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

AMBASSADOR TED OSIUS

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INTERVIEW

Q: So I'm with Ambassador Ted Osius. Today is the second of November, 2024, and we're about to start our interview, and I am really looking forward to chatting with you, Ambassador Osius, this is going to be really fun. One thing we like to start with is really the germination of everything, how everything all started. Can we talk about where you are from?

OSIUS: I grew up in Annapolis, Maryland, because my dad had a private medical practice there, and he loved to sail. Sailing was a big part of our lives in Annapolis. It's still a big part of our lives and we're not very far from there right now.

Q: How about your mom? Your mom, was she also a doctor? What did your mom do?

OSIUS: She taught English in high school and then worked at a university for a long time. After my father passed away, she worked in Annapolis at St John's College in public relations and she's still in Annapolis. My parents arrived in Annapolis when I was two; that's more than 60 years ago and she has remained there.

Q: Do you have brothers and sisters as well?

OSIUS: Three sisters. The eldest has a very international bent. She's a businessperson. She teaches bankers in developing countries about energy finance, and she runs her own business. She operates out of New York, but travels all over the world. My middle sister, Alison, lives in Carbondale, Colorado, and she's the editor of a couple of magazines. One is *Climbing* and one is a running magazine. She and her husband, Mike, are both sports oriented. They are climbers and they raised two sons in Colorado. My nephews are both in their 30s now; one of them is back in Colorado, and one's out in California. And then my youngest sister also led an international life. She was a teacher for many years at international schools in Abu Dhabi and near Dubai, and she lived in Mexico. She was a single mom who raised her son in various parts of the world and, a few years ago, she had a stroke. Now she is near Annapolis and that's one of the reasons that we're here. We want to be able to visit her, which we do often.

Q: Got it. So, when in the age hierarchy of the kids, I guess it's four kids, right? When were you? Were you in the middle?

OSIUS: I'm the third. Two older sisters, one younger. That has something to do with being a diplomat, because I had to mediate sometimes between the older and the younger sisters. I think sometimes middle children play the role of mediator. We also had a Republican-Democrat family. My father was Republican, my mom's a Democrat, and so there were very lively conversations, and I tended to be in the mediator role in a lot of ways.

Q: That feeds into something that I wanted to ask you about. You're the only boy with three girls. And that's interesting. That must be an interesting dynamic. It sounds like you were also a very lively family, a very educated family. It sounds like you like to debate and talk a lot, but being the only boy with three sisters can be challenging, I can imagine.

OSIUS: In a way it's a privileged position. Because I was the only boy, I probably had to do the dishes less, and feed the dogs and take out the garbage more. My parents were not sexist. They tried to treat us all fairly and equally. But I was an ambitious kid, and so I was the only one who went away to boarding school. I don't think that's because I was a boy. I think it's because I wasn't challenged in a local school, and they were very attuned to giving me opportunities to grow and flourish. Maybe a little because I was the only boy, but I think mostly because they wanted us all to have opportunities to flourish. You hit the nail on the head about education. My parents were very focused on education. My mom comes from a family of teachers. Her dad was a teacher, a professor at the University of Michigan. She had aunts who were teachers. My youngest sister is a teacher. And my oldest sister, even though she focuses on business, she's a teacher too. And even my middle sister has been a teacher at times, and I have been a teacher at times. My dad went to Princeton. He very much valued education. A thread runs through the family: a focus on education and a focus on understanding that the world is bigger than the United States.

Q: Can you tell me more about that? Because it sounds like your dad was a doctor. Your Mom taught and did a whole bunch of different things, but they weren't diplomats, right? Did you travel? Did you see the world? What was the connection to outside the United States?

OSIUS: We did travel as a family. We traveled to Europe and to Mexico, and then I traveled. I joined the Boy Scouts. And the whole reason I joined the Boy Scouts was because they were taking a trip to Europe, and I wanted to travel. Travel was always part of our family's life. Domestic travel, but also international travel, and it was certainly something that all my sisters were interested in as well. Two of my three sisters had semesters or a year overseas. They studied overseas as well as in the United States. I traveled a lot between high school and college. I took a gap year and spent most of it on the road. I think that's what led me to become a diplomat. I didn't spend a semester overseas, because I'd gotten it out of my system for a while, and I was happy as an

undergraduate in the United States, but I resumed traveling pretty quickly afterwards. It was an important part of all our lives.

Q: Did you especially like Europe? Or what were your favorite places?

OSIUS: Europe was the beginning. The first travel that exposed me to different cultures and different languages was to Europe. But for me, the most significant trip I made was one between high school and college, where I traveled for about eight months. I worked on a farm in France and a kibbutz in Israel. I traveled to Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. I traveled through Eastern Europe, with meaningful experiences in Hungary and Bulgaria. I met up with my family in Greece. Probably the most meaningful travel for me as a young person was that time in the Middle East, because I had this sense, especially in Israel and then Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey, of a grinding conflict, a conflict between people whose cultures were very different from the one I grew up in. I was really interested in that. I was interested in the Arabic language and Arab culture and how different it was from ours. I learned some Hebrew on a kibbutz. I was, perhaps, a typical American and I got it in my head that Americans can do anything. We're going to fix this problem. We need to fix this problem between the Arabs and Israelis. It causes too much pain and suffering. I was there in 1980 but in 2024 we still haven't fixed the problem. There are some things that America cannot fix, but as a 19-year-old traveling around the Middle East, I thought we need to fix this problem and I wanted to be part of fixing this problem.

Q: Let me back up a little bit to when you were younger, because you mentioned you were an ambitious kid, and you needed to be challenged, right? And it sounds like you had big ideas and big dreams. Did you have a sense of what you wanted to do with your life? Did you want to be a diplomat from a young age? Or what were you thinking when you were a kid?

OSIUS: I was interested in doing something in the world of politics or international relations. I think it gradually evolved from politics towards international relations, especially when I was in high school. In junior high, I was very much interested in local politics, the politics of Maryland. I worked for the governor of Maryland and got involved in Model Congress and Model UN and was learning a lot about what it might be to have a public life. At a certain point, it occurred to me that I might be too thin-skinned to go into elective politics. I might not have the temperament to run for office. I started getting much more interested in the bigger world and this really started in high school. I read avidly. I was part of organizing a conference on China at my high school. I was getting more and more interested in some sort of international career. As an undergrad, I took the Foreign Service exam a couple of times and didn't pass. By the time I was an undergrad, I had focused on the idea of being a diplomat.

But let me go back even a bit further. In elementary school, through the Christian Children's Fund, we four kids sponsored a Taiwanese boy, Yang Hsi Chia. He came from a very poor family in southern Taiwan and we were pen pals. He and I wrote to each other a lot. I didn't have a brother, and he was like my little brother, and the Christian

Children's Fund sent black-and-white pictures of him at his home. He lived in poverty. He wasn't an orphan. He had a disabled father and a mother who couldn't read or write. He had brothers and sisters. I remember being really interested in this boy's life in Taiwan and then, many years later, I had a chance to go to Taiwan and I was able to track him down and meet him. Taiwan had become much more prosperous by then. He was married and had two kids and he and his wife ran a factory. He had 50 people working for him and he was doing quite well. His life had gone well. When I met him, those many years later, we were both adults. It occurred to me that he was probably the first impetus for me to learn about other cultures and to be interested in the wider world. It was also my first exposure to Asia. I think that seed was planted when I was about seven or eight. It took a while to germinate, and it was planted by Yang Hsi Chia.

Q: That is very interesting. I would like to ask you more about that meeting later, because that's quite interesting. But did you learn any languages when you were a kid? Did your family speak languages, like French?

OSIUS: I learned French and Homeric Greek starting in seventh grade, in middle school, the Key School, founded by St John's graduates. They taught Homeric Greek, not Latin, but I liked learning Greek. I liked the alphabet. I liked learning about declensions and the way language was structured. And I liked French. I liked both languages. You can't use ancient Greek in too many settings, although I did use Greek when traveling with my family in Greece years later. But I also used French when our family went on a ski vacation in France, and then I used French right after high school when I worked on a beet farm in La Sarthe, near Le Mans, in the center of France. Language was clearly a window into another world. I liked learning languages, and I liked that it gave me a deeper understanding of something that was different from America, cultures that were different from ours, people who thought differently from us. Those two languages, Greek and French, opened some windows or doors for me.

Q: Sounds like me. It sounds like you were definitely a smart kid, and at some point, I guess you told me about boarding school. I mean, by this time were you in boarding school, or when did you decide to go to boarding school? How did that come about?

OSIUS: I went to boarding school starting in 10th grade. My mom had a friend named Ken Keniston, and she thought I was a lot like this long, long, long-time friend, a bookish, brainy kid, not that good at athletics. She thought boarding school might be a good thing for me. We visited a couple of boarding schools in Pennsylvania, which I liked, the George School, the Westtown School, and I applied to them, but the school I liked the best was the Putney School in southern Vermont near Brattleboro. When we first went there, I noticed all the kids were painting the buildings and playing soccer in the fields and digging up vegetables in the farm and milking the cows. I liked all that. It was a rural setting and there was a sense of community. I was interested in what makes a community. At Putney, I learned community values. I would make yogurt in the morning for everybody. We washed the dishes. We all had to take turns doing barn duty, which meant getting up at 5:30 and shoveling cow manure and feeding the cows silage and hay, milking them. I loved Putney. It was great. There were teachers who took a real interest

in me. Earlier I mentioned ambition. I wrote an essay for an English class in 10th grade on what it was to be ambitious. That was kind of frowned on at Putney. It wasn't that they didn't support being ambitious. They focused on community values. This was the late '70s and some of the teachers were old hippies and a kid who was very ambitious wasn't necessarily something that every teacher embraced. Some did, though. Two teachers in particular saw something in me and those teachers said, Ted, you should go to Harvard. That wasn't something I'd thought about. But those two teachers, one English teacher and one history teacher, Betsy Horton and Tony Buccelli, were instrumental for me. They were nurturing and they were exacting; they pushed me. I had a phenomenal experience those three years at Putney School, which I think had a big impact on my life. Now that I'm a dad, I'd really love to see one of my kids go to the Putney School and absorb some of the values that I absorbed there.

Q: It's interesting, though, like a lot of kids wouldn't want to go to boarding school. I think there's a special kind of kid that thrives at boarding school. Were you afraid to go there? Were you excited to go there?

OSIUS: I was not afraid. I wanted to go, but I hear what you're saying. My sisters didn't go to boarding school. I don't think any of them were particularly interested in going to boarding school. I had a sense of homesickness the first couple of months at boarding school, but then I really got into it. Boarding school is a place where, if you're self-motivated, you're going to have a much better time. If you have a sense of what you want to accomplish or get out of it. There are kids who get lost without a lot of immediate parental direction. But I was not one of those kids. I was self-directed.

I'm going back and forth in time, but I'd had an experience in Canada, as a 14-year-old. This was also motivated by my mother and her friendship with Ken Keniston. My parents sent me to a camp called Keewaydin, where we went canoeing on the lakes of Ontario, went way out into the bush and portaged canoes and lit fires. I was homesick the first weeks; I wrote some plaintive letters home, saying I'm not sure I want to be in Ontario. I was kind of scared, and then I got completely into it and loved it. I kept a journal that I still have to this day. I won a contest in which you had to show canoeing skills and you had to know how to light a fire. I don't know if it was camp-wide, but it involved a lot of kids, and I won the contest, and I won a paddle. I still have that paddle almost 50 years later because that was the summer I learned how to be independent. I came home and my voice had changed. I'd gone from being a boy to being a young man in a fairly short period of time. I think that experience made it possible for me to go and have a successful three years in boarding school.

Q: You had some teachers that were really nurturing you. It sounds like you had a sense of direction. You knew you were interested in international affairs. I know you went to Harvard, right? That's where you did your undergrad. How did that kind of come about, applying?

OSIUS: Those two teachers, Betsy and Tony, urged me along. They said, "go ahead and apply." At that point you could apply early action to more than one place. I applied to my

dad's alma mater, Princeton, and I applied to Harvard and Brown and some other schools, and I wrote an essay. I think this mattered. I wrote that I lived in a log cabin, and we had to light the fire every night. It was very cold in Vermont, so we'd have hot water bottles that we put in our beds. We had kerosene lamps. I remember typing my college applications and my hands were cold and I was making a lot of mistakes. I realized it's 50 degrees in the cabin and that's why I'm making so many mistakes. I loved the cabin. It gave me a sense of independence. I had a great roommate, John, and we were mostly unsupervised in the cabin. We were seniors, so we were at an age when we could be less supervised. This cabin symbolized something for me, something about independence, and that essay probably helped me get into Harvard. I had good grades and great recommendations from the two teachers who believed in me, and I was one of two or three students from Putney to get into Harvard that year. It wasn't that it was unprecedented, but people didn't get into Harvard very often from Putney. It felt like a real triumph. My dad was not thrilled, because he wanted me to go to Princeton, and I made the mistake of getting into Princeton, but by the time I graduated from Harvard, he agreed that it had been a good choice. I didn't go to Harvard until after my gap year. I think I got way more out of Harvard because I'd had a gap year. I'd been exposed to the Arab world. I ended up studying Arabic at Harvard. I had a broader view of the world by the time I went to Harvard, and I had a clearer sense of what I might do with my life because of that gap year.

Q: How did you decide to do that gap year? How did that come about?

OSIUS: That was something my parents didn't think was a great idea. Not many people did gap years at that point. My father said, “if you do that, then your college is going to cost me more, so you need to pay the difference.” And I did. I ended up paying the difference. Because tuition was going up every year, I had to pay the difference in tuition between junior and senior years. It was a commitment. I had to bear part of the cost of my decision. And then I worked very hard. I self-financed that trip to the Middle East. I worked for about seven months and then traveled for eight and I traveled very cheaply. I used *Let's Go: Europe* as my guide, and then, later, after I went to Harvard, I worked on *Let's Go: Europe* for all four years of college. I worked on *Let's Go: Europe*, *Let's Go Greece; Let’s Go: Israel and Egypt*, and *Let’s Go: Italy*. There are many *Let's Go* guidebooks, and I worked on four of them. The travel experiences opened an aperture, and I think made the time at Harvard much more productive. It was a phenomenal four years, but I think it was better for me because I'd had a chance to see the world before I went to Harvard.

Q: By this point, did you know about the Foreign Service? Because I know you mentioned you took the exam, and how did you find out about the Foreign Service? A lot of kids just have no idea. You know, even a lot of adults, most people probably have no idea what the Foreign Service is. Do you know when you found out about it and when you had the idea maybe Foreign Service would be right for you?

OSIUS: The first time I heard about it was in Bulgaria. During my gap year, I went to the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, because I had to register for selective service. I considered myself

a pacifist. I was a Quaker, a pacifist, and I didn't want to register for selective service. I talked to somebody at the embassy who said, "it's going to be a black mark for the rest of your life if you break the law and don't register for selective service. So, I urge you to go ahead and register. It doesn't mean you're going to be drafted. You can still be a conscientious objector. Don't break the law." This diplomat at the embassy in Sofia told me about the Foreign Service. The first time I had an inkling that there was this kind of a life was when I was 19 in Bulgaria. I thought about it, and I learned about it more when I was at Harvard. It wasn't hard to learn about the Foreign Service at Harvard. Plenty of people knew about it and I was very much interested in an international career by then.

Q: So, Harvard also sounds like it was a very formative experience. You had many, many interesting, formative experiences, but Harvard certainly sounds like it as well. Can you talk a little bit more about your experience, like, what were you involved in?

OSIUS: I loved it. Some of the best friends of my life come from those four years. The godfather to my son, Gil, godmother to my daughter, Becky. Tony Blinken was a classmate. We worked together on the *Harvard Crimson*. We were friends from when we were 19 or 20; we were young when we first met and worked on the *Crimson* together. Pat Toomey was in that class. He was later a Republican senator from Pennsylvania. Anthony Brown, who's a member of Congress. There were some fairly prominent people, people who've since become prominent in that class.

Before I worked on the *Crimson*, I spent a lot of my time doing theater. I directed a lot of plays. My freshman roommate was Bill Rauch, who went on to become one of the most celebrated directors in the United States. He ran the biggest regional theater company in the country and now runs the Perelman Arts Center in New York. He's the first artistic director there. There were a lot of people who became actors and are involved in film, many well-known names. I was able to rub shoulders with some very interesting people during those four years. I studied social studies, an interdisciplinary major, involving economics, history, anthropology, sociology. It was an honors-only concentration and I had as my thesis advisor professor Marty Peretz, who was well known as publisher of the *New Republic*. He had been a mentor to Al Gore. He'd been Al Gore's freshman advisor and then later was my thesis advisor and he steered me to work for Al Gore, which was my second job out of college. Those four years were formative. That was an opportunity to awaken intellectually, to be challenged by great professors. My dad asked about it when I was about to graduate. He asked, "who had the most influence on you?" I think he expected it to be a professor, and it wasn't. I said, "my freshman roommate, Bill." Bill was the person who had the most influence on me. There were certainly very good and engaging professors, and there were phenomenal students, and we all learned a lot, as much from each other as we did from our professors.

Q: I have so many questions. You touched on so many interesting topics there. I want to back up to the theater thing, because I don't think you mentioned an interest in theater before Harvard. I'm just curious. I'm curious about that because you described yourself in high school as kind of bookish and intellectual, not that good at sports. Didn't mention

arts that much. Was this something that came about in college? How did you get involved in theater? That's interesting.

OSIUS: It started early. It started in elementary school. I was Ebenezer Scrooge in *The Christmas Carol* in fifth grade and then I directed a play in sixth grade. I'm sure I had help. Then I directed plays and acted in plays in middle school, seventh to ninth grades. I love directing plays and I was a better director than I was an actor. Then, in high school, I both acted and directed. That was a driving passion in high school, and I carried it into college. I did a fair amount of acting, but more directing again, in college, and even in my first year out of college, I had an internship at the American University in Cairo, and I directed a play there. I directed *Caesar and Cleopatra,* and, in the end, I had to pinch hit and play the role of Caesar. All those years I probably thought I would be a director for my profession.

I come back to Bill Rauch, my freshman roommate. He'd come from a public school in New Jersey, and he directed musicals, or at least that's the impression that he initially gave. I'd gone to a prep school, and I'd traveled a lot, so I thought of myself as very sophisticated in freshman year. Bill and I both applied to direct at the Loeb's experimental theater and he was chosen to direct, and I wasn't. I couldn't believe it! I was really shocked that I was not chosen. Because I usually got to do pretty much what I wanted most of the time. When I wanted to direct, I directed, and my first setback at Harvard was not being chosen. It took a while for me to realize he was way more talented than I was as a director. I was a good director. I directed some good plays, but he was a world-class director, and that experience freshman year caused me to think, well, I shouldn't put all my eggs in this basket. I should have more than one possible future. It was good for me to have that setback, because I ended up being in the profession that was the right one for me. I really should have been a diplomat, and I was a good diplomat, and he was a great director, and I think I would have been a good director, but not a great director. Freshman year was a fork in the road, and then junior year I had the premier directing opportunity, to direct on the main stage at the Loeb. I directed *Mother Courage* by Brecht, and it was good, but it wasn't great. Here I was finally handed the big opportunity. And it's not that I blew it, but the play was not great. I poured everything into it; I really, really threw myself into it. But it wasn't a brilliant production. It wasn't an earth-shattering production. The next year, I joined the *Harvard Crimson,* and I started thinking about other things. Even though I kept directing and acting, I branched out. At that point, I got much more serious about the idea of having an international career.

Q: So you joined the Crimson as a sophomore?

OSIUS: Most people joined the *Harvard Crimson* as freshmen or sophomores, and they wanted to be journalists. Well, I wanted to be a theater director at that stage. The decision to join the *Crimson* as a senior was, well, let's try something else. I'd rowed crew freshman year and that didn't work out very well. One of the good things about Harvard was that I could experiment, try different things, and there was no real cost to failure. I think there were benefits to failure and I think it was a safe place to fail, and it was a safe place to explore what you could end up doing well. This also comes to the issue of

sexuality, which I know we're going to touch on at some point, but Harvard was a safe place to explore who one was, what one's sexual orientation, gender identity, was. Not entirely safe, because it was the early 1980s and there was still a fair amount of danger involved. But it was a place to figure out who I was.

Q: I got it. I want to ask about the Crimson *because I have a particular interest in the* Crimson*. I don't know if I told you this before, but I was a journalist before I joined the Foreign Service, and I went to Georgetown, and I was editor-in-chief of the student newspaper there, which is called the* Hoya*, and I had a lot of friends, I connected with people in the student journalism community around the country. And of course, the* Crimson *is a very interesting place. It has a lot of traditions, and it's produced a lot of fantastic journalists, politicians, diplomats, you name it. So, the student journalism world is very interesting to me. I'm curious about your experience at the* Crimson*. What did you do there?*

OSIUS: First you have to "comp" to join the *Crimson*. There's a competition to get in. And one of the people I comped with was Tom Fields-Meyer. He was one of the editors of the *Crimson* and he remains a good friend, and he was a great editor, and he's a kind person, and he taught me a lot about writing effectively. He showed me what it was to be a great editor. There were journalists such as Tom Howlett, Jake Schlesinger. They were senior students at the *Crimson*. Amy Schwartz did a lot of features and editorials and later worked for the *Washington Post*. These are all folks who became friends, and Tony, of course. Even though I was coming in as a senior, and I was known for doing theater, not for my journalistic skills, the *Crimson* was a welcoming place, and I made friendships there that continue more than 40 years later. I learned a lot and, because I knew something about theater, I ended up writing a lot of theater reviews. I wrote features, I wrote travel stories. I wrote one about Petra in Jordan and, at that point, I'd been working for *Let's Go* each summer. *Let's Go: Europe*, *Let's Go: Israel and Egypt*. I could write about travel, I could write about politics, I could write about theater, and I got to explore all those topics. I probably didn't do all that much political reporting because there were people better than I at the political reporting, but I did have a lot of fun writing about the world and about theater.

Q: That's interesting, you came in during your senior year, because, as you mentioned, that isn't typical, right? Because it's usually you rise in the ranks and you become an editor your senior year?

OSIUS: I didn't rise through the ranks, so I never had a very senior role, but they were very generous and let me do a lot of what I wanted at the *Crimson*. And Tony was memorable because he was one of the senior people at the *Crimson* and he was a very sophisticated guy. He knew Europe well and came from a family of diplomats. He was also someone that all the women were crazy about. He was handsome, he played in a band. He was cool and sophisticated, and he was nice to me. I didn't consider myself as terribly sophisticated. But he was welcoming and friendly. Having known him since he was about 20, the amazing thing is he stayed who he was. He was always a loyal friend.

He was always invested in relationships. He was always kind to people. All these years later, I think he's still that same person.

Q: And I'm glad you talked a bit about the Secretary, because, of course, the Foreign Service Officer in me wants to know about what he was like and your experience with him. I'm looking at a photo right now. I don't think you're in this photo, but it's of him at the Crimson *with some - Oh, no, I guess this must be, is this at the* New Republic*? I guess this is the* New Republic*, not the* Crimson*. Can you tell me more about Secretary Blinken? Are there any stories that you have from his time at the* Crimson*? I think they might be very interesting to people if you remember anything specifically.*

OSIUS: This is digging deep. I have impressions from that time that I admired him. I admired the fact that he spoke European languages and spent a lot of time in Paris and came from a diplomatic family. I liked him and I was probably a bit jealous of him, because he had all these women after him and he was so cool. Then our paths crossed a lot over the next 40 years, because he went to work on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I hosted him when I served in India. He traveled with John Kerry. Biden wasn't on that trip, but he came out with John Kerry to India. We got reacquainted. We had a good time on that trip together. Our paths crossed many times and, when he was Deputy Secretary, I hosted him twice in Vietnam. I can't tell you how good an experience that was, how much I enjoyed hosting him, seeing that he was the same great person that I'd known for all these years, that even as Deputy Secretary of State, he hadn't become distant or a different kind of person. He was still loyal, invested in relationships. He took the time to thank everybody in personal notes to people he'd met. We flew down to Hồ Chí Minh City together and we had a chance to talk about our lives. When he was Deputy Secretary, I felt like I had my old friend back.

Q: What an experience you had at Harvard! Sounds pretty wild. It was great. You mentioned it was also a safe place, not a totally safe place at that time, but a safe place, relatively speaking, to experiment, with discovering yourself in terms of LGBT stuff. Was there an LGBT community? I mean, what was that like back then?

OSIUS: There was an LGBT organization called the Gay & Lesbian Students Association. I remember being scared to be associated with it initially. I remember one dance in the Science Center. I watched from outside and thought I'd like to go in there, but I wasn't sure that I wanted to be seen. That was a time when, for example, you couldn't have a security clearance if you were gay. Already I was starting to think about a government career. There were people, including my freshman roommate, Bill, who were out. I don't think he was out freshman year, but he was pretty soon. He was out and I wasn't. I had girlfriends through college. I had a very serious girlfriend at the end of high school. Katherine Bond was a woman I loved very much, and then I had girlfriends through most of college. Katherine was steady. We were together for four years, but then she was at Princeton, and I was at Harvard, and we began to drift. We both dated other people, even though for each of us, the other was the primary relationship. At the end of junior year, I met and fell in love with a man, and then I realized, oh, this isn't just a little transitory phase. This is part of who I am. I considered myself bisexual in college and, by

senior year, I realized, this is not just about sex, this is also about love. That was a revelatory moment. I had to think, what kind of impact is this going to have on my life? Will it restrict the kind of choices that I have? At that time, it really did. It was hard to imagine having a public career or even a diplomatic career and being an openly gay person, so I had to wrestle with it for a while, especially in college.

Q: That sounds hard. I mean, you're 22 years old, you're thinking about what you want to do with your life. You're discovering yourself, and you're trying to square this idea that if you want to be a public official, how are you going to do this? If you are who you are, right? Today, I think it's very stressful for young people to go through this experience, but I can't even imagine what that must have been like. That's several layers more stressful. How do you square that as a 22-year-old?

OSIUS: There was another layer: HIV/AIDS. I came of age, or started coming out, just at the time when HIV became a big concern for everybody. I was very honest with my parents. I came out to my parents sophomore year. I said to my parents, "I think I'm bisexual." Because of AIDS, my mom said, "Well, don't do anything about that, wait until this AIDS thing is over." This AIDS thing is still not over. I didn't follow that advice. I kept exploring who I was, but AIDS was very much in the background. I lost friends, especially in the '80s. I remember a guy I dated in college, between sophomore and junior years, who died a few years later. Then in the mid '80s, as I had more gay friends, I lost more friends. So, when I say it was a bit scary, it wasn't just about my career. It was about survival. When I was in college, I remember thinking that I'm probably not going to make it to age 30, because the initial belief was that any sexually active gay male was going to die. That was what we thought. The chances of us living past 30 didn't seem to be high. Gradually, we were able to learn about safe sex and what you had to do to stay healthy. Then it became less existential and more about being safe, so you could still explore who you were, but you had to be very safe while doing so.

Q: I'm sorry, I realized I forgot to ask: What years were you at Harvard?

OSIUS: 1980 to '84. I graduated in '84. I was originally accepted to the Class of '83 but because of the gap year, I graduated in '84.

Q: So, you must have graduated from high school in '78-'79.

OSIUS: 1979, and then the year from '79 to '80, I worked and traveled, then I started Harvard in September of 1980.

Q: The HIV/AIDS crisis, it's different for people of my generation. So it didn't hit me, and it should have, that you were going through college right when that was happening.

OSIUS: The first name for it was Gay-Related Immunodeficiency, or "GRID." Before it was called HIV/AIDS, it was a disease of gay men and intravenous drug users. In the United States, it started among gay men, so it was considered a gay disease. In addition to the other social stigmas, there was the stigma of being associated with this disease for gay

people. AIDS was something that really hung over me and others of my generation for quite a few years, and it certainly did when I started the process of entering the Foreign Service. It was very much on my mind.

Q: So, you came out in college, at least to your parents, but were you publicly out, or were you out to your friends?

OSIUS: I was out by the end of college. I considered myself bisexual and I had girlfriends. By the end of college, I had a boyfriend. College really was a safe place. There might be stigma, and there might be people who had anti-gay prejudices, but there were enough people who were open and supportive and maybe experimenting themselves. In some ways, it was not uncool to be bisexual or gay. It felt much more challenging in the rest of the world than in the ivory tower of Harvard. Some people experimented and they figured out who they were. When I entered the "real world," at first, I went back into the closet. I was closeted when I worked for Al Gore on Capitol Hill. Even before that, at the American University in Cairo, I was cautious. Only my very close friends knew.

Q: So, at the end of your college experience, you're learning about yourself and you have a boyfriend, were you thinking a lot about the risks that might come with entering public service, and if you would really be able to do that as someone who's part of the LGBT community? Was that something you were weighing?

OSIUS: Definitely. I was concerned about whether it would allow me to have the kind of career I'd begun to think I wanted. It was a real concern. I was cautious about who I told and that had to continue even for the first few years in the Foreign Service, when I had to be cautious about who knew and who didn't. It came to a head when I had to get a security clearance, because at that point a few of my friends had to be interviewed for me to get the security clearance. Several of them were attractive women, because among my closest friends there happened to be some really attractive women. "Well," they said, "What should we say?" They were close enough to me to know who I was and who I loved. And I said, "Don't lie. Whatever you do, don't lie, but don't answer any question that they don't ask." And that was how I got through the security clearance. I never lied. My friends didn't lie, but no one asked. And I think it was partly because I had all these good-looking women friends and it was a man who carried out the interviews who probably thought, "Well, he'd be nuts not to be interested in these women."

Q: Interesting. So, you graduated from college in 1984 and did you go to Cairo next? Or did you go work for Al Gore next? Cairo?

OSIUS: I went to Cairo almost right away out of college. It was right after my fourth summer working for *Let's Go*. In September, I ended up in Cairo, working at the American University in Cairo. Then, halfway through that time in Cairo, my father died. I was in the middle of directing a play, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and I was, at that point, playing the lead. When my father died, I came home, but I didn't stay very long. I came home, we had his funeral, and I thought, I have an obligation. I'm in this play. A lot of

people are depending on me. I went back to Cairo, and I performed in the play and, in my head, each performance was dedicated to him. Then I realized I couldn't stay and finish the whole job. My family needed me too much. I stayed a few more weeks, as long as I could to complete my obligations in Cairo, and then I headed back early to help my family.

Q: What exactly was the job in Cairo? You said you were working at a university?

OSIUS: I worked at the American University in Cairo as a presidential intern. I worked in the office of the University president, a wonderful man named Dick Pedersen, a former diplomat.

Q: So, you were working for the president of the university. Your father unfortunately passed away. You went home, you came back, and then you went home.

OSIUS: I went home, and I helped my mom at home. I started looking for jobs, and that's when my thesis advisor, Marty Peretz, said, "I'm going to introduce you to Al Gore. He recently left the House and won a race for the Senate." Thanks to Marty, I got an interview. Al hired me, and I worked for him as a legislative correspondent, which is at the bottom rung of the ladder. It's not an unpaid internship, but not that much above that. I was paid $14,000 a year. I was writing on topics like Veterans Affairs and Social Security and domestic matters. But a wise man named Leon Fuerth worked as Al's National Security Advisor. At a certain point, Leon called me into his office and said, "I understand you're interested in foreign affairs." Leon, I thought, was kind of tough and gruff, but he turned out to be my greatest mentor, really the mentor of a lifetime. I think it's not entirely an accident that I got to know him after I lost my father, because he was kind of a father figure to me. Leon took me under his wing, and he taught me, and I did foreign affairs, defense and trade work. And he was an amazing, amazing teacher when it came to foreign affairs, trade, and defense.

He taught me so much, and so did Al. Al was a great boss, and very much interested in defense. That was when he was most focused on nuclear proliferation, and he was championing the single-warhead Minuteman missile system, as opposed to MIRVed missiles. Al was very much at the center of the defense debates. It was before *Earth in the Balance*, before his attention shifted to climate change. Al was a great leader. Leon was a great mentor. And I learned a lot working on the Hill.

Q: This must have been around '85–'86, somewhere around there.

OSIUS: My father died in ’84 so that would have been '85–'86.

Q: And DC is an interesting place. DC can be a tough place, whether you're young or old. DC can be tough. And correct me if I'm wrong, but you hadn't worked in DC before?

OSIUS: No, I hadn't, but I liked it. Because I made $14,000 a year, I couldn't afford much, so I lived in a group house in a seedy neighborhood where the third-floor

bathroom was falling into the second-floor bathroom. We received a citation at one point because the weeds in the backyard were more than six feet high. The cockroaches owned the kitchen, especially at night. It was rough. I had a beat-up old Toyota, but parking in that neighborhood was very dangerous. Being out at night was kind of dangerous, but it was fun. Amy Schwartz, my friend from the *Crimson,* had welcomed me into that group house, and I got to know people at that time who are still friends these many years later. We had a great group in that house, and it was interesting to be on the Hill. Ronald Reagan was in office. We Democrats were in the minority. I started getting exposed to the realities of international affairs. It was the time that Ferdinand Marcos Sr. had Ninoy Aquino assassinated. There were still a fair number of dictators. I remember having a picture on my wall of dictators and crossing them off one by one, as they were knocked off one way or another. It felt like a positive time in foreign policy, and I was working for people I admired very much and was learning a lot from.

Q: I'm just curious what DC was like back then, because I think DC has changed a lot.

OSIUS: It was much less prosperous, like that neighborhood where I lived in what was basically a tenement. I'm sure those homes go for millions of dollars now. And the neighborhoods between where I lived, not too far from Logan Circle, and the Capitol, were not safe places to go. What's now the waterfront was no man's land. It was dangerous territory. I used to take my straight pals to the bars off South Capitol Street. We used to go to a bar named "Tracks" on Thursday nights and go dancing -- gay people, straight people -- and we would dance until late at night and then come, bleary-eyed, into the office in the morning. It was dynamic and fun. A lot of us were young and idealistic and working on the Hill because we believed we could make a difference. Democrats and Republicans were much more likely to be friends at that time. One of my great pals was Dan Twining. He's now president of the International Republican Institute. He worked for John McCain, and I worked for Al Gore. We both focused on Asia. He and I became friends and we're still friends. It was easier to be friends with people of a different political persuasion than it is now.

Q: What was the LGBTI community like in Washington and on the Hill? I mean, was there? I'm sure there were a lot of closeted people.

OSIUS: There were lots of closeted people. The fear of AIDS was a big factor. But there were not just gay people, but gay-friendly people. Some of my great, closest friends at the time who would come with me to Tracks were straight people who thought it was fun to go dancing in a gay bar. Even years later, I still had girlfriends, so I think I still considered myself bisexual. But I was part of a community that included a lot of gay people, and that was the time I lost some friends, older gay men who took me on and mentored me, men who died of AIDS later. There were a couple of close friends from that time who died in the mid '80s. There was always this specter of death hanging over us, and yet people would still go out and find ways to find joy and to celebrate and to dance together and to try to understand who we were and where we fit in the world. It was an exciting place to be. It was exciting to be in Washington in my early 20s and mid 20s, and to continue the process of figuring out who I was.

Q: So, you worked for Al Gore until '86 or so?

OSIUS: I started working for him in 1985 and worked for him for more than a year. Then it was Leon who said, "You know, you should go to grad school." In fact, there were two people who told me this. First, Nick Burns, when I was at AUC. Nick Burns was staff aide to Nicholas Veliotes, who was U.S. ambassador in Cairo, and I got to know Nick. I met Veliotes, but I got to know Nick, who was very friendly and kind and inclusive and nice to us interns in the American University in Cairo. Nick said, "Ted, you should go to SAIS and join the Foreign Service." And I replied, "That's a really good idea." Nick planted that seed. Then, when I was working for Gore, Leon also said, "You need to get a master's degree." And I did. I applied to Georgetown and SAIS [Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies]. I wanted to stay in Washington because I liked Washington. I applied to Georgetown and SAIS; I got into both. But I chose SAIS, because it had a rigorous International Economics program. And I knew if I wasn't forced to do economics, I wouldn't do it. And boy, am I glad I did, because without an understanding of economics, you don't know how the world works, and it's been super important for the rest of my entire career to have an understanding of economics. I went to SAIS. I was working for Gore. I was trying to renovate a house so that I could move out of the tenement. I started at SAIS, but I waited until —

Q: Because Gore ran for president.

OSIUS: I took a little time off and accompanied my mother on a trip to India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Later, while still a student, I did work on Gore's campaign. That campaign happened while I was at SAIS. Al ran in the primaries against Jesse Jackson and Michael Dukakis, and he was in the race until the New York primary when he came in third. He got Mayor Ed Koch's endorsement. That turned out to be a poisoned chalice, and he came in third in the New York primary. It was clear he wasn't going to become the nominee, but it was interesting to work on his campaign. I was a volunteer.

Q: So, you must have spent a couple years at SAIS, right? '86 to '88, two years?

OSIUS: Because of the campaign and because I started mid-year, I graduated in May of '89 from SAIS and it was at that point that I joined the Foreign Service.

Q: Was SAIS as impactful in your life as Harvard was, or was it a different sort of impact?

OSIUS: It really was impactful, because I was way more serious about academics by the time I went to SAIS than I had been. At Harvard, I was a pretty good student, but I was more interested in the *Crimson* and theater and rowing and figuring out who I was than I was in academics. By the time I went to SAIS, I was really interested in the topics that I studied. I remember being very passionate about my classes and loving my classes at SAIS. Even though I was balancing studying and working, because I had to pay my way through SAIS, I still managed to get very serious about my studies. I think learning some

economics was decisive; it was decisive in future jobs. Understanding economics enabled me to work at the White House when I did. My concentration at SAIS, in addition to economics, was American Foreign Policy. I wasn't particularly focused on Asia. I was more focused on the Middle East, but I got an intellectual grounding for what I ended up doing for the next 35 years.

Q: I know now they have a campus in Italy. Was that there? Did you do that?

OSIUS: It was there, and I went. The campus is in Bologna. It's a wonderful place. SAIS has two overseas campuses: one is in China, and one is in Bologna, Italy. I went to the one in Bologna, but I was only able to go for a semester, and a lot of people went for a full year. Because of Al's campaign and my focus on American foreign policy, staying there a whole year didn't work for me. First, I'd had one semester in Washington, then I had a semester in Italy, and then I came back to Washington. I loved the time in Italy. There were some friendships there that continue to this day. Rebecca Gaghen was there. She had become a close friend. She was a friend from Harvard, but we became especially close at the American University in Cairo, and we studied together in Bologna. She also joined the Foreign Service. We've shared many chapters of our lives. She's the godmother to my daughter, a very decisive friendship, and that time in Italy was special for all of us.

Q: At this point, are you pretty sure you want to be a Foreign Service Officer? Because I know Nick Burns had to see something in you.

OSIUS: I was pretty sure. I had taken the exam twice as an undergrad, and both times, I got to the oral exam and didn't pass the oral exam, and I think it was because I didn't know much about economics. I'd taken what's called Ec 10 at Harvard, which is the basic economics course, but I didn't like it that much. And I didn't continue learning about economics until SAIS, where you had to. I threw myself into it. When I took the exam for the third time while I was at SAIS, the economics questions were easy. Not only did I pass the written exam, but I passed the oral, so for me the third time was the lucky one, because I knew what I needed to know to pass the exam.

Q: This was while you were at SAIS?

OSIUS: I took the exam while I was at SAIS.

Q: I want to back up a little bit, but I want to ask you, we've been talking for an hour and a half. I know you mentioned at 12:15, I think you have to take off?

OSIUS: That was Clayton who just came out and said that he's found a ride for Lucy to soccer. So, I don't actually have to leave until one. We can keep talking if you want.

Q: I'd love to. Would you like to take a break, though, or are you good to continue? Because we've been talking for an hour and a half, I know it's been a lot of continuous talking. I know that can be taxing, so I don't know if you want to.

OSIUS: I feel like we're on a roll. If you're okay with it, let's go for a little while longer, because you make this super easy. Let's go for a little while longer if you want to.

Q: Well, you're making it easy. You've had a very interesting life, and we're only through part of it, the very beginning of it. We are on a roll. Okay, before we get into the whole Foreign Service thing, I want to back up a little bit because you were talking about working on Al Gore's campaign, and I can imagine an experience like that can be pretty formative and pretty impactful. So, I was just curious about what you did on the campaign, what that experience was like, what you learned from it.

OSIUS: I did opposition research, and I focused on foreign policy, defense, and trade, and I reported to Leon to whom I'd reported when I was a legislative correspondent. I ended up writing my master's thesis for SAIS on that campaign, comparing the different foreign policy approaches of the candidates. I was most interested in Jesse Jackson, Michael Dukakis, and Gore. Gore probably being the most hawkish of the three, and Dukakis and Jackson being to his left. I looked at the different kinds of foreign policy within the Democratic Party, and how they interacted in that campaign. Foreign policy was relevant in the primary campaign. I was in the Gore camp. At that point, I couldn't consider myself a pacifist anymore. I considered myself a pro-trade moderate Democrat, who believed in a muscular foreign policy. That campaign and the time at SAIS certainly helped shape my views on what was an appropriate foreign policy for the United States.

Q: What else did that experience teach you? Did it teach you anything? Did you make any special relationships out of that campaign experience? I've never worked on a campaign, really. So, it's kind of a black hole to me, what it's really like.

OSIUS: We had a big office in Crystal City, and I spent a lot of time in that Crystal City office, but the strongest relationships were the ones I had from my time working for Gore in the Senate: Leon, other people, Larry Harrington. Other people who'd been with Larry Harrington had run Gore's first congressional campaign. Larry and Al go back probably more than 50 years. At this point, Leon and Al go back to the early 1980s, more than 40 years. There are certainly people I met then whom I've continued to engage with over the years. Unlike some Foreign Service Officers who go into the Foreign Service decidedly nonpartisan, or their persona is nonpartisan, because that's the way it's supposed to be in the Foreign Service, I entered the Foreign Service as a Democrat. I was and I've always been a Democrat. I've not been shy about my partisan views. I've been counseled at times to be less partisan. I asked my very first ambassador, Nick Platt, what party he belonged to. I asked, "Are you Democrat or Republican?" He said, "I'm a professional." I got that kind of counseling often in the Foreign Service: "you're supposed to be nonpartisan." But I also worked for political appointees like David Mulford, who liked it that I told him. He was a Republican, a bundler for George W Bush, but he liked it when I said, "I'm a Democrat, you should know, sir, I'm a Democrat." He liked knowing where I stood. I remember when I worked for Madeleine Albright, she asked, "How is that you can work for both Republicans and Democrats?" And I had to be on the other side, saying, "Well, we Foreign Service Officers, we work for whomever is the commander-in-chief." At that point Bill Clinton was president. I was a strong supporter of Bill Clinton, and my views

were quite set before I joined the Foreign Service about what was right for America, and I didn't ever hide those views.

Q: I guess one question I have is, why? Why at this point Foreign Service? Given your clear transparency about where you stood politically, you could have continued a career in the Senate or the House on the Hill.

OSIUS: I'll tell you why. I still think diplomacy is a noble profession. Thinking back to junior high and high school, as much as interested as I was in politics, as absorbing as I found politics, it involved so much compromise that it didn't feel like it had the kind of integrity that I wanted to have in my life. That's why I think I was so drawn to someone like Leon Fuerth. Even though Leon was right smack in the middle of politics for his whole career -- advisor to Al Gore, advisor to Bill Clinton -- he maintained his integrity, he maintained his principles. He was steady and unwavering in his principles, and he was a diplomat. I looked at people I admired and people I didn't admire so much, and I wanted to go with the people I admired, whom I felt had integrity. I thought, diplomacy is a profession where it is possible to hold onto one's ideals. It's a noble profession. I still think that.

Q: I agree with you. I think it's a great profession. So, we're in '89 when you graduated from SAIS, right? So Foreign Service? Presumably, that last year of SAIS, that's when you're taking the exam and going through the whole process?

OSIUS: Including a security clearance process.

Q: I want to come back to that, because we talked a little bit about the security clearance process. I'm presuming, correct me if I'm wrong, that the process was similar to what it is today. You take the written, you take the oral, and then you pass through the security and the medical and you are put on a list, a register. Let's come back to the security clearance, because I think this is the first time you're doing a security clearance. I don't think you had to in Congress, right?

OSIUS: No, this was the first time.

Q: That must have been scary. I would have been extremely scared in your position.

OSIUS: Well, it was a little scary. I mentioned these smart, attractive women who were interviewed by the guy who was doing my security clearance. They were all SAIS students. I was going through the security clearance process, as I was in my last semester at SAIS, and I knew that the security clearance stood between me and the profession I wanted. And I had to weigh: what do honesty and integrity mean? What is honesty in this situation? I didn't agree with a policy that excluded gay people, so my position was that I could be true to my ideals and not answer any questions that weren't asked about my sexual orientation. I was very determined I would not lie. I was asked, "Have you ever smoked pot?" And I said, "Yes." I was clear about when I'd smoked pot, when the last time was that I'd smoked pot. I answered that honestly, and it didn't make any difference

because I think they were more interested in whether I was an honest person than in whether I smoked pot in college. It just didn't matter that much. But on the question of sexual orientation, I told my friends, and I followed this myself, “Don't answer any question you're not asked, but do not lie if they ask that question.” And they didn't, the guy never asked that question, and I thought, well, I got through by the skin of my teeth. I don't even know what the rules were exactly, what the rules the investigator was working under, but he never raised that issue.

I got in without having said anything about my sexual orientation, and then I had to worry, “how do I keep my security clearance?” Because it was not long before I realized that Diplomatic Security was going after people who were gay and driving them out of the Foreign Service by taking away their security clearances. It didn't take too long to figure that out. For my first tour, I was cautious, and I wasn't out to everybody. In fact, in the first tour in the Philippines, I had two girlfriends, for about half of that tour, so it wasn't all that relevant. But, by the time I'd been in for a couple of years, I was worried about it. I liked the profession. I wanted to keep my job, and I didn't want to lose my security clearance.

Q: What were the rules in 1989? I mean, if you're gay, you can't work for government?

OSIUS: Would you lose your security clearance? Yes, you were considered a risk. You were considered at risk of blackmail. That was the approach. I had a friend, Jan Krc, who was one of the founders of GLIFAA, a legend. They took away Jan’s security clearance because he was honest about his sexual orientation. He stumbled around for some years in the wilderness, in a sort of limbo where he challenged this decision, and he couldn't get promoted and he couldn't get good jobs. It was a real setback to his career. They didn't kick him out, but they did everything they could to force him to leave. There was a very hostile DS apparatus at that point. Another very, very good friend, an A-100 classmate, was Danny Hall. Two DS agents in trench coats went to his mother's home in Dallas, Texas, and banged on the door. The DS agents asked Danny’s mother, “Do you know your son is gay?” And she very wisely said, “Of course, I know my son is gay. I am proud of him. You should be ashamed of yourselves. I must go, as I have an appointment with the hairdresser,” and got up and left. They were trying to persuade themselves that Danny was vulnerable to blackmail and take away his security clearance on the basis that he was vulnerable to blackmail, and Danny was not. Could Danny be vulnerable to blackmail? I think there were plenty of straight people who were having affairs or doing something nefarious. Such people would be much more vulnerable to blackmail than most of us gay people were. I was out to my parents and to my close friends. No one was going to blackmail me. No one was going to blackmail Jan. No one was going to blackmail Danny or Bryan Dalton or David Buss or David Larson. These are the founders of GLIFAA [Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs]. We got together, and we founded GLIFAA.

Q: To back up to the security clearance thing, I'm just curious about one thing. Back then, and now, there are a lot of gay people in Washington. There's a whole community, and there are a lot of people interested in working for government, right?

OSIUS: Yes.

Q: Was there a network of people talking about how to handle the security clearance situation? This is what you should say, this is what you shouldn't say? It must have been something that was talked about a lot.

OSIUS: Well, I certainly talked to friends to try to get advice about how to navigate this. But SAIS was not like Harvard. SAIS was not hospitable to gay people. At one point, a group of us, gay people and straight people, formed a gay-straight alliance, and we put up posters around SAIS. We said, "We are a group of gay and straight people who think that SAIS should be a more welcoming place for gay people." And I remember a lot of hostility at SAIS regarding gay people, so I had to be careful about who I talked to at SAIS. But I talked to my friends at SAIS, and I think it was more a rumor mill than a real network of people who gave me advice. I don't remember who told me this, maybe Frank Kameny, but the advice I received was, don't answer a question they don't ask. There was an expectation that I would not get the security clearance if I were known to be gay.

Q: What about the medical clearance? I mean, was that also a risk?

OSIUS: It wasn't for me. I'd never been exposed to HIV, and I think that would have been disqualifying–

Q: But they didn't ask questions about that in the medical clearance? I hear all the time about the security clearance, but I'm just curious if the medical clearance was also a way that they tried to pick people off.

OSIUS: I don't think it came up in my medical clearance, not to my recollection. The time that I worried about was when the guy, and he had a trench coat too, the guy from DS in a trench coat came to talk to me and came to talk to my housemates and my close friends. That's what I recall most vividly, thinking there's a risk here, and I could be excluded based on something that I say or something someone else says, and yet, I didn't want to join if it meant lying. I was adamant about that. I wasn't going to join the Foreign Service based on a lie, but I was prepared to join based on not answering a question that wasn't asked.

Q: Just curious if the Foreign Service didn't work out, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

OSIUS: I already had plans. I was going to be a PMF. I'd been accepted as a Presidential Management Fellow. Initially, the program was called Presidential Management Interns, and I'd been accepted as a Presidential Management Intern. I would have spent some time at State, some time at Defense, maybe some time at Commerce. I would have done a rotation, and I would have come in as a civil servant. I was already accepted when I passed the Foreign Service Exam, and I went to Fred Holborn, a professor I really liked and admired at SAIS. I said, "You helped me get the PMI, and I'm all ready to go, and I'm

excited about that, but I just passed the Foreign Service Exam. What should I do?" And he answered, "Join the Foreign Service." He said, "You're going to have better options if you want to end up in the State Department anyway. You're going to have better options as an FSO than you will as a civil servant." I think that has changed since then, but at the time you really were going to have a better shot at leadership positions as an FSO than you would as a civil servant. I chose the Foreign Service because I was still ambitious, and I wanted leadership positions. Listen, I didn't dream of being an ambassador. That was not even thinkable at that time, for a gay person to be ambassador—impossible. No one considered that even the most remote possibility. I just thought, I'd like a leadership position somewhere; I'd like to rise in the ranks and do something interesting and have an impact on American foreign policy. That's what I wanted. But the idea of being ambassador was many years later.

Q: So, you joined the Foreign Service. It must have been right out of SAIS? Can you tell me a little bit about A-100?

OSIUS: A-100. There were amazing people in that class. We were the 47th A-100. And there were about 46 of us in that class, including Mark Pekala, Phil Goldberg, Debra Towry, Sarah Eskandar, Ken Forder, Jerry Mallory, Beth Schoppe, John Price, Hank Rector. There were lots of people who are no longer in the Foreign Service, who I became friends with, people like Jeff Merrell, and then there were some people from the agency who were in that A-100 class. I remember one of the most vivid moments from A-100, and we'd probably been in for a couple of weeks by then, was when they said, "Okay, everybody who works for the CIA, stand up." And some of the people I liked the most in that class stood up and revealed themselves to be working for a different agency. That was a good moment, because it taught me right away, these people whom I like so much, I like for the right reasons. Even though they work for a different agency, we are on the same team, and they're going to have my back and I'm going to have their backs. And that proved true. In fact, one of the people from A-100 was in Manila, my first post, and I learned quickly how important that truth was, because I was doing provincial reporting. I was targeted for assassination, and the CIA alerted me to it, and I was held back from a trip where I might have been killed. I learned right away in my first post that we really were all part of the same team, and the CIA saved my life. I didn't forget that for the rest of my career. I remembered, "Oh, these are the guys who save our lives, because they're uncovering information about what the bad guys are doing."

A-100 was great. We became social friends as well as colleagues. I remember having everybody out to my mom's house in Annapolis near the water. We had a big barbecue. We traveled together to West Virginia. We learned a lot, and we bonded as a class, and we kept up with each other for the next 30 years. We watched each other's careers. We celebrated successes and marriages and babies, and we cared about each other from that moment on. Jeff Merrell, Richard Pruett, June Ellen Cochran, and Michel Desloover were all in Manila with me. Richard had taken the Foreign Service Exam seven times. Passed it on the seventh time around. And I liked his determination. We worked together again in Vietnam. My path crossed with A-100 classmates for the next 30 years. And that was always a pleasure. It was always a thrill to see where people went. I think of Phil

Goldberg and how terrific his career has been. He's a four-time ambassador and he was one that I think we all realized early on was likely to be a real superstar in the Foreign Service. And he was.

Q: He still is, absolutely. How big was your class? It was how many people?

OSIUS: We were the 47th A-100 and we were at least 46 people in that class.

Q: When I talk to people about their A-100 experience, I'm always curious about the composition of the class. Were there people of color? Was it a diverse group? Were there women? What was the composition of the class?

OSIUS: It was about a third women—

Q: Interesting.

OSIUS: It was unusual for the time that there were even one-third women. There was a little diversity. I remember James Fontanilla, of Philippine origin, Gaye Chun, who I think had Chinese origins, and Kathy Pepper, who was black. Carlos Garcia and Karen Gallegos had Hispanic origins, I think. It was mostly white. Maybe because of the Palmer case a few years earlier, the emphasis seemed to be on gender diversity more than ethnic and racial diversity. In earlier years, there had been some diversity programs, but I was not aware of them at the time. There was not yet a [Thomas R.] Pickering [Foreign Affairs Graduate Fellowship] or a [Charles B.] Rangel [International Affairs] fellowship program. We hadn't entered the era of the Pickering and Rangel fellowships yet. We were proud of ourselves that we weren't all white guys. We were mostly white women and white men, but our class had limited racial and ethnic diversity.

I just looked up the dates and the Pickering fellowship was established in 1992 and the Rangel came after. There had been a graduate foreign affairs fellowship earlier.

Q: David Mico, by any chance, do you know him? No, okay, he's Senior Foreign Service now, and he came through that. I think that was the predecessor to both of them.

OSIUS: Clayton will know better than I do so I will ask him. But I remember we were happy that there were so many women, and that it wasn't just pale, male, and Yale. One of the women I worked with during my first tour in Manila had been a nun and a taxi driver. In my A-100 class there was a former prison guard. So, there was at least some socio-economic diversity. I grew up middle class, I had an Ivy League degree, and I'd gone to SAIS, but there were plenty of people with backgrounds different from mine, even if there wasn't much racial or ethnic diversity. There was geographic diversity, with people in our class from all over the country.

Q: Is that something that people talked about? Did people say, "Oh, there are not that many people of color?" It sounds like they talked about the women aspect of it. But is that even something that came up?

OSIUS: Yes, it was something that came up. There was a sense that the Foreign Service had been too insular, too pale, male, and Yale and wasn't truly representative of the United States. And I felt there was an effort to have a diplomatic corps that was more representative than it had been. I think those early efforts seemed to be more focused on gender than anything else. It was funny, because there was talk about how, in the past, if women joined the Foreign Service, once they got married, they had to give up their jobs, and that requirement was never made of men. And there was talk about how, in the past, diplomats were graded also on the performance of their unpaid spouses. We talked about that and, laughing, said we don't do that anymore. But there was at least one marriage that came out of our A-100 class, and it was the woman who stepped back and the man whose diplomatic career continued once they started having kids and having a family. She was the one who resigned first, even though I always thought she was the star. Then, at my first post, there was a woman diplomat with a trailing spouse who was male, and their marriage was over by the end of the tour. The whole idea that the man's career might not be in front was unusual at that time. There really was a lot of focus on gender. The idea of a woman diplomat with a male trailing spouse was very unusual. I think subsequently it is much more the norm than it was at the time. There was still a lot of gender disparity.

Q: I think one thing that's interesting about what you just said is that a lot of these issues are still being discussed in the Foreign Service. This idea that we don't fully represent the United States, and we really need to. That sounds like a carbon copy of what I hear today. The gender aspect, I don't hear as much. I hear it more with other types of diversity. But it's interesting that that exact conversation is still happening, 30 years later.

OSIUS: Well, we've made progress on the gender aspect. Remember, Madeleine Albright was the first woman secretary of state. Condi Rice was the second, Hillary Clinton was the third. There was a sense of breaking through at the top ranks and even below, when it came to women in leadership positions. Women ambassadors were still rare back then. They existed, but they were still fairly rare, and I feel like, since that time, we made a whole lot of progress towards gender equality. Where we still struggle the most is with race. I think that's because of America's peculiar history, where for 400 years we built our prosperity on the backs of enslaved persons. We haven't gotten past that part of our history yet at all. I faced discrimination as a gay person, but we moved much faster as a society on allowing gay people to do what we do, to serve in leadership positions and be publicly who we are, than we've made on racial and ethnic minorities.

Q: Were there any gay people in the A-100? Did this come up at all?

OSIUS: It did. I can't remember if it came up right away, but Danny Hall was in my A-100 class. I think James Fontanilla, who was a Philippine American, was gay. He left the Foreign Service after not very long. Danny remained in as long as I did. There were at least five of us who were gay in that class of 46 people. I wasn't out in A-100 and it was only years after that I came out at work. I was still cautious because I would lose my security clearance if I came out. Even in my first tour in the Philippines, I remember being cautious about who I talked to. It was only after Warren Christopher said no

discrimination based on sexual orientation, that we could speak freely and not worry about repercussions. We still might have to worry about some career repercussions, but at least we didn't worry about losing our security clearances after Bill Clinton and Warren Christopher.

Q: But I guess you knew who you were and—did you know that all of you were gay? Or was that discussed or did you kind of figure that out after the fact?

OSIUS: We figured it out after the fact. I think Danny and I maybe figured it out during A-100. He was one of the founders of GLIFAA, and he was the GLIFAA president when I was on the GLIFAA board. But I'm not certain we ever had that conversation while we were still in A-100 because we were all fairly cautious. And with James, I know I didn't know. I didn't find out until much later that he was gay. I think it was still a taboo subject while I was in A-100 and certainly through my first tour, and probably into my second and maybe even into my third. During my third tour, Madeleine Albright had become ambassador to the UN and "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," was still the policy. I remember having to be cautious and being very nervous about bringing my then boyfriend to a Christmas party at the U.S. Mission to the UN. God bless her, Madeleine Albright kind of sized up the situation. She didn't want to do anything that was against policy, so instead, she just approached my boyfriend and said, "Would you like to dance?" And they danced at that Christmas party, and that told everybody in the room that she was okay with the fact that I was gay. That was still a time when we had to be careful about who knew. Really, it wasn't until the end of my fourth tour, at the end of Warren Christopher's time as secretary, that we could really be ourselves.

Q: I think you told me the Madeleine Albright story before. That's an amazing story. Madeleine Albright is a legend, right? And I'd love to delve more into that with you, into what she was like, but backing back up to A-100, so you finish A-100. You didn't go to ConGen [Basic Consular Course] right away, did you?

OSIUS: I did.

Q: Was your first tour a consular tour?

OSIUS: It was a two-part tour. It was a year of consular and a year of political. I had both political training and ConGen before I went to Manila. And then it ended up being a three-part tour because I was picked to be staff aide. I did three jobs in that first tour, consular, staff aide and political. I had a lot of training before I went out for that first tour.

Q: I've got to ask you. I know your family, it's an educated family, international connections to travel, but this — it's serious. You know, when you join the Foreign Service, you're going to move far away. What did your family make of this? How about your mom, your sisters?

OSIUS: I think they liked it. My mom came to visit. My dad had passed away by then, but my mom came to visit, and at least one of my sisters did. My youngest sister came to

Manila, and then my older sisters came to other posts. I think my family always liked it, but there was a sense of danger now. It was exacerbated by the fact that the Philippines was not an entirely safe place. Colonel [James N.] Rowe, the JUSMAG [Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group] chief, had been assassinated just before I arrived in the Philippines. There was an active insurgency. The New People's Army was engaged in a left-wing insurgency, and there was a right-wing thing going on among the military, and Gringo Honasan staged a coup against Cory Aquino. It was a turbulent time, and there were natural disasters: a typhoon and a huge earthquake. [Mount] Pinatubo blew up. There was danger. I got shot at during the coup against Cory and, as I said earlier, I was targeted by the NPA when I was doing provincial reporting. There were plenty of dangers, and my mother tended to be nervous. She was always nervous about all her children. She was nervous when we got on planes. I probably didn't tell her everything until after I was safe. But I kept up a steady drum beat of news from Manila to my family. Communications moved a lot slower then. I sent a lot of communications back by cassette tape. I'd do a recording on a cassette tape, package it up, send it in the mail, and it would get there a few weeks later, as well as letters and — this was when email was in its infancy. There were faster ways to send communications, but we were also relying a lot on those light aerograms, those light — [you've] probably never seen them. They were light blue letters that you wrote on, and they used minimal postage. Most of our communication was not electronic at that point.

Q: I have to ask, how did you end up in Manila anyway? Because it seems like before you ended up there, if I remember correctly, you had some Asia experience. But it seems like you had been very, very interested in the Middle East. Frankly, you spent a lot of your time in the Foreign Service focused on EAP [East Asia and the Pacific]. So, I'm curious how you ended up in Manila in the first place? Is it somewhere you wanted to go, or were you directed there? How did that happen?

OSIUS: I had no Asia experience. I mentioned to you the China conference in high school, but I had not focused on Asia at SAIS. I spoke Arabic, and I'd traveled a lot in the Middle East, so I was a perfect candidate for a Middle East career. I made a conscious decision in A-100. I was a political officer. I looked around at the world, and I thought: Middle East, terrorism, oil. That's what I'm going to be reporting on, because that's what it felt like at the time. There was good news coming out of Asia. Change was happening in the Philippines, because [President Ferdinand] Marcos had been taken out. Things were bad in North Korea, but people were emerging out of poverty in China and in Southeast Asia. There were good stories, really good stories, as well as bad stories in Asia. I thought, for a reporting officer, it's going to be more interesting to be in Asia than in the Middle East. As a diplomat, I thought I had a chance to make a difference, because the tectonic plates were all still moving in Asia. I liked Europe, but I thought, I won't really make as much of a difference in Europe as I have a chance to make in Asia. I think I was right, at least for me, that going to a part of the world that was as dynamic as Asia was the right thing for me as a political officer to do. I never turned back from that decision. Once I'd experienced the Philippines, I was clear I was going to do Asia from then on, and I hardly ever diverted from that path. I went to the Vatican for a stretch, and I worked at USUN. I worked a little on the Middle East at USUN. But pretty much from

then on, it was all Asia, all the time. From A-100 on, it was either EAP, or briefly South Asia, SCA [South and Central Asian Affairs].

Q: It was a conscious decision. You knew from A-100 you knew you wanted to do a —

OSIUS: It was a very conscious decision. Because Manila was a visa mill, I thought if I bid on that consular-political rotation, I had a decent chance of getting it, and because I wanted to get my consular work out of the way. I knew I had to do consular work, but I didn't want to do it a whole lot. If I could just do it for one year and then do political, I'd be happy. That turned out to be a good call. I got my first choice, Manila. I remember that day, Flag Day, when they held up the flag for me to go to Manila. I was thrilled, because I thought, I get to go to Asia! I get to start this career in Asia. In a way, looking back, it's not surprising that I've ended in Asia too, that I spent most of my almost 30 years in Asia.

Q: But one thing that is interesting when I'm looking at your resume, is you spent a lot of time in Asia, but you didn't spend that much time in the stereotypical places that people think you need to go in EAP, right? Not so much in China, not so much in Japan. That's interesting.

OSIUS: But I worked on Japan. I knew it was a gap. I thought China and Japan were gaps in my resume, and when I had an opportunity to do a brief sabbatical, and we'll get to that later, I went to Japan because I knew I needed to understand Japan better than I did. And I ended up writing a book about Japan and getting super interested in Japan. I bid on China jobs multiple times, and I never got one. I knew that China was a gap too, but I worked on China a lot at the White House. I ran the U.S.-China Forum on Environment and Development for Al Gore, and I spent a huge chunk of my time in the White House focused on China. Even though I didn't get to serve there, I thought a lot about China policy, especially during that stretch, but I regret that I never served in China. I would have liked to. I can't remember how many times I bid on Shanghai. I thought Shanghai was the center of Asia, and a dynamic place. I wanted to go there, and I never got to go. But I traveled there in preparation for my work for Al Gore. I went other times. I managed to go to China several times during my career, but I never got to serve there.

Q: Well, I think, Ambassador Osius, this might be a good stopping place, because I know you have to take off at one, right?

OSIUS: We do.

Q: And I think the next time we can really start delving into the Foreign Service experience that you had, and GLIFAA and all of that. But we've gotten the earlier stuff out of the way, I think, in a pretty comprehensive way.

OSIUS: I think you're doing a great job. You're steering this beautifully, and I really appreciate your devoting this time to it. I think this matters. I think that telling our stories is important.

Q: I agree with you 100%. So, I'm gonna get with Yasmin to schedule the next one. I think that's probably the best way to do it.

OSIUS: Terrific. Yes, that's the best.

Q: And do me a favor, say hi to Clayton for me and have fun at that soccer game.

OSIUS: I absolutely will. Clayton just came out, so I know he hasn't gone to pick up our son yet.

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Q: So today is the eighth of January, 2025, and with Ambassador Osius, we're continuing our oral history discussion. I think where we left off, ambassador, was, you had just finished A-100 and you were about to go to Manila. Remind me again how you ended up in Manila, why you wanted to go there. You were very interested in Asia if I remember correctly.

OSIUS: I think I mentioned to you, I spoke Arabic, and I'd spent time in the Middle East, and I could have put in for a Middle East posting, and I would have gotten it, but by then, I had thought about, where do I want to spend my career? And I felt like Asia would be much more positive. There would be tough stories, but also good stories, stories of progress, hopeful stories. And the most interesting Asia post on my list for A-100 was Manila, because it was consular and political. In the end, I did three jobs, consular staff aide, and political. It was a fantastic introduction to the Foreign Service. I had amazing bosses. I worked for Nick Platt, a legendary ambassador, ambassador to several countries, and one of the grand diplomats, and also Frank Wisner, another legendary ambassador and phenomenal diplomat. I worked very closely with Ambassador Platt, but also closely with Ambassador Wisner. They're both still friends of mine today, and I got my consular rotation out of the way, but with a fantastic group of junior officers -- that's what we were called then -- so it was fun. The tour was fun, and the friendships still last. Piper Campbell used to sit next to me on the visa line. We're still friends. I saw her recently. Kurt Tong and other people remain friends almost 40 years later.

I thought the consular experience was a useful one. Later, I worked for a DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] who had never done a consular tour, and he didn't understand what the entry level officers were dealing with, and even Ambassador Platt didn't understand. Manila was a visa mill. At one point Ambassador Platt said to a group of the junior officers, "Yes, I sat in my office in Windsor, Ontario, and there was Detroit behind me, on a big picture window, and people would come into my office, and they would sit down, and I'd have to tell them, No." And I said, "Ambassador, don't tell that story anymore. It shows how out of touch you are because none of us have windows, none of us have offices, and we don't invite people into our office and sit them down and explain. We often deal with 100 to 200 cases a day. So don't tell that story."

I worked in a visa mill, and I felt it gave me credibility. From then on, I understood the challenges of consular work. It really helped me as a leader, and then I got to know this fascinating country, the Philippines. I loved that tour, and it was very exciting. We had a typhoon hit us. We had a coup attempt against Cory Aquino, who was president at that time, and I got shot at, and it was all very exciting. Mount Pinatubo blew up, in this huge volcanic eruption, and there was a big earthquake. All those things happened during my tour. I thought, "Whoa, I'm in the right profession if I want some excitement." This is the right profession, and I was targeted by left wing guerrillas, the New People's Army. It was an exciting introduction to the Foreign Service.

Q: Okay, so I have a lot of questions. I presume the first part of your tour was the consular tour, is that right?

OSIUS: Yes, for NIVs [Nonimmigrant Visas].

Q: And did you do ACS [American Citizen Services] too, or just NIV?

OSIUS: No, I did NIVs and IVs [Immigrant Visas], and I didn't end up doing ACS during that tour. I probably would have but because I had a consular political rotation and ACS was desired, as it was more interesting than NIVs. The people who had full two-year tours in consular got to do ACS and anti-fraud, and I just did NIVs and IVs.

Q: Got it. So, you very casually said, "I was shot at and targeted by left-wing guerrillas." I'd like to know more about this. How did this happen? I'm sure there's a story behind this.

OSIUS: This is a fun thing about the Foreign Service. You have these stories. It was a tense time in the Philippines. The head of JUSMAG had been assassinated, less than a year before I got there, and the public affairs officer, Stan Schrager, was targeted by the NPA for assassination.

Q: So, these are rebel groups, right?

OSIUS: There were left wing rebel groups, and there were right wing groups, and the right-wing attempt on Cory Aquino was when I got shot at because we were there during the coup attempt. A lot of people were taken hostage in hotels in Makati, and some of them were American. We were a consular team during the coup that was in touch with the Americans in their hotel rooms who were being held hostage. And we attempted a break, to get the hostages out. We took an embassy bus to Makati, and we were all there ready to get the hostages out. We thought they were going to be able to have safe passage out of Makati, and we'd be able to take them in buses back to the embassy. In the end, they weren't let out. I remember one person came out of the hotel with underwear on his head, saying, "Don't shoot me." And he got out, but most of the people stayed hostages. We went out there with our buses, and then some shooting started, and a bullet whizzed by my ear. Later I went and retrieved the bullet from the street where it had ended up. I felt

this was a lucky bullet that went by my ear but did not hit me, so I held onto that bullet. I don't know if I still have it, but I held onto it for a long time, because it was a moment when we had to do what you do in a crisis, which is communicate, often, with Washington and often with the people who were in danger. These were American citizens in hotels, and they were in comfortable hotels. They weren't in immediate danger, but they didn't have freedom. It took until the coup was resolved before we got them out. Dan Quayle was vice president, and he presided over a meeting of the NSC [National Security Council] where they decided to fly F-4s over Malacañang Palace. Ultimately the coup was resolved. Cory Aquino stayed in power, but it was a very tense five or six days, maybe longer. It was a tense period. I was targeted to be killed by the left wing [NPA] because I was a provincial reporter in the second part of that tour. I traveled everywhere, from Batanes to Tawi-Tawi, the northernmost island to the southernmost island, and many places in between. I had Luzon and the Bicol region as my beat, and I'd meet with provincial officials, I'd cover the rebellion, I'd cover economics, and I'd cover politics in every province -- we had a formula -- so I asked a lot of questions when I was there. I would meet with the bishops and meet with provincial officials and ask lots of questions. The NPA got my name and, at a certain point, a friend working at the station at the embassy, said, "You're targeted. They're planning to shoot you on your next provincial trip." I postponed the next provincial trip, but it cemented in my mind forever the value of a good intelligence service, because I'd be dead if it hadn't been for my colleagues who worked for the agency, working side by side with us. They warned me, and they warned Stan Schrager, and both of us survived our tours.

Q: Well, I'm glad you survived. Okay, so you've covered the political, you covered the consular. You said you didn't really do ACS, but it sounds like you did have an ACS experience with the whole evacuation thing.

OSIUS: With the evacuation, I had an ACS experience, yes.

Q: A very wide-ranging tour. Can you talk a little bit about your time? I guess you were staff aide, right?

OSIUS: During the coup I was staff aide to Nick Platt. At that time, we were negotiating a bases agreement, and Rich Armitage used to come out, and I was staff aide to Nick Platt during that time. I saw what was happening in the most important negotiations with the Philippines over the bases. I got to see that up close. Platt was very inclusive of me. He would go on provincial trips, sometimes in a helicopter or in a DAO [Defense Attache Office] plane. I would take pictures, and I would take notes, and I would report on everything, and I worked very hard on preparing the trips, and I got to see what an ambassador did. I was still staff aide when DCMs changed. Ken Quinn left, and Tom Hubbard came in, and then I was political officer when Wisner came in. I worked with him as a political officer, but I felt like I had an experience that many in the Consular Section didn't have, which was a lot of exposure to what was happening in the other parts of the embassy, starting with the front office and those phenomenal bosses to learn the trade from.

Q: Sounds like a very, very impactful first tour, busy and impactful. Very cool. When I looked at your CV, I was a little surprised to see the place that you went next, the Holy See, right? That wouldn't have been the first place I would have thought you might have gone. I'm curious about how you ended up in the Holy See.

OSIUS: That was because I spoke Italian. I had spent a semester in Bologna when I got my degree from Johns Hopkins. My Italian wasn't great, but it was passable. My Career Development Officer said, you can compete for this job at the Vatican. I thought, great, and so I went for it, and the fact that I spoke Italian already meant it was going to be less time consuming to get me up to speed in Italian. At that time, you couldn't really work at the Vatican without Italian and French. I would say French was just as important at the Vatican as Italian, and I already spoke French, so it was language that got me that next job. It was another combination job. It was political and management officer, or they called it admin at the time, so it was a political and admin job, and I worked for a great DCM, Cameron Hume, who became my mentor from that moment on. I ended up working for him three times in the course of my career. We had a political ambassador who was a nice man, Thomas Patrick Melady, who passed away in 2014. He was a Catholic fundraiser for George HW Bush. I learned from both the DCM and the ambassador, and I got to work with the political and management teams in the Rome embassy, a much bigger embassy. We moved our embassy from one location to another during that time, and we brought on a new ambassador, so I had management challenges to learn about, and I had a lot of political reporting opportunities.

The Vatican is an unusual posting because they don't do consular work. At our embassy, we didn't do consular work, we didn't do commercial work, but it was a very important listening post. Eighteen percent of the world's population is Catholic, and the people who do diplomacy at the Vatican have sixteen centuries of experience, and they have access to the bishops and the archbishops in every country that has a big Catholic presence, so they know what's going on. I'd learned this in the Philippines, because I'd call on the bishops, who always knew what was happening. They might have learned it in the confessional, but they certainly learned from their constituents what was happening politically. And we had common interests with the Vatican. This was George HW Bush's presidency, but our embassy had been established during President Reagan's time, and we shared an interest in human rights and religious freedom with the Vatican. That meant most of my reporting was on refugees or human rights or religious freedom in various parts of the world. We learned so much from our Vatican counterparts, and Cameron was serious about mentoring, so he would bring me along to some of the high-level meetings. I remember one car ride after we'd met Claudio Celli, who was the single most important person under the pope for the reporting that we were doing. The pope was John Paul II. After the meeting with Archbishop Celli, Cameron asked, "Now, Ted, why was that meeting important?" I said, "Well, we talked about human rights and religious freedom, we talked about this country, and that country." And he said, "Nope, Ted, why was that meeting important?" I said, "Well, we also talked about this and this and this," and I was listing all the matters we discussed. He said, "Nope, Ted, that meeting was important because you met a very significant person in the Vatican, and from now on, you have a relationship with him. It's about relationships. Diplomacy is all about relationships, all about building

trust. The most important aspect of that meeting was the relationship that you established." And I never forgot that.

Q: Curious about one thing, the LGBTI issues are intertwined in a very interesting way with the Vatican, right? Did any of that come up? I mean, this must have been on your mind while you were there.

OSIUS: Yes, it did. The political officer who was there when I arrived was Jewish. So right away, I learned that you don't have to be Catholic to report on the Vatican. In fact, she was very widely respected by the Catholic hierarchy that she worked with. I didn't have to believe everything the Vatican said to be an effective reporting officer. I didn't have to buy their views on homosexuality to be an effective political officer at the Vatican. And I was figuring out my life at that point. I was in a relationship, but I was also speaking with a very close friend, a woman, about the possibility of marriage, because I wanted to be a dad. We didn't end up getting married. It was just as well. But I showed up to some events with her on my arm. I was probably less out at the Vatican than I was in the Philippines. But this was still a "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" time. I was out to my boss, Ambassador Hume, later Ambassador — at that time he was DCM Cameron Hume. I had a real conversation with him at one point. But otherwise, I wasn't particularly out while in Rome.

Q: I think this might be a good time to move into GLIFAA, because I know GLIFAA was founded in 1992. Am I right? And I think you were in some sort of training in 1992 and then you went to the Holy See that same year. Italian training. Were you part of the founding of GLIFAA, or were you—

OSIUS: I wasn't at the very first brunch. A significant brunch occurred in March 1992 hosted by David Buss and David Larson. The immediate concern was Danny Hall's security clearance. Participants included my friend Danny, Bryan Dalton, who later became a very close friend, Jan Krc, John Long, Eric Nelson, Richard Hoagland, and John Schneider. I believe that I got plugged in five days after that brunch and already there was a larger group of us. Our list, the list of future GLIFAA members, was something we held very tight because DS was coming after us. Diplomatic security folks were basically trying to drum us out. Jan Krc had lost his security clearance and was in career limbo for years. Danny Hall, David Buss, Karl Olson, and Bryan Dalton were the subjects of DS investigations. Bryan's investigation began in 1991.

Earlier I told you that two DS security agents in trench coats flew to Dallas to meet the mother of Danny Hall, who later became president of GLIFAA. Proud of her son, Danny's mother told them she was proud of her son, she had an appointment with a hairdresser, and then she left. The fact that they were trying to take the security clearances away from individuals meant we felt we were under threat. We thought we could lose our jobs, and so starting with that brunch and various meetings over the next weeks and months that I joined, we determined that we were stronger as a group than as individuals. They weren't going to be able to knock out five or ten percent of the workforce as easily as they could knock us out one by one. We had meetings to strategize

together. What could we do to keep our jobs? Because that's all we wanted, to keep our jobs. David Buss was the first president of GLIFAA, and eventually they formed a board. I wasn't on the first board. I was on the board from 1995 to 1996 when Danny Hall was GLIFAA president. I was in some of the early meetings in 1992, when we started strategizing about what this group would do so that we could keep our security clearances and keep our jobs.

Q: One question I have is, why then? Why 1992, because this sort of stuff had been going on for years and years and years, right? And there have always been LGBTI people at the Department of State. Why didn't this happen earlier? Why 1992?

OSIUS: For one thing, it was existential. The AIDS crisis was still hot. A lot of us had lost friends by then, and we wanted to live our lives, and we wanted to do our jobs, and we saw a political opening when Bill Clinton was elected. George HW Bush probably wasn't sympathetic to our cause, but we thought there was at least a possibility that under a Clinton presidency, there could be some change. And in fact, there was. In 1994, Secretary Christopher issued a brief statement on non-discrimination that included sexual orientation. Even that was challenging because of the politics at the time. Remember, Clinton had campaigned saying he was going to end "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." And then he didn't. He left it in place. He sacrificed us when there was a lot of blowback in Congress. He sacrificed the cause of equality, or at least postponed the cause of equality for a few years. In 1998, President Clinton signed an executive order ending discrimination based on sexual orientation that did not include the military, because of objections from John McCain. It took a long time for the military -- and the State Department -- to treat gay people fairly. By the time I joined the GLIFAA Board in 1995, we were less afraid of losing our jobs and more focused on equal treatment to that of our heterosexual colleagues. Starting in 1992, we worked for that statement from Warren Christopher, saying there would be no discrimination based on sexual orientation, which meant we wouldn't lose our jobs. After 1995, we focused on fair treatment for ourselves and our partners. We did it very quietly at first, and then around 1996 we became more visible.

I think last time I told you the story about Madeleine Albright dancing with my partner. Even she, a cabinet officer, couldn't declare, "I support you." She couldn't say, "I support equality for you capable officers who happen to be gay." All she could do was dance. But that was enough. By dancing with my then partner, she made it clear to everybody that she was on the side of equality. But it wasn't until 1998, during his second term, that President Clinton signed an executive order ending discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Q: How did you get drafted into this? Because you said that you were not the initial brunch, the famous initial brunch, but you came in five days later. Did Clinton start in 1992?

OSIUS: Clinton was elected president in '92 and inaugurated in '93. He was running for president that summer before I went to Italy, and we felt there was hope. Here was this charismatic Democrat running, and we might see some change. When he was elected, we

started to gear up. From ‘93 to ‘98 we revved up our activities, and we went to speak to State Department leadership and say, we're being persecuted by Diplomatic Security. Call off the dogs. That's not what the President wants. And they did that. Under Tony Quainton’s leadership, DS started backing off starting soon after Clinton was elected. We began to emerge during that first Clinton term and started to be less closeted. I mentioned that I was still pretty low key while I was in Rome because I think I felt I had to be, but after that, I didn't. In New York, my next assignment, I brought my partner to Madeleine's Christmas party, and for the first time showed all my colleagues who I was.

Q: How did you get drafted into being part of GLIFAA? How did you find out about it?

OSIUS: First it was through Danny Hall. Later I became friends with Bryan Dalton, through GLIFAA. That's where that friendship started. Bryan and I ended up working in Vietnam together and became very good friends. But Danny was in my A-100 class. Danny and I must have come out to one another, because he invited me to my first GLIFAA meeting soon after the inaugural brunch in 1992. Danny had been targeted by Diplomatic Security, and called to their offices for a meeting about an investigation they were conducting while he was in DC after his first assignment in the Dominican Republic as a consular officer. He thought that it was to help them with a visa fraud case, but upon arrival at DS offices, they told him that it was an investigation about him. Someone at post had written a letter alleging that he was gay, and DS had to determine if he could keep his security clearance, as he could be subject to blackmail. Danny confirmed that he was gay and not subject to blackmail, as he had been very open at post. He wasn’t the only gay officer in the DR, and being openly gay at that embassy wasn’t an issue. The DS agents said that they needed to talk to a member of his family to confirm that they knew also. Danny assured them that his family knew, but left the meeting, shaken, faced with the threat of losing his clearance. He walked to the AFSA office, and AFSA attorney Sharon Papp was furious. “We told them that they aren’t allowed to do that.” Sharon referred him to David Buss and Bryan Dalton, whom she had also counselled through this same process. After these three met, David suggested hosting a brunch, as they all knew other gay people working in the State Department. DS had suspended Jan Krc’s security clearance. I met Jan at that time, and remember that not only had he been targeted, he'd lost his security clearance, and it took him years to get it back.

Q: I really liked Jan. I met him once when he was at the I think he was the PAO in Austria. He must have been in Vienna at some point. Anyway, Jan's beyond amazing story. So, it seems like at some point after Clinton was elected, there was talk because GLIFAA members were actually talking to leadership at the State Department. I guess at some point people must have said, okay, we're probably not going to get fired and persecuted if we talk to leadership. I think we're okay. We're moving in the right direction. But when I think of the formation of GLIFAA, it sounds like you started to get involved right before Clinton was elected, and it was probably still dangerous. I'm picturing in my mind secret codes at meetings and CIA kind of stuff. But I don't know if that's true. I mean, it must have been kind of risky. What were those meetings like?

OSIUS: We thought it was risky. I remember one GLIFAA meeting on Capitol Hill in somebody's backyard that spring soon after the brunch. We talked about creating GLIFAA, and the gathering was also social. Here we were among other gay people, so there was a social side to it, but there was also a sense of risk just by gathering, because we worried about people infiltrating our meetings and reporting to DS who was there. And we were very serious about keeping the membership list secret because we thought DS would take the list and we could all lose our security clearances, or they would knock us off one by one. We wouldn't get to keep our jobs. But we thought it was worth taking some risk. We wanted to be ourselves, and by the time I went to Rome, I certainly knew who I was. I thought it was worth taking a risk. Looking back, it seems so obvious. You take those risks, because you know you're only going to be a good leader if you are yourself; you can't be a good leader by trying to fake it or by staying in the closet. That's impossible – at least for me. But at the time, that wasn't so apparent.

At the time, we were fearful of losing our security clearances and our jobs if DS knew we were in GLIFAA. Still, we met, and still we strategized. In 1992, GLIFAA leaders met with the Director General, Ed Perkins. Linda Thomas-Greenfield was with the D-G in that meeting, as she recalled years later as the guest of honor at a GLIFAA Pride Event. Anyway, in 1993 we met Assistant Secretary Tony Quainton and other leaders in the department, and asked for fair treatment. We asked to be able to keep our jobs. Our argument to DS was, "you can't blackmail us, because we're out to our families. We're not any more blackmailable than a straight person would be." Because we all learned about what made people vulnerable to blackmail, and it's being deeply in debt, or having a mistress, or the various things that people could be blackmailed for. We were making the case that we couldn't be blackmailed because we were out and posed no greater security risk than a straight officer.

Q: Can you tell me about your involvement with GLIFAA throughout the years? Because you said initially you weren't on the board? At some point you were on the board. I don't think you were ever president, right? You weren't president.

OSIUS: I wasn't president. I was Treasurer and Secretary when Danny Hall was president. I supported him, and he asked me to come on the Board with him. That was in 1995 after Italy and New York. I have a tenth anniversary perspective on GLIFAA written in 2002. In 1998, I nominated Bryan Dalton to serve as president. I was working at the White House and my hands were very full, but I tried to help Bryan's board, too.

Q: It seems like GLIFAA really played a pivotal role in your experience in the Foreign Service. Is that right?

OSIUS: Absolutely, because I wasn't alone. Back in the '90s, no one could dream of being an openly gay person and becoming an ambassador. That was just not possible. It was only after being exposed to dynamic gay leaders who were determined to be who they were and be leaders in the Foreign Service, that being a leader in the Foreign Service was something I could even consider. I was inspired by David Buss, Bryan Dalton, Danny Hall, Eric Nelson, and John Long. The early leaders inspired me to be myself, to

be proud of who I was, and to get out of the closet. At work, the first big step was that Christmas party hosted by Madeleine Albright. For me, that was a big step.

Q: Required some courage, and correct me if I'm wrong, Ambassador, but GLIFAA has also played a big part in your personal life, because I believe you met Clayton at a GLIFAA meeting. Is that correct?

OSIUS: Yes, I did. We met in September 2004, at a GLIFAA business meeting. The monthly business meetings were usually held in someone's living room. I saw this handsome guy across the room on September 13, 2004, and we gravitated to the kitchen and talked. I had ridden my bike over to the host's home and Clayton lived within walking distance, so I asked, “Can I walk you home?” I put on my helmet and took my bike, and we walked together to the front door of his apartment building, and decided to have a date the next day, and we've been together ever since.

Q: It's amazing. When did you marry? 20 years ago?

OSIUS: We met in 2004. We married in June 2006. At that point, marriage equality only existed in Massachusetts, and only for Massachusetts residents. So, we flew to Vancouver to get married. We got married under Canadian law, and it happened to be the day that George W Bush introduced a constitutional amendment saying that marriage was only between a man and a woman. Like oppressed people before us, we went to Canada. We got married legally, and it meant a lot to have legal recognition of our marriage in Canada, even though we didn't have it in the United States. In July 2006, before departing for our posting in India, we had a commitment ceremony on Tilghman Island, Maryland, with our families and friends present. The legal marriage was very small and in Vancouver. The commitment ceremony, because it couldn't be called a wedding, felt rebellious in the United States. Then, ten years later, Ruth Bader Ginsburg renewed our wedding vows. For us, it was important to get married when we wanted to get married and not wait for the United States to put its stamp of approval on our marriage.

Q: I'm also curious about what GLIFAA looked like through the years, especially at its founding. A common point of discussion is that there weren't many women involved, right in the early years, or not so many people of color. I'm just curious about how that's what you've seen, what your thoughts are?

OSIUS: That's right. The men who founded GLIFAA were all white, gay guys, and I was in that group. Clayton was on the board of GLIFAA later, so he would have been one of the first people of color to be engaged. It took a while before there was a woman president of GLIFAA. Later, there was a trans president of GLIFAA. But the early years were mostly white, gay men. We wanted to involve more women, but women weren't competing for the board roles or showing up to the meetings initially. It took an effort on the part of the original founders to make it clear to gay women, to lesbians, that there was a place for them in GLIFAA too, including in leadership roles. That was a process. It didn't happen on day one. The first few years were almost exclusively gay white men.

Q: And if we look at the history of GLIFAA, you kind of touched on this, but there are a few key dates, right? Where something pivotal happened? You mentioned one, 1995, when President Clinton said, "No more discrimination," right? Another one, correct me if I'm wrong, but 1999, when James Hormel was named ambassador to Luxembourg. I believe he was the first LGBTI ambassador. I think he was a political appointee. Oh, he wasn't confirmed. Was he a recess appointment?

OSIUS: He was a recess appointment. Just to show how controversial it still was in 1999, he couldn't get confirmed. He was a fundraiser for Clinton. Luxembourg isn't all that big. Clinton was trying to show that it's possible for gay people to be ambassadors. But the president couldn't get him confirmed the regular way. So, he had to make a recess appointment. I don't think Hormel was able to go overseas with his partner. It was not until a while later that it became more regular. The first career person to be appointed and confirmed as ambassador was Michael Guest, a good friend of mine and part of GLIFAA. Michael's lesson was a tough one. Colin Powell wouldn't let Alex, his partner, be part of the swearing in. The department made clear that if something happened and Alex needed to be medevacked out of Romania, they were on their own. There was zero support from the administration for Michael's partner. Zero. It made Michael very angry. He was a career Foreign Service officer. He devoted his entire career to the State Department, and they were so dismissive of his partner. There were more benefits provided to a family pet than to Michael's partner of many, many, many years. That made him mad, and he left. He left the state department after being ambassador to Romania. Then he became an advisor to Barack Obama, and reengaged when Obama was president. But for those first few people it was tough. It had changed by the time I became ambassador because there were several openly gay political ambassadors confirmed around the time I was confirmed.

Q: I've read about Ambassador Guest's experience; I also remember reading about how he was attacked. In the media, it seems like he was quite extensively attacked. So, he's a pioneer, and that's absolutely pioneering.

OSIUS: I was the third openly gay career ambassador, and I was the first to go overseas with my husband and children. Although Clayton wasn't recognized as my husband under U.S. law, he was my husband and the department treated him as such, and John Kerry had him up on stage when Kerry swore me in. He had our son and my mother on the stage, so it was very different by the time John Kerry was secretary. Hillary Clinton had a lot to do with that. I think you're right to describe it in phases. Starting in 1992, our effort was to keep our jobs, keep our security clearances. In 1995, we shifted to a new phase, asking to treat our families with respect. Some of us initially weren't even advocates for marriage equality. When Andrew Sullivan first made the argument that gays should wed, I thought, oh, that's a bridge too far. The American people aren't going to accept that. I wasn't one of the first people to push for marriage equality, but once it had some steam, I saw we shouldn't be seated in the back of the bus. We shouldn't be second class citizens in any way. So, I became a proponent for marriage equality, but I remember initially thinking, oh God, Americans aren't going to go for that. It was a very happy, happy surprise when Americans showed that they were copacetic. They were okay with marriage equality. I

thought Hillary Clinton did a phenomenal job as Secretary, with the support of people like Dan Baer. Dan was another real pioneer. Dan persuaded Hillary to speak about LGBTQ+ equality at the UN Security Council. Al Gore helped, too. He said AIDS was a national security issue, and that was very important. With the guidance and support of Dan Baer, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Hillary Clinton talked about rights for LGBTQ+ persons as human rights.

Q: Just to come back to those first two ambassadors, Hormel and Guest. They faced a lot of challenges. As you mentioned, Hormel was not confirmed, it was a recess appointment. But despite all this, that must have felt pretty good to see that it was actually possible for these people to become ambassadors.

OSIUS: It was good, but it was still kind of scary, because Hormel didn't get confirmed, and Guest, though he got confirmed, was abused by the State Department. Specifically, Colin Powell and Condi Rice did not treat him well. The lesson was that you still need to be careful. It was around that time, when George W was President, that a friend of mine asked, "what's your ultimate goal in the State Department?" She forced me to face up to the fact that I wasn't going to be satisfied with being a second-class citizen. I wasn't going to be satisfied to be excluded from the top job if I merited it. I should have a right to go for it like anybody else. I decided that I wanted to try to be an ambassador. I didn't think it would happen, necessarily, but I didn't see why I should lower my sights just because I was gay. It really helped to have met Clayton because Clayton was very secure in who he was. He was very grounded, and I think from the point of our meeting, and then being together and getting married, there was no more prevaricating. From then on, I was who I was, and there would be no more hiding from anybody. From when I met Clayton on, I never hid from anyone who I was.

Q: You remember a few years ago, there was a GLIFAA event, and you participated in it, and there were some other former ambassadors participating in it. It was the first five ambassadors, or something like that. I'm just curious about that because it's so much progress. There's still a lot of progress that you need, but that particular event, I think, symbolized something for a lot of people. I wonder if you could quickly talk about that.

OSIUS: It was at the Newseum [a museum that focused on news and journalism], and it included James Costos, ambassador to Spain, John Berry, ambassador to Australia, Rufus Gifford, ambassador to Denmark. Dan Baer, [then ambassador to the OECD], Wally Brewster, [ambassador to the Dominican Republic] and me. There is a photo in my book of the six of us at the Newseum, because we did an event celebrating that there were six confirmed ambassadors. We were all in one room at one time, and it was electrifying. It felt that way for me, anyway, to be on that stage. I was the only career person. There were five political ambassadors, but the fact that Barack Obama had six ambassadors who were gay, we thought was amazing. Of course, we were criticized because there were six of us on stage, and we were all white and all male. It didn't happen without a barb, and it was only with the nomination of our ambassador to the ADB, Chantal Wong, that we had our first openly lesbian U.S. Ambassador. The awesome Chantal Wong represented the United States at the Asia Development Bank. There have been lesbian ambassadors

before, but they weren't out. I don't think it's my role to say who. I knew of some, but the first out lesbian ambassador was Chantal Wong. Initially I thought I was the second career person to be nominated, but I learned that Dick Hoagland was at that brunch when GLIFAA was created. Dick first became an ambassador in 2003, after Michael Guest [2001] and before me.

Q: I think we've talked quite extensively about GLIFAA. I feel like we could probably talk for hours about GLIFAA. GLIFAA played a pivotal role in State Department history, right, and in your life before we started.

OSIUS: When I was nominated, GLIFAA was very supportive, and I invited GLIFAA members to come to my swearing-in, and part of my swearing-in remarks were about the role of GLIFAA and about the role of Teresa Heinz Kerry. Teresa and, through her, John Kerry, were friends of the family, of my cousin Kate Osius. We knew Teresa before she married John. People may not remember this, but when John Kerry ran for president, when he ran against George W, who behaved in a way that was very homophobic, Teresa said to the gay people of America, "you come to the White House and knock on the door, and you ask for Mama T. I will open the door. I will let you in." She was awesome. And John Kerry's handlers were constantly saying, "rein her in," and he wouldn't. He said, "you let Teresa be Teresa." So, when I was sworn in, there was a special shout out to Teresa Heinz Kerry, because of the role she played. At that point, she was already ill. She couldn't join the swearing in ceremony. That was painful. I wanted her to be there. I had reached out to her, but at that point she couldn't travel. She was amazing. I loved her. I still do. And John Kerry was fantastic. He was a fantastic Secretary when it came to those issues and so many others.

Q: We can come back to GLIFAA. As it pops up. I think that that was really helpful though. So, maybe let's come back to where you were in your career before we started talking about GLIFAA. You finished up the Holy See, and then the next place you went, of course, is of special interest to me, because I have the job right now, which is USUN. You were what we now call staff assistant. I see your resume. You called it executive assistant, and I understand you were the first person to have that job at USUN. Can you tell me about your experience? How did you end up in that job, too?

OSIUS: For one thing, I cut short my time in Rome. There were people who at the time said, you can't get a job in Rome and then not finish it. But I was in love, and I was separated from my partner, and so I reached out to my friends because had I worked for Al Gore. I reached out to friends in the new Clinton-Gore White House and asked, "is there any way I can come back to the United States?" That's how I came to the attention of Madeleine Albright. Al Gore recommended me, and it was kind of unusual to be rotated in that way. I became the first person to hold that job and it ended up being a rotation. I did a year as Madeline's staff aide, and then a year in the political section.

It was fascinating because she was new to the bureaucracy. She had been a professor, an advisor to presidential candidates, but she hadn't been in government herself. She was a superstar, and a rising force in foreign policy. I remember her asking me, "how could you

work for George HW Bush and then work for Bill Clinton? I don't understand how that works." I said, "Madam Ambassador, we foreign service officers swear an oath to the Constitution, and we will work for whomever is the commander-in-chief. It doesn't mean we don't have views, but I have worked for Republicans. I am more comfortable now because I'm working for someone I voted for, but a professional diplomat will work for whomever is the commander-in-chief. That's the way we roll." And this was news to her. I also helped persuade her to hire Cameron Hume as her political counselor, because she'd had another career officer, Bob Gray, and she needed a new political counselor. When Bob rotated out, I said, "there's an officer I worked for at the Vatican who's amazing, and he worked at USUN before, and he would be great." She agreed, and she hired him.

I spent a year working directly for Madeleine, and I got to travel with her all over the place. We went to Mozambique, South Africa, Central African Republic, Argentina, Brazil, Italy. On the same trip we went twice to the former Yugoslavia. We went to Zagreb and Belgrade, all as part of her visiting the places that she was dealing with, but also visiting the capitals of her colleagues on the Security Council. She was an amazing boss. She was a very hard worker. She was a tough boss. It wasn't always easy to work for Madeleine, but I loved her, and I loved the fact that she was such a tough advocate for American interests. One time, Security Council members were debating over former Yugoslavia, over the Balkans, and Rick Inderfurth was presiding over the meeting. Rick was one of Madeleine's ambassadors in the front office, where there were three or four ambassadors. Rick was presiding, and Madeleine walked in and quickly caught the drift of what was happening. Vorontsov was her Russian counterpart, and he was droning on. She thumped on the table and said, "nyet, nyet!" And she ended the discussion. Stu Seldowitz, who was in the room, described it afterwards: "when she came in, testosterone went through the roof." She was tough, she was tough. She was principled, she was forceful. To me, she was the opposite of Warren Christopher. Secretary Christopher was always gentlemanly and stuck to his talking points. Madeleine was passionate about our work, and I was part of the team that hoped she would become Secretary of State. And she did. She was tremendous at the UN, and it was a great experience to work for her.

Q: Sounds like she was very demanding, though; it sounds like she had very high standards. Were you doing all the paper and everything? Was that part of your job?

OSIUS: Yes, I did the paper, and it was frustrating sometimes because she wanted paper for everything. She wanted a script for everything. It wasn't because she wasn't thinking for herself. She could do things without a script, and sometimes it was much better when she spoke without a script, but she always liked to be prepared. She needed to know that her staff had her back. So, I was the Enforcer, especially of the political section. "She needs talking points for a Security Council meeting she will chair. Don't just let her go there, tell her what the procedure is." That made it quite easy to transfer down to the political section, because I knew what the front office needed. Once I moved into the political section, I was able to make sure that she was well supported on the issues that I handled. Jordana Dym took my staff aide job. She rotated from the political section to the

front office, and it worked well for both of us, because Jordana was also very good at the staff aide job.

Q: Curious about what your portfolio was in the political section. Very, very curious what you covered down there.

OSIUS: We had a team system. Every junior officer, someone who was relatively new, was paired up with a more senior officer. The senior officer I paired with was Tom Countryman, and that was great, because Tom is brilliant. He knew the Middle East incredibly well, and together we covered the Middle East, Cyprus, and North Africa. I got to know the Western Sahara problem well, the Polisario Front versus the Moroccan government. I became expert on that challenge, and on everything to do with Cyprus. I was Tom's backup for all the big Middle East stuff. When he was out of town, I had to know Middle East issues, very, very well. I sat behind Madeleine once when she vetoed an Israel resolution. It was another intense learning experience because every country sends its best diplomats to New York. At least, most countries send their best diplomats to New York, so you tend to get the highest skill levels and the thorniest problems in New York. I thought it was a fascinating place to be a diplomat. I really liked it. I was in love at that time and able to be with my partner thanks to being in New York.

Q: I agree. It is definitely an interesting place to work, and the diplomats are very impressive. It seems like every experience that you had has been pivotal in some way up to now, at least, because the next one, the next place you went, was Vietnam, which of course has really played a pivotal role, for lack of a better word, in your life. How did that come along after USUN?

OSIUS: I had a conversation with Tom Hubbard. He was PDAS [Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary], and EAP was planning for when normalization was declared and planning to staff up an embassy and a consulate. Tom asked, "What would you think about working in Vietnam, dealing with a relationship with a former enemy?" And I thought, how cool would that be? To be in on the ground level when you turn an old adversary into a friend? When he suggested it, I was immediately interested. It turned out to pose some personal challenges, because my partner did not want to go to Vietnam. When I was assigned to Vietnamese language training, it accelerated the end of that relationship. I went to Washington and did language training, and then went off to Vietnam, single again, but I loved Vietnam from the moment I got there.

When I was in language training, I got to go on a language immersion program in March 1996 and, by that time, we'd opened the embassy. When we opened the embassy in the summer of '95, I was beginning language training, so I was following everything very, very, very closely. And then in '96 I got to visit for the first time. Vietnamese is hard, but I arrived in Saigon and started using it. And, boom, this light went off. Oh, I can speak this language. I can use this language. I can communicate with people. They looked at me and they didn't expect me to speak Vietnamese, but I could speak Vietnamese. Those two or three weeks of immersion in Saigon helped me fall in love with Vietnam. From then on, it was exciting, and everything we did was new, and I went back a few months later.

We weren't ready to open the consulate yet. I was initially supposed to be assigned to the consulate in Hồ Chí Minh City, but we delayed the opening of the consulate, so I went to Hanoi, kind of by accident, for a year. But that turned out to be really good, because by the time we went to Hồ Chí Minh City, I knew what I was doing. In Hanoi I got to work very closely with Desaix Anderson, who was our charge d'affaires, and with Bryan Dalton, the other political officer. I learned a lot about Vietnam before I rotated down south and opened the consulate.

Q: You didn't have any Vietnamese connection before you went there, right? I mean, this was totally new to you.

OSIUS: Totally new.

Q: So, did you realize at that point that Vietnam was really one of the places where it was at for you, that you really, really wanted to come back there, or what was your sense?

OSIUS: I can't say that it happened instantly. Probably the most important moment in the tour was when I biked from Hanoi to Saigon. It was a 1900-kilometer, or 1200-mile, bike ride from Hanoi to Saigon in March 1997. By then, I'd been at the embassy for eight months. I was really interested in Vietnam, and I'd learned a lot. I liked the work, but I felt I wasn't getting under the skin enough. And this bike trip was a way to get under the skin.

It was effective, because part of Vietnamese culture is rice, and you could see from north to south the different gradations of rice, the different stages of color and of the harvest. Everything was at a different stage depending on how far north you were or how far south you were. There were new green shoots in the north, mature rice fields in the center, and rice drying by the roadside in the south. Because I was the leader of this group of nine bikers, and had a lot of interaction in Vietnamese, I felt that I was able to connect with people in a way that I hadn't up until then. Biking is good because there's no wall between you and the people you're interacting with. It's not like traveling in a car. You're right there and you're going at the prevailing speed because everyone used bikes at that time. There weren't many cars. There was a growing number of motorcycles, but there weren't that many cars. In 1997, we were biking along Highway One, and we'd have kids biking along with us, and we'd be chatting away. For all nine bikers, it was, I'd say, a transformational experience. It was grueling. We had headwinds every day. It was hot. Sometimes we had hills and mountains to climb, and some long days, but for each of us, it was a big life experience. I think that was, for me, what cemented my relationship with Vietnam.

Later, Pete Peterson came as the first ambassador, and I went with him and Madeleine Albright to open the consulate. And that experience was wonderful, being the first on the ground, the first political officer in Saigon to talk with anyone who had an interaction with an American in 17 years. We started with a very small team for opening that consulate. I loved that. After that, I went to the White House. But I tell you, I almost didn't go to the White House. I liked Vietnam so much I wanted to stay. I kept thinking

about doing another year there, but then I had an offer to go to work for Al Gore in the White House, and I took it. Those two years were spectacular in terms of learning that you don't just go along the surface if you want to make a difference, you need to get under the skin, and language was the key.

Q: Obviously, we have a complex history with Vietnam; that goes without saying. You were there not that long after the war. It was about 20-something years, right?

OSIUS: The war ended in '75 and I was there 21 years after the war; that's right.

Q: That's not very long. It really isn't very long. Did you face hostility? It sounds like people were pretty nice.

OSIUS: People were really nice. No, I didn't face hostility, and I kept expecting to find it, but I didn't. The people were very forward-looking. I told this story at my confirmation hearings about that bike ride. I mentioned we rode through Quảng Trị province. The DMZ used to divide north from south, and there's a bridge that goes over the border from north to south. That bridge was bombed many times and rebuilt many times. I stopped in the middle of the bridge and looked out over a pockmarked landscape. I was eating a granola bar or putting on sunscreen, and a woman came up, and we started talking. I asked, "why are there all these ponds?" And she said, "that's where the Americans dropped their bombs."

She started to talk about how many people were lost in her village to the American bombs, and then how many people were lost in her family. And I was feeling worse and worse. So, I said, well, I need to tell you that I am an American, and I work for the U.S. Embassy. And she said, "*Hôm nay chúng ta là chị em*." You and I are sister and brother. It's an intimate use of the Vietnamese language, not calling us a citizen and an official, but an older sister and younger brother. That was the spirit of reconciliation that I found, not just on that trip, but everywhere I went in Vietnam, in 63 provinces. I found a willingness to look beyond the pain of the past to a different kind of future. It was a revelation. There was the possibility for a new kind of relationship with an old enemy. And I went everywhere. I traveled with Peterson when he was ambassador; I traveled with Desaix Anderson; I traveled on my own. Especially when I was down south, every time I met with someone, it was the first time they'd met with a U.S. official since the war. I didn't encounter hostility, even when I accompanied Pete Peterson to his first meeting with the defense minister when I was the POL-MIL [political-military] officer. That minister had been on the other side from Pete in the war. They started showing each other their scars. It was amazing. I went with Madeleine when she called on the party secretary. It wasn't a warm and fuzzy meeting. It was more like, "we're going to do this, we're going to create a new kind of relationship. We're going to work our way through the difficulties of this relationship." It was awesome. It was an experience I really loved.

Q: Sounds incredible, and it sounds like a really amazing, very formative experience. You mentioned from Vietnam, you went back to work with your mentor, Al Gore? So how did that come about?

OSIUS: I was coming to the end of my tour, and Al was in the White House, and I learned from a friend, Jonathan Spalter, that there was going to be an opening on his team, and that person was to cover Asia and trade. I knew something about Asia. I didn't know that much about trade. I was a political officer, not an econ officer, but my SAIS degree was in international economics as well as American foreign policy. So, I applied. I was an 03 officer, and the other people who applied were 01s, because it was a fairly senior job in OVP/NSA. But I got the job and, looking back, it wasn't because I was the most qualified. It was because they knew they could trust me. They knew me, they could trust me, and I was never going to let down Al Gore. I made some people in the department mad, because how come this 03 got the job and the 01s didn't get the job? But I was good at the job, and I didn't let down Al Gore.

I worked a lot on China entering the WTO [World Trade Organization]. I was the Secretary of the U.S. China Forum on Environment and Development. I had a lot of interaction with the Chinese over those two and a half years. I worked on the bilateral trade agreement between the United States and Vietnam. I worked on all the trade issues that Gore had to be involved in, including ones that were politically very important, like steel. I worked for someone I admired very, very much: Leon Fuerth. First, he'd been my boss when I'd worked for Gore in the Senate, and he was my boss again at the White House. And I liked working for Al. I believed in Al. I thought he was very good at governance, maybe not as good at politics, but great at governance. I saw the way the White House worked and got to be part of big meetings on North Korea, or big meetings on trade, or whatever was the topic of the day. I was there when Bill Clinton was impeached because of Monica Lewinsky, and when Al chose Joe Lieberman as his running mate and ran for president. I was on the policy side, not the political side, but I was there at a pivotal moment. So, it was another very good experience.

Q: I saw you were there during that very pivotal moment when he ran for president, and some very controversial things happened. And he ended up not becoming president. Just curious about what it was like in the White House. That's a big moment in our history.

OSIUS: For one thing, in the lead-up to the election, it had been made very clear to us, we were on the policy side. I was on loan from State, other people were on loan from the CIA or DOD. We were to advise on policy only and leave the politics up to those who were handling politics. But you can't help but think about what the results were going to be. And I was a free trader. I advised Al to take a certain approach to the steel problem that may have caused him to lose West Virginia. The fact that he stuck to his guns on trade may have caused him to lose West Virginia. If he had won West Virginia, he would have won the presidency. I've often looked back and wondered if we did the right thing at the time, because I think he would have been a far better president than George W Bush.

I was with Bill Clinton when the recount was happening in Florida. Clinton took his trip to Vietnam. I was the one person in the White House who had direct experience with Vietnam and spoke Vietnamese. So, President Clinton took me along with him on his trip in November 2000 and it was a split-screen experience. In Vietnam, we had this

wonderful celebratory trip of a new relationship with an old enemy. It was a fantastic trip in every way, but every night, we'd run back to our hotel rooms and watch television and see discussions of hanging chads and butterfly ballots and Jewish women voting for Pat Buchanan. Clinton was apoplectic. He thought Jeb Bush was helping George W steal the election, and he wanted Al to fight, fight, fight. Not to let the Republicans steal the election, because he thought Al had genuinely won the election. His staff was constantly saying, "this isn't your fight anymore. You're on your way out. This is up to Gore to decide." My future was in the balance, too, because if Gore had won, I would have been Senior Director for Asia on the National Security Council. When George W won, I was in exile because I was on the losing team. It was powerful to see it through the lens of Vietnam, which I knew so well, because I was very excited about Clinton's trip. On that trip, Clinton laid out a diplomatic agenda that we followed for the next twenty years. It was a consequential visit in every way, and yet we were all torn by trying to understand what was happening in Florida.

Q: So, presumably you were hoping or thought you might end up on the NSC in a really senior position. It didn't happen. Must not feel great, but I guess you ended up in Bangkok next?

OSIUS: I ended up in Tokyo. I did not want to be around when George W became president, so I got out of town and took a fellowship, a Council of Foreign Relations-Hitachi fellowship in Tokyo. I spent the next six months learning about Japan, which I felt was a gap in my knowledge of Asia. I traveled to Korea and Taiwan, and I wrote a book about the U.S.-Japan security alliance that was published in 2002. It was thanks to Kurt Campbell that I was able to publish that book. I needed a break after the intense two and a half years at the White House. I needed a break from Washington, and I had to decide whether I wanted to stay in the Foreign Service or not. I didn't want to work for George W, but after I had a chance to breathe, to cool off after the fiasco that was that election, I decided I wanted to stay, to continue as a diplomat. And then I went to Bangkok, right after 9/11.

Q: So, you were seriously considering leaving then?

OSIUS: Yes, because I didn't see how I could work for Bush. I didn't agree with his policies. I thought he was wrong on a lot of things. So, I took an ESTH job, not a political job, and I remember some people being very surprised that I, as a political officer, took a "hub job" as we called it. We used to call ourselves hubsters, but I headed the regional environment, science, technology, and health office in Bangkok, which at that time covered Southeast Asia and the Pacific. I didn't want to do a political job right then. I didn't want to have to defend George W's policies on Iraq; I thought the invasion of Iraq was wrong. So, I got out of the political stream for three years and covered environment, science, technology, and health, and that was very useful in terms of learning new skills and getting to know Southeast Asia well. It turned out to have been a good call, even though it wasn't a typical decision to be made by a political officer.

Q: So, I'm curious. I pause here, because you've had a lot of experiences, a lot of different experiences. You thought you might end up in a senior position, and because this thing happens, you're not in that position. But looking at the trajectory of your career, we're not that far away from some very, very, very senior positions, right? Because after Bangkok, you become a deputy director, you become Pol Counselor in a very big embassy, and then DCM. At this point, do you have a sense of things are going in the right direction, or does it seem like everything's falling apart because of what happened in this election?

OSIUS: I thought everything was falling apart. But then Japan helped me to reset. I wrote a book, the Japan experience was very satisfying and very educational, and I decided I still had contributions I wanted to make. I was late in the bidding, because by then a lot of the big jobs had been filled. Coming out of the White House, you might expect to get a big job. Well, I didn't get a big job. A hubster job is not really a big job, but it turned out to be an interesting job. In fact, it's what prepared me to be both DCM and ambassador, because I started thinking beyond the usual econ and political tracks about all the opportunities for diplomacy using environment, science, technology and health, using nonpolitical tools to advance diplomatic goals. It wasn't the usual route, and it was only after cooling off in Japan and then spending three years doing somewhat low-profile work that I was in a position to start going up again. I got promoted when I returned to Washington. So, it made sense for me to go back after three years in Bangkok. I had another mentor at that point, Joe Yun, who said, "you need a Washington job." Because I'd never had a Washington job at State. The only job I ever had at the mother ship was deputy director of the Korea desk, because I had your job in New York, and I had the White House job. I had jobs in the United States, but never at State until I was an 02.

Q: Presumably you met Clayton when you were Deputy Director. Were you an 01 or an 02?

OSIUS: I became an 01 as Deputy Director [of EAP/K].

Q: I see. So now things start to happen fast. That's my impression. That kind of job is no joke. You were deputy director of the Korea desk. I can only imagine how stressful and intense that sort of job is.

OSIUS: Yes, it was intense.

Q: Because you're going from some chill experiences to something of the opposite? Am I wrong?

OSIUS: You're exactly right. George W was President. First, Colin Powell was Secretary, and then Condi Rice. The North Korea nuclear threat was front burner, and there was a battle being waged within the administration about how to handle it. On one side, you had people like Jim Kelly, who wanted the Six-Party talks to work, and then later Chris Hill, hired as a negotiator, who wanted the Six-Party talks to work. On the other side, you had Dick Cheney and his henchmen, people like John Bolton and John Rood, who were opposed to diplomacy. They wanted the policy to be, "we loathe Kim Jong Il." Well,

loathing Kim Jong Il was fine as a sentiment, but it was lousy as a policy. I was on the side of Jim Kelly and then Chris Hill and Jim Foster, whom I worked for, whom I knew from Manila, and Kathy Stephens, who became PDAS, and pushing for negotiations. I thought Six-Party talks were the way to go, and so we had bureaucratic battles every day with Bolton and Rood and the office of the vice president. It was ugly. It was probably the least satisfying two years of my entire 28 and a half in the State Department. I was happy on the personal side because I'd met Clayton, and we were building a life together. But professionally, it was not satisfying. It was very frustrating.

I had to give a speech at Harvard towards the end of my time, and I thought, I can't lie. I can't go up to my alma mater, whose motto is *Veritas*, and lie about the shit that's going on in Washington. So, I gave an honest speech. I was careful in the words I used, but I made it clear that the policies were wrong and that we were headed in the wrong direction on Korea, and that Dick Cheney was at fault, in my view. I didn't get in any trouble. There was still some semblance of free speech. I compared the records of when we were negotiating versus when we were making loathing of Kim Jong Il the main point of our policy. I gave an honest speech at Harvard, and I didn't get punished. I thought I would, and I didn't. I didn't get the job that I wanted next, which was Consul General in Chiang Mai. Instead, I went to India and worked for Ambassador David Mulford, but that turned out to be a better job anyway. I came out of the Korea desk fine, and I didn't lose my integrity. I was still making a public argument for the policies that I thought were right.

Q: Beyond the policy stuff, I think you've moved from becoming an action officer to a supervisor, right?

OSIUS: Yes, and that's a hard transition for a lot of officers. You're curious about that? I had some training at that pivot point in a career, going from being an action officer to being a supervisor of people. Thanks to Colin Powell, we could get some training. I took the training, and I used it, and I began to think hard about what it was to lead people. I had some very good people on my team. I worked for a good boss, Jim Foster, the office director, who left after that, because it was a real burnout job. He left Foreign Service after that job. I had a lot of people reporting to me, and Jim was a good mentor in helping me learn how to lead people. Cameron had been, too. I had learned so much from Cameron in the two times that I worked for him, that I felt like I had some good lessons in my head, and then I had some formal training to go along with the good lessons, and I took seriously the responsibility of being a supervisor. I saw some people, including people who reported to me, who were long in the tooth, who had been in the service for a long time, but hadn't learned that skill. That consolidated in my mind the importance of making that pivot in a career, from being subject expert or action officer to being a leader of people.

The skills are learnable skills. If you think that you're just going to get them by osmosis, you're wrong. It's possible to gain those skills if you take them as seriously as the skills you must learn to be an action officer. I took that part of the job very seriously. I had to have the backs of the people who worked for me. I had a wonderful action officer, Sue Bremner, who was handling North Korea and was going through these battles on a daily

basis. I had to have her back and Laura Rosenberger's. Laura went on to great things. She was a PMF [Presidential Management Fellow] in our office, and then she went on to be Senior Director at the NSC for China. She's a supremely talented diplomat and I got to mentor her. All of a sudden, I was in the role of being the mentor instead of the protege, and I found that satisfying.

Q: Well, so this is what I'm going to propose. We've gone through a lot today. We've done a marathon session. I think now we're getting into senior leadership, and I think we need one more session to make it happen. What's going to take the most time is probably your tour as ambassador, because we're really going to dig into that. I want to ask you, before we go, maybe this is the last thing we'll touch on moving from being deputy director to a political minister-counselor in New Delhi. That is a massive job, out of the frying pan into the fire, and you mentioned that the New Delhi job wasn't actually what you were looking for, right? You were looking to be CG. Can you just tell me about how you landed in that job? Because that is another job that is no joke.

OSIUS: Yes. So, after the burnout job that was the Korea desk, I wanted something where I could have fun. I thought being CG in Chiang Mai would be fun. I loved Thailand, so I went after the CG job. Harry Thomas was DG at the time, and he directed that job to someone who had been deputy director for crisis management, and a very capable officer, but who didn't know Southeast Asia the way I did. At first, I was mad. I thought, I've earned my chops in EAP, and I'm not getting any kind of a reward. I heard from another deputy director that there would be an opening in the South and Central Asia Bureau as political counselor in India. She said I should go for it. I was very dubious. I didn't know India. I met with the ambassador who was in Washington, a political appointee, a bundler for George W Bush. There were all kinds of reasons this relationship wasn't going to work. He asked me about my political affiliation, and I said, "I'm a Democrat. I worked for Al Gore. It is on my resume. I am not ever going to pretend to be Republican. I'm a Democrat." And he said, "I like that. I like knowing where somebody stands." Of course, this is not the usual State Department conversation. You're supposed to be neutral. And I'd had lots of advice, mentors who'd said, "never tell whether you're Republican or Democrat, because you're going to work for both sides." But I was clear, and it worked. He chose me for that job because he knew where I stood, and it turned out to be a way better job than being CG in Chiang Mai, a much bigger job, much more important and a very important relationship, and one of the most consequential jobs I ever had.

BOND: Hi, I couldn't help but overhear. The deputy director for crisis management worked under Harry Thomas, when Harry was executive secretary, which was how I think he got the Chiang Mai job. Harry had worked with [the officer], who reported to him That's how they knew each other.

Q: All right, so when we amend this, I'm going to cross out the name.

BOND: I think Harry helped you [Ted] and us get to India. Because he was a South Asia hand, and I think he knew us, and he felt some obligation. Harry's a good friend. He's a

mentor, a wonderful person. So, he did right by us, and then once we didn't get that Chiang Mai assignment, he helped us get good jobs.

Q: It's good to see you, Clayton.

OSIUS: I told you; someone keeps me honest.

BOND: As much as Chiang Mai would have been great, India allowed us to work together. I didn't have to take leave without pay. I could be there. And it was at a time when in our country and in the State Department, legally we were domestic partners. We had married in Canada, but our marriage wasn't recognized in the United States. So had we gone to Chiang Mai, it would have been complicated for us.

OSIUS: Whereas in India, we could be assigned together but work independently. That was a first.

BOND: We were the first couple who were assigned housing together, the first same-sex couple that we knew of in the whole world, because we knew of at least one same-sex tandem. They told us that they had two apartments. We could have had an extra apartment, for guests, an extra space. But we didn't want that. The political consular residence in Delhi was huge.

OSIUS: So, we wrote a memo together. We wrote a memo to the management counselor in India and said, “you can assign us together, since we're domestic partners and legally married in Canada, or you could waste the taxpayer’s money and spend $10,000 a month of taxpayer dollars on unnecessary rent.” And we thought, by getting it all on paper, we would force their hand. And we did. We thought we should try, although George W Bush was president, and still it worked. They housed us together, and they had to deal with this. A Republican ambassador who asked his staff aide, “what do I call Mr. Bond? How do I refer to him?” And the staff aide said, “you call him Mr. Bond, or Clayton.”

BOND: Jeannie, Mrs. Mulford, was kind to me, like when she invited the spouses of the heads of section. Then she invited me, and I first was scared to even—

OSIUS: I asked, “do you even want to go to this gathering of the spouses?” And he said, “this is about more than me. This is bigger than me.”

Q: Great to see you. Let's talk soon. Well, thanks, Ambassador Osius. I'm going to email Yasmin to set up the next one. Thank you. I think we're in decent shape. This was really interesting. I'll start with India next time. And one other thing I want to talk about. You just mentioned it. The personal aspect to this, right? It's often really hard to coordinate two tandem careers, and tough decisions sometimes have to be made, right? So just something we can touch on next time.

OSIUS: In this case, of course, Clayton's right, India offered us more opportunities to be assigned together. Because if I'd been assigned to Chiang Mai, he couldn't work for me,

the closest he could have been was Bangkok, and India was a bigger job. There were all kinds of reasons that it ended up being better. But mainly, from a personal standpoint, because we got married just before we went to India, we were able to be a tandem couple. And one of the first ever tandem, same-sex tandem couples to be assigned together.

Q: Pioneers in so many ways. Well, thank you, Ambassador. Thanks. Thanks for taking the time.

OSIUS: Looking forward to the next round. I appreciate it so much. Talk to you soon.

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Q: All right, it's Thursday, January 30, 2025. I am once again with Ambassador Ted Osius. This is our third session, possibly our final session. Let's get started. Last time, Ambassador, we had finished your term as Deputy Director in the Office of Korean Affairs; it was a really busy tour. And remind me how you went from Korean Affairs to New Delhi, because your next stop was political minister-counselor New Delhi, which is a huge job, right?

OSIUS: Yes, we started talking about that. I had thought I was going to Chiang Mai as Consul General. I was the EAP candidate to go as CG to Chiang Mai, and Harry Thomas helped someone who'd worked for him when he was Exec Sec, who became CG in Chiang Mai, and I was at a loss. I talked to a friend of mine, Cheryl Sim, who was deputy director on the India desk in the SCA bureau. She urged me to meet with David Mulford, who was George W. Bush's political ambassador, because he was looking for a political counselor. We met. He looked at my resume, and said, "There's a lot of work for Al Gore. There's a lot of Democratic Party stuff in here." And I said, "Yes, you need to know, sir, I am a Democrat. It's on my resume. It's where I stand politically." And he said, "Good. I like knowing where people stand." I said, "State Department FSOs are supposedly non-partisan. You're American. We're all Americans. We often have party affiliations. Well, some don't, but in fact, I do." I was very clear with him: I'm a Democrat. And he hired me to be political counselor. I was working for my predecessor in the job, which can be awkward, but in this case, it wasn't. Geoff Pyatt had gone from being political counselor to being DCM, at least for a year. And Geoff knew so much more than I could possibly know about India. But Geoff always had my back. It was amazing. If a political question came up, he would always turn to me. He would never answer it for the ambassador. There are all kinds of ways a DCM can earn points from the ambassador. Geoff didn't play that game. He backed me up. He supported me. I had a great deputy political counselor, Atul Keshap, who also knew much, much more than I did about India. We had a very good political team. So, we were able to accomplish a lot.

I look back on my career, and I think one of the biggest things I was ever involved in was the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Initiative that really allowed us to move beyond the past and create a new comprehensive partnership with India, because we were addressing the key obstacle in our relationship. This effort had started with Strobe Talbott, but it continued

with Nick Burns and others under George W. Bush, the idea that we could have a new partnership with India, but first we had to deal with the nuclear issue. The civil nuclear initiative was the brainchild of Dr S. Jaishankar, who's now foreign minister, and then picked up by people like Nick Burns and Condi Rice and David Mulford. That's how we spent the three years I was political counselor. I was working on that the whole time. I also focused on India's domestic politics, India's relations with its neighbors, India's role in the world. But the single biggest initiative during that time was the Civil Nuclear Initiative, and the ambassador was obsessed by it. He wanted to deliver this to his president. He wanted to complete this initiative. And he was a very stubborn man. He'd been an investment banker, and his leadership style was that of an investment banker, but he really wanted to deliver for his president that Civil Nuclear Initiative. He did, and we were able to complete it, and broke a lot of crockery in the process. But it was worth doing. The relationship with India was forever changed by what happened during those years.

Q: That must have been a really intense job.

OSIUS: Yes, it was a big mission. It's a very big mission. It was 2,100 people at the time, and I was effectively number three. I remember at one point I was charge d'affaires and Benazir Bhutto was assassinated. And the same day [December 27, 2007] that Benazir Bhutto was assassinated, India announced that it had succeeded in building a car called the Tata Nano. It was a $2,000 car, which only India could produce, really. So, here was Pakistan devouring itself and the Indians were churning forward. The contrast couldn't have been more vivid than at that moment.

There was another moment later in my time as political counselor, when we thought Pakistan and India would go to war. There had been a terrorist attack led by the Lashkar-e-Taiba on Mumbai in late-November 2008, and some Americans were killed, and there were people holed up in the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel in Mumbai. The terrorist attack had started in the Mumbai train station, and we really thought that those two nuclear powers could go to war. At one point, the ambassador called me at 2am and said there are troops lining up on the Pakistani border. The war is about to start. It didn't, but it was very much because of America's efforts. Condi Rice and Admiral Mike Mullen engaged in shuttle diplomacy. He was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, she was Secretary of State, and they were trading places. She would go to Islamabad, and he'd be in Delhi, and then vice versa. And we were supporting their efforts to calm down two nuclear armed neighbors and prevent an all-out war. I think America's efforts were what saved the day. Diplomacy was the reason that war was averted. So, the whole time in India was intense, whether it was a Civil Nuclear Initiative, terrorism, potential war with Pakistan, all the kind of turbulence that was occurring in South Asia at that time. It was intense. I was lucky to be there with my spouse. Clayton had a job first in public diplomacy and then later in management and we were the first same-sex couple to be housed together by the State Department. I felt I had emotional support when I needed it during a challenging time — but let me divert for a second.

We were assigned together as a tandem couple. Nobody else had ever been. No other same-sex couples had ever been assigned housing together. And when we were getting ready to go to Delhi, I thought, well, this is ridiculous. There is housing assigned to the political counselor. I wrote a memo to the management counselor and the DCM, and said, "Look, we can save the American taxpayer tens of thousands of dollars if you house us together. And even though we're not legally married in the United States, we're domestic partners, and we're legally married in Canada, so please save the taxpayer money and assign us together." I wanted this on paper, because if they didn't do it, I was going to make life difficult. But they did, they assigned us together and that was a breakthrough. We took another step towards equality.

Ambassador Mulford didn't quite know how to deal with having one of his counselors married to a man. A man married to a man. In fact, he asked his staff aide, John Rivera-Dirks, "What am I supposed to call Ted Osius's spouse?" And John said, "Why don't you call him Clayton?" It was jarring to this conservative Republican. Then he did a staff retreat at one point at the Rambagh Palace in Jaipur. He brought all the senior staff and their spouses, and Clayton was invited. I remember going home to Clayton, saying, "I'm not sure you're going to want to do this, go to this retreat with all the spouses." And Clayton said, "You bet I'm going. This is bigger than me. Of course I will go." He went. He played the dutiful spouse role. He got to know the other spouses, most of whom were women. And he got to know Jeannie Mulford, the ambassador's wife. It was something to be as visible as we were and it worked. One last little anecdote about that. We were at a party at the DCM's house at one point, a big, high-level event, with lots of muckety-mucks, and a woman in a beautiful sari and a lot of jewels spoke with Clayton. She asked, "Where's your wife?" And he pointed over to me, and he said, "Well, that's my spouse over there. I know that's not something that you have in India, but it is something that we have in the United States." And she looked at him and said, "You live your life." He was expecting to get brushed off, or for her to be really turned off. And we were happily surprised. We've used that line ever since: "you live your life."

Q: I actually remember that story because I read it in that book Inside A U.S. Embassy.

OSIUS: Yes, Clayton wrote a piece for *Inside A U.S. Embassy* about being a non-traditional tandem couple in India. He included that story.

Q: I remember reading that specific piece before I came into Foreign Service.

OSIUS: There were a few breakthroughs.

Q: In a position like that, you have a lot of visibility in DC, I'm sure, with everything that's going on, it must have been a very visible position?

OSIUS: But I felt like we had very good support from DC. Nick Burns was terrific to work with. Many years earlier, he had encouraged me to join the Foreign Service. Anja Manuel worked for him as a special assistant, and she worked the India account. She was fantastic to work with. Then, Alyssa Ayres succeeded Anja. I really liked working with

Anja and I really liked working with Alyssa, too. Both of those friendships continue to this day, and the friendship with Nick Burns continues to this day. We were in the trenches together on the Civil Nuclear Initiative, with the White House.

This was important to the White House. It was important to leaders in the State Department. Mulford would write these — it was very old fashioned — he would write letters that he would sign, and then we would transmit them through classified fax to the Secretary of State. And sometimes we would say, "Actually, you could do a NODIS." There are many ways to limit distribution through the usual State Department cable system. And he said, "No, I'm going to send the Secretary letters. I will sign them. They're going to have my letterhead." Then the letters went by classified fax to the Secretary. In the end, he proved us wrong, because a lot of the cables that we wrote during that time came out during WikiLeaks, and his messages and those classified faxes never did. I had to read all my words in *The Hindu* years later. All the reporting I had done was in *The Hindu* and at least one person lost his job because I had reported very honestly about corruption and an official lost his job. Later I went back to India, and I met my main counterpart, Gaitri Kumar, the diplomat I worked with the most, who had been Joint Secretary of the Americas Division after Dr Jaishankar. She was then working for the President, Pranab Mukherjee. I said, "I am so sorry about all those cables that mentioned you by name," and she replied, "Ted, I read them with great interest. You were a perfect gentleman." She wasn't upset at all. She had not lost her job. She'd done quite well, because I had reported honestly that she was a phenomenal interlocutor and hadn't hurt her at all. But one person did lose his job, unfortunately. And much worse things happened in other places because of WikiLeaks.

Q: Sounds like quite a tour. At this point, things are going pretty well. I mean, that's a big position. Were you Senior Foreign Service at that point?

OSIUS: No. I was an 01 but I was promoted to Senior Foreign Service because of that position.

Q: Got it. That must have been exciting.

OSIUS: Yes, it was liberating, too. By then, I was angry at the ambassador. I mentioned he was a former investment banker. I'm told the investment bank culture is fear based. Mulford deployed fear at senior staff meetings and would often eviscerate someone. It usually wasn't me. Maybe he liked me. But every so often, I took the brunt. At first, I dealt with it, but I didn't like it at all. After I was promoted to Senior Foreign Service, and I had my onward assignment to Jakarta, so that he couldn't destroy my career, I confronted him. I said, "you have been a bully for too long, and you can't bully me anymore." And he didn't. He didn't mess with me again after that, but that was the end of our association. We had been close collaborators, so I lost that, but I thought he was a bully. That doesn't mean I didn't respect what he had accomplished. I thought he was a successful ambassador in many ways. I continue to think he was responsible for bringing the Civil Nuclear Initiative home. But I don't believe there is any excuse for being a bully. It's not the kind of leadership that gets the best out of people. You get so much more if

you lead people with hope than with fear. His method was fear, and I don't think fear works. You want to get good results from people? Give them hope, make them part of a mission, give them a sense of that mission. I felt a great sense of mission with the Civil Nuclear Initiative, so I was going to work my tail off no matter what. He didn't need to bully us. I think we would have done better if people hadn't been so fearful of the ambassador.

Q: Well, your next step in your career was a big one. Because you became a DCM. What was the process like to do that? I know you must go through the infamous D Committee. There's a whole process, right?

OSIUS: There was, and I was fortunate. I had two offers, one from Nancy Powell, whom I admired so much, and she offered for me to be her DCM in Kathmandu in Nepal. I was moved and flattered and touched. At the same time, I was offered the chance to be DCM in Jakarta under Cameron Hume. He was another person I admired hugely. I had worked for him. This was to be my third time working for him, and I was very torn, but I took the bigger job. The bigger job was Jakarta, and Nancy was disappointed. She asked, "Why did we go through this process if you weren't going to take it?" I answered, "I'm truly sorry; I didn't know this other thing was going to happen." But I'd gone through the D Committee, and I'd interviewed with some ambassadors, and I was offered a big job leading a huge embassy. It was 1,200 people at that point under Ambassador Hume.

We had a challenge, and we were going to have this challenge either in Nepal or in Jakarta, of what would Clayton do? Because nepotism rules apply to gay people, too. So where was he going to work? Ambassador Hume said, "he can't work in Jakarta. I don't think doing a carve out really works." We sought an adjacent position for him, as close as possible, and he got a job in Singapore, and that also broke some crockery. But he had a good job in Singapore, and I had the job in Jakarta, and we commuted for about a year and a half. Then he went on leave without pay and moved to Jakarta for the second half of that tour, because we didn't like living separately. We made it work, but we didn't like it. We would meet on weekends in Bali, or in Singapore, or Jakarta, but the dog was with me. Our shared home was in Jakarta, and ultimately, he made a sacrifice; he went on leave without pay and came there so that we could live together again.

I loved the job in Jakarta. Being DCM is a tough job, but it's a great job. It has awful aspects to it. You're the number one disciplinarian, and I ended up sending three people home during that tour. All for very legitimate reasons. All of them had to be sent home. There was no other choice, but if you send someone home, their career is never going to recover entirely. I took these decisions very seriously. Those were the worst parts of it. The best part was that we were moving forward in the relationship with Indonesia. We had declared a comprehensive partnership with Indonesia, but we hadn't created the mechanisms or the substance of it yet. I came in soon after Barack Obama had been elected. And Barack Obama had spent time in Indonesia as a kid and spoke Bahasa Indonesia quite well. He was always modest about it, but he spoke it very well. I'd give a speech, and all I would have to say were two words, "Barack Obama," and there would be huge cheers. The Indonesians were very excited, and we had two visits by Obama

during the time I was DCM. I managed both visits with a hard-working team. Neither of them occurred while Ambassador Hume was in place, which was a shame, because he had done so much work that led to what ended up being very successful visits. Because there must be a lot of substantive accomplishments to make it worthwhile for a president to travel to a country. The president doesn't want to say, "I visited the place where I went to elementary school." Indonesia is the world's fourth largest nation, the third largest democracy, the largest Muslim-majority nation, and we delivered on substance. We made that relationship so much better. And we did something that I'd been involved with in India, which was to deal honestly with the past.

In India, it was the Civil Nuclear Initiative. In Indonesia, it was the challenges involving Kopassus. And without going into too much gory detail, when Suharto fell, a lot of people were killed. Special Forces, directed by Prabowo [Subianto], who's now president of Indonesia, were involved in some of the killings, and they were subject to Leahy vetting. A lot of sanctions were on Kopassus, and it was preventing the security relationship from achieving what it could. Several times Cameron ran up the hill trying to normalize relations with Kopassus. Finally, he succeeded. It was very difficult, one of the most difficult diplomatic tasks I've seen undertaken. Finally, he succeeded, and we were able to stop shunning Kopassus, normalize relations with Kopassus, and therefore normalize relations with TNI, the Indonesian military. That was another lesson: you must deal honestly with the past, as we did in India. We did it in Indonesia. We also expanded educational exchanges and deepened the commercial relationship, and worked on health and environment, and so many aspects of the relationship. But if you want to have a true comprehensive partnership that includes a robust security relationship, that sticking point had to be dealt with so that we could move the entire relationship forward.

There were losses as well as wins. I had to preside over the dissolution of NAMRU-2 in Indonesia. It was the Navy's Medical Research Unit that had been in Indonesia for a long time and had to leave for all the wrong reasons. NAMRU was a fantastic, productive, meaningful operation, but a health minister had made political hay out of the idea that NAMRU was stealing secrets from the forests of Indonesia to enrich American pharmaceutical companies. And this minister used the fact that, at some point in NAMRU's past, the wife of the CIA chief of station had been a director there. The minister concluded that it was a spy outfit. It was nationalism run amok. *Amok* is an Indonesian word. It was the wrong kind of nationalism, going after the wrong target, and they lost an incredible asset for human health in Indonesia. NAMRU-2 went to Cambodia, but I was very sad about that, because I fought hard to keep it there, and to get everything back on track. You don't win all the time, you're not able to accomplish everything you set out to accomplish. But we did deepen that partnership and I continue working with Indonesia today. Looking back, I think the work that we did back then has continued to bear fruit in the U.S.-Indonesia relationship. And I think that's a truly important relationship. I was very proud to play my part in getting it headed in a good direction.

Q: I agree it is a very important relationship. A couple questions popped into my mind. You mentioned the nepotism stuff, right? At this point, that's where that first comes into

play, right? Because, now you're in a senior leadership position. I think a lot of officers, tandem couples, struggle with how to do that. Clayton had a pretty awesome career. He was doing well, too. How do you come to kind of terms with that?

OSIUS: Well, it's difficult, and one of his mentors called me to say, "Don't tank his career. You know he's a talented diplomat. It's your fault if his career is derailed." And I do take some responsibility. We made decisions together, but once I became DCM and then later ambassador, that was a disadvantage for him in his career. If we wanted to be in the same place, that was a disadvantage. His job in Singapore was fine, but he wanted our family to be together more than he wanted that job. That was probably the first decision he made that wasn't beneficial to his career. India was good for his career. The decision to go on leave without pay probably was not good for his career. But he made that decision because he didn't want us to be separated. I was in Jakarta with a great job, and the dog was there. And he really enjoyed Indonesia once he moved. He calls that our best overseas posting. The friendships we made there were fantastic.

It's the world's largest Muslim majority nation. We were able to get him a visa, a family member visa. At the state dinner for Barack Obama, right by the head table, there was one sign that said, "Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States - *Wakil Dubes Amerika Serikat."* Next to it was "Spouse of the Deputy Chief of Mission." Their protocol people had tacitly acknowledged that we were married. We were in a Muslim nation and we were on every invitation list. All the time, we were very visible, black and white, a same sex couple. That was unusual in Indonesia. But once Clayton got a visa, other diplomatic same-sex spouses got their visas. So, we were able to break through there. And I think there was a double standard. You couldn't have been an Indonesian same-sex couple and been treated the way we were, but we were treated very well. We were welcomed all the time. We have lifelong friendships that we created in Jakarta. We still see our friends on a regular basis in Jakarta. Being a same-sex couple didn't hurt, in fact. In some ways it probably made us more visible and gave us more access at the highest levels of society and government, ironically.

Q: Very interesting, very interesting experience. One other aspect of it I'm sure must have been challenging but sounds like you did a pretty good job of it, was supervising all those people. So, you had the experience as Deputy Director of the Korea Office. And then I assume you supervised people when you were the political counselor in a big section. You had a big section.

OSIUS: I was effectively number three in India. Sometimes I was acting DCM or sometimes charge d'affaires.

Q: I see. So you had some legitimate experience, but that's still a big ask. You said it's 1,200 people or so?

OSIUS: Yes. In Indonesia we had two consulates. The consuls general reported to me, all the many, many agencies that were present in Jakarta reported to me. I was chargé d'affaires sometimes, and DCM all the time. It was challenging. When I became Senior

Foreign Service, I received some training, and I'd gotten some leadership training earlier, and I used it. I needed that training. It was helpful.

We had one rough experience when I had to send home the political counselor, and this was because he had fabricated a conversation that didn't exist, and written a whole cable about it, and classified it secret and sent it off as if it had been a real conversation. He'd been on a provincial trip, and he had gotten a massage, and he covered up the fact that he'd spent a lot of time getting a massage by creating out of whole cloth a conversation with an official that had never occurred. The ambassador and I talked about it. We agreed, "we can't let something like this go. We can't let him stay after doing something like that." Because what does that say about the integrity of reporting? So, we offered him a choice: you can leave voluntarily, or we'll write a cable to the State Department saying you're relieved of your duties. You choose. He chose to leave voluntarily. And then he spent the next five years trying to destroy Ambassador Hume and to destroy me. He was very vindictive, and he did damage Ambassador Hume. He made charges that stuck, that were not true, but they stuck, and Ambassador Hume was subject to an OIG [Office of the Inspector General] investigation, which I think was quite unfair. The officer made ridiculous charges about prostitutes in the residence and other things that were not true. I knew Ambassador Hume extremely well, and I was at the residence very regularly – we lived right next door -- and all of this was made up.

Then the officer went after me in a way that was also very personal. I don't know how he did it, but he managed to put onto some website a link between me and some sort of pedophilia organization. Look, a gay person being associated with pedophiles was a charge that could stick. We were trying to adopt a child at that point, so he was hitting us where it hurt the most, because Clayton and I wanted to be parents. When you're adopting, any kind of rumor of you being a bad person could derail it. Being called a pedophile could have killed any chances of us ever adopting. Well, DS investigated all of this. There was no truth to it. Nothing stuck. He threw so much mud at me, and none of it stuck. Later, when I was talking to the director general, when I was trying to figure out what was going to come next, because I wanted to go for an ambassador job, she said, "he threw so much mud at you and nothing stuck. This has probably proven that your record is clear, so this might actually make it easier for you to get confirmed as ambassador." I thought he was going to kill my career, and he didn't. Instead, he got caught on tape mailing poison pen letters to people on the seventh floor, and none of it worked. His attempt to sabotage me and to destroy my career did not work, but it was painful, it was hard, there were moments that it was scary. This is what you take on when you take on being a DCM, you take on nut cases and wonderfully talented people. I got to mentor phenomenal entry level officers and gain friendships that continue to this day with members of the country team and their officers. There were wonderful things about being a supervisor of a big team, but then you deal with the awful stuff too, and we got both.

Q: That sounds traumatizing, actually, but unfortunately at that level that happens. It's politics too, right? That's one nasty example of politics. But at that level and eventually to become ambassador, I think you also have to know how to navigate that world. Including with people like that, difficult people. That's one example. That's a nasty example. How

did you manage? Because we know at that level, people are gunning for you, right? And that guy sounds like a very obvious, in-your-face example. There are other examples that might not be so obvious. I'm curious how you dealt with that.

OSIUS: Once I'd gone to Jakarta, my bureau was the EAP Bureau, and it wasn't a simple relationship with folks in Washington. I had a good relationship with our DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary], Scot Marciel, fortunately, because later he became ambassador to Indonesia. First Cameron was my boss, and then Scot was my boss. But Cameron had a testy relationship with the EAP bureau. Kurt Campbell was assistant secretary, and Joe Yun had a serious senior position. I had a good relationship with the EAP bureau. I worked with all the senior leaders. I made sure that people were well informed. I was loyal to my boss. I really respected, and still respect, Ambassador Hume and all that he did, and he was a great mentor. He taught me so much, but I had to navigate a complicated situation where sometimes he wasn't given credit for things that I think really were his initiative. And sometimes he was a bit of a bull in a china shop. This was his fourth time as a chief of mission. He has a big personality, and he could rub people the wrong way. He liked getting stuff done.

There are two ways to go in the State Department. You can go along and get along and never make waves. And some of those people rise to very high positions. Or you can be determined to get stuff done and go for it. Cameron was the latter. He wasn't out there just to hang out in a nice place. He was going to accomplish things that mattered. I like to think that I learned a lot from Cameron, and I adopted his approach. Then, when I was ambassador, I didn't always get along with leaders back at the mother ship, because I was determined to get things done. I prefer it that way. If you make some people mad along the way, well, what's the point of being a diplomat if you can't get things done? But some people like to avoid any kind of controversy. They think, "you must have consensus for everything. You must have clearances for everything. You never can move forward until everybody agrees." Well, you can't get things done that way. Especially if you're a confirmed ambassador, it's your duty to move the relationship forward and sometimes ignore the folks at the mid-level who might object for one reason or another to what you're doing. If Cameron wanted to get everybody on board, we never would have normalized relations with Kopassus, but Cameron knew it was the thing we needed to do to move relations with Indonesia forward. If he had to make some enemies doing it, he didn't mind. That became my model. Sometimes you just have to bust through and get things done, even if you can't bring everybody along with you.

I learned a lot of skills for dealing with Washington, from Cameron in particular, and then later from Scot Marciel. Scot had a different way of managing Washington. He'd had senior positions in EAP. He probably made less noise getting things done, but he was also very much interested in getting things done and moving relationships forward, but probably in a less confrontational way. I learned from him as well. I learned from both ambassadors I worked directly for, and I learned one thing not to do from David Mulford. Don't rule using fear. That just doesn't work. I learned from each of the ambassadors I worked for. It goes back to Darryl Johnson in Thailand, Pete Peterson in Vietnam, and

Nick Platt in the Philippines. I worked for a lot of very good ambassadors, and I like to think that I accumulated lessons along the way from them.

Q: So you mentioned that you all were considering or working on expanding your family and interested in adoption. That's a big deal. Can you tell me about that?

OSIUS: Yes; we did a home study. While we were in Jakarta, we were hoping to adopt abroad. At one point, we met a little girl who needed to be adopted. She had a birth defect, and we were clear we'd be able to pay the medical bills and deal with the birth defect. We were encouraged in this process by the people who ran the orphanage, but we had three strikes against us. We were two men, we were not Muslim, and we were not Indonesian, and probably you could overcome one of those three strikes, but we weren't able to overcome all three. So, we couldn't adopt this little girl named Septi. We were very sad when we couldn't. It still stings.

Later, she was adopted by an Indonesian-Japanese couple that had the means to deal with her birth defect. I had become friends with the first resident U.S. Ambassador to ASEAN, David Carden, whom I liked a lot. I liked him and I liked his wife, Rebecca Riley. They were very close to the Obamas. David said, "When you finally meet that child you're going to adopt, you will know that child is supposed to be yours." And that was true. He really nailed it, because Septi wasn't meant to be our child, and the children we ultimately adopted were meant to be our children. So that was another lesson I learned from an ambassador. But really, I learned it from him as a friend.

Q: And did you adopt your children that you have now? Did you adopt them while you were in Indonesia?

OSIUS: No. After losing Septi, we made the decision in Indonesia that the best place for us to adopt was the United States, not overseas. As a gay couple, we were going to have a better chance of building our family in the United States. So, we came home for that reason. I was offered a job as Chief of Staff to Maria Otero, who was undersecretary for what is now called "J," and she was wonderful. Maria was someone I like, still like, very, very much, and being her chief of staff would have been a great job. But it was one of those fourteen hour a day jobs, and our priority was building our family. So, I did something unusual, and I went to CSIS [the Center for Strategic and International Studies] as a visiting senior fellow. I worked with Ernie Bower, who was head of the Southeast Asia program, and Murray Hiebert, and I worked on India's relationship with Southeast Asia. I wrote a book-length monograph on India's "Look East" policy. Wrote it with an Indian historian, Raja Mohan, who's very prolific and brilliant. Then I did some other things focused on Indonesia, including another monograph on U.S.-Indonesia relations. While I was at CSIS, I got to know Prabowo's brother very well, Hashim [Djojohadikusomo], who financed part of the CSIS Southeast Asia program. And we went forward with our plans to adopt, and we were able to adopt during that time.

Q: That's great. I saw you spent a couple years in the United States, right? You did what you just mentioned. I think you were also a professor at the War College. It was the

National War College and National Defense University, and CSIS. Presumably, as you said, that was part of the thought process, consolidating or making sure the adoption went through, and you could be in the United States for that whole process.

OSIUS: For two years the driving motivation was to create our family. And we did. During the whole year I was at CSIS, we were pursuing adoption, and then it actually came through. I was teaching strategy at the National Defense University, another great Washington assignment, and NDU, because of the teaching schedule, was flexible when we adopted our child. They were supportive of me as a brand-new father. We were two fathers, both of us working, while raising our first child, a son. We were raising our son without much help, because we were in Washington, DC, and NDU was a good place to be during that time. I was also under consideration to become an ambassador. I put my hat in the ring. It was the second time I tried to become an ambassador. The second try was successful, although it's a complicated story, because there was no direct route to becoming ambassador to Vietnam. But it was good to be back in the United States at that time to build our family and to do what I needed to do to be nominated and confirmed as ambassador to Vietnam.

Q: What was the first time you tried to become ambassador? I guess it didn't work out that first time.

OSIUS: I bid on Sri Lanka the first time around. I went through the process once and didn't get anywhere. I wasn't any bureau's choice. I didn't get too far along in the process, but I learned something by trying. I learned how the system worked. And in fact, the timing was much better the second time, because by then we had adopted our son, and he was big enough to go with us, and I got my dream job. Sri Lanka would have been great, but that wasn't my dream job. My dream job was ambassador to Vietnam. There was no job that I wanted more in the world than to be ambassador to Vietnam. It always seemed like a bridge too far. How could an openly gay man become ambassador at all? That was the first big hurdle. And then, how could I be assigned to my dream job? It's an honor to be considered to become Ambassador anywhere in the world, but EAP put me forward as ambassador to Fiji. And Fiji would have been great. I'm a sailor. We would have had fun, and it is super interesting.

The deadline came for bureaus to nominate people to be considered for ambassador. I'd had a conversation about a week before with Glyn Davies. Glyn Davies was an ambassador to many places. He'd been ExecSec, he'd been in the White House's equivalent of the executive secretariat. He's a fantastic human being, as well as a superb diplomat. And I'd gone to him, and I said, "EAP has been generous. They're putting me up for Fiji, but where I really want to go is Vietnam." And he said, "Go for it, Ted. You need to try to make it happen. You have the credentials. So go for it. Don't wait." One day before the deadline, I was able to get support from the DRL Bureau to put my name forward for Vietnam. I went to DRL and asked, "Would you consider putting me up to be ambassador to Vietnam?" First Dan Baer and then Uzra Zeya said, "Yes, we'll put your name forward." And they did, the day before the names were due. Then, lo and behold, I actually was considered. There were 12 candidates to go to Vietnam, but only one person

spoke Vietnamese — that was me — and I was the lucky one. I was chosen to go. I was worried about things like the pedophilia case still hanging over me. Here I am, an openly gay, married diplomat. How could they consider me for Ambassador to Vietnam? But they did, and my sexuality was not a factor in my confirmation. To my great surprise.

Q: Why did you want to become ambassador? That's a big deal. Not everybody wants to do it, right? There's a lot of baggage that comes with that. What drove you towards that? Why become an ambassador at all? And when did you really start to think seriously, this could actually happen?

OSIUS: I started thinking seriously about it around the time I was deputy director of the Korea desk. I had a conversation with a good friend, and she asked, "How do you want to see this Foreign Service career end? What's the ultimate goal in your Foreign Service career?" And I said, "Well, I'd really like to be an ambassador. I don't think that's possible, because I'm gay, so it's hard to imagine that that could ever happen." She said, "Okay, but for it to happen, what would you have to do to get there?" And I said, "Well, I'd have to become a DCM first. A DCM or a deputy assistant secretary, or something at a very senior level first." She said, "Well, why don't you go for it? Why don't you try to make it happen?" I think that conversation probably facilitated my interest in the political consular job in Delhi, and definitely spurred my interest in becoming a DCM.

You also asked, why Vietnam? I loved my Vietnam tour so much, and I spoke the language, and I'd been there at the takeoff, in the beginning of the process to turn an old adversary into a friend. To be able to go back 17 years later to see how the relationship had progressed, and then take it to the next level, that was a dream come true, and I recognized that potential.

In 2013, Joe Biden hosted a lunch at the State Department, because Trương Tấn Sang, the president of Vietnam, had come to Washington. Sang and President Obama launched a comprehensive partnership. At that point, I was already starting to angle for the Vietnam position, and I got invited to that lunch because I was one of the people who'd been involved with Vietnam for a long time. I realized at that moment, it really would be a dream come true to be able to see this relationship to its next stage. Because how often in life do you have a chance to truly make a difference as an individual diplomat? This was one where I thought I could make a difference. As someone who understands the country and speaks the language, I could make a difference. That's why I wanted to do it so much. So, when Glyn Davies said, "You have the credentials; go for it," that rang a bell, and I worked hard to get that nomination. I talked to a lot of people, and I got several people lined up to support me. Probably most important support was from Pete Peterson, the first U.S. ambassador to Vietnam. He called his friend John Kerry, and he called his friend John McCain, and those were the two most important people in making me ambassador to Vietnam. That was because of Pete.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong, you know better than I do, but there are multiple steps, right? I think the first step is some sort of White House vetting. Where the White House decides, or how does that actually work?

OSIUS: The very first step is you must get on the list, and I'd done that, but then you have to get the votes. There is a committee made of people who decide what names are going to the White House, and you must get their votes. To get the State Department's nod, through friends I was able to reach out to the people on that committee and get support. This is complicated, because there were eleven other people in the mix, and they were all ahead of me in seniority, and I was not the regional bureau's choice. The bureau had someone else in mind for Vietnam, not me. So, I was starting from the back foot, because usually you want to be the regional bureau's choice, and I was a functional bureau's choice, which was good enough to get me on the list, but it wasn't enough to get me the votes of the committee. I don't know exactly how this all worked out, but I think I had the support of the person who mattered the most in the State Department: John Kerry. He knew I spoke Vietnamese. He knew Pete Peterson thought I was the right person for the job. I had been Kerry's control officer in Vietnam. I think John Kerry thought I was the right person for the job.

Then the next step is you must be vetted by the White House. They asked me a lot of questions about the pedophilia charges, to make sure there was nothing that would stick. And nothing had stuck. There's a reason nothing had stuck, because there was no there, there. And they checked out whether there were any conflicts of interest. They do a thorough vetting before they put your name to the Senate. I jumped through all those hoops, and they sent my name to the Senate, and then I wasn't confirmed right away.

The next hurdle was that a senator put a hold on my nomination, the Senator from Louisiana, David Vitter, and I didn't understand why, or what I was supposed to do. But one of the people in my ambassador course managed to get confirmed even though a lot of confirmations were being held up. He said, "You're like a test rat in a cage, and you have to keep hitting on all the levers until finally a pellet drops out." I needed to hit a lot of levers. I reached out to people I knew on the Hill, or who knew people on the Hill. Then ultimately, my friend Leon Fuerth, who'd been my advisor, my mentor, said, "Ted, you have to learn everything there is to know about Louisiana, about catfish, and you must go see Senator Vitter." And this was not what H [the Legislative Affairs Bureau] was recommending. They were saying, "Wait, we'll take care of it." That was not good advice. Leon's was good advice. I learned everything there was to know about catfish and everything there was to know about Louisiana, and I went and saw Senator Vitter. I said, "I will help you on your issue, but I can't if you don't let me go to Vietnam." The next day, he released the hold, and I was confirmed right after that. Then I did everything I promised to do. I took very seriously Senator Vitter's concerns and those of Marco Rubio, who had concerns when I finally went to my confirmation hearings. Every concern that was conveyed to me by the Senate, I took super seriously, and finally I did get confirmed. It was a moment of great joy.

Q: Remind me, why did he put a hold on you? Why did Vitter put a hold on you?

OSIUS: It was over catfish. Catfish are an important Louisiana product and so are shrimp. And the Vietnamese were selling a lot of catfish and shrimp in the United States,

and they were selling at lower prices than the Louisiana fishermen could sell. Vitter had a point. Louisiana fishermen and shrimp farmers had been hit by the BP oil spill in the Gulf. They'd been hit by Hurricane Katrina. They had been slammed again and again and Vitter had a right to be concerned about something that was affecting his constituents. I told him, "I will make sure U.S. laws are carried out. If the laws must be changed, that's your job. My job is to implement the laws. Your job as a legislator is to change them if they need to be changed." He was focused on phytosanitary laws, and he said that the shrimp and the catfish weren't safe for consumption by Americans. In fact, that wasn't the case. They were safe, but they were selling them cheaper because the cost of labor in Vietnam is lower. They weren't breaking any U.S. laws in selling them. Still I went and inspected the catfish farms and the shrimp farms, and made sure that they were adhering to all American laws. That's what he'd asked me to do, and that's what I did.

Q: Sometimes those holds are put on people for something that they have absolutely no control over.

OSIUS: I didn't have much control over this issue, but I did have the duty to look into it as American ambassador, to investigate and make sure American laws were being upheld and I was able to do that.

Q: What were some of the other concerns? I mean, you mentioned Marco Rubio had concerns. I'm sure you had to lobby a bunch of people.

OSIUS: Marco Rubio was concerned about human rights and asked in my confirmation hearing about a particular Pastor [Nguyễn Công] Chính, who was being held in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, in Gia Lai province. And I went to the Central Highlands many times as ambassador. I even rode my bicycle through the Central Highlands, and I got to know every single one of the People's Committees and all the senior government officials in each of those provinces. And finally, I got Pastor Chính let out of prison. That was what Marco Rubio wanted. He considered Pastor Chính a prisoner of conscience. I think that's fair, and I was able to get him let out of jail. If he'd stayed in jail, he would have died. Getting him out of jail was very gratifying because it was the right thing to do. Human rights was often the focus of members of Congress with regard to Vietnam, and a number of senators had concerns about human rights, and I used those concerns to press the Vietnamese, because the Vietnamese wanted to be part of the Trans Pacific Partnership [trade agreement]. I made it clear to them that Congress had a say on whether they could be part of TPP or not, but that's jumping ahead.

I mentioned there were two people who were most important in getting me the job: one of them was John Kerry, and the other was John McCain. The most important meeting I had before my confirmation hearings was just the day before. It was with John McCain. When I went in, I knew that if I could get his support, others would fall in line. And if he was opposed to me, there was no way I was going to be ambassador to Vietnam. Because he was the man who made decisions about Vietnam in the U.S. Senate. He told me right at the beginning of the meeting, "Pete called me and I'm going to support you." At first, I thought, "Oh, my job is done." But it wasn't as simple as that. He also wanted me to

understand some things before I went. He was tough on me in the hearings, and it was fortunate that I knew I'd ultimately have his support, but I answered his questions honestly, directly and in a way that satisfied him.

In the meeting the day before, McCain took me by the arm and walked me over to a wall in his office, where there was a State Department cable in a frame with a line highlighted. The cable was from the Paris talks over Vietnam's fate in 1967. And the cable said, "Admiral McCain's son, who is being held in the Hanoi Hilton, was offered the chance to leave, and he declined." I wondered why he was showing me this cable because I knew the story. I knew John McCain's story, but I was appropriately respectful. Then we talked about a monument that had been erected in Hanoi to John McCain, and he said, "There's bird poop all over it. And they spelled my name wrong, and they've said I'm Air Force and not Navy. Can you fix that?" And I said, "Senator, if I get confirmed, I'll take a toothbrush and I'll clean it myself, and I'll make sure the inscription gets fixed." Later I did. That monument is all cleaned up and the inscription corrected. But I didn't quite understand why he was showing me that cable initially and only afterwards did it dawn on me that that was the most important decision he made in his life. It was the decision that made him the man he was.

After McCain had been shot down over Trúc Bạch Lake, and his arms were broken and his leg was broken, someone had stuck a bayonet in his groin. By the time he was hauled ashore, he was in bad shape. Then, after six months in the Hanoi Hilton, he was in worse shape. He was called before the warden, as the cable on his office wall accurately reported, and offered the opportunity to leave. He made a decision that was most likely to be the final decision he ever made. The prisoner in the cellmate next to his, Bob Craner, said, "John, you're exempt from the code." The military code says, first in, first out, you can't be released as a POW out of order. The warden was offering him the chance to go ahead of everybody else, but he chose honor over his own survival. He chose to honor the code even though he knew he would suffer terribly, and he did. He was about 100 pounds at that point and wasn't expected to live. They threw him in solitary confinement for the next two and a half years. My view is that decision, honor over life, earned him the right to decide whether I went to Vietnam or not, earned him the right to make decisions about Vietnam for the rest of his career. Understanding that about him turned out to be very important for me in understanding how we reconciled with that country, and how he had played his part, and John Kerry also played his part in bringing about reconciliation with Vietnam. Those two men are very central to the book I later wrote about the thirty-year arc of our reconciliation with Vietnam, *Nothing Is Impossible*.

Q: Both of them have very personal relationships to Vietnam because of their history. Did you, presumably, talk to them about this? What were their messages to you about Vietnam?

OSIUS: John Kerry was very direct with me. He said, "you're going to my country, and I'm going to visit a lot," and I knew he would stay on it. He had a lot of things going on with Iran and climate change and he had a very busy job as Secretary of State, but I knew he would pay attention to Vietnam. That turned out to be tremendously useful, as we

moved the relationship forward over the next three years. With McCain, it was different. I hosted him in Vietnam. He knew he was running out of time. And there was one evening where he really opened up about what it was like to be a POW because mostly, he had not. One evening on his trip to Vietnam with Senators Joni Ernst, Jack Reed, and Dan Sullivan, he told us a story about his time as a prisoner that has always stuck with me. He also deferred to the other senators, even though he was senior to them and head of the delegation. He's a national hero in Vietnam. He's absolutely a national hero. But when he came with those other senators, he never said much in any of the meetings. All the Vietnamese leaders wanted to see McCain. I didn't understand at first what he was doing, because he was the person they all wanted to see. But he knew he would be gone at some point, and he wanted others to take up the mantle of the relationship. I believe he thought Dan Sullivan could be his protege and could nurture the relationship after he was gone. Once again, it wasn't about him. He was making choices that weren't about him, but about what he considered to be in the best interest of the United States.

Q: Sounds like it was a pretty typical nomination or confirmation hearing. There are always those tough questions. And McCain had some tough questions for you, it sounds like, but did anything surprise you, or was it about what you expected?

OSIUS: Mark Lippert, who became U.S. ambassador to Korea, was confirmed at the same time and he got the hardest questions. And Joan Polaschik, who became ambassador to Algeria. Joan Polaschik and Mark Lippert were on the same panel. We were all confirmed at the same time. Mark got the toughest questions. I got some tough questions from Marco Rubio and John McCain, but I didn't bear the brunt of that hearing. Ambassador Lippert did, so one thing I learned is that it's good to be up there with other people who are going to take some heat, because you don't have to take all the heat. I took my share, but I had an easier time of it than others. The other thing I learned was that being gay had really no impact on my confirmation. I'd been worried about it all along. I thought at some point during the consultations I'm going to run into a buzzsaw. Never did, not from either party. The senators were much more interested that I spoke Vietnamese and I had a history there. They were interested in the merits of the case more than who I loved. That was a big lesson. And the hold up from Senator Vitter had nothing to do with my sexuality and everything to do with catfish. Those were the lessons I learned. I don't think they're universally applicable, but they were of interest to me.

Q: Yes, those are very positive lessons.

OSIUS: There was one other thing I should mention. In the confirmation hearing, we put my mom and Clayton and our son right up front. I don't remember if the baby stayed there very long. Maybe my sister or a caretaker took him out. He didn't have to stay through the whole hearing. But when they go for confirmation, many people have family there. We did the same thing, and so did the other people who were up for confirmation. I told a story that I think was compelling about reconciliation; I tried to appeal to the senators in a way that hit the heart as well as the head. Then there are always questions for the record later. I had support for those. The State Department has a system where they help you get ready for confirmation hearings, and they help you with the questions

for the record afterwards. I had good support. There was a person in the H Bureau, Julie Bulgrin, who was very, very helpful to me through the whole process. I saw one of her old bosses the other day who agreed that she was phenomenal at handling that process.

Q: You mentioned your son, did you? I thought by this point you had two kids, no?

OSIUS: At this point we only had one. After I was confirmed, we learned about the upcoming birth of our second child. I was confirmed in November, sworn in in December, and we went to Vietnam in December. But just before we left for Vietnam, we learned that a baby girl was going to be born and that the birth mother wanted the two children to be raised together. The birth mother had chosen us the first time to raise the boy to whom she'd given birth, and then she chose us the second time so that the two kids could be raised together. She wanted them to be able to see the world and to get a good education. Check, check; we could do those things. She wasn't born until February, about three months into my time as ambassador.

Q: So, you were confirmed. And I think you left to post in 2014, correct?

OSIUS: That's right. We went to post in December 2014, and I was able to present credentials about eighteen hours after we landed.

Q: Wow, cool. So I just wanted to ask you one other thing before we actually get to Vietnam. Usually there's a ceremonial swearing in, right? I'm curious about what yours was like because that's exciting. I think there's usually something that the State Department does, other than the official one.

OSIUS: Yes, the legal one is very quiet. Jen Wicks swore me in in an office with Clayton there. They took a photo, but it was legal and not ceremonial. They allow you to invite people to the ceremonial one. I asked John Kerry if he would swear me in, and he said, "Yes." He really cared about Vietnam. He was busy. He didn't swear in very many ambassadors, but he did swear me in. Thanks to him, not only my husband, but also my mom and our son were able to be on stage, so we were seen as we were: a three-generational family. I invited members of GLIFAA to come to the swearing in, and then people I knew for many reasons throughout my career, family members, friends. The Ben Franklin Room was being renovated, so it was in the George C. Marshall auditorium on the historic side, near 21st Street. That big auditorium seats a lot of people, and it was packed.

Secretary Kerry was fantastic. He made it very personal. He talked about our bike ride together in 1997 but he lied a little. He said, "Ted was riding circles around us." That is not true. Senator Kerry, and then Secretary Kerry, is a very competitive person, and when we biked, I remember him being ahead, even though I was younger and a strong biker, he was ahead. And Pete Peterson, who wasn't such a strong biker, was also very competitive, and he was riding with his buddy John, and I was just making sure that everything was okay and nobody got hurt. But he told that story as if I rode circles around him and he made it very personal. He made sure that my family felt very welcome, a contrast to what

Michael Guest faced during his swearing in. I was the third career ambassador to be sworn in at the State Department. Colin Powell wouldn't let Alex Navarro have any role in his partner Michael's swearing in. Secretary Kerry embraced us as a family and made jokes about our son TABO's seersucker suit and was incredibly welcoming to my mother and to Clayton. It felt very personal. It felt historic, and I spoke some lines in Vietnamese so the message would go back to Vietnam that I knew the language. The Vietnamese ambassador was there, and Alan Lowenthal from Congress was there, and lots and lots of friends from my entire life.

Q: I'm pretty sure you told me this story earlier, but I don't remember specifically, I'm guessing you rode bikes with Senator Kerry when you were his control officer in 1997? So, he remembered you?

OSIUS: He remembered, and he must have told his speech writer to put that in the remarks, because it was very personal, and only he would have known that.

Q: That's pretty cool. Okay, so you're done with all that, you're getting ready to go to Vietnam. What are the main issue sets that you knew you were going to have to deal with once you get there?

OSIUS: I'd gone through the ambassador course. Bill Burns had said, "You don't have as much time as you think. Three years goes by fast. If you want to accomplish anything big, you'd better hit the ground running. You'd better have a plan." He referred to a hundred-day plan. So, I'm a good student, I had a hundred-day plan. We were going to do things on the security side, and we were going to move TPP forward and build commercial relations. We were going to work on health, science, environment, and education. I had a plan, and I was ready with my plan by the time we went. I had filmed a video for the Vietnamese people that was released when I was about to arrive, and I did it entirely in Vietnamese to show that I knew something about the language and the culture and the history. I used cultural references in my opening remarks when I was sworn in, and I laid out America's agenda. I used a key line that Secretary Kerry had used, that the United States supports a strong, prosperous, independent Vietnam that respects human rights and the rule of law. I wanted there to be continuity in policy. I wanted the Vietnamese to know I was going to carry out the secretary's policy regarding Vietnam. I crafted the words when I was in the Senate and for the swearing in, so that they would be received well in Vietnam, and they'd know what I was up to.

What I didn't count on was that the Vietnamese would have an agenda, and how strong and well thought out their agenda was. I didn't really understand that until I got there. So, the next phase was understanding what their agenda was and how important it was to listen, not just to go in with plans, but to listen to their plans and their aspirations.

Q: I imagine, with your history in Vietnam and speaking Vietnamese, people must have been quite excited to anticipate your arrival. You must have been gaining a lot of positive vibes.

OSIUS: I think so. I spoke entirely in Vietnamese to the press when we landed at the airport in Hanoi. That went over well. Having talked to folks in the ambassador course, I made sure that first photograph was a tableau: two dads, their kid, and my mom. *Một gia đình ba thế hệ* is the phrase in Vietnamese, a three-generation family, because that's very well understood by the Vietnamese. Okay, our family didn't look like just any family, because we were two dads, but I wanted them to see we were a family like other families. The first picture on the front pages and on television was of our whole family.

Q: Mom came as well.

OSIUS: Mom came as well. She stayed for a few months, and she helped us with our son, especially at the beginning. We had babies and when they have jet lag, they don't understand that night is day and day is night. So, Mom had a lot of long nights and slept a lot during the day for those first couple of weeks. But she was there for the first few months.

Q: Just to make sure I get this right, this was your mom, or this was baby's — your mom was there. Okay, got it. That makes sense. So, this is exciting. You're really sending a message as soon as you land. That's really an important message. Can you talk more about trying to implement what you want to implement? You alluded to some challenges, because it sounds like the Vietnamese had their own agenda, which isn't surprising.

OSIUS: First, I wanted to be visible. I thought that was important. I did some interviews right from the start. I did them in Vietnamese, and talked about the kind of partnership I believed that we could have, our hopes for Vietnamese prosperity and strength and independence. We did cultural events right away. My sister came out for a Christmas event that featured us, but also Vietnamese kids, because we'd gotten there just before Christmas.

Before too long it struck me that I hadn't thought everything through when I created my 100-day plan. There was a 20th anniversary celebration of normalized diplomatic relations, with a series of discussions at the government guest house. Pete Peterson was there, with [former charge d'affaires] Desaix Anderson and [former ambassador] Mike Michalak. Vice Foreign Minister Hà Kim Ngọc said at that event, "We must move on from bilateral cooperation to regional and global collaboration. That's where we must take this relationship." I knew I'd heard something important and, by then, I had started to have a relationship with this vice foreign minister. I met him a few times, and he began telling me something very interesting, which was that the general secretary of the Communist Party wanted an invitation to go to the White House to meet Barack Obama. General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng had been a professor of Marxist ideology and Hồ Chí Minh thought, not a capitalist, not someone whom you would expect to be very cozy with the United States. But he was the general secretary of the Communist Party, number one in their system. He was the most important leader, although there was a very powerful Prime Minister at the time, Nguyễn Tấn Dũng. But this plan for a visit doesn't work in our system. You don't get to bring party leaders to see the president of the United States in the Oval Office.

Right away, when I sent messages back to Washington that this visit request was an important one, I got a lot of pushback. Susan Rice said, “No, that's not going to happen. He's a party leader. The president meets heads of state, heads of government, not party leaders,” and Susan Rice was National Security Advisor. It's kind of hard to overcome the opposition of the National Security Advisor, but I thought, “Well, I'm just going to see how far we can take this.” I called my friend Tommy Vallely, who was the head of the Vietnam program at Harvard, and said, “Tommy, they want the general secretary to come to the Oval Office, and it's really important for the Vietnamese that this happens.” And Tommy said, “That's nuts. That's never going to happen. You can't do that.” I said, “I'm telling you, Tommy, this is very important, and I'm hearing that this is the way we're going to move things forward,” because we had several initiatives stuck at that point. TPP was not entirely stuck, but it wasn’t where it needed to be. The security relationship was stuck. Agreements that we wanted signed weren’t getting signed. We were not making the progress that I wanted us to make.

Tommy finally agreed that this was something we needed to pursue. He went to his friend, John Kerry, and they’ve been friends for fifty years. Secretary Kerry said, “that would be very hard. Susan Rice doesn't like it. It's going to be tough to do, but I will make the case.” In one of his once-a-week lunches with the president, he made the case to Barack Obama. He said, “You need to invite the general secretary to come and see you.” Obama said yes, and Kerry described getting beaten up by Susan Rice afterward because she objected. But the president had decided. The invitation was made.

In July of my first year in Hanoi, after I'd been there seven months, that visit took place, and it changed the trajectory of U.S.-Vietnam relations. If I had followed the rules and waited for EAP and the undersecretary for political affairs and everybody else to agree, the visit never would have happened. But I went around the system, and it worked. The meeting lasted an hour and a half. It was supposed to be forty-five minutes. That meeting resulted in Vietnam coming into the Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement. It resulted in a series of initiatives being undertaken by the Vietnamese. From that moment on, we were turbocharged. We were in overdrive in the relationship, and it resulted in a very successful visit by President Obama a year later that wouldn't have been so substantive or so successful if it hadn't been for the general secretary’s visit. It was the right thing to do, and it was the right thing to break the rules to do it, and to go around the system to do it. Even Susan, after the meeting, said to me, “Ted, you were right.” She is a big person, and big enough to accept that she wasn't always right. I really admire her for that. I'm telling you that visit changed the trajectory of the relationship.

During that visit, the president said to the general secretary -- on my recommendation -- that the United States respects different political systems. This was put into a joint statement. The entire joint statement was read in all of Vietnam, all sixty-three provinces. These statements are dry, but they were memorized by all the Party cadre throughout the country. The general secretary accepted that Fulbright University would have academic freedom. Huge decisions were made after the visit that changed the relationship, and the most consequential thing I did as ambassador was to facilitate that visit. But I'll tell you,

it wasn't in my hundred-day plan at all. It was not part of my agenda. Success came from listening to the Vietnamese about their agenda.

Q: Well, it sounds like, right from the start, you're kind of hitting the ball out of the park. But I also feel bad for you, because two POTUS visits, that sounds like a nightmare.

OSIUS: Those are hard. Two POTUS visits in Indonesia, one POTUS visit in Vietnam, and a general secretary visit to the United States; some very high-level visits. But for the first, the Vietnamese had to do most of the work, and for the second, the Americans had to do most of it.

Q: What was it? Can you tell me a little bit about the internal dynamics at the embassy, and what it was like leading the embassy, because that's also a big part of your job. Usually, it's the DCM who's the chief operating officer, but you have to be concerned about that too, right? What was the embassy like?

OSIUS: I tried to organize things a little differently. This was something I'd learned from Ambassador Hume. I tried to organize the embassy around key mission goals. We called them joint endeavors. At various times, we had different numbers, but there was a core of twelve joint endeavors. And if the joint endeavor was Vietnam joining the TPP, that wasn't just the econ section, that was also commerce and others. There was a joint endeavor involving TPP. There was a joint endeavor involving human rights. And that's not just the political section. It also involves others. There was a joint endeavor on environment, science, technology, and health. There was one on education. Again, that's not just the cultural affairs section. That involves commerce, too. I ignored some of the bureaucratic differences and got people focused on missions, no matter what their parent agency was, and it was very effective.

It made a big difference when it came to President Obama's visit. When President Obama came to Vietnam in 2016, we signed twenty-one agreements. We moved initiatives that people thought were impossible, like bringing the Peace Corps to Vietnam. People said that was impossible to do. And it was not impossible. It took a little while. It took a lot of work, but we did it because we organized, not around bureaucratic lines, but around what we called joint endeavors, or mission goals is probably the more common term. This encountered some resistance, because some people are used to staying in their silos, but we had a motivated group. You don't go to Vietnam because the shopping is good. You go to Vietnam because you can be part of turning an old adversary into a friend. People self-select, and we had some very strong, talented people on the team there.

My second DCM was instrumental in all this. I had inherited a DCM when I arrived. Then I was able to choose a DCM to come in the summer of 2015. Scot Marciel, who was PDAS [Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary], helped me find Susan Sutton, and she was fantastic. She was an amazing DCM, who shared my vision, and she was terrific at implementing it. She was better at managing Washington than I was. The two of us worked extremely well together, and then I had super strong section heads and an excellent POL-MIL [political-military] officer and a fantastic defense attaché. The

defense attaché couldn't get a visa because he was born in Huế, and he didn't have his birth certificate. All birth certificates had burned up in Huế in 1968. I used strong-arm tactics to get him a visa. I told the minister of justice, "You have a visit coming up to the United States. If you want to have any meetings when you go to the United States, then I think you need to give a visa to COL Ton, my defense attaché." And that defense attaché helped us move the security relationship forward, light years ahead of where it had been. I was the leader, but the work was done by very, very talented people who were part of the team and dedicated to what we were doing.

Q: Well, unfortunately, Ambassador, I think we're going to have to do one more, and it won't be as long of a session, but I think we're almost there. Okay, almost there.

OSIUS: Let's not forget, in the next session, to talk about Ruth Bader Ginsburg, okay? Because there's a story that I think you'll like.

Q: Amazing. Can't wait to hear it. Well, thank you so much. Ambassador. Say hi to —

OSIUS: I will. He just walked out the door to go get our son. He usually picks up our son and I pick up our daughter.

Q: I'll email Yasmin and I'll get on your calendar, and we just need one more, and we'll be good.

OSIUS: Thank you for doing this. You are a volunteer. This is a lot of your time.

Q: Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you for doing this, and it would —

OSIUS: It takes a good interviewer to make something like this work, and your questions are sensitive. I love talking with you. I think that makes all the difference. I really thank you for doing this.

Q: I'm so happy to hear that, and I think this will be good, and it's valuable. It's a piece of history that's really, really important. I think these are really important.

OSIUS: I do, too, and Clayton does. That's why he's on the board of ADST. People use these oral histories. I've seen again and again how scholars and journalists and others use these interviews. I really appreciate your doing this.

Q: I don't anticipate you going for another ambassadorship, right? One way that people use these sometimes, one way that I saw Congress use this, was to go after an ambassador nominee, Elizabeth Bagley, I think that was her name, Elizabeth Bagley. I was at that hearing because I worked very closely with Michelle Kwan. I was her desk officer, and she became our ambassador to Belize, and Mari Carmen Aponte, who became our ambassador to Panama. And Mari Carmen Aponte, she was very concerned about her hearing, but they spent the whole time on Bagley and picking apart her oral history.

OSIUS: I will not be an ambassador again. I will not be in government again. And I've even used names — if I were worried about confirmation, I wouldn't have told you the names. I'm telling you the full truth because I think that's the only way these can be useful.

Q: I appreciate that. Good. We'll be in touch, and I appreciate your time very much.

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Q: Ambassador, thanks for meeting with me again. It's Monday, March 3, 2025, at 1:10pm Eastern Time, and we're doing most likely our last session on your oral history. We left off last time talking about your ambassadorship, and you had mentioned that even early on, there were some big successes. There was the visit of the general secretary to Washington, and that was 2015?

OSIUS: The most consequential thing I did as ambassador, I believe, was getting the general secretary to Washington, because it created the space for everything that followed. It was an unusual visit, and it was historic in many ways. It launched us for what happened for the next two years. I followed it by going to Orange County. Orange County, California, has the highest concentration of Vietnamese Americans, or I should say, Americans of Vietnamese origin. That's something that every U.S. ambassador to Vietnam must do. Go and talk to the people who really care the most about the relationship, but whose views about reconciliation might not be the same as those of the U.S. government. I went, I got beaten up a bit, but it went well, and that visit persuaded me that part of what I had to do as ambassador was look for ways to facilitate reconciliation between Americans of Vietnamese origin and their homeland.

Maybe we can set that aside for a moment, because then I went back to Hanoi, and soon after that, we had visits by John Kerry and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Both of those were consequential. The Ruth Bader Ginsburg story is interesting. When I first arrived as ambassador, she had written a message: “I have a practice of traveling overseas when the court's not in session, and I travel with my daughter. Could we stay at the residence?” We wrote back, “Hell yes! We would love to have you; we'd be so honored if you would stay at the residence.” Then a member of my team said, “Hey, the Supreme Court has just made the decision about *Obergefell,*” which made Clayton's and my marriage legal in all fifty states. “Why don't you ask RBG if she would renew your wedding vows?” I thought, well, that's a lot of chutzpah, but yes. I wrote to her and asked, “While you're here staying with us, would you renew our wedding vows?” We'd been married for about ten years. At that point, we had two children. And she said, “Yes, I'd be delighted to,” and so we had this amazing ceremony in the ambassador's residence, where she presided over the renewal of our wedding vows ten years into our marriage.

At this point we had a one-and-a-half-year-old and a six-month-old, and marriage is a different thing when you have children, because it's not just about the two of you. It's also about these young people, who are, I think, like your heart outside of your body. They're vulnerable. They need you. I had been thinking about the wedding vows as a political statement. Since our marriage was legal in the United States, it would be great for there to be marriage equality in other parts of the world as well. And it was political; the stories about it went viral and it made a big difference to a lot of Vietnamese that we renewed our vows in Hanoi. But it was also very meaningful to us because marriage meant so much more than it had. At one point in the middle of the ceremony, I was holding TABO, our one-and-a-half-year-old son, and he jumped out of my arms into Dada's arms. It hit me at that moment: this is what it's about. This is why marriage equality is so important. It's not just for us, but for him and for his little sister. It was a very meaningful ceremony for us, as well as for a lot of Vietnamese. From that point on, young Vietnamese would come up to us wherever we were, in restaurants or on travel and say, "Hey, I know about you, I heard about your marriage, and I understand that you have a big job, and you also have a family, and you're openly gay. And now I've come out to my parents," or "now I've come out at work, I've decided to be my true self." This was very meaningful to us, to be able to help some people be their true selves. That was the RBG story that I wanted to tell you.

Q: That's a fun story. Lucky you to have that experience. Maybe let's riff off that a little bit, because there was a lot of news coverage and a lot of discussion about the LGBTI community when you were there. In fact, there's an article I ran across from NBC News. It says, "U.S. ambassador becomes face of Vietnam's LGBT evolution." I think a lot of people looked up to you in the community when you were there. Can you talk a little bit more about what you did with the LGBT community?

OSIUS: Clayton and I agreed that we should not be setting the agenda for this community, because then it's a foreign agenda, but we could be responsive to what they thought was important. We invited leaders of the community over and asked, "What matters to you, and are there ways that we could be helpful without imposing any agenda on you?" Some very thoughtful leaders of civil society groups led the LGBTQI community. They said, "there are two things that matter to us. One is for trans persons to be able to list their actual gender rather than the gender they had at birth on their identity cards, because that will allow them to get the health care that they need." Working with UNDP and others, we were able to support that effort. While we were in Vietnam, transgender persons were able to determine their own gender identity and have that put on their national ID cards, and therefore get the health care that they needed.

The second challenge that the community said was important was to be able to be out at work. "We need to help create an environment where it's possible to bring yourself — your whole self — to work." So, we started by working with U.S. companies, and we visited a lot of companies that had enlightened HR policies, and had extended, say, health care benefits to same sex spouses or same sex partners. Those were companies like Citibank, KPMG, Baker McKenzie, and a lot of U.S. companies that supported marriage equality and supported people being their authentic selves at work. That started becoming

more the norm in Vietnamese companies. I think it's a long, extended effort, but we were able to contribute in some ways to the initial efforts in Vietnam. Then, as I mentioned, we kept hearing stories of people who saw us with our kids and saw the role that I was playing in Vietnam, and said, "hey, I can have a family and a job and be myself." We kept meeting people and hearing stories that we were making an impact, and it meant a lot to Clayton and me.

As one example of how this worked, we participated each year in Hanoi Pride. One year I rode my bike with our son sitting in the child's seat and waving a rainbow flag, with the Dutch ambassador right next to me, waving her flag. Other ambassadors participated, and we had opportunities in Hanoi when we could celebrate equality, and the diplomatic community would turn out, and the LGBTQI community would turn out and no problem. No one had a problem with any of this. But we were in Hồ Chí Minh City for a visit, and we had been invited to join the Hồ Chí Minh City Pride event, which was a march, not a bike ride. The day before, I was told officials canceled the event. They didn't want the people to be able to march, and they especially didn't want me marching, as ambassador. So, I went to see the chairman of the Hồ Chí Minh City People's Committee, who's like the mayor or the governor of that part of Vietnam. I said, "For a couple of years now, I've been able to participate in Hanoi pride. And we've done other events and there have been no problems in Hanoi. It's funny to me, but it seems like Hanoi is way more modern and more open than Hồ Chí Minh City. That's surprising. I thought this is the larger city, I thought this was the more cosmopolitan city. Clearly, I was wrong. This city is less progressive than Hanoi." He didn't like that at all. The next day, the march was turned back on, and Clayton and I marched in the front. Thousands of people marched with us. So, it worked to be able to highlight that it wasn't necessarily good for Hồ Chí Minh City's image to be seen as less progressive. We got to march. It was great.

Q: I know there's some people who are going to be reading this, who are really interested in Vietnamese politics. I'm not an expert on Vietnam, but I believe that Nguyễn Phú Trọng was the general secretary, is that correct? And that he passed away last year. I think he was the longest serving general secretary in post-war Vietnam. I'm guessing that he had three terms, which is very unusual, right? I'm guessing that he was a very important figure in Vietnamese politics and Vietnamese history. I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about your interactions, impressions of him.

OSIUS: He was not a very outgoing person. He had been a professor of Marxist ideology and Hồ Chí Minh thought — very scholarly, quiet, self-effacing. Lived an ascetic lifestyle, but he turned out to be a very powerful general secretary. He'd been underestimated by some of his political rivals, including Nguyễn Tấn Dũng, who had a rivalry with him, but in the end, Dũng stepped down after ten years as prime minister. I had dinner with him on the final day he was prime minister after ten years. But Trọng stayed, and some people attribute his political longevity to that visit I described, the visit to the Oval Office. I don't know all the reasons that he was able to last in the role for so long, because there are parts of Vietnam's political apparatus that are opaque. But he stayed, and he turned out to be a very powerful, long-serving general secretary who had a big influence. We had a good relationship when he visited Washington.

Before Trọng's meeting with President Obama, I talked with one of his key advisors, Bùi Thế Giang, the American advisor to the general secretary. I suggested, "Look, when they sit down for their meeting, don't have him read from his notes. Throw away the notes, look the president in the eye and have a conversation with him. That's going to work much better than if both leaders read their talking points." Lo and behold, he listened, and he put down his notes, looked the president in the eye, and they had a conversation that changed the course of our relationship. It was supposed to be forty-five minutes but ended up being an hour and a half. It laid the foundation for everything that happened afterwards. I was with Trọng for the whole visit. The next day, he gave a speech at CSIS, the Center for Strategic and International Studies. And we were in the green room, the holding room before he gave his speech. Trọng asked, "Mr. Ambassador, how do you think it went with the president yesterday?" I replied, "Sir, you used to be a teacher. If I were grading this interaction, I would give it an A plus plus." Because that truly was an impactful conversation, and the president said what I'd urged him to say, which was that the United States can respect different political systems. In essence, the president was saying to Nguyễn Phú Trọng, "We're not trying to foment a color revolution. We're not trying to overthrow you. We tried that in the '60s and '70s with the Vietnam War, and we're not going to do that again."

That line was included in the joint statement released after the after the visit, and that joint statement was read aloud by newscasters in every one of Vietnam's sixty-three provinces. The whole thing. It's long and dry, and they read every single line of it, but that line was the most important, and all the party cadres had to memorize it. It was very impactful. On our side, the president was very, very effective. He said, "If we're going to have a real partnership, then you need to be able to talk about what really matters to us, too, such as respect for human rights, religious freedom, freedom of expression, freedom to associate. These represent who we are. These are principles that represent what the United States values as a nation. We need to have honest and straightforward talks in areas where we disagree" -- and that's a respectful way of stating our demands for adherence to international human rights norms. The general secretary, I think, took it for what it was: a respectful insistence that the Vietnamese listen to us about what mattered to us, too. It was a powerful interaction that led, a year later, when the president came, to signing twenty-one agreements. All these things that had been stuck for years suddenly came unstuck, and we were able to make progress on peacekeeping, bringing the Peace Corps to Vietnam, on environmental collaboration, on public health, on commercial issues, on security issues, you name it. From the general secretary's visit on, we were moving on all fronts, and so by the time we got to the president's visit in 2016, we had made progress in so many areas that the visit was a celebration of how far the partnership had moved in a remarkably short time.

In Hanoi, once again, the president was extremely effective, including on human rights. He gave a speech to the people of Vietnam that was telecast live, where he was very direct and pointed on human rights. But he was also respectful of Vietnamese history, culture, traditions. He talked about what Thomas Jefferson had said about Vietnamese rice. He looked at the whole span of the relationship, not just the time since the Vietnam

War, but the multi-century Vietnamese history, and then the long history of interaction with the United States. It was a brilliant summation. It took me by surprise, because I thought he was going to focus more on the Vietnam War and its aftermath, and he didn't. He put the war in a much broader context, and I thought extremely effectively.

Then we went to Hồ Chí Minh City, and millions turned out. The president said, "I've never had a visit like this, except for maybe Tanzania, but I've never had a warmer reception than this." I remember being with Bill Clinton when he visited Hồ Chí Minh City. And the crowds were big. There were six people deep everywhere Bill Clinton went, but when Barack Obama came, the crowds were thirty people deep everywhere we went. It was phenomenal, the outpouring of public support for this relationship. The president loved it, and he turned things on their heads. He interviewed young entrepreneurs. He was the most powerful person in the world, speaking to young entrepreneurs, not the way things are done in Asia usually, but it worked. It was very effective. And he met in a big town hall with 800 young people. This was very shocking to the Vietnamese. They couldn't understand how he could meet a huge group of young people and how it could be safe. But it worked, and it showcased a vibrant, youthful Vietnam. A woman stood up and said, "I'm a rapper." And the president said, "Ah, give me what you got." And he started going, boom-boom, boom-boom. He gave her a rhythm. She began rapping about corruption, of all things. But here she was, not wearing baggy olive-green drab clothes. She was a hip, young Vietnamese rapper, and that clip went viral.

When Anthony Bourdain and Barack Obama had a *bún chả* dinner in a Vietnamese restaurant in Hanoi, that went viral. And the image of Vietnam that came out of this visit was not a war, but a dynamic place where people eat *bún chả* and young people like to rap. I thought it was phenomenal. For Vietnamese leaders, at first, I think it didn't compute. They couldn't understand why I had pushed back against a state dinner. And I couldn't say, "well, so the president can have *bún chả* with Anthony Bourdain." But when the visit happened and they saw the global response to it, they realized this is a great thing. I tell you, none of that would have been possible if Nguyễn Phú Trọng hadn't gone to Washington beforehand.

Q: Got it. A lot of exciting successes, it sounds like. So, I want to get into what happened at the end of 2016 and then into 2017. There were twenty-one different agreements signed, there were a lot of different things accomplished. If you could, and I don't even know if this is possible, but if you could boil things down to the thing you're most proud of during your time as ambassador, and maybe the biggest challenge and regret or thing that you wish you could have accomplished. Those two dueling things, is it possible to boil that down? What would you say?

OSIUS: I think I can. I spent two and a half years negotiating Vietnam's entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And President Obama spent a lot of his time in the Oval Office with Nguyễn Phú Trọng talking with him about membership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership. The general secretary essentially agreed to the toughest demand that the United States made, which was freedom of association for Vietnamese labor unions. If

you think about what that means, that's the capitalists telling the communists how to deal with labor. It's bold, but we got a side agreement in the TPP that committed the Vietnamese to letting their labor unions freely associate with labor unions around the world, and to let Vietnamese people have freedom of association and not just work through the Communist Party-led labor unions. This was a tremendously important human rights agreement, probably the most significant human rights agreement we had ever reached with Vietnam. That was one of the greatest accomplishments. And bringing them into the Trans-Pacific Partnership was a huge accomplishment. Then, it was also the greatest regret, because when Trump came into office, he pulled us out of the TPP on day one. This meant the human rights agreement on freedom of association was lost, and it meant the U.S. and Vietnam would not deepen their commercial relationship through the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We found other routes to keep the commercial relationship going. And it did. It's gone forward at a remarkable pace, and now Vietnam is our eighth largest trading partner. When I first went to Vietnam, it was very much at the bottom of the list. I felt the TPP accomplishment was huge, but we threw it away.

The other accomplishment I'm very proud of is how we built a security relationship. My predecessor made huge efforts to move things forward on the security side, but by the time I got there, we were stalled, and we weren't able to have the kind of security collaboration that I thought was good for our overall goal, which was a strong, prosperous, independent Vietnam that respected human rights and the rule of law. By independent, we meant strong enough to stand up to bullying, particularly from its neighbor to the north. I thought it was in our interest, and in the Vietnamese interest, to create a strong security partnership, but we weren't getting much love in that area at all. There was a lot of suspicion. A lot of the leaders were people who'd fought with us during the war. One can understand the suspicion, but I wanted to get past that. Ultimately, we did. We've had three aircraft carrier visits to Vietnam, which if you think about it is huge, given that we were at war with the Vietnamese not that long ago. We've been able to bring huge floating cities to Vietnam’s shores and have 5,000 Navy personnel get off and enjoy the city of Đà Nẵng and have a very robust military collaboration, especially in the maritime area. That was a gradual process, but I'm proud that we were able to succeed in the process during my time as ambassador, and then the aircraft carrier visits came soon after I left office. I think it is good for both countries.

The only way we could get to a robust security relationship was to be honest about the past. And this is complex, given our history during the war and after the war, because being honest about the past meant we had to face up not only to the fact that a lot of people had been lost. On both sides. 58,000 Americans were lost during the war, and more than 2 million Vietnamese. First, we worked together to find the Americans, and then provided support to the Vietnamese as they've found the remains of those whom they had lost. That was especially important during the early days of the relationship. But I also thought it was important to be honest about the unexploded ordnance and the bombs that we'd left in Vietnamese soil, and we worked very hard to clean up unexploded ordnance. That began slowly with Bill Clinton's visit at the end of his presidency in 2000 and really picked up steam, including during the time I was ambassador. We were trying to make Vietnam UXO-free in the provinces that were most seriously damaged, like

provinces like Quảng Trị in the middle of the country, and that was on target for completion.

Then the challenge that was most troublesome and most expensive was that of cleaning up dioxin. When we dumped Agent Orange on big swaths of Vietnam's landscape to defoliate areas where the Northern soldiers, or the Việt Cộng, were hiding out, we left behind a very toxic residue called dioxin. Once it gets into the human body, into the human system, the impacts last for generations, and we'd seen that among our own veterans after the war. In fact, many of our veterans got together and sued Dow Chemical Company and are receiving benefits from the Veterans Administration because of the disabilities that were caused by dioxin exposure. But this wasn't happening in Vietnam at all, and many more Vietnamese were exposed to dioxin than Americans. One of my predecessors, Mike Marine, the third U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, seized the political third rail when he took on the dioxin cleanup. He persuaded George W Bush to say, "We will help when it comes to cleaning up dioxin." At first it was a small commitment, but it was the camel's nose under the tent, and then Mike Michalak and Dave Shear -- his successors, my predecessors -- leaned in and they were able to get support for cleaning up dioxin around Đà Nẵng Air Base. The UN cleaned up another hot spot, called Phù Cát. But there was a third hot spot that was the worst, Biên Hòa Air Base. I went to Đà Nẵng, after we'd been cleaning up the dioxin for some time and put my hands into the soil. And showed the press, "Look, this is clean." I have little kids, so I wouldn't have touched that soil if it weren't safe. But it was safe. We'd made it safe, and I went with General Nguyễn Chí Vịnh, who was vice minister of defense and had been a key person driving us towards being honest about this issue of dioxin cleanup.

Then I tried to get funds to clean up the worst hot spot, Biên Hòa. The worst hot spot was also the biggest and was going to be the most expensive to clean up, and we didn't have the money in USAID funds to clean it up. I went through a two-year odyssey of trying to get the resources to do this cleanup. I finally got agreement from John McCain and from Barack Obama for us to do what I thought was right, which was commit to clean up the dioxin. And then Trump came into office, and Rex Tillerson said, "We're not going to have any resources for dioxin clean up." But I didn't give up, and neither did Tim Rieser, who was Senator Pat Leahy's point man for war legacies. We persisted. Tim persisted, and eventually Jim Mattis, Trump's secretary of defense, understood how important this was if we wanted to have a security partnership with the Vietnamese, and he was able to free up resources. A combination of USAID money and DOD money allowed us to get the cleanup started. That continues. The cleanup has been going on for some time, but it's been [temporarily] suspended. Now that there are no USAID funds, there has been a setback again, but I really hope we will finish the job of cleaning up Biên Hòa. I think it's essential for us to have the kind of security relationship we want with the Vietnamese. They want us to be honest about the past, and I think we should be honest about the past. Sorry, that was a long, meandering answer. Those are areas where I think I was able to make the most difference,

Q: In your answer just now, you talked a bit about the Trump administration; maybe let's get into that part. Towards the end of 2016, as everyone knows, there was a big election,

and we have someone who's a very different president, right? Someone who's very different who was elected, and you were a career ambassador. Typically career ambassadors stay on from administration to administration. That's exactly what happened in your case. Did you talk to the administration? Did you have a sense of what their priorities were going to be, and what it would be like working under President Trump?

OSIUS: I had supported Hillary Clinton and wanted to see her become president. I hosted a big election morning party — morning in Vietnam, when it was election evening in the United States. I had hundreds and hundreds of people at this big event, and I'd asked the staff to prepare three speeches, one if Trump won, one if Hillary won, and one if it wasn't clear. I'd lived through Al Gore's defeat by George W Bush when it wasn't clear for some weeks after the election. When I realized how it was going, I asked the staff to get me to the podium right away, because I did not think I could give the speech announcing that Trump had won. I thought the press would see a physical reaction, and I didn't think that would be good for the relationship. We didn't have final results yet, so I gave the middle speech, saying the electoral college still has to decide and it may be a while before all the votes are counted. I gave that speech, and then I got out of there, and that same day, I wrote a letter of resignation and sent it to the State Department, writing, "I don't intend to stay as ambassador under Trump." And I received a response saying, "You must stay. You're not allowed to leave." Then my staff started coming and talking to me and members of the staff said, "Ambassador, you think we needed your leadership before; we really need it now." I talked with Clayton about what we should do, and we decided we would take it day by day. That was not a simple decision, because then there were things that happened that I did not like after Trump became president. He withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He withdrew from the Paris Agreement on climate change. He referred to "shithole countries." He imposed a ban on Muslims coming to the United States. I kept thinking, "Maybe now is when I'm going to have to resign," but it seemed like I could help defend against the worst things happening to this relationship that I had devoted so much of my career and life to, so I stayed for ten months, and we were able to keep making progress in many areas in the relationship. To my great surprise, we kept moving forward, especially on the security front. I was able to bring Nguyễn Xuân Phúc, the new prime minister, as the first Southeast Asian leader to meet Trump in the White House. I was able to do some good during those ten months, and then it became impossible. I was asked to do things that I thought were wrong and un-American, and I ultimately decided what mattered to me most of all was whether I could look my kids in the eye and say, "Papa did the right thing." That mattered more than holding on to a diplomatic career. I resigned in November 2017. I left post six days before Trump arrived for a visit to Vietnam for the APEC Summit. It was a complicated series of events that led to departure at that time. But I thought it was the right thing to step down and not try to represent the United States anymore.

Q: And I want to get into that, what led you to that. But first, I want to back up to one thing. I believe Nguyễn Xuân Phúc visited Washington while you were still ambassador? And you were there for that visit, right? You accompanied him? In your book, you shared some, some might say, telling anecdotes, or some very interesting anecdotes regarding

the president and his interactions, and how he viewed diplomacy, which I found very interesting. I found some of the surroundings of that particular visit interesting. I want to know if you wanted to talk about that visit and any of those anecdotes?

OSIUS: Sure. I accompanied Phúc. Phúc had secured the first meeting by a Southeast Asian leader, and this was partly through business connections. The Vietnamese can be transactional when they need to be. He was very happy to go and meet Trump. I was on his plane from New York to Washington. I'd met him in New York with businesspeople and potential investors in Vietnam orchestrated by Kurt Campbell. I went on his prime ministerial plane from New York to Washington. And Phúc is a very nice man. We were in the front of the plane, and he ambled a few rows back to where I was sitting. He asked, "So, how should I engage this president? What would you recommend?" I said, "One thing that might be useful is to use some visuals if you want to talk about the South China Sea. You might show him a map. If you want to talk about business, you might show some visuals about what things are possible in the commercial relationship." And he brought a map of the South China Sea, and he used it with Trump. But I found out the night before the meeting that he was going to illustrate business opportunities using a diagram in the shape of a Nike shoe. I said, "Do not use that. President Trump doesn't particularly like Nike. Find another way, other than a picture featuring a Nike shoe to talk about commercial relations." Phúc had what they call a "one-on-one" in the Oval with the President. It wasn't really a one-on-one because the press was there. But they did talk about the South China Sea before letting the press in. And Phúc was able to have a discussion with Trump about shared interests in the South China Sea. And then they came into the cabinet room, and I participated in that part of the meeting.

But let me back up a bit. Just before these meetings took place, I was called into the Oval Office, and I went in with Mike Pence and Robert Lighthizer. I knew Lighthizer because I'd hosted him when he visited Vietnam a few months earlier. First, I walked in and the president said, "So you're the ambassador to Vietnam? You're lucky to have that job." I answered, "Yes, sir, I'm very privileged to be ambassador to Vietnam." We had given him a little piece of paper with a short list of issues we were hoping he would cover in the meeting with the prime minister, but he didn't look at it. He didn't look at the paper. He asked, "Who are we meeting?" I was with H R McMaster as well as Lighthizer. McMaster said, "We're meeting with Prime Minister Phúc." And the president said, "Oh, Fook, you mean like 'Fook you?' I heard about a guy named Fook who used to run a Chinese restaurant. He would answer the phone, saying, 'Fook you here,' and couldn't get any business. But he was Chinese, and I know how to negotiate with the Chinese. Nobody's better at negotiating with the Chinese than I am." And he started going off on a tangent about how great he was at negotiating with the Chinese. Then he went…. I don't know where he went. Maybe he went to the bathroom, but we had never had a chance to have any kind of briefing about the upcoming meeting, and we only had five minutes before the meeting was going to happen.

Lighthizer thought, "Okay, well, we'll get Jared Kushner engaged, and maybe he'll help us." He started telling Jared Kushner that we were going to build a new embassy in Vietnam, and Kushner's eyes lit up. "Real estate deal," he thought. Kushner said, "If

you're going to give them that, then we need something in return. If we're going to give them an embassy, then they should bring the trade deficit down to zero." And I said, "No, no, we're not giving them an embassy. This is our embassy. We will own this embassy. Our people will be safe in it. Right now, they're not safe. A truck bomb could drive up, and then we'd have a Benghazi problem. You don't want that. You want them to be in an embassy where they're safe."

Kushner was not the least bit interested in the safety of American bureaucrats. They didn't matter to him at all. He wanted a deal and he wanted to know how much the embassy was going to cost. I said, "Well, I don't know. The one in China cost us a billion dollars. Maybe this would cost 500 million. I'm not sure, but we must do it in a way that is safe and we're able not to be spied on. We must control the construction." But he wasn't interested in that either. Just, "How much is it going to cost? Okay, then our bargaining chip is we're spending this money so you can only have the embassy if you bring the trade deficit down to zero." And there really is no connection between building an embassy and addressing the trade deficit. The trade deficit is a real problem, but it's a separate problem. Anyway, Stephen Miller whispered into the president's ear on the way into the cabinet room about deportations, and I'll come back to that. The President fixated on two things in the meeting. One was bringing the trade deficit down to zero, and the other was this issue that had been raised by Stephen Miller. He hadn't ever listened to McMaster or to me on what we thought could be raised and he passed those issues over to McMaster, Rex Tillerson, and others.

Let me explain about the deportations issue. Stephen Miller had been conducting very quiet interagency meetings — no press, no exposure to the light of day about deporting 8,000 Americans of Vietnamese origin from the United States to Vietnam. I was very, very uneasy about this policy, because he was essentially saying, "we're deporting them back to their country." Well, the country they left in the years after '75 following the fall of Saigon, that country had a yellow flag. They'd been fighting for years for the Republic of South Vietnam. They had no loyalty or ties to a country with a red flag, whose capital is Hanoi. So, I was very worried. You deport these people, and where are they going to go? They're going to end up in jail. Their families are in the United States. Their livelihoods are in the United States, and the crimes that they're being deported for were often crimes committed twenty, thirty years ago, when people who didn't speak much English, some had gotten involved in petty theft. One man had stolen a car and served time. The man who had stolen the car had subsequently, after time in prison, built a supermarket. He had fifty people working for him. He was paying $500,000 a year in taxes to the United States; he had grown a family. His petty criminal days were long, long behind him. Some of these people were the children of our soldiers. They were half Vietnamese, half American, but one way or another, they hadn't gotten U.S. passports. Their applications for citizenship had been lost. This happened before the internet. You can imagine, someone who doesn't speak much English keeps trying to submit an application for citizenship, and it keeps getting lost. There is nobody you can follow up with, and finally they give up and they don't have citizenship, so they can be subject to deportation orders. I found this policy difficult and offensive, and I thought it was

un-American, because I did not think the same policy would be pursued regarding Norwegians, or anyone who was white.

I wrote messages, first to Tillerson and to McMaster, saying, “if you pursue this policy of deportations, you're going to mess up the president's visit, and you're going to derail all the progress that we're making in the relationship. I don't think it's good for the president politically, and I don't think it makes sense in terms of what we're trying to accomplish in this country.” I was told to shut up. I was told, “it’s none of your business, just carry it out,” that’s what I was told. But I thought it was wrong. I thought it was not something that we should carry out. I kept objecting, doing this quietly and using back channels, but I wasn't moving things along. At one point, I was told to threaten the Vietnamese, to tell them that if they didn't accept all the deportees, then they'd be denied port courtesies. That means that if any senior official came to the United States, he or she would have to go through the security line and get a pat down and wouldn't get special visas or special treatment. I told this to a very senior official who just laughed and said, “That's all right. If you don't give us port courtesies, we won't come. Period.” This was during the lead-up to a visit to Vietnam by the president of the United States. And I wanted the visit to be a success. No matter what I thought about Trump, I thought I had a responsibility to make sure that the U.S. president was respected when he came, and that we were able to use the visit effectively to advance our interests, and I didn't want the visit to be wrecked by this issue or anything else.

The visit got closer and closer, and by then there had been hearings for my successor, Dan Kritenbrink. I don't know exactly what happened, but I think they sped up the confirmation process to get him in place. About ten days before the president was supposed to arrive, I got a message…. Correction: I didn't get a message. I was handed a one-way plane ticket. The management counselor handed me a one-way plane ticket, economy class, to the wrong airport in the United States. And I said, “This is ridiculous. I'm going to leave with my family with dignity, and we're going to go to the right airport, and you must give me the right tickets, or I'm not going anywhere.” So, they did. They got me the right tickets, but no one from Washington ever bothered to say anything. I'd served as a diplomat for twenty-eight-and-a-half years and had a very successful time as ambassador, and no one bothered to pick up the phone even to let me know it was time to go. Still, I was ready to go by then. Once I had the right plane ticket to the right airport, I got my family together and we left, and I resigned a few days later, because I didn't want to be part of what was going on.

This all goes back to the conversation in the Oval Office with Stephen Miller when Miller had asked the president to insist that the prime minister of Vietnam accept 8,000 deportees. The president was very much interested in that, and he wasn't interested in the rest of the relationship. McMaster and Rex Tillerson had the discussion with the prime minister about security, about the South China Sea, about other issues that were covered, but not by the president. He was interested in the trade deficit and the deportations.

Q: Interesting stories there. So just two questions that I have. The first is, that is not how I would normally expect an ambassador to be sent home. There are several competing

narratives, right? Because I know that, later, the State Department said that you neither resigned from nor were removed from the position of U.S. ambassador to Vietnam prematurely, and instead, and I quote, he "concluded his three-year tour as ambassador." End quote. It's just a strange way to do this. But also, my understanding is eventually the Trump administration decided not to follow through with this policy, right? The deportation policy, correct?

OSIUS: No, they followed through with it, and they were picking up steam and starting to carry out the deportations. As I was at that point a private citizen because I'd resigned, I'd left government service. I published an essay in the *Foreign Service Journal*—

Q: Yes, I saw it. Yes. I saw that one—

OSIUS: —where I basically said I thought this was un-American. There are lots of good things you can do as a diplomat, lots of ways to build a good relationship. But I thought the deportations were un-American, and I thought they were being carried out in secret, and I thought the American people should know what was being done in their name. That article set off a series of events. After I published the essay, I was approached by the *New York Times* and CNN and various other outlets, and asked to speak about the issue, because I'd clearly disagreed with the president and I'd resigned on principle, so they wanted to hear my side of the story. I talked to the *New York Times,* and I talked to Don Lemon on CNN and to some other outlets, and I said, "This is how it looks from my perspective." Then an interesting thing happened. There were midterm elections in 2018 in four purple districts that were very close and that had significant Vietnamese American populations where four Republican members of Congress lost their jobs. I don't know if there's a direct causal relationship between those Republican losses in the midterms and the fact that I had gone public about the deportations, but I do know that a lot of Vietnamese Americans did not like what was being done behind closed doors. It may be that after that the Administration went quiet about the deportations, but that policy was pursued throughout Trump's first term, and I think will be picked up again now. In fact, I know it's being picked up now. They're starting to push the deportations once again. But the policy was wrong then, and I still think it's wrong, and that is why I resigned. The State Department's story to the press was not accurate, and what I just told you is accurate.

Q: Got it now. That must have been jarring for you to leave like that so quickly, under those circumstances, because you've been in this profession for a long time, twenty-eight-and-a-half years. What did that feel like?

OSIUS: It stung. One of the things that stung was that not a single so-called leader in the State Department bothered to pick up the phone to talk with the U.S. representative in Vietnam, a career official who loyally served his country for twenty-eight-and-a-half years. That hurt, and the way they did it was cowardly. First, they asked my family and me to move out of the ambassador's residence, saying that Donald Trump would stay in the residence when he came to Hanoi for his visit. We moved, because it was requested. We moved out of the residence, packed up our things. We have little kids. It was difficult,

but we managed. We stayed in a hotel. But Trump certainly didn't stay in the residence. In retrospect, it was clearly a ploy just to get us out of the residence. Then, when they sent the one-way ticket with no explanation, I thought that was cowardly. The team and I had accomplished a lot when I was ambassador to Vietnam. I thought even if we had policy differences with the President, maybe I could still be treated with some dignity, but that was not the way it was. I felt like I was treated badly.

After I went public, and spoke to the *New York Times* and CNN, the members of the embassy staff were told they were not allowed to speak to me. These were 900 people who had worked for me, and I was friends with many of them, and they were told that they were not allowed to speak to me. There was one approved channel for speaking with me, but members of the staff broke those rules and came and spoke to me anyway, because by then we were living in Hồ Chí Minh City. I was vice president of Fulbright University, and people still wanted to talk because they had friendships with me and a certain amount of loyalty, and they didn't think it was right to be told they weren't allowed to speak to me. I thought that [prohibition on speaking] was cowardly too. It's not as if my lone voice was a threat to the United States; I was speaking out against a policy I thought was wrong. I didn't see that as a threat in any way to the United States, but I was treated like a pariah.

Q: Oh, that's quite a story. I'm guessing you don't regret resigning though. I think that you feel that was the right decision.

OSIUS: Absolutely the right decision. Because I can look at my children and say, "Papa did the right thing." I've studied so many examples of people, especially in the Vietnam context, who didn't do the right thing by their country. I don't forgive them. I don't forgive Ambassador Graham Martin for digging in and refusing to permit an evacuation of Vietnam when Saigon fell in 1975. He made the wrong decision. Maybe he was under pressure from Henry Kissinger. But in the end, you have a responsibility to carry out your duties. I think your duties as a public servant are to be loyal to the Constitution and to look after the people who are under your charge.

I don't forgive Robert McNamara for what he did. He knew that we were not going to win the war in Vietnam. He knew that we would lose enormous amounts of blood and treasure. It would damage the United States, but he didn't want to speak out when Johnson was president, maybe because he wanted to be loyal to the president he served. Later, after Nixon became president, he could have spoken out, and he didn't, because he had a nice job at the World Bank. The only time he spoke out was after it was far too late in about 1996. McNamara did a *mea culpa* tour, published *In Retrospect*, and he was wracked with guilt. He did a film interview for *Fog of War*, where you can see a man tormented about the decisions he'd made.

Those are two examples of citizens who I think didn't ultimately fulfill their responsibilities to the Constitution or to the people of the United States. I was not going to fall into that category. I loved being a diplomat. I would have liked to have stayed a diplomat, but I was not going to follow their example and carry out orders

unquestioningly in ways I thought were contrary to my duties to the Constitution and to the people of the United States. I wouldn't do that. I don't work for the U.S. government anymore, and I have no regrets.

Q: Understood. So, you concluded your time with the U.S. government in 2017 but you've maintained a strong connection to Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam, haven't you? You've done a lot of things since then. You worked for Fulbright University, Google, and now you're continuing to work on the relationship. Do you want to talk about what you've done since your time in government service?

OSIUS: Sure. Fulbright University was, I thought, very important in the relationship. It was a university that, from the visit of Nguyễn Phú Trọng, had been granted academic freedom that didn't exist in other Vietnamese higher education institutions. And Fulbright University is a Vietnamese university supported by the United States. It's a Vietnamese university. It's an important distinction, because we were creating a university that would be part of an ecosystem where it was possible to have real freedom of inquiry and academic freedom where it had not existed before. I was proud to be first vice president of Fulbright University and to help get it going when it was in its infancy. I'd been a strong backer while I was ambassador, and then I became its first vice president. I did that for a year. Then, while my family and I were in Hồ Chí Minh City, I got a call from Google. At first, I thought it was a wrong number. I don't know anything about tech. Why would you want to hire me to be a Google executive? But they weren't interested in what I knew about tech. They were interested in what I knew about working in Asia. So, in 2019 I became Vice President for Government Affairs of Google Asia-Pacific, covering eighteen countries in the Asia-Pacific for policy advocacy regarding the issues that mattered to Google. It was a great job, and I had an amazing team, and Google was a very interesting company to work for. I learned so much about what the private sector can do that the public sector can't. When you're a company like Google and you have vast resources, you can move very nimbly to make things happen that would be beyond the ability of the government to do. Whether it's USAID or the State Department, or anyone else in the public sector, Google could do— and I should say the private sector more broadly can do -- things that the government cannot do. I found a new path. After my diplomatic career, I found that I could still make a difference in a part of the world that I cared a lot about.

I stayed at Google for two-and-a-half years through the Covid pandemic, and then, for family reasons, we came back to the United States. I had an amicable parting with Google and came back here and started running the US-ASEAN Business Council, which makes use of my diplomatic experience, but also private sector experience. For forty years, the Council has helped American businesses succeed in Southeast Asia. It serves as a private sector bridge between the United States and Southeast Asia. That turned out to be a very interesting job as well, and it allows me to stay close not only to Vietnam, but also to other countries where I served: Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. We lived in Singapore working for Google, and I've worked in all the ASEAN countries, one way or another, and so this job feels like it was tailor-made for someone like me with both the private sector and the diplomatic background. I've been doing it for four years,

and I'm about to switch places with another former diplomat, Brian McFeeters, who's running the Council in the region, where three-fifths of our staff are based. We have six offices in the region, and he will come back here to Washington and serve as President & CEO in the role that I will vacate in June.

Q: Sounds like there are still a lot of exciting things going on, for your family and for the future, so I guess you're going to go back to Vietnam?

OSIUS: I am heading there in less than two weeks, for a big business mission. We're bringing sixty-one companies to Vietnam for our annual business mission. Then, in June, my family and I will move to Hồ Chí Minh City, where I'll take up a new role for the Council, and our kids will be able to go to a great school in District Two, in Hồ Chí Minh City, a place where we lived from 2018 to 2019. It's a place that's very familiar to us. I love Vietnam. I think I can continue to engage in the relationship via the private sector.

Q: I want to come back to just one thing that just popped into my mind when you resigned from the State Department. We talked about how that affected you and how it was jarring, but that also affects families, too. That must have been jarring for your family. I don't know if Clayton had resigned from State Department by that point, or maybe he was on LWOP [Leave Without Pay]. I don't know. I'm just wondering how that affected the rest of your family too, because that's a quick goodbye, right?

OSIUS: It was a quick goodbye. Clayton resigned a few weeks before I did. I resigned in November 2017. He resigned in September, and he'd been with the State Department for about fifteen years. That was when we really could see the writing on the wall that it wasn't going to work for us for the long term to stay in government. When we were hustled out of Hanoi -- I mean, we really did feel like we were rushed out of Hanoi in early November -- we went home for a few weeks. We had a small flag ceremony at the State Department. None of the leadership of EAP showed up. But we were able to see our families, and then we headed back to Hồ Chí Minh City for a one-year stint when I was vice president of Fulbright University. That year wasn't easy for Clayton. That was rough. I was treated as a pariah by the U.S. government. That year was challenging for him. We found a good place for the kids to go to school, so I think they were fine. But I remember that was a tough year for him, in particular, because of the way we'd left government, my resignation, his resignation, and the way we were treated by the embassy. It was a challenging time for him, in particular. It felt good when the call from Google came and they said, "come to Singapore and start something fresh." That turned out to be very good for us as a family, to get away from what had been painful, because I loved Fulbright University. I started writing my book, which I really enjoyed doing, but it was also good to get away from Vietnam for a while.

Q: Ambassador, we have touched on a lot of different things. This has been great. I want to just ask you just a couple more things here. This is hard to do because you've had such a diverse and incredible career. If you can sum up and if there's a message that's attached to your career, I'm just curious about what you think that would be. Then I also want to ask you if there's anything else you want to talk about. Thank you.

OSIUS: I mentioned having a flag ceremony during the weeks after leaving post. For that ceremony, I reflected on what I thought my career meant and where I thought I'd been able to make a difference. I tried to sum it up in the piece that I published in the *Foreign Service Journal*, "Respect, Trust and Partnership: Keeping Diplomacy on Course in Troubling Times." Especially in the last three posts, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam, in all three of which I was in senior positions, I felt that I'd learned a lot about what created the possibility for partnership. In an era where you can't always rely on alliances to get everything done that you want to accomplish, I think that partnership is an important concept. That made me think, how do you get to partnership? It really boils down to starting with respect. You must start with a very basic way of approaching your counterparts, a human way of approaching your counterparts. Think about it in human relations: when someone is disrespectful to you, it's hard to hear anything that they're saying, it's hard to feel or hear anything other than the disrespect. Translate that into diplomatic terms. When the United States, the world's superpower, shows respect, that means a lot. The United States casts a long shadow, but when we as diplomats show respect to those we're working with, it makes so much possible. I found that to be true throughout my career, but I would say it was no more true than in India, Indonesia, and Vietnam — my last three posts — where I found that if we could show respect to a country's history, language, culture, traditions, art, and literature, it meant a lot, and it meant the doors were open to the possibilities that we had in mind for the relationship. When you show respect, then you're able to build trust, and trust between people and trust between nations are, I think, conjoined.

In India, for example, we had had a lot of mistrust over nuclear issues, and I was involved in negotiating the Civil Nuclear Agreement between our two countries. We built trust during those negotiations and during the process of overcoming the past in India. Then I moved on to Indonesia, where we overcame obstacles regarding Kopassus, and in the process of doing so, we built trust, and we were able to do things together under the rubric of the comprehensive partnership in Indonesia that led to more trust between the world's third largest democracy and its second largest democracy, the United States. And then in Vietnam, once again by showing respect to history, culture, traditions, language, and then by doing things together, we were able to build trust between two former adversaries, and trust can build upon trust. Once you start doing things together, you discover that there are more things you can do together, and that builds more trust.

As we fleshed out the comprehensive partnership between the United States and Vietnam, we found that the more things we did together, the more things we were able to do together, and the more trust we could build. Now, you must keep building trust. You can't just build it and then it stays and it's static. You must do what you say you're going to do. You must clean up dioxin if you say you're going to clean up dioxin. You must clean up unexploded ordnance if you say you're going to clean up unexploded ordinance. I think we should have followed through on the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement that we had created. That would have been the way to keep building trust. We didn't get to do that. But once you really start doing things together, you create partnership. I learned in all three countries that, once you had a foundation of respect on which you built trust and

you started doing things together, you were creating conditions for real partnership. It's in America's interest to have partners, especially in the fastest growing parts of the world, South and Southeast Asia, and if we want to deal with adversaries or competitors such as China, it's better to have partners whom you can do things with and have trust with your partners. If I could sum up what I learned in twenty-eight-and-a-half years as a diplomat, it's show respect, create trust, build on it, and you will build powerful partnerships.

Q: Thank you, Ambassador. That's very prescient and helpful for this next generation of diplomats. Thank you so much for spending all this time with me. This was great. I really appreciated it. Anything else you want to talk about?

OSIUS: Well, I think we've covered a lot. You've devoted quite a few hours to this project, and I am grateful for that.

Q: Absolutely, my pleasure. I'm going to stop the recording now.

End of interview