatever briefings former President Jimmy Carter received from the government, especially when he was planning his travels, the Center got wind of the proposed change in policy. I received a phone call from the diplomat in residence in Atlanta asking what we thought we were doing. When I asked pointed out that we had been on this path for a while and asked why the Center was objecting at this late day, I was told that Carter was going to a two week Guinea worm conference in Khartoum at the end of July and did not want this declaration to interrupt his plans.

Q: He was at this time a roving peace maker.

McISAAC: Of sorts. He did not want the declaration to be made because it might mean he couldn't attend the meeting. The work he has done on Guinea worm is highly commendable. But his objection created a kerfuffle in the upper reaches of the Department. After the important people had muttered back and forth at each other for awhile, I was directed to just have the paperwork ready to go but not to plan the rollout as the Department was going to delay the announcement.

The Carter visit would go on. I then received a call from Carter's Secret Service contingent at the Carter Center asking whether we knew that Carter was going to Sudan in a privately owned airplane and that he planned to stay at the ambassador's residence. Our ambassador, Ambassador Pederson was not in country. He was on R&R in the United States and when I located him and asked, had no plans to return for Carter's visit. Pederson pointed out that as he was on R&R, the management staff at post had removed the heating and air conditioning units to replace them. According to Pederson, the entire house was in bad condition. Communications with Khartoum was difficult. This was pre-ubiquitous cell phones or e-mail. There was a nine hour time difference and only one international line out of Sudan. We had to rely on cables and the occasional phone call, when anyone could get a line.

In addition, the Department had to tell the poor schmuck, a CEO of something, who promised to fly Carter into Sudan on his personal jet that the country was very dangerous. We argued and the Secret Service concurred that he should be told, but they wanted the Department to take the heat for telling the guy the truth about the ongoing civil war so he could make an informed decision. Eventually, someone higher up than me told him and he decided he didn't want to leave his plane in the country for the two weeks. He flew Carter in and dropped him off and then went back to pick him up. I got the impression that the Carters weren't very happy with us. The Embassy after considering the problem of putting all the equipment back into the residence decided that the small guest house on the property was easier to prep, so they put the former president up there. Carter attended the Guinea Worm Conference, and I went off to INR. The Department announced the declaration adding Sudan to the list of official state sponsors of terrorism at the end of August or early September, something like that.

Q: You were in INR from when to when?

McISAAC: From 1993 to 1995. It was a two year assignment. I was in WECA at that time: Western Europe, not sure what the C stood for but I think the A was for Affairs. While I was in the office, the name was changed to EUC. EU which is European Union and Commission or something like that. I was the France Benelux analyst.

Q: OK, well let's talk about France Benelux. First let's talk about the Benelux scene. I mean that still is, you kind of wonder particularly, Belgium seems to be really split. It had been put together in the end of the 18th century as a sort of after Napoleon and the Flemish Walloon virus didn't take.

McISAAC: It continues to this day. I have a soft spot for Belgium but yes the country and its politics are very complicated. I studied in Belgium at the graduate level. Unfortunately, I could never line up when I was moving with when an appropriate position opened up there, in any of the three missions we have once I was in the Foreign Service. I would have loved to gone back. Chances are, of course, that EUR would not have taken me since I was not a "Europeanist".

The Belgians seem to never have come to terms with who and what they are as a society or community, let alone a country. Because of that, the Brabant, where Brussels is, was created as a kind of no man's land, a neutral zone as it were around the capital, between the Flemish and the Walloon (French) communities. Obviously they are still not fixing the problems. The Italians are usually the ones who are held up for having over 40 governments since WWII or something absurd like that. Well, the Belgians give them a run for their money. When I was studying at the university in Louvain-la-Neuve (1980-1981) there were ministries for both of the two main linguistic groups – there were three recognized languages, including German. For example, there was one ministry of health for the Walloon or French speakers, and one ministry of health for the Flemish. Because of debt issues, the government tried to consolidate the ministries in the early 1980's. By the time I was in INR the government was a bit more coherent. But the sides still did not get along particularly well. Of course in the last 50 years, the Flemish have had much larger families than the Walloons, and with the concomitantly larger population believe that they should be the controlling power. There are periodical discussions of the merits of splitting the country and letting Flanders combine with the Dutch and the Walloon with the French. But the problem is that the Belgian Flemish and Walloon are more like each other than they are like their linguistic counterparts in the other countries. I don't think the other countries could or would want to absorb them. Flemish has a lot of dialects. They can't communicate with each other between Flemish communities without Dutch. As long as they hold onto their dialects, coordination will continue to be difficult. So it is a very complicated little country, and we mostly ignore it. We have three embassies in Brussels: the bilateral mission, the mission to the European Union, and the mission to NATO headquarters.

Q: Do we have any _____

McISAAC: No.

Q: I mean it is not like they are on the order of a hostile power that could take advantage of one side or the other.

McISAAC: Well that is assuming Germany stays where it is, and doesn't do what it did twice in the last century. But no Belgium is not a threat. If the EU were not headquartered there, the rest of Europe would ignore it. The joke going around among the Europeans, which I heard from an Irish diplomat's son, was that the EU had to put its headquarters in Brussels or the Belgians would not have joined the Community.

Q: Well were we interested in Islamic migration there?

McISAAC: Not so much concern over Islamic terrorism at that time. This was pre-2001 and there may be concern today, I do not know. When I was covering the country, we were concerned about the Kurds, the PKK, because they had…

Q: The PKK being the radical Kurdish party which has been sort of at war with the Turkish government for years.

McISAAC: And has been quiet for awhile but seems to be coming out of the woodwork again. In the early 1990's we were looking at them because the group had a fairly large contingent throughout Europe and were flexing their muscles. The PKK was a vicious bunch. They kneecapped and killed people, primarily within the Kurdish expat community, for not contributing to the cause. Very nasty stuff. Recently there was a killing in Paris, the assassination in Paris of some PKK members. The PKK raised a lot of money and they did it by holding people at gun point. But that is more criminal activity than terrorist so while it was concerning, it was not a major concern for us vis-a-vis Belgium. Our biggest concern of course was France. The French have no problem spying on us and they are very good at it. While we do periodically work together and I have to say of all the Europeans, the French are the most likely to put their money where their mouth is, they are a difficult ally.

Q: What are they spying on?

McISAAC: There was a lot of economic espionage. I cannot go into much of it. We used to warn business people flying Air France not to leave their brief cases untended on the plane because someone might go through it. Business people did report such activities to us.

The French were heavily invested in the Middle East and northern Africa. Algeria was boiling at the time I was an analyst, in the midst of a civil war; several central European oil contractors beheaded and French facilities attacked. Also there was a whole series of problems within the disaffected banlieues or neighborhoods where the Arab population is concentrated, in Paris as well as in other French cities. The French solution under the government of the time was to round up 50 or 60 Africans, put them on an airplane overnight, and fly them down to one of the former French colonies in Africa and kick them out in the middle of nowhere. Which became a human rights issue for the United States. They didn't go to a court of any kind; they would just round up all these people and put them on a plane and then drop them off in Algeria or Morocco and say "Bye," in pretty large numbers.

Q: I find myself strangely unmoved by this. I realize it may be a human rights problem but a bunch of disruptive Islamics wandering around the desert well.

McISAAC: Again I am of two minds. Yes, if they were illegally in France, then why not. The government had the right to deport them. But by dumping people in one area, all you have done is transfer the problem from France to a poorer country that doesn't know

what to do with them. They are liable to walk right on back north. So I am not sure the French saved themselves any headaches, though it was a popular move in France at the time.

Q: What were we doing about that?

McISAAC: Very little. Mostly just talking to them and saying you know this doesn't look very good. You might want to have the pretense of giving them a court hearing. The court system for deportees is not the same as the regular U.S. court system. They don't have the same rights. So we are not pure as the driven snow on this issue. But we do at least give them a place where they do have access to lawyers. Every once in awhile you get a child swept up in this and then the question arises about having dumped a 15 year old somewhere with no parents, no family, and that leaves us vulnerable to criticism. The French actions came back to haunt them in riots, not just in Paris but in other cities. In one, a major Renaissance building was destroyed by fire, not necessarily intentionally by the rioters, but they were throwing Molotov cocktails around and the fire caught and held. There was nothing left.

Q: Did we have any problems with American citizens getting involved in French military actions or French politics or anything like that?

McISAAC: Not while I was the analyst. The French played both sides in terms of Iran. They wanted Iranian oil and wanted the U.S. to back off and let them get on with it. As is true of most countries, France views its own self-interest as trumping any other concerns.

Q: It is sort of the saying I have heard is the French and to a lesser extent the Germans would sell their grandmother for commercial interests.

McISAAC: We have got some of those types here as you know. But yes I think there is some of that. And it's nothing new. The French tried to point OPEC at the United States and the Dutch in the first oil embargo.

Q: Well with the French commercial interests often seem to drive them much more than human rights and PR.

McISAAC: Perhaps. I subsequently worked in the political military bureau (PM) and there was a big outcry from our business people to be allowed to work in China. They wanted the U.S. government to get rid of restrictions on technology sharing. But then once they were there, they turned around and started demanding that the U.S. government protect them from Chinese government actions. U.S. companies are independent of the government than is true in other countries, which is good and bad. Many French firms have government involvement, so there is less clarity on who really owns them. It also, however, gives them a bigger voice when negotiating deals in a country like China where there is anything but a free market. Our companies were upset about countries like France and Germany undercutting them because bribery is not illegal – at one point it was a tax write-off for the French. But the United States was concerned about France stealing

secrets from American business people. At that time, Iran was the big area of contention as French companies (and other European companies) wanted in.

Q: Well at the time you were there what were our concerns about French activity in Iran?

McISAAC: That they were undermining the idea convincing the Iranians to comply with international law in a number of areas. The sanctions in place were U.S. We were trying to convince our allies to push Iran on nuclear issues. The Iranians were thought to be arming others in the region, including the Palestinians. There was some skepticism about those claims as it was felt in INR that some of the reports were beefed up deliberately to get our attention and might not be very accurate by not only Israel, but also Saudi Arabia and some of the other Arab countries who had their own reasons for pulling the United States into the mix. At that time they were at the beginning of their nuclear push. There was a question of whether they were getting help from Pakistan on nuclear development, or India. A lot of this is much clearer now than it was at the time, but those were the concerns that were out there.

The other thing that happened while I was the analyst was the civil war in Rwanda. The French decided to move ahead of us, as they did in the former Yugoslavia where French troops showed up one day without warning. On Rwanda, the international community was discussing what to do, how to do it, and the French simply showed up in country and say OK, we are going to do X, Y, and Z. Their arrival created some problems for us. We were not leaning forward because we were still trying to figure out what was happening and whether there was a role for us. France's surprise appearance forced the issue. But with Rwanda I think nobody really knew how to handle it. What was happening on the ground was vicious. I ended up supporting the task force on Rwanda, providing background on the European side. Some people call it genocide. Some people say that is too strong a word, but it was close.

Q: Well damn close to genocide.

McISAAC: Yes. Without slipping over according to some, including the Department's lawyers, because despite what people say now, that this issue was ignored, there was a very intense discussion within the intelligence community and among the Department, the National Security Council (NSC), and the White House about whether to refer to the slaughter as genocide. There were voices saying yes, but a large number, including a Jewish contingent that said no. The latter were concerned that any use of the word, especially when the numbers were in the thousands, not the millions, would trivialize the Nazi-driven holocaust. I don't think anyone was very satisfied in the end. I found the task force was the worst organized I had ever worked on. I would try to take somebody some Intel and they wouldn't want to look at it but later screamed that they didn't know what was going on. People were running all over, duplicating effort. Nobody knew who was in charge of things. It was incredibly chaotic. That was the worst one I ever worked with until I dealt with the Haiti earthquake in 2010. That one was very badly managed as well.

Q: Let's talk a little about the Rwanda task force. Was this specifically on the genocide thing?

McISAAC: No, it was broader than that because of course you had the concern about Americans who might be in the countries, both Rwanda and Burundi which was being closely watched because of the danger of spillover. Then there was the refugee problem, with people pouring across the border into the Congo, and fighters mingling with that refugee population, continuing to target people. The problem was that so many countries were involved and almost none had good communications. It was difficult to sort out what was happening on the ground, especially in real time. The Congo and Burundi were heavily involved. Europe wanted to be a part of a solution, but weren't willing to go in by themselves. Of course the French said they are in charge. Though Rwanda was a former Belgian colony, not French, but because they were French speaking France claimed precedence under the mantle of la francophonie. I don't believe the Belgians wanted to be in charge anyway.

There were a lot of concerns, including how the Hutu were getting weapons. Who was arming the various sides? Was it going to spread into Burundi? What was happening on the Rwanda-Burundi border? Our embassy in Kinshasa, Rwanda, organized a land convoy to get the diplomats out of the country. I had visions of the ambassador in the front car waving his sword as they drove out. He overruled DS and his own security folks who thought that it was a really lousy idea, given how insecure not only Rwanda was but also Burundi, but they made it out ok.

There was great concern that even once UN peace keepers were on the ground the chaos would continue. Which it did. Ten Belgian peace keepers were shot and killed in one incident because the rules of engagement did permit them to fire their weapons, even in self-defense! One Rwandan government official tried to get into the compound of one of our people. She managed to climb over but then was forced out and ultimately killed. A lot of what we were doing was trying to figure out who was doing what to whom. Where could we have influence? Where could we effectively put pressure? Who do you talk to? I keep saying it, but the situation was chaotic, with different groups trying to grab power. I believe the killing lasted a lot longer than it might have as a result because the powers – the Europeans, Russia, the United States – weren't on the same wavelength. Part of that arose at least in part because of the debacle in Somalia. The Clinton administration did not want to go into another war, but nobody knew quite how to get a handle on it. It was very sad.

Q: Did we have any real contact with the Rwandan government or with the other side, the Tutsis?

McISAAC: There were contacts. In fact some of the government officials like this one woman, the only one I know of, did in fact come to us to try to get help, not all successfully. The immediate focus was to take care of Americans in country and the diplomatic community. We may have misjudged what was needed. It was very clear we did not have enough contact with the people who were doing the killing to be able to get,

or at least carry enough weight with them to convince them to stop. I saw something recently in the paper about a trial of a Rwandan priest who pointed the Hutu towards his own church where a large group of people were hiding. They were all killed.

Q: I interviewed Pru Bushnell. For one thing after Somalia we just didn't want to commit any forces.

McISAAC: Right. We provided transport for others. Our government could not figure out what to do and spent far too much time at the beginning trying to get its act together. By the time we were had a more coherent policy, an awful lot of people were killed. And the French had already gone in without coordinating much with other Europeans or the United States. They subcontracted some of their flights with ex-pat Soviet pilots shepherding old Antonovs. Some of the stories about those flights were scary. Very drunk pilots and near misses and things like that. We fell down because we could not make up our minds. That led to accusations that we would go help Yugoslavia but we wouldn't help an African country. I'm not sure the situations are truly comparable, but public perception is what it is.

Q: We ran into the same thing with Cuba and Haiti too. I mean there was racism involved.

McISAAC: In terms of the Haitians receiving protected status coming into the U.S., yes. I was on the Haiti desk, 2001-2002, and a Coast Guard officer told me, "I could just pick up the whole island and bring them all here and nobody would ever notice." But people get very attached to a particular country, irrationally so. I don't think the Cubans should have the protected status they do, with greater rights than any other group. But giving it to them is not a valid argument for letting everybody else have it. You could use the same argument with other impoverished populations/countries in other parts of the world. You can make that argument but then why do bother with a visa system?

Q: You mentioned Armenia and Armenians have a special status because of clout in Congress.

McISAAC: And then you have the Cubans. No, you follow the money and you find the political clout.

Q: Well how long were you doing this?

McISAAC: The task force lasted for a couple of weeks, though clearly the follow up continued beyond the disbandment of the task force. I continued to follow events in Rwanda because I was watching what the French were doing, but I wasn't directly involved once the taskforce disbanded. I was interested though because when I studied in Belgium in the early 1980s, my thesis was on the use of multi-criteria analysis and humanitarian programming in Rwanda. So I knew something about the country, the internal conflicts, and previous periodic manifestations of Hutu-Tutsi tensions.

Q: While you were doing INR on France, what was your impression of Franco American relations at that particular time?

McISAAC: They were prickly. I don't think they were as bad as the more recent freedom fry French fry fight.

Q: You might explain what that was.

McISAAC: You know I can't remember exactly what happened. People here were angry with France.

Q: I think it was because they didn't go into Iraq.

McISAAC: When everybody else did. Also, they denied overflight for our planes headed for Iraq. So some members of congress decided that they would change the name of the French fries in the congressional cafeteria to freedom fries.

Q: Well we went through that. My mother used to talk about how at the beginning of WWI sauerkraut became liberty cabbage.

McISAAC: Plus ca change. Go figure. But people get very caught up in that type of rhetoric. That said, our relationship with the French is perennially prickly. On the other hand, I found the French often are more likely than our so-called really close allies like Britain or Canada to do the hard lifting. The French will put their money where their mouth is. They may not agree with us on a lot of things and they will poke the U.S. in the eye, which is why a lot of people find them difficult to deal with. On the other hand, when they do finally decide they are going to do something they will do it and they will pay their own way. In addition, they are hard to read because they are quite jealous of their prerogatives. The French believe that everyone should speak French, especially if you are a diplomat because it is the language of diplomacy. The loss of influence on world events is always difficult for any country. I think part of their angst is that they are pulled between the traditional and the new – what their world was and what it is becoming.

The French also went through several series of bombings in the 80's and into the 90's by Algerians. They implemented a visa system as a result, which I always thought was ironic because they were furious with us over our visa system. That was prior to the visa waiver program which once implemented, allowed French citizens to travel to the United States without a visa. The French implement their own visa system to better control their borders, hoping to stop the bombings and reduce the unrest within their Islamic communities. I think they were wrong because the people engaged in bombing French targets likely were already in the country. Going forward, the visa system helped them control their external borders better.

The portfolio was interesting. I learned a lot about the way the intelligence world works and how it impacts the policy work of the Department. I think all FSO's should be

required to have an INR tour; it's part of our world overseas, but very few officers really understand how the two worlds intersect and influence our work.

Bo Miller was the office director. He really wanted to be the intelligence officer for Europe, not be in charge of the office. He had refused a promotion to deputy assistant secretary because he was comfortable where he was. The UK officer and I shared an office. We often compared notes on trying to get Miller to let us do our jobs. He had been working in this office for years, so he knew everybody in the area who dealt with our issues and he did not like to share. The analyst for Germany also had some of the same issues and left early for another assignment.

I believe that Miller's desire to control everything about the countries led to tunnel vision in the office, especially when it came to experts on France. This narrow vision, in turn, negatively impacted the breadth of our knowledge. I learned early on that the group of people who "did" France, the sort of in-crowd in this area that the intelligence community relied upon at the time – things may have changed a bit since it's been quite a few years – had an average age of about 55 or 60. Any time there was a meeting about France that involved the universities and think tanks, INR – our office – kept inviting the same people. I suggested that we branch out and bring in younger talent, that there had to be somebody out there who was in their 20's and 30's to add a different, perhaps fresher, perspective. The response from Miller, and the France analysts at the CIA, was oh no, these are the experts. We cannot have a meeting on France without so-and-so. But I believe that limited contact list also narrowed the view that we were getting from the outside. There was never an off-beat or unexpected perspective. While I think INR is quite good at what it does, there are these blind spots. I thought we needed to take in a broader set of experts, so that we are not just talking to our selves. I lost that argument and I do think that, at least in the case of the countries I dealt with – almost no one wanted to talk about Belgium, Lichtenstein, and the Netherlands, including the desk, none of whose desk officers ever sought SCI clearance so I couldn't take them any intelligence to read – there was a very small group that only talked to each other.

I wrote a number of pieces for the Secretary's Morning Summary (SMS), an INR publication that was provided to the Secretary early every morning. Henry Miller was the long-time editor of the SMS. He smoked a pipe that he refused to give up even after smoking was banned from the entire building. He would close himself in his office with the door shut and the smoke would curl out from under the door. Miller summoned drafters of pieces to his office to discuss his edits. When it was my turn, I mostly tried not to breathe too deeply or to get into any arguments so I could leave as quickly as possible. The smoke was often so dense it was hard to see him through it.

Q: Well did you find yourself conflicted? Were you a European expert, a Russian expert, South American? What were you?

McISAAC: I am still trying to define what I am, though I am most expert on the Caribbean, and in particular, the English-speaking Caribbean, though I have worked on the Dominican Republic and Haiti as well. I like knowing a lot about a lot of different

things. I do not like being narrowly defined as one thing, because that often leads to blinkered thinking and I believe everything is interconnected. What the French do in Africa or in Latin America will affect what the Russians do just as much as what we do. Well perhaps a little less, but actions in one part of the world impact others.

I came to the conclusion that I was being pushed towards Latin America because that is where I started, in Maracaibo, Venezuela. Within the Department's assignment process, there is an attitude that if an officer starts in one region, that's the region they will remain in. Some, a very few, are able to push back hard enough to get into other regions, but bureaus look askance at outsiders – officers who never served in their countries. It belies the whole world-wide availability shtick we are fed. Consular and management officers have a bit more flexibility, though there are limits there too. It is far more difficult for political and economic officers. I also firmly believe the Department of State does not really believe in multi-functionalism, despite all the rhetoric. The Department wants officers to narrowly focus on one area, on the area they put them into, whether it's cones or regions.

So by default I decided I was probably going to have more opportunity or more variety with Latin America or the Caribbean. I wasn't going to get into EUR, despite my work in Russia and the Department's promises to give us any job we wanted (to get people to bid on Moscow and take Russian – only those with Russian already seemed to benefit from that offer, not the rest of us). That was a closed door. I really did not want to go back to Russia after my horrible experience in Moscow. And that made my decision for me. I wanted to work in the eastern European region, but I ultimately decided I did not want to beat my head against all the walls erected in my path to get there. I was tired of fighting.

There was one FSO in the Moscow political section, Jackson McDonald, who threw chairs at people. He even heaved a chair at the office director, one of those big, old, solid wood chairs with the straight back and arms. I was standing at my desk, a few feet behind him when he did it. He turned around, walked over to me and asked, "Do you think that was too much?" Ya think? I responded that he should not have done it, at which point he turned on his heel and stormed out of the room. That episode never hurt him. He went on to be principal officer in one of the consulates in France and ultimately became ambassador to some little country in Africa. Give me a break. You can't work with people like that. You tiptoe around them. I am not prepared to have a screaming knockdown drag out fight with people. I don't do that very often; once in a while I lose my temper but more often I get angry and use what my mother calls my "stern" voice. So I thought the better part of valor was to say OK that area is off limits. I did make an effort to try to do more with EUR, and I sort of did it around the edges, but I was never successful at being assigned there.

Q: Well you left when?

McISAAC: I left INR in 1995.

Q: What were you picking up about France, Belgium, Benelux and Yugoslavia at the time?

McISAAC: The second year things picked up because the analyst covering the former Yugoslavia moved into EUC. There had been a separate group but as things became routinized and a task force was no longer needed, members of that group were folded into our office. All they did was the former Yugoslavia. The Department had finally given every officer a computer on their desks, but in INR there was a special intelligence system, called INRESS. I don't remember what the acronym stands for. Those computers had to be used in the SCIF, the vault, on the sixth floor. Our office had 16 people, including office managers, briefers, and officers. We shared eight INRESS computers.

Q: You say SCIF.

McISAAC: It's an acronym for sensitive compartmented information facility. These are secure rooms with rebar in the walls and they make it so that no sound or radio waves can emanate out of it, like a vault. Our regular offices were also vaulted. There were combination locks on the doors. But there were certain things that could only be done in that sixth floor space.

With only eight INRS computers for 16 people, there was stiff competition to get access. There were some special moments! One woman, Laura Luftig who handled Italy, the Vatican, and Malta, bless her heart, regularly fell asleep on her keyboard. You would have to wake her up by talking to her, or if she was sleeping soundly, leave her to get up herself. Laura Clerici arrived on a Y tour. I was never sure what she although she claimed to be working on the former Yugoslavia. She used to tell me I didn't know how to dress. Then she would demand that I give her my clothes. She was strange. She went from INR to run a consulate in Poland.

Q: So then you left there in…

McISAAC: In the summer of '95, I moved to the political military bureau. The office was called DRSA. Then they changed it to ATEC. Then they changed it back to DRSA. Whatever the name, we licensed government-to-government arms sales. There were two sides to the office, the one that dealt with the Warsaw agreement, and its predecessor, COCOM (Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Control of Exports), the international system to control the spread of not just weapons systems but computers and other high technology to the Warsaw Bloc. I was in the other side of the office, the non-policy side, in which we managed government-to-government foreign military sales, foreign military financing. We also reviewed all of the private sales of weapons and military items listed in the International Trade in Arms Regulations or ITAR, with a long "i". I was told by Robert Maggi, the deputy office director, before I arrived that I would be working on sales to Russia and eastern and central Europe. However when I arrived, he assigned me Saudi Arabia and the Arabian Peninsula. That was how I ended up working on arms sales to Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Yemen was included in my group, though we mostly kept an eye on the country so we knew what

they were doing, rather than selling them anything. Arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE were controversial at the time. About six months before I was due to rotate out of the office, the person working on satellite sales went on maternity leave, so I picked up her portfolio. I also analyzed the U.S. policy of not selling weapons systems to Latin America. The policy had been in effect for a long time, but the weapons manufacturers very much wanted the policy to change.

Q: The idea being not to start an arms race.

McISAAC: Right.

Q: I mean it was a big deal when it started.

McISAAC: Well we reversed the policy during the Clinton Administration.

Q: We had that. We wouldn't sell jet fighters to anybody.

McISAAC: We had sold jets to Venezuela much earlier, but with the implementation of the policy of not arming South American countries, we refused to refurbish them or to provide assistance to maintain them. Mind you, they could have – and perhaps should have – developed the ability to make the parts and maintain the planes themselves, but maintaining an asset is not their strong suit. I did not actually handle the sales part, but did draft the analyses of the pros and cons of the policy. My preference was to continue the ban, but of course the commercial sales impetus won out. The policy was changed and the United States started to allow sales to Latin countries, with restrictions continuing on some specific weapons systems. We were chary of the Venezuelans, pre-Chávez.

The person who handled arms sales to western European countries in the office had a huge backlog of cases, mostly reviewing the private sales; there were piles of paperwork thigh-high in his office. I never figured out what he spent his time on to not be able to keep up; European sales were pretty routine and could be handled in about 30 – 40 minutes for a tough one. Since the Arabian Peninsula was controversial, a lot of my work was slow. I would draft the papers justifying the sales and then they would sit with higher levels for review and decision. Following that, for any government-to-government sales, the proposed sale then went to Congress for review and comment. There were not as many private arms sales to that region, so I had a lot of down time in between the frantic periods of working on the paperwork for the proposed sales. I volunteered to help the Europe officer out and actually cleaned up his backlog in about two to three weeks while still doing my own work. In addition to the routine, there were the more interesting issues, including convincing Congress that selling arms to the Saudis was in our interest. Every Saudi case became a nail-biter since all such sales had to be notified to Congress a few weeks before they could be approved. Ultimately, despite a lot of heat and light from a few members, they cleared the Hill because no one wanted to piss off the Saudis, both because of oil but also because of the regional balance of powers.

There were a few other policy issues I worked on, like the satellite sales. A decision had to be made whether we would sell satellite technology to Romania and some of the other central European former Eastern Bloc countries. I assisted the officer who worked on central Europe on that one. Once I was given the satellite portfolio, we had an interesting event with the failure of a satellite launch attempt in China; the Chinese rocket failed. There were hints that in violation of the rules the satellite company may have provided the Chinese government with restricted information on the technology, allegedly to be able to figure out why the launch failed. There was a lot of talk, but ultimately, I don't recall any real investigation. The company argued that the Chinese told them the satellite caused the failure and they needed the technical information to fix the problem. Though it was pretty clear that the failure was in the Chinese rocket, not the satellite, which until put into orbit was dormant. The failure happened during launch, on the launch pad.

Maggi, known as Turk, was retired U.S. Navy, a 25-year man. He attended a Catholic boy's school, elementary through high school and then went on to the U.S. Naval Academy. He did not work well with women. He had his "boys" as he called them and pretty much dismissed those of the opposite gender. This is not to say he was not very charming to be around. He was. He did not see women as equals. His bias became very clear at evaluation time. It took me a while to figure out why the evaluation he drafted looked so strange to me. I re-read the evaluation several times and remember thinking, well this doesn't sound like me. I eventually realized that he simply took what he wrote for one of the men and pasted and copied it onto my evaluation. I had offered to draft the evaluation but he declined. There were two women in the office. At least in my case he changed the pronouns from male to female. In the other woman's case, he didn't even change the pronouns. She filed a grievance and won. She curtailed. I tried to rework my evaluation to reflect at least some of what I had been doing. I had been picking up and doing so many different things, including working on other officers' backlogs, taking on satellites, working on the Latin America and central European arms policies.

Tensions came to a head when he decided that because I helped out with so many other things, I should do the typing for his favorite junior officer who was getting way behind in his work. Chip apparently couldn't find the time to type his papers or to complete arms sales paperwork for his countries. Before talking to me, Maggi told Chip that I had agreed and the kid approached me. That was one of the times I lost my cool, telling him that I was not his secretary. He of course ran to Maggi and I was called into Maggi's office. We had a long discussion about why it was inappropriate to ask me do someone else's typing, especially when the officer was untenured and two grades junior to me. He just could not grasp that I was willing to do the work – take the cases and work them from beginning to end – but was not willing to be the secretary to a young twerp who couldn't handle one of the major aspects of his work, putting it in final form on paper. Maggi tried the avuncular uncle with the 'oh can't we all just get along' routine, but my response of "no, Turk, just as you would refuse to do the job of any subordinate two ranks below you in the Navy, it is inappropriate to ask me to do that," at which pointed he yelled at me, accusing me of being unhelpful and of making life more difficult for a young officer who was going to rise to the top. I repeated my offer to do Chip's work that he was having trouble completing, but refused to be his secretary. At the time, I shared an

office with another officer. When I got back to the office, Chris Wittmann looked up at me and said, “You know if you want to file a grievance, I will back you up 100%. This is ridiculous.” I never did. I decided it was not worth it. I remained on friendly terms with Maggi, but was discouraged by his attitude. Wittmann was the only one in the office who knew what happened.

On the other hand, the issues we handled in the office were interesting and I’m glad I had the opportunity to learn how the system works. It was fascinating to find out that the same fighter jet the U.S. sold to Israel for $30 million would go Pakistan for $15 million or to somebody else for $17 million. There was no fixed price tag. Pricing appeared to be based on a calculation that one country could pay more so we asked for more and if a different country could not afford that much, they were charged less. It was a lot less orderly than I expected.

Our group decided that since we were selling these weapons systems, we should know what they looked like. We as a group told Maggi that we wanted to see the things we were selling, especially the big-ticket items like jets, submarines, and missiles. Amazingly, he followed through and organized two field trips and convinced the bureau to pay for it. We went to the Aberdeen Proving Grounds one day and I got to drive an M1-A1 tank. Turning it on and steering were not difficult since they don’t want soldiers to have to go through complicated procedures to start it and steer; it’s designed a bit like a motor cycle. But I didn’t realize a 70 ton tank takes upper body strength to actually turn and driving it is counter intuitive. You can’t slow down into a curve. You have to speed up because there is so much weight to move. We drove around an oval track with a lake on one side. I had visions of missing the curve and driving straight into the water. Obviously they had a military guy in the turret who would take control if things went wrong.

I also drove an articulated 50-ton truck and a Bradley Fighting Vehicle. We fired the 150mm guns. There were a few things we couldn’t do because the facility was testing, but we really got to experience a lot of the equipment. They also fed us MREs (meals ready to eat) for lunch. My first one was a dud – it didn’t heat – which surprised the officers.

Our second field trip was to Norfolk where we visited several ships which were in port. We were not allowed on a submarine, but we saw part of one where the hull was being tested. It was enormous. A piece of the hole is placed in a hole in the ground, not much bigger around than the boat, with water in it to test structural integrity. After that we went on an aircraft carrier. The trip was fun and informative.

Q: Did you feel any of the politics with reference to Saudi Arabia and weapons to Israel or Egypt or something like that?

McISAAC: Certainly the problems arose because several members of Congress were very opposed to providing weapons to the Saudis. Some of the concern was because of Israel, but also there were questions raised about whether the Saudis were reliable allies. I

did not deal with Israel directly. Christopher Wittmann, the FSO I shared an office with, handled Israel. There is a lobbying organization that has…

Q: AIPAC?

McISAAC: It wasn't them. Though they did attend this event. It was somebody else, a business group that arranged a yearly meeting in early autumn to which they invited the officers from PM/ATEC together with any interested business member. In addition to business reps and diplomats, AIPAC attended. We were told we could sit at any table in the room. Wittmann had a unique experience. AIPAC and the Israeli embassy cut him away from the rest of the group and steered him to their table. Afterward, he asked me where we all went. We sat with other organizations and company representatives who were interested in selling military items to various parts of the world.

On Saudi Arabia the important thing was to make a very good case for why it was in the United States' interest that we sell weapon systems to Saudi Arabia. I think one of the weaknesses of U.S. policy regardless of political party is that we are afraid of the Israeli lobby. We don't actually look at what is directly in the U. S. interest, where there is convergence and where there is divergence. There is definitely the assumption by a lot of people outside government, and some within government, that the two are the same. This can lead to real resentment not just in the region but internationally. Neither party is willing to go out on a limb. Just look at what is happening to Hagel at the moment.

Q: Well then did you get into the Latin American sales?

McISAAC: We did, we began to sell to Latin America. At the time there was the final act of the long-running Peru-Ecuador spat. Once our recommendations went upstairs, the debate went on at the Secretary's level for a while. The latest skirmish on the border, which the Ecuadorians won, surprising the Peruvians, was part of the discussion. The other part of the discussion was the Peruvian government's decision to buy Russian MIGs for their air force, since we would not sell planes to them, or help them fix the ones they had. It's not clear who was talking with whom, but apparently the Peruvian generals got a better deal, or so they thought, from Belarus for some older MIGs. The planes actually belonged to Russia but were parked in Belarus. The Byelorussians delivered them to Peru but did not tell the Russians, though it must have quickly become obvious that some planes were missing. There was a major spat between Russia and Peru as a result of the deal with Belarus. In the end, the Russians refused to fix the MIGs, which they would have done if the sale had gone through them. The Peruvians wound up with a bunch of airplanes that did not fly. Though I'm sure the generals got their cut in the deal and were happily counting their payoffs.

Ultimately, U.S. companies wanted the Latin American market. Even though the Russian planes Peru bought were unusable, it was still seen by Boeing, Lockheed, and others as a serious threat to their ability to sell to the region. Besides which, the U.S. companies did not like the policy of limiting sales to anywhere in the world, one of the more unsavory aspects of weapons sales. Ultimately, we reversed the policy and sales of some weapons

systems to Latin countries resumed. There were still restrictions, but the U.S. companies were back in business in the region.

Q: Did the Peruvians at a certain point begin to question the policy?

McISAAC: When Fujimori first took office, he really seemed to know what Peru needed to do to improve its financial situation and make the economy function properly. His government began to look at things like this because the generals had bought those planes because they got a kickback from the Byelorussians for doing so. The Peruvian government began to ask the right questions about their own acquisition policies and the idea that they wasted millions of dollars on planes that did not fly, and which the Russians refused to fix. That Fujimori later became a de facto dictator is one of the sadder chapters in Peru's history.

Q: Then what did you do? How long were you in PM?

McISAAC: I was there for two years, the standard domestic tour. I moved from there to Multilateral Affairs Office of the Human Rights Bureau, renamed Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. I went from one extreme to the other.

Q: Which means what?

McISAAC: Which means I dealt with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the UN general assembly or UNGA. UNGA runs from September through mid-November. The high-level portion, when all the heads of government and heads of state give their speeches, takes place in the first two weeks. After that, the various committees meet on their issues, issuing resolutions which are negotiated throughout the time period, though many are not particularly original and have been repeated over and over for years. In addition to the HRC and the UNGA Third Committee, I dealt with ECOSOC (the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations). When I applied for the job my future boss told me that the office lost one position and I was going to handle the portfolio of the other job in addition to the one I bid on. This meant that I also picked up any dealings with the Organization of American States (OAS) in support of the U.S. Mission to the OAS, which is located in Main State. What the office director did not tell me was that I would also be absorbing the workload of a third position. The officer in that position did not get tenure and was selected out. Greg (I don't remember his last name) was still in the office because the Department allowed him to remain while filing a formal grievance. The fiction in our office was that he was helping draft resolutions, but in the three months he remained, his sole focus, understandably, was on the grievance. During that time, he was arrested for throwing a video at a video store owner and then getting into his car, a big Cadillac or something like that and driving through the plate glass window at the guy.

Q: Sounds like he had some problems.

McISAAC: He had issues. He was not a particularly nice person, though of course he was under a lot of pressure. That does not excuse the lack of basic courtesy. After several initial run-ins shortly after I arrived when I tried to work with him on some items he was supposed to have drafted, I simply avoided him as much as possible. I figured out what was required and did my best.

What I know of the incident is what was reported extensively in the local papers. Apparently he owed $3.95 on a video rental and when the owner confronted him and told him he could not rent anything else until he paid what was due, his response was to deny the charge and throw the video he had picked out at the clerk. When the clerk followed him outside, he took the car and ran it at the man. He was not arrested immediately because he went AWOL. My first thought when we were told he had disappeared and were asked whether we had heard from him was that he committed suicide because of the pressure he was under. Five days later his wife called to say he had gone to Amsterdam. He had used his diplomatic passport, perhaps he didn't have a regular one, which meant that Diplomatic Security (DS) was involved. I don't know what the arrangement was but he returned to the United States and turned himself in. At that point the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Steve Coffey, called the DRL staff together and informed us that Greg was not allowed into the building. We were instructed to notify DS should he contact us.

Well, one day, somebody in our office must have vouched for him when he arrived at C Street and the front desk called to check before clearing him in. This was before the heavy duty security we have now. I learned Greg was in the building from one of our secretaries who came back to my office to tell me he was in the office and wanted to know what to do. She was afraid of him because of what he had done at the video store, though of course he might never do something like that again. But you never know. I hadn't seen him myself, but I reminded her that we had been instructed to let DS know if we heard from him. I suggested she let DS know he was in the office and then stand back and let them take care of it. I also suggested that if she was concerned, she should leave the office and go somewhere she felt safe. That is what she did. I kept working until I heard a commotion in the suite. When I peered around the corner towards the front, I saw four uniformed guards marching into the office suite, guns drawn. DS must have gotten the biggest guys they could find. It was a bit of overkill. They surrounded Greg, who though chunky looked positively small by comparison to his escorts, and led him downstairs. He was charged with five felonies as I recall, and was found guilty on some number of them. The court gave him a suspended sentence on all counts and he was disbarred. There was continuing tension in our office during this period because a group of officers wrote a letter of support for him to the court. They wanted everyone in the office to sign it. I declined. I did not really know him and my short experience with him was so unpleasant that I did not want to be party to language I did not think was accurate. Several were really angry that I didn't join in. That was how I wound up doing the work of three people. It was a lot of work. I found it challenging, but also very tiring.

Q: Well when you are doing somebody else's work, do you have to go through paper steps to do it or do you just pick it up and do it?

McISAAC: You just pick it up and do it. DRL didn't want officers getting wind of the loss of positions and people. At that time, the multilateral office in particular was not popular. As a side note, the irony is that they replaced me with four people within a year of my departure.

I just did the work. It was a hard slog but there were interesting aspects to the job. Issues with which I did not have much previous experience. One was the death penalty. Thirty-eight states had it at the time. There were lots of demarches, mostly from Western European governments objecting to the practice. The U.S. justice system is unlike anything else in the world and the federal courts cannot tell the state courts what to do. There is a struggle whenever we sign an international treaty that binds the country to a particular standard. We say the federal government controls the states but on issues like the death penalty, in fact it does not. At least not until the Supreme Court finds something unconstitutional. I prepared all the briefing papers for these discussions. None of the upper level officers liked these meetings so eventually, I was receiving these demarches on my own. I referred to myself as Madam death penalty. Of all the countries which scolded us, the British were the most hypocritical. At the time they still carried the death penalty on the books, though had not been used in a while. So when the British political officer arrived for the third time to tell us we should get rid of the death penalty, I accepted the paper he had and then asked, "All well and good, but why is it still the law in Britain?" He acknowledged that he felt kind of sheepish about having to come in when in fact they still had carried the law but the European Union (EU) was requiring as many countries as possible to demarche the United States. I am not a death penalty proponent but my job was to support the U.S. position, however difficult to defend.

Q: Well we are sitting here in the State of Virginia. I think it is Texas that has the highest number because the poor people can't afford good lawyers.

McISAAC: That is a lot of it. I find defending the death penalty abhorrent, but I was in the position of having to defend it. It was not an easy thing to do.

Q: Well did you find, there is a different state of mind or caste to your office compared to Political-Military? You are sort of in a do-gooder office.

McISAAC: Yes and no. People had a different attitude toward particular subjects, yes, but oftentimes they were hyper or difficult in dealing with them because by God they were right! We had several officers who were rabid on certain topics or about the behavior of particular countries. Being in the multi-lateral side of the house I didn't deal with the human rights reports. There were a lot more civil service employees in DRL than in other bureaus I had worked in. John Shattuck, the assistant secretary, brought in quite a few people from the NGO community. One question that arose was whether they would strongly argue the government's point of view. I think in an office like human rights that can be an issue, especially with the growing power of non-governmental groups.

One of the things that I saw when I first started dealing with USAID in the 1980's on food aid was the transition from the professional development experts employed by USAID full time, to an agency dealing with people staffed by people from the NGO community for discrete contracts of three or four years and then returning to the NGO community. That transition created a great deal of angst within the agency as it led to two different populations, one long-term employees and a long series of short-term employees. It also created instability in the work force and difficulties working with other agencies as the short-timers were often less likely to toe the official line. They had to maintain their credibility with the non-governmental community. A number of the NGO-niks came in on schedule B (expert) or schedule C (political), but most burrowed in eventually, with a few exceptions. There was tension within the group over U.S. policy, which they came in to change. But policy is usually not simply blown up and changed. It takes time and lots of nudging to move government along.

Q: Well did you find you were sort of some of the civil servants with NGO background had sort of the NGO spirit?

McISAAC: Yeah, and it created some issues because policy direction comes from the top down. If they did not agree with U.S. policy, they would not necessary engage strongly with the outside world. That unwillingness to argue forcefully positions that were not in line with the NGO communities positions often clouded and made less clear what the official U.S. position was. This is not to say that these were not intelligent and skilled people, but that their dedication often conflicted with their employer's policies.

I was not directly involved in the land mine treaty discussions but the team that went out from the U.S. included a combined State, mostly DRL, and Departments of Defense and Justice team. But certainly the ones from DRL went out with very unclear instructions at least in part because of its discomfort with the U.S. position. The U.S. lost badly on that treaty, partially because the woman who was running the process deliberately tried to make the U. S. look bad and set up some meetings to exclude our team. But partially because our group did not reach internal agreement with DOD and Justice on the U.S. position before they went over. DOD was quite clear that it would not tolerate the position the DRL folks wanted to take and so ultimately, it all fell apart. When the DRL participants returned to the office, they complained bitterly that the U.S. did not get what it wanted and blamed DOD. It seemed to go over their heads that by not taking DOD seriously and working out in sufficient detail an end result that everyone could live with, the U.S. got nothing and the organizers were crowing that they had "shown the bad United States". And of course, the United States did not sign the agreement.

Q: I had a feeling that the Canadians were behind this.

McISAAC: The NGO leader was Canadian. She was the face of the leaders of the meeting.

Q: They didn't use mines. We used mines only in one specific place which is South Korea which made eminent sense. Fear of invasion still makes it as open as possible. We know where they are. We are not sowing them indiscriminately.

McISAAC: But the problem was we didn't have a unified position. Nor was there a planned fallback position. DOD was happy because the U.S. did not sign up to the treaty but everybody else was miserable.

Q: Did you feel the Canadians were being a little bit insufferable?

McISAAC: Of course. It's always fun to undermine a world power. Though it was mostly the one woman who traveled around the world crowing about how she had beaten the mighty U.S. It made her feel good for a while. I don't know that the Canadian government said much publicly. It did not actually reduce the number of mines floating around the world, many uncharted. And it completely ignored the amount of work the United States does in de-mining. The amount of money we spend on de-mining in Africa and all these other places where other people have set the mines. That is where our group should have been the most vocal in the negotiations. The DRL contingent really wanted the same thing as the organizers and therefore did not seriously engage with DOD to have a stronger position. Once you're at the meeting, you cannot be negotiating with your own side on every detail. And of course, the higher-ups in the Department were not happy with the beating the U.S. took. So the group was very defensive about their role in the U.S. failure upon their return to the office.

We also "lost" Cuba for the first time in the human rights commission while I was in DRL.

Q: What the hell, I mean Cuba has got such a miserable record. I mean was this real?

McISAAC: You better believe it. As you know the other Latins don't think the Cuban record on human rights is miserable. Nor do many of the Europeans honestly try to hold Cuba accountable. First, the Cubans aren't very honest. But in addition, many countries see only the U.S. embargo and go after us, not the Cubans. In the UN Human Rights Commission (HRC) there was traditionally a country-specific resolution on Cuba, about their miserable human rights record. We usually draft the resolution, though we try to find another country to do so. That year the Europeans did not stand with us and as usual, the Latins did not either. In addition, the Cuba desk was doing its own thing in Geneva but not telling everybody else and managed to upset a bunch of people with their unwillingness to bend. My first year I wasn't allowed to go to Geneva because I was too new; at the time, I was insulted. Then the second year I wasn't allowed to go because I was leaving the following summer and I resigned myself to the decision. I mean it was not just well planned. I had equally long days here during the three weeks of the meeting so there was little difference.

The day after the vote I arrived in the office around 7:30 am. I took a call from our principal deputy assistant secretary, Steve Coffee, demanding to know how the Cuba vote

went. I had barely looked at the computer so I promised to find out and call him back, which I did in about five minutes. I gave him the bad news, at which point he started shrieking, "You lost the Cuba vote" and more in that vein as well as "are you sure that's what the vote was?" He was angry. My response was, "Well, I am sorry. That is what the vote was according to the head of our delegation." As more State officials heard the news, as people arrived in the office, the finger pointing became more intense all the way from the very top – Secretary Albright's office – on down. You lost Cuba. No, you lost Cuba. By the end, the upper level officials tried to pin the blame on the junior Cuba desk officer for having lost the HRC vote on Cuba.

I was singularly unimpressed by the whole mess and by the behavior of our superior officers. One person could not possibly have lost that vote. There was a lot more going on in Geneva at that point and the Cubans were more effective at getting votes than we were. It was also a period when the Europeans were being distinctly snerty about the embargo. If we are honest it is U.S. Cuba policy that lost the vote.

Interestingly there was no discussion of our Cuba policy and how it played into the loss of the vote. But what I had found in talking to people (not in the context of this vote but in the course of my work), particularly the Latins, was that they used the embargo as an excuse for not expanding their own trade with Cuba. They also ignored or were willfully ignorant of Castro's disinterest in trading with them while it had the Soviets to prop them up. The embargo is only for Americans and American companies. It would not stop any other country from trading with Cuba. The Cubans have been masterful at convincing other countries that U.S. policy keeps all countries away. I discussed this issue with some Mexican diplomats who demarched us over the embargo and U.S. Cuba policy. They had no answer when I asked, "Have you never thought that there is nothing stopping you from going and trading with them? Why is Mexico not trading with Cuba?"

Q: Why aren't they trading with Cuba?

McISAAC: They may not have anything the Cubans want. Up until the Soviet Union fell apart the Cubans didn't have to look to anybody else for anything. The Cubans weren't looking for trade and were afraid openness might undermine the revolution. Mexico has oil, but they keep a lot at home and sell to those who can pay hard currency, like the United States. Cuba did not have the hard currency to pay. For a while there were three way deals between the Soviets, the Spanish and the Cubans. Russia paid Spain for oil delivered to Cuba and Cuba sent its sugar cane to Russia.

Q: Did you feel the hand of Cuban lobbying, Cuban exiles?

McISAAC: Oh yes. I had dealt with them when I was in the Soviet Union, because when it fell apart the Mas Canosa group sent a guy over to Moscow to open an office. I was his control officer. At one point he accused the U.S. embassy of keeping him from getting office space. They wanted to buy property. I pointed out that nobody in Russia owned private property. It was against the law and against the constitution. In addition, the Russian government pushed landlords to not rent to the Cuban-Americans. The U.S.

embassy could not make the Russians give the group space. He did finally calm down. But definitely any time there was any thought of movement on the Cuba issue, Congress was the stumbling block. I was quite disappointed in President Clinton because I think the Florida Cuban-Americans, the Mas Canosa's and Ros-Lehtinen's of this world, were never going to vote for him. They were highly conservative and did not vote for Democrats. Clinton had the opportunity to actually change Cuba policy, but chose instead to sign the Helms Burton Act which means it is law now, not just executive order. The embargo can't go away without Congressional action. Obviously there was a political calculation I am not privy to where he felt that he couldn't afford to go up against the Cuba lobby.

We are still blessed with this thing. I ran into it again when I was in Caribbean Affairs. The Trinidadians were to host a Cuba friendship conference with all the Caribbean nations and Cuba in Port of Spain. The government planned to use the brand new Hilton Hotel. The Hilton did not bother to tell the Trinbagonians that it was illegal for them to serve Cubans without a waiver of the law. The Cubans actually told TT officials that Hilton could not legally host the Cubans in any capacity. The TT officials were furious of course because the two largest hotels in Port of Spain are wholly Trinidadian owned, but they are both managed by American companies. I learned the law was even stupider than I thought because when we asked OFAC whether Cubans could be in the conference room during the day, just not stay overnight, we were told that if the hotel serves a Cuban even one cup of coffee it is violation of the act. I mean come on, but it's true. And not just Cuban officials, but down to the lowliest civilian. I do think Clinton should have had the balls to change.

Q: OK, well looking at the time, is there anything else we should talk about on this.

McISAAC: Yes, the other major element in my portfolio was dealing with Native Americans.

Q: We'll talk about that.

McISAAC: The Clinton government decided to improve the government's outreach to Native Americans, to proactively resolve long-outstanding issues. It is primarily an Interior Department area of responsibility, with the Justice Department, which both those agencies jealously guard, but because the United States has treaties with the tribes, State is involved. The Native Americans are considered sovereign nations within the U.S. Constitution.

In addition, indigenous issues in general were coming up both at the United Nations and at the OAS. The questions were how countries deal with their indigenous populations and what kind of access to international organizations should these populations have. The U.S. has argued for the inclusion of the indigenous at United Nations and regional organization meetings for quite a while; this was alongside attempts to include non-governmental organizations. Many countries preferred that neither group participate. The Europeans were slower on NGOs because they resented their presence. However, many

Europeans argued for inclusion of the indigenous; less concerned since there are very few indigenous left, mostly in the north – the Sami and the Inuit, which only directly involve a few countries.

Because of the push to increase our contact, I obtained permission to set up a conference with the 625 officially recognized Native American tribes. I reached out to Interior and Justice to organize the event, which we held in the Loy Henderson Auditorium at the State Department. Amazingly, Attorney General Janet Reno agreed to speak as did Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Unfortunately, Reno had to back out when she was called to the Hill to testify, but her deputy came and did a great job. The effort to stand the conference up was hard though as Interior did not want to give us their mailing list for the tribes. Ultimately, I was able to get a set of mailing labels and then had to stuff envelopes, by myself. We also had a reception in the Benjamin Franklin Room the same evening. About 50 people came to the event. The next year, we had more participants; Albright spoke again. The conferences were successful. .

The group was very mixed in terms of what the different tribes were doing on their reservations to provide services to their communities. Several were not speaking with each other. One leader from Michigan told me, "You know, if we didn't have you in the U.S. government to fight with, we would be fighting amongst ourselves." There were diverse attitudes towards issues like gaming. Some struggle with dire poverty but do not want to bring in the crime that accompanies casinos/gambling, while others welcome the money they bring in. Others appear to be smugglers and thus are immensely wealthy. One of the Oklahoma Cherokee pointed out a group in one corner of the room, "See all those people in that row up there – the big heavy guys with all of the turquoise? They smuggle everything across the border from Canada, because some of the reservations cross borders, and they are incredibly wealthy."

Q: Cigarette smuggling is a big deal.

McISAAC: Cigarettes, people, you name it. It is a really very diverse group. It was fascinating to work with.

Q: OK well we will pick this up the next time where are we.

McISAAC: So this is '97 when I no, '99. It was '97-'99, and in '99 I went to Guayaquil.

Q: OK we will go to Guayaquil then where Thomas Nast the cartoonist died.

McISAAC: Did he die there? I didn't realize that. OK.

Q: He got the fever.

Q: Today is 19 February 2013 with Karen Jo McIsaac. It is 1999 and you arrive at Guayaquil. You sere saying Guayaquil is not exactly a paradise.

McISAAC: No it wasn't. But it was not just the city, which was recovering from the period when Abdalá Bucaram, a Guayaquileño and former mayor of Guayaquil, was president of the country. The entire country suffered, but in Guayaquil in particular, the garbage was not collected and many city services did not function very well. I arrived shortly after León Febres-Cordero became mayor of Guayaquil which really marked the beginning of the city's revival to what it is today – with a few bumps along the way as the country suffered several recessionary periods, and two so-called "coups". Local consulate employees, officers, and other people I met in the city talked about the mounds of garbage that gathered in parks and on roads when Bucaram was in charge. This of course attracted a large rodent population and in the high temperatures of the equatorial town, the smell was oppressive. While the sanitation was improving, crime was at an all-time high. Shootings were regular throughout the city and its suburbs. Carjacking was common. Thugs held entire restaurants hostage until everyone gave up their money and valuables and these holdups started progressively earlier in the evenings. When I arrived at post, I was told not to eat out after 9:00 pm, but over time, that warning shifted to 8:00 pm and then 7:00 pm. I started eating lunch out rather than going out in the evening.

The consulate was still in the old building, a converted movie theatre. I believe since then they have moved to a newer building. I participated in the planning process and initial search for a new facility. We looked at a number of properties but diplomatic security always nixed everything. I do not know where they ended up.

When State first moved into the building I worked in, the consulate was on the first two floors and junior officers lived in small apartments on the upper floors. By the time I arrived in 1999, the four small apartments had been converted into two large apartments for visitors. All officers lived in leased housing in the city, mostly in gated and guarded communities. There was not much flexibility with the rest of the consulate building, because the second floor was not a full floor; it was originally the ceiling of the movie theatre and remained structurally unsound. We could only walk on certain parts of the floor where the few beams were, which left a large amount of spaced unused. My boss was Steven Hardesty, the head of the consular section, and the Consul General was Timothy Dunn. I was Deputy Consul in charge of the Immigrant and Non-immigrant visa sections and was the alternate American Citizen's Services head. At the time there was no political or economic section. There had been before, and I believe there is now.

The Consulate General Guayaquil is an active consular post. Guayaquil handles all immigrant visas for all of Ecuador. Quito and Guayaquil split the country for the non-immigrant visas, each handling roughly 50,000 per year. Guayaquil covered five provinces, including the Galapagos. When there was trouble in the Galapagos, we dealt with it, but usually at a distance because Quito would not approve official trips for anyone from Guayaquil to go there. If anyone went, they went from Quito. It was frustrating because there were shipwrecks and Americans in distress out there on a fairly regular basis.

We were not encouraged by Quito to do any regular reporting, but on the side, I got to know some of the banking community as well as a number of judges and drafted cables

on the activities in Guayaquil. I also did a major report on the health situation in our region, engaging with city health and sanitation offices. Because Quito did not like us to do substantive reporting, I always found a consular basis for the reporting I did. In addition, I expanded the fraud investigation unit and produced a report that ran in Consular Affairs' *Fraud Digest*.

Q: Well in the first place how stood relations between Ecuador and the United States at that particular time?

McISAAC: At that particular time relations between the two countries were relatively good. This was shortly after a difficult period when Abdalá Bucaram (10 August 1996 to 6 February 1997) was president. He was known for bursting into song at odd moments and was flamboyant before Venezuela's Hugo Chávez made it fashionable. He was ousted in 1997 in one of those coup d'états we don't call a coup. This has happened with Ecuador a number of times in the last 20 years and nobody in the U.S. or the international community really paid much attention or complained too loudly. By the time I arrived in country, Jamil Mahuad was president. He was a technocrat, someone everyone considered very sharp, who understood the very deep economic problems Ecuador was going through. But he was not colorful, in a country which preferred strong, colorful leaders. One of his major accomplishments, which eventually undermined him at home, was the negotiation and signing of a treaty with Peru to end the long-running land dispute.

Q: Not too long before they had a little war.

McISAAC: There was a skirmish, which Ecuador won, taking the Peruvians by surprise. The roots of the conflict go back to the 1800's and imprecise boundaries. War broke out between the two countries in July 1941 and officially ended with the January 29, 1942 with the signing of the Rio de Janeiro Protocol, but tensions remained high. Ecuador refused to accept the loss of the large swath of territory the Peruvians took. Skirmishes occurred in the early 1980's and again in 1995. Mahuad became president in 1998 and negotiated an agreement ending hostilities and drawing definitive borders with Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori. They signed the agreement on October 28, 1998, and it was eventually ratified by both congresses in 1999.

As a result of the agreement, Ecuador changed its maps, finally letting go of the chunk of Amazon territory it lost to Peru in the 1940's. When I arrived in 1999, the old maps were still in use with the disputed territory cross hatched but clearly marked as Ecuador's. Mahuad kept his part of the bargain and the maps changed a move that was unpopular with many Ecuadorians. He demonstrated leadership on economic issues but his population wanted to maintain the long-standing fiction of ownership, especially after the 1995 skirmish in which the Ecuadorians unexpectedly beat the Peruvians. This was not a good start for his presidency. Especially because the country was in dire economic straits. While I was there, several large banks went bankrupt. I was primarily doing consular work but also I engaged some on economic issues, and in particular banking. Ecuador was a very corrupt place and owners of banks often thought of their institutions as their

personal piggybanks. Family and friends were given cheap loans which were never repaid. There was no sense of fiduciary responsibility. The owners of a major privately owned bank decided that they didn't want to see their bank fail, so the family got together, reached into their collective pocketbook, pulling out enough money to support the bank. It was the only bank that survived that particular crisis because it had sufficient reserves. Of course as soon as things stabilized the family removed the money from the bank and returned it to their own pockets.

There was a serious discussion about the weakness of the national currency, the Sucre, and whether or not Ecuador should adopt the U.S. dollar. The United States officially told the Ecuadorian government to not make the switch. A country loses control of its currency if it uses the dollar because of course the U.S. Federal Reserve controls and sets the policy for the U.S. dollar. The Treasury Department did not believe Ecuador was ready to take on such a switch. Despite U.S. concerns, we woke up one Monday morning and discovered that Mahuad decreed over the weekend that Ecuador would make the switch. At first they used not just U.S. bills but also U.S. coins. By the time I left post at the end of 2000, Ecuador had its own coins in circulation.

Q: OK, I mean the dollar is American currency. I know Argentines have done it, but what do you do? In the first place you don't have the bills on hand. Do we ship them bills or what?

McISAAC: I believe the government bought dollars to begin with. They had a program for exchange of old Ecuadorian currency for U.S. currency. Bank accounts were shifted over as well. It took time. But you would be amazed at how many dollars were under mattresses and in coffee tins. Because the Sucre had lost so much of its value against the dollar, a lot of Ecuadorians hoarded dollars. The preferred foreign currencies were the U.S. dollar, followed by the British pound, and the German mark. Many stores accepted U.S. dollars by that time, at least in Guayaquil; I'm not sure about Quito. Ecuadorians were looking for dollars even before the shift out of the Sucre. The coins were more difficult. That switch was kind of haphazard. The government scrambled to put the program together following Mahuad's announcement.

Q: How stood some of the, did you feel the government was stable or was there a military hovering around the outskirts.

McISAAC: The military was not very evident, at least not in Guayaquil, most of the time. They were around, but with some exceptions, they were not threatening, unlike when I was in Venezuela and there were military and police roadblocks everywhere. In some ways, it would have been nice to have more presence. Drugs were rampant, high jacking of cars and small trucks was common, and hostage taking at restaurants in the early evening became a real problem. The military was more visible in the mountains and around Quito. Colombian guerillas used Ecuador for rest and relaxation and attacked small villages in the jungle from time to time. Indigenous groups regularly blocked roads around the capital to protest their treatment by the government as well as the non-indigenous takeover and misuse of tribal lands.

Guayaquil was very different from Quito. It was like being in a separate country. Nowadays, I don't know. Guayaquil is larger than Quito and, as the center for commerce, is wealthier than Quito. Goods flowed through from the port. Business was the lifeblood of the city. Also, Guayaquil is in a real no man's land by the Guayas River. Diseases, particularly malaria, are endemic to the region, with its low-lying, swampy environment. It was not a place where there were large populations living before the country was over run by Europeans.

Q: We used to lose a good number of consular officers there. I think I mentioned Thomas Nast was one of those we lost.

McISAAC: It is a long standing problem. In 1999, we were told that we no longer had to take malaria prophylaxis in the city, but the message changed as the number of malaria cases in the city sky rocketed after the government stopped spraying. Before I went to Guayaquil, I met for the first time the older brother of an aunt, in his 80's, who retired to Ithaca not long before. When he discovered I was going to Guayaquil, he told me that he remembered the city well because he worked there in the 1930's. Turned out that he worked on the development of DDT and was part of the team that tested it. Guayaquil was chosen for the tests because the levels of malaria were so high.

In the late 1990's, the other thing that happened was the shift from the vivax form of malaria (Plasmodium vivax malaria) to the falciparum form (Plasmodium falciparum malaria), the most dangerous form of the disease. Many of the older medicines like chloroquine were not effective against falciparum which attacks the brain, unlike vivax which attacks the liver. I had been taking chloroquine and found out I had what the neurologist finally decided was a neurological reaction to it. I had several episodes in which I became confused and the muscles in my legs and arms gave out – I collapsed on the floor and could not get up for anywhere up to ten minutes. The neurologist kept asking me if I had Asian blood because apparently Asians are more likely not to tolerate the medicine than Caucasians. I tried mefloquine briefly but was so dizzy and nauseous from just one pill that I had to stop. It took nearly a week to recover from that one pill. The consulate's nurse contacted the health unit in Washington and eventually they hooked me up with the Department's medical expert on chloroquine who came up with the diagnosis of "neurological reaction". He put me on doxycycline for the remainder of my time at post.

Q: Let's talk about where do Ecuadorians go? I mean immigrant wise?

McISAAC: All over. When I was working in Venezuela in the mid 1980's there were many Ecuadorians working in the hotel and restaurant industries. They are all over Latin America. A large group headed to Spain in the 1990's with the punishing economic problems in Ecuador. They joined previous waves of previous migrants. There is a sizeable population in the United States as well. There were fairly regular smuggling trips on boats that sailed up the Pacific coast to Honduras. If they made it without sinking, the migrants disembarked in Honduras and continued north through Central America and

Mexico to the U.S. southern border. We knew about that route because every few months a boat with 30-40 Ecuadorians would sink, especially along the Honduran coast. I don't know if the currents there are particularly treacherous or if the boats themselves were in bad shape, but the sinkings tended to be in that area and usually all on board were lost at sea. In addition, because Guayaquil was a major shipping port, there was a big business in taking money to stow people on boats that were loading up. At U.S. urging, the Ecuadorian authorities more regularly inspected vessels. But sometimes they would wait until the boat was underway to prevent potential stowaways from waiting on the pier until the inspectors were gone to sneak onto the ships. When the inspectors did show up, the stowaways often were thrown overboard into the cold water and too far from land to swim ashore. People were dying so the smugglers would not get caught. It was a pretty awful business. But Ecuadorians would go just about any place where they could find the work or where there were rumors of work, despite the potential risks involved.

Q: In the States were there any centers?

McISAAC: I am not really sure about centers. But we found many were coming across the border from Mexico, another dangerous trek, across the desert in this case. Then people would spread out to Los Angeles or Boston or the DC area, generally wherever there were other Ecuadorians. Of course, at that time you still had the transit without visa facility. A lot of people did that and they could get to Miami or Houston since Continental flew into Houston from Guayaquil. On American Airlines, the migrants would arrive in Miami or New York and then scatter, around and over the physical barriers in the airport. So many people were disappearing from the airports that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) did away with the transit without visa. The other tried and true method was for those who qualified for visas to simple stay in the United States once the time permitted lapsed. This included some very wealthy individuals and families who pretty much lived illegally full time in the U.S. with expired non-immigrant visas.

It was a difficult economic time for people. People sold their household effects out on the street, reminding of Russia after the Soviet Union fell apart. Very poor Russians took whatever they had in the house and sold it on the street. Ecuador was a very corrupt place, even for small things, or things to which the person was entitled, like their identification documents, including birth certificates. So in addition to the official fee for service, there were lots of other informal payments under the table fees, including just being allowed to get in line for the relevant office. This meant that there were people who did not have the wherewithal to register their children's births, which kept them from receiving health care and schooling.

Despite all of that, Guayaquil while I was there was a vibrant town and there was work. At the same time, there were strikes up in Quito on a fairly regular basis. The protestors burned tires, chased people, shot at people on the mountain roads and unless you watched the national news, it was invisible on the coast. The Quiteños and the Guayaquileños were not especially kind to one other. The former referred to the latter derogatorily as "monos" or monkeys. Guayaquileños adopted the insult as their own and depictions of

monkeys of all kinds and in all kinds of positions are on mugs and plates and other touristy stuff.

Many Guayaquileños went to the beach at Christmas and the New Year. The city emptied out and the social life went with them. My husband arrived in country for Christmas 1999. We married in 1997. He joined me about six months after I arrived at post in order to complete a contract he was working on. We decided to go to the beach a little bit after the Christmas/New Year period, to avoid the worst of the crush – and to be able to find a hotel room. We packed Tyr (our dog) into the car and headed to a small hotel in an out of the way area, a few miles north of the main beach town of Salinas. The owner was a shipwreck diver who had several big finds of Spanish wrecks under his belt. The first floor was crowded with the less valuable bits and pieces pulled from the sea. His parrot hung around on the guy wires holding up a mast on the patio. Reaching the place was not easy. The roads devolved from paved to gravel to sand with lots of deep holes that we had to navigate around or risk breaking the axel. We had been at the hotel for about a day when the owners turned the television news on and we heard calls for a big national strike against the government. The organizers claimed they would shut down the entire country, including all of the major highways, adding that they intended to "burn things and break things". My boss, Steve Hardesty called me and said "I think you had better come back early because if this really happens you are going to be stuck." I was a bit skeptical given past experience with all the "*sturm und drang"* in the mountains without perceptible activity in the coastal areas, but I agreed to return to Guayaquil.

We cut the vacation short by about a day and a half. There were dire warnings about road closings, barricades, shooting, burning. Most of the major roads to Quito were closed. We listened to the radio as we left the hotel about the protests in Quito; the roads were physically no better going out as coming in, but once we were on the main highway to Guayaquil, all was clear sailing. There was absolutely nothing going on the coastal areas. These were two very different regions, almost as if they were different countries. Guayaquil did its own thing, irrespective of events in the capital. That said, it was a very dangerous place, particularly at night. Major drug flows transit Guayaquil. Something I learned while reading up on the country preparatory to traveling to Guayaquil, was that Ecuador was the hub for arms trafficking in the region. People were armed to the teeth. There were shootings most nights and lots of breaking and entering, carjacking, and other petty and major crime. The DEA unit in Guayaquil was large and they bought Montero's because that was the "in" car that year; it was also the brand most high jacked in the area. One of their Montero's was shot up one evening when two of the agents were in it; fortunately no one was seriously injured in the attack.

Q: What about Ecuador, were they growing coca there? Was this or was it a transit.

McISAAC: There was a big dispute along the Colombia – Ecuador border in the jungle up in the mountains about which country was really responsible for the drug growing and smuggling. Is it Colombia or is it Ecuador? Ecuador of course insisted that Colombia was responsible and accused the government of Colombia of trying to change the border. There definitely is coca grown in the mountains as well as incursions across the border by

armed groups. I am not sure it is Colombia officially. Most likely, the cocoa growers and drug traffickers are the ones moving across; they are armed to the teeth, sometimes with greater firepower than either the country's military or police forces.

Much of the oil exploration in Ecuador was in the jungle. Foreign oil workers were kidnapped and held for ransom and in some cases killed. It appeared from the outside to be indigenous groups and drug-related groups though it was hard to distinguish between the two at times. But despite all its issues, Ecuador was a gorgeous country, an absolutely gorgeous country.

Q: I have been told it is just fantastic.

McISAAC: Simply stunning. But deceptively dangerous.

Q: What about American citizens in trouble. What sort of troubles did you have?

McISAAC: We saw a little bit of everything. But as I said, with Galapagos, we had issues with boats not being properly registered, tourists getting sick, boats sinking, boats hitting islands.

Q: I thought the Galapagos was heavily controlled.

McISAAC: Yes and no. The Audubon Society built hatcheries on Galapagos to try to bring back the sea tortoise population. There were regulations to keep the population down, to reduce the goat and donkey population to preserve native habitat. But if you can pay somebody a bribe, and you would be surprised at how little the amount could be to get an official to look the other way, people could do whatever they wanted. A large number of people had moved out to the Galapagos, not just to support the tourism industry, but also to fish. Sea cucumber, big slug like things, was a big business destined for the Asian markets. Overfishing was so great that the divers were having to go deeper and deeper to find any. The sea cucumber population collapsed and was disappearing. The government tried to reduce the number of sea cucumbers that could be taken (there was a quota already which was not enforced particularly carefully). The fisher folk were told that they had reached their quota and must stop fishing. That did not go over well because the Asians were still buying, regardless of the crash of the population, so the prices were high. There was a violent uprising during which members of the mostly illegally resident population trashed the tortoise hatcheries. The mob destroyed the buildings and killed the baby tortoises. Unlike the sanctioned population to run the tourist hotels and sites as well as the scientists at the hatcheries, who understood the fragility of the islands and were working to preserve the wildlife, if for no other reason than future tourism, the fishing population was unwilling, or financially unable, to stop its activities. The Galapagos' days are numbered if the Ecuadorian government does not do a better job protecting the islands both from tourists and from the Ecuadorian fishing community. The latter were also undermining the government's efforts to remove all goats and donkeys from the islands, bringing them in for food and milk but leaving them to roam freely and chew their way through the flora. It was a very bad situation.

The tourist boats often were not well maintained. Probably the most common problem we saw was an American on one of the boats suffering from food poisoning. Food was left out in buffets which was easier for the staff but in that kind of heat was not a good idea. Several boats sank as well, not the big ones, but smaller ones. The consulate had an ongoing debate with the Ecuadorians about the inspection and registration of the tourist vessels. Many were not properly built or had inappropriate additions put on that would not pass inspection, but they did not bother to update the inspection. One boat with about 10 tourists, American and German, on it, ran into the rocks and sank. According to the people we spoke with, the owner turned the boat towards the island they were near and gunned the engine. The boat sank. The crew helped the passengers get out and into life jackets. They were in the water nearly 8 hours before a French sailboat spotted them floating in the water and after radioing for help, picked them up. One German tourist died of a heart attack. I learned later that this was the second boat the same owner had thus run aground and sunk. A private sail boat with a father and son team on it ran aground on a different island. The father suffered a broken leg and while the son was able to get him to land, he later died.

My favorite Galapagos American tourist story arose from a high school group on its senior class trip. They stayed at an official tourist inn run by an American who often helped us with American citizens in trouble on the islands. One young man apparently suffered from an upset stomach and was given some Pepto-Bismol. He was convinced that he had contracted some kind of plague as the surface of his tongue turned black. One of the junior officers, Nichole Manz took the initial call. The kid wanted a medevac plane out and his parents were wealthy enough to foot the bill even though they did not have insurance for it. They were concerned enough that they would pay the full $50,000. I do not remember why I got involved, but late one day, I took a call from the owner of the inn who was having trouble reaching the parents. I asked to speak to the kid after ascertaining that the owner did not think that a medevac flight was warranted. The kid said he was feeling ok, the stomach ache was gone, and he did not have a fever, but that his tongue was black. I asked whether he had taken anything for his upset stomach, like Pepto-Bismol. He said yes he had. So I asked if his tongue was still as black as the day before when he first saw noticed the discoloration to which he replied in the negative. I suggested that he not take any more Pepto-Bismol and said we would be in touch in the morning. At that point, I contacted the parents to explain where we were on finding a medevac flight, which was proving problematic. I also explained about the Pepto-Bismol. I spent my youth taking the stuff every time my family went on a road trip as I had a terrible time with motion sickness. One of the side effects of taking lots of Pepto-Bismol is a black tongue. The next day, the kid called to say he was better and was going with his classmates to the mountains. When I asked how his parents were about him doing it, he cheerfully declared he was all better and they were fine. We did confirm with the parents.

Q: Ok, let's take a look at the mainland, the South American coast.

McISAAC: There was the usual range of American citizen issues, from someone having an unguarded knapsack stolen on the beach all the way up to people with serious mental

health issues being arrested. In one case, well in both cases in which mental illness was suspected, the local authorities actually took the people into custody because it was clear they were not functioning normally. The family worked with us to get the woman home and into care after she was discovered living in a room where she had smeared feces all over the walls. She had stopped taking her medicine. It was heartbreaking but the process worked well.

Not so much in the other case. The family was not at all helpful. It was not the first time this had happened with this member of their family. They wanted the Ecuadorians to pay the cost of sending him back to the United States. Ecuador was going to deport him as they could not take on foreigners in their badly stretched mental health system. We tried to ensure that the patient was going back to a safe situation, working with HHS (Health and Human Services) to make this happen. We did finally convince one brother to fly to Ecuador to accompany him home. The family wanted to haggle over the cost and kept insisting that we had to make the Ecuadorians pay for the flight. We explained many times that the government did not have the money to pay for the flight, and that it never paid for deportations. Eventually, the family did cough up a ticket and it turns out had more than enough money to do so. The brother told me that when the same thing happened in Spain, the Spanish government paid the flight back to the U.S. I got the impression the family was fed up as the guy would travel and then stop taking his medication. They were at the end of their rope.

There were a lot of crimes against property in Guayaquil as well as holdups at popular tourist sites. The consulate put out a rather long list of places in the city that people should avoid if possible. Of course, they still went and then came in to complain about being robbed or beaten up.

One of the most dangerous locations was a large statue of Christ, sort of like the one in Brazil, though smaller, overlooking the harbor. Visitors were routinely beaten up, robbed, stabbed, etc. One gentleman, a self-described businessman, who I spoke with and recommended that if he wanted to go there that he make sure he was with other people who knew the area. Well, he didn't listen. He was a big guy, over six feet tall and hefty. A group of three or four people threw him to the ground and took his passport, money, and his wedding ring. He came back to report the crime, kind of sheepishly, admitting he went even after the warning. I wrote up the report and also alerted the police. The guy fortunately left some money and other valuables in the safe at the hotel, which meant he was not destitute. Oddly enough, he got the passport back; apparently the thieves heard the consulate contacted the police and the message was out that we were looking for the passport. According to him, an elderly woman showed up at his hotel and handed him his passport. I've always wondered what he was really involved in, whether selling documents or drug smuggling.

We saw everything. Drug smuggling, document selling, child smuggling, visa fraud, you name it. There was one guy who called to say he was arrested for selling documents. I went to see him at the police station; he was an Ecuadorian with American citizenship living in northern New Jersey. While he was an American citizen, his wife was a legal

permanent resident (LPR). He brought her documents with him, including her green card and her Ecuadorian passport to sell to someone to use to get into the United States. But he was caught, or informed on, it was never clear which. He was reticent about giving me next of kin information. He did not want his family to know what he had done. I pointed out that if that was the case he was going to be on his own hiring a lawyer. He resignedly gave me his brother's phone number. When I called, all I had to say was that I was calling from the U.S. consulate in Guayaquil, and his brother asked, "What has he done now?" I had not even told the man who I was calling about; apparently the brother in jail did things like this quite regularly. He was not very bright but he was the youngest in the family and they had a system for dealing with his escapades. His brother asked for the police telephone number after I explained what I knew about the case. He also said he would call their sister. They still had family in Ecuador. The whole family got together to bail him out.

There were a number of American prisoners in what was a pretty ghastly prison outside Guayaquil, about 12 men and four or five women. There was a meningitis outbreak in the prison. The Department authorized the purchase of a ciprofloxacin – a very powerful antibiotic. Any of us going to the prison on a regular basis were told to take it. In addition, we made sure all of the Americans in the prison got it. As none of them came down with meningitis, the prophylaxis apparently worked.

Though we had three junior officers to do the prison visits, I wound up going a number of times because I was assigned to be the point of contact for our high-profile prisoner. Jim (I forget his last name) was a "shrimp farmer," and had been caught shipping drugs to the United States among his frozen shrimp. He was serving a 20 year sentence; though it was cut in half for good behavior. When I arrived in Ecuador, he had behaved himself as far as the prison authorities were concerned so he was close to leaving. For the Americans, he had been a problem from the beginning. He had enough money to pay for perks in the prison. He had a computer, fax machine, cell phone, internet connection in his cell, all illegal but all available for purchase from the right corrupt prison officials. He maintained a web site that offered "proof" of his innocence. Initially, his case interested a number of congress people, so the consulate carefully documented everything, including all actions the U.S. government took on his behalf, filling two file cabinets. After several years the Congressional interested waned and the congress people tiptoed away as it became clear that he was probably guilty as charged and that his "interpretations" of Ecuadorian law were faulty. He was very vocal and very loud. An Ecuadorian lawyer told me that Jim had probably so angered his local backers because he wouldn't shut up and take his sentence like a man that they wanted nothing more to do with him. The lawyer predicted that Jim would serve his full sentence, with time off for good behavior, rather than being helped out by the drug dealers. I don't know whether that was true but I can see why drug traffickers might not want to be linked to him since he could not keep his mouth shut.

Jim was also wanted in the United States, along with his wife, on drug charges. I worked through the process to get him out of jail and on the way home when he completed his ten years. Jim's U.S. lawyers worked out a deal with the Department of Justice that allowed him to give himself up at the FBI office in Tampa, rather than being taken off the plane at

the airport. It was an education for me in Ecuadorian law and lawlessness, as there were a number of forms that had to be completed, in a certain order. I was dealing with prison authorities not only in Guayaquil but also in Quito and other parts of the country – there were officials who lived elsewhere and commuted to work in Quito several days a week, to avoid the high altitude. At one point, I was called by a man in the Judicial Prison Ministry in Quito who sounded like he wanted a bribe. But ultimately, all our ducks were neatly in a row to get him released and on the plane home. Shortly before that, he somehow got hold of my cell phone number. For the last few weeks he was incarcerated, Jim called me two, three, four times a day or at night, just because. It was at that point that we realized he did qualify for a passport because he was a convicted felon. The Department declined to approve even a one entry passport. We had nothing. Consular Affairs told me not to issue a transportation letter since that implied the right to a passport. However, in Guayaquil we had a huge pile of refugee cards left over from WWII, and after difficult negotiating with the legal folks in Consular Affairs, I was given permission to issue him a refugee card in order to get out of Ecuador and into the United States. Shortly thereafter, we were ordered to destroy the remaining refugee cards.

When Jim was on the plane waiting for departure, he called me one last time to complain that the plane was old, the seats torn. My response was, “Jim, you are on your way home. Turn your cell phone off, buckle your seat belt, and just get the hell out of here. Don’t complain about it.” His response was: “Yeah, you’re right.” That was the last I heard from him.

Another interesting character who showed up on our doorstep was an older gentleman who claimed to have been robbed. In the course of trying to assist him and his wife – who was with him, along with her two little dogs – we discovered he was an old grifter who had been wandering around Mexico and Latin America for some time before washing up in Ecuador. He claimed to be President Bill Clinton’s representative to the government of Mexico. Somehow he had gotten hold of what looked like legitimate White House letterhead. He had obviously forged Bill Clinton’s signature. But you have to deal with whoever shows up, if they are American citizens. My job was not to worry about guilt or innocence. He ended up in prison after several attempts to get away from the police. We made arrangements for his wife to stay in a local hotel with the dogs only to learn that the couple paid someone, though they claimed to have no money, to let her into the men’s prison. She was living in the men’s prison. I never did figure that one out.

I always took a local security guard and one local employee with me when I went to the prison as it was not a very safe place. One time while I was just inside the second gate, the sirens went off. Somebody went over the wall and they started to lock the prison down and I was still inside with the two Ecuadorian employees. When I asked to be let out, the prison guards refused. This was the men’s prison, I was now the only woman there with two Ecuadorian men who were more vulnerable than I was. So I turned around quickly and insisted that prison authorities could not lock me in. First off I was a woman and I could not be locked into the men’s prison and secondly, I was a diplomat. The duty Sergeant just shrugged and said no, “this is a complete lockdown.” At that point, I shot back, “No you will not keep us here.” I went toe to toe with the Sergeant who was shorter

than me. We stood there for something like five minutes of shouting at each other. I didn't know what I was going to do if they wouldn't let us out.

A lot of Foreign Service officers don't like consular work, and there are parts of it that I find awful. But I wanted to do it again at the mid-level as it was an opportunity to learn how a consulate operates, not just being a cog in the wheel as you are at the beginning when we all do consular work.

Q: What was the background of your husband?

McISAAC: I met him in the United States, but he is from Peru originally. He is a computer programmer. When I met him he was a contractor, primarily in the telecommunications industry. He had a contract to complete before he could join me in Ecuador. He arrived at post about eight months after I did. He told me that Ecuadorians hate Peruvians but Peruvians are more worried about Chileans than they are about Ecuadorians. Actually he was surprised at how similar the Peruvian and Ecuadorian cultures were. Very few people could actually tell he was Peruvian as opposed to Ecuadorian. He had been in the U.S. for so long, since 1987, that his Peruvians friends tell him he speaks Spanish with an American accent. He looked for work when he first arrived, but did not find anything. He was a mainframe programmer and most local companies used software. But then one of our local computer employees went AWOL, so Oscar ended up with a job at the consulate. He reported to the Administrative Officer, not through the consular section chain of command so there were no nepotism issues. We learned after several weeks that the local employee was having an affair with the consulate's communicator/computer FSO. This came to light when he began to process out to go to Hanoi for his next tour. The FSN's sister-in-law also worked for the consulate. The sister-in-law was saddled with the FSN's children when she left and I think rumors started as other FSN's heard things. The FSO went to Washington for training in between tours and apparently when he found out his wife was going to go visit her mother with their kids, he called FSN and said come on up. So she went to Washington to be with him. Oscar was hired to fill in because he had the computer expertise. The Ecuadorian employees treated him as one of them because he was a native Spanish speaker and so he had a completely different view of what was going on in the consulate than I did from listening to them talk openly around him.

The American community was an interesting mixture. My predecessor told his maid that I would employ her, even though I had told him before I went to Guayaquil that I would consider her but would interview other candidates as well. Trying to be nice, I did employ her. Big mistake. She pushed limits a lot. And some of the things she told me about my predecessor made me wonder, about both of them. She wouldn't let me use her first name, Rosa, because that was what he called her. I was told to call her Irma. I was not used to having household servants and was afraid of being too harsh since she was at home when I was at the office and could damage things or hurt my dog. She got away with a lot as a result. When my household effects came, she took out the things she wanted in the kitchen and then dumped the rest in the dining room. She wasn't supposed to have touched any of it while I was at work, but I came home to find a mess in the

dining room and a neatly organized kitchen. Since I did not have her live in nor have her work on the weekends, I spent the entire next Saturday and Sunday reorganizing everything the way I wanted it. Oscar was very good at dealing with maids and once he arrived, he was her main interlocutor. But he didn't arrive until the next spring.

I bought several turkeys and hams through the commissary in Quito in November 1999. I kept them frozen. For Christmas I put together a basket for the maid and her family that included a 20+ pound turkey as well as other foodstuffs, e.g., pasta, cooking oil, rice, and cookies. I added toys for her three children. In Ecuador employees also get an extra paycheck, what they call their 13th salary, an entire month's pay. After all that, Irma came to me and demanded wine. I was stunned, "Excuse me?" "I want wine." Now of course I had wine because I entertained. People drank like fish there which meant that I had a fair number of bottles in the house, but I was pissed. The value of the basket was over US$100, she had her 13th salary, and now she was demanding wine? I thought the demand was inappropriate, but was afraid to say no. I don't drink alcohol but do cook with wine on occasion. I brought a number of small, one-cup bottles of wine with me specifically for cooking. I gave her one of those. You could see from her face she was not happy with the small bottle, but I had given her wine so she could not complain. When my husband heard about the incident, he blew up. He said she should never have asked for wine and that I should not have given it to her. I told him it was done. However, when Oscar arrived, she became his to deal with and found him a more difficult person to manipulate.

I learned in the course of my time there that I was the only FSO who paid the required social security payment for the maid and did all of the things that by law you were supposed to do. I didn't realize that the other diplomats were not, until my boss's wife furiously accused me of ruining things for everyone else. I was trying to do what was the right, and legal, thing.

Guayaquil was a messy place on the personnel front. There were three junior officers, two of whom decided they should be running the consulate. One in particular, Nichole Manz, went over not only my head but Hardesty's head and Tim Dunn's head to the ambassador and DCM in Quito demanding certain things that she should be in charge of. Tim Dunn who thought he had been getting along with the ambassador, Gwen Clare, just fine suddenly found himself being demeaned and ignored by her. He became very angry and disillusioned. Steve Hardesty was unhappy. Then the Quito hierarchy attacked the admin officer, Keith Sanders. I had a good relationship with Hardesty, Dunn, and Sanders, the consulate's chain of command, so at the same time that I was being attacked by the JO and Quito and the Bureau of Consular Affairs, I was hearing about the embassy's mistreatment of them. However, let's just say that bad things run downhill and everybody in between steps out of the way as things roll downward. I became the focal point for the Manz's anger. It seems to have started with the first evaluation I did for her. It was a good evaluation but not stellar, a deliberate choice. Manz treated others badly. She would call for a local employee by yelling out "FSN" at the top of her lungs, rather than getting up to find someone or picking up the telephone. She was abusive to applicants as well as to the local employees. And while she churned out visas very fast,

she was indiscriminate; if Quito wanted more issuances, she would simply not deny anyone. In a country with a 70% refusal rate and extremely high fraud, this was criminal. If the applicant was a good looking young man, she issued the visa. The other agencies went directly to her at the visa window if they had someone they wanted a visa issued for that they knew would not get past myself or Hardesty. I had a lock put on the consular section door so people could not just waltz into the section and hand the JO's passports and applications directly, which they had been doing. Locking the consulate doors should have been done long before to comply with the regulations. Hardesty read through the evaluation and agreed with several proposed changes which I accepted. Then he wrote his portion. He was actually harder on her than I was. The portions she objected to were in his reviewer's portion of the evaluation, not the rater's.

She then sent it to the DCM, Larry Palmer. I found out a lot of this after the fact. Palmer decided to change language and make her sound as if she was far better than she was. Most of the language he objected to was in Hardesty's part, the reviewer's statement. However, I became the focus of Palmer's rage and Manz's baiting. At the time, I did not know he was the main actor as he insisted that the Ambassador was responsible for all of the objections and for targeting me. He had struck me as superficial in the only meeting I had with him before this all started, though I had been at post for over a year. He was physically striking, though not handsome, and dressed well, appearing quite plausible. I was to learn that Palmer was not to be trusted. He was very careful not to leave fingerprints on any of his dirty work, but he was truly vicious. The whole thing would have been fascinating to watch if I were not the target. And it all happened very fast, starting in the summer of 2000. Palmer convinced Ambassador Gwen Clare that something had to be done about me. She called in her buddies, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Mary Ryan and Donna Hamilton who was on leave without pay in Peru while her husband was ambassador to Peru.

The first inkling I had that Washington was involved was when Ryan announced that an FS-03 officer was not allowed to supervise junior officers; that I was in the position I was in against regulations. Hardesty went back to CA and asked for a ruling since there are many FS-03 officers supervising junior officers in consular sections around the world. Even her own lawyers and Consular Affairs advisors disagreed with her. But Ryan continued to insist that I was not allowed to supervise junior officers because of my rank. We transferred the job of writing evaluations to Hardesty. But Ryan had found a lie she liked and she continued to accuse me of not following instructions. She or Palmer, I do not know which one told the junior officers in Guayaquil that I was not their supervisor but once they had that, they no longer listened to anything I said. I stopped trying to supervise them but continued to manage with the local staff. By this time, Manz was telling everyone within earshot that she was running the consulate. At about this time a new junior officer arrived, Edith Spruill, who had serious issues. She missed her first flight to Ecuador. Her CDA instructed me not to ask why. She also decided she wanted to run the section and informed the local employees that they were not to report to anyone but her. Chaos was all around us.

By this time, I was keeping written records of everything – I ended up with two four-inch three-ring binders full of material. Everything I did in the job was approved by my boss or by Quito and/or Washington and I was actually promoted in part based on my first year in Guayaquil.

In the middle of the summer, Tim Dunn left post. He was not happy, especially with the way the ambassador treated him by the end of his tour. Mike Glover, who had already been in Quito for two tours as Economic Counselor, was transferred to Guayaquil to be principal officer, a stretch assignment Clare and Palmer insisted upon. I'm sure there were people at grade bidding on the position, but he was biddable and would do whatever they wanted, regardless of merit and the Department let them get their way. It was cheaper to move him from Quito to Guayaquil than to ship someone new out. He clearly came with instructions to harass and get rid of me. Just about the first thing he did was call all the local employees together to find out "what Karen Jo has done to you" as several of the more senior local employees told me. And some of the stories they came up with were pretty amazing, including that I was searching purses. None of it was true, but given the opportunity to kick someone when they are down, Latins, especially women, are enthusiastic joiners in. Up until Manz began her campaign, I had a pretty good relationship with most of the local employees. Glover arrived and my life became miserable.

At this point, I worked with the administrative officer, Keith Sanders, to change the job to comply with Ryan's demand. Shortly after Glover's arrival, I requested curtailment. I was told no. I also asked to be allowed to finish my tour through to the next summer – it was a two year tour because Guayaquil was a 15% hardship post. Again, I was told no. I had to have the embassy's concurrence to curtail and in conversation with the Administrative Counselor, it became clear that the personnel and administrative officers at the embassy had no clue about what the DCM and Ambassador were doing.

Donna Hamilton was tasked by Mary Ryan to come to Guayaquil and review the situation. I figured out pretty quickly that Hamilton had no plan to review anything. Her sole purpose was to tell me to go away. The problem was that when I asked to curtail, Quito said no, twice! So Hamilton arrived and told me to take her to dinner. I can't remember if she even stayed overnight; she must have since I had to buy her dinner. I was amazed at the chutzpa it took to come to town to tell me "we don't like you, you have got to leave," at the same time I was being told by the embassy that I could not curtail. And she had the gall to insist I pay for her dinner. So I took her to a restaurant I liked, since I figured I would at least have a good meal. She went on and on about how wonderful Manz was. I tried to explain that while Manz's number of visa issuances was high, she was abusive to applicants and local employees. She would scream at them and I would have to ask that she leave the window until she calmed down. I told Hamilton that one day after Glover arrived at post, he instructed the consulate to lower the refusal rate. Ecuadorians complained about too many visa refusals even though many of them, including a high proportion of the well-to-do, given the chance would simply remain in the United States. When 70% of the population wants to leave and fraud is rampant, there is justification for a high refusal rate. So that day Manz simply issued every visa. The rate

dropped to 20% for the day. Glover and she were dancing around the consular section celebrating that the low refusal rate. I agreed with Hamilton that Manz might work fast, but asked "if she is not thinking this through and she is manipulating the refusal rate based on what somebody in power wants her to make it, is that the right way? Is that the way you want the consulate to operate? If you don't want anybody refused, we can go ahead and not refuse anybody." Of course, Hamilton's response was, "Oh no, no. That is not what I meant," but that was the way she and Ryan and Glover were looking at it. I realized after a bit that Hamilton didn't care; she was there for one purpose only, to tell me to leave.

In the middle of all this, at the end of October, the promotion list came out and I was promoted to FS-02. I will never know whether Quito's refusal to let me curtail was because Palmer wanted the ambassador to do a loss of confidence cable. Of course, once I was promoted that became impossible.

At that point, Palmer started telling me directly that I had to leave and the sooner the better. I sent him an e-mail after each time he called me, at Sander's suggestion, so that I would have a record. The e-mails stated, "I understand you to have said …", and included the gist of what he had said to me. As soon as Palmer got the e-mails he would call me up to threaten me, every time. He threatened to crush me, to ruin me, to make sure I was finished; it went downhill from there. I do think he is the primary reason I was never promoted again. He continued to badmouth me.

Pressure was building on me to leave before Nichole did. She was due to leave post in mid-December. I dutifully drafted a cable requesting curtailment. HR was not happy and said they saw no reason for curtailment, their reasoning including that I had good evaluations for the job I was doing in Guayaquil from everyone in my chain of command. The Department made clear Quito was not allowed to do a no confidence cable. I had kept my CDO apprised of my battle with CA. Eventually, HR agreed to let me curtail but only if I found an onward assignment first. I was not to return to Washington as over complement. There were very few jobs at that point in the winter cycle and I was not allowed to bid on early summer jobs. I had to be out of Guayaquil in December.

I received little support from anyone, except Keith Sanders. Once you are labeled like that, no one wants anything to do with you. It was very hard emotionally, professionally, and intellectually. Also, it was physically exhausting, to behave in a professional and calm manner, no matter what was thrown at me. I was being told I was an absolute failure when I was trying my damndest to do what I have been told to do. I am not someone who goes out and wings it. I tend to follow the rules. Nothing I did, including counseling Manz and drafting the evaluations was done in a vacuum. I consulted with Hardesty, with Sanders. Some of the more delicate changes I was asked to make, including to the visa recommendation system which at the time was very much abused by other USG agencies and all the local employees, were done at the behest of Washington and were approved both by Washington and Quito, up to and including by Palmer, though he was loathe to admit it. I accepted that I had to leave and found a not very satisfactory job and packed out in early December 2000 so I could leave post two days before Manz did. So she could

say she won, whatever the competition was that we were in. I decided before I left post that I was going to grieve my treatment by Palmer, Clare, and Glover, et al. I also thought it was better for the marriage and my dog that we be in the Washington.

A few weeks after I arrived in Washington, I made appointments to meet Mary Ryan and Patrick Kennedy who was either assistant secretary or undersecretary for management. I asked what I did wrong. I was fascinated by Mary Ryan because she didn't want to talk about what had happened. She behaved as if nothing had happened, as if she had not meddled in a very unhealthy and unhelpful way and that she lied about regulations which were easily checkable in the FAM. Clearly she was an expert at compartmentalization and either had not a clue who I was or was expert at separating out her vicious, nasty side with her more public, "mother of consular affairs" image.

The meeting with Patrick Kennedy was interesting because he came to Guayaquil while I was still there. After I was set to leave, Steve Hardesty asked to curtail. Keith Sanders also requested curtailment after Palmer and Glover attacked him when resisted their interference. The Department did not want everybody to leave post all at the same time. Kennedy showed up in Guayaquil to tell Hardesty he had to stay. I was sitting outside Hardesty's office when Kennedy, furious, stormed past me into the office and slammed the door. Kennedy brought a mediator with him. The Department is, I am sorry to say, does not use mediation effectively. The mediator should have been in Guayaquil months before, not when the war was essentially all over except for some residual shouting. The mediator sat at Hardesty's secretary's desk and we talked about this. She told me they had pulled her in too late and that there was little she could do at that point. Kennedy did not acknowledge me as he ran past. So when I went to see him in DC and asked why he had not spoken with me, his response was, "Oh, you weren't there." I pointed out that I watched him go past me into Steve Hardesty's office. He responded that he was told I wasn't there. I don't know if it was Palmer or Glover or Ryan who told him that, but it fit the pattern. Earlier, an officer was sent from Venezuela to do my job because I supposedly was not there. But I was still very much there. So someone was pretending that I was no longer at post. It was like being invisible. I let her try to manage the junior officers, though by this time, between Manz and Spruill, the local employees were in two camps and I don't imagine it was easy. I continued to review all issuances and denials and when Hardesty was on leave for several weeks in the middle of all this, I ran the consulate.

Back in Washington, starting in early 2001, I was in the Nuclear Proliferation Bureau, NP. The job was not my first choice but in reality there were no other choices. The people running the office did not get along each other or their employees. There were running battles over workload as there was not enough to do to fully employ all the people assigned to the office. The office director and I were the only Foreign Service Officers. I took the job with the understanding that there would be minimal traveling but my boss wanted me to travel to Moscow and other cities in former Soviet republics almost immediately.

My main focus was to settle my family and to draft a grievance of the situation in Guayaquil. I had documented everything and wanted to remove gratuitous nasty language from my final evaluation which Glover threw in at the last minute – I refused to sign it which more angst as the acting admin counselor tried to force the issue. The remedies I requested included eliminating the gratuitous and inaccurate language in the evaluation and being allowed to bid on jobs that summer since there had been no real option in the winter cycle. The Department review resolved the entire thing, correcting the evaluation, allowing me to find a job better suited to my background. It was a sweeping result and the AFSA lawyer who assisted me expressed surprise at how completely the reviewers agreed with me, adding "you just never know."

I looked for a position in WHA. I decided that I was not going to let Palmer and Ryan run me away from the area I was most familiar with. I'm sure some of the people in WHA, in the executive and the front offices knew some of what happened in Ecuador but since I was in the consulate and not a political section the story had not spread very widely. I moved to the Haiti desk for a one year tour as WHA eliminated the Haiti Working Group and reinserted the country into the Office of Caribbean Affairs with a two-person desk. I worked hard to win everybody's respect by doing my job and doing it well. I am not an extrovert and it takes time to win people over. The most ironic part of this whole thing was that in 2011, I became the control officer for Palmer who was nominated to be ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean. Of all the people he was the nastiest right throughout and afterwards and I was not sure how he would behave. He basically pretended he never met me before. There was a concerted effort in Guayaquil to destroy me. I played some role obviously, but I have never been able to figure out what I could have done differently to have reached a different result, except perhaps to fawn over Palmer.

Q: Well looking at this, what about this cabal of you were talking about junior officers. What was this all about?

McISAAC: I think management is something the Department does not do well, in fact does quite badly overall, and I have felt that way since I joined the Foreign Service. I left a position as Assistant Vice President of a mortgage bank when I joined the Foreign Service. State treated us as if we were kindergarteners. They tell junior officers that anything you did before doesn't count. I went through a bit of struggle to accept that but ultimately decided that I would pay my dues like everyone else and not let the overt condescension annoy me. I supervised 25-30 people at the bank but once I was at State, I accepted that I was back to square one. Nowadays, I think there is also a generational difference. When I started out in 1984, only a few dared challenge those directing us. Though it was a struggle, I accepted that I had to learn how State did things and that I must to pay my dues. Younger officers do not seem to feel they have to do those things. They do not want to have to listen to somebody else tell them what to do. They do not want to follow the rules. And the Department encourages that these days by calling them all "leaders." And yet, our type of work is very rule-bound, with Congress looking over our shoulders.

Q: What was their job? Visa issuing?

McISAAC: Yes, primarily. We rotated them from non-immigrant visas to immigrant visas to the American citizen services, the standard rotation. Manz in particular, but the other two went along with her, wanted to run things. Shortly before I left, I overheard Manz telling Glover how to write a paper which I thought rather presumptuous. I did not like the man but he was an experienced officer and good writer. Manz wanted to run the entire building, not just the consular section.

Q: What was her background?

McISAAC: A bright kid. She was a cheerleader in college and had not quite outgrown her teenhood. She taught cheerleading classes in Guayaquil. She got involved with a local guy who appeared to be abusive, though before him I learned from one of the FSNs that she dated at least one of the local guards. She joined the Foreign Service out of graduate school. She had excellent linguistic skills, with good Spanish and Portuguese. But she didn't have people skills. She would be working on a visa case, and start screaming at the applicants. Calling them stupid. She used to turn around when she finished with a passport and yell "FSN" to have one of the local employees come pick it up. I counseled her to stop shouting at people and to address the local employees with respect. She did not take any of that onboard. I continued to have to ask periodically that she leave the visa window because of her behavior.

My one great accomplishment in Guayaquil was to re-organize the entire physical circulation system of non-immigrant visa issuance to reduce running around, eliminate shouting, and increase privacy of applicants. After watching the way work circulated and also working at all the different work stations myself, I engaged Keith Sanders to find money to make things work better. Of course, the OBO did not want to spend $25,000 to fix our consular section. They told Sanders they would consider a $400,000 project but not the "little stuff." Sanders was able to find money in the post's budget to do what needed doing, so we moved forward without OBO.

We put in a counter behind the visa windows, with Plexiglas above it to reduce the noise and increase privacy. The local employees prepared the passports and papers for the officers' review and put them in boxes on the counter. The officers simply swiveled in their chairs to pick up the pending cases. Once the adjudication process was over, the officers swiveled around to place the passport/documents into one of three boxes: one approved visa printing, one for denied visa filing, and one for review by the visa fraud unit. This ended the endless running around by local employees and/or officers, increasing efficiency and enabling the officers to move more quickly through the cases. We also put locks on the consulates' two doors. I mentioned earlier that I would turn around and find someone from one of the other agencies sitting at the window talking to the officers while they adjudicating cases. There was a lot of under the table dealing by officers from other agencies bringing in their friends' and contacts' passports, bypassing the review process. When we were ordered by Washington to tighten up the visa recommendation system, lots of noses were put out of joint.

After I left post, I kept in touch with Dunn and Sanders, and Hardesty. The INS investigator, Robert Hlvak, had been convinced that there was a lot of fraud among our FSN's. What Hardesty and I told that if he brought us evidence, we would take measures to weed out any bad actors. I was pretty sure there were problems but we needed something to go on, not just allegations. After I was pushed out, Hardesty started to work more directly with Hlvak to uncover any fraud. In the process, they put together the evidence to show that the senior NIV FSN was selling referrals for substantial sums of money. They uncovered that another FSN lied on her application to work at the consulate; she had been fired from the bank she was working at after embezzling funds. They also were finally able to pin down rumors about my predecessor. He had been inviting nubile young women to the hotel next door to have a "discussion" before he approved their visa application. He was known to wander around town and frequent bars in rough parts of town, some thought for sex, though that was never confirmed. So there was a lot happening that was never thoroughly investigated until Hardesty got really angry. We had several FSN's who were given visas to study in the U.S. or go to FSI courses who never returned to Ecuador.

Q: Unfortunately in order to get the job done a visa to the United States can be the equivalent to a very sizable bribe, and can speed your work.

McISAAC: Of course. But there are legitimate ways to go about it. People often try to cut corners. One time, a DEA officer (whose name I do not remember) came with Hlvak to insist I issue a visa for an informant. Hlvak was over six feet tall and thin. The DEA agent was over six feet tall and huge. They came into my office and said we have this person who has to go up to the U.S. this weekend. He is going to testify in a trial.

I looked at it and asked, "How long have you known that this guy needs to go up."

"Oh we have been working on this for months."

"Then why have you not asked the department for approval?" I referred to the S visa as "skuzzy people" visa. The S visa is for people a law enforcement agency needs to get to the United States to testify or for some other purpose. But there is a clearly defined process in the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM). The Department must direct the consulate to issue; the visa is not adjudicated at post. DEA and INS hadn't bothered to have Justice make the request to State. But they came in to my office on 4:00 pm on a Friday and tried to intimidate me into issuing the visa, no questions asked. I was standing when they arrived and both of them backed me against the desk and loomed over me – I'm 5 foot 5 inches tall, so I was looking at their middle buttons. I solved the problem by inching around the desk and sitting down. Both of them were at a loss because I had taken their height advantage away from them. However, despite their screwing up, I worked with Hardesty and Washington in order to get it done. If I had issued the visa without getting approval first, I could have been prosecuted for issuing a visa to a known felon.

After the first experience they were more careful. There was someone they wanted as a witness in a case and the two thought they had their ducks lined up before they came to me. They told me he had never had a visa before and had never applied for one. Of course, when I pulled him up in the computer, not only had he applied for a visa before but he had been denied because of proven drug smuggling. I went back to the two agents with the information and offered to get permission to issue a visa but pointed out the man was lying to them. I never heard back on that case.

Tightening up the referral system which was a big thing for CA at that time shut off a substantial amount of under the table dealings. In Guayaquil, not only U.S. officers, but also local employees were issuing referrals, which was against all the rules. Cutting that off was a major source of resentment, even though I explained why to the FSNs before it happened. They suddenly, and it seemed to many of them without reason, lost the power to hand out eagerly sought referrals. The post eliminated the black box for so-called lowest-risk travelers before I arrived at post since so many in this category were overstaying. Even though I wasn't there and wasn't responsible for the change, I became the lightning rod for all the resentment and anger building up at the Consulate. Then there was this one particular FSO who just needed to be in charge of the whole building. I don't think anybody covered themselves with glory, top to bottom.

Q: It sounds like somebody with a personality was able to sort of win hearts and minds you might say.

McISAAC: Well she was cute, she was young; she was perky. But I don't think that was what drove the FSNs. It's a very Latina thing – if someone is down, the vultures gather and if they agree about nothing else, they can agree to attack the weakened party. It was not so much that they were supporting her but that they were taking an easy opportunity to attack me and to flout consular authority. Manz flirted with the ambassador's husband every time they were in Guayaquil. I thought that was a little weird. I didn't know what to think. I learned that Palmer visited Guayaquil periodically without telling anybody he was there. I don't know if he was sleeping with the FSO or not but I've often wondered.

Q: He was…

McISAAC: Palmer was the deputy chief of mission and claimed trouble with the high altitude. I also found out from the principal officer's driver that Glover had a several girlfriends. He had his driver take him in the official vehicle to visit his girlfriend in Cuenca. It was a long drive to Cuenca and a bit of a nail biter on the mountain roads so the driver was not happy; he wanted me to intervene so he would not have to go. I suggested he speak with Keith Sanders, the administrative officer, who ran the motor pool. I don't know if he did. Glover drove himself to his Guayaquil girlfriend's house. It turned out she lived around the corner from Steve Hardesty. Hardesty saw him arriving one day when he was walking his dog around the block.

Glover's wife was still in government housing in Quito at the time though they were getting divorced. I don't know whether it had to do with letting the children finish the

school semester or not, but I was in his antechamber several times when he had screaming fights with his wife on the phone. Generally, I slunk out of the room when I heard them as I did not want him to think I was purposely listening in. But it was impossible not to hear in much of the consulate.

Shortly after I moved from NP to WHA, one of the Deputy Office Directors in the Office of Caribbean Affairs, Alex Lee told me that Ambassador Gwen Clare was invited to leave Quito, not because of anything related to my tenure in Ecuador, but for political poor judgment. She directed her consul to cancel the visas of some bankers based on a Government of Ecuador request. The government was afraid the bankers would take the banks' money and run to Miami. The cancellation was effected without prior consultation or approval from the Department which created an uproar. Hardesty told me he suggested to the consul in Quito that she request guidance from Consular Affairs. Apparently she didn't. Clare was allowed to say she was leaving post because of allergies. Then she went to the Carter Center from where she retired.

But then, of all things, she showed up in my consular district in Grenada. Her husband, also a former FSO, called the embassy to let us know she was admitted to the private hospital on the island. They came off the Queen Mary on which the Ambassador was a lecturer for a tour group traveling around the southern continent from New York to San Francisco. One of their stops was Grenada, and from there to Brazil and on down around the tip. That is not the horn, what is that?

Q: The cape.

McISAAC: The cape, thank you. Clare got sick and decided she was going to get off the boat. I was standing outside the office of the FSN who answered the phone when Mr. Clare called. When I heard the name, I felt numb. I started waving my hands at Lesley Ann Hardy, the FSN who answered the phone, to say I wasn't there, to take a message, which she did. I thought about it a while and decided that, dammit, I am going to be professional about this. At that point, I called back and spoke with her husband, and offered any help we could give. The one good thing for cruise ship passengers in Grenada is that the husbanding agents are very experienced and generally helpful. We could rely on them to do many things that in less organized countries, the embassy would have to pick up and do for Americans in trouble. I could hear Mr. Clare turn to his wife and ask, "Do you want to talk to Karen Jo McIsaac". There was dead silence for a couple beats, and then an "Oh." But she picked up the phone and we had a nice conversation. She declined assistance several times. Since I knew the husbanding agent, I knew she was being treated well; I checked in with him as well in any case. When I called the hospital the next day to see how she was doing, the hospital administrator told me the husbanding agent had arranged for them to fly back to the United States on the 6:00 A.M. American Eagle flight to Puerto Rico. The Clares did not tell me but that was fine. I was just relieved that she was healthy enough to get on the plane and leave.

Q: OK I think this is probably a good place to stop. We will pick this up when you are back.

McISAAC: I go to NP, Nuclear Proliferation for six months.

Q: All right we will pick this up in NP.

McISAAC: It was January, 2001.

Q: All right.

Q: OK, today is 24 February 2013 with Karen Jo McIsaac. Karen Jo I think well you tell me where we are.

McISAAC: I left Guayaquil, Ecuador in December 2000 and started in NP which was Nuclear Proliferation in January 2001 with only a few days break. The office dealt with assistance to countries to get rid of nuclear waste. Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were the main recipients, for obvious reasons. There was talk of expanding to include other parts of the world as U.S. officials realized that this stuff easily could be put on a ship and go anywhere in the world.

Q: Had India and Pakistan gone into the nuclear business?

McISAAC: They had, though both were highly secretive, so it was unclear how far along they were. At any rate, the two countries clearly were headed towards possessing nuclear bombs. I can't remember if people knew much yet about Ali Kahn the man who distributed nuclear technology, mostly information and capability, to any country that could pay. We did not have any programs with either India or Pakistan. They would not have wanted any part of not developing nuclear capabilities anyway. They competed with each other and for Pakistan, there was the additional lure of possessing the so-called "Islamic bomb".

The assistance program I worked on started with the former Soviet Union as there was a lot of not very well controlled nuclear material lying around in various former Soviet republics, including Russia. Kazakhstan was where the Soviet Union located its launch sites for rockets and space program. There were nuclear material and missiles in Ukraine as well. Ukraine turned out not to be as much of an ally as Americans had always assumed they would be if released from Soviet control. Interesting for me, having worked in Moscow when it was the Soviet Union and then as it fell apart, that a lot of people in the U.S. government assumed that because there were a lot of Ukrainian refugees in the United States that Ukraine was a country that would be pro-western. That was a misreading of the country based on a limited refugee population. Many of the Ukrainians who migrated to the United States came from the western sliver of the country, whereas the rest of the country was more Russified. Ukraine was closely connected with Russia for 500 years or so. The union was not solely a Soviet construct. We are seeing that division play out in real time in 2014.

While I was in Moscow in the early 90's, the Department set up a program to reach out to Soviet scientists, pairing them with European and American scientists, to encourage them to refrain from selling their expertise to places like India, Pakistan, Iran, North Korea, and elsewhere. The NP office in 2001 maintained assistance programs targeted to the same groups. My arrival in the office coincided with the beginning of the Bush administration, Bush II, and as he came into office. Unfortunately, as the new administration set itself up, it stopped all of our activities in order to "review policy." The new crew arrived, accusing the Clinton administration of being too soft, of not doing enough in the nuclear arena. While there were reviews of all policy areas, the Soviet policy was particularly scrutinized and for over eight months, nothing moved, no money could be spent, undermining the very programs we hoped would reduce the nuclear threat. We were suddenly dead in the water, with money that had to be used by September 30 or we would lose it. Policy making and implementation came to a screeching halt. There were programs ready to go but no money. It was a very stressful time for everyone involved.

As I said previously, I won my grievance over what happened in Guayaquil. One of the accommodations was that I was allowed to bid in that summer cycle for another job. I had taken the NP job but it was not a job for which I felt much affinity; it was simply my only option. On the other hand, I had served in Moscow and had experience with assistance programming so I did bring a fairly good skill set to it. I contributed during the time I was in the position, in particular by developing a more collaborative and therefore productive relationship with the other offices in State and DOD that our office worked with to provide the assistance. The relationship when I arrived was not very collegial. Because of the policy halt, and the desire of the National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, to reset Russia policy, we twiddled our thumbs for most of time there. The administration did not release its hold for almost eight months. Poor planning and a very inefficient way to run a government. Of course at the end of the review, the agencies scrambled to push the money out the door so that it wouldn't disappear on October 1. It was a great learning experience about bad governance but not a very good use of anyone's time.

Q: So were you there sort of for the end game of that particular time period?

McISAAC: No, I left before everything was resolved. I spoke with several people from the office after I left, I was at the other end of the building so saw them occasionally in the corridors and the cafeteria. They were literally trying to get all the money allocated by September 15, after starting the process in August. People were biting their fingernails and the DOD counterparts were hyperventilating. I gather there were some tense meetings as State could not move – DOD provided the training but the money was part of State's budget, the 150 account – until the administration gave the green light.

While it is important to have review and oversight, much of what happened should have been done during the transition period between administrations. The new team had a month and a half or more after the election even with the recount debacle. The Bush people accused State officials of hiding information because the "Clintons were so

terrible", and many more accusations in that vein. I have noticed it more and more recently where one party comes in and says I don't trust anybody who had anything to do with the other party. Which reminds me very much of the third world countries where I have served. In Venezuela following an election everybody down to the janitor and the elevator operator gets replaced. There is a lot more of that attitude in the U.S. government today than when I started. Both parties are guilty of this. There is a distaste for lower level civil service and Foreign Service employees, an attitude that "you worked for them [fill in either Democrats or Republicans], so you must be tainted". Before 2000, I don't think I had seen the attitude as open and pervasive as after 2000.

After a lot of soul searching, I decided that despite what had happened in Guayaquil, I was going back to WHA. Starting over in a different regional bureau was next to impossible at the 02 level. I have seen people run out of bureaus before. Some people can survive and even thrive but others limp along forever after. My expertise, the languages I knew, were all appropriate to WHA. Serving in Moscow did not necessarily earn you a place in EUR. Those of us who had not studied Russian all our lives were the cannon fodder or excess to requirements while the long-term Russian speakers did very well.

I looked very hard and the Haiti desk was in the Office of Caribbean Affairs, and I knew an officer working there. I spoke with her first and then applied for the position. That was how I ended up back in WHA. I was the senior Haiti desk officer, the economist. It was a one year assignment which also put me back in the summer cycle when bidding is easier because there are many more positions open than during the winter cycle.

In 2001, the Department disbanded the Haiti Working Group (HWG) after several years of high-level access and attention. During the U.S. military action in Haiti in the mid-90's the HWG left the Office of Caribbean Affairs (WHA/CAR), and assigned an ambassador as special representative, with a staff of some 20 FSOs and support staff. I had dealt with Haiti when I worked in the food aid office in the Economic Bureau in the 80's so I was familiar with how Haiti's political system operates and how the government runs or doesn't. When I started on the desk, there were three officers and a deputy office director. One position was eliminated within that year and ultimately a bit later the deputy office director position disappeared as well.

The deputy office director and the political officer sincerely resented the demotion and hated having to report to the office director. They had been hot stuff. They spoke with the Secretary and now suddenly they were being pushed back into a normal office environment. The office director was Marsha Barnes. I have to give her credit. She was a good manager of people.

I learned very quickly that the person I replaced had been out sick a lot with serious heart issues. Suddenly there was a person in the office, doing the work. It seemed to come as a shock for the Haiti group, in particular the political officer, Patrick (can't remember his last name). For three years, the United States put millions in assistance, in addition to the millions spent on the military action, into Haiti with no observable effect. Little had changed. As is still the case today, just with a different cast of characters. Congress

questioned whether the U.S. should be assisting in such a big way. Substantial amounts of money remained since Senator Patrick Leahy was (and still is) a big Haiti fan and continued to insert money for the country regardless of any administration's Haiti policy. The big question for policy makers, as it is today, was whether what we were doing was appropriate or even useful.

The International Financial Institutions (IFI) were all engaged with Haiti. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) had a number of outstanding loans for development projects when I arrived. One of my first tasks was to get a handle on what the loans were. The loans were stalled primarily because Haiti had stopped paying anything at all on them but there were also questions about whether the Haitians were meeting the built in benchmarks to allow the release of additional tranches of money.

So my task was to determine what was going on and to formulate suggestions for U.S. policy makers about next steps. I hadn't thought it would be as consuming as it was, but it ended up being a fairly major project because I discovered that the loans were stalled not because the U.S. was not willing to deal with Aristide, which was the allegation of many in the non-governmental organization (NGO) community and the multitude of Haiti "experts", from Congress, church groups, the IFI's, and even by some in the WHA front office and at Treasury. The U.S. government stopped providing assistance directly to Aristide since his government was completely opaque with assistance dollars, a non-system often referred to as "black box accounting". It was impossible to tell where the money went, whether it was used properly or went into his and his supporters' pockets. So we were not working directly with the government.

I arranged with the finance officers in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs (EB) to sit down with IDB officials working on the loans to find out exactly what was what. That was when I learned that the Government of Haiti had not paid the amounts that were due on these loans, nor paid off its arrears on other loans. As a result, the IDB was not allowed to disburse any additional moneys. Despite the facts, even the IDB officials working on Haiti accused the United States of holding up the loans by not allowing direct assistance to the president of the country.

It was quite an education. I learned a lot about how the IDB system worked, how the loan process worked, and what was doable and what was not. The first thing I did was actually read the loans from front to back, something that would put anyone to sleep. I think I was the first person in a long time to actually read them. I put together a presentation – this was pre-PowerPoint so I used transparencies with an overhead projector – for the WHA front office, EB, and anyone else interested, running through the facts as to what the loans were designed for, what the amounts actually were (there was some disagreement about the totals), what disbursements had been made and which benchmarks were met and which were not. I also described how Haiti had fallen behind in its payments and that IDB rules did not allow the disbursement of additional funds once the arrears overdue for a prescribed time period.

I realized after completing my review of the history and analyzing the situation that the Government of Haiti not only could not meet the benchmarks, they had not been meeting any benchmarks all along though the IDB had continued to disburse funds. It appeared that the loans were needlessly complicated and did not meet Haitian needs. We, the donor community, were setting them up for failure. One side point that was very illuminating: the World Bank's auditing arm, their inspector general's office (it has a different name that I do not remember), held a conference about the same time to share their findings in a review of the Bank's history of assistance to Haiti. Their findings were very controversial at the time. The inspectors determined there was a lot of wasted effort and money, all the way back to the 1950's. The finding I remember, in part because one of the loans I was reviewing was about the same road, stated that the Bank had rebuilt that same road 12 times since the 1950's. Every loan agreement called for the Haitians to put aside money to maintain the road after it was completed. Every single time the government agreed, took the money, and did something else with it. We needed to change the way we did business. The international community was not ready to hear the message and things did not change appreciably.

As I said, I put together the briefing for the deputy assistant secretary and assistant secretary that walked them through the loans, why things were not working the way they were set up and why they weren't going to, and what we needed to think about to provide more effective assistance to a desperately poor country. I provided a handy little chart to the assistant secretary so he could see the issue visually as well and use to brief others.

There was an office director at Treasury who insisted that the United States must tell the IDB to release all loan funds, even if Haiti did not qualify. He convinced his bosses to call an unexpected inter-agency high level meeting on it. I drafted the paper and provided the presentation to the assistant secretary. Normally desk officers were not invited to those meetings. Invitees were principal plus one and the deputy assistant secretaries and office directors vied to be invited, to get the exposure. At the last minute on the day of the meeting, the Assistant Secretary, Lino Gutierrez, called me directly to tell me, "You are coming with me." When we arrived at Treasury I sat at the back wall. The Treasury person running the meeting went around the table to each participant, from the various agencies, including Defense, AID, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, and so on, and each one accused the State Department of keeping Haiti from getting the additional IDB funds by not allowing their release. When it was State's turn, the Gutierrez turned to me and said, "Ok, you tell them."

I did not expect that. I took a deep breath and went through the entire argument. At the end of it, there was a deathly silence for probably only seconds though it felt like much longer, and then people started nodding. My arguments made sense. I really felt good about it because I spent a lot of time ensuring accuracy in the report. My recommendation was not to cut the Haitians off at the knees, but to look at what they could realistically be expected to do. Take a different approach. Come up with less complex loans. The outcome of the meeting was that the U. S. went back to the IDB and presented our position and asked what could be done. By that time, there was a new Haiti team at the IDB. Unlike their predecessors, they actually took all of our points on board and modified

the loans' requirements to something the Haitians could accomplish. It was up to the Haitians to pay off their arrears so that the money could be disbursed and eventually once they saw progress, they did. It was rewarding to start from the beginning of the process, to be involved in formatting the solution, and to see success.

Every six months, the Department of Justice sends information provided by everyone registered as an agent of a foreign government to State Department desk officers. Registered agents must report to DOJ every six months, what work they have done and for whom and for what amount of money. There is a public website as well. Reading the documents for Haiti was incredibly discouraging. The country was close to bankrupt, couldn't get its political or economic act together, and yet, Aristide was paying Kaplan, a lawyer in Florida, a $1 million per a month retainer. Aristide used the money, whose source was unknown, not to help feed his country or to build a factory, but to be sure he had an American lawyer. It made me wonder what he had to hide. There were several other registered agents, but none earning nearly as much as Kaplan.

There are also a lot of people who are invested in Haiti for religious reasons or otherwise but have very little feel for the country itself. And many of these groups do not work well with others so assistance programs are often contradictory. There never seem to be long term results.

Q: Well what about the Aristide supporters? I mean this guy was a pretty nasty guy. I mean really nasty. And you have people particularly in New York in the Black Caucus and all and ____ his is God Almighty.

McISAAC: Unfortunately he thought the same way. I was the Dominican Republic desk officer in the Office of Caribbean Affairs when Aristide was forced to flee Haiti. Things had been deteriorating for a while and he sent his kids to their grandmother in the United States, with 12 trunks. I doubt those two girls had 12 trunks full of toys or even clothes. I wondered at the time what he was sending out of the country. Aristide played people off each other, keeping everyone on edge. There was significant unrest in the country then with a number of different strong men claiming leadership of what amounted to gangs. Despite Aristide's supporters' view of him as saintly, he did seem much more interested in what was in the position of president for him. A lot of talk but very little real investment in the Haitian people.

I often dealt with Haitian business people who came to the United States seeking money for development. These people were wealthy in Haiti, though here they would probably be considered upper middle class. They were well-educated, in the United States or in France, and despite the topic of discussion, personally benefited from the unresolved situation in Haiti, from the abject poverty as labor was so cheap. There was one gentleman who organized groups to escort to Washington, eight or nine at a time. They each paid him up to eight thousand dollars for him to arrange meetings with U.S. government officials, the Chamber of Commerce, and Congress. I told one of the groups that they did not need to pay anyone to arrange a trip. We would be more than happy to meet with them if they called and asked for an appointment, but they didn't believe me.

So every six months or so, this group (the members changed a bit every time but there were some who came repeatedly) would show up and demand to know what we had done for Haiti. I would ask them, "Well, what have you done? What projects have you established? Have you established a business? Are you hiring people? I pointed out that we could work with somebody who was already doing something, add value to an ongoing problem. They would just stare at me like I was nuts. Because why would they spend their money in Haiti? Did I think they were stupid? It was sad.

At the same time, there was the beginnings of the push to either extend the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which is a program to promote African textile manufacturers, to Haiti. Adding Haiti to AGOA required Congressional approval. It took a number of years. I was no longer on the Haiti desk when the legislation finally passed. But what was most interesting to me was that there were Dominican business people who were more willing to invest in Haiti than the Haitian business people were. The Dominicans negotiated with the United States and won permission for their businesses to use Haiti's quota on textile exports made in Haiti but shipped via the Dominican Republic where there were port facilities. Some large Dominican companies built factories in Haiti. Not enough, and they need more. But they seemed to be more interested in getting something going than Haitian business community or government.

I was on the Haiti desk for a year. I was there on 9/11. September 11 was a beautiful day, blue sky, not a cloud in the sky. The Director, Marsha Barnes called a staff meeting for 9:00 am. The room we were in faced south, over C Street side, looking towards the Lincoln Memorial. The TV was on a table behind the office director's chair. We had the TV on before the meeting. Somebody muted the TV but did not turn it off when the meeting started. The TV was tuned to a news station and I remember we saw the first plane hit the building. At that point nobody was listening to Barnes anymore; we were glued to the TV. She turned around. At the same time, one of the officers pointed out there was smoke outside our window, thick black smoke. We could not tell where it was but from that angle, it looked like it was at the Lincoln Memorial. Unless you know where the river bends, it's hard to tell that the Pentagon lines up with the memorial. Next the news showed a video of people running out of the White House. At that point Barnes told us to go tour offices, lock everything up, and be ready to leave. There was no official announcement as yet, but she was an experienced consular officer and well versed in emergency preparedness. She told us to get ready, that something was "going on". So we returned to our offices and locked up. And then we sat in the conference room, watching TV, wondering what was happening. We saw the second plane hit the second tower on TV. Probably ten minutes passed before the official announcement came over the loudspeaker that everyone was to evacuate the building immediately. Lock everything up but get out. There was a mob scene with the entire building trying to get through the exits at the same time. The security officers were dressed in riot gear, carrying the helmets and batons, the first time I remember seeing that. People were not allowed back into the building once they left. There was one woman I overheard protesting, "But my purse is in the building," who was told she had to leave; I don't know how she got home. No one could take their cars out from the Main State parking garage. A group from our office walked out together. One woman parked her car in the public parking garage at Columbia

Plaza and offered to give four of us a ride to Virginia. We piled into her minivan, which fortunately, was parked close to the exit. We were able to get out of the parking garage and across the Teddy Roosevelt Bridge fairly quickly. We beat the congestion caused by thousands of government workers all trying to leave Washington at the same time. A lot of people had trouble getting out.

We were going to drop one person off in West Falls Church Metro Station but there was conflicting information on the radio about whether or not the Metro was operating. Turned out that the Pentagon City station was closed, but the rest of the system was operating. But it sounded like the Metro was shutting down. So we stopped there and he and I went in to find out what was going on. I met a woman who had been in the Pentagon when the plane hit. You could tell she was in shock. She wasn't in the section of the building that the plane hit, but she knew people who worked there. As at State, DOD emptied the Pentagon. She had run out of the building without her purse since she was not in her office when they ordered people out. She had been able to get on the Metro the turnstiles at Pentagon City were opened. But she did not have a fare card or any money or ID. She was on the inside of the turnstiles and I was on the outside. She was gripping my arm and talking a mile a minute. I of course knew no more than she did but she was having trouble calming down. Finally, I walked her over to the booth and got the official's attention so they could figure out how to get her home. The official also confirmed that the system was working, only the Pentagon station was closed. I returned to the car and was dropped off near the Fairfield Crossing apartment complex in Falls Church where we lived at the time. Shortly after I arrived home, my husband ran into the apartment. He was studying at the Chubb Institute in Herndon and ran out of a test when he heard the news was reporting that the State Department was bombed.

Q: I remember that.

McISAAC: Chubb was in Herndon. Oscar said several buildings nearby were suddenly bristling with arms.

Q: Apparently when they knew there was an attack on the Pentagon the only plan that was seen to get people out was one that called for a bomb at the State Department. I heard that.

McISAAC: Really.

Q: A car bomb or something like that, so they pushed that button because it was the only one that kind of made sense, you know.

McISAAC: Interesting because that was what was being reported. I didn't know it was because of the limitations of the emergency system. The whole situation caused my adrenalin to go up, but you do what you have to do to get where you need to go.

Q: I think also the Foreign Service makes you more, I mean things happen, so you I mean I did a bunch of walking, but it was interesting. But it wasn't the end of the world.

McISAAC: True. The next following week I accompanied Marsha Barnes to a meeting at the World Bank in the U.S. Executive Director's office. The USED's office is on the top floor of their building. Shortly after the meeting started the alarms went off as a bomb threat was called in. Suddenly, we were running down the very narrow stairs from the 13th floor to get to the bottom, and I realized I was kind of anxious. It might be real. And I think that is the other part of it. In the United States, and particularly in Washington, we have been really lucky. There has not been as much terrorist violence in the U.S. as has occurred in Paris or London. That New York was hit suddenly makes it possible, just more real. That was the only time, but it was kind of funny because I realized what was happening and simply told myself to pull it together and get out of the building. Others were not as calm. One of the women started screaming at people to move out of the way, to let her out, that this is what happened in New York and we were all going to die. I was apparently not the only one who was thinking about 9/11 that day.

That was the difference between reactions before and after 9/11. I don't remember the exact date that this happened but I was in PM/ATEC so it was sometime between 1997 and 1999. If you remember, people used to be able to park right in front of the C Street entrance to the State Department. I was in an office on the third floor, facing the courtyard behind the C Street entrance, the one with the man holding the solar system aloft. We could see through the atrium to the outside through the plate glass. There was an explosion and then a fireball. It turned out not to be a bomb but an electric fault in one of the cars parked there. Its engine overheated and threw an electrical spark and blew, starting a merry little fire on several cars around it. I was fascinated that the men in my office ran towards it to see what was happening. I was sitting there thinking, uh-uh I am not going anywhere near an explosion. Very different reaction than nowadays.

Q: No, there is always a second bomb you know.

McISAAC: As I say, we've been lucky that up to that time, there were no attacks in Washington. So that was the Haiti desk. The U.S. government really struggles with what to do about Haiti and how to help them help themselves. I don't think we have it figured out how to do it.

Q: Well you were dealing with Haiti from when to when?

MCISAAC: From the summer of 2001 to the summer of 2002.

Q: OK, then what did you do?

McISAAC: I moved to the Dominican Republic desk, also in the Office of Caribbean Affairs. Actually I didn't move at all. The admin folks switched the safes.

Q: You know ever since Trujillo has departed it seems. The Dominican Republic well they had that problem when they put the 101st Airborne in there and all, but it for quite a long time Caribbean style there hasn't been much of a problem there.

McISAAC: The Dominican Republic has not had the types of problems that led to the U.S. sending in the military in the early 1900's, but for a long time there was a tendency to pick strong men to rule and despite their more recent history of democratic elections and successful transitions of power, there is still rampant corruption. The DR has been more successful than its neighbor on the development front though there are still a significant number of impoverished Dominicans. Trickle down economic theory works no better there than it has here.

The U.S. government tends to view the DR through the prism of Haiti, I found once I became the desk officer. There is a steady stream of emigration from Haiti into the DR. The illegal Haitians at first were primarily located in the "batays", the sugar cane plantations, but they captured much of the construction work by the late 1990's. As anywhere, the illegal population was hired for less than the locals or legal migrants and as a result you see fewer Dominicans in construction, which creating resentment. Work on the sugar cane plantations in particular is brutal and there was a lot of concern about the abusive work conditions for Haitians working there, particularly children. The number of children working in the "batays" seems to have fallen to near zero. Sugar cane harvesting is much more labor intensive labor than sugar beet growing which is what most U.S. sugar producers have switched to.

The other big issue the Department focused on was the undocumented Haitians born in the Dominican Republic. The DR did not provide children born to non-Dominican parents a birth certificate or citizenship which the U.S. urged the DR to change. A 2013 Constitutional Court ruling in Santo Domingo that children born to Haitian migrants in the DR are not entitled to Dominican citizenship supported the government's actions. That was a big deal for the NGO community and therefore, the United States focused on it. Mind you, we have allies who have a very recent history of not documenting foreigners born there, including Germany. Somehow that never comes up. The aspect of our strident condemnation of the DR over this was that we completely ignored the fact that a large numbers of Dominicans were also not being documented. This group was not of Haitian descent, but they were not documented either, though nobody could tell me whether that was because they lacked money or simply did not think it was important. Without documentation, these kids could not get health care, nor could they attend school, among the number of things impossible to access without proper documentation. So it wasn't just a question of the Dominican attitude towards the Haitians which was problematic. It was also the lackadaisical Dominican attitude towards poverty and its own impoverished population. In 2005, the World Bank said there were about 75,000 undocumented Dominicans (not counting children of Haitian parentage) or about 9 percent of the population, which seems pretty high.

The DR is a country that does not generally cause problems, which is why it gets attention primarily only when it relates to Haiti. The levels of Dominican corruption, both official and unofficial, meant it was difficult to find reasonably clean interlocutors for assistance programs. In addition, we spent a lot of time trying to figure out whether the Dominicans would follow through on various promises they made to us and others. While

I was the desk officer, the Dominicans provided 200 troops for the second Iraq War, a big deal for an Administration which was scrambling for allies. Countries who assisted us were given more assistance, high-level meetings, and generally a lot more attention. Unfortunately, abruptly in the middle of the DR's 2004 presidential campaign, the government yanked its troops out on short notice. The Dominicans were surprised that everyone was angry with them. When President Hipólito Mejía sent the troops into Iraq, they were stationed in the Polish sector, with Spanish troops. During the presidential campaign, the opposition leader Leonel Fernández ran at least in part on the dangers posed to the troops by being in Iraq. He ignored the extensive training and large amount of military materiel the country received because they went to Iraq. The USG spent a goodly amount of time trying to convince Mejía to leave his troops there. It did not help that Spain abruptly withdrew its own contingent following Spanish election of a left leaning government. This left the Dominican troops in a country whose language they did not speak without anyone able to translate for them. So I understand why they were pulled out. I imagine if the Spanish had stayed, the Dominicans might have as well. At any rate, they didn't. Mejía did not give much notice to the Americans, which meant that while the Dominican soldier managed to get to Kuwait, there was no immediate transport for them back to the DR. In the meantime, I received increasingly hysterical calls from an FSO stationed in one of the small offices outside Baghdad. There is a term of art for them but I forget what it is. He accused me personally of not making the Dominicans remain in Iraq and leaving him exposed to angry Iraqis. I listened politely and explained the strong effort we were making to change Mejía's mind but also the political realities we were up against. I understood the fear that was generating his anger but thought it was pretty silly of him to think that I, single-handedly, would be able to reverse Dominican political decisions if everyone above my pay grade at State and at Defense could not do so. I let him vent. When he showed up in my office a few months later still complaining that I was going "to get us all killed," I was less sympathetic and invited him to discuss it with the White House or DOD. He flounced out claiming he would do just that. I never heard from him again. Mejía still lost the election to Fernández; the gesture of pulling the troops back was far too late to do him much good, and may have undermined his attempts to portray himself as a calm, courageous leader.

I realized that our embassy in Santo Domingo was also taking sides in the DR's election as the reporting from post became less and less objective about the two vying political parties. They sent cables calling Fernández essentially the best thing since sliced bread, nowhere near as corrupt as Mejía. The political section gushed over his youth and supposed beauty and all around general wonderfulness. When I pointed out that what I was reading in the local press and elsewhere suggested that there was a darkness to this saint, I was brushed off. Of course, the reality was that he was neither uncorrupt nor saintly. I think that over time the sheer corruptness within Dominican society overwhelms officers serving there. People, including Dominicans, were tired of Mejía and all the empty promises. But the embassy's reporting during that period was decidedly skewed.

Despite the endemic corruption, which touches all levels within the society, Dominicans are some of the nicest, most welcoming people. They are so open in some ways that it

becomes rather complicated to work with them. Secretary Colin Powell didn't like dealing with the Dominicans, I discovered when he decided to travel to Haiti. But because of the Haiti's uncertain security situation, he had to have to stay overnight in the Dominican Republic. We spent weeks getting all the papers drafted and cleared, reservations made and confirmed, security set up. You know the drill: time consuming and onerous, with the added complication of coordinating the Haiti side of the trip. Several days before his departure, according to the staff assistant who called me, Powell announced that he was not going to have any of that "God damned Dominican hospitality". He apparently doesn't eat dinner. Ultimately the trip fell apart because the Secretary of State cannot go to a country and sit in his hotel and say screw you, I am not going to have anything to do with you to the country's leaders. It was very embarrassing trying to explain his cancellation to the Dominicans without saying well he said he didn't want to talk to you guys, he doesn't like your version of hospitality

The DR desk job involved a fair amount of public relations work. There were many calls from the public about political issues in the DR, or Haiti. In addition, there were consular issues. Because there were so many Dominicans legally residing in the United States, there was a lot of demand for immigrant visas as they petitioned for family members to join them. There was also a significant population of American men, including non-Caribbean, who married or wanted to marry Dominican women and petitioned for immigrant visas to bring them here. The immigrant visa process is very document rich and very rigid in its requirements. It would be nice if it were less so, but simplifying the process is up to Congress. People get very annoyed and want to find workarounds that will let them skip a step or two. When they called me up to complain that the process was not working, I would walk them through it again and advise patience. There were two cases that were particularly memorable because the petitioners (the Americans) kept in touch with me throughout the process. For two years, every couple of weeks I would hear from one or the other of them. Both of them tried to come up with any dodge to get around the requirements. I would just say, "Look it is a paper intensive process. You have got to follow the rules. If you follow the rules you are more likely to be successful." Only one of them listened, and at the end of this process he called to announce, "She is arriving tomorrow!" The other guy called up to complain after the visa was denied. People don't believe that even though the system is bureaucratic, it can work. If you want it to work you have got to play with the bureaucracy by its rules.

My back up in the office, Elizabeth Wolfson, hated the phone calls. When I was out, she wouldn't return the phone calls. We look bad if we are not responsive. I could not convince that a large portion of our work is dealing with the Americans. But I got over it. I finally told her to write all the names and numbers down for me and I called them when I returned. It was easier to apologize for the wait, most people were understanding, though who knows, perhaps they were cursing me when they hung up. What I do know was that I did return calls no matter what, which I think is important when dealing with the public.

Even though I was on the DR desk, I still dealt with Haiti, including taking the public's comments about U.S. Haiti policy. I was the first officer in a long time who had worked

both desks. As a result, I was called in if there were people coming in who wanted to be briefed on either country. One meeting was with members of a Catholic organization who wanted to talk about the Haitians in the DR. Both the office director and the deputy director refused to take the meeting, so it fell to me. When the group of five arrived, they asked for time to prepare for the meeting and asked if they could use our conference room. I figured it would be five to ten minutes but they didn't come out. After about 15 minutes, I looked in and they asked me to wait. After an hour, I insisted that the meeting take place then or never. When I entered the room fully, I discovered that they had set up a crucifix, a really large one, in the middle of the table. One of the group was a journalist with the main American Catholic publication, who they had not told me would be there. They came to demand that I tell them that the United States government was going to make the Dominicans treat the Haitians "properly" though there was some fuzziness about what that meant to them. First, however, they asked, "Will you pray with us?" I am a lapsed Presbyterian and I was taken aback. After a moment of internal panic, I responded that I did not mind if they wanted to pray but that I was not religious. Also, I didn't think that is appropriate in the government office. It was an interesting ambush. I also declined the opportunity of being in a photo for their publication.

Q: When Tony Quainton was ambassador to Nicaragua and the Maryknoll Sisters came in and said, "Will you pray with us?'' He thought, all right. So they all joined hands and then they started fulminating in prayer talking against the president.

McISAAC: So what did he do? He just stood there I suppose at that point. I thought about agreeing, but then I thought no this is a government office and I am not religious. I was polite about it of course.

Q: You are absolutely right. People can use this getting your unwilling participation. We are too damn polite. Say enough of that nonsense.

McISAAC: The groups I found interesting but that really worried me were the ones who were going to the Dominican Republic to build housing for the Haitians. Many were religious groups or single churches who hadn't cleared what they were doing with any Dominican authority, rather had hooked up with a local church serving the Haitian population in the DR. Quite often, the Americans going were not adults, rather junior high and high school children. The parents usually did not accompany them as this was a "mission" experience for the children. After several unsatisfactory briefings, I decided to find out how much the U.S. church leaders, and the parents, really understood about the history of the Dominican Republic and tensions between illegally present Haitians and the local populations. I closely questioned the organizer from the next U.S. church group to come for a briefing. He arranged for a group of ten 15 and 16 year olds to live with Haitian families in the Dominican Republic in a remote community. My questions were common sense ones, about phone access, emergency plan in case someone fell ill, evacuation plan in case of natural disaster, or political upheaval. I also asked whether there would be an American adult with them or easily reachable. What was fascinating to me was that the three or four parents sitting across the table were surprised by the answers, that there would be no phone access since the area did not have cell phone

towers or regular land line phones, and that several of the villages would be far away from the one adult, the organizer. The kids were to live in houses of church members on their own. I pointed out that they were going into the middle of a potentially volatile situation. Every once in awhile a community of poor Dominicans rose up and chased out, and sometimes beat up, the poor Haitians because they believed the Haitians competed head-to-head with them for resources, for housing, for medical care, and so on. I also asked why the church was building housing for poor Haitians in the middle of the Dominican Republic while not also building them for poor Dominicans, many living in equally deplorable conditions. And oh by the way why are you taking children there with inadequate adult supervision? I was diplomatic but direct. Nobody in the group seemed to have thought it through. Nor was the church much informed about the DR itself. There were cell phones by this time but they weren't ubiquitous like they are today and large swathes of the DR were not wired. Nor were they wired for regular landline phones in many cases. Nowadays that is probably less true. Like many developing countries, they are probably more wired for cell phone service than the United States is, though I imagine there are still rural mountainous regions that are still underserved. But it was interesting to see people not looking at the entire context of what they proposed to do. I have no problem if they want to build housing for poor Haitians if they also build houses for poor Dominicans living in the same community. Entering a community and upsetting the delicate balance by favoring one group over another is a recipe for disaster. Why not build affordable housing for the entire poor population regardless of national origin? I don't know if I made any difference, but I alerted a number of parents to some issues that they needed to consider before blithely sending their kids off on a church mission in a foreign country.

Something else that made me wonder about parental judgment was the number of parents who gave their 18 year old son or daughter a free trip to the DR unchaperoned as a high school graduation present. I think they thought that the kids could not get into trouble at one of the large resorts. But the DR was a high crime country and things did happen, even in those compounds. Drugs were ubiquitous, there was a lot of alcohol. We received reports from several American women that year of being raped by massage parlor employees at one large resort. A high school kid who apparently decided to take a midnight swim; they never found the body. After years in the Foreign Service, I am convinced that Americans leave their common sense at the plane door when they travel. They don't think before taking huge risks. We were lucky when I was DR desk officer that we did not have a case in the DR as high profile as the Natalee Holloway case in Curacao.

Q: What was that?

McISAAC: I became involved tangentially as I backed up the Suriname, Netherlands Antilles desk officer. A group of high school seniors, supposedly chaperoned, had a big end of high school party in Aruba. The Consulate General in Curacao handles the consular issues for all the Netherlands Antilles islands (now former NA islands). Holloway disappeared one night. Her body was never recovered but much later the suspicion that she was murdered was confirmed when the culpable person confessed. The

U.S. government did not cover itself with glory, though many of the problems were not the fault of the government. Her mother was married to a man, Natalee's stepfather, who was well connected in Congress. He pushed for FBI involvement. Of course we needed a request from the government of Aruba before the FBI could go in as advisors, a fact the family was very unhappy about. Many Americans believe that the FBI can just show up in any country it likes to investigate anything. Which is of course not true. We pushed the offer of FBI assistance very hard, but the government took its time issuing an invitation.

Curacao is a small post. It tends to be staffed primarily by junior officers, often first tour officers with no experience. The Consul General is a senior FSO covering political and economic issues with two junior officers handling everything else, including covering Aruba, Bonaire, and the rest of the former Netherlands Antilles. At the time of Holloway's disappearance, the senior FSO was in England for the graduation of his son from some private school there. He refused to return to post. I do not understand why the Department didn't just order him back, but it didn't. He also refused to let Consular Affairs send a more experienced consular officer to help the two junior officers. I would have thought that somebody could have told him it is too bad but you have got to cut your vacation short and you will accept experienced help. I have certainly been told that I had to give up vacation time for some important work-related issue.

I was backing up the Surinam/Curacao desk officer when I was roped into the case and discovered that nobody had instructed the two junior officers to immediately send in a cable reporting the disappearance. Mind you, this is consular 101 and they should have been able to figure it out, but instead they were only communicating with CA from which they did not receive constructive assistance, as far as I could tell. Holloway has disappeared, the family is screaming for the FBI to investigate as of yesterday, and WHA and CA front offices learn of it from irate Congressional calls and the press. Both the junior officers were chewed out by the CA Assistant Secretary Mora Hardy and again by WHA Assistant Secretary Roger Noriega. At that point, one of the officers requested guidance from me. I spoke with them separately because one had traveled to Aruba where Holloway disappeared. I explained the process to them and asked if they had anything in writing. The officer still in Curacao was not particularly helpful; I found out later he was talking to the senior FSO in England and was instructed by him not to cooperate with CA, which he broadly defined as Washington. The officer in Aruba was more cooperative and wanted to handle things in the right way. First I offered to send the cable format to her, but she did not have time to figure it out. So I asked her to send me anything she had in writing. I drafted their initial report cable and sent it back to them and said, "Send this in. Get this on the record. Now." Which they finally did. I encouraged them to send cable updates periodically as a way to keep Washington off their back. As a result, the high-level hyperventilating and nasty phone calls, ceased.

The government did request FBI help (after a lot of prodding by the U.S.) and one team began working productively with local officials. However, they did not get results fast enough for Holloway's mother whose husband again complained to the FBI which then sent another team of specialists to Aruba, without withdrawing the first group. So now there were two competing groups of FBI agents in country, each claiming to be in charge

of the investigation. The junior officer tried to referee their interaction with the government with little to no constructive assistance, either from her boss or from CA. It was a mess. One of the other officers in our office said, "I'll bet the islanders know who did it." And he was eventually proved right. It took a long time for it to come out but it turned out that the son of a local official killed her, putting the body in the water, where it disappeared since the currents around the island do not bring bodies back to it. He fled to Peru where he killed a local girl several years ago. He was tried and convicted of that murder and is in jail in Peru. He confessed to the Aruba murder. He had been picked up and questioned as he was the last person seen with Holloway, but he was released after a few days. But at the time of the disappearance, the U.S. side was not organized. We did not cover ourselves with glory.

Q: To get us back to the thing you were doing the Dominican Republic and then you left there, and then what were you doing.

McISAAC: I worked on the Dominican Republic for three years. The next tour was on the Venezuela desk. I bid on and was assigned to the Policy Planning and Coordination (WHA/PPC), but about two months before I was to change jobs, the WHA human resources officer in the Executive Office (WHA/EX), Carol Heinec, told me about senior economic officer position on the Venezuela desk which WHA had been unable to keep filled. She thought I could handle it and had suggested me to the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary. He authorized her to offer me the position. There had been three officers in that position over a period of six months, all three of whom quit because of conflicts with the GS-12 political appointee on the desk on the desk or the deputy director for Venezuela. It was the first time at the State Department where I have seen a political appointee that low down in any office.

I thought hard about the request. I had started my career in Venezuela after all. When I decided to do it, I insisted that EX make it very clear to PPC that it was at the Bureau's request not mine, that I was not the one who broke my original assignment. I knew that PPC's new office director, Carol Fuller, who I knew from several different earlier assignments, would be furious. Amazingly, EX did do that. The principal Deputy Assistant Secretary (PDAS), Charles Shapiro really wanted somebody on the Venezuela desk.

Q: I have to ask was there a reason other than illness why the officers left.

McISAAC: Personalities and politics on the desk were the primary reasons for the departures. There was a political appointee at the GS-12 level in the office, Lourdes Cué. The deputy office director for Venezuela was Bruce Friedman. He was dating Paula Dobriansky, Under Secretary for Global Affairs or G. Very bright man. He started in government as a presidential management intern. The political appointee had carte blanche to take any issue that tickled her fancy, even if technically it was someone else's responsibility according to job descriptions. None of the three officers who preceded me was willing to put up with the uncertainty and the sudden periods with no work that resulted. One of the three even went so far as to leave the Foreign Service. I think he had

other opportunities that looked better than the Department at that point. The other two refused to tolerate the treatment they were receiving; in at least one case, the Andean Affairs office director, Lisa Bobbie Schreiber Hughes, encouraged their outrage as she was also put out over the way Venezuela was being run. Phil French took over shortly after I arrived. There was tension among the desk officers because the Venezuela group reported directly to the PDAS Shapiro, a former ambassador to Venezuela. We were located in Andean Affairs physically but we weren't actually of that office.

Q: What was the political appointee's background?

McISAAC: Lourdes Cué was Cuban American from the Miami area and her family was politically connected. Her uncle worked first in the Bush White House and then was appointed U.S. ambassador to Spain. I was told, the uncle asked that she be found a job and she wanted to be at State. Bright woman but no experience working in a bureaucracy for one thing, and no particular desire to abide by the rules. The previous incumbents of the position curtailed because they were upset by the lack of job definition and the continual poaching.

As the economic officer, I assumed I would deal with economy, trade, the usual suspects, but was informed that Cué handled all oil issues. But if she saw anything of interest in any other area, she took it. So I would be working on an issue, go to lunch, and come back and find out I was no longer working on that project. Not always and not every project, but it was hard to work that way. I had to be beyond flexible. I got along with the Deputy Office Director, Bruce Friedman, whom I had known for a number of years, and I learned to simply accommodate whatever floated my way. The third Venezuela desk officer did not compete head-to-head with Cué so we worked it out.

I remained in the position for almost the entire year. I had to leave a bit early to do consular training for my onward assignment. Over the year, the Department weathered run-ins with the Venezuelan ambassador, but relations were not as poisoned as they became later when the ambassadors were removed. Bill Brownfield was the U.S. ambassador. He told me he wanted to be declared persona non grata (PNG) by the Venezuelans. I think he was tired of dealing with the Venezuelan government. He would do things that would be perfectly legitimate in a normal environment but were certain to irritate the highly sensitive government. He undertook extensive baseball outreach, visiting poor areas and handing out balls, bats and other equipment. He challenged the Chávez government by going into areas that the government hinted were off limits to the U.S. Which was fine if he wanted to put himself in harm's way, but he put his people in very dangerous situations such as when DISIP (Venezuelan intelligence police – very scary people) motorcycle riders played chicken with the official vehicle. I was on the phone with the public affairs officer at the moment it was happening and I could hear the fear in his voice. You don't play around with that sort of thing.

I responded to public queries, especially when President Hugo Chávez offered oil to poor people in the U.S. Not through Petrocaribe, which had specific requirements a recipient government had to meet in advance which of course was impossible with the U.S.

government, but through the downstream company, Venezuelan-owned CITGO, which was incorporated in the United States. The Kennedy's of Massachusetts were involved in all of this, and seriously misrepresented some of the details. I became the person who answered the phone when people called to complain not about the program but about the fact that Exxon and Mobil and other American companies were not offering the same benefit to people who were unable to pay the high prices to heat their homes. I agreed that the other companies ought to have programs to assist low-income customers, and maybe they did, but since they were reluctant to join hands with Chávez publicly, who was making their lives difficult in Venezuela, the Kennedy's made a huge deal out of Chávez helping America's poor and the others not.

I also handled all consular issues that arose as I was the only one with any consular experience. I cobbled together a job.

There was an interesting consular policy issue that played out between the State Department and the FBI in which I became involved. Because Venezuela was making it harder and harder for U.S. government officials to get visas, the FBI wanted to reciprocate, in time honored tradition. But State was concerned that the FBI wanted to cut off visa issuance to all Venezuelans rather than look at cases individually, to take the time to determine whether an applicant should be denied. When I was pulled into the issue, I did not know that Consular Affairs (CA) had provided the FBI with what is referred to as the Consular Lookout and Support System or CLASS, the computer program into which information about applicants is entered, including derogatory information. This comprehensive system is available to all consular posts worldwide. It provides information about whether somebody has been involved in terrorist activity, was in prison for stealing, and all other derogatory information that has been entered by any consular officer around the world. When I contacted CA to find out what was going on because the FBI did not tell us in the initial meeting that they had access to CLASS, the guy I spoke with was furious. He ranted for about five minutes about the FBI in quite colorful terms. I pointed out that WHA had no idea of the history and that we did not need to revisit it, but wanted to work with CA to make sure the FBI did the job properly. He calmed down and I worked with him and several others in CA to create a plan for State to present a united front to the FBI office which contacted WHA, not vice versa. Turns out, that office had not bothered to learn how to use CLASS. As a result, it sat on visa applications, since following changes made after 9/11, all visa applications must be reviewed by five stateside federal agencies, including the FBI, prior to issuance (immediate denials do not go through all those hoops). Two FBI agents came directly to WHA, claiming the State Department was not cooperating, deliberately doing an end run around CA. I engaged Charles Shapiro, the principal deputy assistant secretary and proposed that he reach out to CA's front office to sort the issue out, to offer one more time to train the FBI agents and make sure they not only understand how to use it, but actually did use it. Shapiro brokered an agreement between the two sides to ensure the bottleneck was eliminated and that the denials were appropriate.

Q: Let me understand this. The FBI wanted to sort of go at things with a meat cleaver. Was it based on terrorism or was it was this based on retaliation?

McISAAC: Their actions were based on a little bit of both. The U.S. government had not officially named Venezuela a state sponsor of terrorism, but given Chávez's ties and promises of support to countries like Iran and Syria, there was increasing pressure from Congress and other agencies to do so. State still hoped to engage the government to forge a workable relationship. Kind of futile at that point but State did not want to completely cut them off. For the FBI it was also a retaliatory issue because their agents were among those that were routinely denied visas or having the process drawn out for incredibly long periods of time, weeks and months, no longer just days. The terms of visas are negotiated bilaterally, and so we were going to reciprocate, but State preferred not to wholesale give up on negotiations.

Q: Who were they, the Venezuelans who were they denying visas?

McISAAC: We would have somebody assigned to a normal tour at the embassy in Caracas. It could be the political officer or one of the consular officers. The government of Venezuela did kick out the entire military assistance group which works directly with the local military, residing outside the embassy – referred to as the MilGroup. And for the defense attaché (DOD) and the legal attaché offices (FBI) in the embassy, the Venezuelans were slow rolling visa issuances. The problem for DOD was that the defense attaché office in Venezuela was (and still is) a regional office with responsibility for much of the lower part of the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and all of the eastern Caribbean islands as well as Guyana and Suriname. When someone left, there was a gap of three, four, or five months before a visa might be issued so the replacement could arrive at post. The Venezuelans held up consular officers on general principle and at one point our new deputy chief of mission wandered the halls of the Department for several months awaiting a visa. The Department wanted to target any retaliation to similar groups of Venezuelans not just cut off the entire Venezuelan population. At that point we still had an ambassador in country and we were trying to resuscitate the relationship. Nowadays, it may be different.

Q: I would have thought that just looking from afar that the Venezuelan government, the Chávez government would be particularly vulnerable to holding up visas because this is a group that is now receiving the largess of Chávez and what do you do if you have got largess? You head for Miami.

McISAAC: Right.

Q: I mean this cut off Miami to the upper class.

McISAAC: I wish it were that easy. The lawyers at State did not want to have a wholesale cutoff. They insisted that the Department had to have all our ducks in a row and our facts straight. It ends up not being quite as simple or straightforward as you would think.

Q: I mean I think there would be a certain point where you wouldn't say as Shakespeare said, "First we should kill all the lawyers." But we should bypass them.

McISAAC: There are occasions yes absolutely.

Q: I mean what are all the other people.

McISAAC: Really only the Cabinet Secretaries are the ones who can bypass the lawyers. The rest of us are stuck with them. Sometimes that is a good thing, keeping us from doing something precipitous that we should not do. But there are occasions and this was one of them where their slow pace of deliberation – and remember the FBI had lawyers contributing as well – gums up the works. It took us a couple of months but we actually sorted it out and got everybody on the same page and things began to move. Slowly but we were beginning to get some action. The FBI even began using the CLASS system. But we got all of the U.S. on the same page.

Q: Well what was the situation in Venezuela? When were you dealing with Venezuela, and what was the situation there.

McISAAC: I was on the desk from 2005 to 2006. The U.S. – Venezuela relationship was tense in part because of the attempted coup in 2002 during which Chávez felt the U.S. sided with the opposition against him. That was not exactly the beginning but it was when he ceased to cooperate on any level; he had started to be kind of snotty before that because he did not like George W. Bush. But the coup and some remarks by Roger Noriega and other right-wing politicians gave him ammunition to focus his ire on the United States. Particularly after Bush announced the "axis of evil", Chávez visited each of the named countries. He realized that being anti-American won him far more attention internationally than he could drum up on his own. His visits to Iran and North Korea and I think Syria were planned specifically to tweak the Bush's nose. Even when what Chávez was doing or talking about had little or nothing to do with the United States, if he accused the U.S. of trying to stymie him and/or his revolution, he received lots of international attention and support, a junior Fidel Castro, if you will. So 2002 after the attempted coup failed was when the anti-American rants really began to crescendo. Below the top levels, the Venezuelan government continued to work pretty well, or as well as it ever had, with the U.S. Embassy. A number of years passed before it became clear that the lower levels were not going to work with the Embassy any more. One of the funnier results of this political disconnect was that embassy used the Venezuelan government's own official statistics office to demonstrate the deterioration in Venezuela's economy, despite Chávez claims. The poor were not better off; the revolution was not delivering on its promises. His own government provided the ammunition against his propaganda. Someone finally must have pointed this out to Chávez and he quickly put a stop to the release of accurate information. After that we could no longer trust the numbers coming out. The thing about Chávez that Americans tend to forget is he was appealing to the many Venezuelans living in poverty who had been marginalized and ignored for a very long time by all of the previous politicians and the traditional political parties.

Q: My understanding is we really sort of knew it, but we were part of you might say the upper class elite that was I mean those social contacts.

McISAAC: When you get out of consular work, or admin work, you are talking to the elites in a country when dealing with governments and economic actors. Venezuela has been a wealthy country for a long time, having discovered oil in the 1800's, and now with major coal deposits as well. They never qualified for U.S. assistance programs which is one way corruption at these levels rises to the attention of the general U.S. public. But that their political class ignored and abused the poor and near poor was well known in diplomatic circles. There was reporting on this over the years as well as on the amazing levels of official and personal corruption. When I was in Venezuela, the politicians did not represent anyone in any real sense. In their system, the political parties run lists of candidates for government. Voters elected a list, not individuals. Once elected, they left for Caracas, and the regions never saw them again, and very little money trickled back out. It all flowed into Caracas where there were beautiful buildings and amazing public parks. Outside of the capital city, public spaces deteriorated as a result of no reinvestment or maintenance. In Maracaibo, there were several public parks with original sculptures in them that you could not see for the chin-high grass growing around them. It is a lot worse now, because instead of using the money to enable industries to thrive and create work for people, or even to maintain Caracas' parks, the government has been handing out money. Chávez has taken the easy route by buying people off rather than tackling the lack of jobs, affordable housing, or encouraging investment projects. In many ways, not much has changed. In fact he is repeating some things that were done in the 80's like controlling imports. The controls encourage smuggling and black market activities. Chávez created marketplaces for the poor but there can be shortages of foods and other items there as well. It is not an efficient system that he has put in place. They have done it before and it didn't work. Venezuela remains tied to the roller coaster that is the oil business, with deteriorating infrastructure, for better or worse

Q: Apparently a lot of the money had been wasted too, paying off down in Argentina.

McISAAC: And that is the other aspect of it. Regular Venezuelans were not particularly happy to see so much money given away. The revenues from oil and gas were falling as the oil industry equipment was not maintained after Chávez replaced many of the oil workers with political allies after the 2002 failed coup attempt. In addition, Chávez created a number of programs to give gas away to foreign countries. Venezuela supplied Cuba with gasoline which you would think would be good for the Cuban people. However, the Cuban government sold it on the market rather than selling it to their own population. None of the money from those sales, at market prices, flowed back to Venezuelans. The government's expropriation of foreign businesses without compensation also spooked other foreign companies that might have considered investing. I do not think much will change, even with Chávez's recent death as the majority in congress are Chávez supporters and the judiciary is stacked with his people. His successor, Maduro does not have the charisma of Chávez, nor the following. The country will stumble along, earning just enough money from oil sales to not completely

collapse perhaps but without being able to move forward and accommodate its growing population.

Q: While you were dealing with Venezuela this is pretty clear this is the way things are going.

McISAAC: It was pretty clear. Not in terms of Chávez's health. But in terms of the economic decline, yes. Chávez replaced all the professionals in PDVSA (pronounced peh-deh-veh-sah), the state-owned oil and gas company. The Venezuelans kicked the foreigners out in 1979 when they nationalized the oil industry. However, they left the structure of the companies in place. PDVSA is the overarching company and there were branches for different parts of the industry, such as MARAVEN, the marine portion, or PEQUIVEN, the petro-chemical industry, and so on. There were well trained Venezuelans working in all of the parts of the industry who kept the lights on and for the most part, the companies continued to run pretty well. There was some deterioration and maintenance suffered as the foreigners who not only handled maintenance but also insisted that it be done, were gone. Once the professionals were removed from the companies, things really began to fall apart.

Cabimas on the east side of Lake Maracaibo is where the oil industry started. The focus now is the Oronoco River, but in Cabimas, the industry camps, built by the Americans, the British, and the Dutch, were will still laid out as they were built when I got to Maracaibo in 1985. They looked like something out of 1950's Florida. The oil wells start onshore and march out into the water for half a mile or so. This was before deep sea drilling capabilities so they stayed in relatively shallow water. There were hundreds of them, connected by pipes. Lake Maracaibo was increasingly a salt lake as the government maintained a shipping channel by dredging from the Gulf of Venezuela south to Maracaibo's port. No one thought to map the pipes linking the platforms and shore. The sheen of oil leaks across Lake Maracaibo point to burst pipes which cannot be traced to their origins. When I visited Cabimas the first time, I was impressed with how high the dyke was along the coast, as high as a two-story house. When I commented on it to one of the oil men, he laughed and said, "That's no dyke. So much oil has been taken out that the ground has sunk."

By the late 1980's, the Venezuelans were not producing as much oil as they claimed. There were always questions about the numbers as the industry limped along. With the attempted coup in 2002 and Chávez's decision to use PDVSA's income to support his social programs coupled with his firing of industry professionals, oil extraction went into a steeper decline. Oil people I spoke with when I was on the Venezuelan desk in 2005 - 2006 were dismissive of PDVSA and its capabilities. There was general agreement that the company was producing several hundred thousand barrels fewer per day than it claimed. The Venezuelans were not maintaining equipment or reinvesting in the industry.

There was also a question of where the money was going. Probably a lot went to other countries, buying Argentine debt, giving away gasoline to Cuba, and other outreach to win Chávez support in the international arena. The deterioration was visible everywhere,

including in Caracas. If you see pictures from 1980 of Caracas and pictures today, the lack of investment and maintenance is painfully obvious. When I visited Caracas from Maracaibo I walked in a beautiful, well maintained, mall with lush grass, benches and other structures to invite visitors not just to come but to stay. On Sundays, the Indian community played cricket there and Caraqueños played soccer. An FSO at the embassy sent us before and after pictures in 2006. That mall now has grass over five feet tall. Many of the outdoor sculptures by local artists installed by previous governments are disintegrated or gone. Despite taking so much money out of PDVSA, Chávez did not invest in developing industry to substitute for the foreign companies he nationalized to create jobs or to support Venezuelan artists. Instead, he handed out cash to supporters or to other countries. I don't see a constructive development there. Chávez had the opportunity to truly create a different climate in the country. He was different from other politicians who were more interested in putting money in their pocket. Chávez did lavish money on his family; C130 flights to Miami for Christmas shopping. But he appeared less interested in the money than the power and his ideological approach to politics.

When I served in Maracaibo, I met a banker, Mr. Winter, who told me that the banks ran out of hard currency to send to their students studying abroad, who were allowed a certain amount of hard currency per year to pay tuition bills, because Venezuelans paid those bankers under the table to get their hands on the limited hard currency available. One former politician was rumored to have accumulated so much money in off-shore accounts that he could take $1 million per month out of the account without touching principal. During the 1985 – 1986 period I was in country, a story emerged of a military ship that had been appropriated by a high-level official and then parked in a river because he couldn't use it without anyone noticing. Venezuela has been a very corrupt country for a very long time. Chávez did not change that reality. He may not personally have taken advantage of the opportunity, but the people around him certainly have, including his family. That aspect of the corruption reminds me a bit of a similar situation in the DR. People get to a certain point when they are so public they have to be clean. But they are enablers, so that the people around them continue to take advantage. You can no longer see the strings from these enablers to the corruption because they have cleansed themselves. Chávez sat atop a hugely corrupt system, top to bottom. Nothing new, but still, it is disappointing that he did not insist that his people not engage in corrupt acts. Though that of course would probably have ensured him a much shorter tenure.

Q: Well when you were there, had the coup taken place, the one that knocked him out for a day?

McISAAC: No, that was before my tenure on the desk, in 2002. He continued to hold Roger Noriega personally responsible for undermining him.

Q: Well we were pretty happy.

McISAAC: We were not sad. No. And some were happier than others.

Q: The Bush administration didn't play it very well.

McISAAC: U.S. officials should have stayed quiet. Somebody crowed publicly when they should have just kept their mouth shut. Unfortunately, we do that to ourselves on occasion. By the time I left the office the relationship was really going downhill.

Q: I would assume you would deal with the Venezuelan embassy.

McISAAC: No. Not for lack of trying. I asked the deputy director if I could reach out and was told that he was the only one who talked to the political and economic officers at the Venezuelan embassy. Most of the discussions were about visas as they were delaying visas for U.S. diplomats to visit the country and to be assigned there. I probably could have helped since I understood the visa issue, but by the time I joined the desk, the issue was being handled at the political level.

Q: Were we reciprocating by stopping Venezuelans from coming to Miami?

McISAAC: Not in any big way. We tried to keep the dispute at the official level. There was very little direct interaction. It is always possible that the Venezuelans would not talk to me anyway, but I will never know.

Q: What about your political appointee, the niece. How did you get along with her personally?

McISAAC: We got along just fine. I don't think she ever had a clue, just how frustrating it was to work in that office under those circumstances. She was a very nice person. That wasn't the issue. I was very careful to ensure I did not create problems or waves. If she wanted to do something I would just say OK, bow out gracefully and let her have at it. I had to swallow my tongue a few times when it got really bad. As I said, I don't think she noticed.

Q: Did you see her with other people in the State Department?

McISAAC: Well she and our PDAS had a rather strange relationship. Shapiro and she would be sitting in a meeting and texting each other under the table on their blackberries. They would start laughing or giggling. Another thing that just blew me away happened at a WHA awards ceremony. Cué sat next to Shapiro in the front row. I arrived a little early and sat in the row behind, a bit off to one side. I looked around to see who else was there and realized that Cué was buttoning his shirt and fixing his tie. I try not to be a prude, but that really struck me as totally inappropriate public behavior. There was a power disparity for one thing though perhaps not so much since she was a political appointee.

Beyond the wholly inappropriate behavior in that particular instance, there is the question of corruption. Everybody tiptoes around a political appointee and the political appointee is the one who knows everything and does everything. I can't see Shapiro letting me or any other officer get away with the same type of behavior. Perhaps that person does know everything and is the brightest person in the world, but chances are they are not. By

making them the focus of attention and not questioning them as we would anyone else, we lose our ability to be truly objective.

Political appointees in the non-political levels of government is quite disruptive. I have seen more and more of it over the last couple of years, by Democrats as well as Republicans. For the at least the past 30 years, our political class has been demonizing the public service and now is convinced that all public servants are bad. Many of the political and business leaders do not believe that public servants are non-political and I'm no longer sure that many politicians truly want public servants to be a-political, to work for whoever is in charge. There are always some who aren't, but the vast majority abide by the rules and put equal effort into working for whoever happens to be in power. At the upper levels in the federal agencies there is that tension where the positions are more political and from the assistant secretary level and up, are purely political since the holder must be confirmed by the Senate, whether they are career public servants or not. But a GS-12 should not be political. Both because that then limits the few positions at that level for civil servants to aspire to but also because the simple fact of having a politician in that position can skew the advice provided to the political class. The non-political levels do not make policy, they advise policy makers and I always believed, attempt to provide unbiased advice. You lose that perspective when the politicians are sitting on the advice.

Q: Well how did things work out? You were there until when?

McISAAC: I was the senior Venezuela desk officer until 2006. I was assigned to Grenada as principal officer/chief of mission and as a result, was required to retake the entire consular Con-Gen Rosslyn course because it was over six years since I had last taken it. Charles Shapiro was the reason I got the position. I had accommodated him by taking on the Venezuela desk job and kept the office calm for nearly a year. So he helped me when I bid on principal officer/DCM positions. There are only a few FS-02 positions on the list.

Q: This was the Bush administration.

McISAAC: The Bush administration was the first time I have seen political appointees so low down at State. Traditionally, political appointments started at the DAS level and above where career meets political in the State Department. I had seen low level political appointments in the Energy Department in the late 1980's when I worked on energy issues but until the Bush II had not seen political appointees at the GS-11/12 level at State. Perhaps it was only a matter of time. According to EX, WHA had eight free positions. Bureaus traditionally carry a few unencumbered positions to provide flexibility if someone returns from overseas on over-complement because they get sick or other things happen. Noriega as Assistant Secretary filled all eight WHA positions with political appointees. The incumbents were given various titles, e.g., senior advisor, junior advisor, consultant, but they were all GS-11, GS-12, or GS-13 positions. In addition, being political, they were paid as schedule C scale employees, higher than the regular civil service pay scale. The Venezuela desk was the first place I ran into a political appointee encumbering a regular Foreign Service position at a GS-12 level.

Q: Were these people in the opinion of those who had to deal with them were they coming with a strong political point of view bias or were these just jobs?

McISAAC: Some were pretty political, pretty ideological, others less so, but they all burrowed in at the end, staying in place after the Bush administration was over. They all definitely reflected the ideological views of those who appointed them. The WHA front office did not challenge the packing of positions.

The political appointee sucks all of the oxygen from the office, the person who gets the most attention from both the political but also the career officers higher up the food chain. I saw this also in Moscow when I was there. On the Venezuela desk, the political presence at the working level hardened the attitude of the office about the Venezuelans. We were perhaps not as objective as we ought to have been. Which rather undermines the office.

Q: I mean I would think to have a sort of dysfunctional thing. In the normal course of events you just live with it. It is a nuisance but you just have some professionals living under different circumstances. But when you got a red hot political issue I would have thought this would have tracked farther up and down the line.

McISAAC: It certainly tainted all discussions of issues.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the consular course. How did things change? Was there a different attitude or not. How did you find it?

McISAAC: The course was much better than the two previous times I took it, in 1984 and 1999. The section at FSI was better organized and the training more rigorous. Just because somebody does consular work does not mean they can teach and we had a couple of people who struggled. But there were several really good FSO's on a tour as trainers at FSI. Unlike many FSO's, I find consular work interesting, though the way we set up consulates and understaff them, it can be a grind in the field for sure. I thought it was a bit silly to make me do all the visa stuff since in Grenada there is no visa issuance or related activities. So that requirement did not make a lot of sense. On the other hand it meant that I was up to date on what the rules were on the issuance of visas if it ever came up, which it did occasionally. I focused most of my effort on the American citizen services portion and the computer system. The computer system is so much better than it used to be, though the ACS Plus program remains a trifle problematic. But it has come a long way since the late 1990's when I was in Guayaquil and certainly in the 20 plus years since I was in Maracaibo and did everything by hand. It was a useful exercise on the whole.

Q: Let's go back to Venezuela a bit. Venezuela obviously because of Chávez and because of oil had to rank very high on our priority list. Yet we had someone who was not overly, a political so someone dispensable. Also, what was our basic attitude towards dealing with the Chávez government during the time you were doing this?

McISAAC: We were burned in 2002 when there was the attempted coup failed. Roger Noriega publicly crowed about the change in government and then had to back off when Chávez regained the presidency. In so doing, he gave Chávez a really good club with which to beat the United States over the head. There was a distaste and disdain for Chávez inside the Administration, but after the coup failed, everyone was careful what they said since we still had to deal with him. Chávez at that point announced he would be in office until 2020. Sometime later, he changed his forecast of his time in office to 2030. Of course the irony was that he passed away long before then, but not before sticking it to the United States for many years.

Q: By the way as we are speaking now, he has been dead about four days.

McISAAC: Yes. He consolidated his position, packing the courts and the parliament with his people. Though they were all loyal to Chávez, they had different philosophies and we expected them to turn on each other when he left the scene. In fact, the only way he realistically could have been brought down by the time of his passing was through internal disputes among his own followers. There really wasn't a lot of hope for the opposition which was fractured and ineffectual. They did not coordinate with each other, they barely acknowledged each other. They were not willing to pick one person to represent the whole group. This raised real issues for the U.S. and a lot of the discussion when I was on the desk involved trying to figure out what our role was, if we even had one.

At the beginning of Chávez's tenure, U.S. officials dealt with Venezuelan officials at the lower levels of government. By the time I left the Venezuela desk, those connections were breaking down. Chávez noticed that some government officials were still talking to the embassy and he cut off the access.

Q: Well consular wise, in the first place how was the passport thing? Were you sort of sparing in your giving visas?

McISAAC: Visas continued to be a sore point. What the desk has nowadays is one officer primarily occupied with riding herd on visa applications. When I was in the office, Bruce Friedman handled the visa discussions with the Venezuelans. I dealt with the FBI.

Q: Were you under sort of either Congressional or media pressure about what you all were doing?

McISAAC: Not particularly. There was the usual political posturing of course, but since State did not propose to go further than the politicians were comfortable, there was not a lot of high decibel pressure. That has changed since, but when I was on the desk, we struggled to figure out what to do and hoped it would not get worse. What was interesting was the number of celebrities who stood side by side with Chávez. Sean Penn, Danny Glover, Harry Belafonte, stood with him and bad-mouthed the U.S. government but there was no pressure trickling down. I think people were more focused on the wars in Iraq and

Afghanistan. There was a lot of skepticism about U.S. policy towards Venezuela, but it was a sideshow compared to Abu Ghraib and other Iraq war scandals.

Q: I mean obviously the policy is still ongoing. But I have to say the way we handled this fairly well here as a man who wanted to demonize, I mean his views of the United States as a ploy. We just kept getting our oil, and ok well the rest of it go ahead and do your stuff.

McISAAC: In fact when Thomas A. Shannon became assistant secretary, the policy shifted sharply to ignore Chávez; to deliberately not rise to each and every insult. That made Chávez madder of course. But Shannon's philosophy was to not give him the attention he so badly craved. There continued to be a group in the Republican party, clustered around Noriega and Otto Reich (who was WHA Assistant Secretary before Noriega) that wanted to "do something" about Chávez and gave him more attention than he deserved. When Shannon's policy to lower the temperature and ignore him was put in place, the U.S. position became: let him say whatever he wants. It doesn't mean that it's true. What was very disappointing but not unexpected was that while Chávez regularly insulted most of the Latin American leaders, they refused to say anything. They would tell U.S. officials privately that they didn't like him either, but refused to speak out. Some were worried he would undermine them by appealing their disaffected poor populations. Others did not like him but enjoyed his tweaking of the United States. The Latin unease with Chávez's tactics broke into the open during an Ibero-American meeting in which Spain's King Juan Carlos told the Venezuelan leader to shut up and sit down, using unusually crude language.

Q: But in the long run that means that the man is less and less effective.

McISAAC: True to a point. Because the Latin leaders did not ignore him as we did, he was able to create platforms for his efforts to undermine existing international institutions. There is a temptation for the Latins to embrace anything that is anti-American in public while insisting privately that they don't really mean it. Chávez established a southern alternative to the Organization of American States (OAS), and Brazil was a big proponent of that, partially because Brazil stopped paying its OAS dues. Despite its positive language about the alternative organization, Brazil is apparently not paying the dues to it either. The question now with Chávez's passing is what will happen to all of his ideas since he was propping them up with Venezuelan oil income. Many Venezuelans were not very happy with how much of their oil income was going to other countries, rather than staying in country and paying for increased housing, better electricity, and other desperately needed items.

I never saw Chávez as much of a threat because while he blustered, he didn't cut off Venezuelan oil shipments to the United States because that would be cutting off his nose to spite his face. The U.S., with the exception of Curacao, is the only place with refineries capable of refining Venezuela's sour crude. Chávez did not have a lot of alternatives. If he did not have the income to buy people off, his revolution would stall. Chávez was mostly concerned about his own staying power, not with strategic planning for the future.

I look at him very differently than I look at the Chinese, the PRC (People's Republic of China), who are in it for the long haul. The Chinese have a strategic outlook on the world and where they want China to be 20, 30, or 40 years from now. Chávez said it all when he said, "I am going to be in power until 2020," or then, "I am going to be in power until 2030." That is about him and the focus was on him and what he was giving to people, not on how to develop and position the country for the future.

Another important point about Chávez is that he did not create Venezuela's problems. I worked in Maracaibo from January 1985 to June 1986. Chávez inherited most of Venezuela's problems, including the corruption, the lack of investment in infrastructure and manufacturing, the terrible labor policy, the lack of affordable housing. But what Chávez did not do was tackle or solve any of those problems. Yes, he was the first Venezuelan politician to pay attention to the poor and he should be commended for reaching out to this forgotten population. But he did not create a permissive climate for the poor to establish businesses to create jobs, or to farm. Nor did he provide the necessary training to ready the population for work. Nor did he focus on building affordable housing, either privately or publicly. Rather, he took houses and buildings from their owners and handed out money. People liked that. Money is good, but it isn't a long term policy or strategy for development. Building new houses and apartment buildings would have created badly needed jobs and injected money into the economy in a sustainable way. The result is that the country will remain dependent on the vagaries of the oil market for the foreseeable future. It is sad because Chávez had the money and the opportunity to create a more vibrant Venezuela. Instead, he undermined the Venezuelan oil company PDVSA.

When I was on the desk, the world oil market went looking for a missing two million barrels a day. There was a gap in the numbers presented by producing counties and no one could figure out why. Turned out that Venezuela reported that it was producing two to three million barrels per day, but was only managing 1.5 to two million barrels per day, which explained the gap. Because PDVSA's equipment was allowed to deteriorate as Chávez repurposed the company's profits rather than investing in upgrading equipment, experts figured that the wells could no longer physically produce the amount the Venezuelan government claimed.

Venezuela nationalized the oil companies in 1979 but for a long time, the government left the structures established by the foreign oil companies in place along with the highly trained employees, so the company remained quite efficient. PDVSA, (Petroleos de Venezuela), is the overarching company for the different component industries, including oil drilling on land, oil drilling in water, petrochemicals, and plastics. After the 2002 coup attempt, Chávez substituted his own ideological followers for the trained professionals. The new workers were not engineers, they did not know the oil business, nor did they have experience running the equipment. In addition, Chávez increased the amount of PDVSA profits he diverted to his social and international activities. Oil infrastructure has deteriorated, from an already not so great level, and it remains to be seen if it is repairable. A loss of great opportunity. It really is sad.

Q: It is sad.

McISAAC: Venezuela is a rich country. It has coal, oil, gold. The gold is in some of the indigenous areas, where there has been a lot of trouble over illegal mining operations in restricted areas. The miners use mercury and other strong chemicals to separate gold from dirt which has badly contaminated major rivers. Venezuela is a country with huge potential and really lousy management. There are a lot of talented Venezuelans who given the opportunity and direction could overcome the very real problems that exist and predate Chávez's turn in the government. He, like his predecessors, did not give them that opportunity. When I was in Maracaibo, I heard a joke told by a Venezuelan friend that went something like this: a Colombian complained to God that Venezuela was given more than its fair share of natural resources. God's response was, "Yes, but have you seen the Venezuelans?"

Q: I mean he was on to a right thing, but he mismanaged it.

McISAAC: And all of this to say that Charles Shapiro is the one who helped me go to Grenada.

Q: OK, you served in Grenada from when to when?

McISAAC: I was there from September 2006 through July 2009.

Q: Ok, what was the situation in Grenada when you went out there?

McISAAC: I went a little later than I was supposed to because the DCM in Barbados first tried to close the post and then wanted to find a different residence, neither effort successful. I was assigned in late October/early November. The position is a strange one since while internally the FSO is a principal officer, in public that person is the chief of mission and therefore Chargé d'affaires, a.i. The person reports to the ambassador in Barbados via the deputy chief of mission. There cannot be a free standing consulate in a sovereign nation without an embassy. Meg Gilroy, who I worked for in CAR called to say, "Well congratulations on being assigned, but don't plan on coming. We are trying to close the place." So I didn't know what was going to happen.

There was a very thorough internal Department review and discussion. The decision was to keep the embassy open for political and consular reasons. There is a large American community on the three islands of Grenada. It is our only embassy still open in the eastern Caribbean. We lump everybody together with Barbados. If you ask someone from Barbados or any of the eastern Caribbean countries, they will tell you that Barbados is not part of the eastern Caribbean. Barbadians sometimes refer to Barbados as little England. For several centuries Barbados was the British Empire's hub for the Caribbean. George Washington briefly lived in Barbados with his brother in the 1700's when the latter, suffering from tuberculosis, traveled there for health reasons. It was Washington's first exposure to world trade as a young man. Barbados was the hub and so they were very much tied to England for a very long time. But what many Barbadians do not realize, or

at least do not acknowledge, is that most of their modern migration is to the United States, 70% of it in fact. They insist they orient themselves towards England and yet try to migrate more often to the United States.

Q: All right well we will pick up the fascination of Grenada.

McISAAC: I was assigned in November 2005. Embassy Grenada was a one officer embassy with five local employees. When the Department decided to keep the facility open, the staff was reduced to three, two months before I arrived. The ultimate decision was political, that the closure could create negative political issues for the United States. The post is small but as a result, not very expensive. Barbados doesn't like to support Grenada, but its presence performs an important political purpose. There was some Congressional pressure to keep the post open as well, pulled together by the Chancellor, Dr. Charles Modica, owner of St. George's University, the institution that started as an American medical school in 1974 in Grenada.

Q: Well already we had expended some blood and some military force I mean to just kind of leave it.

McISAAC: Americans lump Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean together. Neither sides likes this at all. Barbadians will tell you indignantly that they are not eastern Caribbean. They will tell you that they are "little England." Eastern Caribbeans, while recognizing that they need Barbados, the hub for flights and the diplomatic corps, resent being lumped together with Barbadians. The eastern Caribbean is made up of small island states, situated on the volcanic chain that curves around the entrance to the Caribbean Sea. Barbados is a rock sticking up further out in the ocean. Barbados is more developed than the other islands, though that does not mean it does not have its own economic problems. It was part of major trade routes north to the United States, south to the southern continent, and northeast to Europe in a way that most of the other islands were not. We have an embassy in Barbados covering most of the eastern Caribbean for our convenience. If we did not have the embassy in Grenada we would have no embassies in any of the eastern Caribbean countries. Some of the other small countries argue that we should have embassies on their islands as well, a sentiment I agree with, though I would argue on the model of Grenada, with a chief of mission reporting to the ambassador in Barbados – we don't need six more ambassadors, especially political appointees of which the Caribbean suffers with many. We would have better and more productive relationships with these countries if we were physically present, but despite a nonbinding resolution in 2011 or 2012 put forward by Eliot Engel (D-NY) in the House of Representatives, nothing has changed.

Embassy Grenada was established in 1983 after the U.S. military action. The embassy had an ambassador and 20-23 U.S. and local employees until 1995 when it was reduced to one American and five local employees. There is an ongoing battle by Embassy Barbados to close Grenada, short sighted short sighted in my opinion, but regularly proposed. In March 2006, after one such battle, I was informed that the embassy would remain open but with a 40% reduction in staff: they retired one person and laid off

another one. But oh by the way, I was instructed to continue to provide all services to American citizens, represent the United States to the government, and do all the regular required reporting as well as original reporting of any important events and activities.

The principal officer in Grenada reports to the ambassador in Barbados but is the Chief of Mission in Grenada. Everyone has a hard time getting their heads around this but because the facility is in a sovereign nation it must be an embassy. There are no free-standing consulates. My experience was that the ambassador managed to visit Grenada from Barbados about once a quarter on average.

Grenada is one of two such posts one officer posts in the world, the other being Embassy Apia, in Samoa, reporting to Embassy Wellington. The East Asia Pacific (EAP) Bureau takes much better care of them than WHA does of Grenada. The principal officer there had 20 plus local employees and a bigger budget overall.

When I arrived at post in September 2006, the government was run by the New National Party (NNP), which won a one seat majority in the 15 member lower house of parliament, in the 2003 election. The Prime Minister was Keith Mitchell who, by the way, won reelection as PM in February 2013. In 2006, he had been in office for nearly 13 years and people were tired of the NNP government. The economy still had not recovered from the devastation of the 2004 passage squarely over the island of category 4 Hurricane Ivan. That hurricane, followed in 2005 by a smaller but still damaging Hurricane Emily, destroyed a large percentage of the nutmeg trees that supplied Grenada's most lucrative export, nutmeg and mace.

Grenada consists of three islands ranging from small to smaller to tiny. The total population is estimated to be around 108,000 – 110,000. Between 95,000 and 100,000 live on the island of Grenada, 8,000 on Carriacou and maybe 900 on Petit Martinique. What fascinated me when I arrived was just how much the 1979 – 1983 revolution still informed their politics. It was not what I expected based on my reading of an admittedly skimpy catalog of works on Grenada in the Department's library and the local library.

Q: This is the New Jewel?

McISAAC: The New Jewel Movement was Maurice Bishop's party is no longer in existence. It died with him. Another aspect of his movement we don't hear much about in the United States was the number of New Jewel movement supporters in many if not all of the eastern Caribbean countries as well as in Barbados. Based on the 1979 coup d'etat that Bishop and Bernard Coard instigated against then Prime Minister Eric Gairy, a gentleman in Antigua and Barbuda (AB), another eastern Caribbean country, unsuccessfully tried the same thing. Unlike in Grenada, in AB, the government survived the attempt and he was sent to prison (he is out now). Of the eastern Caribbean island nations, Grenada won its independence first, in 1974, with Gairy at the forefront of the effort; he is called the father of the nation for his long efforts. The rest became independent from 1980 on.

One of the first thing I realized after I arrived in Grenada was that in the United States, when people refer to the Grenada revolution, they are really talking about the U.S. military action, not Grenada's revolution. Some, including the CIA's Fact Book, write it off as if the U.S. military action was the entirety of the period. Americans, myself included before I was assigned to Grenada and familiarized myself with its history, saw the country's revolution through the prism of American politics of the early 1980's. The received wisdom was that President Ronald Reagan sent troops to Grenada to distract attention from its problems with U.S. Middle East policy, in particular the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon.

I've had this kind of epiphany before. When I was assigned to Moscow and was moving around the city and the country and speaking with Soviets, I realized that despite being a skeptic and having read a lot about the Soviet Union, I had absorbed the U.S. propaganda to a certain extent. The deeper and more carefully I looked, the greater the nuance I found. No matter how careful we are to keep an open mind, we always start from the point of view from which we come.

Grenada's revolution had real life consequences. Some good, some bad. People were killed. The coup itself was bloodless as Bishop and Coard waited until Gairy was overseas before taking over. People who were perceived as anti-revolution were rounded up and thrown in prison. Around 3000 people were imprisoned from 1979 – 1983. A large portion of Grenadian Rastafarians were put in a prison camp. These were not benign actions. On the other hand, the revolutionaries moved the country forward on education, expanding its availability beyond the well-to-do class. When we look at the revolution from the point of view of U.S. politics, that Reagan wanted a little war to distract attention from our problems Lebanon, we do not see nor do we understand why this small group of Grenadians determined to take over their country or what they were trying to achieve. Interestingly, this way of viewing the Grenada revolution also has been absorbed by non-Grenadians. Former revolutionaries told me that the U.S. only invaded Grenada because of Reagan's desire to change the conversation and several expressed bewilderment because they pointed out, the U.S. government did not boycott or sanction Grenada beforehand. So not only are Americans ignorant of the Grenada revolution, but many Grenadians also are unaware or unfamiliar with it.

I found that if someone had a family member who was directly involved in the revolution, either because they were imprisoned or were part of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG) or the People's Revolutionary Army (PRA), they were more likely to know the history than those without. Kids were not taught anything about that in school. Nobody talked about it out loud. Views on the revolution were whispered. The stories I heard were told to me privately, behind closed doors or only after the person checked to ensure no one was close enough to hear.

Grenada is a very friendly place on the surface. It is one of the few places I have been to where there is substantial mixing among the various economic classes. As you get to know the people and their politics, it becomes obvious Grenadians are still playing out the issues the events of the late 1970's and 1980's. After the revolution crumbled and the

United States restored democracy in 1983, Grenadians formed a number of political parties and established the first democratically elected government in 1984. Former PM Eric Gairy's party, the Grenada United Labour Party (GULP), reformed. The New National Party (NNP) was founded as well as the National Party (NP). Shortly thereafter, a number of NNP members split off to found the National Democratic Congress, including Tillman Thomas and Francis Alexis, the latter a well-respected jurist and recognized expert on the eastern Caribbean court system. Also incredibly arrogant. He never won an election and, still fancying himself as prime minister, later took his toys, left the NDC, and formed yet another new party, the People's Labour Party (PLP), from which platform he keeps trying but never wins anything. Up until 1995, these parties vied for power and each government contained a mixture of their representatives.

There are two very small parties in addition to the three main ones. First the GOD party. The Good Old Democracy party. Basically one guy who runs for office in every election but never wins. He campaigns walking around town in a full length robe. The National Party (NP), which has dwindled down to about two members usually contests a seat or two, but has not won.

In 1995, only the NNP and the NDC appeared to be viable parties and split the seats in Parliament between them in that year's election. By 2006 people were tired of Keith Mitchell and the NNP. The country was doing pretty well economically until 2004 when it was hit by Hurricane Ivan, a category 4 hurricane. The storm was slow moving and remained over the island for so long that it basically wiped much of the vegetation off the island, including 90% of the nutmeg trees, destroying the country's main hard currency earner. Economically Grenada was in real trouble. Suddenly the country had to import a much higher percentage of its needs than before the storm. When I arrived in 2006, the island was only just beginning to look green again. Around 20% of the damaged buildings were still not rebuilt or repaired. A census of buildings in 2007 found that the building stock pre-Ivan of around 2000 buildings was post-Ivan around 1800, shrunk to about 1800 post-Ivan, even with rebuilding. The Parliament building and the Governor General's residence remained in ruins and the three largest churches were still without roofs and in the case of the Presbyterian church, also without three walls.

It was interesting to be in Grenada in 2008 when the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which was founded after the revolution won the election with a significant majority. The party was always left of center, but today includes a number of former revolutionaries who initially fled the country after the revolution fell apart. This group began to filter back into Grenada in the 1990's as they realized that no one was coming after them. Many went to Canada, but a significant number fled to the United States. Once back in Grenada, core group joined the NDC, including Peter David, Nazim Burke, Vincent Roberts, and others. To some Grenadians, the NDC win was the return of the revolution or at least its possibility. Others, including longer term members of the NDC were not happy when the new members pushed their way to the top of the party, into positions of authority. The NDC's political leader, Tillman Thomas, had been sympathetic to the revolution but was imprisoned for the final two years because he joined a small group that founded a newspaper. The group, led by Leslie Pierre a leading

Grenadian journalist, who to this day hates Bishop and Coard, followed all the PRG's rules but after one printing, the paper was closed down and the founders jailed. The ruling NNP lost all but four seats to NDC candidates in 2008. Several other small political parties ran candidates but none did well enough to claim any seats in Parliament. Grenada has a modified Westminster form of government. In reality it means that the winners take all and control all levers of power. Under this system, the opposition party has very little leverage over the legislative agenda. By 2003 when the NNP squeaked out a one seat majority, the NDC members of Parliament were terribly frustrated and began to take counterproductive actions, such as regularly walking out en masse over perceived slights from the majority.

The NDC's 2008 win meant the party finally grasped power after 13 years in opposition. Several of the NDC politicians I knew wanted power so badly they could taste it, and it was obvious. Others were less obviously power hungry and were hard workers. Power for them meant they could finally accomplish things. Unfortunately, over the next five years, the various factions within the party pulled it apart and kept the government from accomplishing even minimal progress. Very few were really ready to govern and because they were fighting each other for position and power, the NDC government was not successful.

Q: What was their major product?

McISAAC: Nutmeg was one of the biggest earners of hard currency. Their production was not the largest in terms of size, but Grenadian nutmeg was considered higher quality than most any other nutmeg so they did well off it. Nutmeg and the mace which is the red mesh that surrounds the nut in a lacy construction and is more valuable than the nutmeg itself, were among the most lucrative of Grenada's exports. The spices had been imported by the French in the 1700's from Indonesia. Many of the trees destroyed by the hurricanes. Those that tipped over but did not break from the root ball had to be removed because they would no longer grow upright, damaging any fruit.

There was always some tourism to Grenada but it was never the main focus for policy makers since the country had nutmeg and mace. Grenada's hotels were mostly smaller, nothing in the category of a Hilton or Hyatt, and more focused on the British and European markets than on the U.S. market. Part of this is because as a former British colony, the English and other Europeans have been visiting for many years. Without any marketing in the U.S., Grenada is unknown to U.S. tourists and without U.S. traffic, there is little reliable jet service from the United States. It is also the furthest eastern Caribbean country from the United States, reducing its attractiveness to Americans who typically have shorter vacations than the Europeans. There are many similar islands much closer that advertise to the U.S. market. Americans mostly see Grenada from the large cruise ships as it is one of the stops for routes that go to the southern Caribbean. That said, the U.S. sailing world is very familiar with Grenada as it has traditionally been a safe haven as large storms generally pass it by.

Suddenly having lost its primary hard currency earner, Grenada looked to tourism to fill the void. However, tourism does not pay as well as nutmeg and Grenada, sorry to say, simply does not have the tradition of tourism nor the tradition of service required to be a high-end tourist destination like Barbados and the Bahamas. The hotel owners won't work together. So you will see in magazines and newspapers in the U.S. and elsewhere, big advertisements for Bahamas, Barbados, and St. Lucia. There the hotel owners, and the restaurateurs collaborated with their governments to buy ad space in U.S. magazines and newspapers. According to one Grenadian hotel owner, the Grenadians won't help each other out that way. They are too suspicious of each other. So the country struggled since 2004, going further into debt as the government sought alternative hard currency earners to nutmeg. New nutmeg trees have been planted but the trees take anywhere from five to ten years to mature and bear fruit so it is imperative that Grenada develops other economic sectors to survive.

I am curious to see if with Keith Mitchell back in power after the 2013 election, whether he will be able to govern and to create economic opportunities that he wasn't able to before. In 2006, the United States was completing work on all $46 million of promised post hurricane assistance.

Q: What were they pushing? Tourism or…

McISAAC: One of the problems for the eastern Caribbean, Grenada included, is that per capita income is too high to qualify for a lot of our normal assistance programs. So while the poverty rate may be 32%, because their per capita income is several hundred dollars above the programs income cap, the countries do not qualify for the Millennium Challenge Account. Nor do they qualify for the types of development assistance programs that they desperately need, e.g., agriculture, administration of justice, and political party building. Basically, the only regular assistance they get is counterdrug, counterterrorism, and military/police training programs. While the police are quite happy, the general population never sees the results in any concrete way. Absent a clear emergency like the aftermath of a hurricane, earthquake, heavy flooding, and landslides when the U.S. is often the first on the ground and provides assistance, these countries are not viewed as needy.

The United States provided $46 million in assistance to Grenada post Hurricane Ivan. The U.S. was the only country to fully deliver everything it promised and completed the work in 2006. We helped to rebuild homes, though fewer than USAID planned as the U.S. could only help those with clear title to their property. Many Grenadians are long-term squatters on government land and could demonstrate ownership. The United States and the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) teamed up to rebuild several facilities, drying sheds and other small buildings, where the Grenadian government grows seedlings and sells them to local farmers. With Canada and the European Union (EU), the U.S. assisted in the rebuilding of damaged lockers for local fishermen. In addition, a series of new lockers were built in several cities for the local fishermen. The majority of Grenadian fishermen are artisanal, with very small boats, essentially rowboats with a

motor; the lockers enabled them to safely lock up their gear at the wharf/on the waterfront so they would not have to drag it home every night.

One of my first official acts was to attend the official ribbon-cutting ceremony at a home for the elderly. The United States, along with Canada's assistance agency and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), had rebuilt the facility's roof, two times. Once after Hurricane Ivan and again the next year after Hurricane Emily. The home was built for the elderly but over time increasingly also housed the severely disabled who had no other place to go. The second new roof was built to withstand hurricanes, a technical matter I can't do justice to.

I was asked to speak at the ceremony, so I drafted a speech. A colleague from USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance or OFDA, Julie Leonard, also attended the event. The PAHO representative sat next to her in the audience. There were a number of local officials. At the head table, I sat next to the Minister for Social Development with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) representative on her other side. My name was on the program but when the Emcee simply ignored me and introduced everyone else at the table. At that point, I wondered why I was there. However, with the TV cameras pointed at the head table, there was no way I could sneak out. Julie Leonard's face was priceless as she realized that the United States was passed over. She turned to the PAHO rep and told him to do something. He walked over to the Emcee and they had an animated, whispered conversation. Turned out the omission was deliberate. The Emcee had to be convinced that the United States had been a major contributor to putting in the new roof. After about five minutes of their heated conversation, with everything stalled, the ceremony was restarted and this time the Emcee acknowledged the United States as one of the donors. I was trying not to laugh at this point because it was so absurd. But we got through it.

For the first six months I spoke at a lot of these handover ceremonies. We rebuilt schools, community halls, houses, etc. In several cases, we supplied all of the books and materials needed for the elementary schools we rebuilt. I gained a lot of experience writing and giving short speeches. Doesn't make me a speechwriter perhaps, but I am more comfortable with the process than I was prior to serving in Grenada.

Despite everything we did, there were a substantial number of Grenadians who were in my face about how the United States did nothing for Grenada. The politicians would thank us privately but refuse to publicly acknowledge that the U.S. had provided all of this assistance. There was an attitude that the United States owed Grenada in some way. Some of the attitude comes from 1983, and after that period up until the early 1990's, the U.S. did provide a lot of assistance to the country. We built most of the sidewalks in St. George's and the gutter system for drainage. The assistance petered out as Grenada's economy improved and as the U.S. lost interest in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. But many Grenadians demanded the United States do more.

I was more annoyed with Keith Mitchell and the New National Party (NNP) than I was with the National Democratic Congress (NDC). This was in part because I knew the

NDC, with a few notable exceptions, were consistent in their disdain for the United States, especially the former revolutionaries. I privately advised politicians of any stripe that if they really wanted to see more U.S. assistance, they needed to think before spouting anti-American rhetoric. Even if it was only for domestic political consumption, we did take note. The United States can ignore Grenada. If the government of Grenada refuses to acknowledge that the U.S. was actually the first in country after the hurricane and provided the bulk of the assistance, how do we argue to Congress that Grenada should get more? They took the criticism on board but still never said anything publicly. It was an ongoing battle to try to get the politicians to realize that what they did and what they said could make a huge difference in how the U.S. viewed them. The Grenadians felt it was ok to poke the U.S. in the eye, something they would not dare do to the Venezuelans or the Chinese, but then were miffed that the U.S. ignored them. I do not think it is a good thing that the United States is not more strategic in its approach to the eastern Caribbean, but it was and is a fact of life. I did after much talking get an admission from the Department's economic folks and one of WHA's deputy assistant secretaries that maintaining the per capita income as the measure for assistance was not particularly helpful. Even the World Bank admitted the per capita measurement does not provide a useful picture of a country's true economic health, but nobody came up with a viable alternative. It is simple and therefore, much used in the development world.

Of course, all of the Grenadian officials clamored to be invited to the U.S. 4th of July party, regardless of their political leaning. I was tempted to not invite a few of them, but better judgment prevailed. I had a tiny representation budget and catering was very expensive on the island. I wound up paying out of pocket each year in order to maintain an appropriate level of official interaction and maintain decent quality of food and drink. The first year, I let the staff dictate the menu for the July 4 party. The senior FSN, who was a snob, informed me that Grenadians do not eat hamburgers or hotdogs. The next two years, I did not listen and bought the hamburgers and hotdogs and also brought from home some chicken barbecue sauce (the dry ingredients which we then mixed up). Upstate New York barbecue is very different from southern barbecue. It is drier without the heavy sauce. Despite the dire predictions, the hamburgers and hotdogs were gone within an hour and a large dent was made in the chicken. This also saved money. For my final Grenada 4th in 2009, I paid out of my pocket for a small fireworks show. We had a good time.

As the 2008 election approached, the NDC came up with a talking point that NNP head and PM, Keith Mitchell, was an American citizen. I don't know where they found out about it, though I have some suspicions. At any rate, the rumors flew at that point. I, of course, was not allowed to talk about it publicly, so I kept my mouth shut. The local press would call and I would decline to comment. Mitchell thought it was funny. He told me to let the press know. I reminded him that I could not without a signed privacy act waiver from him and suggested he should tell them himself. After leaving the truth hanging in the wind, and me issuing no comment every time the local press called, towards the end of the election cycle, Mitchell finally signed a privacy act waiver form. I went back and forth with the Department's lawyers to draft an acceptable statement. I was becoming part of the campaign by declining to discuss the issue. I needed to defang that beast. With

Mitchell's signed waiver in hand, I issued the negotiated statement and took the issue off the campaign table. What was interesting was that in 2009 as I was leaving the country for good, I received a very nice note from one of Grenada's main judges congratulating me on my handling of all the difficult political issues, including Mitchell's citizenship. It came out of the blue. I was grateful anyone had noticed.

The development of the NDC was fascinating. The party started in the 80's as a breakaway group of NNP-ites. On a side note: one of the founders of the NDC, Francis Alexis, who never won a seat (even when the NDC was on top), once again took his toys after the 1995 election and founded yet another party, the People's Labour Movement (PLM). To my knowledge, he has yet to win a seat in Parliament, despite his best efforts. In addition, he has occasionally been on the outs with his own party. He is a lawyer by training and involved in the ongoing efforts to make the Eastern Caribbean court system more effective. He is also a mean harmonica player!

In the 1999 election, the NNP took all the seats, all 15. The NDC was demoralized. In 1983 when Bernard Coard and the others considered directly complicit in the deaths of Maurice Bishop and his supporters were arrested, a substantial number of others lower down in the hierarchy fled the country, fearing arrest. As far as I can tell, there was no indication that anybody intended to pursue the mid- and lower-level officials, many hightailed it to Canada, the UK, and surprisingly, the United States. I was told by one local lawyer that he had helped some of them change their names in order to migrate to the United States, Canada, and elsewhere. Seems a wasted effort since no one pursued them. Some of it was self-importance, some real fear. It appears that members of this group began to feel homesick and in the 1990's, realized that they really were not going to be pursued. They began to filter back into Grenada. A core group, maybe 20 or so, joined the National Democratic Congress.

On the one hand, there was Tillman Thomas, the party's political leader, a founding member, who had been arrested during the revolution and was in prison for I think two years, and the other original members of the NDC. On the other hand, there was now a group of very avid former revolutionaries who wanted power so badly they could taste it. This group stepped into positions of power within the party. Among them were two who really wanted to lead the party, Nazim Burke and Peter David. These two men spent an inordinate amount of time and energy jockeying for the top position. I heard Burke referred to as "the bag man for the revolution". Peter David was called Captain Peter, though I'm not sure whether he was in the People's Revolutionary Army or if it was just an honorary title. At any rate, there was a story that I was told by several different interlocutors, though I don't know whether it is apocryphal or not, which claims that he was told to kill his father, and his father hid under the bed because he was afraid of him.

Regardless of the rumors of their revolutionary past, these two men worked their way up through party ranks into positions of power. Other returnees chose to remain behind the scenes and exercise power from the shadows, including Vincent Roberts. The former revolutionaries moved the party further to the left than I think it would have been naturally, though the party was already the most left leaning of all the political parties.

1999 was the watershed year when the NDC, having lost every race, was trying to figure out the way forward. Peter David became General Secretary and Burke, Treasurer. Both men continued to vie with each other to unseat Thomas as political leader. David was more of a bomb thrower while Burke worked from within, becoming Thomas' right hand man. By the 2003 election, a re-energized NDC was ready. They were also fortunate that the population was getting tired of the Mitchell administration and in some ways, their success in 2003 was due as much to the feeling of "throw the bums out" as to their own popularity. In any event, while the NNP retained eight seats, the NDC took seven seats, leaving Mitchell with a one seat majority.

One of the leftover issues from the revolution was the location of Bishop's remains. Practically the first question I was asked by both political parties upon arrival in country, was, "Where did the U.S. put Bishop's body?" The remains of Bishop, his girlfriend Jacqueline Creft, and the others killed with him in 1983 have never been positively identified. The Grenada 13, those convicted for the killings, including Coard, continued to deny killing Bishop and disposing of the bodies. Coard's line is that the U.S. transported the bodies to the United States.

The accused group started out as the Grenada 17. Almost immediately, one person was excused for illness. Several others fell off the list as well and eventually the group became known as the Grenada 13. Coard's wife, who was arrested with him, was released early to travel to her native Jamaica for cancer treatment. The People's Revolutionary Government suspended the constitution when it took over. Paul Scoon, Governor General before and during the revolution, told me that he feared for his life at the time because his position took its authority as representative of the Queen in Grenada only from the constitution. Scoon was convinced that the bodies that were shown to the Americans in 1993 were not necessarily those of Bishop and company. He thought that the people who killed Bishop may have disposed of the bodies at sea or in some other way. The amount lapsed between the killings on October 19 and October 25, the date U.S. soldiers arrived, is wide enough for any number of things to have happened. The autopsy of the bodies by a U.S. military pathology team took place after that. Lots of time for anything to happen during the chaos of the collapse of the revolutionary government and the arrival of outside troops.

The pathology report is written in highly legalistic language, presumably because the team wanted to be sure it could be used in court. The bodies the team was led to were in a shallow grave and had either been blown apart, possibly by a detonated grenade, or set afire or both and were in pieces. According to the report, there was very little that was intact or complete. The report very carefully, and somewhat obscurely if one is not used to deciphering legalese, states that the team could not definitively state that the remains were Bishop's, Creft's, or anyone else's. DNA testing was not available in 1983, something many Grenadians forget. Among the many local claims is one that the autopsy was done in the United States with the added reasoning that the U.S. government did not want Bishop to be made into a martyr. It is very clear from the U.S. Army autopsy report that the procedure was performed in Grenada. I am not sure that many Grenadians have actually read the report, rather latching onto conspiracy theories floating around. There

was an American citizen professor at St. George's University who claimed to have witnessed the autopsy, which was performed at SGU facilities. He sidled up to me at an SGU party once, claiming that if the FBI knew his location, he would be arrested. He asserted that the U.S. government was lying and that the remains were of Bishop, et al. He says he saw things like complete limbs. Others claim a woman's shawl was found with the remains and a wedding ring were found with the remains, proving they are Bishop's, Creft's, et al. The one thing that was not clear from that report was what the team did with the remains when they finished. So the rumors run rampant.

The U.S. embassy in Grenada made arrangements with the FBI to send in a forensic team in 2005 when a claim about a new grave arose. Turned out to not be Bishop and the others. But this team did their homework and went back to the original U.S. Army pathology team for a briefing on the 1983 findings. The 2005 report includes the information that the original team returned the remains to Bailey's funeral home, one of the two main local funeral homes. The Embassy's stock response to queries about the bodies was that Coard and rest of the Grenada 13 knew where the bodies were. I made sure that the government had a copy of the FBI report. I found in my time there that no one shared documents. When the NDC won the election in 2008, I gave them another copy of the FBI report because I was sure they would claim the NNP did not give it to them.

Interestingly, just before I left post in 2009 a former governor general, Danny Williams gave me answers to several questions I had addressed to him over the three years I was there that he had not previously been willing to answer. He confirmed that the remains were handed to the funeral home, saying he and several other prominent Grenadians discussed the fact with Bailey, the founder and director of the funeral home at the time. The other thing he acknowledged, was that Grenada did have the originals of the documents from the revolutionary period. The U.S. Army removed a large number of the PRG's documents from Grenada in 1983 but were instructed by a U.S. court to send them back, which the Army did in the 1980's. However, the documents were microfiched before the originals were returned and are in the National Archives. Someday I am going to go look at them. None of this is known by most Grenadians. Williams told me that the documents are in Fort George which is where the police station now is, in a locked room. Not far in fact from where Bishop was killed. Not only are the documents there, there is an archive committee, which he was a member of when governor general. He said they met occasionally though not often and not recently. I was surprised. I asked him why they did not open their archives and let Grenadians judge whether the revolution was good or bad. It would also let them begin healing the rifts between the various factions which remain because the answer to any question is that the United States was responsible. He had no better answer than anyone else did. So far, Grenadians are determined not to discuss the revolution in a constructive way. There are family stories, but no one is looking at the documents to determine whether the myths they are so sure are true, are actually based on fact. The stories very much underpin their politics but there is no discussion of what really happened.

Q: Why don't they talk about it?

McISAAC: I never heard a good reason from the Grenadians I spoke with, though I think fear plays a big part. Fear that what they think they know is not true. Fear among those imprisoned that their jailors remain in Grenada and might attack them if they speak. Grenada is a young country. Many Grenadians alive now were born after the revolution fell apart so their level of knowledge is variable, dependent upon which side their family was on. The ones who are still pro revolution are convinced that the United States entered the country in 1983 to take it all away from them or have at least been allowed to think that for a long time. The ones who were against the revolution are afraid of the ones who are still pro revolution. So you will hear people speaking privately about what happened to them during the revolution, but they won't speak up publicly. People were beaten. People disappeared. The Rastafarians were rounded up and put in prison camps in the northern part of the island. I don't know that any actually starved, but they were highly malnourished when they were finally released.

I met one man who told me that, "Oh yeah, my mother was a nurse and nursed Bishop after he was beaten up by the Mongoose Gang [Gairy's enforcers, a gang renowned for its viciousness]." He added that when he was 11, Bishop arrived at their house unexpectedly late one night and told the man's mother that he had just signed the order for her execution. Bishop apparently felt obligated to give her time to get away. According to the narrator of this tale, his mother packed up the family and found a boat to Trinidad and Tobago (TT) that night. He grew up in TT but returned to Grenada in the 1990's with his mother when she was homesick.

Another person who spoke privately about his experience in prison during the revolution was later a driver for the embassy. He went by the nickname Sparrow, as a tribute to the Might Sparrow, because he loved to sing. The Mighty Sparrow was the stage name of a famous Grenadian calypsonian, Slinger Francisco. Sparrow left the embassy in the early 1990's to start his own transportation business. He was also a Baptist preacher with a ministry centered on gospel and other church music. Sparrow spoke of the horror of being imprisoned by the PRG and being beaten. He was afraid of the returned revolutionaries. In his case, the 2008 election, in which the NDC won a majority, was a turning point. He gave an incendiary sermon against the revolution shortly after the election, and what it stood for and did to people. He was castigated by many for violating the unspoken rule to never openly mention the revolution.

After the NDC won an eleven to four parliamentary majority in 2008, we started to hear talk about the possible release of the remaining Grenada 13 or "the guys on the hill," as the group was were commonly called. The group was originally sentenced to death for the October 19, 1993 killings. The group appealed to the Privy Council in London, the court of last resort for the Caribbean nations, and in the late 80's early 90's, the Council overturned the death penalty sentence as illegitimate (even though at the time both the UK and Grenada had the death penalty on the books). The death sentence was converted to life in prison. Of the 13 in prison, three were the PRA soldiers who actually did the shooting. Their sentence was 20 years and in 2006 they had served their time and were released. The question remained about the ones who masterminded the 1983 coup

attempt against Bishop. There were repeated hints that the NDC administration might release all of them. Every time the prime minister mentioned this possibility, there was a public backlash against it.

The group's lawyers continued to petition the Privy Council over the years and on February 7, 2007 the Council issued its decision agreeing to a re-sentencing hearing. In its decision, the Council rejected a new trial, something Coard particularly wanted, confirming the homicide conviction. A hearing was set for June 2007. The judge in the rotation for the hearing was considered too close to Coard's people and was passed over. The government, which was reluctant anyway, opted to bring in a judge from Barbados. Ironically, that judge turned out to have had very close ties to the revolutionary movement in the 70's and 80's. The entire process took about two weeks. Coard continued to try make it a retrial rather than a re-sentencing, proclaiming his innocence throughout. The group made daily entrances and exits to and from court with supporters cheering them. Protestors, including those who lost family members during the revolution were kept outside the fence.

Part way through the process, the hearing ground to halt because someone who had known that particular judge in Barbados when he was young, sent a letter to the court claiming the judge was not impartial. He had been a member of one of the original NJM support groups at the time of the revolution. The person also claimed that the judge remained close to the guys in prison but lied about it in order to be selected for the re-sentencing hearing. The Public Prosecutor and the court ignored the claim at first, so the accuser released a copy of his letter to local media. For several days things just got really loud. But eventually the prosecutor said I am going to go ahead anyway. The judge was left in place and the hearing continued. At this point, however, there was bad blood between the prosecutor and the government, which was not entirely enthusiastic about the whole enterprise. The strain marred the rest of the Mitchell administration.

The ultimate conclusion of the hearing led to the immediate release of three of the Grenada 13. The final ten would remain in jail until they reached the normal 50% of time served and then they would be released. The decision did not satisfy many Grenadians, especially the families of those killed. They believed that the judge had ignored their side of the issue. So one group was celebrating the outcome and the other was upset at the lack of consideration for their losses. So again there was no resolution to the tension between the two camps. Ultimately, the NDC government, elected in the summer of 2008, released the final ten before their prison term was up, but by that time the release was inevitable and most Grenadians appeared resigned to it. Coard took off for Jamaica to join his wife. The others have found work/things to do. A couple of them have tried to get the U.S. to issue them visas, but without any luck.

In 2008, with Tillman Thomas at the helm, the NDC set out to govern after many years on the sidelines as a disgruntled opposition party. By early 2009 the party leadership was beginning to fray at the edges. There was the division between old and new members as well as the dispute between Peter David and Nazim Burke over control. Factions sprang up, reducing the party's ability to maneuver and ultimately to govern. There was a huge

national block party the night the NDC won its eleven to four majority over the NNP. I was at the Spice Island Beach Resort where the OAS' (Organization of American States) observers were located, watching the results come in. Once it was clear that the NDC was the big winner, I headed for home. The only way out was via a very narrow street to the main road, both of which were clogged with celebrators. It took me over 30 minutes to move about a block to the main road and then another 30 minutes or more to get to the point where the crowds thinned out. Normally, the trip from that hotel to the residence took about ten minutes.

The change in government did not impact the U.S. – Grenada relationship in any major way. There was never any hint that the NDC meant to replicate the revolution, despite the background of many in the inner circle. There were some unfortunate incidents in the handover of power. Under Grenada's system, the new PM is sworn in the day after the election and cabinet members and members of parliament within a week. The governor general also generally changes as the new government tends to make a new recommendation to the Crown in London. The public service workers are supposed to be neutral but none of the political parties behaves as if they were. The first act of the new government was to lock the public service out of their offices. Sorry, that was their second act. The first one was to pull all security and vehicles from Mitchell, who until the new PM was sworn in, was still prime minister. The new government accused the public service workers of being too closely tied to the NNP and the public service unions accused the new government of unlawfully targeting the workers.

The first few months of the new government were rocky as the NDC had been out of power for so long that it was not clear the party could buckle down to the mundane task of governing. Finger pointing was not uncommon. Eventually, there was a major falling out among the executive of the party. Tillman Thomas accused the revolutionaries of trying to undermine him. The party went into an election in February 2013 with all of that baggage so they lost all of the seats.

Q: Who lost all of the seats?

McISAAC: The NDC. The NNP won all 15 seats in the lower house of Parliament. Which is not necessarily a good thing, but because the NDC membership was at each other's throats, the party could neither govern effectively nor successfully contest an election.

Q: Did we have a dog in this fight? I mean something like this in a small community it must be all consuming. It would be kind of hard to be at a reception or something and keep your mouth shut or not to blink an eye.

McISAAC: You're right. It's not easy or fun. Plus any questions I needed to ask were seen in the context of local politics, not as U.S. priorities. I had had some experience in a small country where the local politics outweighed everything else. I lived in Belgium for a year, a small country surrounded by Europe which you would think would lead to

greater sophistication, but which actually leads to a more inward looking society. We are all focused on ourselves. I think it is human nature.

Q: Walloon and Flemish.

McISAAC: Yes. When I was in Belgium in 1980 - 1981, there would be a Walloon demonstration in Brussels demanding removal of all Flemish from the neighborhood followed a week later by a Flemish demonstration demanding the removal of all Walloon from their neighborhood. Small country dependent on others to survive. One assumes there is a greater sophistication, but all politics is local and local problems loom large in contrast to more distant geopolitical issues.

Q: Well now I guess the colossus to the north would be Barbados wouldn't it?

McISAAC: The United States gets that title. You would be amazed at how many people in the Caribbean believe that Nostradamus's writings are real predictions. I heard in Grenada in the mid- to late-ought's what I heard in Venezuela in the 1980's and in Ecuador in the late 1990's: the colossus to the north (the U.S.) would invade its southern neighbors. Barbados is a necessary evil; eastern Caribbeans have to fly there to get to other places.

Q: OK, in the first place who was our ambassador to Barbados?

McISAAC: When I arrived Mary Ourisman was ambassador. Mary Kramer was leaving (there was a bit of an embarrassing overlap where one refused to move and the other refused to delay). Barbados traditionally gets a political appointee.

Q: There is Ourisman Chevrolet here.

McISAAC: Her husband, Mandell Ourisman. She is his second wife. One of the advantages she had was that she came with her own airplane. This was fortuitous as the Barbados position covers seven countries, Barbados plus the six eastern Caribbean countries. Being able to avoid Liat, the local airline was a real benefit. Mary Kramer, her predecessor who had headed Bush's re-election campaign in Iowa, did not have an airplane. She lost her luggage a lot as Liat was known for leaving luggage in odd places. She said that she learned to carry just what she needed when she went anywhere.

Q: OK, well Mary Ourisman coming you must have been on tenterhooks at receptions with her around because you had gotten accustomed to subjects just to stay out of or to be neutral. Somebody who is coming in from the outside can't help but say, "Oh really, tell me more about that," or something like that.

McISAAC: She was good at the reception business. I imagine being on various boards, including the Kennedy Center, gave her lots of practice. Yes, I did worry a bit about things that might happen, but she was good at reading the papers we provided and discussing what we might want to focus on so that she was prepared. I.e.: Here are the

things you might want to steer away from; if you hear this, try x; or we don't have a dog in that fight, suggest you smile politely and move on. I have worked with political appointees who were not as receptive to working with officers who know what they are doing.

Q: Obviously this is a matter of we spent blood there and it is not hard to tell me more about that or something like.

McISAAC: Yes. But what the locals most wanted was assistance; more money. Because the eastern Caribbean countries did not qualify for U.S. humanitarian assistance, she had the unenviable task of explaining why they would not receive more assistance. The Grenadians constantly demanded more. We did what we could which was primarily assistance to the police forces, but the things they really needed, like anti-corruption programs, political party strengthening, agriculture, and so on, we could not provide. Agriculture for me was the main thing as they were importing so much when the fertile conditions of the islands meant they could produce enough to feed themselves. This would help reduce the levels of diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic illnesses. Grenada's agriculture needed a lot of help. But USDA had no money and Grenada did not qualify for the USAID programs or the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA).

Their agricultural practices date from the 16th century: a hoe and the farmer's back. Grenadians expressed dismay that so many farmers were leaving their land and moving to the cities or migrating off island. Well, who wants to do that kind of back breaking work? I asked many government officials, including agricultural ministry types who should know, why no one was importing the Japanese small tractors, but never received a satisfactory response. I don't mean to promote Japan, but they do make little tractors that would fit in the Grenada landscape. Grenada imported lots of cars from Japan so why not tractors?

Q: Yeah little one horsepower.

McISAAC: I suggested to the government that Grenada use the resources it already has to generate power and at the same time improve agriculture by utilizing this resource for irrigation. Grenada has several gorgeous waterfalls. There is a tropical rainforest at the top of the island surrounding a volcanic crater lake. As a result, there is a fairly steady supply of water to the creeks and rivers that come down from the mountain even during the driest months. The remnants of 18th and 19th century water wheels with systems to bring water from the mountain down to run them are scattered around the island. In addition, on both Grenada and Carriacou (the second island of the country), a number of the stone bases of 18th century French windmills remain. Why not use that principle again to create power? Sort of a duh moment. Wind power, not the great big humongous commercial windmills, but the smaller agricultural ones. If one wants to irrigate one or two small fields, the windmills don't have to be that big. I grew up in an agricultural area where there were many one to two story windmills with small sails to generate electricity for barns, pull water up from wells, and so on. Not large and not overwhelming to maintain. The suggestions fell on deaf ears. In part because the farmers did not want to

pay for anything – one even suggested that the Chinese laborers do the farm work and the government pay them. The attitude was "what have you got to give me? And it better be good." I did manage to wangle a visit by the regional USDA folks and arranged for two Grenadians to attend USDA courses in the United States. Without Grenadian buy in, there was little else I could do.

Q: OK, let's talk about the British. I mean the British, because they had a governor general didn't they?

McISAAC: And Grenada still does have a governor general, but the British are pulling back from direct assistance and working more through the European Union. The governors general are no longer Brits assigned to a country. They are locals picked by the country's politicians who are subsequently knighted by the Queen and sent back to serve. Besides, the British weren't happy with us going in after the revolution.

Q: No, I mean we didn't tell Margaret Thatcher.

McISAAC: I think she was told and she did not want us to go in. I was told she objected but I am not entirely sure of the timing. But the British are pulling away from these islands.

Q: Well but it is either you is or you ain't under the commonwealth.

McISAAC: All true but the British, as I said, increasingly providing assistance through the EU and less through the Commonwealth. In 2011, when I was in the Office of Caribbean Affairs again, representatives of the Commonwealth showed up, hats in hand, looking for U.S. assistance since apparently the British have told them they were on their own, or at least more on their own. The British no longer have diplomatic representation on the smaller Caribbean islands.

Q: No British?

McISAAC: No, they are based in Barbados, like we are. Someone visits each of the smaller countries once in a while. As I think I mentioned earlier, the only professional diplomats in country when I was in Grenada were the People's Republic of China (PRC), Cuba, Venezuela, and the United States; the Brazilians moved in about two months before I left in 2009. The British closed their office in Grenada for good in 2006. The professional diplomats were pulled out a year earlier in 2005. The Caribbean is not a major part of the Western countries' consciousness anymore. That said, we should have an interest based on who else is moving into the region. I never really got too excited about Chávez as I have indicated. Yes, he gave them gas under PetroCaribe but he sometimes forgot to deliver it. He was not a particularly reliable partner and now that he is gone, it will be interesting to see how long his successor, Nicolás Maduro, can keep the empire afloat. Increasingly, it looks like Maduro is having trouble at home that may force a re-evaluation of the extensive foreign assistance started under Chávez.

But now China has moved into the region – and Grenada – in a big way. This may well come back to bite Keith Mitchell now that his is once again prime minister. Up until Hurricane Ivan, a category 4 storm, swept through Grenada in 2004, the government recognized Taiwan. The country owed a substantial sum of money to Taiwan for already completed projects. The devastation wrought by Ivan, followed by the slightly smaller Hurricane Emily in 2005, left the country desperate. Ivan sat over Grenada long enough for the island to be scoured by both the front and the back ends of the storm. Vegetation was wiped off the ground. The entire nutmeg crop was gone, including quite a few mature trees, so the country had no income. Mitchell stopped paying the Taiwanese back, without apparently clearing it with them first. And in 2005, Mitchell switched allegiance to the People's Republic of China. I don't know this for sure, but I think he thought he could pay off the Taiwanese with Chinese money. Well of course, the Chinese were not going to let him use their money to pay Taiwan. Mitchell was the one who stopped the payments, and was castigated by the NDC for it, but the NDC did not start the payments up again when it took over in 2008. Taiwan two or three times has gone to court several times in the United States against Grenada and won every time. In 2011, the government of Taiwan began garnishing income from the airport, practically strangling trade with Grenada. That stopped for a while but I heard in 2012 that they likely would start up again because Grenada still was not paying its bills. Why Mitchell originally signed an agreement with Taiwan giving up Grenadian sovereignty, I do not understand, but he did and now the country is suffering for it.

China must have promised the sun, the moon and the stars in 2004, though according to Mitchell himself, they did not actually deliver everything they promised; the United States was the only country to fully deliver all of the assistance it promised – all $46 million worth. Instead, the PRC imported 600 Chinese workers to work on several projects. The projects the Chinese started with were not things the Grenadians needed most, like houses and health clinics and schools. Rather, they were big showy projects, such as a new cricket stadium. Eventually yes, a cricket stadium would be a nice thing to have, to replace the Trinidadian-built stadium which collapsed due to watered down cement. But not while there were still 20% of existing homes with unfixed hurricane damage and an unknown percentage of homeless. They also built a Chinese restaurant which was quite nice but closed rather quickly in a dispute over who would pay the water bill: the hotel next door or the restaurant owners. With these projects completed, it would have been natural for the Chinese laborers to move on, but they didn't. Someone, I think the Chinese embassy since one worker told me the embassy kept his passport, began offering their services for private construction projects as well as government transportation projects. They were cheaper than Grenadians and worked harder which appealed to some developers. But this action, condoned or at least ignored by the government, pushed Grenadians out of work at time when unemployment was already very high at around 23% of the workforce. The Chinese did not train Grenadians to work more efficiently/effectively, which would have been constructive assistance. The projects struck me as a PRC jobs program for its population more than assistance for Grenada. The projects were instrumental in establishing Chinese populations in the Caribbean beholden to the PRC, in strategic areas with few indigenous Chinese because they were

not destinations for prior migrations, unlike the coastal countries in South America where Chinese migrants flowed in in the 1800's and 1900's.

Practically the entire Grenadian government traveled to China on the Chinese renminbi at least once if not more often. The PRC offered scholarships for Grenadian students to study in Chinese universities. By 2009, there were 23 Grenadians in schools around China. There was a training program for journalists which I thought was rather interesting since China is not exactly the epitome of free speech nor does it allow a free and unfettered press. It seemed that everyone in the foreign ministry was studying Chinese. The PRC provided several doctors to the hospital though that was a mixed blessing. I was told by one local doctor that there were two Chinese doctors in the radiology unit of the General Hospital but since they did not speak English, they were not very helpful.

And that is how the PRC works to keep countries in their camp. The downside is that they bring workers in who never leave. China thinks strategically. They are establishing populations around the world in countries where people of Chinese descent are either absent or few. The Caribbean's small Chinese population of long-standing is being augmented in a very short period of time by the PRC in the countries that recognize it. 8,000 workers went into the Bahamas. Trinidad had two or three thousand, in camps. The Trinidadians actually helped push them back into camps when they broke out and rallied to protest their living and working conditions.

In Grenada the PRC migrants were forced to live on the construction sites and to plant gardens to grow their own food; they were not allowed out on their own and most spoke no English. At one private development, an apartment building going up below the official U.S. residence, when the work was turned over to the Chinese (the owner chortled that he got the labor at a great bargain), the workers were forced to live on the building's roof. They draped plastic over wire to create lean-tos on the flat roofs with no bathrooms and no real shelter from the constant sea breeze. My neighbor complained bitterly until they were forced to move the workers out because she had a four year old son who starting asking about what he was seeing them doing: bathing, cooking, and peeing in full view. Grenadians complained that the Chinese did not fraternize with the locals but did not seem to understand that that was because the Chinese government maintained tight control over their lives. So there were human rights and labor practice abuses by both sides. The Chinese are creating a presence in the Caribbean for the long haul. They are not getting anything other than recognition from Grenada since the country does not produce anything China needs. This is not Africa; it is not South America. There are no raw materials. What the Chinese get is a foot print in a region where they were until now underrepresented.

Q: Well it has at least the potential for what about that airfield. Was it ever finished?

McISAAC: Yes, the United States completed the airport and runway at Point Salines shortly after the 1983 intervention. Grenada has the longest and sturdiest runway in the Caribbean. The runway was built to accommodate the United States' largest transport plane, the C-5.

Q: How about the Cubans? Were they mucking around there?

McISAAC: The Cubans are still there. The Cuban ambassador while I was there was a real piece of work. Shortly after I arrived, I attended the 2006 throne speech in Parliament. The MFA rep led me down the front row, introducing me to everyone – there were a lot of honorary consuls. There were only four professional diplomatic services resident in Grenada: the United States, Cuba, Venezuela, and the PRC. The Brazilians showed up later. Anyway, I walked down the aisle, greeting everyone and shaking hands. When I reached the Cuban ambassador, she folded her arms across her chest and turned away sharply. I tried not to react, but it was kind of funny. Her husband, who was the Cuban's deputy chief of mission, actually said hello very softly to me when her head was turned away. She didn't want anything to do with the United States and was given to long anti-American, anti-capitalist diatribes on the radio. There were Cuban doctors in the country. The Grenadian government declined to tell me how many. My best guess from talking to people in health care was that there about 20 spread around the three islands of Grenada. They were a bit hard to see because there is a small but not insignificant population in Grenada of Cuban exiles, who for whatever reason did not make it to Spain or the United States, or did not want to. The Cuban embassy keeps an eye on them though unlike the doctors, has no official hold over them.

Q: I would have thought this would have been great ground for Chávez to play games.

McISAAC: Of course, he certainly tried. But as I've said before, Chávez was not a strategic thinker in the way the Chinese are. Strategy to Chávez was all about keeping himself in power and extending his influence, but less about long-term Venezuelan interests. The Venezuelan ambassador in Grenada when I arrived was one of the older generation, in other words, a real diplomat. She had been left in Grenada for over eight years, basically ignored by the Chávez government. Much of Venezuela's professional diplomatic corps was undermined by Chávez. She was finally replaced in 2008, and encouraged to retire. A new ambassador, from the Chávez camp, arrived around that time. He was less open to engagement, though I developed a good relationship with one of his minions, also not a professional diplomat.

Chávez, like everyone else, tried to buy the Caribbean with minimal effort. He tried using gas diplomacy with several unsuccessful programs before finally coming up with Petrocaribe. Petrocaribe was the successor to the San Jose Accords which was the successor to the Caracas Accords, all focused on the Caribbean countries. There were only two companies providing gasoline and cooking gas to the eastern Caribbean since none of the countries required a full tanker or even a full small coastal tanker. Sol, out of Barbados, bought the Shell franchise and sold Shell products. Texaco was bought by Chevron but still used the Texaco name. PetroCaribe required each government to set up a PetroCaribe committee. The committee was meant to determine who would get the gasoline. The problem for Grenada was that even though there was a committee established, there was only one producer of electricity on the island, Grenlec, a private subsidiary of an American company, and the only company capable of receiving the gas.

Sol did not propose to give up its position. Grenlec canceled its contract with Texaco, agreeing to take the Venezuelan gas. However, delivery was not always reliable. Shortly after Grenada signed up, the gas did not arrive. The company was down to one or two days of fuel and finally had to go back to Texaco and purchase the fuel on the market, which was quite expensive. Venezuelan officials arrived en masse afterward, apologizing profusely and promising the oversight would never happen again, etc., though there were other tense moments. Chávez's government was not a reliable partner.

Chávez also tried to develop hemispheric organizations to rival the OAS (Organization of American States) and the international financial institutions, with some success. Among these was the Bolivarian Alliance for Our America (ALBA). Grenada never joined though the NDC government flirted with the idea. Peter David popped up in Caracas during one ALBA session when he was Grenada's Foreign Minister. PM Tillman Thomas declined to sign the country up as he did not see any benefit to Grenada from membership. One of ALBA's requirements was that member countries sever ties to outsiders, namely to the United States. Several of the other eastern Caribbean countries joined, telling U.S. diplomats privately that they would not cut ties with us, as usual trying to have it both ways. Venezuela did not punish them for the decidedly two-faced behavior. I assume if he really was serious he would have thrown them out. The real problem for Chávez was that he had lots of ideas and would start something but then would not pay enough attention to follow through. Despite the pressure of his ministers, Thomas was very firm. He had a very clear picture of right and wrong, of what his authority should be, and he did not like what the organization represented.

Q: What about the medical school? Was this much of a factor or was it still there?

McISAAC: St. George's University (SGU) is still very much there and thriving. It is the largest single employer in the country, with over 800 local employees at all levels, including teaching. Charles Modica founded the school in 1974 and SGU has filled a great need for local and regional students in addition to U.S. students. I understand that he would like to sell the operation. Unfortunately, in the U.S., we don't give it enough credit, the knee-jerk snobbish dismissal of offshore medical education. The school has developed in ways unforeseen in 1974 when it was founded. In the early 1990's, SGU established an undergraduate program primarily for Grenadians. Over the years, around $7 million in scholarships has been provided to the local population. An issue of concern to the professors is that while Grenadians are very proud of their education system, it is not very good. The school estimates it spends from six months to a year bringing Grenada's high school graduates to university level capability. The program is a success and many Grenadians have graduated from SGU. The SGU administration developed a graduate program in business administration and several other areas. A few years ago, a nursing program was stood up. The school is not standing still. SGU undergraduate students are entering and graduating from the medical school. In addition, there are students from around the Caribbean as well as from other parts of the world studying at the school. The veterinary school was started in 1998 and draws students from the U.S. and around the world. The school remains private, with around 5000 students; fewer than half are from the United States.

SGU is as I said the largest single employer in Grenada. In addition to administrative employees, many of the professors at the undergraduate and graduate schools are from the Caribbean islands, e.g., St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, even from Grenada. The medical school professors come from around the world, including the United States, India, the United Kingdom, Germany, and South Africa. The WINDREF Research Institute connected to the university is run by a South African professor.

GAO visited Grenada when I was there. They were directed to determine whether or not students who study medicine abroad are less competent physicians than people who study in schools in the United States, including whether they suffer more law suits and so on. Grenada was one of the countries chosen; others were in Europe and elsewhere. The results of the study showed that there was no effective difference in performance.

Q: Was there a port? I mean was there any place where ships could come in and bring tourists?

McISAAC: Of course. This is a set of islands that was home to pirates. The port of St. George is large (relatively) enough to handle cruise ships. In fact, that is the way most Americans who see Grenada get there, as tourists on the cruise ships. After Hurricane Ivan the Grenadians built a long jetty for cruise ships to tie up to. I was told by a British naval officer that boats can be smashed against the jetty because of the particular way the tide rolls in. When the water is too rough, the largest boats sit offshore and ferry passengers in and out by launch. The original port is in a natural lagoon to one side of the Carenage, the old center of town where the fishing boats tie up. Mid-sized cruise ships can enter the lagoon but are limited to two at a time. Container ships use this wharf to offload. With the new jetty, more cruise ships can tie up. It's a pretty amazing sight. Those ships are so large, you can stand at the top of the hill overlooking the town and be looking at the sides of the ships.

Q: I mean to my mind it sounds like some of these islands are tipped to one side or something.

McISAAC: Yes, it would be bad. But the cruise ships do come to port. They do not stay overnight, rather stay for about eight hours and leave before dark to cruise on to the next island.

Q: Did we have any port visits?

McISAAC: There were several. There were several U.S. Coast Guard cutters and in 2008, the USS Grasp came in. The Grasp is a combination U.S. Navy and Merchant Marine recovery ship. The boat was in the area to do training with each of the small island nations and we were the final stop.

For the first ship visit, in early 2007, I received a message that there was a coast guard cutter in the vicinity and they wanted to take R&R somewhere and asked if we were

willing to host them in Grenada. My response was yes, of course. At that point, I reached out to Barbados since they had a MilGroup office there, including several coast guard officers and asked for help. Their response was that they would not assist. My response was, "Excuse me?" Every other post I have been assigned where there were port visits, the defense attaché and/or the MilGroup were heavily engaged. But not Barbados. So I and my four employees (before I had filled the fifth position) handled the ship visits on our own. Having never been in charge of such a visit it was an experiment and I spent a lot of time trying to anticipate needs. We had excellent cooperation from the Grenadian government and our local employees were excellent organizers, so we were all set. About a week before the scheduled arrival, the boat's captain started to get cold feet because no Coast Guard vessel had visited Grenada in many years. He wasn't sure about the harbor. Is it OK? Can our boat fit? We remained calm, responding to every query with as many specifics as we could give to reassure him that things would be all right. We went back and forth for several days. The ship's crew wanted R&R, not work since they had been underway for several months without shore leave. All I asked was to have several officers available to lunch with local law enforcement representatives and perhaps a ship visit for a small group. Other than that, they could have all the R&R they wanted.

We negotiated with the government to make provision for crew members walking in and out of the port through a pedestrian gate that normally was closed after hours and on weekends. Grenada had finally that year complied with international port security requirements and we did not want to undermine their efforts. We found an appropriate husbanding agent that the Coast Guard was happy with to re-provision the ship and to make arrangements for taxis/buses to provide transportation as needed to the crew. Grenada's husbanding agents are incredibly professional, far better than in other places I have worked.

Q: Husbanding means?

McISAAC: The husbanding agent is the company that takes care of the all the pier-side needs of a ship in port, arranging for food, fuel, local security, as well as liaison with the local dock workers to tie up and cast off, basically the care and feeding of the boat itself.

I invited a group of local law enforcement to lunch at one of the local resorts with one of the better restaurants. We also arranged a tour for the diplomatic corps which went well, though not as many came as I had hoped. The Chinese showed up in force, though. About 15 Chinese diplomats with spouses and children arrived in one group, with cameras. They kept asked if it was ok to take pictures and seemed amazed that we would actually let them do so. Of course, anything classified was locked up and hidden away during the tours. I suppose they would not allow us such free access to their own ships. The visit went really well from my perspective. The ship was in port for three days and shortly after they left one of the U.S. Coast Guard officers in Barbados forwarded to me a copy of an all ships message the captain blasted out even before they cleared port, telling everyone they had to visit Grenada. And they did come. We had two more U.S. Coast Guard ships visit during my three years. These visits were productive since we could show the flag in a very visceral way. There were also productive results: one of the boats

was steaming away when it was called back to intercept a drug ship running out of Venezuela. They snared a substantial amount of cocaine on that run. If they had not stopped in Grenada, they would have been much further north when the call came in. On subsequent visits, we offered tours to local townspeople and to student groups. There had been Venezuelan and British military ships in port more recently so it was a big deal that the U.S. finally showed up. And it was fun. Even though I had never run a whole ships visit on my own. Now I have.

Q: How did you find operating there as being sort of this amorphous not chief of mission but chief, whatever you want to call it?

McISAAC: There were some comic moments and some infuriating moments. Mostly, I decided that I was not going to sit on my hands for two years. My predecessor, who was an interim chief of mission for 6 months, rode his bike all over the island and from all reports was fairly invisible. The person who was assigned to Grenada in 2003 Jeannette Davis, was run out of town by Embassy Barbados during the messy period following Hurricane Ivan in September 2004. I have heard several different stories about what happened and cannot speak to the details, but she and her mother, who is her dependent and travels with her, spent the hurricane in a closet at the residence. Her phone line remained open afterwards and she allowed American citizens to use it to call out, until someone cut it while clearing Lance aux Epines road. She also put up the visiting OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance) team when they arrived. According to the administrative desk officer for the post when it happened, the consular chief in Barbados arrived in Grenada and announced he was in charge of everything and pushed Davis aside. I don't know the truth of it all, but would not be surprised. She was asked to leave post.

I decided I was not going to be an invisible presence. I was fortunate in that I knew the Deputy Chief of Mission in Barbados at the time, Mary Ellen Gilroy, having worked for her before. We only overlapped for six or seven months, but it meant I had somebody sympathetic I could bounce ideas off of. I also developed a good relationship with the public affairs officer, Julie O'Reagan which meant we were included on the schedules of speakers and other experts, e.g., librarian, cycling through the region. The political side of the house was less helpful as also were the consular and the military. I politely but firmly made it clear that I hoped to have a good relationship with everyone, but needed to have only one point of contact, which was the DCM and through her to the Ambassador who was a political appointee. There was a bit of perhaps jealousy or at least snide comments that I could not do certain things, that they were the ambassador's job. Which was true, but I was also the Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., (CDA) and therefore acting in the ambassador's place. The problem was that it was an 02 position and in the bid list called principal officer, but in fact I was CDA full time as the Ambassador visited only about once a quarter. She had seven countries to cover in total and Grenada was not the most important. It is a weird little setup – there's only one other in the world, in Apia, Samoa – but it actually provides better coverage by having someone on the ground than we give in the other five eastern Caribbean countries which are covered by periodic visits out of Barbados

I arrived at post on September 9, 2006, later than my original arrival date of June 30 because Meg said the embassy wanted to change houses; they were fed up with the landlord. As far as I can tell, they did not look very hard, it was the summer transfer season so no one followed through and when I arrived in September, I went into the old house. However, during the extra time, the embassy forcibly retired one local employee and fired another, a 40 percent reduction in force. They did not get rid of the one person they should have, who was causing trouble with everyone, the political FSN. The workload was neither reduced nor reorganized to reflect the new reality.

I was not unhappy that they forced the consular FSN to retire. She had been there for 25 years terrorizing all of the principal officers and appeared to have been adjudicating passports. When I first saw the consular section I almost sat down and cried. I spent the first six months working seven days a week trying to bring the consular section into order. I asked for help from CA. They delayed even though I described in detail what I found, hundreds if not thousands of copies of passport applications strewn all over the open space that was the consulate. Nothing was locked up. There were official seals in the FSN's offices. I found stacks of blank passport books on shelves and in the unlocked filing cabinets. I did not know that fraud was involved but wanted someone from CA to come help me evaluate what I found. I also requested the American Citizens Services (ACS) computer software, ACS+, to bring the services up to date. In addition I analyzed personnel and work requirements, drafting new job descriptions for the three remaining staff members. I requested and ultimately received permission to hire back the fired FSN part time.

Mind you, I also had a non-working dryer at the house. The washing machine sort of worked. Fortunately, I wear a lot of cotton and linen which is easily washed in the sink and air dried. Towels, however, do not dry well on a clothes line in a humid climate. Barbados GSO refused to send over any washer or dryer for me from their warehouse, nor would they authorize us to buy them in Grenada. The landlord denied anything was wrong and kept sending someone over to "fix it". When I told her the dryer still didn't work, that there was no heat, she expressed surprise and said, "But the barrel goes around." She and her husband tried very hard to avoid fixing anything in the house; they used the money from the rental to buy two new VW Passats (which are even more expensive in Grenada than in the United States) and built themselves a new house twice the size of the residence, right next door.

I had been in country about seven months before the Administrative Counselor in Barbados, Dean Wood, came over for a visit. Our local GSO employee took him on a tour of the facilities. Wood noted that the washer and dryer at the residence did not work and then asked what the problem was. I swallowed hard before responding that Embassy Barbados had denied our request to purchase new locally and had also declined to send any over from Barbados' warehouse. I pointed out that the last time someone came to fix the washing machine, we were told that the bottom was rusted almost through and it was only a matter of time before the bottom fell out; in addition, the dryer barrel went around but there was no heat. Wood agreed that was wrong and returned to Barbados. About a

month later I was told I could buy a washer and dryer locally but for that month I could not employ the part-time person.

That response was just one example of the pettiness we dealt with. We sent bills to Embassy Barbados because the BNF officer had to approve all purchases, and the local employees put them at the bottom of the pile until I called up and asked the officer about them. Since we had to request permission to purchase beforehand above a certain amount, there should have been no delay in payment. But we were forever late because the Barbados office kept pushing our stuff back to the bottom of their piles. Most of Grenada's businesses were the cash and carry only. There were very few places we could use the procurement credit card which would have streamlined the process. We were forever fielding complaints from local businesses about late payment, as once Barbados finally completed and filed the paperwork, Charleston had to issue the checks.

Grenada had no public affairs budget of its own, relying on Barbados' public affairs officer (PAO) for programming. The first PAO I dealt with, Julie O'Reagan, was fantastic. She would work with me to figure out what we could do if they had the money or materials. She included Grenada on the speakers' schedules and she supplied us with lots of books for libraries and schools. She left post in summer 2007. Her replacement was a guy who didn't want to know. He kept the PA budget for Barbados and the ambassador. He mostly used it in Barbados and in St. Lucia, a country which was favored by Embassy Barbados for reasons that remain obscure to me. There was a constant tug of war as he declined to use his budget in Grenada. There was this constant beating your head against a wall of you don't exist, I don't like/want you there. It was a tremendous challenge.

Q: Well did the Ambassador Ourisman, was she part of the problem or oblivious or what?

McISAAC: More oblivious of the day-to-day struggles of managing a post because the people around her were uninterested and did not keep her informed. Once I finally convinced Dean Wooden to come to Grenada and he met people and he got to know the local employees it was suddenly oh we can do this. He began to help us. He also kept the ambassador informed in a way that previous management counselors had not. Unfortunately, he bored in Barbados and volunteered to go back to Iraq. He left post just as he was beginning to help us function better. But before he left I did get permission to hire back full time the person who had been laid off. She came back as administrative assistant and took up the slack in several other areas as well.

The division of labor when the group was cut to three positions was one person doing GSO, Personnel/Human Resources, as well as being the official driver. The second person who had been the computer person had to take on financial management and consular duties in addition to IT.

Then there was the political/economic local employee. The senior FSN had a difficult personality. Her family was very engaged in local politics and there was great potential

for conflict of interest and at least the appearance of impropriety. She refused to do anything but her one little piece though I tried to engage her in public affairs issues in addition to the political/economic arena. She refused to learn how to use the camera. I spent most of the three years just trying to move her into a more productive frame of mind.

The others were all very professional. They were overworked but they did what was asked of them. I nominated one for the FSN of the year award, though he didn't get it; hard to compete with Afghanistan and Iraq. I also convinced Barbados to sign off on other smaller rewards, which I hope helped.

The other big management project I managed with the ample assistance of the HR regional officer (HRO) in Florida was to win the Grenada FSN's long overdue raises. Grenada was on a different salary schedule than Barbados and so no one had done a salary survey in many years. The HRO and I convinced the Washington office (HR/OA) handles the surveys to visit Grenada to update the survey. It was not easy as there were not many comparators in the country that could be used. However, the person who came down was willing to work with what we could find for her. In addition, for the first time in a very long time, the Department noticed that the Peace Corps FSN was even further behind than the State employees and the HR/OA officer was willing to work with Peace Corps in Washington to bring that employee up to scale. The whole thing took nearly a year but in the end all of our local employees received raises and the Peace Corps FSN was brought into the Grenada embassy scale (where she should have been all along) with what amounted to a nearly $7,000 raise. We were less successful in trying to fix their health insurance, but that battle was ongoing when I left.

By the third year, my petition for a fifth position (CA pulled the consular position as soon as that employee had been retired so it was an all-new position) as a junior GSO to try to take some of the pressure off the senior GSO, was approved. That seems to have worked. The embassy still employs five locals.

But it was a constant battle to be recognized as having the authority to function while not stepping on any delicate toes in the process. There was a tug of war over everything, including the accountability statement required from every chief of mission every summer. When I received notice from the EX office in Washington that it was due and asked Barbados about it I was told I need not worry about it, that Embassy Barbados would submit one statement, including Grenada. I should have asked Washington about the idea but trusted that Barbados would not mislead me. Well, I was wrong. The WHA Assistant Secretary's office chewed me out because I had not properly completed and sent in Grenada's chief of mission accountability statement. I scrambled that first year and came up with a draft that was acceptable to Washington and sent it to Barbados to complete one paragraph on their oversight. So on the one hand, I was being told "you are only a principal officer" and on the other hand, I was told I was chief of mission. WHA/EX instructed me I was to complete the statement or they would leave me to the tender mercies of the Department's lawyers. So for the following two years, I simply completed the statement, asking for Barbados' input, making clear that I was going to

submit it on time. The new DCM, Brent Hardt, did not like the arrangement very much. Whenever a question on management responsibility came up after that, I followed the Department's instructions not Barbados'.

Hardt, who went from Barbados to Guyana as ambassador, had a seemingly charmed career, from the Caribbean to London, the Vatican, and then back to the Caribbean. I was less than impressed, however, when he declined to talk to the Grenada local employees after he arrived. Gilroy started a weekly phone call to Grenada during the gap between American officers in Grenada that included heads of sections in Barbados with the local employees in Grenada to keep a handle on what was happening and so they would not be completely isolated.

Hardt arrived at post in May 2008. There was a DCM problem, with one asked to leave, followed by a series of interim DCMs. When I arrived at post there was brand new DVC equipment (I don't remember what that stands for) for teleconferencing sitting in boxes in the common area on the second floor of the building. Although Grenada's computer FSN could have put it together with no problem, there was a note on it that only an American officer could set it up. I spent about six months convincing Barbados to send the IT officer over – he was supposed to visit four times each year but we were lucky to get him twice a year since Barbados did not want to spend the travel money – to set it up. Finally, he came and did that, among other tasks. Once we were online, we started teleconferencing with Barbados every so often. Barbados announced Hardt was meeting with Barbados' local employees, so I asked whether we could teleconference our employees in. That idea was rejected. I asked if he would do a teleconference or a phone call with the locals and was also refused. His response when I asked was, "why should I do that?" Nor did he visit Grenada for some time. I was not happy but there was nothing I could do.

Q: What were the problems with the DCM?

McISAAC: Anthony Fisher arrived as DCM in September 2007. Gilroy finished her three years and left that summer. Fisher was a very nice guy. Shortly before Fisher showed up, a new management counselor arrived at post, Phillip DuBois. As we all know, the Department can do some pretty dumb things. Assigning DuBois to Barbados was one of them. He had been a Foreign Service national in Barbados. He went to the United States on a special visa and became a U.S. citizen. He then joined the Foreign Service as an officer and in 2007 was assigned as management counselor in Barbados.

Housing committees are some of the worst places to work because everybody is really tense about the housing. DuBois arranged some sort of deal for himself on a local house which was better with more space than the available housing in the pool. One of the members of the housing committee objected and took her complaint to the RSO. She claimed the deal was shady. I don't know that it was. I don't know any of the actual details of the house or how DuBois arranged the deal, but the perception was not good. I found out about it because Anthony called me to complain that I had counseled our senior FSN, Sherron Roberts, and she complained to DuBois. Roberts started fights with the

other employees, usually not in front of me. Each of the other FSN's complained to me about her behavior and so I sat her down to talk about it. I discovered by accident that she provided privileged information to her brother Vincent. In addition, she was telling anyone who would listen that she was running the embassy and that I did nothing at all; which, of course, many people were quite anxious to be sure I knew. I scheduled the session during an RSO visit from Barbados for him to act as a witness. The RSO's last name was Starnes, I do not remember his first name. Everything was put in writing as required by the FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual). Roberts then cursed me steadily for almost 20 minutes, calling me all sorts of names; I was pretty shaken by the end. The RSO was not particularly nice to her, which I regretted but they had a negative history I was unaware of until that meeting.

At any rate, Fisher called me to warn me off doing anything to Roberts. I explained my reasons for counseling her, including the severe disruption within the embassy that her fights created, which he agreed was a problem. He did not know the details of the issue and had been told I was picking on her without cause. He was not interested in hearing the truth of the matter, rather seemed to want someone to talk to. He began telling me about the problems within his own embassy. There was no reason that he should have been telling me any of it, but I think he genuinely did not know what to do or where to go. Fisher called DuBois his friend and complained that officers in the embassy were saying nasty things about him. The RSO apparently opened an investigation of the incident, and Fisher was furious, insisting that the RSO did not have the right to go to Washington without going through him. I tried to explain to him that while the RSO should keep the DCM informed, the DCM did not have the authority to stop him. I suggested that he talk to Washington, to the Office of Caribbean Affairs or to someone in HR to help him navigate the situation. That was the last I heard of it for a while until out of the blue, I was called by Velia DePirro, the Office Director of the Office of Caribbean Affairs. She asked if I had heard anything from Fisher. I told her what he told me and she sighed and said well he didn't talk to anyone in Washington until the issue was raised with Ambassador Ourisman. Now the Ambassador wanted to issue a "no confidence" cable on Fisher to remove him from post. Turned out that she and the RSO were close. The RSO wanted to investigate not only DuBois, but also Fisher because the latter objected to the RSO's investigation of DuBois and the house deal. DuBois threw Fisher under the bus at this point by stating that Fisher supported him against the Ambassador. DuBois filed a grievance against the ambassador and ordered those under his authority – all of the management staff – to refuse to attend meetings chaired by Ourisman. My understanding was that the embassy was in two armed camps. After filing the grievance, DuBois volunteered to go to Iraq. At that point, with DuBois gone, the sole focus for Ourisman's ire was Anthony Fisher, the DCM. Fisher did leave post very soon afterwards. I don't know whether a no confidence cable was sent. After he left Barbados, Fisher looked hard for another job but ultimately was forced to retire. I heard from him one more time but nothing since.

The entire incident was unfortunate because Fisher in addition to being a really nice person was also a good officer. He had the calm, competent personality that Barbados really needed, especially with a political ambassador. What he did not count on I guess is

that at that level there are no such thing as friends. There are colleagues. He was used by DuBois who he counted as a friend and cast aside as soon as Dubois got himself squared away. Fisher was left to fend for himself. It certainly was not a fair fight. From about October/November through May, there were three different interim DCMs.

Q: Well looking at the time this is probably a good place to stop. Is there anything more we should talk about in Grenada or should we go on?

McISAAC: I don't know unless there are things you want to ask.

Q: I am thinking about it. We can always fill in. You will get a copy of this. What happened then? You left there when?

McISAAC: I left Grenada in July of 2009. I pushed my time of arrival in the office I was going to – Caribbean Affairs – as far as I could but even with that, in order to take the required 25 days of home leave, I had to leave by the end of July. My successor, Bernard something (I don't remember his last name) to Grenada declined to engage, did not respond to e-mails, nor show any interest in the position once he was assigned. When the list came out, I sent him an e-mail congratulating him and letting him know some of the things he needed to think about in advance, including the requirement to get consular training and take the DCM course. But not a peep. Eventually, around May, out of the blue he announced he wasn't going to show up in Grenada until November. I tried to work with Hardt in Barbados and CAR in Washington to either have me stay longer, have Barbados provide coverage, or get the new guy to arrive earlier. Hardt refused to discuss the issue at all, CAR stuck to its guns, and after that one bleat, Bernie did not answer any queries. Eventually, I threw up my hands, told Washington I would arrive at the end of August, and began the process of setting up travel, pack out, and all the other myriad of arrangements required to depart from a post. Barbados seemed surprised when in June, I reminded them that I was setting up one last July 4th celebration and by the end of July I would be gone. I reminded Barbados and Washington that they needed to ensure some type of coverage for Grenada, that the last time there was an extended gap between officers there were difficulties between the local employees and Barbados and among the local employees themselves. The gap would also close the consulate with all passport issuances and citizen services cases having to be handled by the Barbados consulate, which was always claiming it was far too overworked with the caseload it had. No one would discuss it with me. It wasn't until I was back in Washington when I did in fact leave and Bernie was not arriving for nearly another four months that Barbados woke up. I imagine the consulate realized they would have to handle all the American issues from Barbados, leading to complaints about having to travel by Americans used to dropping into Embassy Grenada. Because Barbados did not request help from Washington in the spring when I first suggested it, Embassy Barbados had to provide the manpower. Someone from Barbados traveled to Grenada for two weeks at a time, with rotations among Barbados staff.

Q: So anyway what did you do?

McISAAC: I came back here. I decided since I was going to have to retire, that it would be easier to do so working in DC than from overseas. I saw too many people have things go haywire in the process. I originally thought I had to retire in 2011 because that was 27 years from when I entered and my PAR (the personnel record) had that year listed on it for many years. Time in service when I started in 1984 was 30 years but in the 1990's to save money, the Department reduced that to 27 years, which I always thought was an unfair and arbitrary decision.

In 2010, I spoke with my immediate boss in CAR, Henry Rector, about retirement. He suggested I contact the human resources office that dealt with that number to confirm the date. Turned out that I was given an extra year. Sometime after mid-2009 when I last looked at my PAR while bidding on jobs and 2010 when I contacted the HR office, the Department discovered or remembered that I went to 9-month Russian training in 1990 – 1991. Long-term language training does not count towards the time in service calculation, so I acquired an additional year. I returned to Washington as the Trinidad, Barbados, and Eastern Caribbean desk officer. When I learned I had an extra year, I extended in the position for one year up to retirement. Finding a one year position in Washington these days is not easy, especially in the middle ranks.

Q: OK so we will pick it up once again and cover that period. Great.

Today is 21 March 2013 with Karen Jo McIsaac. Is this the first day of spring or not?

McISAAC: I think that was yesterday.

Q: Ok, you left Grenada. Whither?

McISAAC: Still in Grenada. The period of rotating DCMs meant the functioning of the embassies was a bit rocky. I tried mostly to keep my head down. Retired Ambassador Oliver P. Garza was one of the interim DCM's. He was the only one who took any interest in Grenada. I spoke with him several times though he never visited. His comment on the Fisher-DuBois fiasco was that the RSO suffered from "an excess of testosterone" and pushed the ambassador too far so that by the time that Washington was truly paying attention to what was happening, it was too late to fix it. That was the best explanation I got from anybody.

During that period, U.S. policy and politics were focused elsewhere, to Afghanistan and Iraq and Asia. There was, as there usually is, a lot of pressure to go to where big things were happening. The policy makers, like all politicians, cannot seem to focus on more than one or two areas at a time, regardless of how much information the lower levels, the non-politicals, provide them. The period I worked at Embassy Grenada coincided with the push by the PRC into the Caribbean region. Unlike Africa, Latin America, South America, or Central America, the Caribbean countries with one possible exception really don't have anything to trade with the Chinese. Jamaica does have bauxite and I believe China may have purchased the bauxite mines that American company Alcoa closed down. Beyond that, the region does not have raw materials or any products that might

interest China as an import. A big part of the Chinese push into the region is to change countries' diplomatic recognition of Taiwan to recognizing the PRC as the "one" China. Recognition, however, is only a part of it. The Chinese are positioning themselves in the region, expanding their presence by importing large populations – the workers who arrive and then never leave – looking to the future. The Caribbeans, desperate for money, are not very choosy when it comes to partners. There is also the contrast of the Chinese treating them with dignity and the U.S.' inability to get any of the leaders a one-on-one meeting with President Obama.

Some U.S. politicians, particularly Republicans who were disappointed by the failed attempted coup d'état in the early 2000's, paid too much attention to Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, but mostly because he was noisy, trying hard to poke the U.S. in the eye at every opportunity. As I have said before, I did not think Chávez was the biggest threat. He was not a strategic thinker or rather his long-term strategy was to figure out how to stay in power for as long as possible. The irony is that despite his announcement that he would be in power through 2031, he was killed by cancer at such a young age.

The Chinese are far more strategic in their thinking than many Americans and certainly than the Venezuelans. They plan for a future in which they will expand their influence and control well beyond their own region. The Chinese believe this is their time, which I think is a little premature, but which informs their policy decisions. The Western Hemisphere is ripe for the picking as it feels ignored by the United States, whether that is really true. We could debate that proposition for months and never reach agreement with the Latins.

A Chinese company purchased the Panama Canal among other infrastructure purchases. Chinese companies, no matter what they try to tell us are not independent of the Chinese government. This raises many questions that I believe U.S. policy makers ignore at their peril. What does that mean for the U.S. in the longer term? Will we wake up in 20 or 25 years and have any friends in the Caribbean? What does that mean for votes in the United Nations on issues of importance to us, including human rights, Israel, and other issues? The only U.S. politician I have ever heard speak on the subject who actually seemed to understand the dynamics and potential for future conflict was Representative Eliot Engle from New York.

Engle visited Grenada in 2007 with a Congressional delegation or CODEL, right in the middle of the 2007 cricket World Cup being held in the Caribbean. Engle wanted to go to St. Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG) – he knew one of the ministers there – but insisted on flying milair (military aircraft), on a plane that was too large for the short runway at the SVG airport. The group wanted to land in Grenada and take a Liat (the local airline owned by several eastern Caribbean countries) flight to SVG, but given the World Cup schedule with matches in a number of the countries, there were no seats to be had and no planes to rent for love nor money. We tried hard to accommodate the CODEL's wishes with little success under the circumstances. Their military liaison was a twit who did not believe anything I told him. I discovered early in the planning stages that he was calling the same people about renting planes that my staff was and getting the same answers we

were. When I confronted him, he was unapologetic. He also contacted one small airline I told him was off limits because its safety record was so bad. Since he was not listening, I asked the RSO to warn him off, which the RSO did. As I told the RSO, I could just see the headline: “CODEL lost in crash of SVG plane on flight from Grenada to St. Vincent”. Fortunately, SVGAir, despite its reputation, was all booked up so we didn’t have to worry that the military liaison would book the CODEL. Eventually, it was clear even to the CODEL’s organizers that the group could not go to SVG so we were ordered to develop a visit in Grenada – for the day of the opening cricket match in Grenada when no one was available. Also a Saturday when it’s always difficult to find local politicians. We did wangle a meeting with Prime Minister Keith Mitchell at the cricket stadium during the match – against all rules of the cricket organizing committee and the international cricket association. I brought Ambassador Ourisman over for the visit. Arranging for hotel rooms was a nightmare because of cricket and also because the delegation decided it did not want to pay the cost of the most expensive hotel on the island, the only really high-class hotel, which because of its price still had rooms available. So the politicians were in one hotel and the staff members wound up staying at a different hotel. And while nothing is far from anything else in Grenada, it was a good ten minute drive between them, resulting in some unhappiness.

The CODEL arrived 12 hours late, at nearly midnight on the Thursday, because one of the members, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Leigh who was on another congressional delegation, arrived late at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland. If she was not on the trip, the CODEL would lose the military aircraft because they would have too few people to qualify. So they waited and so did we.

I asked for help from Barbados and was sent two local employees and a junior officer. The junior officer managed to insult all of the Grenada local employees in the first three hours on the ground. The two Barbados locals essentially watched the rest of us work and then when it was clear the CODEL was going to be late, they and our senior FSN went off to bed. The rest of us managed about eight hours of sleep in the 48 hour visit. When the CODEL finally arrived, it took another hour and a half to settle them into the hotel, though the facility was a stone’s throw from the airport. The rooms were not big enough, the transformer was too old, not enough M&Ms of the right colors in the control room, and on and on.

I was especially disappointed with the Democrats on the CODEL. There was one Republican staffer along to satisfy the “bipartisan” requirement. The Congress people were very rude to Ambassador Ourisman, a Republican appointee. They refused to speak with her and ignored her in meetings, even though she was the one “hosting” the visit. Maxine Waters’ husband, a former ambassador was openly contemptuous, although he was pretty evenhanded in his contempt for all of us and for much of the local population as well. Waters had not been properly briefed by her staff; she gave a speech at the one joint press conference they held that was geared to Central American issues, not Caribbean ones which left many scratching their heads. Engel’s wife was unwell the first day – the heat was horrendous at the time and she felt it. When she emerged from her room on Saturday, the atmosphere improved somewhat. It was very clear that she was

instrumental in all Engel's activities and how he behaved. I watched her closely because his manner had changed so dramatically. She nudged him at strategic points; she spoke with Ambassador Ourisman and pulled her into conversations the others excluded the ambassador from. She clearly is very politically astute. I was impressed.

Our one truly "oh, no" moment came when Waters on Friday afternoon demanded to meet with Bernard Coard, one of the Grenada 13, on the Saturday in prison. Coard's brother, who is resident in Waters' district, asked her to meet with Coard. I spoke directly with PM Mitchell as this was a very politically fraught appointment request. Mitchell laughed out loud and told me to contact the Superintendent of Prisons directly because he, Mitchell, was not going to touch the request. So I did. After a lot of hemming and hawing, the Superintendent agreed. I sent the junior officer along since he was the biggest guy I could find, over six feet and large. I told him to do as Waters asked at all times but to be vigilant. We did not know what she wanted and whether there would be some political outcome. The visiting area was wide open with visitors and prisoners wandering in and out. As it turned out, the prison visit went smoothly; the junior officer was told to wait outside of the room with the guards, so we don't know what was said. Coard passed over a list of demands but Waters never showed it to me and I chose not to push the issue. I do not recall hearing of any follow up later.

Despite all the potential pitfalls, the visit went well and after all the midnight bitching and moaning by the CODEL and their handlers, the group was quite complementary when they left for Trinidad and Tobago (TT). I provided the control officer in TT with some advance information about the group and their interests after she provided me with a copy of their schedule. I overheard Barbara Lee worry about a planned visit to a nature preserve; she wanted to know if there was some indoor place she could get tea as she did not like walking outside. The head's up helped the control officer arrange for tea for several of the group and smoothed what might have been an unfortunate hiccough at the very beginning of a several day visit.

Going back to China in the Caribbean, however, I confirmed that the Department really did not think through the long-term implications of Chinese activity in the region during a deputy chief of mission/chargé d'affaires conference for which we all trouped to Washington. Deputy Secretary John D. Negroponte spoke at one session, going on about how China was our new best friend and trading partner. I raised my hand and asked if there were any concerns about the fact that China was moving into the Caribbean in an aggressive way with overwhelming numbers. Grenada being one small example. The Chinese brought in 600 people to work on projects. They worked on government projects but they never left and were now competing with Grenadians for jobs. The PRC embassy retained control of the workers' passports so they were not free to move about or leave. Negroponte's response was interesting from several perspectives, first because it was clear as he fumbled around for something to say that he had never considered the issue and the second because he told me I did not know what I was talking about, trying to make me feel stupid. And of course there was a collective gasp from everyone in the room. You know how it feels when everyone around you withdraws and leaves you stuck out front, like they don't want to be contaminated by you? It was a telling moment,

making clear that U.S. policy makers really did not give much thought to the issue or the region. Several people, also from island embassies came to me afterward and said they had the same question and thanked me for asking it.

During a later session with a political appointee from the office of Strategic Policy Planning (SP), I asked the same question again. I figured in for a penny, in for a pound. He was more gracious than Negroponte had been. He admitted he had never considered the question. None of this resulted in any greater thought being given to the matter on the political level of course, as far as I could tell. Money blinds all, I guess, and trumps common sense.

In addition, many people in these countries still cling to their revolutionary past, whether active as in Grenada, or as wannabes in Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, where the political leaders pose as revolutionaries. Those who were revolutionaries in Grenada and elsewhere have a natural affinity with a communist country like the People's Republic of China. The Chinese are now players in the politics of these countries. In fact, there were lots of rumors that the National Democratic Party candidates received support from the PRC during the 2008 election campaign. Word was that the Chinese Communist Party, which the Chinese Embassy very seriously declared was not a government entity, paid for the NDC campaign literature and tee shirts. The losing New National Party leader, Keith Mitchell, complained bitterly to me that the Chinese had not provided him any support. There are still three eastern Caribbean countries that do not recognize the People's Republic of China, all the saints, although St. Lucia briefly toyed with the idea after its 2011 election resulted in a change of government. St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, and St. Kitts and Nevis still recognize Taiwan.

Q: Were you finding responsive Foreign Service people who had served in the Caribbean? Were they mentioning growing Chinese influence?

McISAAC: Yes. And as I said, several of my colleagues came up to me and said, "I am glad you asked that question. We see the same thing." WHA Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Charles Shapiro told me afterwards, "You know, that was a really good question." The political appointee from SP asked Shapiro if I knew what I was talking about. Shapiro said, "Yeah, she knows. She is down there. She understands the region." Shapiro told me he suggested that SP begin to think about the issue. I have never seen any evidence that the office did.

Q: No, but you started a certain thought process. These don't go away.

McISAAC: One can only hope. The issue remains a valid one but it will take some incident to bring it home to people in the United States. The politicians and Department hierarchy are just too busy with other things to pay attention. WHA even picks leaders for the Office of Caribbean Affairs based on their knowledge of South and Central America (and in one unfortunate case, of Africa) rather than of the Caribbean. Any progress will remain stymied as long as that willful blindness continues.

When the NDC won a majority in Grenada's 2008 election, the party decided it would honor Maurice Bishop by changing the name of the airport from Point Salines International Airport to the Maurice Bishop International Airport. The proposal was supposedly hush-hush and the public was not told. However, it became public knowledge in early 2009 when Peter David, then Foreign Minister, on a visit to Havana told the Castro's about the name change. The news hit Grenada to the consternation of a large number of people. First of all, the Foreign Minister told the Cubans without first informing Grenadians. Secondly, there was no discussion with the Grenadian population before making the decision. At the time I was not sure whether the announcement in Cuba was a trial balloon by the new government or whether David was trying to embarrass PM Tillman Thomas into making the change. For a short time, Thomas backed away from the proposal but then out of the blue, he announced that the name change would take place on Bishop's birthday, May 29.

The diplomatic corps was invited and I checked with Barbados to see if Hardt, by then Chargé d'Affaires following Ourisman's January 2009 departure. He declined so I invited several of the political officers to come over to assist in representing the United States. The affair was staged as a revolutionary rally. I do not know whether it was deliberate or not, but the government put the wrong time of arrival in the diplomatic corps' invitations. Even the Chinese were late as a result. When we showed up, we discovered that the rally was in full swing. There were revolutionary signs and banners and red this and red that. The way the stage was positioned it blocked the door through which we all had to enter to get to our seats. The speeches had already started and of course as we entered, everyone was staring at us and the television cameras followed the long walk to our seats. The Chinese ambassador arrived after I did, as did a number of the honorary consuls. The Cubans, one of whose vice presidents was at the event, were already seated. Our path cut across the front of the stage, right in front of the dais. It was embarrassing. People pointed and whispered, "She is late. She came late to this party." Though there were a number of honorary consuls walking in behind me. I attracted attention because some Grenadians were surprised the United States showed up at all.

I was seated behind Bishop's family, including his mother, and his son and daughter and former wife, the latter playing the grieving widow even though they were separated by the time of the revolution and the kids were raised in the United States. The event was fascinating to watch. The participants, about 150 to 200 in all, relived the glory days of the revolution, shouting slogans. I think a lot of that survives in part because they have never resolved the fratricide that led to the collapse of the revolution. The U.S. was a bit scattered in its approach to the revolution, not cutting them off but then entering when things went south. Several former revolutionaries expressed to me their bewilderment about U.S. actions, lamenting that we did not let Coard rebuild the revolution following the slaying of Bishop which they claimed was happening already, contrary to reports of what was going on in the days following the collapse of the government.

Q: This is the New Jewel movement. And that…

McISAAC: Is gone.

Q: That is gone so this is…

McISAAC: Some of the people participating had been part of the New Jewel Movement, and others were revolutionary sympathizers from different groups. Of course, there were some too young to have lived through the revolution. During the ceremony, there was a lot of call and response between the speakers and the crowd. Bishop's pregnant girlfriend who was at his side during the coup d'état and revolution was killed with him. Bishop's mother who must have been in her 90's also attended. She was seated in a stuffed armchair for her, lugged out onto the tarmac for the event. The emotions at the rally evinced a palpable longing for what was no more.

Esteban Lazo, a Cuban vice president, attended. He was elderly and looked a bit fragile, but he had a sense of humor. The microphones kept going on and off with lots of feedback. His speech was in Spanish and had to be translated. I think he realized that his audience wasn't going to sit there quietly for as long as it would have taken, especially with the stops and starts of the microphones, so he turned to the translator who had a pre-translated hard copy and said, "Just read it." He stood beside her the entire time she read the text, another twenty minutes.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines prime minister, Ralph Gonsalves gave a long and very beautifully written speech, which boiled down to a biography of Gonsalves as the Forrest Gump of revolutionary Caribbean. Gonsalves is a very gifted orator, using allusions to the Bible and to poetry. But ultimately, the entire thing was about how important he was and how he was in touch with all the Caribbean revolutionaries. When he referred to himself as the "last Caribbean revolutionary", I wanted to ask about the Castro brothers, but I kept my mouth shut, struggling to keep a straight face throughout. The TV cameras kept turning to focus in on me; I could see them out of the corner of my right eye. I had to keep a straight face even when the program veered into the truly weird, such as Gonsalves' speech and the Cuban dance troupe's slightly pornographic contribution. Most of the speakers ranted about the U.S. infidel. Finally, we even had a revolutionary wannabe in Dominica's Roosevelt Skerrit, who regretted being only nine years old during the Grenada revolution, but suggesting he had always been a revolutionary at heart.

At the reception afterward, I wandered around talking to anyone who would acknowledge me – and some did refuse. The true revolutionaries who thought the revolution was the answer to their dissatisfaction with the world do still resent the United States. Our actions in 1983 are seen to have destroyed the revolution even though Grenadians were destroying it themselves. The Grenada 13, especially Coard, have spent their years in prison pushing the view of the last days of the revolutionary government as destroyed by the United States, turning attention from their own actions killing each other. However, on top of that feeling from the true revolutionaries, another attitude is clear: You don't give us anything. You don't pay any attention to us.

Our current policies reinforce this hate-want feeling because we do not pay a lot of meaningful attention to the region. We did help Grenada after Hurricane Ivan to the tune

of $46 million, which is a lot of money. In fact, we are always the first to arrive after a natural disaster, but that is not the type of help these populations crave from the United States.

To the Grenadians it is a game of who gave me the most, most recently. They talk a lot about what the Chinese give them, though interestingly, beyond the showcase items like the cricket stadium, a lot of the assistance is not substantive. But it appeals to Grenadians' pride and sense of importance in the world. The Chinese treat them with the respect they crave and which they do not believe the United States government accords them. When the prime minister goes to China he gets a state visit. We can barely get them into the White House here. We were able to get PM Tillman Thomas at meeting with President Bush in 2003 because it was the tail end of his administration and he didn't have anybody else to talk to. That feeds the general perception that that we just do not care. The result is that we lose their support in a lot of ways. We need their support at the OAS; we need their support in the United Nations, and quite often we don't get it. Then of course high-level Washington comes screaming, demanding to know why the Grenadians did not vote with us. Well why should they? I mean yes logically you would think they are a democracy, they should want many of the same things. But if they are going to get a lot of attention from China and little to nothing from the United States, then they are going to vote with China. That is just common sense. Policy makers ignore that truth with the Caribbean to their peril. It is a truth those same policy makers understand with countries they think are important. Assuming that the Caribbeans do not understand the difference in treatment between themselves and those "important" countries is just willful stupidity among our elected and political class. Unfortunately, that attitude filters down to the lower levels who ape their superior officers.

Yet if the Caribbean votes as a bloc in the OAS they can stymie anything they want because together they are 15 votes. U.S. policy towards the Caribbean and that includes WHA, is really dismissive. To make matters worse, the fact that they have not been in for individual visits with Obama and when he has been in the region, their group meetings were perfunctory, rankles. Many in Grenada believe that white American officials are keeping Obama from them; they do not believe that a black president would not give them special status. And they resent the hell out of it.

When I left Grenada I went to the office of Caribbean affairs where I was the desk officer for Trinidad and Tobago and the Eastern Caribbean and Barbados. The dismissive attitude became even clearer to me when I was in Washington than out in the field. It even affects who is appointed director and deputy director of the Office of Caribbean Affairs. These were people with no experience in the Caribbean or even in countries related to the Caribbean. In one case it was Makila James from AF whose only connection was that her first tour was in Jamaica. Following her was someone whose name I don't remember but who was important to the South America part of the bureau, knew nothing about the Caribbean but the front office did not care. It wanted to reward the man for work in South America. The learning curve for these people is extremely high and undermines the effectiveness of the office in the fight for relevance and therefore, for resources. My experience in Washington confirmed the impression I had

from the field that those of us in the Caribbean were fighting a losing battle for policy oxygen. On top of the neglect from our own assistant secretary, for the entire time I was in CAR, the National Security Council wanted little to do with us. It's tough being an expert on a region that no one gives a damn about.

Going back to the Grenadians, while I was in CAR, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) never got its act together. The party had been in the opposition so long, they did not know how to govern, which admittedly is difficult to do if there is no money. They continued to flounder as a government. Mitchell, who won his own seat, was happy to sit back and watch them struggle.

Q: What was the role of Chávez at that time? I would think this would be chump change or something to give something to Grenada just to keep them happy.

McISAAC: Well he provided gasoline through PetroCaribe, at market cost but with a complicated system of allowing a portion of the payment to be set aside for assistance programs for the purchasing countries.

After Hurricane Ivan, the Venezuelans promised somewhere in the neighborhood of $30 million in assistance. Even when I left Grenada in 2009, Chávez had delivered less than $10 million. Follow through on promises is a real problem for the Venezuelans. And sometimes, as was the case with the few houses they did complete for Ivan survivors, the quality of construction was so bad that the houses were uninhabitable and due to a lack of infrastructure, nearly inaccessible up a very steep hill with no access road.

It bears repeating that PetroCaribe was not cheap gas. The recipients paid market rate, but with very long terms, very soft terms. This creates an added problem, something the United States learned from our PL 480 Title I food aid program (started in 1954). If there are very long loan terms for a commodity that is immediately consumed, the debt load increases very quickly. We are still working with countries around the world to pay off PL 480 debt, long after they received and consumed the assistance. The PetroCaribe members are building new mountains of debt and there are very real concerns about whether they will be able to pay it off. Venezuela is not a Paris Club country so debt to it cannot be written off in the normal fashion. We do not know whether Venezuela post-Chávez will let the countries off the hook if they cannot pay. Another reason to worry that paying off the debt may be difficult is that energy prices in the eastern Caribbean are heavily subsidized. Realistically, the prices should be allowed to rise, but fears of a backlash prevent the governments from acting.

Dominica in particular was a cautionary tale as it is one of the poorest of the eastern Caribbean countries (Grenada after Hurricane Ivan vied with it for that position). Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit is a wannabe revolutionary – he showed up at Grenada's airport renaming with a message of "me too," following Gonsalves' lead though he was too young for the Grenada revolution as he was born in 1972. He spoke about being too young but wanting to be part of it. Skerrit stiffed Ambassador Ourisman during her late 2008 farewell visit to Dominica, not bothering to show up. At that time, he was running

after Venezuela's Chávez. I do not know whether it was because he did not get a whole lot from Venezuela or simply the change in the United States from Republican George Bush to Democratic Barack Obama, but Skerrit changed his tune shortly after that and became available to Embassy Barbados and more cooperative with U.S. officials.

The real question now about Venezuela is whether Chávez's successors continue to pour money into these foreign ventures or curtail or end them. Many Venezuelans are not happy about the amounts of money spent abroad when there is so much need at home. Will PetroCaribe continue? I don't know the answer to that question.

Q: Well returning, how long were you dealing with Trinidad, Tobago and other islands?

McISAAC: I was the desk officer for three years. I left Grenada in the summer of 2009. I thought I was going to be in CAR for two years, and then I would reach my time in service in 2011 and retire. When I learned my retirement date was 2012, I extended in CAR. I knew the area and I knew the countries. I am a bit sorry I did as Makila James turned out to be a very difficult and vicious boss, but I stayed.

Q: Well what was happening in Trinidad and Tobago?

McISAAC: Among other things, the Chinese workers imported to work on a number of special projects, who were kept in fenced camps, got loose and tried to protest their treatment, ending up rioting when confronted by the police.

Q: Who was rioting?

McISAAC: The Chinese workers. Perhaps I should say demonstrating, though there were intimations of violence; not sure by which side. In Trinidad they were handled a bit differently from some of the other countries. Imported Chinese workers were forced to live on the work sites and even to grow their own food. In Grenada, the workers dug up the athletic field next to the cricket stadium they were building to plant. As far as I could tell, they were not paid much, if anything. The Trinbagonians assisted the Chinese to control the workers by confining them to camps. The conditions reportedly were bad. The workers protested and broke out of the camps and tried to march on Port of Spain. The Trinbagonians rounded them up and forced them back into the camps. The irony was of course that Trinbagonians prided themselves on being very progressive on human rights. But when it came to the Chinese, they saluted and jumped to comply with PRC wishes, no matter the political or moral cost.

While I was in Caribbean affairs, Trinidad and Tobago elected their first woman Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, which was a very big deal because the Caribbean is this odd mixture of the highly promiscuous and the incredibly conservative and puritanical. There is a lot of spousal and abuse as well as extensive teenage pregnancy. Persad-Bissessar is of Indian descent, represented a new willingness to reach out to others that the country's ethnically divided political parties used to eschew.

Around this time, the Trinbagonians decided to re-examine the attempted coup d'état in the early 1990's of a local Muslim group. The ring leaders were not prosecuted. The mastermind, Abu Bakr, is still alive but these days, he appears to be more a thug than a terrorist. While the United States continues to worry about him a bit, he really seems to have dropped his terrorist pretensions. Abu Bakr's organization no longer throws bombs. It forges passports and counterfeits money and U.S. visas. In fact, his son unsuccessfully ran for political office. Some in the United States see Trinidad and Tobago as a Muslim hotbed of potential terrorism when in fact it really isn't. Much of the Muslim community is well integrated into the society and has no interest in terrorist activities or even the criminal activities of Abu Bakr and his family. Many families were originally from the northern part of India that became Pakistan and Bangladesh and migrated prior to the partitions. There is still tension between Tobago and Trinidad because Trinidad is much more industrial and developed and Tobago remains rural. Tobago wanted to keep tourism down, to not build large hotels and restaurants, á la Barbados, but the lack of meaningful development means the island is much poorer than the island of Trinidad.

But like the other Caribbean nations, Trinidad and Tobago does not often vote with us in the United Nations and are sometimes less than helpful in the OAS. The Caribbean countries, and especially the English speaking ones, on average vote with us in the United Nations about 16% to 17% of the time. They get lots of high-level U.S. attention during the voting season, especially during the fall human rights voting in the UN Third Committee. The countries do not accept that by not voting with us, we are not going to pay them any substantive attention, behavior that leads to a vicious cycle.

Trinidad and Tobago, like Barbados and the Bahamas, is considered an upper income country, unlike the others that are considered middle income. Yet there still is a lot of poverty with substantial unemployment. What prosperity the country enjoys does not filter down to the majority of the population (kind of like us these days), but TT is more successful than other Caribbean nations. TT is a main Caribbean transportation hub, importing many items for distribution and resale in other Caribbean countries. In fact, a stumbling block for a trade agreement with the region is TT's insistence that we count their re-exported, including to the U.S. (for that read Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) imports from China as their exports, not China's. We won't and so they won't sign an agreement.

Trinidad and Tobago has built productive industries that export to the surrounding islands, including canned fruit juices. In many ways, TT is more forward looking than its neighbors, but they still have a long way to go on issues of health and women's rights.

Going back to when I was in Grenada, Obama visited Trinidad and Tobago for the 2009 summit of the Americas, in April, I believe, in Port of Spain. The Trinbagonians requested air cover from the United States to secure the skies for the meeting. The U.S. agreed. The original plan was to station the jets on Tobago. I was originally asked to check with the Grenadians, which I did and they were amenable, but then I was told to stand down that the planes would be in Tobago. Some obnoxious twit in DOD called me and said the island was too small and made some gratuitously uninformed comments

about the country. My reaction was surprise since Grenada's airport has the longest runway in the Caribbean built to handle C-5's, the largest plane the Air Force has, but I got over it and sat back to enjoy everyone else's scurrying around preparing for the visit. My contribution was information for the policy papers being drafted. But then TT announced that the F-15's were too "aggressive-looking" and could not be on TT soil. I do not know whether Chávez objected outright or TT Prime Minister Manning got cold feet on his own, but I received a phone call from DOD asking me to check with the Grenadians about hosting the F-15's and the 200 plus support staff. And oh, by the way, the advance team with a General (I do not remember the name) will be arriving in three days.

I negotiated the limited visiting forces agreement so the ten planes and what turned out to be nearly 300 crew members could be stationed in Grenada. Two weeks before the summit; haggling with DOD and State lawyers. Once I talked the lawyers out of trying to negotiate a full blown status of forces agreement (SOFA), we were able to come to agreement very quickly. The Grenadian government was very gracious and bent over backwards for us. It was great fun, but it was a hell of a lot of work. Of course on the days of the meetings, the planes took off every two hours including late at night and they are LOUD. Their flight path from Grenada's airport went right over my residence so along with everyone in St. George, I was woken up every time. Three days of that is tiring. It took them only ten or fifteen minutes to get to Trinidadian airspace and they would loop around until time to come back and wake us all up again as they landed and the next pair went up. The Grenadians were very good about it, although we discovered that there was a large audience on the hillside overlooking the airport every day. We were able to run tours for local residents when the planes were not flying and of course we had a special event for the political leadership, taking photos of them with the aircraft and crews. A number of the crew volunteered to visit the local orphanage for boys. I took a small group to the orphanage where the kids taught them to play cricket. There was a reciprocal visit of the boys to the airport to see the planes. All in all, State and DOD were pleased with Embassy Grenada and with the Grenadians. I was relieved when it was over.

Following the election of Obama, there was a real expectation in the Caribbean that now the U.S. would change its attitude towards the Caribbean, that we would pay greater attention. I think expectations were far too high and could never be met. There was tremendous disappointment that the Obama administration did not give them the special attention they felt they deserved. There was no way to effectively manage those expectations, though we tried. To give you an idea, there was one politically active Grenadian woman, who was quoted by local media calling Obama "Christ-like." Over time, as the U.S. did not change its posture towards the Caribbean, there was muttering that the white people were keeping Obama from them.

Q: They would get special attention.

McISAAC: Yeah and it did not work that way. But they did get good attention during the Summit. That was the high point and then of course, the U.S. turned to other issues.

Q: What about Chávez?

McISAAC: I imagine he was one of the reasons the government of Trinidad and Tobago suddenly decided they didn't want the planes stationed in Tobago. The Trinbagonians work very hard to play both sides and always seem a bit surprised when we figure them out. The country is physically very close to Venezuela, nine miles. So often, they tell us oh yes we are your friends, but at the same time they are probably telling Chávez that as well. TT's actions demonstrate that they are more concerned about how the Venezuelans will react than how we will, probably for good reason. If they do not do what we want, we will just ignore them. Venezuela's response, particularly with Chávez, was more unpredictable. So they are more likely to err on the side of keeping Venezuela happy.

Trinidad and Tobago is supposed to be a major player on security for the Caribbean region, through CARICOM (Caribbean Community). CARICOM is physically located in Georgetown, Guyana but the group divides up the issues and each country takes the lead on one or more. When Kamla Persad-Bissessar took office as prime minister, she announced that TT was no longer going to be the "ATM" for the Caribbean. That statement, of course, created uproar among the other members. Because in fact because TT is a relatively wealthy country, the others expect that it will foot the bill for regional programs. Under Prime Minister Patrick Manning, Persad-Bissessar's predecessor, the focus of TT was outward. Manning tried to position himself as a world leader, which explains his disgruntlement when he did not get the high-level attention he craved from President Obama. Being able to pal around with Obama would have really put him on the map. And he tried hard to make it happen. When I was the desk officer, one of Manning's people contacted the political side of the White House and invited Obama to attend a big meeting that they were having that was supposed to talk about climate change, over the Thanksgiving holiday. Instead of going through the normal request process from their embassy here to the State Department, one of his assistants contacted a White House aide who he had apparently met when the President was in TT for the April 2009 Summit of the Americas.

Not only did the guy contact the White House directly, but he also told our embassy in Port of Spain that he was doing so and our embassy failed to let Caribbean Affairs know. You know how people get when they think they should be in the loop but are not. It was not pretty. One political officer asked me about the president's travel schedule, if he was available that week, so I asked whether the government had submitted a formal request since I had not seen anything. The answer was not really, that they had asked the White House aide whose card they had. My next question, of course, was, "And when were you planning to tell us they were talking to each other? We need to follow through with the NSC and the White House if you really want this to happen." I asked for an e-mail explaining the request and a copy of the agenda for the meeting, which I had never seen. With those in hand, I contacted the NSC person handling the Caribbean and asked, "Can we do this?" Neither he nor his boss had seen it. The way the request was handled exposed a rift between the White House and the NSC because the aide had informed NSC climate change staff – who were in favor of participation – but not the NSC staff handling the Western Hemisphere who did not favor participation. State agreed with the latter

because PM Manning behaved badly on a number of key issues and we did not want to appear to reward him for not cooperating. However, once I forwarded the e-mail explaining the request, the NSC factions were so wrapped up in fighting each other, we could stand back and watch. Ultimately of course what we expected did happen when the NSC declined the President's participation. Manning was very upset because he apparently felt he had a promise from the presidential aide that Obama would show up and give the meeting the U.S. imprimatur of authority, and in no small part burnish Manning's credentials as a world leader, able to convoke Obama.

Persad-Bissessar turned TT inward, initially forbidding her ministers to travel abroad to international meetings. This policy contrasted with Manning jetting off to this or that conference or meeting, all around the world, as many of the Caribbean leaders do – it makes you wonder when they govern, they are away so often. Persad-Bissessar focused more on the internal issues and problems, including high unemployment, high poverty rates, problems providing basic services such as electricity, water, and cooking gas at rates people could afford than her predecessors.

The Caribbean region was impacted by the 2008 global downturn although there are no U.S. banks in the region (with the exception of Hispaniola). CLICO (Colonial Life Insurance Company) a TT-based company collapsed, creating havoc in the financial markets of many of the English-speaking countries. There are unresolved issues to this day between TT and the others over inadequate compensation of non-Trinbagonian CLICO investors. Despite the collapse of CLICO, TT weathered the downturn a bit better than the smaller Caribbean nations because of its gas production and exports. The United States was in the past a very big customer for TT liquefied natural gas. Our imports have declined as we produce more at home. This will have a lasting negative impact on the TT economy.

All of the Caribbean cozy up to the Cubans and the Venezuelans. There is a solidarity with Cuba that U.S. officials do not necessarily appreciate or understand. Like Chávez, Manning went to Cuba for his health care. He had heart problems. When he suffered a stroke in January 2011, his daughter insisted that he not go back to Cuba because she thought the care there was inadequate. Instead, she took him to the United States for post-stroke care. There was a question of whether he could get a visa as no one was sure whether he could pay for the care; the point became moot after Persad-Bissessar, by then prime minister, announced that the TT government would cover all his medical costs. He was in a DC-area hospital for rehabilitation for a while before returning to TT, a spent political force.

Our embassy in Port of Spain was a mess during the Bush Administration. I arrived as desk officer at the end of that period, after the ambassador had left post. Ambassador Roy L. Austin managed to turn the embassy upside down during his tenure. I do not know if he was clinically paranoid, but he went through something like four or five deputy chiefs of mission, always because he believed they were behaving disrespectfully. Len Kusnitz, the last DCM, told me he thought he would have been pushed out as well if Austin had

stayed any longer. Austin really did not want to leave but finally the White House prevailed upon him to do so.

Q: Who was he?

McISAAC: He was a political appointee, a former college roommate of George Bush. Stories circulated that Austin wrote Bush's college papers for him. I have no idea if they were true. Whatever Austin wanted, he got. He wanted to remain at the post through the second Bush administration and the Department was told by the White House to give him whatever he wanted. So Austin remained in Port of Spain for seven years. For all of that time, he refused to allow anybody from the embassy staff to enter the residence which meant there was no maintenance performed in a country where the climate is hard on structures. The facilities in Trinidad and Tobago, the embassy and residence among them, were old and in bad shape. When Austin finally departed, the Department had to sink something like $400,000 into the residence alone to make it habitable and even then, the next ambassador was not pleased with it.

Q: Was he married?

McISAAC: Yes. His wife was with him.

Q: What was the problem?

McISAAC: He felt he was disrespected by State Department employees, particularly the deputy chiefs of mission. He locked several DCMs out of the embassy building. There were four or five DCMs during his seven year tenure. The Department was slow to catch on and blamed the first three for the problem. Finally, someone in Management recognized that it was not the DCM's, rather, the Ambassador who was the problem. The Ambassador encouraged dissension between the American officers and the local employees. He announced an open door policy for the Foreign Service nationals (FSN's). In TT there are many local employees who have worked at the embassy for years. Of course they have been through a lot of Foreign Service officers, of varying degrees of empathy and respect. The locals are in a difficult position to begin with because they will never be promoted beyond a certain level. They cannot adjudicate visas. They cannot read classified documents or be in on classified discussions. Their salaries cap out below American salaries since they are based on TT pay scales. These things create tension. On top of that, the Ambassador publicly called the Americans pigs and other choice names, saying they didn't know anything, were stupid, and that the FSN's should be in charge. The consular section became unmanageable, divided into camps. There were curtailments by good officers because Washington was not supportive of them. As with the DCM's, at the beginning, and for an unconscionable period of time, the Department supported the complaints against the officers, without verifying their veracity. Even when it knows better, the Department can screw up badly and make life even more difficult for people working under harrowing conditions.

Trinbagonians have a very low non-immigrant visa refusal rate but of course they would like 100% of them to be issued. That there are any denials is an ongoing public relations issue. There is supposed to be a bright line dividing the Ambassador and the political side of the house from the consular section, enabling the consulate to do its work unencumbered by inappropriate attempts to influence the decisions. Austin set up a phone in the guard booth and let the Trinbagonians know that anyone who was denied a visa could call him directly. He apparently invited them to his office and then called the consular officer to his office and chewed the officer out in front of the local person. He encouraged the local employees to complain to him about the Americans.

Q: Did the inspectors come down?

McISAAC: Not until after he left post.

Q: This is because of the White House.

McISAAC: By the time the inspectors were sent there were many entrenched problems. The person who caused much of them was gone. The embassy struggled to make the recommended fixes, but the damage was done. I think it will take time and the retirement of many of the long-term local employees to create a better climate.

Q: It sounds like he was kind of a remittance man. In other words, he is kind of nutty. Keep him on the island. Keep him away so he doesn't…

McISAAC: Perhaps. He was a professor at the University of Pennsylvania which floored me. He was not a stupid person but he did not impress me as a particularly thoughtful person. I thought UPenn was a good university.

The Obama White House repeated past Administrations' mistakes in the Caribbean with regard to chiefs of mission. Another political appointee chosen for Trinidad and Tobago. Beatrice Welters. Her husband, who was in the health insurance business (his company was bought by United Health Care) really wanted to be the ambassador but apparently he could not pass the security background check. So the position was offered to his wife, who was I think of two minds. While the appointment was an honor, her entire life was in the DC area and she did not sound very enthusiastic about leaving. Between her reluctance and Congress as usual dragging its feet, the appointment and confirmation processes were painfully slow. The Welters were very wealthy and contributed and raised a large amount of money for Democratic candidates. Vetting took a long time and then, once the vetting process was finally complete, Congress refused to schedule confirmation hearings for an extended period. I arrived in the office at the end of August 2009, starting the process with her and did not get her out to country until the following May.

There are some esoteric rules governing contacts appointees may have prior to actual confirmation which can be quite constraining. Since we did not have any idea when the confirmation hearing was going to be, it seemed best to get the internal meetings over with. Welters had an excellent assistant without whom I probably would have no hair left.

It put the appointee at one remove but I quickly learned that her assistance was efficient and responsive and took some of the flak which might have landed on me throughout the process. When I would ask for a block of time to schedule appointments, I assumed I would get a day or several half days. Instead, I would be given two hours on one morning and two hours on another afternoon. It was particularly harrowing trying to schedule high-level appointments. We had fun trying to get her in to see the Under Secretary for Management, Patrick Kennedy. His schedule governed the timing, not hers. We went back and forth multiple times before finally pinning it down. Welters seemed to feel she was doing us a favor rather than viewing these appointments as part of her job. Ourisman, who I had dealt with in 2006 (she went through the process and arrived in Barbados about the same time I landed in Grenada), had been more motivated and cooperative.

I provided briefing material for the meetings but as far as I could tell Welters never read much of it. When the Senate Foreign Relations Committee finally announced the date of the confirmation hearing, we were lucky. Welters went to a hearing with two career nominees going to difficult African countries. The Committee was more interested in them than in Trinidad and Tobago. She was tossed three softball questions and blew all three. It was not pretty, but she was confirmed. Then it became clear she did not want to go. She was confirmed in February so we thought she might leave by March. First, she refused to be sworn in by anyone but Secretary Clinton, which delayed her departure at least a month and a half. Then she played around a bit more. She would not give a date until pressed by higher ups when she announced she would travel to post in early May. Though she wanted to turn right around and come back for some event in the United States later that month. I figured that was ok as long as she stayed long enough to present her credentials so we officially had an ambassador in country, if in name only. Marsha Barnes, my boss in CAR in 2001 – 2002, told me her biggest problem as office director of Caribbean Affairs was keeping the ambassadors, mostly political appointees, at their posts. The countries are so close to the United States that many prefer to hop back home. To try to deter this, the Department promulgated a rule allowing a limited number of official trips to the United States. The rule also set a cap of 25 on the number of days a chief of mission could be absent from post without requiring permission from the Under Secretary for Management.

Welters was briefed about the problems in the embassy. She kept saying she was going to be good at this and that she understood people. I was a little concerned because I realized that she was not entirely honest with us about her contacts with the Washington TT population when she was restricted from speaking with anyone outside State. Ambassadors may pick their own secretaries, but Welters' assistant indicated she was not willing to go overseas. There were several Foreign Service office management specialists (OMS) and a civil servant who were interested in the position as Welters' secretary. I worked with the administrative officer for TT to set up interviews with three, two in person and one by phone. One of the interviewees was an experienced OMS in her early 60's. Welters declared her to be too old, which shocked me. Which might have been one of the first indications that there was something else going on. She declined everybody. About a week later, Welters triumphantly announced to Patrick Kennedy, not to us, that she had found her secretary. I was annoyed because if she had just said so, we would not

have wasted anyone's time with futile interviews. Of course Kennedy's office turned around and told off the WHA administrative office for not doing its job with the nominee. Welters appeared to believe that most of us were beneath her. She only wanted to talk to the "important" people, a trend continued throughout her tenure.

Welters would bring up issues in meetings that had nothing to do with the person she was speaking with. For example, when we were at the Department of Energy, she asked about the status of the official residence. Everyone was polite but bewildered. The one time it blew back at her was during her first meeting with Kennedy when it finally happened. Prior to confirmation, as I said earlier, nominees are restricted from speaking about the assignment; in particular, they should not be speaking with the expat community. Welters, it turned out, reached out to the TT population in Washington. In that first meeting with Kennedy, Welters raised TT complaints about the cost of non-immigrant visa processing. Kennedy's eyes narrowed and he politely cut her off and then gave her a detailed lesson on how the processing fees are set for consular work by a committee on which he sat. Welters squirmed in her seat, clearly uncomfortable but the Under Secretary did not let her interrupt him. I struggled to keep a straight face.

Q: Did she bring any experience to the table?

McISAAC: Not the kind of experience that was needed. She had been on the board of the Kennedy Center. She started a camp for disadvantaged youth, but clearly she was not the one doing the day-to-day management. She was not Austin, which was a blessing, but she also was not as even handed as the embassy needed. To begin with, the secretary she chose did not pass vetting, which made Welters very angry. She liked the public part of the job where people told her how brilliant she was. She did not like the day-to-day mundane details of the job, the demarches, and the endless meetings.

I have to say Welters adapted better than I expected. She did some things quite well but others she just never got. The embassy personnel learned what areas she was good in and tried to keep her occupied with those. She developed a good relationship with the new female prime minister. Unfortunately, management was not her strong suit and she exacerbated some of the problems that already existed in the consular section. We were lucky that five of the public affairs office FSN's retired that summer, affording the embassy the opportunity to hire new people and start fresh. Which continued to be a problem plaguing the consular section.

Welters brought a number of her high-level friends to the country, including Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas which delighted the Trinbagonians. When the new Caribbean Affairs office director Makila James arrived, she wanted to be the only one talking to the ambassadors. At that point, I was fine with that given the issues still in play. James was often angry that Welters would pick up the phone and call her good friends Cheryl Mills, an intimate of Hillary Clinton's who terrorized Caribbean Affairs through the 2010 Haiti earthquake recovery, or Valerie Jarrett in the White House to complain about various issues. They then called the WHA front office demanding answers. The calls cascaded down to James who would then yell at me.

Q: She was?

McISAAC: The office director for Caribbean affairs starting my second year in the office. I accepted that James would be the point person. I had enough else to keep busy, covering seven countries. But Welters did not follow instructions and as a political appointee the Department did not require her to. She continued to call Mills and others higher up. James had no one other than me on which to take out her frustration and so that's what she did. When I told her that Welters had her name and number, James was angry. There was a fair amount of friction during the first six months of her tenure in the office. Not just with me. James was mercurial, perhaps manic. She would rant about a problem, at times directly at some high-level people – I watched one such rant at Anita Botti a political appointed as the Deputy in the Office of Women's Issues – but mostly at those of us in her office.

I blame the Department, well not just the Department, but also the White House, regardless of which political party is in power. They see ambassadorships to these islands as rewards for donating huge amounts of money to somebody's campaign. They don't see them as countries with problems and issues and needs that ought to be taken seriously. But I don't see that changing because coming back to the U. S. this time I was amazed at how many non-State Department people were in special positions created for them and as a result, how much the seventh floor talked only to itself. The best example was how Cheryl Mills took over Haiti after the 2010 earthquake devastated the country. The country was once again pulled out of Caribbean affairs and a gigantic task force was created. I volunteered on the task force until I realized that there were too many players who were not talking to each other and that Mills and her people were vicious to anyone not in their inner circle. At one point, the people supposedly running the thing were not talking to the people doing the actual work.

Mills et al were not interested in anybody who had experience with Haiti from previous crises over the years. There is a substantial coterie of people with extensive experience working on Haiti and with Haiti and all the interested parties. Mills came in, announced that nobody knew what they were doing and began to reinvent the wheel. That is really easy to do and is often done with Haiti, but as usual, it was disruptive and counterproductive. When experienced officers tried to point out what had worked and what had not, they were told to take a hike. Usually by some cute young thing on Mills' staff. There was one young woman in particular who was rude and nasty to everyone. There was a story circulating that she even told off Patrick Kennedy during a meeting. I do not know whether she was foreign or civil service but she was about 24 years old, new to the work world and to the Department. Early in the process, the office director at the time, Valerie DePirro (she preceded James) sent me upstairs to help out since the Deputy Assistant Secretary Julissa Reynoso asked if I would. I had been working on a different part of the task force. When the DAS asks, you go. When I offered my services, this young lady rounded on me and demanded, "Who the hell are you? Why do you think you can come in here?" At that point, I turned around and left. I told Reynoso and DePirro that I was slimed by this young thing and I really did not care to go through that again.

There are decent political appointees and I have over the years had the opportunity to work with them and learned a lot. However, there are political appointees who will talk only to other political appointees and do not believe public servants have anything useful to contribute. It's not new but that it is so pervasive, and lower down in the hierarchy than before, I think is indicative of the state of our politics. I noticed it with the Bush people but it was overpowering with the Obama folks. They want their own people with them and do not believe that public servants are capable.

Q: Yeah, well this is been going on forever.

McISAAC: But I think politicos are actually more brazen about inserting more political appointees into the system than was true when I started, 28 years ago.

Q: There has been much more of a creep of political appointees farther down the line into what used to be professional ranks.

McISAAC: Absolutely. I think so. When Clinton was president, first under Warren Christopher and then with Madeleine Albright at State, there were 23 special representatives. These were political appointees with fancy titles and small staffs. They would task offices with work, in addition to the work being tasked by the bureau front offices. Lots of overlap and confusion. The Bush Administration fired the 23 but then proceeded to appoint an extensive array of Republican special assistants, advisors, at all levels.

I think there were far more special "whatever's" this time around with Hillary Clinton at State under the Obama Administration. I don't know about other agencies, whether it was as bad. We were double and triple tasked with no one really clear about who was responsible for certain issues, totally discombobulated. I think the contempt for public service which started more than 30 years ago and strongly nurtured by Reagan in the 1980's has gotten to the point now that it hampers an effective workforce. Political appointees in the lower levels, as I pointed out earlier, warp workplace dynamics and undermine the non-partisan nature of government, of the professional public services. And I am not sure that the politicians are unhappy with that. It becomes easier for them to violate the rules and regulations designed to control not only corruption but also the perception of corruption.

Q: Politicians use this and I notice it again in the budget they have been fighting over for years, and they froze special pay again. I mean it is an easy one. Somehow expertise is not a marketable commodity in the political world.

McISAAC: No, I think you are right.

One more point – another little irony of the political appointee system. In 2011, the man who tried to destroy me in Ecuador was nominated to be ambassador to Barbados while I was the desk officer. I thought about recusing myself but there was no one else better equipped to handle it so I bit my tongue and began the preparations. Larry L. Palmer was

first nominated to be ambassador to Venezuela and, according to people I knew in the Office of Andean Affairs, blew his confirmation hearing by not being prepared to answer the pointed questions everyone knew he would get. For whatever reason, WHA felt they owed him – he certainly believed that WHA owed him for the debacle – so they gave him Barbados. I have to say, he was lazy and did not read the background material. He squeaked by in the confirmation process. I think he always got by on his gift of gab, which was considerable. I wondered how he would handle me but he pretended we had not met previously, except one time when he got really drunk at the office's Carnival party. So I swallowed my pride and prepared him as best I could and sent him off. What a way to end a career, if you can call it that.

The Department loses many highly qualified managers early by not valuing their contributions. Despite the official rhetoric of management, in fact the agency is now as highly politicized in its hiring and assignments as it was prior to the 1980 Foreign Service Act. By not hiring in the early- to mid-1990's, the Department created a huge experience gap with newer officers promoted far faster than they can handle the positions they are thrust into. Posts are understaffed for the work they are expected to accomplish.

Personally, I think the up or out system has run out of steam, especially now that the Department has replaced so many FS positions with civil service officers. In the late 1980's, I suggested to an HR Deputy Assistant Secretary that it might be interesting to set up a competition to design a new personnel system for the Foreign Service. Of course she told me I was nuts. But it hit me that senior officers benefited from the up or out system and therefore are invested in its survival. Whereas, good officers who are tossed out at the mid-level after the Department has invested enormous amounts of money in their training and development, carting them around the world. Of the bosses I have had who were excellent managers of people, most did not make it into the senior service, while some of the worst did. That tells me that politics is more important than management. I wish it weren't so, but it is. I do not know what the ideal system would be but I think we should discuss it and get fresh, outside ideas.

Q: Well you retired what in 2012.

McISAAC: Yes.

Q: What have you been doing since? We are now talking about 2013. So not a hell of a lot of time.

McISAAC: In typical State Department fashion, my retirement was fraught at times. As you know, when one leaves the Foreign Service there is an exit medical examination. I was not as organized as I should have been. I should have started the process earlier but managed to get an appointment in September. I made the mistake of telling the doctor assigned to me that I had pain in my hip; I was limping so it was obvious but I should have kept my mouth shut. He wanted an MRI and x-rays, the former for my brain – he had me close my eyes and try to walk putting one foot in front of the other, which I couldn't do – and the latter for the hip pain. The doctor also announced that I wasn't

going to be allowed to retire until I got it all done. At that point, I was wondering how I was going to tell the Department that their doctor told me I could not retire when the Department was throwing me out at the end of the month. I had reached my time in service. I carefully pointed out to the doctor that I did not have any option about retirement, which would happen whether he signed off or not. His response was that he would make sure I could not be a WAE because I would not be cleared. So I trooped off for the MRI and found a neurologist.

The MRI was a disaster. It had to be done twice because when the radiologist tried to find a vein in my hand rather than my arm, the vein blew up. My hand was three times normal size and excruciatingly painful. At that point, they tried my left arm which worked until they tried to put the contrast into the line. Most of it ended up all over me leaving me soaking wet. Took two tries to get it right, two weeks. When I met the neurologist, she read the results and after asking a few questions, said I did not need to see her. She told me that the other doctor's straight line with eyes shut was not an accepted test. When I went back to the medical unit, they told me the doctor who sent me on the wild goose chase had left. I don't know whether he left voluntarily or was fired. So it took me a full two months to get the medical clearance. At that point, I applied to be a WAE.

Q: That is "when actually employed." When somebody is brought into various aspects of work up to a certain period.

McISAAC: Sorry, I forget to spell out acronyms sometimes. WHA/EX accepted my application at the beginning of December. The person who was supposed to follow up told me that I had provided everything needed to make a decision. I checked at the beginning of January and was told "no decision". I continue to check periodically then dropped it for several weeks. It's now the beginning of February and I checked yet again. Finally, I got hold of the woman again and asked why it was taking so long. She said "Oh, are you in the area?" I said, "Yes." She had just dropped the whole thing even though I had told them I live in Fairfax, VA. It turned out I could have been a WAE at the beginning of January but she hadn't bothered. This is quite typical of my experience with the Department of State. Management is not the Department's strong suit. As it turns out, there has not been much opportunity to do WAE work as I prefer not to go to Afghanistan or Iraq. In addition, the work I would be most interested in is unavailable to me because I am an FS-02, not an FS-01. The office that declassifies documents restricts its WAE employees to FS-01 and above. I have the experience to do the job, just not the rank.

After several months of searching, I went back to school and have become certified as a medical biller and coder. Still hard to find a job because I am older and this is a new career field for me. We shall see.

Q: OK so we will stop at this point. Now as I explained before. Do take a look at your transcript, edit it and also add. Anything you want.

McISAAC: I am working my way through it.

Q: Great. I thank you very much.

End of interview