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

LAURIE PHIPPS

Interviewed by: Linda Lippner
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INTERVIEW

Q: We are talking today to Laurie Phipps, as she is known now. Today's date is May 7, 2021, this is our first interview with Laurie. Laurie is a retired employee of the State Department Foreign Service, and her last assignment was in the United Nations. She was back and forth to the United Nations and had many other assignments. Today being the first interview, we are going to start with Laurie's early life.

PHIPPS: Great, just to set the record straight for a second, when I retired, I was not Foreign Service, I was Civil Service. So I started my career with the State Department as Foreign Service, but I transferred into Civil Service. Most of my career was Civil Service.

Q: So Laurie, where did you start your life?

PHIPPS: I was born in southern New Jersey. My parents lived on a chicken farm in a small town that was halfway between Atlantic City and Philadelphia called Flemington, New Jersey. Our farm was about twenty-five acres, and it straddled the border between Atlantic County and Camden County in southern New Jersey.

Q: You said it was a chicken farm, anything else that was going on at the farm?

PHIPPS: It was really just chickens. So it was a working chicken farm, mainly to produce eggs, not to produce chickens for food and we went bankrupt when I was in fourth grade. Attributable, according to my father, to the rise of industrial farming. Purdue and, you know, the sort of egg factories that were being set up in the South. That put my father and his small family farm out of business.

Q: Did he sell to these larger operations or was he direct to his customers?

PHIPPS: He sold to Mr. Berkowitz. Mr. Berkowitz would come and get the big crates of eggs. So if you have ever seen big crates that have flats. Forty-eight eggs or something like that, and the flats are stacked up in these big crates. There is, I do not know, fifty thousand eggs or something like that in a crate. We had an egg sorting machine in the basement of our house. It was a very damp and unsavory kind of basement. When you collected the eggs in a basket like I would, we had people working on the farm when I

was very little. When I got a little older, like second third fourth grade, I would go to the chicken coop with these wire baskets, and I would collect the eggs from underneath the chickens in their little nest. Then the baskets of eggs would be brought to the cellar, and they would be very gently dumped into the machine.

The machine would sort them into sizes so that these small eggs would go down one tube. The medium size, the large size and the extra-large. When you got to the supermarket, all the extra larges were in one place then all the smalls were in another place. That is because these egg sorting machines would sort them out. So we would sort the eggs and then pack them in these big crates. Mr. Berkowitz would come with his truck every once in a while, take them. Mr. Berkowitz who lived about ten miles away. We would go visit him once in a while. He was a family friend, which is why I remember his name. My sister, who is four and a half years older than me, used to have to work down in the cellar sorting the eggs. I was too little, and we went out of business before I really was old enough to have to do that for very much. My sister has very unhappy memories of spending a long time in the cellar sorting eggs. As I say, it was very damp and unpleasant down in the cellar. Kind of scary, I was scared to go down to the cellar.

Q: Yeah for a young child. Did Mr. Berkowitz go out of business as well or and he just did not want to buy from your father anymore?

PHIPPS: All the chicken farmers in the area went out of business. All the chicken farms were small, family run farms, not massive, industrial farming type things. There was a whole community of Jewish refugee farmers in South Jersey because there had been a charitable organization called the Baron Diverse Fund. Baron Diverse paid for Eastern European immigrants to be given small plots of land, small farms, to do poultry farms. So the Jewish poultry farm industry is centered around Vineland, New Jersey. We would go into Vineland every once in a while, to go to the kosher deli that was there. My father had friends, he was a very gregarious outgoing sort of person. He had friends all over. I would always go there and get a turkey sandwich with coleslaw, Russian dressing, and a little bar for dessert. Like I have these memories of going to this place.

Q: By the time your father, unfortunately, had to go into bankruptcy, was this organization helpful in any way?

PHIPPS: No, they just got people started. I do not think they kept them up. So my father had come to the United States after the Second World War because he had been in the Red Army as an officer. He had studied engineering in Russia, the Soviet Union. Then he was the lead in the Engineering Corps, the Red Army, during the Second World War. Towards the end of the war, he got wind of the rumors of how many officers were being purged by Stalin after the war. He was with the division of the army that was occupying East Germany and realized that a lot of the officers who were involved in that ended up in Siberia or worse. So he and a friend of his buried their uniforms, smuggled themselves back east across the border into Poland, then presented themselves to the authorities as Polish Jews, who had lost all their papers, possessions and land in the Holocaust.

He was then put into a displaced persons camp for Jewish refugees. Because of his leadership abilities, which he had gained when he was in the army, he had some kind of role in helping to run and organize the DP [Displaced Persons] camp. He was not just like one of the people sitting in attendance, he had some kind of organizational role, I do not know exactly what. At one point in 1946 '47, they said to him, "okay, you can leave the DP camp, where do you want to go, Israel or America?" He said, "Which boat is fleeing first?" They said America. He says, "okay, so I'll go to America."

Q: Really affected your life, didn't it?

PHIPPS: Oh, yeah. So he took a boat to America. My mother tells the story that one day, because my mother was born in America and her father immigrated, you know, in the early twentieth century. She was in the movie theater one day and they used to have newsreels back before we were even kids. Newsreels would come on before the feature and in one newsreel, there was a shipload of refugees coming from Eastern Europe, Jewish refugees. Everybody came off the boat and got down, you know, flat on their belly and kissed the ground, except for one refugee who like got down on one knee, scooped up a bit of dirt, and kissed the dirt in his hand. My mother said to herself, that is a smart man. It turns out that they met sometime within the next year or two, my father had been that refugee who scooped up the dirt and kissed it in the sand instead of getting flat on his belly.

Q: That is amazing. So she met the man in the newsreel, who was your father. What was her background? You said her family came earlier, was she also from Russia or somewhere else?

PHIPPS: Technically somewhere else. When there was a Soviet Union, it was part of the Soviet Union. Now the area that he comes from is part of what they call Moldova. Back when he lived there it was called Bessarabia. So my grandfather came from Bessarabia, now part of Moldova and was about seven, something like that. He was a furrier because there were only certain jobs that Jews were allowed to do. I think that was Arabia. Back in the day it was part of the Ottoman Empire. There were various laws that said, Jews were not allowed to own land, Jews were not allowed to be in certain professions. But Jews were allowed to be furriers and work with leather because it is kind of unpleasant, smelly, and dirty. That work was relegated to the Jews. So my grandfather was trained as a furrier. He never learned to read because he came as a child and did not go to school. This was in 1902 or 1895, somewhere around there. He went straight to work, never went to school and never learned to read. My mother tells the story that he was deeply embarrassed about being illiterate and not knowing how to read. He would get on the subway every day with a newspaper tucked under his arm so that no one would realize that he was illiterate. That was my grandfather and he died when my mother was relatively young. Shortly after the Spanish flu, he did not die of the Spanish flu, but he died a little bit after that time. My mother was only seven or eight I think, when her father passed away.

My grandmother had a father who was a labor organizer, David Gingold. with a New York Yiddish organization called the Workmen's Circle. He was one of the founding members of the Workmen's Circle, which was a labor organizing entity for Jews, and especially English speakers, for about a century or so. It still technically exists, but it does not do much now. He was a blacksmith working on horseshoes, that sort of thing. The logo of the Workman Circle features horseshoes because it organized people like blacksmiths and those sorts of tradesmen. My mother grew up in a very liberal-minded kind of household, with labor organizers and activists all around. My mother in the 1930s became a communist, a member of the Communist Party of the USA. She learned Russian, although she never went to college. Her father died when she was relatively young, during the Great Depression, leaving my grandmother a widow. My mother was just out of high school. Back in those days, if you did well in school, they skipped you a grade. They said, "okay, you do not have to finish third grade, you are too smart, go to fourth grade." So my mother had skipped two grades in school and she graduated high school when she was sixteen.

My mother's dream was to go to City College of New York. Her mother was very poor during the Depression. She sold apples and "*schmahtas*", people's used clothes, on the street corners in New York City. My grandmother told my mother , "You cannot go to college, we cannot afford for you to go to college, you have to work and help support the family." There were three girls in the family and my mother was the middle one. So instead of going to college, she went to work as a legal secretary for their distant cousin who was a lawyer and gave her a job. For the rest of her life, she worked as a secretary.

Although my mother had very much wanted to go to college, she also had aspirations to be a modern dancer. She was very enamored of Martha Graham, the iconic modern dance visionary. My mother had taken dance lessons at one point. She would go to her dance lessons and was determined to be a dancer. In fact, she told me that once she danced in a performance, I think it was at Yankee Stadium or Madison Square Garden or some large venue, where there was some modern dancing involving lots of people. She performed there and she wanted to be a professional modern dancer, but her mother, the one who made her quit college and go to work, one day, mortified my mom. She showed up at her dance lesson, confronted her dance teacher and basically said to her dance teacher, something along the lines of "how dare you steal money out of my children's mouth, these twenty-five cents that Ruthie is paying you for dance lessons, I need that to feed the children. I will not allow her to come here anymore and waste her money on dance lessons."

This was a devastating blow to my mom. My mom remembered, and she told that story several times. She just never really forgave her mother for destroying her dreams. She might not have been a dancer, might not have had the body type and skills to make it as a dancer, but her mother did not even let her try to pursue that. She told her she was not allowed to take lessons anymore, a waste of money. She had to go to work, she could not go to college. My mother was a very smart and talented person. I think Linda, you met my mother. When we were in Moscow, she lived with me.

Q: Yes, I remember visiting with your mother quite a lot, actually.

PHIPPS: By then she had Alzheimer's and she was not saying or doing much, but she was a very bright and inquisitive woman. She was very disappointed in her life, I think. So she went on to be a secretary and during the Second World War, she worked in Washington. She did not work for the U.S. government, as she had become a card carrying member of the Communist Party. But since she spoke Russian, she used those language skills to get a job with the Soviet Purchasing Committee in Washington. She did not say this explicitly, but I only imagine it was part of the Lend-Lease program since we were allies with the Soviets, British and the French in World War Two. She worked for our allies in Washington in their office because she had some Russian-speaking ability. So that is what she did during the war. Her younger sister was a WAC [Women's Army Corps]. After the war, my mother went back to New York City. Eventually, not long after the war, she met my father because mutual friends set them up.

Q: I wonder what your grandmother thought of your mother's career in Washington.

PHIPPS: I do not know what she thought of my mother's career in Washington, but my grandmother did not like my mother's boyfriend, and made her break up with him. My mother's boyfriend was not Jewish and was actually Chinese. My grandmother put the kibosh on that and said, "No, you cannot, you cannot marry this man." My grandmother seems to have been a force and I am named after my grandmother. She died when my mother was pregnant with me, and it's a Jewish tradition to name children after someone who is recently deceased. There was not really much question of who I was going to be named after.

Q: I assume you do not know too much about your father's parents or grandparents if he came to the U.S. alone as a refugee from Eastern Europe.

PHIPPS: Right. He came to the U.S. alone. He used to talk about how before the Russian Revolution, his parents owned a macaroni factory, they owned a silver tea set and he had a governess. It was a source of pride for my father that his family was wealthy enough to have a silver tea set. These were things that he remembered in his adulthood. The Russian revolution happened when he was seven. He did not speak a lot about his life in Russia, but those were some of the things that stood out to him that he passed along. My father's family lived in Bershad, which was sort of the equivalent of a county seat in our system. It was a relatively larger small town than most small towns.

This small town was located in what is now Ukraine, between the Dnieper and the Dnister Rivers down in southern Ukraine. He lived in Bershad through his youth, attending a higher level school called a *gymnaseum* for his high school education. Not every kid, it seems, was smart enough to go to *gymnauseum*. After he graduated, he went to a technical institute in Leningrad for engineering. From there he went into the army and was one of the engineers who helped to construct the roadway across frozen Lake Ladoga during the siege of Leningrad.

Q: Being Jewish, did he have any problems getting into the gymnauseum? I always thought there was discrimination, but after the revolution, was there any discrimination again?

PHIPPS: I think after the Russian Revolution there was discrimination against all religions, in terms of studying religion and being active in religious practice, but there was not necessarily the same sort of anti-Jewish overt discrimination that there had been in Tsarist times. Many of the leaders of the Russian Revolution were Jewish themselves and there was still latent anti-Semitism, but it was not– If you think of anti-Semitism as sort of equivalent to the Jim Crow laws, there was not that sort of overt, legal barrier to Jews doing things. But there still were certain discriminations against Jews which is why you have so many Jews who came from the Soviet Union who were engineers. Engineering was one of the professions that was very open to Jews. Mathematics, engineering were subjects where there was less of a barrier to Jews then for instance, becoming a lawyer or some other things. They also had prohibitions in Russia about landowning. Of course, in the Soviet Union, nobody owned land, as it was all held communally. But in Czarist Russia, there were laws against Jews owning agriculturally productive land. So there were no Jewish farmers or Jewish peasants. Only the Russian Orthodox were allowed to own land or work on it. Jews had to be landless, which was one of the reasons my father very much wanted to own land and be a landowner when he got to America and pursued this farming option that was open to him. With his Russian mindset, the sign that you have really arrived and are successful, is when you own land.

Q: So, let's jump to when there was a bankruptcy. Did your father lose the land in New Jersey, or did he do something else with the land?

PHIPPS: We stayed on the farm, but by the mid 1960s, it was no longer able to provide a living. So my father went back to school to build on his engineering background. The knowledge that he had was obsolete, so he was not able to become a full-fledged engineer. But he went back to school to become a draftsman, which uses some of the same kinds of skills. In the 1950s, during the McCarthy era, relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were terrible, but they improved a little bit in the early 1960s. When my father first came, because he had declared himself to be a landless refugee from Poland, he always told me never tell anybody where Papa's from. “Just say we are from Eastern Europe.” He could not get any kind of documentation that he was an educated person because he could not have his degree from the Leningrad Technical Institute certified.

But in the 1960s, when things lightened up between the Soviets and the U.S. government, my father went to Washington at some point. He put the record straight, acknowledged that he was from Russia and that he had gone to school in Leningrad. He got whatever acknowledgement it was that they were able to give that he actually had a degree in engineering. After having done that, he was then able to get into a draftsman school in Philadelphia. For a year he went to classes in Philadelphia and became a registered, certified draftsman with whatever degree a draftsman gets. Then one day we were on vacation at the 1967 World’s Fair in Montreal, and he struck up a conversation while we

were having lunch with the person sitting next to him at a long table. Turns out this guy was also from New Jersey (we were living in New Jersey on the farm at that point) and told my father about a job opportunity with the State of New Jersey as a building inspector. With his draftsman credentials he qualified for this building inspector job and so he became an inspector for the State of New Jersey, working, inspecting buildings. He did that until he eventually retired at sixty-five.

Q: Wow. It sounds like your father was very resourceful.

PHIPPS: He was a survivor. He landed on his feet for us; he was very resourceful.

Q: You have one sister?

PHIPPS: One older sister.

Q: So there you are growing up on a lot of acreage in New Jersey. You are hearing a lot about your family background and sometimes, frustration from the women in the family. I can't even guess that your grandmother was a bit frustrated having to sell apples on the street and things like that. She probably had her dreams that were not realized. What propelled you out of the farm and into your education? How did that happen? High school, anything in influences before you went off to college that were important to you?

PHIPPS: So, you mentioned my sister. My sister was the first one to leave the nest or escape the farm, however you want to think of it. My sister was very unhappy and unpopular. I, on the other hand, was a little bit more popular. I was a cheerleader, I was on the softball team, and I did very well in school. My sister also did very well in school, but she was a little chubby. At that point, I was not chubby. I am now, but not back in grade school. Other kids made fun of my sister. She was very smart, a bookworm, and she had very few friends. At some point, she found out that there was a private school in New Hope, Pennsylvania, about an hour and a half drive away, where there were scholarships available. She applied for a scholarship, and she got one when she was a sophomore in high school, which would have been when I was in sixth grade.

After she won the scholarship, she went off to boarding school. I must have been about ten, eleven years old, and she left. So I saw that there was a path out of that area, but everybody I knew was in this farming area. Most of the other farms around there are blueberry farms. If you go to your local market in June and look at your package of blueberries, almost all the blueberries come from Hammonton, New Jersey. Earlier in the season, some blueberries come from North Carolina and some come from Michigan later in the summer. But my hometown used to be known as the blueberry capital of the world. It was a very provincial sort of town. Most of my classmates grew up in Hammonton, their families were in Hammonton, they had cousins in Hammonton, their life trajectory was to stay in Hammonton. This applied to the majority of my classmates. I really did not think beyond Hammonton when I was in grade school. Then my sister went away. My mother and father made it quite clear that the expectations were that I would go to college

because I was very smart. Valedictorian in eighth grade, whatever. So college was my trajectory.

Q: I just have to show you this, Egg Harbor of New Jersey [Shows Phipps a box of blueberries].

PHIPPS: Right, which is the town where Mr. Berkowitz lived.

Q: Right, I just wanted to show you my blueberries that I bought yesterday.

PHIPPS: Yeah. That's right next door to Hammonton. So I was a cheerleader, on the softball team, and I was on the field hockey team. I tried to downplay my academic accomplishments because that did not play well in Hammonton, New Jersey. I remember my guidance counselor, when I was looking at colleges, including the University of Pennsylvania, and I had very good SAT's. But my guidance counselor basically said, "why would you want to go to University of Pennsylvania? It's in Philadelphia, it's dangerous there. It is known as a bad neighborhood. Why don't you just want to go to Glassberg Teachers College like everybody else from our town. Why would you go all the way to Philadelphia?" Keep in mind Philadelphia is thirty-five miles away. It was not that far, but the guidance counselor thought that this was something to be discouraged. To him, it was a different world. Not exactly a very good guidance counselor, but I went to Penn anyway.

Q: So you went against the guidance counselor or you did attend the local college for a while?

PHIPPS: I went against the guidance counselor. U of Pennsylvania is an ivy league school that I got admitted into. Why would I listen to a dimwit, who, you know, was counseling that we should lower our expectations? Years later, maybe ten or fifteen years later, at one point, I volunteered to do a recruiting trip for the University of Pennsylvania and went back to my hometown. I spoke to kids at both high schools, -- there was a Catholic school in town, and there was the public school that I went to. The same guidance counselor was there.

During that recruiting meeting at my old high school, I told the interested students that they should go to Penn, it is a great school, you know, this is why you want to go Penn [University of Pennsylvania] instead of somewhere else. It was then that the guidance counselor brought up that the university is in a bad neighborhood, and asked, "don't people get mugged?" He was pushing kids not to go to Penn, whereas in the Catholic school, the nuns were the guidance counselors and were like, "Oh, yes, Penn is wonderful, you should shoot for the stars and do everything you can." That was really an eye opening moment to me, seeing that the school that I went to directed kids to underachieve.

Q: Was there anyone in your high school that was pushing against that under achievement? Did you have a mentor? Maybe a teacher or anyone?

PHIPPS: There were no mentors, there was nobody who was trying to raise aspirations. Maybe the English teacher, looking back at it now. The English teacher demanded more of us than anybody. Our English teacher in senior year made us do public speaking, write speeches, and stand up in front of the class to speak. I remember, at one point, we were reading the play "Our Town" out loud. We were so provincial; everybody was Italian except for me and one or two other kids. There was a line in the play about people who were in a place called "Polish Town." The kid in class who was reading that part was so unexposed to the world that he pronounced "Polish Town" like polish your shoes because it was spelt the same way as Polish from Poland. We did not know anybody who was Polish. I remember the English teacher making a big deal out of it, stopping him.

Q: But most kids are led a little bit. So how about your parents, where they supportive or maybe your older sister, to get to University of Pennsylvania–

PHIPPS: My parents were very supportive. My mother, like I said, was very intellectually curious, a smart person. She used to read the newspaper every day, subscribe to news magazines, worked as a secretary, but she wanted to be, you know, more intellectually involved than that. So my mother was very supportive of me doing better things with my life. I did not go straight from high school to college. I took a year or two off and sort of frittered away my life a little bit. But I got a job as a legal secretary. Somebody that I knew was a lawyer in Philadelphia, and I got a job as a legal secretary. It was after working as a legal secretary for about a year in Philadelphia that I decided to go back to college. My father passed away during that summer.

Q: You use the term frittered away. That must have been a pretty momentous decision. Your parents wanted you to go off to college and you actually did not.

PHIPPS: I went to college. Before the first semester was out, I took a leave of absence and I became a wastrel. Eventually got my act together, no need to dwell on that part.

Q: Okay, that is fine. You do not have to dwell on anything you do not want to. It sounds like an interesting little period of time. What happened to your sister after her private high school, did she go off to college?

PHIPPS: She went off to the University of Chicago. She met her husband when she was in a school play. He was the director of the school play, they fell in love and lived together. My parents were horrified that they were living together, and he was sort of a hippie. They were sort of horrified with him, but they ended up getting married. The lesson to be learned is that when your daughter is going out with somebody, do not say anything bad about him because if he ends up being a keeper, then you are going to be in the doghouse.

Q: Was he Jewish?

PHIPPS: Yeah.

Q: And they are still married?

PHIPPS: They are still married and have two kids. The youngest one just turned forty, I think. It is hard to keep track. They moved to California for a while and then came back, now they are in Brooklyn. My sister has always been a social activist kind of person. She was a lawyer for a while and then got cancer. That made her reassess her priorities. She decided that she did not want to spend her whole life being an entertainment lawyer and went into the nonprofit sector. Now she has been the director of a number of different nonprofits. She is the director of a nonprofit right now.

Q: Living nearby in Brooklyn. Back to your earlier life, was the Jewish religion an important part of your upbringing or not?

PHIPPS: That is sort of interesting. We had this small, tiny little synagogue in Hammonton that was a source of contention within the Jewish community. Whether it ought to be affiliated with the Conservative branch of Judaism or the Reform branch of Judaism. My mother very much wanted it to be Reform, not Conservative and when I was young, it was Reform. My mother was the organist. They had a little organ, and she would sing little Jewish songs, part of the liturgy. Not a pipe organ, a little electric keyboard. She was involved in the Jewish community in the synagogue. We used to go every Friday night to services.

For my father who had been brought up in the Soviet Union where it was forbidden to practice religion, it was very important to him that we go to the synagogue every Friday night and on the high holidays. My sister had a bat mitzvah in the synagogue but then the membership voted to become affiliated with the Conservative movement instead. My mother really liked the rabbis that we had. We had student rabbis who would come down for the weekend and then go back to rabbinical school. She really liked these young intellectuals. We had two different young rabbis in different years. She really liked the student rabbis, the group of ladies and the synagogue that she hung out at. Then they decided to turn Conservative, and she was like, “no, we are not going to go to a Conservative synagogue.” We stopped going to the synagogue any more, so I never had a bat mitzvah.

But my parents used to send me off to Jewish summer camp. The Reform Movement had a Jewish summer camp in the Poconos. I would go off to sleepaway camp in the Poconos and it was wonderful. It was the best time of my life. I adored going to summer camp. When they would pick me up at the end of the four weeks to drive me home, I would cry all the way home. “Why can't I stay in summer camp? Why do I have to go home back to New Jersey to the farm, which is in the middle of nowhere? You know, there is nothing to do, I want to stay in camp. Please do not take me home. Mommy, I want to stay at the camp.”

Q: What age were you during those camp years? Was it through teenager hood or earlier?

PHIPPS: Earlier, from like age seven to eleven. There was a first session and a second session, and I always went for the first session and came home, not staying for second session. I would come back very energized about Jewish things because we learned about Judaism. Then at one point, it all fell apart. I am not sure what age I would have been. I remember I was in the next to oldest bunk. I would have had one more year of being a camper, then a year of waitress and a year of counselor in training. One year, I did not know why at the time, my parents called the camp and asked if I could stay for the second session. The camp administration said yes, but I couldn't stay in the same bunk, as that bunk's space was already filled up. I had to go into a different bunk. So, although I stayed the second session, I was not with my friends, but with a different group of girls. It was not fun anymore. When I came home, I found out my mother had breast cancer and had a mastectomy. That is why they could not deal with me at home and kept me at camp. I never went back to camp.

Q: In the camp, there were activities that educated you. So when you got to your teenage hood, did you have any other jobs when you were not in school?

PHIPPS: Yeah. They had three tracks in high school, college prep track, agricultural, for the people that are going to be farmers, and a vocational/technical track. In the vocational track, girls would take shorthand and typing. They encouraged college prep kids to also take typing because it might help you write your papers when you were in college. So I took typing, but I also took steno class (shorthand), which was not what college prep people were supposed to do. I don't remember why. It turned out the teacher for shorthand was the funniest lady. She was at a certain point in middle age, and she would always say, "Open the windows girls, I'm having a hot flash!" There were only girls in shorthand, although there were some boys in typing class. That was one teacher in high school. Another teacher in high school, our social studies teacher, was a big fan of *Gone with the Wind*. When we studied the Civil War, basically all we learned about was Scarlett O'Hara. If I had mentors, looking back, these were my mentors in high school.

Q: Those are influencing no matter what you got from them. You did get those influences and you can work against them, or you can work with them. So we were talking about other jobs you might have had.

PHIPPS: Because I took steno and typing, the steno teacher, (I guess my mother must have asked her to find me a summer job between junior and senior year), got me a job. My first job ever was in the office of a trucking company in Hammonton, New Jersey. It was something to do with bills of lading, manifests and I would file them or fill them out. I hardly remember. Once in a while, they would come with things that had 'fallen off the back of the truck.' I remember having some throw pillows, and other little miscellaneous things that ended up in that trucking office and got distributed to the employees. Still now, when I go down the highway and I see a tractor trailer, I recognize the names of some of the trucking companies that were named on those bills of lading.

Q: Having watched The Sopranos and being in New Jersey, falling off the truck? Do you think there were any major criminals?

PHIPPS: Oh, yeah. In my town, it was very much rumored that there were a lot of mafia bosses. I did not personally have any interactions knowingly with people who were, you know, in the mob. You know, people would say, "oh, that barber shop, that is where there is somebody who is, you know, affiliated with the mob, and they run numbers." People would say this, but like I said, everybody was Italian, and it was just rumored. I have no idea.

Q: Any other jobs during your high school period.

PHIPPS: Yes, after high school I had a job with a golf club down the road from where I lived. I worked in the snack bar, making liverwurst sandwiches, sausage and peppers, and meatball sandwiches. We had a repertoire of five or six sandwiches. I also served drinks. I do not think I was allowed to mix drinks, as I think I was too young.

Q: Any other things that went on during that period up till the age of seventeen? Any travel with your family? Did you go anywhere on vacation? Sounded like your dad had a stable job to support the family. Your mother, I guess, was working throughout this period of time. She was not a housewife, am I right on that?

PHIPPS: My parents went on vacation at one point to Yugoslavia and Israel, I think it was the same trip. They did not take us kids. Maybe I was already out of high school, it must have been like a year or two after, but they went overseas. That was like the first time they ever went overseas, and they brought back slides. Remember slide projectors? We looked at the slides. We rarely went on vacation. When I was young, we went to the World's Fair in Montreal. Once we went to visit a friend of my mother's outside Washington and once to a friend of my mothers in Peekskill, New York. But other than that, we would just go into Brooklyn once in a while to visit my aunts.

Q: Of course, your camp experiences took up your summers. Yugoslavia, really? Was there a reason for that to maybe see some of the family that was still in Europe?

PHIPPS: No, the family is long dead. My father's father died in his early sixties, before my father left Russia. My father was terrified that he would die at the same young age. My father died at sixty-seven, which is kind of young, but he was afraid from the time he was like fifty-eight or something that he would die like his father did. My father's mother died after the war, back in the 1950s when the relations were so terrible and people in Russia were so afraid of having any connection with America. The way my father learned that his mother died was he received a postcard that simply said, so and so died on such and such date. Signed, so and so.

That was it because he was not able to keep in touch with his mother and sister after he left the Soviet Union. It would have put them in danger of being sent to Siberia if it were known that he had deserted and gone to America, rather than just being, you know,

missing in action or killed in action or whatever. Remember, he buried his uniform, and he deserted the Red Army. So, if it were known that they were still in touch with him, prison for his mother and sister. When he got this very impersonal notification that his mother was dead, he never got to see her again. He always used to long to see the white birch trees of Russia again. I remember he cried when he watched Doctor Zhivago because it made him think of his homeland and he wished he could go there. He always wished that he could go back, and he never did. He died before he could go back.

Q: Was that family in Leningrad when he got the postcard? Who sent him the notice?

PHIPPS: I do not know who sent the post card but when I was posted in Moscow, I did some digging around and I found my first cousin. I had an eighty-year-old first cousin that I never knew existed. I knew that my father's mother and my father's sister had remained in Russia. I found that my father's sister had a son and I found him in Leningrad. I visited with him twice.

Q: When you were posted there, what happened to the Communist membership situation?

PHIPPS: My mother lost faith in the Communist Party when Khrushchev revealed the horrors of Stalinism. So, she stepped back from her membership in the party and did NOT want to be in the Communist Party anymore. She disavowed Stalin and the Soviet Union. But because she had been a member of the party, when my father married her, he thought, well, I am marrying an American citizen, that means I will easily get citizenship. But because of her background, his citizenship was delayed for seven years. This was during the McCarthy era. His affiliation with someone who had previously been a communist made it harder for him to become a citizen then if she had not.

Q: Did that cause conflict between your parents?

PHIPPS: I do not know what caused conflict between my parents, but there was always a lot of conflict. It probably contributed.

Q: After your two years of goofing around, you go off to the University of Pennsylvania. So tell us a little bit about your first year or two at the university.

PHIPPS: I loved Penn, it was great. I remember a number of the professors on the courses that really had a big influence on me. The professors at Penn had a very big influence on me. There were some very popular history professors. One who taught modern European history, one who taught Russian history, and then some of the more advanced courses. They just had really wonderful history teachers, I loved the history teachers and everybody at Penn was required to take a freshman English seminar. I had a wonderful professor for freshman English. We concentrated on Irish literature. We read *Ulysses* by James Joyce and poetry by William Butler Yeats.

It was really eye opening. I came from this terrible high school where we learned about *Gone with the Wind* instead of the Civil War. Terrible, I had a very limited literary

background. I had done some reading on my own and I was a smart kid, so I did well on my SAT's and got into a good school, but I had never been intellectually challenged at all. Then in college, there are just all these ideas. My first year I had signed up to live in a dorm, even though it was only thirty-five miles away. But I never got my housing assignment. A couple weeks before school started, I phoned up and said, "Where is my housing assignment?" They said, "What's your name?" I said, "Laurie Ann Lerner." They said, "You are in nursing school, right?" I said, "No, I am not in nursing school." They said, "Oh, well, there is a dorm for Laurie Ann Lerner in the nursing school, but there is not one in the liberal arts college. We do not have housing for you." So, my first year I had to commute, instead of having the normal college experience.

I lived on a farm, and I drove an hour every day to get to class. I took Russian, history classes, my freshman English seminar, and I was in one of the singing groups. I made friends with a girl who was in my Russian class, so if I had choir rehearsals, I would sleep over in her dorm room once a week. All other days I drove back to the farm. I had no social life, all I did was study, so I got a 4.0 GPA my first year because I had no fun. I did not go out drinking with anybody, I did not go to movies with anybody, I lived at home with my mother and all I did was study.

So, there was an upside to the university housing office having fouled up the bureaucracy and not giving me a dorm room. I started off doing very well. My sophomore year I got a dorm room. I had very good roommates and continued to do well in school because I kind of set that bar high. I loved my classes. At one point I told my sister that I wanted to major in history, that I had great history professors. She said, "What are you going to do with a degree in history? There is no employment for people who have studied history. You need to study something like economics, where you can do something with it." I said, "Okay, well, I kind of want to be an opera singer when I grow up." I was taking voice lessons at that point, singing in choir.

Q: Well, you were thinking about what you were going to major in? Economics?

PHIPPS: Right economics. So my sister said, "You've got to do something where you can get a job, you should major in economics." So I took an economics course and, oh my God, it made my brain hurt. I did not get it, it came very hard to me, and then I had an epiphany. One day I was sitting in Houston Hall in the lounge, racking my brains over ECON 101 [introductory undergraduate economics course], trying to understand macroeconomics, supply and demand curves. All of a sudden it came together. I was like, oh, I get it. This goes up, that goes down. I had an epiphany and I understood economics. I said, "Okay, I can take more economics courses now." I am not going to flunk economics, I broke through, but it took a while for my brain to get wrapped around the concepts of economics.

I decided instead of going into the real mathematical kind of economics, to take a number of courses in comparative economics, Soviet economics and planned economic systems. A lot of that sort of thing, very interesting and not quite so heavy into the numbers. I did manage to understand economics. Up until then, everything I had ever studied came very

easily to me. My high school was not challenging. Everything in language arts was fairly intuitive, but for economics, you really had to use your brain. I was not used to trying hard.

Q: Better to learn that earlier than later, right?

PHIPPS: My sister had suggested I do something like economics, but I did not want to spend my life in economics or business. I found out from the guidance counselors at Penn, who were much better than the guidance counselors in my high school, that I could devise an individualized major, an interdisciplinary major. So I majored in international relations, which was interdisciplinary. If you took some economics, some history, and some political science, you could call yourself an international relations major. So by adding some political science classes, some French language, some Russian language, and some interesting electives I became an international relations major.

Q: You continued with your Russian then?

PHIPPS: For two years, not anywhere past intermediate unfortunately.

Q: Did you start taking Russian because of your father or was there any other–

PHIPPS: My father tried to teach me Russian when I was around six years old. His educational approach was to sit me down and teach me the Russian alphabet, instead of just talking to me in Russian. My mother felt that if parents used two languages with a child, it would confuse the child and delay their language acquisition. So, she did not speak to me in Russian and she did not allow my father to speak to me in Russian, only English. They did not want me to grow up with an accent or not speak fluent English. Looking back, that was the wrong decision. If there had been daddy's language and mommy's language, I would have been fluent, but I am not. I wanted to be, so in college I suppose–

Q: What else happened in your college years? You mentioned you did not have much social life the first year. Did that, may I use the term, improve?

PHIPPS: Yes, everything was fine once I got into the dormitory.

Q: Any extracurricular activities beyond singing?

PHIPPS: Oh yes. I was in some plays, some musicals. I was in Penn singers, Penn players, the Gilbert and Sullivan troupe. I was in a choir and did plays whenever I made the audition.

Q: It looks like you got a Bachelors with honors, so Magna Cum Laude in international relations.

PHIPPS: Yes, I had to write an honors thesis in order to graduate with honors. I wrote about the Marshall Plan. I do not remember anything about the Marshall Plan or much about what I wrote. I do not think it was groundbreaking in any sort of way, but I had to learn how to use the primary source material to do research and spent a lot of hours in a carrel in the library.

Q: You learn methodology, I suppose.

PHIPPS: Writing things on index cards because it was before computers. We still used typewriters.

Q: Did you continue to have jobs during the summer?

PHIPPS: Yes, not only during the summer. I had worked as a secretary for a lawyer for one of the years in between high school and college. Since I had these secretarial skills, I went to work at an econometric forecasting company. The Wharton School had a lot of influence on local businesses. So there was an econometric forecasting company that was not affiliated with the university, but just in the neighborhood, a block or two from my dorm. This econometric forecasting company needed people to type up academic papers about econometric forecasting that would include complicated mathematical formulas. These mathematical formulas would include symbols like deltas or 'y to the three minus four power.' There were superscripts and subscripts. Most of the typists that they got did not understand mathematics well enough to know what was supposed to be a superscript or what was supposed to be a subscript, when you have the X with a little three above it, or when the Y minus one was on a different line. I understood enough about the math to format the formulas properly. So, I had a relatively high-paying job as a skilled typist to type papers with econometric formulas in them. I made good money for a college student, much more than if I were shelving books in the library.

Q: So you were employed. I did not ask you how you financed your college education, but it must have been a combination of your money and your parent's money or?

PHIPPS: I don't think my parents did not put any money into it. My mother was a widow by then. I think college was paid for by a combination of loans, scholarships and my money. I came out with a lot of loans.

Q: That is why I brought it up, I was curious how your college was funded.

PHIPPS: Lots of loans, not anything like what people have these days. I think tuition was sixteen thousand dollars a year, something like that. I remember paying it off out of my State Department paycheck. I remember the day that my last loan payment came out of my pay. I was like "Yay, my loans are paid off!" Now, keep in mind that I needed spending money while in college, so I needed to have a job. I was lucky to have typing skills and the ability to figure out the mathematical formulas.

I typed on a thing called a Vydex machine, which is a sort of precursor to computers. It was a word processing machine that has become totally obsolete. Because I had been a secretary for over a year, I knew how to use a Dictaphone machine. Remember those, when you push the little button with your foot, and it talks? In case you missed something, you could make the tape go backwards and replay. Because I could use a Dictaphone and could figure out how the formulas were formatted, I kept that job for a while, making good money.

Q: The happy news is you are still not there, you could have still been there.

PHIPPS: My mother was a secretary all her life when she moved to Philadelphia. She worked as a medical secretary when we lived in Hammonton, New Jersey. Then when we moved to Philadelphia, she became a legal secretary and worked for a lawyer. I would write a lot of papers in college. I would write my papers longhand. Kids cannot even imagine that because everybody has a computer now.

I would write my essays and papers out longhand then give them to my mom. My mom would stay after work in her office for an hour or so and type it up. Then eventually I bought a typewriter, and I would type my own. I would type my roommates' papers too because I was much faster at typing than any of my roommates. Sometimes in class, I would take my notes in shorthand because then I could keep up with everything that was being said. Freshman and sophomore years, I took my notes in Gregg shorthand, then I would go back and rewrite it in longhand. Without even realizing, this was a way of revising and reinforcing what I heard in class, because I would have to go back and write the notes in English while the lecture was still fresh in my mind.

Q: Skills you learned during your high school years, not a bad thing to have.

PHIPPS: And I know to open a window if I get a hot flash.

Q: The only time I ever heard that was a woman I worked for in New Jersey. She was having the same issues in my office. So it looks like you graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1980. It looks like you then went straight into Tufts University, is that correct?

PHIPPS: I went straight to the Fletcher School for graduate studies. The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy is at Tuft, but it is also administered in conjunction with Harvard University. That is the technical term for it. Students are able to also take classes at Harvard as well as at the Fletcher School. I went straight to graduate school because by then I was two years behind my age cohort.

Q: You moved to Boston?

PHIPPS: Right. I got accepted into SAIS in Washington at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. I got accepted to Georgetown in Washington and the Fletcher School in Boston. I figured that it was likely that I would probably spend part of

my career in Washington doing international affairs and I would never have a chance to live in Boston unless I went to school there. So I went to school in Boston.

Q: Sounds opportunistic and like a good idea. You move up to Boston and your mother stays in Philadelphia? It looks like you spent two years there. What were your thoughts about going there? Were you starting to think about a career at that point?

PHIPPS: Well, I knew that my degree in International Relations did not really qualify me to do anything. An undergrad degree in IR is just like history, I really was not fit for any kind of job. So, I thought I would go to grad school and see if that would help. Most of the people at the Fletcher School took the Foreign Service exam. Georgetown, SAIS, and Fletcher are like feeder schools into the State Department. At Fletcher people either went into some kind of international business -- corporate, management stuff -- or into government. A quarter to a third of the student body were foreign people from other countries who were either in their countries' governments or aspiring to be. There were a lot of mid-career people who were sent from the Ministry of whatever, to learn more skills and went to Fletcher. There was a very big international contingent, which was fun. There were a number of non-international students who were straight out of college like me, which was fun. Fletcher was a very good school and very focused on international relations. I did not love it as much as I loved Penn, which says more about me than it says about Fletcher.

I had some very good courses at Fletcher and made some good friends. My original idea was to go work for the UN, as an international civil servant. But as you may know, it is very hard for an American to get a job at the UN [United Nations] because they have quotas for how many people of which nationality they can have. Since the UN is headquartered in New York, eighty five percent of the staff could be American. They did not want that, they wanted to be even-handed with an eye towards geographical distribution, as they say. So, there is a limit on how many Americans can be hired. I figured, well, it is going to be hard to get a job at the UN, even though I wanted to do something to make the world a better place. I thought of the UN as being an organization where they help to improve the world. In some sort of way, that is the aspiration of the UN, to make a peaceful world with wellbeing for everybody.

Even though I wanted to work for the UN , I realized that was not going to be a very easy lift. Almost all the American students at Fletcher took the Foreign Service exam. We had a few prep sessions where people gave tips on how to do well on the Foreign Service exam, especially the oral exam. They advised what things to look out for, what tricks they have built in, and how to maneuver around the tricks. So I thought to myself, “what the hell, let me take the Foreign Service exam and see if I pass”, because a lot of people do not pass the Foreign Service exam. It is very competitive. I also had a few interviews with international banks. But when they asked the interview question, "Why do you want to work for our international bank?" I did not have a ready answer, since I did not really want to work for a bank.

I wanted to make the world a better place. I did not just want to make rich people richer. So, I had no good answer for why I wanted to work in banking, except that it was what was expected. You were expected to go on interviews, these recruiting people came, and they recruited people for their bank. So, I went on interviews but my heart was not in it. That must have come across. I was offered no jobs with any multinational corporations or banks. But I passed the Foreign Service exam and that got me to the second stage where I took the oral exam for the Foreign Service. Having been prepped by the people at Fletcher to look out for tricks, I was able to avoid getting caught in the weeds of the in-basket.

One of the tricks that the Fletcher advisers told us about (I do not know if they still use this) is that in the oral exam they give you an inbox and the task is to go through the inbox in a set amount of time to see how many things you can get through, what your decision-making ability is, and how you can handle the paperwork. They told us that in order to get through the inbox quickly, you should delegate and not try to solve every problem on the first few pieces of paper. You should say, "Okay, this goes into the pile to give to my underlings, this goes into the file to look into later." Try to get through as much as you can, because three or four pieces of paper from the bottom there is going to be a big crisis. If you do not get to the big crisis, you are going to fail that part of the exercise.

The aim is to try to get through and delegate the early pieces of paper so that you can get to the bottom of the inbox where the crisis is, then focus on the crisis. My natural instinct would have been to spend a lot of time doing paper number one, two, and three as well as possible. Without the coaching at Fletcher, I would not have used that tactic of sorting things out to get to the bottom. But I used what I was taught at Fletcher for that part of the oral exam. I was comfortable with the debate, essay, opinion sections and all the rest of the oral exam. Ultimately, I passed the oral interview, which only about one out of seven applicants pass.

Q: I heard that on the oral you are working with a team with a group of other applicants?

PHIPPS: Yes, at least when I took the oral exam. Back in the day there were six or seven people who took the exam at the same time as you. There were some parts that you did on your own individually, like that inbox exercise. Everybody had their own inbox. But there were other parts where the examiners looked at group dynamics. There was one part of the oral exam where we all had to sit around a table and negotiate over a budget. The theoretical budget for our embassy was set at X amount of dollars, and everybody had their scenario that they had to read before getting together with the whole group. Each person had their own situation and priorities: one was the political officer who needed X amount of money to accomplish this, another was the admin officer who needed X amount of money to accomplish that. Then you get around the table and you have to negotiate with one another to determine what part of this theoretical budget was going to be allocated to your theoretical projects.

One of the things they told us at Fletcher was to try to advance your project, but not be so focused on your project that you cannot be flexible enough to understand that maybe somebody else's project should get higher priority. That is how a real-life situation might work. Just because you have your pet project does not mean that trumps whatever else there is out there in the world. So, I went into that part of the exam having a better perspective. Some might have thought that what would earn the best grade on these exercises would be to win four thousand dollars for their project. But that was not what the examiners were looking for. They were looking to assess your judgment, how you can prioritize, and when you can be flexible. When you can advocate for yourself, but not only through mindless advocacy.

So, it was very helpful to have these little tips beforehand and I passed the exam. I said to myself, "Well, here I am, I passed this very competitive exam, both the written and the oral part. What the hell, might as well join the Foreign Service. If I like it, fine, if I do not like it, I will stay a year or two and I will leave." You know, see what happens. Very much taking a 'go with the flow' approach towards my future. People all throughout my career and college were always asking things like, "what is your five-year plan?" I have to confess to you Linda, I have never in my life had a five-year plan. I never said to myself, "This is where I want to be in five years, this is where I want to be in ten years."

Looking back, all those people who said you should have an idea of where you want to be in five or ten years, they were right. By going with the flow and just sort of drifting wherever the winds took me, I did not advance in my career the way a lot of my colleagues did. A lot of the people that I either went to Fletcher with or entered the Foreign Service with, ended up advancing very far in their careers. About two-thirds, three-quarters of the way through my career, I asked myself, "Why am I still at this mid-level, instead of at the higher level, where a lot of my peers are?" I think it is because I never did have that mindset of being able to look to the future, and say, "This is what I set my sights on, these are the steps that I need to take in order to get there." I felt like, "if I just do what I am doing and do a good job, then I guess rewards and acknowledgment will come." That is not the way the world works. Nothing in my early schooling and rearing put that competitive mindset into me. Not just competitive, but strategically competitive.

Q: How about fire in the belly sort of thing?

PHIPPS: No, I did not feel driven by any fire to achieve this or that. I was always, you know, happy to be doing a good job at what I was doing. I did not have the fire in the belly which is maybe why I never became an ambassador or a deputy assistant secretary?

Q: Well, there are a lot of reasons that people become those things. It seems like what drives you is intellectual curiosity and seeing what is out there. I have to ask this question. While you were at Fletcher, is when you applied for the Foreign Service and got in? It was 1982 when you graduated from Fletcher, did you do all of the Foreign Service after you graduated or while you were still at Fletcher?

PHIPPS: The tests were in my final semester at Fletcher, that is when it was scheduled. I took the tests and then I got on the waiting list for the Foreign Service. There is a whole waiting list procedure. I did not enter the Foreign Service until January of the year following graduation from Fletcher. During the fall, I just hung out waiting. I was talking about fire in the belly. I really did not have much fire in the belly. People say now to the youngsters, "you should do what you are passionate about." I was never particularly passionate about anything.

At Fletcher, you have to write a thesis in order to get your degree. There was no burning question that I wanted answered. There was nothing I really wanted to research. So I worked with my academic advisor and I picked a topic that was not very exciting. I did not really apply myself, and I never finished my thesis. After I graduated, before I got into the Foreign Service, I went home to my mother in Philadelphia. I went to the library at Penn as an alumnus, and worked on my thesis, but never actually finished my thesis.

Q: So that did not affect your graduation?

PHIPPS: I never actually got my degree from Fletcher. I studied my two years, and I can put on my resume that I went there. But I never actually got my degree, so when I got admitted to the Foreign Service, I was entered at a lower pay grade than someone who had a master's degree. Entrants get a certain pay scale with a master's, but a certain lower pay scale if not. But, it turns out, life is funny. Something that looks like a cloud can have a silver lining. Later on in my career, I learned about a mid-career master's program at Princeton. If I had gotten my master's from Fletcher, I would have been ineligible. But because I did not have a master's, I got a fellowship to go to Princeton for a year as a mid-career training. To finish my degree there, I did not have to write a thesis.

Q: The silver lining. I noticed the difference in chronological order. To anyone reading your transcript that is in your CV, you were in the master's program at Tufts. You do not say that you got a Master of Public Policy, which you did at Princeton, nor Bachelor of Arts. So you are totally honest–

PHIPPS: The degree from Fletcher is called an MALD, a Master of Art in Law and Diplomacy. I did not actually get that.

Q: You did not. So I want that to be very clear to anyone who is either listening or reading your transcript. I was going to ask a question about being a female entering the Foreign Service in 1983. I have gotten some feedback from, well, a particular woman who entered ten years earlier, and how difficult it was. Alright, so we are going to jump over to Princeton 1999 to 2000. Having the silver lining, getting your Master of Public Policy at Princeton, the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, I am wondering if it is still called that.

PHIPPS: The name is now called the Princeton School of International Affairs.

Q: I am aware of having worked at the Wilson Museum in Washington. So somewhere along the line after you were at the Foreign Service in 1983, you decided to go back to school 1999. So how did that occur? Or why did you decide to do that? 1999?

PHIPPS: By that time, I had left the Foreign Service, I had divorced, I had moved to New York, and I was working at the U.S. mission to the UN. The divorce was relatively recent, and I had a very nice boss at the U.S. mission to the UN. The office director was really great, and he alerted everybody in the section about the cable that had come through announcing the fellowship program to Princeton. The deputy office director had gone through that program at Princeton, and she told me it was really good. She really enjoyed it and I probably would never have noticed that cable or thought about it in terms of me. But because the office director and the deputy office director talked about it, I thought, well, let me apply for it. My Two kids were quite young at the time, in either first, second grade or kindergarten and first grade. I do not remember exactly, but they were quite young. So I applied for the Princeton fellowship and got it.

They had a requirement that you had to go during the summer and have some orientation, taking statistics and things like that before the actual semester started. All of the mid-career people (there were about a dozen or so of mid-career people from different government agencies and from different countries), we all showed up there a month in advance before the semester started. I took my kids, and we sublet a faculty apartment.

Q: In Princeton?

PHIPPS: In Princeton. Then I had to negotiate with my ex-husband where the kids were going to go to school. So, in order not to disrupt their schooling, I did not live on campus at Princeton for the regular semester, just for that summer orientation period. I came back to my house in New Jersey, kept my kids in their regular school, and commuted to my classes at Princeton. Looking back, I wish I had made a different decision. I wish I had fought harder against my ex-husband and moved the kids to school in Princeton with me. I think I would have gained more from it. I still had some great courses at Princeton. It was really interesting, I am really glad I did the mid-career at Princeton. It was very worthwhile, but I think on the family level, I would have made a better decision if I had moved the whole family.

Q: So where was your home? Not when you were not in Princeton, your home was in New York?

PHIPPS: When I was first married, I lived in Brooklyn but then we bought a house in Bergenfield, New Jersey. That is the house that I have had for nearly thirty years.

Q: So you had a sabbatical from your job, then in the United Nations? You did not want to leave that?

PHIPPS: Not at the United Nations, at the U.S. mission. I didn't work for the United Nations, but went there to negotiate on behalf of the United States.

Q: The U.S. mission. Did you specialize, did you finish that thesis? Or did you start another one?

PHIPPS: No, you did not have to write a thesis. You just had to take your classes and you were fine. No thesis. I loved Princeton, it was great.

Q: What particular area of your coursework did you like the most? Or subjects?

PHIPPS: There were some very interesting classes in international development, economic development. They had practitioners from the field who came and designed the courses on how to be better at providing international development assistance. Those were very interesting and brought in aspects that I had not been aware of before. I had a very interesting class on Islam and Africa. What struck me about the graduate classes at Princeton is that they were quite different from either Penn or Fletcher. That may have to do with the intervening years between when I was first doing my college work and then when I did this new curriculum, or the nature of Princeton being very small. The coursework at Princeton was much more focused on small seminars. Students did more of the presenting and the faculty did less of the presenting, playing more of a facilitating role. That was quite different and interesting.

Q: Also, career development. I would think because you had to be presenting. I almost noticed that in your first era of education, you almost had like twenty years of work experience. Not exactly twenty but getting there. Since you graduated from Princeton, almost another twenty years, I think you retired in 2019 or so from your _____ of retirement that you did from the U.S. mission? What year did you retire?

PHIPPS: I would have to look it up, I think 2018, 2019?

Q: It is almost like these nice two chunks of work, after this educational type, which I think is very interesting and great.

PHIPPS: I remember coming back to the UN after my year at Princeton and being in a negotiation with other diplomats. I would bring in some sort of point about development that was based on my coursework and real life. I remember a diplomat from India saying "Yes, that is very interesting, probably true. But that is not what we look at when we negotiate UN resolutions. We do not look at the real world. Let's put that aside, we are back in the UN." I remember thinking like, yeah, he is right.

Q: Going back, you did kind of change, maybe push in one direction. So our next session will be to start your career in the Foreign Service. Your first assignment was London, which I am not sure these days a junior officer gets to do as their first assignment.

PHIPPS: Back then it was a visa mill. So they had a very big consular section.

Q: Yes, of course. What a nice place to start your career.

Q: Today we are doing our second recording for Laurie Phipps. I am going to use your last name Phipps. Is that okay, Laurie?

PHIPPS: That is fine. For part of my professional career I went by Shestack.

Q: Today is July 8, 2021. We ended on our first recording with your education, and I know some of your education overlapped with your career. We will go back in time to a little bit of that overlap and start with your career. We are going to be going back to the 1980s. You started with the Foreign Service in June of 1983. Going to the Embassy in London to work as a consul, is that right?

PHIPPS: Yes, of course. I started about six months before that, because you have to go through the A-100 training. When I left graduate school, I went back to Philadelphia. I was working on my graduate thesis and was put on the waiting list for foreign service. I was just hanging out at my mother's, waiting to hear whether I got called up, and I got called into the Foreign Service I believe in March of 1983. Then I went to A-100 and did all the training. I remember just feeling such a huge shift in my life. I got on the Amtrak train in Philadelphia, where my mother lived, to go down to Washington to start in the State Department. I remember, even though I was very happy and anticipatory, I just cried from Philadelphia to Delaware. It just felt like such a breaking point. A turning point in my life because here I was, having just been a student, not yet fully engaged in the world, and now embarking on my career.

I remember (and I very rarely cry) crying half the way there. Then I got to A-100 and met a lot of very interesting people in my A-100 class. We had lectures and we learned about consular regulations, because the first job everybody does in the Foreign Service, of course, is being a vice consul. I remember we had to do role plays of being a consular officer and a prisoner, simulating how one interacts in that role of visiting jailed Americans, which is one of the things that a consular officer has to do. We were doing those role plays and a reporter from the New York Times came the week that my group was doing it. There was a big picture in the New York Times magazine of me and one of my classmates role-playing as a consular officer visiting prisoners in a foreign jail. So that was sort of fun.

We had to bid on our first assignments. That is part of the Foreign Service process, to bid on where you want to go. I was very gung-ho, and I wanted to be somewhere that made a difference and that really mattered. My first choice was Lebanon, where there was a lot of turmoil going on. Lower down on my list was London, where they had a big visa mill and a lot of consular officers. I remember waking up in my little studio apartment that I had rented with a fold out bed that I had to fold back every morning. It was such a tiny little apartment right down the street from the State Department. I woke up to the radio news, the way I always wake up, and learned the U.S. Embassy in Lebanon had been bombed. It turns out that the office of the vice consul -- this was not while we were waiting to hear about assignments, this was a week or two after we had gotten our assignments and knew what was what -- the office where the vice consul sat had been obliterated. It just

happened that the man who had been assigned to that assignment was an Arabic speaker, an expert in the Middle East, and was the right person to get that job. He had stepped away to go to the bathroom. He was not killed in the bombing of the embassy in Lebanon. But I remember thinking to myself, I have that kind of workaholic tendency that I probably would have been sitting in my office and not taking a break. I probably would have been snuffed out. So, what a blessing it was, in disguise, that I was not assigned to Lebanon. I might very easily have been killed my first week on the job. Even though, you know, that is what I had wanted, and I felt very disappointed when I did not get it.

Q: So how did you feel about the London assignment?

PHIPPS: I was very excited to go to London. The work in London is not as interesting as consular work is in a smaller embassy. It was very routine. This was back when the American Embassy was still in Grosvenor Square; they had not moved to the place across the Thames, where they are now. The Consular Section was a large room in the basement. It was a very big building, and pretty much the entire basement was taken up with the visa section, which was filled with consuls and vice consuls. We had little cubicles. This was back in the day before cubicles were really the rage. We had so many people in London that we could not all have offices, only the consuls had offices. The vice consuls all had cubicles that we would be in part of the day. Most of the day, we were behind a counter.

Think of your motor vehicle office. A counter with windows, the bureaucrats are behind the counter, and then the supplicants come in front of the counter. That is really what they were in the visa office. This was before the days of Britons being automatically eligible for visas. There were still a lot of categories that had to come in and ask for a visa. We had a big waiting room very much like in the motor vehicles office, filled with plastic chairs and people would just fill the waiting room. We had eight or twelve little windows and we would staff those windows. We would have these applicants come to us and explain why it was that they wanted to go to the United States.

I remember we had three consuls and a consul general. The Consul General was an interesting guy. He sort of had a chip on his shoulder that he had never graduated college. These days, I think it would be impossible to conceive of somebody getting into the Foreign Service and rise to the rank of Consul General in London without a college degree. This guy had gotten into the Foreign Service back in the early 1950s. So, he had been in for thirty years. He got in some time shortly after World War Two. He mentioned it all the time, which was sort of odd. His approach was that we should have blanket rules, rather than case-by-case thinking about people's lives. Blanket rules such as: if a person was visiting from India and they wanted to go to the United States, then a vice consul should just assume that they were never coming back.

I do not know how familiar you are with the U.S. visa law, but back in those times, and I think still today, there is a presumption that anybody who wants to visit the United States is presumed to want to come and stay forever. The burden of proof is on the applicant to

show that they have reasonable, strong enough ties to their home country, that they will go back. The thinking of our consul general was that if they really had strong ties, they would not be in England. There is almost no way, sitting in England, that they could prove they had strong enough ties to want to go back to India. However, when they were through with their visits here (they were probably visiting relatives in the UK), they usually wanted to visit relatives and visit Disneyland in the United States.

There was almost no documentation they could show that would prove to him that they would go back. We were supposed to just automatically deny pretty much anybody who is from India. Anybody with the last name Singh or the last name Kaur had an automatic strike against them, because there is -- you know, in the United States, there are a lot of professions that are sort of ethnically predominant. There are a lot of motel owners who are of Indian or Bangladeshi descent. His theory was that anybody who was going to visit America on a visa from London, was going to go into their cousin's hotel chain, and you know, own a Motel Six in Texas somewhere and never come back. He also did not like giving visas to Nigerians. He also was very skeptical about young British women who wanted to be nannies. He felt that it was very hard for them to prove they had a reason to come back, and he was just very dogmatic in this kind of approach.

I came up with a suggestion that maybe we ought to look back through the records of people that we gave visas to six months ago. I would call them and see if they actually had come back. Do some fact-checking and gather some statistics to see whether his assumption that everybody stayed was true, or whether we could call them six months later to see whether they were actually back with their families in London. The consul general totally nixed that idea and thought that I was very naive, and very green. That I just did not know how to follow orders. So that was some of what I did in London. We also had a very lovely black man who was a consul. I stayed friends with him for several years, until unfortunately, he died about 10 years after we were in London from an illness that nobody knew at the time, when it was probably AIDS. The other consul, I do not remember at all, he just did not make an impression.

Q: That is a tough start to your Foreign Service career. If you are working with a manager who has those attitudes, it is too bad. I know that everyone starts in the consulates area, and then there, a lot of them are anxious to get out. I just wonder if some of those reasons are that it is depressing.

PHIPPS: We had a very nice program for junior officers in London, where for at least one month, every consular officer had to be temporarily assigned out of the consular section to either the economic section or the political section. I remember being transferred for a month to the political section to be sort of a shadow to one of the real political officers, who became one of my good friends. I stayed in touch with her for many years. It was very interesting. I wrote my first cable when I was doing that one-month stint being assigned to the political officer. It is about the U.S. not paying its dues to UNESCO [The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization], which is still a story that comes up periodically.

Q: Thirty-five years later, yeah. Well, I know you have an economics background, too. When you had that month in the political area, political department. How did that get you interested in other areas of the Foreign Service then? How did you react to that kind of shadowing?

PHIPPS: I just thought it was very interesting. I got a glimpse into what political section reporting was about and it was much more interesting than being in the consular section. Although, there were parts of the consular section that were intellectually interesting, especially in the citizenship unit. All the consular officers did part of our stint, our tour in London, in the nonimmigrant visa section, which is for people who want to go visit Disneyland. Another part of our tour was in the immigrant visa section, where you had to determine whether people who wanted to immigrate permanently would be entitled. That was usually British people who married an American citizen, or children who were born to American citizens and then wanted to get their citizenship. We had the three units -- a citizenship unit, immigrant visas and nonimmigrant visas. Non-immigrant visas: not interesting.

Immigrant visas are only mildly interesting. Part of what we had to do there was try to unearth visa fraud, people who pretended to be married. We were told to ask things like, "Where's the toothbrush in the bathroom," you know, things to show whether they really live together or not. That was not very interesting, but the interesting part was the citizenship unit. So, if children were born to Americans, no problem, they get their passport. We would issue passports. But sometimes there were cases that had to be really delved into. Part of it was because of visa fraud. Did the person who married the American airman really, you know, have an American baby with him?

In many cases, British, usually British, women married American airmen from the big airbase in the UK. Local women would get married to these U.S. citizen airmen. Sometimes a couple days after they got divorced from their British husband, or maybe they were already pregnant, and they got married to the American, but they had been married to a Brit. So, you had to do an investigation into whether this baby that was being born really was the baby of the American airmen, and not of some Brit who she happened to be technically married to. It could get a little complicated. But the most complicated case that I had was based on changing visa laws, because the U.S. changes its immigration laws every twenty or thirty years.

I remember one particularly interesting case of a woman whose mother was Irish and would go back and forth to the United States to work as a housemaid. Depending on what years her mother was in the United States, I had to see whether that counted towards her eligibility to become a citizen herself and confer citizenship on this thirty-something woman who was standing in front of me wanting to get an American passport. We had to look at all the different dates when the laws changed. What was the law then? That you had to have five consecutive years in the U.S., or two consecutive years in the US, where you could not have left within six months of getting there? All sorts of different variations in the law, and you have to see, in 1917, when the mother came, what was the law? In 1921, when she came, what was the law? Add it up to see whether she had

enough time in the U.S., consecutive or nonconsecutive, to make this daughter of hers, who had never set foot in the U.S. eligible to be a citizen, right? It was a little intellectually challenging and much more interesting than saying no to people who wanted to go visit Disneyland.

Once in a while, I would give people visas if I believed their stories. They would come and they would, sort of, really supplicate in front of these windows. I remember once there was an old man dressed in the kind of Indian garb that Gandhi used to wear. It was really like this wrapped up sort of sheer kind of thing. Oh, a very old man and he came with his two grown Indian children. I remember letting him in behind the window because he seemed so very old and frail. I listened to his story of why he only wanted to go and see his son or cousin or nephew or whatever it was. He really wanted to be back in India, where he was sort of a holy man and meditated in caves. I believed his story. I remember when I granted him his visa to go visit his nephew, he kissed my hand and he blessed me. He was very emotional. I could not see him living in Tennessee or whatever for the rest of his life. I don't know if he ever came back or not because, as I said, the Consul General never allowed us to follow up.

Q: Well, I know that if they get to the U.S. and they violate their tourist visas, or whatever, then Homeland Security gets involved with investigations about visa violations.

PHIPPS: They did not, so much, back in the '80s. INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] did not have computer systems. They did not know where to find people. There was only a paper form that was in a drawer in London with the address of where they were going to go visit, and another paper form that they filled out on the airplane, and handed in to Customs. Who knows what happened to those paper forms. So, INS did not do a lot of that kind of investigating. I remember one interview I did at the embassy in London that involved a woman who wanted a visa to go to the U.S. She had been, twenty or thirty years prior to that, alleged to be a member of the Communist Party. Back in those days you had to tick a box on the back of the visa form that says I am not, never have been a communist, or something like that. Somewhere in a file, a black mark against her came up, indicating that the embassy cannot give her a visa. I looked into why. It was because somebody had -- not that she actually had been a member of the Communist Party in the UK, which of course is not illegal -- but that somebody had alleged that she had been a member of the Communist Party. It was an unproven allegation. I remember looking into that a little bit, as well, to try to question her about that and try to see if that was true or not. But these were the kinds of investigations people were doing. The stone Cold War.

Q: Yeah, you are right. It was before 1989 or 1990. Well then it looks like you were there for a year and a half. I am guessing you enjoyed your off-time experiences in London and enjoyed life before you were married, before kids and all of that. So it must have been fun.

PHIPPS: Life was great in London, I loved it.

Q: Well then it looks like you then went on to be a vice consul again in the consular area in Calgary, Canada. Tell us a little bit about that, that period of time.

PHIPPS: Calgary was a very small post. There was me, one Consul, a Consul General, two secretarial staff, and two or three locally hired people who were assistants. I had the responsibility of also covering and reporting on the local economy. Calgary is a center for oil and gas. So, I would go to oil and gas industry events and try to get to know some of the oil and gas bigwigs. I would report on what was going on in the oil and gas industry. Also do both nonimmigrant visa, immigrant visa and citizenship passport work.

Q: You were there from February of 1985 to August of 1985. Previously in London, you were there from June of 1983 to December of 1984. So it looks like you had a little home leave in between London and Calgary.

PHIPPS: I was in training, that was additional training.

Q: In DC probably. So six months in Calgary, that is not a really long time. What was the reason for that short assignment?

PHIPPS: Oh, the reason was because it was such a small post. We had to be on duty every other weekend. Because I am a religiously observant Jewish person, I am religiously prohibited from working on the Sabbath from Friday night to Saturday at sundown. This was in the days before computers and before cell phones. So being on duty required that you come into the office and print out all the cables, read through the cable traffic, and call the Consul General if there were any kind of emergency to be dealt with. The duty officer dealt with any sort of consular emergencies that there might be, such as if there is a citizen that has been detained or something like that, or if there has been a death. It was difficult in London to have duty, but we only had duty occasionally because there were so many staff. There were almost twenty-five vice consuls, plus the consuls themselves, plus all the political officers and the economic officers. So, everybody took a turn on duty. I was on duty maybe once or twice in London. I was told to just find somebody to substitute for me on Saturday. So that was not very hard to do., although a little awkward, because I had to ask somebody to do me a favor and trade. "Please, could you come into the office on Saturday and take over my duty and I'll do your Sunday, or your Christmas holiday," or you know, whatever holiday they might have, to make up for them doing Saturday as a favor to me. So, it was possible to substitute duty in London with their large roster of potential duty officers.

But it was impossible to substitute Saturday duty when there were only one or two other people to share it with. It was not fair, it did not appear to be fair. Even though for religious reasons, one is entitled to various accommodations under the law for religious discrimination. But still, it was very difficult logistically, so I curtailed. I decided the easiest thing to do was curtail and go somewhere where there was a larger pool of people to share duty with. So, my religious beliefs really kind of stood in the way of my career being able to play out in a normal way in a small post.

Q: Okay, any interesting cases from your time in Calgary. I know it was not long, but I always think of Canada as someplace where people might be waiting to come into the United States over the border. So would there have been situations like in London, in Canada for people who were trying to get a visa to the US?

PHIPPS: Canadians had a very easy time getting nonimmigrant visas and they were able to apply by mail. Almost all Canadians who asked for a visa to the U.S. got it. We did not have the same kind of Consul General with the same sort of racial and ethnic prejudice. Citizenship questions were usually pretty straightforward. There were Americans who had moved up from Montana, or whatever, and married a Canadian and ended up having a kid who was entitled to a passport. I do not remember a lot of green card application cases. There were some, but they were not complicated. They were not interesting and complicated like they were in London. There was not all that much that was so very interesting going on in Calgary, although it was a lovely place. A few years after I left there, they merged two consulates to close the consulate in Calgary. They merged it, I believe, into the consulate in Winnipeg. There were a few local people who worked there and they were very, very competent, extraordinarily competent. They just, you know, took care of anything that was complicated. Things ceased to be complicated because they knew how to deal with everything. There was really quite a good staff there in Calgary.

Q: So no Russians or people of Eastern Europe, threading their way through Canada to get in the U.S.?

PHIPPS: Not in the '80s. It was very hard for people to get out of Russia in the 1980s, there were not any exit visas to be had. Exit visas were very hard to come by. If anybody were to get to the United States, you know, it would be a defector like Mikhail Baryshnikov or something. Russians were not traveling then as tourists or business people. There was no business, there was still communism in Russia.

Q: It looks like then you took a turn in another direction, leaving Calgary back to the United States. Here you were a human rights officer.

PHIPPS: Before that I was an economics officer in the Office of Food Policy.

Q: Yes, you are very correct about that. From September of 1985 to March of 1989. You came back to Washington, and you monitored trade developments, agricultural products, including wheat, corn and cotton. Then moved into human rights problems in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This is where I saw Soviet Negotiations with Soviet officials for the release of refuseniks. Maybe during your narrative, you can define what refusenik is, but start with your first job as an economics officer.

PHIPPS: Because I curtailed, I had to look for a new job in Washington and because it was the summer, there were some openings. I applied for and got a job in the Economics Bureau. EB, they called it -- the economics bureau. I think it has a different name now. As you had mentioned before, part of my studies was in economics. So, I went into the

Office of Food Policy and I became the 'wheat and feed grains expert', as they say, in the Office of Food Policy. These were the days when we were trying to export wheat with subsidies, but trying not to call them subsidies. We were selling, doing wheat deals with Syria, Russia, all sorts of countries. It was called the Export Enhancement Program, although it was against international law to have subsidies on agricultural products. The EU, Australians, Canadians and the Argentines were the other major wheat exporters. They were always complaining to the State Department that we seemed to be unfairly subsidizing our wheat. Part of my job was to write memos to explain why we were using the Export Enhancement Program, but how it was not really a subsidy, and it was not really going to tick off the Argentines or the EU, or the Canadians. This was before email. I remember a lot of running around the department, down the different corridors to talk to the Canada desk, the Argentine desk, the Australia desk and the EU desk to make sure that they would sign off on my memo, that they agreed it was okay to ask the Secretary to approve this.

We exported to Syria, Russia and other countries. It was challenging, as I knew nothing about the export of wheat or corn. I had to work hard to learn what the markets were like, what the statistics were, to monitor whether our exports went up or down, whether prices were going up or down. It was quite different and rather interesting. I met a lot of people, because, as I say, in those days, you had to walk the halls and pop into people's offices, or use the phone to actually talk to them, then pop into their offices. Now it would all be done by email, and you would never know what anybody looked like. But back then we had to actually walk the halls and then, when we sometimes sent memos, we did it through the pneumatic tube system in the department. I do not know if they still have that, or if they are still using it, but they have this system of pneumatic tubes. You have these plastic cylinders that have a special little cap opening on the top. You put your piece of paper in there, you put it in this pneumatic tube, and it whooshes away. It ends up in somebody else's office.

Q: Hard to imagine.

PHIPPS: Hard to imagine. Another thing, going back a step when I did my training to go to Calgary. Part of what I had to do, because it was such a small office, was I had to encrypt any cable that was going to be sent that was confidential or secret. We, frankly, did not have many secret things going on in Calgary. But once in a while we would have a cable that was confidential about industry or politics. Part of my job, as the vice consul with a top-secret security clearance, was to be the one to go in the vault and encrypt it. We had this old fashioned, big metal machine with metal keys, like a typewriter that you had to really push down on. There was a system that we are not allowed to talk about, of how to do a one-time encryption with a secret code to be able to send the cable. Now everything is electronically done, and it is all automatically done by the computers. Back then, we had to actually type in secret code on a machine. It is kind of like a mimeograph machine, a big old clunky machine. Old fashioned technology, it was very old-fashioned technology. Nobody has—

Q: The pneumatic tube one, that is incredible. It would be interesting to see if it still exists somewhere in the State Department.

PHIPPS: Right. I stayed quite a long time at the Office of Food Policy, where there were two other unmarried women officers. Everybody else in the office was a man, of course, and there were three of us young, unmarried women. Back then we would have been in our late '20s, early '30s. I remember that a much-publicized news article came out, I think it was in Time magazine. The bottom line of this news article is that a study had been done finding that the chances of a woman getting hit by lightning were higher than the chances of a woman getting married if she was still twenty-nine or whatever it was. I remember the three of us really did not seem very happy about the findings of this study. All of us ended up getting married eventually; none of us got hit by lightning. So, Time magazine was just wrong.

Q: I might be wrong but was there a time that you recall, maybe before your time, where if a woman got married, and she was in the Foreign Service, she ended her career, or am I completely wrong?

PHIPPS: You are not completely wrong. It was a little bit before my time. But in our A-100 class, we were told about that time, because it only ended maybe ten years or less before I entered the Foreign Service in 1983. Ten years before that, it had been the norm that only unmarried women could be Foreign Service Officers. If a woman got married, she had to resign. Also, we learned in training, back in those days, when officers were always men, their job rating included how their wife performed. Male officers were assessed on how well they were able to depend on their wife, whether their wife threw good parties, was a good entertainer, or whether the wife was not a benefit to him. This eventually became outlawed or regulated out, and the Department no longer assessed male Foreign Service Officers based on whether their wives were supportive or not. It was sort of a surprising thing that a man would be judged on whether he had managed to get a good-enough wife or not.

Q: Am I right that if you maybe are an ambassador, you have to have your spouse have some training at the Foreign Service Institute as the spouse of someone of a high official? I thought that I had heard that spouses still have to go through some sort of orientation or training. But do you know anything about that?

PHIPPS: I am not sure about that, but even back in my day, there was training available. It is a disruptive and difficult thing to deal with, to move from one culture to another and to live in a different country. To deal with a different system and a different language. So there has always been training available for family members on how to deal with the transition, how to cope with stress. Those sorts of things were always available. I am not sure about ambassador's spouses being trained on the niceties of being the spouse of a high official. If it is an opportunity for someone to enrich themselves, I do not know how—

Q: Obligatory or not. So then you moved into human rights and Soviet exposures. That would have been sometime, three and a half or so years in D.C. So let's talk about you as a human rights officer.

PHIPPS: I was a human rights officer for Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union at a very interesting time. This was the time of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. There were a lot of refuseniks--people, usually Jewish people, who wanted to leave the Soviet Union. They could not get out of the Soviet Union during the Soviet period without an exit visa and exit visas were very hard to come by. One of the reasons that the Soviet officials used to deny an exit visa was the claim that a person had worked in an area where they had access to state secrets.

There were a lot of discriminatory rules in the Soviet Union, written or unwritten, that made it very difficult for people to go into certain professions. Some of the professions that were more easily available to Jewish people were mathematics and engineering. Other professions were harder to get into. To be a lawyer was harder to get into. To be a doctor was much lower status than it is in the United States, so it was mostly for women, and it was not very highly paid. While here in the U.S. we might think of doctor, lawyer, accountant, as the professions that one might want their child to go into, to make a lot of money, that was not necessarily so in the Soviet Union. Medicine was not a well-paid or high-prestige profession in the Soviet Union. If a person wanted to get a good education, they could, in the Soviet Union. If they were Jewish and restricted from getting into a lot of academic programs, they could often get into mathematics and engineering, if they had the grades and the skills to do that. So, a lot of Russian Jews were engineers, both men and women. The Soviet authorities would almost routinely slap on any person who had been employed as an engineer a label that they knew "state secrets." Because whatever engineering project they were working on was for the betterment of the economy, and therefore, it should be a secret. So, there were hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews who were not allowed out of the Soviet Union because they had this level of access to state secrets. Some of them had been working on nuclear fusion projects and some of them had just been working on, you know, much lower-level agricultural projects or whatever.

The Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights at that point was Richard Schifter. Richard Schifter was a real go-getter and an activist. A true believer in trying to help Soviet Jews get out of the Soviet Union and to protect human rights of all kinds. During his period of leading the Human Rights department, we made up lists of Soviet refuseniks. How would we find out who was a refusenik? We would get letters. We got piles and piles, reams of letters from people. Handwritten letters, saying, "I am living in Yakutzsk, I worked in this kind of place, and I did not do anything secret, but I am trying to get out and go to Israel or go to the United States. And I have been persecuted as a Jew in this way and that way and the other way, and I have suffered through X, Y, and Z. Please can America, can you help me get out of the Soviet Union?" Remember, these were the days in the early '80s, mid '80s, when the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry was a big thing. SSSJ, they called it, and there were a lot of Jewish activists in universities, who were demonstrating to free the Soviet Jews who wanted to leave. There was another

organization as well, whose name I cannot remember at the moment, but there was a lot of activism on behalf of Soviet Jews.

American activists, students and other leaders would chain themselves to the fence of the Soviet Embassy in Washington routinely in order to make a point. The Soviet Jews were locked into the Soviet Union, and they wanted to leave and were not allowed to. They were not treated the same way that ethnic Russians were treated. It was a very big political deal back in the ‘80s, the Soviet Jewry struggle. In the human rights bureau we made lists of people who wrote to us, of American activists who would say, "we have been to Russia, and we met with the following thirty-five people who all say they want to leave Russia and have applied for visas, exit visas and have been denied their exit permit." We would get letters from all over. Some of them were easier to read, more official and typed up, some of them were handwritten.

My job was to read through all these letters and come up with a list, now we would call it a database. Before computers we had to type up a list and then you know, keep retyping it all the time, alphabetically, every time somebody new came in, (Schwartz Baelish, Schwartz Felix, and then you got Schwartz David in between), I had to retype the list, squeeze him in there. We had this big list and Assistant Secretary Schifter would routinely get in touch with the Soviet officials at the embassy and say, "here is a list of six hundred twenty-five people that the United States State Department thinks should get exit permits." The first several months, year or two, that I was there, we would routinely send out these lists and say, here is the list, here is six hundred twenty-five people. The Soviets would immediately write back like, "no, all of them had access to state secrets, none of them are getting exit permits, you know, go whistle Ambassador Schifter, we do not care."

Towards the end of my assignment, because *perestroika*, *glasnost* and Gorbachev had started to change the whole culture in the Soviet Union, we started to have ministerial level meetings with the Soviet human rights officials. They actually named a Human Rights Commission in the Soviet Union, and they would send in vice ministers. The Deputy Secretary of State would kick off the meeting and then Assistant Secretary Schifter would take over and we would sit there with the Soviet officials. We would say, "Okay, here is the list of six hundred twenty-five." By that point, they would say, "okay, of this six hundred twenty-five, we will give four hundred of them visas because we looked into it on the Soviet side. For the others, what they did really was not all that secret, but we are still denying two hundred twenty-five.” So, we would sit there and say, "we are going to go through this list of two hundred twenty five people one by one and we are going to go into their circumstances and who their family members are and what their job was. We want you to prove to us why it is that you say they had state secrets." Part of my job was to make sure there was background information filled in about where they had worked, what engineering facility they had been in, how many children they had, how old they were, and who needed to be released. We would sit there, we would have these day-and-a-half long ministerials. At the end, we would have gotten a number of more people approved to leave the Soviet Union. We were in touch with all sorts of high-level Jewish group leaders, with refusenik leaders. These are the days when Anatoly

Sharansky was still in prison, and he got out eventually. A lot of the leaders of the Jewish community in the Soviet Union got released because of the efforts of Assistant Secretary Schifter, and a little bit of my support to those.

Q: Any other issues that you were dealing with during that time besides refuseniks, which would have been primarily or exclusively Jewish, Russian Jews who were trying to immigrate?

PHIPPS: Well, all throughout Eastern Europe. There were still efforts in the Czech Republic that had a lot of dissidents. Hungary had some dissidents. Yugoslavia was still one country but was starting to fall apart. I remember a Yugoslav leader, I do not remember what his name is now, who came, met with our deputy assistant secretary and noted that Yugoslavia had been pretty stable under Tito. Tito had just died and Yugoslavia was starting to fray at the edges. This Yugoslav intellectual came and forecast that it was going to get worse before it got better in Yugoslavia. In the Balkans, sure enough, the break-up of Yugoslavia turned into the wars that we saw with Serbia and Croatian. You know, Srebrenica's ethnic cleansing and all of that. I remember that very prescient process.

Q: You were living in Washington, is that during the time that you got married and started having children? Or were you still a single person in DC?

PHIPPS: Yeah, so I was single in DC. Then I met my husband-to-be at a sort of retreat weekend. We kept in touch, then he eventually proposed, and I agreed to marry him. He was living in New York, so I moved to New York when I got married. I was in the Foreign Service and he had no interest in going abroad. He did not even have any interest in coming to live in Washington. So, I resigned from the Foreign Service and in the process of resigning, I told the people in IO/EX [The Bureau of International Organization Affairs Executive Office], who keep track of who is where, and who gets assigned where, that I was moving to New York. I asked if they ever had any need of a former foreign service officer in New York, to please not hesitate to get in touch with me, and gave IO/EX my contact information. You know, my phone number, my address, whatever, no emails back then. I let them know that I was moving to New York and I moved to New York as a former, tenured, Foreign Service Officer.

After I resigned and I got to New York, I said, "Well, what am I going to do with myself? Well, first, I am going to play at being a housewife. And I am going to sew curtains and set up my apartment." So, for a month, I did not work at all and just sort of settled into being in a new place, being married. Then I realized we needed money, and I needed to get a job. I thought about what a former foreign service officer could do. Back when I was in college, the career paths for people with international interests seemed to be either banking, insurance, or the Foreign Service.

I had resigned from the Foreign Service, so I could not do that. I still had no interest in banking, finance and insurance, so what could I do to earn money? Well, when I was in college, I worked as a typist, and I was a very fast, accurate typist. I decided to go to

Kelly Girls [an American office staffing company that operates globally and places employees at all levels in various sectors] and sign up as a temp secretary. You know, at least bring in some money and see what comes of that. So, I signed up with a temp agency. They sent me to one job as a receptionist in some medical office in a hospital. I did that for a day or two, and then they sent me as a temp to a company that did international trade in commodities. Not like commodities futures, but actual commodities like steel bars. I was the secretary to the director of this office on a temporary basis. After the second day that I was there, he called me into his office, and he said, "You seem highly overqualified for this job as a temp secretary, What's your deal?" I told him that I had been in the Foreign Service and the things I had done in the places I had been posted. He said, "Would you like to be a commodity trader for our company? I'll bring you on as a professional, as a commodity trader, and if you're smart, you'll pick it up." I said “okay, I will be a commodity trader.”

So, after two days on the job as a temp secretary, he brought me into his company. For about two or three months I worked as a commodity trader, but did not sell a single thing to anybody. The job involved a lot of cold calling, looking up in the business-to-business directory (again, still, before computers) which I used to see who used and bought steel bars. Looking up what companies were listed. What size steel bars? And so I did these cold calls. “Hello, I am calling from blah, blah, blah company and we have eight hundred pounds of one-and-three-quarter-inch steel bars, do you need them?” They would ask, how much is it? I would reply, send me specs, give me quotes. I never closed a deal, but it was kind of interesting.

The company was thinking about expanding beyond steel bars, to concrete and to paper. A few times I went down to the offices in Federal Plaza where the Department of Commerce has their New York offices, and I would look up the trade statistics books and write up a little report. U.S. concrete was exported in these amounts to these top five importing countries and imported in this type from these countries and these amounts. Just very basic little reports on international trade in concrete or paper, whatever it was he was trying to get into. His reaction was: "Oh, my gosh, I am so impressed, this is amazing! You did fantastic research to put this together." These people in business had no background in doing any kind of research at all, so, they were very excited to get research papers, and it did not even occur to them to assign that to anybody. This was before the internet. You could not just Google who imports concrete. You had to take the subway downtown to an office where they had the big books. Oh, it was different.

And while I was working there, the Berlin Wall came down. I remember thinking, I really miss being able to see the cable traffic, because all I know about these groundbreaking international events is what I can read in the New York Times. I know there is more to the story behind that. If I were in the office, I would be reading the cables and I would be able to know who was saying what to whom and what the dynamics were and what was going on. I would read all the analysis from the very well-informed Foreign Service Officers on the ground and see what it was doing to relations with other countries. I remember really missing being on the inside and feeling very much out of it, only

knowing what was going on because I had read it in the paper. I just remember wishing I were back in the Foreign Service.

And while I was working for this very nice company, very nice people, I got a phone call from the people in IO/EX who said, "I remember several months ago, you told us you were moving to New York. We just had a vacancy in the U.S. mission to the UN. We have an opening to be the head of the host country section." What the host country section does is replicate a visa unit for diplomats attached to the UN [United Nations], so you have to deal with a lot of visa questions. Overstaying visas, renewing visas, family members who get arrested for drunk driving and dealing with that. Talking to the NYPD to get the guy released because he should not have been arrested because he is a diplomat, even though he was waving a gun around on the subway or whatever his crime might have been. It was sort of consular work.

And IO/EX and the Mission wanted a certain kind of background. I did not have a law degree and they wanted somebody with a law degree. It really did not seem terribly interesting. So, I said, "No thank you, call me if something else comes up." About a month after that, after I decided I would not take the 'consular' position, the host country position, IO/EX called me again and said somebody had left the political section for personal reasons. "We have a vacancy, the Africa expert is no longer there. Would you like to be the Africa expert in the political section" Then I thought, "yes, that sounds like more of a Foreign Service job, not consular, which is not terribly sexy or exciting. Yes, I will be the Africa expert" and I came on board. Within a few weeks I said goodbye to my illustrious, non-productive career as a commodities trader, which had been at a quite reduced salary from what I have been making at the State Department. I went back to work, this time in the civil service, because they could not take me on as foreign service because I had resigned. As a former foreign service person with all the Foreign Service skills, they were able to transfer me into the civil service and the Mission hired me as a civil service local hire. The U.S. Mission has a special exemption that allows them to hire local staff without having to go through the usual civil service exams and hiring procedures.

I began to work in the Political Section of the U.S. mission to the UN. This was just at the very beginning of Ambassador Thomas Pickering's time at the UN. He was one hundred percent, totally brilliant. The most brilliant person I think I have ever run across and worked with personally. Being the Africa expert at that point (this was before the first Gulf War) meant that I went to a few meetings of the Committee against Apartheid. This was still the era of apartheid in South Africa, and in those days, when I first started at USUN, the U.S. was sort of an apologist for the Apartheid regime. Other countries were trying to stop arms sales to the South African white regime, and we were trying to block the efforts of those other countries. Our job was to be kind of obstructionist and not allow the Apartheid regime to be punished for arms sales. It was a very cynical kind of position. That was the main thing going on with Africa at that time.

In those days, in the late 1980s, the Security Council met very rarely, and the General Assembly met from October to December. The rest of the year was sort of a slow period.

We had a high period of activity from October to December during the GA and the rest of the time, maybe once every three or four months, there might be a Security Council meeting. These were the days when the Berlin Wall was just falling, when the Soviet Union still existed. The Soviets had not fully transitioned yet and they still created a lot of obstructions at the UN. The Soviet regime did fall though, and it became the Russian Federation. All of a sudden, we stopped having this cold war animosity in the Security Council and the U.S. and the Russians started to be able to work together. We had the first Iraq war -- Iraq invaded Kuwait and the U.S. went into the Gulf War. The Russians took no action in the Security Council to oppose that.

At that point, we started having lots of Security Council meetings, lots of activity in the Security Council, which all of a sudden became a functional body instead of a dysfunctional body. There was a civil war in Angola involving Cuban mercenaries, and there was a civil war in Mozambique. These were wars that the Security Council now decided should be on the agenda of the Security Council. So, the UN started holding peace talks in Angola between the warring factions in the Civil War. We started having peace talks a little bit after that in Mozambique between the warring factions. The Security Council was meeting pretty regularly to discuss these two ongoing wars. So, what was supposed to be a very sleepy job started to be a very interesting and dynamic job. We had a lot of Security Council resolutions about Angola. I do not know if you ever heard of Jonas Savimbi. Jonas Savimbi was the Angolan leader. Oh, horrible man who killed thousands and thousands of his own people. He was very self-serving, and self-aggrandizing. I was with Ambassador Pickering when he met with Jonas Savimbi. First, there were wars going on in the early 1990s in Angola and Mozambique. Shortly thereafter, during the next administration, war broke out between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Q: I think you mentioned Somalia as well.

PHIPPS: Black Hawk Down, that whole battle incident happened in Somalia while I was the Africa expert, but a few years later. So yeah, we had a lot of activity; it became a very big job. Being the African expert was very interesting. I chaired a lot of working-level Security Council meetings to come up with resolutions about the peace processes. Thomas Pickering eventually left, and after a short stint with Ambassador Edward Perkins, Madeleine Albright became the ambassador. She was personally very interested in what was going on in Angola. She would get on the satellite phone and talk to Jonas Savimbi and try to convince him to send his warriors to disarmament camps and live up to the terms of the peace agreements. He would promise to, but then would renege. At the same time, the Balkans was falling apart, with the genocide in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia. All of this was happening at the same time. The Security Council was meeting practically around the clock. It was a very, very intense time. Then, you had the plane crash in Burundi, with the death of the President of Burundi, and then the death of the president in Rwanda. The UN had small peacekeeping operations in Burundi and in Rwanda, and then the Rwandan genocide unfolded. That became a huge issue, of course, as it needed to be. The Security Council was meeting every single day about that.

Q: You were at some of those meetings?

PHIPPS: Every single one, of course. All the meetings of the Security Council's behind-the-scenes meetings of the working groups of the Africa experts that were dealing with it. It was a very intense job. When Somalia was turning into the debacle that it turned into, I was pregnant with my first child and feeling very connected to the plight of the women who could not feed their babies. I was particularly moved by things like the UN warehouse of the World Food Program having baby formula stolen by the militants. Hundreds of thousands of doses of baby formula just disappeared, meaning that women could not keep up with feeding their children. I felt that very keenly because I was having a baby myself. Then, by the time my second child was born, it was just before the Rwandan genocide. When my youngest was quite young, I went to visit Rwanda and Burundi in the aftermath of the genocide. I remember, she was still quite young.

Q: I was going to ask if you did any overseas traveling on this particular job as an African Affairs expert. Did you have to go to Africa or any of those places?

PHIPPS: Well, I had never been to Africa, I had never studied Africa, and yet they named me the Africa expert. So, after a few years on the job, I tried to make the case to my ambassador, and to the people in Washington, that it would be helpful if I actually knew something first-hand about Africa and could travel to Africa. I managed to convince the U.S. Mission (USUN) and the Africa Bureau (AF) to split the cost of sending me on a two- or three-week mission to Africa. I went to Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique (which was getting ready to hold their first round of elections), South Africa, Botswana, Malawi (where they were holding the peace talks for Angola). I also visited Kenya, because that is a hub for all the flights, and there were Somali refugees in Kenya. I went to Zaire, which was called Zaire back then before it became known as the DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo]. There were refugees who had fled Rwanda into Zaire. So, I did a whole tour of Central and Southern Africa. I did not get to East Africa. I did not get to see Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea, but I saw Central and Southern Africa. It was very eye-opening, informative and ruminative. I am very happy that AF [Bureau of African Affairs] agreed to pay for half of the travel because otherwise USUN would never have paid for it. It was a very beneficial trip.

Q: Do you have any insights into cooperating or working with the former Soviet Union or I guess, in transit? You mentioned that there was less of an obstruction in the Security Council. Can you give any more insights about working with Russia during this time?

PHIPPS: It was an interesting thing working then. I actually became quite close with some of my Russian counterparts, who were also operating under new ground rules because they were not representing the Soviet Union anymore. Now they were part of this new expanded, open Russia. Some of them stayed in the diplomatic corps and some of them left the Russian Foreign Service to do more entrepreneurial kinds of things. But I had very good working relations with my Russian counterparts. I remember feeling or maybe even discussing, at one point, with some of the Russian counterparts that, as great powers, we had a similarity to each other in our approaches on how to deal with the rest of the world, which was different than the way a small country would. The Russians had

a sense of being a great -- they did not use the word former imperial power -- but former Great Power. So that is the term of art, and you know, in historical analysis, political science, an 18th or 19th century Great Power has a different way of looking at the world. Different ways of thinking about deploying its military and thinking about the use of its power and its leverage than a place like the Netherlands, for instance, might have. They're a nice, rich country, but very small. But the Russians back then, and the U.S. now are more like the eight-hundred-pound gorilla in the room. The Chinese are coming into their power, too. It was interesting to have these sorts of discussions with the Russian diplomats about how great power thinking was a little bit different from small country approaches.

Q: A great window of opportunity there to have a different relationship with our adversary, the Soviet Union.

PHIPPS: I remember at one point I was assigned to deal with the issue of blood diamonds. You might remember when there was a controversy about whether people should wear fur, and the anti-fur animal-rights activists started throwing blood on people wearing fur coats in New York City, ruining people's fur coats. So, the people who sold diamonds were very afraid that diamonds would fall into this same category of opprobrium that fur had fallen into, because there were movies coming out and reports coming out about human rights violations related to diamonds. Bloody, violent militant groups in Africa were mining diamonds and selling them on the black market, or not even on the black market. Just selling them and taking the proceeds from the diamond sales and buying weapons and perpetrating atrocities on their citizens.

You might remember that in Sierra Leone, there were some horrible militants who were doing awful atrocities. Things like cutting off the arms of children. I remember one heart-wrenching reporting story in which the reporter had interviewed a three- or four-year-old little girl who had her arm chopped off by the militants. She asked, "When is my hand going to grow back?" You know, these sorts of atrocities were being perpetrated by people whose money for weapons and for paying their soldiers was coming from the sale of diamonds, which were being illicitly mined, but then sold on the international diamond market. Some of those diamonds might have shown up in Tiffany's and other jewelry stores. People would get engaged with a diamond ring, and worry that maybe it was a so-called 'blood diamond.' The problem was popularized in a movie, called *Blood Diamond*, with Leonardo DiCaprio. There was a fear within the diamond industry that there would be backlash -- a fear in the jewelry industry that people would stop buying diamonds. Very bad for the diamond industry, if people stopped buying diamonds. So, the diamond industry was very concerned about their image, and lobbyists came to the U.S. government and they came to the UN. They said, "What can we do to avoid this animal-activist, fur-like-type backlash that might make people not want to buy diamonds?" The UN, the U.S. government, and the other governments came up with the idea that there needs to be some sort of way to certify that a diamond came from a legitimate diamond mine run by legitimate people, not from militant groups that were going to use the money to buy arms and foist atrocities upon the people they were fighting against.

So, we sat down with the Russians, the Swiss, India and a whole host of countries -- because there are a lot of countries that either mined diamonds, such as Russia, or processed diamonds. Russia has a lot of diamonds in their territory, mainly industrial-quality diamonds. South Africa, with DeBeers, is a major source of diamonds. India does a lot of diamond cutting. Switzerland was a nexus for importing and exporting duty-free diamonds. The U.S. is a big consumer of diamonds, and the EU, again, a big consumer of them. We had all these disparate countries around the table, with different equities at stake. I remember the guy who came to represent the Russians was one of my former colleagues who used to be an Africa expert five or eight years prior to that. It was like seeing an old friend or colleague. We had a very good negotiating rapport because we knew each other from the old days of trying to solve the war in Angola, which is one of the sources of these problematic diamonds. DRC and Angola were said to be sources of blood diamonds. Our working group came up with a scheme for how to do the certification and how to make sure we were not standing in the way of trade, or harming anybody's commercial interests. We all worked in conjunction with our capitals to be able to devise some kind of certification to say that some authoritative body had checked into a diamond's provenance, and the proceeds from this diamond was not going to fuel the civil war in DRC, Sierra Leone, Angola, or wherever.

Q: You land in very interesting places in your career and timely, sometimes by good luck. But luck I think always does contribute to people who have wonderful careers, which in my opinion, you do. It looks like in November of 1996, you are moving again within the United Nations. You are moving, probably because of your background in African Affairs and other parts of your career into the Refugee and Humanitarian Affairs Expert. So that title of expert is still part of your job, but you have moved over to something a little bit more wide, I guess, refugee and humanitarian affairs. It was from November 1996 through August of 2002. I know what happened after that, but we will talk about that in a minute. You are moving over into the humanitarian efforts, relief efforts, and a creation of a branch of the United Nations to deal with humanitarian demining and the impact of landmines on civilians. So can we talk a little bit about that period of your career, November 1996 through August 2002.

PHIPPS: I made a personal-life-driven decision to move out of the Security Council and into the Economic Section. Because, as I said, the Security Council was becoming very hyperactive. Meetings just about every day on African affairs, with more wars going on in Africa. We just had meetings all the time. At this point, I had two little children and I wanted to get home to see my children before they got to bed. Because otherwise, the only time I had with my children would be ten minutes in the morning, saying, "get up and get dressed, because the babysitter is coming any minute now. Mommy has to rush off to get the subway to go to work." The workload did not leave me much time with my children. I often came home after they were asleep. I did not see my children. With the Security Council, we had meetings several times a week on African issues and I needed to write memos for the next morning's meeting. I would be in the office till all hours, and I was not getting to see my children.

Q: Or your husband.

PHIPPS: Yeah. I do not think that is perfect.

Q: Well, it must have been hard on family lives.

PHIPPS: Yes, it was hard on the family. So, I talked to my boss and the head of the economic section, saying, I just cannot keep this up. I do not want to keep working until eight or nine o'clock at night, every night and then having to catch the subway at six o'clock in the morning to be here for the morning meetings. How can we lessen this time pressure a little bit, so I can see my family? They said "why don't you come to the economic section. You have all this background dealing with Africa." The largest number of refugees in the world at that point were in Africa, before the crises in Syria and Iraq. All those African conflicts started to create a large number of refugees. Most of the refugees were in either Tanzania, or coming from DRC [Democratic Republic of the Congo] to someplace or another. The head of the economic section said the hours would be less, as the work culture in the ECOSOC [United Nations Economic and Social Council] section was not 'to see who could outdo each other by staying the latest', but to try to leave at a more or less reasonable time. We might leave at six or seven at night, instead of nine or ten at night. So, I said "yes, great. I will switch over to the ECOSOC section."

So, I switched over and I became the 'refugee and humanitarian affairs' person and dealt with a lot of the same issues, such as the African civil wars, but I was not the person primarily responsible for writing the memo for the ambassador for the next day's Security Council meeting. I just had to write a paragraph for the memo and clear off on the memo, to make sure that the refugee aspect of it was not overlooked. That meant a little bit less time pressure. In addition, they gave me other interesting other things to do, because they knew that I could handle them. They knew me from the political section and knew I had capabilities. So that is why they gave me the diamond certification portfolio and I worked with the electoral branch of the UN (the branch that certifies that elections were free and fair), because when I was the Africa expert in the political section, I worked on the South African elections, the Angolan elections and the Mozambique elections.

The UN became concerned with a new category of problem -- humanitarian demining -- which had not really been an issue in the world previously, until Angola finally began to get its peace process underway in the late 1990s. Angolan rebels had been demilitarized and life was able to go back to some semblance of normal in Angola. There was no longer an active civil war, but there were still hazards. Civilians could go back out into their fields to do their farming with their cattle and their maize, or whatever it is that they were growing, without fear of being shot. But there were still masses of landmines buried in unmarked locations. You had thousands of people going out into their farms and getting their limbs blown off. Either the rebel group or the government army group had planted landmines, anti-personnel landmines throughout the countryside. So, you had lots of people, especially women and children, disabled by having one or two legs blown off when they were just walking through the field following their cattle or hoping to plant

their crops. This was horrifying. You had all these people mutilated, because planting a landmine is a very cheap tactic. A lot of the mines are manufactured in the United States. They are very inexpensive, and it is very easy to dig a little hole and put the landmine in. Getting rid of the landmines is far more complicated than putting them in place, because first you have to detect them. Especially since rebel groups, and some of the armed groups which were not so very professional, did not necessarily keep well-detailed maps of where they planted the landmines. If, for example, the U.S. Army were to plant landmines -- I do not know if they do it, I do not, but if they were in a war situation and needed to plant anti-vehicle landmines -- I am pretty s that there would be somebody making records that the mine was located precisely at x minutes and so many seconds of latitude and longitude. There would be a record of where this or that type of landmine was positioned, and you would be able to go back and go to that exact spot and dig up the landmine.

But the Angolan rebels, the Congolese rebels, the Somali rebels and the Sri Lankan rebels, did not keep such records. They just put landmines willy-nilly all over the place. They knew which fields were used by peasants aligned with the other side, not their side, so they would place their landmines all over those fields. The challenge was how to find them after the fighting was over. And how do you dig them up? How do you prevent children and women who are working in the field from getting blown up? And getting their—

Q: What can the United Nations do about that?

PHIPPS: What can the United Nations do about it? Well, number one, you need trained people who know how to detect landmines. You need money to deploy people, you need the equipment. It turns out that bomb-sniffing dogs are very effective at this. We wanted to make a priority of highlighting this issue, because if nobody talks about an issue, then nobody does anything about it. But if you start having speeches at the UN, saying "we are appalled at the thousands of people in the last month who had their legs blown off, who were farmers and farmers' children," you start a conversation about it. People start to react in the way you reacted, like, "oh my god, this is horrible, what can be done?" So, we started this whole new section of the UN to deal with humanitarian demining [the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS)], to try to identify where the problems were, which countries had the problem. How many landmines? What is the best technique to deal with it? In some countries the issues might be different than in other countries, because of cultural differences. It might be mostly water buffalos stepping on the landlines, or mostly children. Depending on the findings, different tactics might be called for.

The United States went into a public-private partnership with, I think it was, DC Comics. They made up comic books with storylines of children who came across some sort of an unknown object. Like, "oh, what is this on the stream bank here? Should we touch it? Should we poke it with a stick?" The comic book would show the kids playing with an object that goes "kaboom." The kids would learn that this is a landmine, put there by the rebels, what it looked like, and that they should not touch it. DC Comics produced those in Spanish, for the Honduran and Nicaraguan children who were encountering landmines

left by the Sandinistas and the Contras and whatnot. There were a lot of landmines in Central America, at least there were back in the 1990s or '80s. These DC comic books were written, translated into Spanish, and distributed in communities in Central America. It was part of an educational effort so that people would be aware and look out for the landmines. There were a lot of signs put up by the UN saying "danger, this is a landmine infested area, do not walk into this field." The UN ended up doing quite a bit, sent out a lot of dog teams, trained a lot of people in how to detect landmines safely without stepping on them. That was a very interesting thing to be involved in from the get-go. Just like with the blood diamonds, we started it up from nothing and made it an issue that has now kind of fallen off the radar. Ambassador Rick [Frederick] Inderfurth was very involved in this effort. Also, there was a lot of money put into making prostheses and substitute legs for the people who ended up having injuries from the landmines.

Q: Also, part of this time, you mentioned pioneering the redefinition of refugee to include internally displaced persons. What does that mean: "internally displaced persons"?

PHIPPS: When you think of a refugee, you think of somebody who has fled from a war, right? The bombs are falling, they gather their children, a knapsack full of stuff, and they flee into the hills, or wherever. But, definitionally, where that person heads to is very important. If the person who is fleeing from a war crosses an international border, they become a "refugee." A refugee is defined as somebody who crosses the border into another country. If you flee from the fighting into the hills, or over the hill into the next valley, you might not cross a border. You are still not in your home, you still don't have a roof over your head, you don't have food, you don't have shelter, you don't have medicine, you don't have school for your children, you are still displaced. But you are in your own country, so you are "internally" displaced. The UN has a whole agency, UNHCR, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, that deals with refugees who have gone over a border. However, in the year 2000, the UN and the international community had nothing for people who had fled their homes but had not crossed the border.

Nobody was paying any attention to this problem until Ambassador Holbrook. Richard Holbrooke, may he rest in peace, died a few years back. Richard Holbrooke took a trip to Angola. He did not take me, unfortunately. I would have wanted to, but he went with other aides to Angola. While he was in Angola in December, 1999, he was going down a road in the Angolan countryside. On one side of the road, he saw squalor and people sleeping in the mud. You know, with no tents, no latrines, and no food supply. Total squalor and chaos. On the other side of that same road, there was an encampment with blue tarps that said UNHCR [UN Refugee Agency], with medical tents, school facilities set up and latrines set up. Everything in rows, lines, orderly and UN officials, teachers, nurses and all sorts of services being provided. Food from WFP [the World Food Program], on one side of the road, other side of the road total chaos. He said to the UN people who were taking him around, "what is going on? Why do we have this lovely well-organized camp on one side, but chaos over here?" They said "Oh, these people here in Angola, they came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and they are refugees, so we have a refugee camp for them. On the other side of the road, those are people who came from a different part of Angola. They are fleeing the fighting in Angola, and they

are still here in Angola. We cannot do anything for them. They're not entitled, they do not fit the definition of 'refugee'."

Holbrook came back to New York, and he called a meeting of the people on his staff who dealt with these sorts of things. He asked us "what can we do?" and the Political Counselor, the head of the political section, started to say "there is nothing we can do. The treaty says this, and the law says that. This is the way it has always been done." Holbrook was so angry, and I chimed in and said I thought we could find a way around this problem. He said, "Okay, Laurie, you are going to work on this with me." So, we started pressuring the UN system, which, of course, reacted the same way the Political Counselor did, objecting, "No, it is contrary to the resolutions, the treaties and the Conventions to provide aid." We knew this was just not equitable, it was not fair. It was not right. Ambassador Holbrooke insisted we were going to figure out how to do something to rectify the inequities. He started talking about it and he started holding meetings about it, insisting that people deal with it. He used his clout as the U.S. ambassador to the UN to effectuate change that really mattered to needy people. Eventually, the bureaucracy came up with a system where there is now a classification called "IDPs", internally displaced persons, and the UN is now authorized, by Security Council resolutions and General Assembly resolutions, to provide assistance to IDPs. Donors are required and requested by the UN to do this. Now, the same kind of help is available to IDPs, in most situations, as to refugees.

Q: So, what the United Nations can do is change policy. They cannot make laws of course, but they can change policies where they can apply their help, funds or whatever. Of course, all of that refugee aspect around the world has grown tremendously in—

PHIPPS: The UN, in a sense, can help make laws, because a Convention, a treaty, has the force of international law. Even in the United States, if we sign and ratify a treaty, then all of our laws have to be in compliance with that treaty. So, if something rises to the stature of being a Convention, a treaty, then it has the force of law. If it is a Security Council resolution -- most Security Council resolutions do not invoke Chapter Seven, which has an obligatory nature -- but Security Council resolutions are a little bit more binding than General Assembly [GA] resolutions, which are more like recommendations and have no force of law. GA resolutions are not enforceable. Certain categories of Security Council resolutions are enforceable, usually those having to do with peacekeeping operations, not the other more typical ones that simply make exhortations.

Q: We are recording the third session with Laurie Shestack Phipps and the date is July 14, 2021. We stopped last week on our second recording with Laurie working at the United Nations having several different assignments. We finished more or less with the United Nations before you went to Russia. You had worked with the Peacebuilding Commission at the UN, supported creation of methodology for discouraging trade in conflict diamonds. Earlier today we were talking about Laurie going from the United Nations in New York, to Moscow, to the U.S. Embassy in August of 2003. So Laurie, if you can tell us, how did this happen? I mean, you are working on projects that really do

not seem to have anything to do with Russia or economics, go ahead and tell us about that.

PHIPPS: Right, so. I got a copy of a cable that had gone out throughout the State Department that told about a process of being able to be seconded to posts that had an inadequate number of bidders. Because, you know, in order to fill all the different positions in the Foreign Service, people bid on the post they want. If a post does not have enough bidders, enough interest in that post, then it can be put on the 'hard to fill' list. Once a post is on the 'hard to fill' list, then State Department employees outside of the Foreign Service, but in the Civil Service, can apply for those posts.

I had heard about this process and I remember being interested in a few other positions. All of those got filled in the normal course of the Foreign Service bidding process. There was at least one other in former Yugoslavia that I was interested in, and I was at a point in my personal life where I thought it would be beneficial to have a change. I had been divorced for maybe five, six, seven years, I forget exactly how many. My children were having some difficulties in their relationship with their father. I was commuting from New Jersey to the east side of Manhattan, which is a distance of about eight miles, and it could take anywhere from forty-five minutes to two hours. One never knew how long the commute was going to take. So, it was stressful, there were long hours. I was working a lot of overtime, coming home late. I had to have childcare and I kept calling the babysitter to say, "Oh, I'm sorry, I'm delayed, please stay a little longer." My mother was no longer well enough to help with the childcare, and I wanted to see if there was a way to put some distance between myself and my ex-husband.

Because of all the tensions, I had looked into seeing if I could get a job in Washington, in the Department through the Civil Service. But that was logistically difficult, because there was not the sort of support for civil servants that there was for Foreign Service Officers. As an FSO, if you move from one place to another, the Department helps with your relocation costs, and they just give a lot of support. If you are Civil Service and you move from one city to another, that is all on your own dime, and you have to take care of all of that yourself.

As I was looking for ways to try to shake things up in my personal life, this 'hard to fill' post in Moscow showed up in the Economic Section in Embassy Moscow. Technically, when I was in the Foreign Service, I was in the 'economic cone'. I had studied some economics in college, although I did not think of myself as an economist. On paper, I had the economics credentials. I had studied Russian language in college, so I spoke some Russian. So, I decided to bid on the Russia post. The upper-level managers at the U.S. Mission in New York were not very supportive and they made it clear that they could not guarantee my job when I came back. If I were seconded for two years, they could not guarantee that I would have the same job when I came back. They also said that it was my responsibility to find someone and arrange for somebody to fill my position if I left for a 'hard-to-fill' post. You would think that is a management thing, but they were really not very helpful. They said that if I wanted to do this, I had to find some way to fill the position. At that point, I was the Mission's Humanitarian and Refugee Affairs Officer. As

the so-called ‘humanitarian expert’, I was in very close touch with USAID [United States Agency for International Development], because all the humanitarian situations involved a lot of USAID activity. I knew the Deputy Assistant Administrators, the Assistant Administrators—I had not only working level, but also higher level and high mid-level contacts.

So, I knew a lot of people at USAID. I had been in New York for a long time by this point and I recalled that at one time, the job I now had, as Humanitarian Affairs Officer, had been filled by a USAID person. That person left for I do not know what reasons, and the post was filled by a Foreign Service Officer. When that person moved on, I filled the humanitarian post. So, it occurred to me that USAID might be interested in getting that position back. Consequently, I proposed to USAID’s upper level that this post as humanitarian officer at USUN [United States Mission to the United Nations] might be something that they might want to take back. It had been, I do not know, six or eight years since they had a USAID person in the position in the Mission in New York dealing with Humanitarian Affairs. A big part of the job was being the liaison between OCHA, [the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs at the UN] and USAID, coordinating what the UN was doing on the humanitarian fronts with what the U.S. Government was doing. Managing the information flow, coordinating, making sure everybody was on the same page and knew what the others were doing. Not overlapping and not duplicating.

I made the case that it made a lot of sense for both USUN and USAID to have a USAID officer in New York. He thought about this, and USAID said, "Yes, this is a really good idea." And then USAID had to work out with the USUN Admin Section how to make the logistics of it work. Especially because there are various restrictions for the U.S. Government being able to pay for people's housing and other costs when they are in the United States. There is a very complicated situation with Foreign Service Officers in New York and how they get their housing— who pays for what. The same kind of issue arose of what would happen with a USAID officer’s housing allowance if they came to New York. How would the housing be handled? How would all the different benefits and whatnot, money wise, be handled? So, a discussion or negotiation took place between USUN and USAID Admin and HR experts. My future prospects were dependent on whether that would work out.

And statutorily, if someone in Civil Service is seconded to another position, their host agency, the agency they are leaving, has to promise in writing to guarantee them a job at the same level, although not necessarily the same job. So, I had to negotiate with the USUN Admin to make sure that the DCM [Deputy Chief Mission], the deputy ambassador, was on board with making the commitment that they would have a position for me at the same level, even if not necessarily the same one, and that USUN could work out with USAID who was going to pay for what, housing-wise. In the meantime, the person who a few years back had been the head of my section, the Economic Counselor, was now the Office Director at the Russia Desk in the European Bureau of the State Department (EUR/RUS). In the role, he had a lot of influence in the Department on the Russia Desk. He had been my boss who had made it possible for me to go to Princeton

University on a fellowship, to do a sort of 'sabbatical' year in Princeton. He was a very supportive manager who worked very hard to make sure that all the people who served under him had good training opportunities, good opportunities for career advancement, branching out and pushing themselves.

His name was Seth Winnick, and he was an exceptionally good manager. I got in touch with Seth and asked him if he would write me a letter of recommendation to be considered for the Russia post and if he would lobby for me. He said yes, and all the pieces fell into place, and I got paneled into the embassy job. In the meantime, my ex-husband decided to take me to court to try to block me from taking the children overseas. I had to work with a lawyer to push back against that and find precedents—reasons why it was not bad for the children to go overseas and be exposed to other cultures. My ex-husband fought, but he lost that battle. Then I got paneled, everything worked out and I went to Washington for nine or ten months of training in Russian language. I had a long stint of Russian language training at FSI [the Foreign Service Institute]. My mother at this point was living in an assisted living place for older people. When I was working in New York, I lived less than a mile away from her assisted living place in New Jersey, and I would go see her several times a week. Every weekend I would pick her up and bring her to my house, spending a lot of time with my mom. I could see she was mentally deteriorating with Alzheimer's or dementia, and so it was really important that I was around to look after her.

Q: What about the children while you were in Washington with language training?

PHIPPS: The children came with me to Washington, and I enrolled them in school. They got to play baseball and soccer. The hours at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] were very predictable, and much shorter than in NY, which was really wonderful for family life. When we got out of FSI classes at three to four o'clock in the afternoon, the workday was done. Whereas in New York at USUN, officially the hours were over at six pm, but sometimes I would be there till seven, sometimes till ten pm. You know, it was hard to know when I would come home. In Washington, during training, I was able to actually be with them, watch their baseball games after school. It was really nice to go do things with my daughter. I was able to pick up my daughter every day after school, which I had never, ever been able to do in New Jersey because I never was home from work when she got out of school.

So, it was a very good thing for the children, but not for my mother, since I was in another state and not able to see her as often. We had to come back to New Jersey every other week, as part of the court settlement with my ex-husband. The arrangement with my ex-husband was that one week he would drive down to Maryland, and the next week I would drive up to New Jersey, so that every week he got to see the children. Every weekend, it would either be him or me doing the four- or five-hour drive. So, I got to see my mother every other weekend when I came up to New Jersey and dropped the kids off with him. But that was not sufficient in terms of my mother's well-being, and she ended up losing a lot of weight. One day I got a phone call and the staff said she had fainted. My mother was taken to the doctor, and it turned out her blood pressure had gotten really

low and that she was forgetting to eat. So, I said, “Well, that will not do. This is unacceptable. My mother needs to be with me.”

So, I moved my mother to Maryland and that was really very good for the whole family, the kids as well as my mother. Since I had much shorter hours, we spent a lot of time together. On a family level, it was very good. On a professional level, I was going to my Russian classes, but, I have to admit, that with all these other family things going on, I did not spend as many hours after class in the language lab, perfecting my Russian skills, as I probably should have. But my priorities were just not there at that point. Then I started thinking about what would happen when I went to Moscow. It happens that my mother spoke Russian. She had studied Russian when she was in her youth in the 1930s or ‘40s when she was flirting with the lure of socialism and communism. You know, a lot of people sort of fell into this ‘romance’ with leftism, and so she had studied Russian at that time. During the Second World War she had worked in Washington for the Soviet purchasing agency. She knew Russian and she was very interested in going to Russia.

I then worked on changing my Orders so that my mother could be my “dependent” and come live with me in Moscow. Well, once again, I hit another bureaucratic snag. The bureaucracy said that the Department would not take responsibility for my mother, who was at that point ninety years old. They did not want to have any liability for her health and said I had to realize that she would not be permitted to use the medical facilities at the Embassy. The embassy provided comprehensive, quality medical care, as they had American doctors and nurses staffing a good medical clinic at the Embassy. My mother was not going to be allowed to use that, because they were not going to accept any responsibility for my mother.

I said “Okay, I understand that.” I signed up for travel insurance for her and medical evacuation insurance. One of my first priorities once we landed in Russia was to find an English-speaking medical center. There were two or three in Moscow and I signed her up as soon as I got to Moscow, having to pay a few thousand dollars so that she was enrolled with an English-speaking medical center. That ensured that if she needed any medical care, she could go there. I completed whatever paperwork I needed to sign saying "Yes, Department, you are off the hook, nobody is going to sue you if my mother slips on the ice; you’re liability-free." I took my mother to Moscow, and hired a housekeeper in Moscow who had previously worked for another embassy family that was reassigned. She was fantastic. She loved my mother and my kids. She was a good cook, a fantastic housekeeper, she was caring and wonderful. It worked out really well.

In the meantime, I started my job at the Economics Section. It was a totally different skill set than what I had been doing at USUN. I had been very good at what I did at USUN and, to be perfectly honest, I was not quite so stellar at what I was doing in Moscow. I did, I suppose, a mediocre job. I am sorry. But I had very good staff. I was the deputy in the section, and I had three people under me. One of them was amazing, another who was very good, and another one who was kind of junior but doing just fine.

Q: These were Americans or did you have Russian staff?

PHIPPS: They were Americans, FSOs. I had a really great staff. I do not think that my supervisor was totally thrilled. You know, at some things you do well, on some things, you do not do as well. I had some, I guess, self-confidence issues. Trying to move out of the box that I had been in, into another box, which is something Foreign Service people have to do all the time. They are always changing it up. But I had some very interesting experiences in Moscow. One of the issues that I worked on was the oil and gas industry. I was the trade and investment chief. Of course, oil and gas were a big part of trade. Also, whether Russia would become a member of the World Trade Organization [WTO], was a high-profile issue.

Another preoccupation in terms of trade was that pirated videos and pirated DVDs were being sold all over Moscow. That involved intellectual property issues regarding the movies and the music being stolen. The proper revenue was not going to the American artists and filmmakers, creating pressure from entertainment industry executives. We had a lot of discussions with the Russians about that. Another aspect of intellectual property, not quite as prominent as the media stuff, was pharmaceuticals. There was concern about whether Russian pharmaceutical companies were doing knockoffs of American trademarked, patented drugs. There were a lot of issues at play. Also, American industries that were looking to invest in other countries wanted a more predictable investment climate than was common in Russia. We were repeatedly trying to talk to the Russians about making it easier for foreign investment to come into Russia and for American companies to set up shop, branches, whatever, in Russia.

This was not something that the Russians were totally open to. It was several years after the fall of communism and of the rise of the oligarchs. The American economic experts who had advised the Russians on how to transition their economy led to the rise of 'gangsterism' and oligarchs. The common Russian had been given a sort of share of all the state assets. But the way it played out was that almost every Russian commoner was persuaded to sell over their share to the oligarchs. This led to an imbalanced economy and there was a lot of resentment towards the American economic experts. Academic advisors had given them what they saw as bad advice on how to transition and structure their economy. Consequently, Russians were not really happy to listen to American ideas about how their economy ought to work. It was difficult at that time for the Economic Counselor or the Deputy Chief of Mission, or even for the Ambassador, to get meetings with the appropriate-level Russian officials to talk about the sort of trade and investment issues that we wanted to talk about. There were a lot of difficulties with the oil and gas industry while I was there. [Mikhail] Khodorkovsky, the head of the largest privately-held oil company, Yukos, was arrested and put on trial. I went in and observed his trial a couple times to see how that was going. So, there was a lot of—

Q: They let you into the trials? That is almost like going to this Stalin era, Soviet trials of the 1930s. So, you were an American allowed to go.

PHIPPS: Yes, they let the American ambassador, American Embassy, comment, observe. Sometimes it was another embassy official, a few times it was me. It was very interesting

to watch that. There was a lot of tension in the oil and gas industry, with proposed pipeline deals that were not going the way that the American oil majors wanted them to go with the Russians. There was an "American Chamber of Commerce" [AmCham] in Russia and my staff or I would go to their meetings and hear about the difficulties American businesses had getting the Russians to do what American business wanted them to do. The Russians had a very different idea of where their interests lie, versus where the American corporate executives thought their own interests lie, and what they wanted the Russian to do. It was a very interesting time and there were a lot of journalists who were covering it. As I said, some very good people working in our section who were covering the incidents--

Q: Well, it sounds like, in spite of what you said, you are involved in a lot of different areas, being there and reporting. I am not sure what part of the job you felt you were not as expert as you felt you should be. Was that writing reports? Did you fear analysis, economic analysis? Were those issues that you felt a little insecure about?

PHIPPS: Oh, I do not know. I probably could have made deeper contacts and delved into things more if I had worked more on my Russian language skills when I was in Maryland. Things all kind of snowball on each other. Then that posting came to an end. Towards the end of my posting my mother broke her hip and went back to the United States. She had a hip operation, and we put her into a nursing home -- they do not call them nursing homes anymore, but it was basically a nursing home. I was going to come back in two or three months and be, again, right down the street from where she was. But she passed away while I was in Moscow. Then the children and I came back to the U.S. When I went back to USUN they said that the people at USAID were very happy having the humanitarian position back under their control. They were not going to let me come back and do the humanitarian portfolio anymore. They said I would stay in the economic section, and they were going to give me the part of the human rights portfolio that was not straight up human rights, but what they called the social aspects of the human rights portfolio. Basically, they said I would become the Women's Issues Expert.

Q: Okay, we are going to stop before we go back to New York, I have questions about you as a family in Moscow. It is not a problem revealing that I was there while you were there, that is how I know you. There you are with two young children, an aged mother, a housekeeper. Tell us a little bit about the education for your kids, where you were living when you were in Moscow, and some of the nonwork inside activities that you had while you were there. I will just reiterate, you arrived in August of 2003, and you departed in July of 2005. So it was a two year assignment, but you completed it for sure. So let's talk a little bit about what it was like to have kids, school, social life, et cetera in Moscow. I think archives would be very interested in knowing more about that in the early aughts of the 21st century.

PHIPPS: I lived on the embassy compound and it was a wonderful place for children. The compound contained an apartment block of garden apartments. I guess thirty, fifty or so garden apartments around this large courtyard with the office building that houses the embassy offices at one end of the courtyard and the marine house at the other end. There

was a lounge for teenagers with various activities in there. There was a big cafeteria, a gym, a video rental store, all in the basement concourse level of the embassy compound. All the offices were located right there inside. There was a little store, a kind of 7-Eleven type store with all the conveniences you could want. There was television service in the embassy that received the Armed Forces television. That meant there were American television shows on TV but you could also watch Russian television shows if you wanted to do so. It was very good for children. There were a number of children the same age in the compound. They would just go, and play in the gym, play basketball, hang out in the teen lounge, rent movies and see their friends. It was all very safe because it was a gated community. Nobody could come in without going through the security guards. It was all very nice, very safe.

The Marines in their marine house had a little recreation area, like a bar with a snack bar, darts and a pool table. My kids had friends in the compound. The Marines had a program that they called “adopt-a-marine.” We ‘adopted’ a marine and he would come hang out with us sometimes, we would do things together. If my kids came around the marine house, he would sort of look after them. They really enjoyed being in the compound. There is an Anglo-American School in Moscow, which is run jointly by the American Embassy people, and I think the Canadian embassy. There were some Russian-origin families who sent their kids there; not very many, but a few. There were other diplomats from other countries who sent their kids there and just about all the American children went there. The children of some American business people who were in Moscow also went there. Very well organized, very well run, very impressive school.

My two kids went there, and my son was always a good student. Always played a lot of sports and never had any academic problems at all in school. My daughter on the other hand, a very smart girl, did not quite understand how she was supposed to apply herself to academics. You know, kind of kid who all throughout, every year from kindergarten through fifth grade, even when she was in Maryland, every parent teacher conference stressed, "your daughter does not live up to her potential. She is very smart, but she just is not living up to her potential and not applying herself. She forgets her homework, she talks too much in class, she is too social, she is not applying herself."

This was a consistent issue and was still a problem in Moscow. So, we were always having meetings to discuss how we were going to help my daughter get on track. They were really, I thought, very helpful to her. The school gave her special sessions of counseling and whatnot. She really tried hard, and she applied herself. I remember there was one project, a report with ‘artifacts’ that went with it. She really tried hard, she put a lot of effort into it, but she got a C plus. At that point, she just said, "That is it, I tried my hardest! I am still not doing well, what is the use, I cannot succeed." It was heartbreaking to see how she was not reaping the rewards of putting in the extra effort. How it really undermined her self confidence, her initiative, and her willingness.

Summer came, they went back home to be with their father for a while, and then they came back. A week or two before school started my daughter, very surprisingly to me, declared "I do not want to go back to the Anglo-American school. I do not want to be

here. I want to go live with daddy. I do not want to stay in Moscow, I am not happy here." I was so taken aback, and she insisted that she did not want to stay in school here in Moscow. It was about two weeks before school was to start, so it was a real crisis. She really insisted she wanted to go back to America. So, I was talking to my ex-husband and the schools back in America, trying to figure out how we were going to pull this off.

A couple days after she insisted she wanted to go back to the U.S., she said, "Mommy, why are you sending me away?" My reaction was “Oh my gosh, like, what?! I am not sending you away, I want you to stay here. You are the one who said you want to go.” Turns out, trying to delve into what precipitated this request on her part, she revealed that kids had been picking on her all throughout that year at the Anglo-American school. She had previously been at an all-girls school in America and now she was in a co-ed school with boys. The boys were mean because, you know, you are talking about sixth grade boys, twelve-year-old boys. They are at that stage where they are mean to girls. They would pick on her, call her names, throw things at her on the bus. They were just mean to her, and she didn’t have the wherewithal to cope with that, and had kept the problem to herself. In addition to that, something had been stolen from her by one of the girls at school. She had a charm bracelet, and she had all these different charms on it. Each one meant something and had its significance for her. Somebody had stolen her charm bracelet, although she never told me this until months afterwards.

Q: Obviously she did not tell her brother either. Her older brother did not know about it, right? Or the school?

PHIPPS: These social issues were why she did not want to go back to the Anglo-American School, on top of her feeling like she was inadequate because she was not getting good enough grades. So, we came to a compromise. The school she had been in before she went to Russia was a Jewish parochial school, so I set out to find her a Jewish school in Moscow. Through my connections in the Jewish community, I knew some people who were American and were teachers in the Jewish schools. There were three or four different Jewish schools in Moscow. I ended up enrolling her in an all-girls Jewish school in Moscow and the embassy paid the tuition there and for a driver to take her to the school.

It was a very eye-opening experience for her to be there. We had a ‘shadow’ for her, a Russian speaker who was an older, seventeen- or eighteen-year old American girl, who was also a counselor, serving in a kind of intern role at the school. She acted as my daughter’s shadow, and she would help her understand some of the Russian things that were being said. She tutored her in science and English literature from English textbooks, Math was taught in Russian.

Q: Like having a mentor?

PHIPPS: Having a mentor, personal tutoring. And she became friends with the Russian Jewish girls there. The school was partly a boarding school. There were students who came just for the day, for the class time, and the students who boarded there were mostly

either orphans or people whose parents were too poor to continue to raise them at home, so had put them in this charitable institution. I remember one day my daughter came home saying she wanted to go through her closet to look for the skirts and dresses that she did not wear anymore. She wanted to give them to kids at school. I said that was really nice. She says, "yeah, I have so many things and there is this one girl who only has two skirts. Every day she alternates between the two skirts. I have so many things, let me give them to these girls who do not have as much."

There was another time when she said that she really felt bad for this other student in school because the student really missed her mother. This student was in school in Moscow and her mother lived in Minsk, which is in Belarus and maybe five hundred miles away, maybe less. She said neither the girl nor her mother had the money to pay for train fare to see each other and so they had not seen each other for a few years. They did not have the money to make the trip from Minsk to Moscow, which is not a very long trip, and she just felt so bad. So, this school experience exposed my daughter who had lived in a kind of middle class affluent bubble to the needier, more vulnerable sides of life. I think it instilled in her a sense of caring about people that she had not had to the same extent before.

Q: Yeah, it really probably helped shape her character going forward, having those experiences. I'll say, great opportunity, out of necessity in your personal situation, that was really good.

PHIPPS: It is not a decision I would have normally made. I would have wanted to keep her in the Anglo-American school. She would have gotten a lot more academics, but she would not have gotten this other, you know, more emotional, social, psychosocial kind of experience.

Q: Well when you were not dealing with your kids and your job, did you do any travel or did you stay mostly in Moscow? Or did you get a chance?

PHIPPS: Mostly I stayed in Moscow. I did one trip out to Siberia where the aluminum industry is based. I had contacts in industry, education and working with indigenous people. One person I met with worked with indigenous Siberian tribal youth, and their school had a relationship with a ‘sister city’ in Arizona with American indigenous tribal youth. I found that quite interesting. Another day, my Russian contacts drove me about an hour or two to an aluminum plant and we saw how the aluminum was produced. Alcoa at that point was thinking about setting up a joint-venture factory in Russia, so it was all very relevant to American investment interests. That was a very interesting trip. I took another trip with the embassy's Agricultural Attache down to southern Russia because there was an American who wanted to invest in a sunflower oil enterprise. We toured the agricultural districts where sunflowers were grown and processed into oil. Again, an interesting and edifying trip.

Q: Any personal travel around Russia or did you stay for personal travel? Did you stay mostly in Moscow? Or do you go to St. Peter's?

PHIPPS: Well, you and I Linda, we went and saw some interesting places within an hour or two of Moscow. I went to St. Petersburg twice. I traveled to Warsaw and St. Petersburg with the kids. I went to Ukraine with the children and my mother, because my father had been born in Ukraine. We went to see the town where my father had been born, where his parents were buried, and then went to Kiev, which is the capital of Ukraine.

Q: We are going to talk about the fact that you did come back at the end of your two-year tour, your job was no longer available for you, and they put you somewhere else. So let's go to that point in the early fall of 2005 when you got back. Tell me about that.

PHIPPS: When I got back to New York, I became the Women's Affairs Officer. This was during the Bush administration and empowering women was not a high priority on the foreign policy list of things to accomplish. The job at first seemed sort of lackluster and did not capture the imagination of the higher ups at USUN. I was relatively downhearted and dissatisfied to have this job, which seemed quite a step down in terms of what was a priority for the U.S. government. My previous portfolio, refugees and humanitarian affairs, had been very active, pretty high profile. You read about those things in the papers and people in Washington cared. When I first came back from Moscow, nobody cared much about what was going on in the sphere of women's rights.

But some related reorganization was happening at the UN at that point when I came back. The way the UN dealt with women's issues at that point was fragmented, ineffectual and low level. There were four different pieces of the UN that had different angles of women's issues. One of them was not even in New York, but was a training and resource branch in the Dominican Republic. The other three branches were headed by relatively low level, mid-level functionaries. They did not have the clout of an Under-Secretary-General but were one or two notches below that. All the women's branch heads were below the stature of the UN Development Program [UNDP], below the stature of UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund]. If somebody from Washington, such as a Deputy Assistant Secretary wanted to come up to New York to talk about women's issues, they had to talk to three different branches of the UN.

There was nobody who integrated it all together. Women did not matter enough to have any integrated approach at the UN. But there was an ongoing movement to try to consolidate these three women's branches: UNIFEM [United Nations Development Fund for Women], which dealt with development projects that helped women in third world countries; the branch that did policy and program recommendations; and another branch that basically dealt with women within the UN Secretariat and advancing women internally at the UN. There was a move to put all of those together to have the policy branch coordinated with the development assistance branch and wrap in the smaller unit of internal women's advancement at the UN. The United States government's position at first was to be against this. It evolved over time to a position where we would not oppose consolidation if we could make it work and neither have to spend more money on it, nor elevate people that we did not have faith in.

So once that became our position, the international community had two three four years, I forget exactly how many, of pretty intense negotiations on how to make this happen. Not every country was in favor of this consolidation that would give a higher profile to women. Different countries had different ideas of which branch ought to be predominant, different ideas of what the level of representation ought to be. There was a lot of discussion about what it ought to be called. Also, a lot of discussion about whether it should be focused on “women” or “gender”. Anybody who studies these kinds of questions would know that back in the '70s, and '80s there were Women's Studies. That evolved academically and theoretically to become Gender Studies, with the idea being that as things happen in the world, male, female, and other genders are looked at from different perspectives, and they have different roles. From that perspective, it is gender that needs to be looked at and one must examine how gender impacts people's abilities to progress in the world, as opposed to just looking at women. Theoretically, if the focus is on women's issues, you run the risk of the topic being marginalized off to the side, as it only impacts half of the world's people. Whereas if you are dealing with gender, men have gender issues, women having gender issues, it impacts everybody. So, the trend was to turn t away from women towards gender, at least in the U.S. and Europe. But in the rest of the world, in the developing world, there was still this idea that we ought to be dealing with women's issues, empowering women and lifting up women. The developing countries did not quite understand this idea of gender. In some languages, such as Russian, they did not even have a word for “gender”, there is just “sex”. There was no linguistic differentiation between the word sex and this concept of socially-constructed gender.

It was a very hard sell to get people to look at gender issues, but European and U.S. policy was moving in the direction of gender, rather than women’s, concerns. So, we had a lot of discussions over what the name of the new branch should be and whether it should be called a “fund”, “program” or “agency.” It all had to do with internal bureaucratic criteria of whether the organization was going to be part of the UN Secretariat, under the Secretary General on the organizational chart, or whether it was going to be an independent branch like UNICEF or UNDP. Those two are outside of the Secretariat, with their own structures and governing boards. It all came down to how much power and decision-making power certain countries would have over the activities of this new consolidated organization. If it were to be part of the Secretariat, then it would get its marching orders from the UN General Assembly. The GA would come up with resolutions that would say, "We instruct this organization to do X, Y, and Z and to work on X, Y, and Z.” The financing would be governed by a committee [Fifth Committee] within the Secretariat, that is elected and governed by the entire UN membership of 193 countries. For an organizational unit within the UN Secretariat, there is just more control by the majority of developing countries over what the organization will and will not do, what its priorities will be, as well as what projects it will undertake.

If it were an independent separate entity, however, like UNICEF and UNDP, it would have an Executive Board. Countries are elected to an Executive Board in a different way than they would be to the Fifth Committee of the UN General Assembly. So, countries like Cuba and Egypt, for instance, very much wanted the new organization to be part of

the Secretariat so that they would potentially have more control. Countries like the U.S. and the Europeans wanted it to be separately governed and have an Executive Board, because the voices of donor countries on an Executive Board are stronger than the voice of donor countries in the General Assembly. The Western countries are outnumbered in the General Assembly, but the Executive Boards are structured in such a way that the countries that are giving money for the activities of UNICEF and UNDP, World Food Programme [WFP] and WHO have proportionally more of a say in how that money is spent than if decisions were taken strictly by the numbers in the entire UN General Assembly.

There is a lot of tussling over exactly how we were going to accomplish this. How were we going to work out these kinds of internal power struggles? It took several years to negotiate this. I was the person who was the lead negotiator for the U.S. on all of these internal bureaucratic, hairsplitting kinds of discussions. In the end, we decided to not call it a fund, program, agency, division or department, but to call it an "entity." It would be the only UN "entity" and it would have a split nature, in that it answered partly to the General Assembly and partly to its own Executive Board. Formally, it is named the "United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women", but it is known as "UN Women." We had some very contentious negotiations over its complex structure. My boss, the ECOSOC Counselor, had to be brought into the discussions on what the composition and chain of command of the Executive Board would be. Ultimately, it was decided that the new entity would answer indirectly to the General Assembly, through the Commission on the Status of Women [CSW] which reports to ECOSOC [United Nations Economic and Social Council], which itself reports to the General Assembly.

The Commission on the Status of Women [CSW] meets every year in March. CSW has some authority over the program objectives of UN Women, and UN Women answers to its Executive Board, which has some programming authority over what kind of projects it does in other countries. UN Women also receives some governance from the UNGA Fifth Committee, and there is another committee whose name escapes me momentarily (CPC [Committee on Program Coordination]), which is another General Assembly body. So, UN Women has three different masters that it reports to, and the composition of the Executive Boards is determined by a very complicated formula, based on which traditional donor countries are consistently providing the most funding. Then in order to balance that, there are slots set aside for non-OECD [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development] countries that are giving money to UN Women. For instance, if Saudi Arabia gave a million dollars one year, that would earn Saudi Arabia a spot on the Executive Board.

There was an assumption in Washington, when we were negotiating this, that the U.S. would step up and give a lot of money. Since the U.S. was the primary donor to UNICEF and a very big donor to UNDP, the assumption was that the U.S. would also be a major donor to what became known as UN Women. Washington assumed that the U.S. would therefore always have a spot-on the Board. But as it turned out, Congress did not allocate a lot of money to UN Women. At that point, Congress was cutting allocations to the UN

every year and cutting the amount of money that would be given for various agencies. The U.S. was not doubling or tripling our contributions to the UN Women program the way that the Swedes, the Brits and others were doing. So, we had to fight really hard to get a spot on the Board initially, and to keep a spot on the Board. We were not ponying up the donor money in a way that would have made our Board membership a foregone conclusion, even though we had negotiated a formula that should have ensured the U.S. would always be a Board member if we gave the right amount of money. In the end, we did not consistently give a sufficient amount.

Q: Did that mean the United States was not on the board?

PHIPPS: We fell off the board a year or two before I retired. We fell off—

Q: Now we are back on?

PHIPPS: Yes. I think we are back on, although I am not one hundred percent sure. I am not following it too closely now that I am retired. People on the inside found it kind of scandalous, especially women's advocates in the U.S. When we did not give enough money to keep our slot on the board, it was kind of embarrassing and shabby.

Q: What happened to the term gender?

PHIPPS: The term gender is incorporated into the full name. It is the "UN Entity for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality." So, gender equality is in the name and for two decades or so, every year UN resolutions refer to gender equality. So, it was fairly easy in, I think it was 2010, 2005, I forget exactly, when "gender" was still a kind of obscure enough term, internationally, that we were able to get agreement to keep gender equality in the mission statement and the title of the entity. With the change of administration after the Obama administration, the word gender became a much more controversial term. There began to be, in conservative countries, a big backlash against the use of the term gender because it was starting to be defined not so much in the old ideas of the women's movement, but more in terms of LGBTQI+. It became a very politically fraught term.

Consequently, we had lots of very contentious negotiations at the UN about whether to continue to use the reference to gender equality. However, since "gender equality" was encapsulated in the name of the organization itself, the anti-LGBT contingent had a very hard time getting rid of the term altogether. We fell into a rhythm of negotiating every March at the Commission on the Status of Women. Negotiators would face lots and lots of controversy over terms like "gender", "gender equality", whether "girls" should be included in the CSW resolutions and conclusions, whether activities should be mandated to be taken on behalf of "women and girls" or only "women". In the end, the word "girls" became very controversial because there were countries that wanted to say the existence and protection of rights ought to be just for women, because children are totally different. Those countries' diplomats argued the UN should not be teaching girls about women's

rights, girls should not be getting jobs, girls should not be doing this or that. There was a lot of controversy over the word “gender”, the word “girls” and the word “family.”

Q: Oh, tell me more about that.

PHIPPS: A non in-the-weeds, just average, intelligent, educated person, would think “family” is a good thing, a positive concept. But “family”, in some contexts, is sort of code some might use for the notion of patriarchy. So, for instance, for people who want to say that “family is the dominant form of organization of society”, those people are thinking of families as in a husband and wife, two kids and a dog, your kind of stereotypical Leave It to Beaver family. The opposite approach to that is the idea that “families take many forms”, a phrase that was agreed upon twenty-five years ago, but that is now very controversial. On that side of the debate is an acknowledgement that sometimes there are single parents, grandparents raising children or siblings raising children, sometimes same sex couples are raising children, some cultures have a man with several wives. In this view, all those permutations constitute a “family.” There are many “different forms of family”, which can be argued, exist.

There is serious tension between the countries that want to acknowledge “various forms of family” and the countries that want to acknowledge “the family.” So, we would have contentious negotiations late into the night on those sorts of terms. The Commission on the Status of Women every year would choose a theme that they were working on, and it might be ‘women in science’, ‘women in agriculture’, ‘women in the economy’ or ‘women in education.’ During negotiations, everything having to do with the actual theme was usually pretty easy to sort out. We could agree on what the world should do about science education, or what should be done about agricultural workers. That was all pretty much easy to agree on, what steps should be taken. But then it would come down, at one o'clock in the morning, to whether we would say those things for “women and girls” or whether they would be only for women. Or whether it would be for the goal of women's empowerment or gender equality. Whether the steps that were being recommended should be recommended to governments, private industry and governments, feminist organizations, or to nongovernmental organizations. How you split those hairs was the recurring issue, and we would negotiate every day for two weeks until one in the morning, three in the morning. There would be all-nighters where we would not leave the negotiating table till five, six in the morning. Very contentious, very draining.

Q: Very exciting. Once again Laurie, you keep finding yourself in areas that become hotspots and out there areas. The women's issues that were, as you said, kind of more abundant, not really serious concerns at the United Nations, is blown up into the 21st century about gender and equality—

PHIPPS: Violence against women became a big thing. One year the theme was ‘violence against women’ and a new controversy popped up when we were talking about that , namely whether that should include violence against women “in areas of armed conflict.” You see, discussions about armed conflict are traditionally held in the 15-member

Security Council. However, many countries wanted to have a say in what UN Women was doing through the broader General Assembly. Those countries wanted to make sure that this new women's organization kept its hands off of armed conflict, because armed conflict was the purview of the Security Council. They did not want the SC getting involved, although, in fact, UN Women has a whole branch that deals with women affected by armed conflict.

Also, diplomats in negotiations would always reiterate the same arguments, year after year, about "sexual and reproductive health and services." The point that brought me to deciding it was time for me to leave government service was when the U.S. changed its position to saying that we would no longer allow the United Nations to mention "sexual and reproductive health." For many years, it has been controversial to talk about reproductive "services" because there was a very strong stream of thought that interpreted the term "reproductive health services" as not only including abortion, but predominantly being abortion. And then there is another stream of thought that "reproductive health services" is much wider than that. The term "services" had been controversial for years and diplomats always argued annually over exactly how to handle that. However, the idea of sexual and reproductive "health" had not been challenged until the Trump administration. The Trump administration only wanted to only talk about "maternal health", not the broader idea of "sexual and reproductive health" because of the LGBT angle of "sexual health."

When Washington changed our negotiating position guidance on the last day of a week-long negotiation, I realized it was time for me to throw in the towel on this. While I was dealing with women's issues, my portfolio was expanded to include a number of other, what's known as, social issues. So not only was I dealing with women's issues during the Obama administration, but also indigenous issues became a pretty hot topic. This was a topic that had not gotten a lot of attention at the UN before. As it became more important, a number of meetings were held in Washington and in New York with various indigenous people's representatives of American Indians and Alaskan Natives. We did not meet much with Hawaiian Native groups, but American Indian groups and Alaskan Native groups took up an interest in UN activities. The UN has a little branch that deals with indigenous issues.

The Australians and New Zealanders were very engaged in that because there are large Maori and indigenous populations in Australia, New Zealand. Denmark and Norway were very influential on indigenous issues, although at first I did not quite understand why. As I learned, in the very northernmost parts of Norway and Scandinavia, in what is sometimes known as Lapland, there are indigenous peoples who have their own language. They have a lot of political clout in the Norwegian political system, while Greenland is an important political question in Denmark, and Greenland is mostly populated by indigenous peoples. The Scandinavians give these indigenous groups quite a lot of autonomy and say in their parliamentary systems. So, Norway and Denmark were big actors along with New Zealand and Australia—

Q: You mentioned Russia earlier, meeting with indigenous peoples while you were in Russia. How about now? Who are those indigenous people of Russia?

PHIPPS: Siberian tribes, a lot of small Siberian tribes. Russia has a number of different indigenous groups and Russia at the UN usually acts as the bulwark against progress on giving more power to indigenous people. China, also very touchy, very nervous about empowering indigenous people. Tibet likes to brand itself as an indigenous peoples, you know, vis-a-vis China. The Uighurs [Muslims living in Xinjiang province] send representatives to the indigenous meetings, though China tries to block them from taking part. China is, as you know, very leery of any group that wants to separate itself from the mainstream of Chinese culture. So, China and Russia had many concerns that put them on the opposite side of the fence from the U.S., the Europeans, Australia, and New Zealand.

The developing countries, generally, were not very enthusiastic about acknowledging the rights of indigenous peoples. It had the danger of undermining the dominant cultures' hold on whatever political and economic power there was to be had. So, it was a fairly contentious issue. India was a very interesting actor when it came to indigenous peoples, because there are over two hundred plus different languages in India and different groups there want to claim indigenous rights. The approach of the Indian government is that every Indian citizen is equal and there should not be any group that gets more rights than others. Very politically fraught issue because it touches on power and who exercises power. It is not just a simple human rights question. It's not just about whether people can speak their indigenous language in their school. Thinking it's a clear-cut, black-and-white human rights issue is easy to say, until you kind of dig down. You see that allowing that 'foot in the door' starts to challenge the basis of political and economic power in certain countries. So, indigenous issues is not only a very touchy issue for many countries, but also an issue where a number of countries do not want to stick their neck out and say "no, we are opposed to indigenous rights." So it is a balancing act. That was an interesting portfolio to do.

Also added to my portfolio was the treatment of people with disabilities, and there was a negotiation for a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I was not the lead negotiator on that, but I would take part in those negotiating sessions. There was a team of lawyers and others who came up from Washington once or twice a year to negotiate the details of the Convention. Those negotiations took, I think, seven years, and at the end of the negotiation, we came out with a Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, very much based on the approaches of the Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA]. The ADA has provisions such as public places should have not just stairs, but also a ramp, and that elevators should have buttons in Braille. The ADA mandates various accommodations for persons with disabilities. A lot of the things that the United States had been doing for a few decades were included and codified in the UN Convention. Then, the United States Senate refused to ratify it.

Q: They refused to ratify the United Nations—

PHIPPS: Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Just like we do not ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on CEDAW [the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women], like almost all rights treaties. The United States refuses to become a party, refuses to ratify. We have signed them all., but we cannot get rights treaties ratified by the Senate. So, persons with disabilities were very upset. Bob Dole, Senator Dole, had been lobbying in favor of the Convention, but it did not manage to get the two-thirds ratification that it needed. It was, you know, two or three Senate votes shy.

In addition to disabilities, an issue that popped up part way through my last few years in the U.S.Mission was the topic of aging, discrimination against people on the basis of age. There was only a small unit in another branch in the UN that dealt with aging, but Argentina, and I think Costa Rica, led the charge to try to have a UN Convention, a treaty, on the rights of older persons. Latin America had adopted a regional treaty on the rights of older persons. There were a few government leaders in Latin America who wanted the UN to do the same thing. The U.S. was very cautious about that. Mainly because of the potential financial implications of a government having to support people in their old age. Think of what that could mean about social security, pensions, you know, making sure that seniors have adequate housing, that they have adequate food, water, adequate heat, the things that are not usually paid for by the government. In our system, there is concern about adequate access to health care, adequate drugs, medicines at affordable prices. All of these were things that people in Washington were not willing to "sign on the dotted line" to make the Federal government be responsible for.

Q: What I am learning through you is that we are an independent nation, the United States. We have our own laws, rules, Congress, but if these are conventions that the United Nations sets up, we are obligated to comply with those in the United Nations Convention. That is why we do not ratify them or approve of them because it would interfere with our own internal national—

PHIPPS: If there is a treaty or a convention that the U.S. is a "party" to, that carries the force of international law. Then the U.S., as all other States Parties, is obliged to modify and amend its laws in order to be in compliance with the treaty. If there is a UN resolution on a subject, that resolution does not have the force of international law, that is just a recommendation. So, a UN resolution can say, "We call upon states to do this or we urge states to do this." Those provisions do not have the force of law, the resolution is basically just laying out thoughts on what actions would be a good idea. However, the U.S. is also very cautious about what we agree to, even in a UN resolution, especially if the paragraph starts with the verb "calling upon states" to do this. "Calls upon" is the strongest verb in the UN lexicon. There are instances where litigants will go to court and say, basically, "we think our government should be doing X, Y, and Z because we approved a UN resolution that "calls upon" states to do X, Y, and Z, and we are suing the USG because they did not follow through." So, the main thing we, as negotiators, are always looking out for, in negotiating UN resolutions, was to not obligate the U.S. government to do something that, A) it did not want to do, or B) does not have the power

to do, for instance because it is within the purview of individual state governments, not the Federal government, or C) it would be too expensive to do.

Always in the back of the negotiator's mind is, “what kind of litigation could this lead to?” We had lawyers, experts and whatnot in Washington always looking into this. It became kind of second nature to read the proposed language of a resolution and say, "What would this actually mean if we agreed to this." So, we could not agree to something in a UN resolution that called upon all states to provide pensions for persons, or to provide jobs for older persons until they are willing to give up working. There are mandatory retirement ages in some places in the UN. There are various things that sound like a good idea when you first hear it. You are just kind of thinking like, “yeah, that would be nice.” But when you are thinking about it from the terms of, “will I be legally obligated to do this and if I do not, will I get sued?” it creates a different way of looking at suggested actions. So a lot of negotiations had to take that into account. I also dealt with global health issues, which entailed a lot of legalities and qualms about agreeing to things that you would think would be a very good idea in terms of global health. But if those provisions put the pharmaceutical companies on the hook to make less money and to share their patents, then that was a big problem.

Q: Now, of course, you left. You retired from your job before the pandemic, but you must be kind of curious about the United Nations in your area of health, how they are dealing with this global corrosion?

PHIPPS: I was dealing with global health when the SARS [severe acute respiratory syndrome] epidemic happened. When the swine flu epidemic happened, when the bird flu epidemic happened. There was a lot of discussion about drug resistant infections. You know how sometimes people go to a hospital where they get an infection, but the antibiotics don't cure it. Then doctors have to keep upping the dose of antibiotics and then give intravenous antibiotics. Some infections just cannot be cured by antibiotics because the bugs themselves have developed resistance. So that was a big topic. Now the current COVID pandemic is sort of the same, on steroids.

Q: You have served under quite a few ambassadors to the United Nations. Do you have any insights or comments about any of them, good or bad? I do not think that anyone is going to fault you if you have critiques.

PHIPPS: I do not think I would critique any of them. They were all very effective and very passionate in their own ways. Some were better informed about world affairs than others. There is one man in particular that I am thinking of, I will not name who, who was basically a politician, came into the ambassadorship and did not know what the acronyms were for the different UN organizations. He had a very narrow set of interests, was very interested in traveling to hotspots and making sure that he had some exciting peace negotiation to take part in. His questions would be, "Where can I go to next? What can you find for me to do?" Rather than deal with the issues that were bubbling up organically. Ambassador Albright, Ambassador Holbrook, and Ambassador Pickering were really good. Ambassador Khalilzad on women's issues was surprisingly strong.

Ambassador Samantha Power, Ambassador Susan Rice, all of these were people that I served under and all of them are very smart, energetic, and articulate.

Q: Very engaging, it does not seem as if there were a lot of women.

PHIPPS: Oh, Ambassador Negroponte. He was also very good, very professional.

Q: That is great. You did decide to retire, which you did in January of 2018. So it has been three years but you are also still working as a professor. You were teaching global issues, anything of emphasis in your teaching at Fairleigh Dickinson?

PHIPPS: Fairleigh Dickinson University has an interesting approach. FDU has a "core curriculum", where every student, no matter what their major is, has to take four core courses. One of them has to do with an introduction to university life. The next one is an introduction to how to navigate the world of work. The next one is "cross-cultural perspectives", dealing with helping students understand that different people look at the world in different ways. The thrust is to impart that whatever views and cultures students were brought up with might be right for them, but that does not necessarily mean that everybody sees the world the same way. The last one is "global issues", which is a mixture of teaching about the sustainable development goals of the United Nations, about human rights and about conflict resolution in peacekeeping. That last one fell into my wheelhouse, having worked on the UN Millenium Development Goals [MDGs] and Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] in various aspects for years and working on human rights issues for years. Also having worked on peacekeeping and conflict resolution in the beginning of my tenure at USUN.

I was teaching Global Issues until COVID. The day before spring break, I decided to do a lecture on the COVID pandemic, because it was just becoming a thing when we were about to go on our spring break. It was, as I say, very reminiscent of other global health issues I dealt with at the UN. I gave an overview of what we might expect, economically, health-wise, and how people could react in different ways to the pandemic. I said, "Guys, we are going on spring break; there is a chance we will not come back after spring break." Sure enough, halfway through spring break, everything closed down. We got the email saying "do not come back to class, switch to remote teaching on Zoom." So for the last month of the semester, I taught on Zoom.

When they asked me if I would like to teach again on Zoom the next semester, I said, "Oh no, I do not want to teach on Zoom, I never signed up to do remote classes, online classes." There were some professors who specialized in remote learning, but I never wanted to do that. I found that when I was teaching on Zoom it was very unsatisfying. When students turn off their cameras, the instructor ends up looking at a black square that has somebody's name in it. You do not know if they are listening, in the room, or if they are, you know, out on the front porch smoking a cigarette. You do not know what is going on. When you ask people to answer a question, there is just total silence. Very unsatisfying compared to being in a classroom and seeing people's facial expressions, knowing if you should dial it up or dial it back. Whether you should call on that person to

answer a question because they are, you know, looking at their phone and you want to re-engage them. It is just very difficult on Zoom. I said, "No, thank you. Please call me up again when we go back on campus." At the end of August, they are going to have some classes back in person and some on Zoom. They have given me a section to teach on campus. I am fully vaccinated, and the college administration is requiring those students who come on campus to be vaccinated. So, I will go back to teaching in person after about a year-and-a-half off. That will be fine.

Q: I am sure it will be. It sounds like you have been enjoying your new career.

PHIPPS: And you can see I can talk at great length.

Q: That is what has been so wonderful about this interview with you, Laurie, that if anyone is doing research on different projects or subjects, United Nations in the evolution or anything about Russia, you are a great source. I do want to tell you how much we appreciate your input and your contribution. It has been great. Good luck with the coming semester, teaching in person. I think there should be more etiquette rules about if you are going to be in a teaching environment, the students should be required to do some things just like in a classroom. They were required to show up, maybe they are required to have their video on.

PHIPPS: I asked all my students to keep their video turned on but when they did not, there was not much I could do about it.

Q: I see, understandable. Well, the college administrations are going to have to deal with it. That should not be up to you. Okay, thank you.

PHIPPS: Thank you for the opportunity, it has been fun.

End of interview