

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

AMBASSADOR ROBERT PRINGLE

*Interviewed by: Kenneth L. Brown
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is March 10th, 2015. This is the oral interview with Ambassador Robert Pringle on behalf of the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training. My name is Kenneth Brown.

PRINGLE: This account is based on my interviews with Ken Brown at ADST in March, 2015. It has also been informed by a recently completed written narrative of family life in the Foreign Service, not yet published at this writing and based partly on family letters. Some of the material covered in my oral history interview is treated in greater detail there.

The tentative title of the longer memoir is *Fires: A Memoir of Domestic Diplomacy*. The title is from the following verse, slightly altered, from "Fires," a poem by Rudyard Kipling:

How can I answer which is best
Of all the fires that burn?
I have been too often host or guest,
At every fire in turn.

Q: Bob, when and where were you born?

PRINGLE: Born in New York City on November 12th, 1936.

Q: Tell me a bit about your family history, starting with your father's side.

PRINGLE: My paternal grandfather, James Maxwell Pringle, was from Charleston, South Carolina. The first Pringle of his line arrived from Scotland in the Eighteenth Century.

Q: What brought them to South Carolina?

PRINGLE: Perceived opportunity, as usual. They prospered as merchants and slave-owning rice planters. They became part of a sometimes rather charming local aristocracy. In recent years, some have been quite liberal politically, pioneers of Charleston-area historic preservation and other social causes, and my parents, including my mother who of course was not a Pringle by birth, renewed ties with them.

I'll never forget being in basic training in the army at Fort Jackson (in Columbia, South Carolina) in 1958 when one of my Charleston cousins arrived to work on integrating a local playground with local civil rights activists, black and white. This was *years* before Selma or anything like that. But there were southerners who did this kind of thing. One minute I was in basic training and the next minute with cousin Margareta sitting in a room where people were disputing how they could get this playground integrated.

All that was far in the future when James Maxwell moved to New York, probably in the 1880s, because he didn't like life in the South. And there he met a young German girl from Lubeck, one of the old Hanseatic port cities, just off the boat. She had left her family after a quarrel with them, we don't know what it was about. James spent most of his life as a retail druggist.

My father, Henry F. Pringle, benefited from New York's City's public education system, attending DeWitt Clinton High School (of which he was immensely proud), then attended Cornell University. He became a journalist, was a very successful one, worked for a number of well-known New York newspapers (including the *Globe*, *Sun* and *World*), and

gradually switched to magazine work, always free-lance. He never held a salaried job except later, during The War, as we called it.

By the time I was born he had written a campaign biography of Alfred E. Smith, and, in 1932, the first serious biography of Theodore Roosevelt, which won a Pulitzer Prize. On the side, he taught journalism at Columbia University for many years before coming to Washington and working for the government during World War II as so many other people did. He was head of the Writer's Division of the Office of War Information (OWI). This period of his life is well covered in *A Life in the Twentieth Century* by Arthur Schlesinger, whom he hired to work for OWI and who remained a close family friend.

My mother was from New England. Her father was a Latin and Greek teacher, a graduate of Amherst College (class of 1885). He loved gardening, railroads and the classics, and moved a lot, as was common for teachers in those days. He ended up at Deerfield Academy where he taught for many years. My mother, born in 1899, was an only child, adored by her doting parents. They sent her to Smith College, and after that, being highly independent, she left for New York, where she met my father. They had three children, a oldest boy, Geoffrey, who was born severely brain damaged, my sister Margot, an anthropologist who now lives in Sheridan Wyoming, and another boy, yours truly. My parents were divorced in 1944, but they both continued to live in the Washington, where I grew up. My father continued, as did my mother, to write for a living.

Q: You were quite young then when the family moved to Washington D.C.

PRINGLE: Yes.

Q: And then after your parents divorced you lived with your mother.

PRINGLE: Correct.

Q: Yes. Did she speak German with you? Did she speak German at home?

PRINGLE: No, that was my father's mother, Anna Dorothea Juergens.

Q: OK, well tell me more about your mother's background.

PRINGLE: Well, as I said, her parents had sent her to Smith College, which she professed to hate. She went to New York, started working in the newspaper world, met my father and married him. He nurtured her into the writing business. She then wrote articles for The New Yorker and several other magazines.

Along the way she formed a passionate attachment to the history of the American West. She wrote three books that are still in print, under her maiden name, Helena Huntington Smith. One of them, We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowboy, is one of only two authentic memoirs of American cowboys which comprise the truth behind the vast

mythology. It was part of the basis for the Larry McMurtry Lonesome Dove series. McMurtry was a big fan of hers and gave her full credit.

She always struggled with her writing, but when she was good she was brilliant. She was a war correspondent briefly, in 1944. She went back to Europe in 1947 to cover the onset of the Cold War for the North American Newspaper Alliance and another syndicate. This time she deposited me in a Swiss boarding school, Le Rosey, because the lights were still out in most of war-torn Europe. I was there for less than a year and adored it once I got used to it, and learned limited French with a decent accent, which came in handy later.

Although my father divorced Helena, I think in a funny way he remained in love with her and he certainly tried to help her career, although he did remarry himself. But from the moment of her infatuation with the West and its cowboys and the rest of it, the marriage was in trouble, although it lasted just short of twenty years.

Q: Your father's career after that?

PRINGLE: His experience as head of the Writers' Division of OWI, mentioned earlier, was formative. OWI's staff, including people like Schlesinger and Archibald MacLeish, believed deeply in the war and its objectives, and they thought the truth could and must be told about it, not least to rally support. Telling lies about it was what the Nazis did. Some time in 1943 or 44, my father led a rebellion against what he and others thought was a take-over by advertising professionals, not writers. He was gently but clearly fired and went back to being a free-lance writer. FDR nominated him to do a history of World War II which never got off the ground. But he was never healthy, didn't get any exercise, drank and smoked to excess, fretted unduly over his ex-wife and his children (us), and died of lung cancer in 1958 when he was only sixty. I was still a senior at Harvard.

Q: But he had a second marriage.

PRINGLE: He did, to Katharine Douglas, a highly educated Californian whom he met at OWI and married after what Arthur Schlesinger described as "a well concealed office romance." They did not have any children, I think because my father was too busy worrying about us -- me, my sister, and my brain-damaged older brother Geoffrey, by this time at St. Elizabeth's in Washington. I never met him, which is the way things were done at the time.

Kate, as we always called her, was a powerful influence in our lives, indeed a second mother. It is a tragedy that she never had children with Henry.

Her mother, Helen Elizabeth Cooper, was raised on the American frontier, the daughter of a mining engineer, and then married William Douglas, a man who worked for what in those days was the Bank of Italy, later the Bank of America. Fairly prosperous, he headed their personnel office in Berkeley. Kate went to the nearby University of California. Her mother, a formidable character in her own right, was determined that she should get a

proper education, and that meant sending her off for two years of studying in Europe and learning French, Spanish, and German, all of which she did.

After that, she worked for Time magazine in its earliest days under Henry Luce. Time offered to pay young employees like her partially in shares of Time stock, which she turned down -- that was a big mistake (*laughs*). Then she joined OWI, a working girl in Washington along with thousands of others, and that's when she met my father as his marriage to my mother was breaking up.

Q: Anything more about your biological mother?

PRINGLE: Her father, Charles Huntington Smith, was a superficially austere man with a snow-white beard and mustache (his students called him "Beaver" Smith, behind his back) who lived to his early nineties. My mother told me always to be very careful with him because he had a bad temper. This reflected her own strained relationship with him, and I did not find him at all frightening.

After a typically itinerant career as a teacher in New York and Massachusetts, he was hired by Frank Boyden, the legendary headmaster of Deerfield Academy. Boyden adored New England characters, which Charles certainly was, but Boyden also recognized his skill as a teacher. Because of him, Boyden gave me a full scholarship to Deerfield for three years - I had not been doing well in school in Washington - and because of that I got into Harvard. My only regret is that he died when I was still in high school, by which time he had retired from teaching at Deerfield.

Q: Where did your mother's interest in the West spring from?

PRINGLE: She had a wealthy aunt. She always called her an aunt, although she was actually a cousin of some kind, who showered her family with gifts and treated her to a trip to Glacier National Park not long after she graduated from college. She was completely swept away by this experience.

But her interest in the cowboy west was not exclusive. She wrote on many other subjects, for magazines mostly: *The New Yorker*, *Woman's Home Companion*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *American Heritage*, and others, and I've already mentioned her experience as a war correspondent and later in Cold War Europe.

Q: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

PRINGLE: She wrote an early book on the travails of childbirth, *Damned if They Do*, which has become a minor feminist classic. But she never saw herself as a feminist in the conventional sense. She wanted equal rights in terms of getting her writing published. And she was mad that they wouldn't let go her the front lines when she was a war correspondent, although she witnessed the Battle of the Bulge in January 1945, when the German Army punched through the allied lines in the Ardennes, near where she was staying, in a last desperate offensive. She wrote one of her best articles about it for

American Heritage, with the awkward title "A Few Men in Soldier Suits" (not her idea - and not published until 1957). But I think she liked men too much to be a full-blown feminist.

My father was an out-and-out liberal politically. My mother was liberal, but very much on her own terms. She didn't care for the "Easternness", if you will, of the liberal establishment. But she was also full of contradictions.

Q: But she didn't remarry?

PRINGLE: No.

Q: What name did she write under?

PRINGLE: Helena Huntington Smith, which was her maiden name.

Q: Did you share this interest in the West?

PRINGLE: No. My sister Margot did. She and my mother were all about horses and The West and everything. I was little Bobby, I was just the younger brother and I didn't like horses. I was afraid of them, they put me too high up in the air. At one point Margot tried to teach me to ride, quite lovingly, but I was hopeless. I was never a good athlete of any kind. And I was rebelling I think, or reacting, against this thing, certainly against horses. I was the second in most ways, of the two of us, as far as my mother was concerned. Margot was of course the oldest.

But there was no shortage of love as a result of Helena's divorce from my father. My parents were competing for our affections and that of course was very stressful, especially for Margot, who was old enough to understand what was going on, whereas I was not. But it was far from being a stereotypical divorce where the children are abused. Both of my parents would have thought that such a thing was barbaric.

My father had rights to only two weeks of visitation under the divorce settlement -- he was also paying alimony and child support to my mother -- but there were plenty of other times when he took us on. For example, when my mother went to Europe as a war correspondent during World War II, Margot and I stayed with my father and Kate.

Q: So you grew up in Washington, DC then?

PRINGLE: For the most part, yes.

Q: And where did you live?

PRINGLE: We arrived in the early days of World War II, and you lived where you could. We ended up renting a house on Argonne Place near Sixteenth Street and Columbia Road, in what is now called Adams-Morgan. It was a row house, still there. After the

divorce, my father bought a house in Georgetown at 3319 N Street, right up the street from where the Kennedys later bought their first house in Georgetown. Later, in the early 1950s, my mother moved to Alexandria.

My schooling was haphazard. The first few years were at H. D. Cook, a public school which is still there. It was segregated like all DC public schools at the time. Then I switched to a private school, Sidwell Friends, not yet the fine school it later became, and I didn't care for that very much. When my mother went abroad in 1948, as mentioned earlier, I went to Le Rosey, in Switzerland, now one of the most expensive private schools in the world. All sorts of people were there, including the future Aga Khan and the future King Baudouin of Belgium.

Q: When you were there?

PRINGLE: In 1947-48, and it was a rude shock at first. I arrived after the school year had started. It was located at Rolle, on Lake Geneva, but the entire school moved to Gstaad in the Bernese Alps during the winter. It was bilingual, in French and English, and I had almost no French. But I learned pretty fast. And I ended up loving it, even though I never learned to ski properly partly because Gstaad got practically no snow that winter.

Back in DC, I went to Georgetown Day School in its very earliest days when it was out on Nebraska Avenue. It was considered to be "progressive." But it was mostly just informal. We sat on our desks and called the teachers, including the headmistress, by their first names. It was in an old Eighteenth Century farmhouse off Nebraska Avenue, where one of the big broadcast networks later built its headquarters. It was more fun than monkeys.

But GDS ended after the sixth grade and then I was sent to Landon and I did not do at well there. Finally my mother went to Frank Boyden of Deerfield, and said "I've got this kid and he's sort of -- it's not that he's a delinquent. It's just that he's not going anywhere and he's not enjoying it and he seems to have bad people as friends and.... Will you take him?" and he did. I did well at Deerfield, and since Boyden decided who would get into which university -- that is the way the world worked then -- I was admitted to Harvard, based in his recommendation. End of discussion. No helicopter parents, no fuss, no muss. None of the trauma that goes into the modern college admission scene.

Q: Tell me more about your childhood. Was it the typical childhood in DC.? What do you recall? Was it pretty much what other kids do? You didn't like horses, you didn't like sports.

PRINGLE: I loved to read. I loved history. And my favorite course at Landon was a geography course, but the teacher, who was very good, had everybody do a foreign policy project. So I remember that my project was China. Well, this was 1949 and the civil war was raging in China. I would clip *The New York Times* every day until I had a notebook full of articles on China. It was a wonderful experience, in spite of the mediocrity of Landon generally.

Q: So you move on to Harvard. Did you choose a major right away?

PRINGLE: Yes. *The Harvard Crimson*, it's called. Academics were, to my subsequent regret, a secondary concern. And because my parents were all writers I decided to be a photographer instead. So I had a wonderful time being a photographer for the *Crimson* and doing almost no studying at all, with a few notable exceptions.

Q: You didn't have to study at Harvard?

PRINGLE: Maybe a little bit, but you could slide by, at least in the humanities, with minimal work. However, I presumed too much at first. In my first semester I slept through two important tests, "hour exams," on the same morning. And the university wrote a letter to my father who of course was horrified. The university knew him because he was paying the bills with my child support payments, \$100 a month. Tuition was about \$1,000 a year, plus another thousand, plus change, for room and board. Even if you inflate that, it looks pretty cheap today.

At Deerfield we had been totally regimented, in a very nice way. There were no penalties, reprimands, or demerits for being late. We had no opportunity to do something as stupid as sleeping through two serious exams. After I told my father to calm down, and I wouldn't do it again, I didn't.

Q: But you had to have a real major at some point?

PRINGLE: Yes, I majored in American history. And I did study hard now and then despite the *Crimson*. For example, Frederick Merk, a student of Frederick Jackson Turner, was still teaching "The History of the Westward Movement" and he allowed no nonsense. He gave wicked quizzes with questions like, "Where was the center of hog production in 1847?" and if you cut more than two of his lectures in row you would get a little hand-written note from him wondering where you had been. This was heresy at Harvard, but it worked. Indeed he was a hugely effective teacher.

By this time my sister had studied anthropology and had continued my mother's professional interest in the West. In her case it was American Indians. I was definitely interested in that. So I did an American History honors thesis on the history of the Northern Cheyenne Indian tribe during the time after they were confined to a reservation, which was near where she lived, having married a cowboy herself.

Q: Oh really?

PRINGLE: So they were living out there hoping to acquire cattle and buy land and the cattle would multiply. They would get wealthy and everyone would live happily ever after, and Margot would earn money from her anthropology. Well, needless to say, that didn't quite work, for a lot of reasons. But I got interested in these Indians because they are a truly remarkable group.

To do research for my thesis I came home to Washington (actually Alexandria by this time) for a month or so, and worked on unpublished documents at the National Archives, in their "Indian Room." There I reconstructed the extraordinary forty years in which every ten or fifteen years U.S. Indian policy changed and the Northern Cheyenne, like others, would be jerked from doing one thing to another - first living on handouts from the U.S. Army, then trying to be farmers, then cattle ranching, and then wage work with the Civilian Construction Corps (CCC) under the New Deal, perhaps the most successful period. The constant insecurity resulting from these changes did not improve their already not-too-great state of affairs.

There's an interesting end of this. If you fast-forward to today, the Northern Cheyenne tribe has become more and more concerned with its own identity and with its own history, and so forth and so on. And they may even publish my fifty-year-old plus honors thesis.

My thesis received praise from three senior professors and a grade of "Summa Minus" on the thesis, which enabled me to graduate respectfully, Magna cum Laude, in spite of having done damn all in the way of serious work on almost everything else - and neglecting numerous opportunities along the way, like learning another foreign language. However, I still enjoy photography.

Q: Well, how could you get by in Harvard without doing serious work?

PRINGLE: Because Harvard is greatly overrated in that department. Still is, apparently, unless you are pre-med or need to get into Law School. You learn how to take exams. And I got B-, B+ type grades, with the occasional C or C-. I *never* would have graduated with honors without the thesis. That made all the difference.

I should say that this kind of behavior was easy for me, because I had done a lot of reading, I had had a lot of exposure to politics at home, including much adult conversation, and I inherited some fluency in writing.

Q: When did you graduate from Harvard?

PRINGLE: 1958.

Q: And then did you do graduate work?

PRINGLE: No, because I didn't know what I wanted to do. I could have gone to graduate school anyway, and gotten out of the draft. But I thought, why not go in the Army for two years? It might be a useful experience. I felt the need to think about my future. I suppose if Peace Corps had been around, AmeriCorps, anything like that, I could have gone in that direction. But I did the two years in the Army and it was a good experience for me.

Q: What branch of the Army were you in?

PRINGLE: I started out as Signal Corps, because they asked me "You -- what do you want to do? What are you?" This was to assign me a Military Occupational Specialty, or MOS.

And I said, "I'm a writer/photographer," because that's what I had been on the *Harvard Crimson*.

And they said, "You can't be that. You've got to be either a writer or a photographer."

So I said, "Well, I'll choose photographer." And I got sent to White Sands, New Mexico, home of the White Sands Missile Range. It turned out to be not so good. I had thought it would mean taking interesting pictures of missile launches. But civilian Civil Servants did all that. All I did was really boring, like photos of on-base automobile accidents, and promotion ceremonies, than which nothing could be more tedious.

What I could get from the Army, I decided, was some foreign experience. I had eighteen months left. A European assignment was three years, so that wouldn't work, but Korea was only a twelve-month tour; why couldn't I go there? The Korean War was long over and it sounded interesting. But I had the wrong kind of serial number.

Q: What do you mean?

PRINGLE: Although I had *volunteered* for two years of active duty, I had a serial number beginning with "FR." While the tour of duty was the same as for normal, non-voluntary draftees, they were being sent to Korea, often against their wills. And they had serial numbers beginning with "US." It was my introduction to the stupidity of the military bureaucracy.

My mother, pursuing her Western interests, knew the senior staff person for the then-senior senator from Montana, who was, shall we say, very elderly. This guy ran the whole office. So he told my mother, "I'll write a letter and the senator will sign it and he'll be out of there and on his way to Korea in a twinkling."

The next thing I knew I was literally being frog-marched around White Sands Missile Range by two majors telling me that I'd ruined my military career by exerting political influence. And within a month or two I was on a transport ship going to Korea by way of Seattle and Japan. Then I had a full year in Korea, in Seoul, where I worked for the Public Information Office. It changed my life.

Q: What did those duties involve?

PRINGLE: It was not exciting. We wrote tedious press releases, mostly (again) about traffic accidents, all too often about an Army truck running over a Korean child on a narrow village street between Seoul and the demilitarized zone to our north, along which most of our combat units were located.

Occasionally I wrote articles for *Stars and Stripes*, the US Military daily printed in Tokyo, but most of that was done by their own Korea Bureau. I dearly wanted to be part of that. They their had own quarters in the newspaper's warehouse, in what was then the countryside, on the way to the Seoul airport, with no non-coms or officers within miles, whereas I was in a 900-person headquarters company, with thirty generals from three major commands - the UN Command, US Forces Korea, and the US Eighth Army -- all with large staffs.

We lived in old Japanese barracks in the former Japanese headquarters at Yongsan. Most of us were college graduates. We had some Koreans serving with us, many of them also well educated, with whom we became friends. We also had Korean houseboys who made our beds and shined our shoes. We paid them with cartons of cigarettes, I believe two cartons a week per GI and purchased at the PX. The houseboys then sold them on the black market for a tidy profit. So we were not exactly suffering.

During our twelve month tours we got two -- two! -- free, paid R&R ("rest and recuperation" - ha ha) trips to Japan, where you could stay for almost nothing in wonderful hotels that our military still had in Tokyo and vicinity. Rooms cost about five dollars a night. Everything else was paid for.

And Korea, as I had hoped, turned to be anything but a waste of time. We were able to see the sights of Seoul and attend meetings of the British Royal Asiatic Society, which sponsored lectures on Korean culture and tours into the hinterland. That enabled us to meet diplomats from all countries.

It is fascinating to recall that almost none of our foreign friends, technicians, economists, etc., had a good word to say about the future of Korea. They thought the country was hopelessly mired in poverty. Our aid programs, hobbled by corruption, were going nowhere. The educated Koreans were mostly still in the north. The ones in the south were peasants, "slick boys" skilled mainly at stealing from the US Army. Almost five years after the armistice, Seoul was still largely a slum.

No one we met recognized what later became apparent: an extraordinary thirst for education. Any GI, no matter how uneducated, or crude his own speech, could make good money by teaching English to these impoverished people. That thirst would turn the country around much faster than anyone realized.

Before long we hatched a great idea. We found out that the USAID Mission, in collaboration with the US Information Service, had considered a project to support Korean 4-H clubs. It never got off the ground, but they still had lots of unused 4-H pamphlets in Korean and English. So we decided, in collaboration with some Korean university student friends, to start our own 4-H project.

We found some GIs who were from the Midwest and actually knew about farming! Then we went to a nice lady lieutenant colonel in charge of civil-military relations (G5) and she

agreed to assign a three-quarter ton military truck to us on weekends, the GI equivalent of heaven.

Thus began many weekend days of visiting a thatch-roofed village overlooking the Han River, in an area long since paved over with high-rise apartments. It is debatable whether the villagers learned much from us, although they did start a 4-H club, but they appreciated the attention and all concerned had a grand time.

My colleague in the 4-H project was a brilliant character who became a good friend, Herb White (now deceased), a Georgetown University graduate, sometime artist, and born entrepreneur, later a pillar of the Washington DC art scene. It later turned out he was gay as could be. I didn't know that for decades, even after I traveled with him for almost a year. All I knew was that he wasn't interested in girls.

Herb discovered that if you asked the Army to give you your separation papers when you had finished your year in Korea, you retained a right to go back to the United States ("CONUS" = Contiguous United States) at military expense. All you had to do was to present yourself to the nearest US military base wherever you were, with your separation orders -- and of course we had bases all over the place at that time -- and say, "I've had enough fun, besides I'm out of money now. Would you please take me home?" I was separated from active duty in Korea on November 15, 1960.

We took advantage of this invitation to travel for a little over a year, first in Japan, then Hong Kong, Southeast Asia and back to Europe through India, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and finally through Europe. I discovered I could support myself by writing newspaper articles along the way, mostly for the Quincy (MA) *Patriot Ledger*, a very good little newspaper, still alive and well, on greater Boston's South Shore. They paid me \$15 an article and \$5 per photo. I air mailed them the text plus negatives, and they would send me a check to the American Express office at our next stop. By the end of our rambles I was averaging about \$100 a month, enough to cover my travel expenses.

Q: Did you make it to Vietnam?

PRINGLE: Yes. I had gotten some advice from a professional free-lancer in Korea, and he mentioned that the American Catholic Maryknoll Order was always on the lookout for stories about their missionaries for their magazine. I did an article on one of their priests in Hong Kong and another in Vietnam, Father Duchesne. The latter was running a big American PL480 food aid program based in Saigon.

This was late in 1961. CHECK. The war was heating up, we had just sent our first military advisors to the country, and when Father Duchesne took me into the countryside we saw a bridge that had been burned the previous night by the Viet Cong.

After that Herb and I went by taxi across the border with Cambodia, at outrageous speed -- it was quite dangerous by that time -- to Phnom Penh, and then through Thailand and Malaysia to Singapore.

Q: You traveled by hitching rides?

PRINGLE: A combination of hitchhiking, riding busses, whatever was cheapest; learning from other back-packers along the way. Initially, I got a ride from Tokyo to Saigon on a Norwegian freighter with a Chinese crew (at that point Herb had split off to work for a few months in Iwo Jima for a US contractor). And there was this wonderful French passenger line called *Messageries Maritimes*, or MM. It was the maritime equivalent of UTA (*Union de Transports Aériens*), a kind of second-class, government-owned service for the colonies, as oppose to the ritzy Air France and French Line.

It had three ships, the Laos, the Cambodge, and the Vietnam. The cheapest fares, for dormitory (*dortoire*) class, got you a bunk in a cavernous section of the bow with no partitions, that could take a couple of hundred passengers sleeping on stacked canvas bunks attached to stanchions. Any ticket on MM included meals and all the wine you could drink. This taught me that French are fully capable of producing undrinkable wine.

Q: That's quite a story.

PRINGLE: We went all over Ceylon thanks to a Ceylonese friend met on the road, then by train from Colombo to Calcutta, and then all around India with a side trip by DC-3 to Nepal, which had just opened for tourism and was utterly medieval. By this time (July 1961) we had learned that Sikh drivers would take you on their trucks anywhere in India for nothing, and you could sleep in Indian Railway waiting rooms, another free privilege allowed only to foreigners.

From Pakistan we took a spectacular train across the Baluchistan desert to the Iranian frontier, at Zahedan. It had been built to protect British India (which Pakistan was still part of) from raiding Afghan tribes, and was still using its original equipment, including broad-gauge steam locomotives refueled with big iron buckets of coal.

Once in Iran we hitchhiked to Shiraz, where we stayed with Louise (Laylin) Firouz and Nancy Firouz, her wealthy, US-educated, Iranian husband. They were trying to modernize Iranian agriculture. The Shah was still in power, but they had plenty of trouble with the Iranian Army, which wanted to use their land near Shiraz for a tank range. Louise was well known for discovering a lost breed of miniature horses, known as "Caspian Ponies," with help from, among others, HRH Prince Philip. She outlived Nancy and died, still in Iran, a few years ago after writing a wonderful memoir, *Riding Through Revolution*. [Louise Firouz with Brenda Dalton, *Riding Through Revolution*, Advanced Global Publishing Inc., 2013]

I took copious photos and put together a big album on the entire trip entitled "the Great Globetrot," during the govern shutdown and blizzard of 1996, with all my Quincy *Patriot Ledger* (etc.) articles.

Q: So that lasted until 1961. At that point you got your free military transport back to the U.S.?

PRINGLE: Right.

Q: And settled in DC?

PRINGLE: At that point my mother kept saying, "You've got to get a job." One of her funny sides was that, freewheeling she was, she was always worried *to death* about money and saying to me "Why don't you do this, why don't you do that?" So I got odd jobs, none of which worked very well. I discovered I would *never* make a competent plumber under *any* circumstances, and so on.

Finally I got a job, thanks to a *Crimson* friend, with the Pat Monroe News Bureau. It was the Washington bureau for a few newspapers that were too small or cheap to have their own Washington correspondents. Such papers could either rely on the wire services to cover Washington news of interest to them. Or they could share a Washington staff with some other newspapers. So we had about four or five newspapers and other publications, including the *Albuquerque* (New Mexico) *Journal*, the *Lincoln* (Nebraska) *Journal*, and one big one, *Chicago's American*, now defunct, not to mention *Editor and Publisher* and *Western Farm Life*.

I got to hang out in the Senate press gallery, and once I met Lyndon Johnson (then Vice President), in an elevator. He thought I was the elevator boy, and blew up at me when I took him to the wrong floor, so I got a taste of the famous LBJ temper.

And once, just once, in the dog days of summer, when most reporters were away on vacation, I got President Kennedy to recognize me at one of his regular press conferences, then being held in the State Department auditorium. Creation of the Peace Corps had just been announced, and readers of the *Albuquerque Journal* wanted to know why it was going to be serving only foreigners, and not American Indians? The President nodded gravely, said he didn't know, and sent me off to Sergeant Shriver who told me that plans for a domestic "Peace Corps" were in the works.

That job lasted about a year. By that time I knew that I didn't want to be a career reporter. My father had always told me it was not a good way to make a living -- he always wanted me to be a doctor. So of course I didn't even think about *that*. And I did not care for the press habit of deciding communally what was "the story" of the day, which everyone would then have to chase, as instructed by their editors, in a pack.

I was on my way to figuring out that I wanted to join in the Foreign Service. I liked the FSOs I had met, they seemed uniformly to be bright people who were doing interesting work. But, having grown up in the McCarthy era Washington, I thought I'd better get a PhD, something that I could fall back on if I ever got purged from government service. I decided to go to Cornell and study Southeast Asia, because I'd been attracted by the diversity of Southeast Asia on my trip home from the Army. I applied to Yale and

Cornell, and got into Cornell which had the best Southeast Asia program anywhere at that time.

Q: So that was in '62. What was your field research focused on?

PRINGLE: I was interested in tribal minorities. That was partly because of my work on American Indians. I knew that there were such minorities scattered all around Southeast Asia. Often they were mountain people, with the majority groups (Thai, Malay, Vietnamese, etc.) being lowland or valley people. Those in Vietnam and Laos, collectively known as *Montagnards*, had become quite famous because they were fighting mostly on our side against the North Vietnamese communists, not a good idea in the long run for them.

These mountain or upriver minorities were beloved by anthropologists, but ignored by historians. I decided to do a history of such a group, focusing on its relationship with the relevant colonial power and majority society. I chose the Iban people of Sarawak, a state on the island of Borneo, once ruled by a British family, the Brookes, until World War II. The Ibans were famous as head hunters (*not* cannibals) and the Brookes, who were not wealthy, used them as an unpaid army against their local foes, mainly the Sultanate of Brunei at first, and later other Ibans. They did not get paid money but were permitted to keep the heads they took in the service of the Rajah. Anyone interested in this stranger-than-fiction tale can read the book based on my PhD dissertation and just republished in a new and improved edition by the University of Malaysia Press, forty-five years after the first edition. The title is *Rajahs and Rebels: The Ibans of Sarawak under Brooke Rule*.

I was incredibly lucky to have as a thesis advisor Oliver (O.W.) Wolters, a former British civil servant who had been a district officer in Malaya, and had just arrived at Cornell to teach early Southeast Asian History. Trained in Chinese, he had, after his retirement, done his own doctorate on the history of Srivijaya, an early Indonesian state and precursor of Singapore -- there has always been one state that controlled the Strait of Malacca and serviced the trade transiting it. Wolters did his thesis partly by analyzing Chinese records of their pharmaceutical trade with island Southeast Asia.

He was a totally brilliant character, and a marvelous teacher who excelled at bringing his often abstruse subject alive. While many of my student colleagues thought I must be mad to be considering a diplomatic career, Wolters, not surprisingly, thought it was normal and admirable and cheered me on.

Q: Had you taken the Foreign Service exam at that point?

PRINGLE: I did while I was at Cornell.

Q: And at Cornell?

PRINGLE: Well the main thing was meeting Barbara, an undergraduate history major from Cincinnati five years younger than I was. That happened in 1964. My expenses were almost totally covered by the government under the National Defense Education Act. I qualified by studying Indonesian (Malay), and I had a small additional stipend because of my military service. Thanks to the Cold War there was plenty of money available for area studies, and by the time I met Barbara I had successfully applied to the London [University] - Cornell Project, which had just been established to encourage cooperation on China and Southeast Asia studies between the two universities. All I had to do was visit London both coming and going, first for additional research and more language training, and later to report on my findings. It was really tough.

I was initially worried that having a spouse might be a problem, so I asked the professor in charge of London-Cornell, Bill Skinner (famous for work on the Chinese in Thailand), what could be done. "Oh," he said, "We will have to increase your stipend."

Q: What did you do in London and Sarawak?

PRINGLE: In London we both studied Malay, the variant of Indonesian used in Malaysia, including Sarawak, at SOAS, the School of Oriental and African Studies. I took courses, mainly in anthropology at LSE, the London School of Economics, which, you may not realize, has an excellent anthropology department.

I also traveled to mostly southern districts like Kent to interview retired Sarawak Civil Servants, who were amazed that a young American should be interested in their old home, and were warmly hospitable. It goes without saying that we totally enjoyed London. We were there for Churchill's funeral.

In Sarawak we lived in Kuching, the state capital. Barbara taught at Batu Lintang, the local teacher training college. I worked in the Sarawak Archives, part of the small but excellent Sarawak Museum. We both traveled around interviewing old Iban men in longhouses. Most importantly, thanks to an arrangement between Cornell and its sometimes irascible Curator, Tom Harrison, I had a partnership with the traditional tribal historian, Benedict Sandin, who later became the Curator himself. I helped him to do a book, and he shared with me his vast knowledge of Iban oral history. He could give me their version of events, which often provided a rich additional dimension to what I found in the archives.

This was not a hardship experience despite a low-level Chinese insurrection in Sarawak related to the one in peninsular Malaya and a low key, quasi-war with Indonesia, which, under Sukarno, was trying to "crush" the state of Malaysia, then in its infancy. We had a British (Northumberland) Army ambulance unit quartered a few blocks away. When Barbara got a high fever they drove her to the small but excellent local hospital. She, being a local government employee, had to pay thirty American cents a day for a private room. You could drink the water in Kuching, the last of our foreign "assignments" where that would be possible until South Africa, three decades later.

Q: Sarawak is known for its indigenous sculpture too. Did you take any interest there?

PRINGLE: We were very much interested in the local art, which of course has much in common with that in other areas of Borneo.

We left Sarawak in mid-1966. I had some time to kill because although I had finished my research, I was not expected in London, to report on my findings, until the fall term began. Barbara preceded me back to Ithaca to find a place to live and start the fall semester while I finished my thesis - and she wrapped up her own MA on Medieval European History with a genial but very demanding paleographer, James John.

Q: You had taken the exam for the Foreign Service and came into the Foreign Service in '67.

PRINGLE: Correct. I left Barbara in Ithaca getting things settled there

Q: What about in your A100 class? What do you remember about the A100?

PRINGLE: I thought it was fine. I didn't have any complaints about it. I remember thinking the consular segment was wildly difficult and how on earth were consular officers supposed to do their jobs on the basis of so little and so rapid training.

Q: Was this -- were there women in your course?

PRINGLE: Indeed there were.

Q: And were there any minorities in your class? What about the diversity otherwise?

PRINGLE: I must say I do not have strong memories of my A100 colleagues. I do remember that we had a great-grandson of Theodore Roosevelt. Other than that I have remained friends with a few individuals, including Dick Hecklinger, who has been a neighbor in Alexandria. And that's about it. It is a fact that we were not concerned about diversity the way we are today. That goes for me, even though I grew up with a father who had several close friends on the Howard University faculty and wrote about "Negro" issues, and I personally attended Georgetown Day School, the first private school in the DC area to admit blacks.

Q: What do you recall from your Foreign Service oral?

PRINGLE: Mainly that it was a piece of cake! It was just not challenging at all.

Q: Did you sit in front of three people and --

PRINGLE: Yes.

Q: Because this is before they made the change to include a group exercise, that sort of thing. Were there any sort of off the wall or challenging questions?

PRINGLE: Not that I can recall. It was a very friendly -- they obviously thought I was qualified and were probably impressed that I was the oldest person in my A100 class and had a relevant PhD, with the dissertation on the way to being published. They were going to pass me and it was rather pro-forma. Maybe that's what the new system was intended to correct.... Or maybe it made sense.

Q: My experience wasn't quite like that.

PRINGLE: Perhaps mine should not have been.

Q: So you entered the service in '67. You did your A100. You did some consular training.

PRINGLE: Right.

Q: And they sent you off to your first assignment in 1968, to INR (the Bureau of Intelligence and Research), is that correct?

PRINGLE: Yes. It was because Tom Hughes, who was then director of INR, needed a replacement for a junior officer FSO staff assistant who had been "dissing" those of his office directors who were from academic backgrounds. Hughes liked a mix of insiders and outsiders for his regional office directors, including FSOs, Civil Servants and academics, a policy which I think made great sense. What mattered to him was talent, and diverse perspectives. The outsiders included Fred Green, from Williams, a China specialist, and Helmut (Hal) Sonnenfeldt, a Sovietologist, later Kissinger's NSC director, and another well known academic with Middle Eastern specialization. These people served for at least one or two-year terms.

Anyway this young man was not treating the professors with respect, and Hughes thought that I would know enough to avoid doing that.

Q: How did he know about you? Maybe he was searching for people and somebody sent your file.

PRINGLE: I don't know. But I'm glad it happened, because we got along very well and eventually when I wanted to go to Indonesia as my first overseas assignment, Hughes was able to make it happen.

Q: What did your job as INR staff assistant involve?

PRINGLE: Intelligence, as we saw it, was about keeping the government informed on vital foreign policy issues, based on all sources. There was a lot of paper passing, but some of the paper was fascinating. We had, for example, something called "briefing notes." If one of our analysts saw a fast-breaking event that he thought the Secretary of

State -- at the time, it was Dean Rusk -- should see, right away, he could type out a briefing note and hand-carry it up to his office, x'd out typos and all. Carbon copies of the note went to a few other interested parties, but the text did not have to be cleared by anyone else.

Another INR institution was the morning briefing. Early every morning, well before the regular work day began, INR's analysts gathered to brief Hughes on events of importance over the previous 24 hours, based on "all sources," including the most highly classified traffic. Hughes would then sally forth with a fat brief case full of hot news to brief the Secretary. His Deputy did the same for the Deputy Secretary, and INR Office Directors did likewise with regional Assistant Secretaries. I should note that the Director of Central Intelligence - who had an office in the White House, then as now - did something similar for the President. Of course, based on this kind of regular contact, some of the briefers became personally close to their briefees.

Q: So the analysts weren't just writing term papers and --

PRINGLE: Oh, no, not at all. Some of our senior analysts had originally come over from the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), indeed they were the core of INR for years. They understood very well the connection between intelligence and action.

Q: Ever meet Miss Blue? Miss Blue was in INR on the East Asia side at about that time and, her major responsibility seemed to be to go through documents and make sure that we didn't refer to Peking as Peking. We had to refer to it as Peiping.

PRINGLE: I don't remember that. I knew Pat Barnett and Evelyn Colbert, both former OSS officers, on the Southeast Asia side, smart and tough-minded and very big-picture oriented.

The core of INR's work was and presumably still is political analysis, through several types of reports longer and more formal than the briefing notes I just mentioned. INR at its best was not afraid to challenge official policy, and it became famous for this years later during the Iraq war, to the disgust of the "Neocon" group that was in the driver's seat under Bush Junior and Cheney. It's a proud tradition and there will always be a need for it.

I also got to carry Hughes' bag to U.S. Intelligence Board meetings and sit in on them. They were chaired at the time by Richard Helms who was the CIA Director, hence the leader of the "Intelligence Community." Most of the discussion was about the content of national intelligence assessments on the most important topics.

I realized how lucky I was to have a first job in the front office of INR. Most of my junior officer colleagues were dying to get good foreign assignments on their first tours -- Paris or Tokyo, to be sure, certainly not Ouagadougou, where I would serve later. The last thing anyone wanted was a job in Washington.

But Washington is far more exotic and harder to understand than any foreign post. And what people really need is know, however imperfectly, is how this assemblage of puzzle palaces works. To put it another way, by serving in INR I came to understand the intellectual basis -- the knowledge underpinning - of policy making. That's what FSO's will be dealing with throughout their careers. It will always be as important, arguably more important, than what is going on in "your" country.

Q: You also get a feeling for the way the Department worked. Whereas people going overseas immediately might not have that.

PRINGLE: Exactly.

Q: Then you were assigned to Jakarta. Who was your ambassador and what were responsibilities?

PRINGLE: For the majority of my four years (technically two tours), my Ambassador was Frank Galbraith, and I was the junior officer in a five or six person Political Section. I reported on political Islam, minorities, and certain regional issues. And I joined everyone else in the Section on things like elections which required all hands, including our two consulates, to pitch in.

Q: This was mainly internal reporting?

PRINGLE: Yes. Lots of travel -- Indonesia is as long, from east to west, as the continental US -- but no, I didn't do much if any foreign policy work aside from stray memorandums of conversation.

Q: Was the embassy doing a good job? Was it pretty well run?

PRINGLE: Yes

Q: This was your introduction to life overseas in an embassy. How was it?

PRINGLE: The initial Sturm and Drang of the Suharto takeover of 1966-67, when the Communist Party was crushed, was over. I was an Indonesian specialist, indeed expert, thanks to my Cornell training. I was not expert on Muslim doctrine, but my job was to assess political Islam in a situation where Muslims, although a statistical majority, were a political minority.

Q: Expand a little bit on the discrepancies or divisions within the Muslim community in Indonesia.

PRINGLE: Indonesian independence would have taken decades more to achieve had it not been for World War II. The Dutch told the aspiring nationalists, led by Sukarno. "You'll never be a nation, you're too divided. All those islands and languages stop talking about it." There was much variety in the Islamic community, although no Shiites

to speak of, and only a minority wanted an Islamic State. The nationalists didn't know what that meant, but they feared it might mean ambitious Muslim politicians from certain areas telling everyone else how to behave, which could indeed have been disastrously divisive.

Sukarno didn't want to prove the Dutch right. National unity had to come first. So he proposed, not a secular state, but a state founded on "Belief in One God." That let Christians and many varieties of Muslims into a big tent. He won the day, but argument over the need for an Islamic State -- which really meant a bigger role and/or more recognition for Islam writ large -- echoed through following decades.

The immediate problem - the reason I was asked to follow Islamic politics - was that General Suharto, who was to be President for more than three decades, had crushed the Indonesian Communist Party and needed a new justification for his thinly disguised military rule. And he focused on the pro-Islamic state Muslims, who, on the one hand, had a history of rebellion, but on the other, had been instrumental in eliminating the communists. They thought they should be rewarded; instead he banned their political party, Masjumi. This made them unhappy and eventually paved the way for more radical, fundamentalist Islam.

The offended Muslims of this era were not extremists, indeed they (people like Sjafruddin Prawiranegara) were Dutch-educated modernizers and quite pro-western, and we did not see them dangerous. But we realized that alienating them could endanger the future stability of the state, and we did worry about that.

Q: Were there other things that were preoccupying you when you were in Jakarta? You said you did regional issues.

PRINGLE: I did a lot of reporting on local issues, such as there whether or not Suharto was dealing adequately with the poverty of the Javanese, the most numerous ethnic group. We were still worrying about resurgent communism as a danger, even though it was not.

Q: Did Indonesia seem to be making progress?

PRINGLE: In fact, Sukarno was doing better in that department than we gave him credit for, eventually achieving a decade of almost double-digit economic growth, before the Asian financial crash of 1997. His biggest success, widely under-appreciated at the time, was using oil revenues for rural development. The kind of regional reporting I did included tracking our aid program, especially its extremely successful family planning program, and the political impact of high-yielding, "miracle" rice varieties. I also looked at the quality of Suharto's military rule at the local level -- and the increasingly notorious problem of political prisoners.

Q: What was Barbara doing during this time?

PRINGLE: Barbara spent a lot of time traveling with me - it was too rewarding to pass up. After the first year or so we had extremely competent household staff, including a family of former teachers who had been fired for belonging to the communist teachers' union. We could trust them to look after the children, now toddlers, when we were away.

But eventually Barbara found a good teaching job. It began oddly. The International School in Jakarta, at the behest of a high-ranking Indonesian, had hired one of his relatives to teach Indonesian. The school, probably unwisely, had made it a mandatory subject. That was all very well, but the gentleman was totally unable to control a class of American and European teenagers, and they were running all over him. Barbara was not exactly fluent in Indonesian, despite some Malay/Indonesian training at SOAS and FSI, but she certainly knew how to control a class mainly of Americans. She was hired for that, but later taught subjects more appropriate for her training, like modern European history.

Q: We didn't talk about your Indonesian language training at FSI. How long did that last?

PRINGLE: It was a six-month course, short for an Asian language. To teach it well would have taken much longer. But, somewhat like Swahili in East Africa, it's everybody's second language in Indonesia. In those days most of the people you interacted with had learned it in school, and you were on a level ground with them linguistically. In the case of uneducated people you could, after six months at FSI, speak it better than they did. Barbara took the whole course and, having studied the language in graduate school, I joined for the final several months only.

The FSI training was excellent, and I'm very sad that they later fired the linguist, named Harter if I recall correctly, because he didn't have a degree in linguistics. Spare me. He was a hell of a good teacher! And the "native speakers," who are still around town, were also wonderful. Harter had some great techniques. One minute we would be reading Indonesian press clippings and the next minute we would be singing selections from a collection of revolutionary songs, like "Hallo, Hallo Bandung." Having a degree in linguistics would not have improved him.

Q: So you were in Jakarta for four years, a long assignment. Did you sort of re-up after two years, or how did that work?

PRINGLE: Fairly early on we decided that I would extend for a second two-year tour. At some point in my last year my former boss in Jakarta, Skipper Purnell, by now the DCM in Manila, asked if I would like to join him there. I thought "Of course, another Island Southeast Asia posting. Perfect!"

But I came within twenty-four hours of being "GLOPPED." GLOP (for Global Outlook Program) was Henry Kissinger's vehicle for stopping officers from developing clientitis. The story is that he had attended a Latin America Chiefs of Mission, where he exhorted the assembled Excellencies to do a better job of promoting our Vietnam policy, and one

by one they stood up and said, "But Mr. Secretary, you don't understand. That won't work in Uruguay," or wherever; "They don't like our Vietnam policy." Kissinger came home seething with rage and determined to break up these regional cliques that weren't interested in being team players or American policy, and seemed to have forgotten who they were working for.

Q: So you went to Manila in 1974, to the Political Section? What were your responsibilities there?

PRINGLE: In the Philippines, Islam was a live issue because of the southern rebellion, which had been going on since before the Americans arrived, and I was assigned to cover that. In the process, Barbara and I traveled a lot in Mindanao, doing the kind of regional reporting I had done in Indonesia, although my old friend Purnell would initially not let me go to the more dangerous "Moro"-controlled areas.

Toward the end of my tour he relented a bit, and I did something quite stupid. Barbara and I were down in Zamboanga attending a conference and checking out the local Muslim situation. The hotel, where the conference was held, was a famous old one, dating from the time that John J. Pershing was the local military commander in an earlier phase of conflict with the Moros, as the Spanish had called the Muslims.

The hotel was on a salt water lagoon with a lovely sandbar just across from the hotel. We had plenty of time each morning before the conference began. By this time we were great shell collectors, and we decided to hire a local "banca" (outrigger canoe) and see if there any interesting shells over there, And there were, and nothing happened.

The *very next weekend* a Japanese Airlines crew did the same thing and were kidnapped by rebels. I thought My God, what if that had happened to us? I could see the headline: "US Embassy Muslim Expert and Wife Kidnapped in Zamboanga by Moros while Shell Collecting." It might have been a career stopper.

Q: Oh Lord (laughs). What happened to do the Japanese crew?

PRINGLE: The Japanese negotiated their release, no doubt paying well.

Q: What else did you do?

PRINGLE: There was another insurrection in the north, in Mountain Province, where the Communist Party was gaining strength, mainly due to local resentment of some big dam projects. So I reported a lot on that, based partly on travel to the area. This part of the Philippines was never controlled by the Spanish, because the people were fierce headhunters, the same kind of people I had studied in Sarawak, living in the mountains. They were finally converted to Christianity by American Episcopalian Missionaries.

I was the embassy specialist on minorities generally. In addition to Muslims and the northern tribes, I did quite a lot of reporting on the Philippine Chinese community.

Of course, we also had all sorts of important visitors to take care off. The one I remember best was Clair Booth Luce, a real class act, including being friendly and considerate to a junior officer. The oddest of my odd jobs was serving as Embassy liaison to the American Association of the Philippines. It was composed of senior members of the 60,000-strong resident American community who gathered periodically to reminisce. Many of them were veterans of the notorious Santo Tomas prison camp, and I will never forget one meeting which ended with an argument about who had gotten what in their Red Cross packages – and who had refused to share their goodies with others.

I also remember doing a paper on the Spratly problem. I think this was the first time that the South China Sea issue had surfaced in a big way. It happened because the Filipinos started test drilling for oil, and the Chinese objected - I forget which Chinese. I remember being very skeptical about why everybody was getting so excited about it. By this time we were big into scuba diving and I had the cheek to write in an official report that the best solution would be to make a gigantic international coral reef park out of all those reefs and islets. It's still a good idea.

Finally we were all concerned about the consequences on President Marcos's martial law, and the future of the big US bases.

Q: What about the Ambassador?

PRINGLE: Bill Sullivan. He was terrific: a brilliant, totally self-confident individual, hence a pleasure to work for. He admired good reporting, read everything we wrote, and would comment on it. He didn't care if your analysis differed with his, within limits, as long as you didn't use the first person. That was his prerogative, and everyone knew it. It didn't mean that he wasn't listening and taking your ideas into account. I thought it was a great system, and if it was a bit arrogant, it allowed freedom of expression without loss of control.

Q: So the embassy was pretty well run. Was Sullivan responsible for the day-to-day operations?

PRINGLE: Responsible, but not for minor details. Of course it was a vast highly divided embassy in the sense that there were hunks of it that were more or less autonomous, like the thirty-officer visa mill, and a big bureaucracy for looking after all the highly fraud-prone pensions being paid to Filipinos -- part of our post-colonial obligations. It had its own office building.

Then there were the bases, Clark and Subic, not strictly speaking under Chief of Mission's control - legally they answered to CINCPAC (Commander-in-Chief Pacific) -- but their presence was pervasive and they and all their high-ranking personnel took a lot of the ambassador's time. We had a helipad on the embassy grounds. Top brass flew in and out from Clark and Subic all the time. The ambassador did not have a helicopter.

Q: (laughs) Aside, aside from not being able to travel to certain areas, were there security issues? Did you have to be concerned in Manila itself for example?

PRINGLE: No. There was no crime to speak of, beyond what one would expect in any big city.

Probably the most harmful element in our relationship with the Philippines was the almost universal misconception, on our part, that they loved us because we both speak English, and they were so grateful for all the wonderful things we did for them. But despite their cheerful exterior there was a lot of underlying angst on the part of the Filipinos. They didn't love us as much as we thought. There were many things about our colonial record that they liked, not least the provision of widespread education, in English. But they resented our unwillingness to grant them statehood. It was a source of sorrow and embarrassment to them, but we didn't get it.

In a way we succeeded too well in the Philippines. They came willingly into World War II at our side. They fought to the death for us and they felt that we repaid them with rejection. The result has been a compromised, ambivalent kind of nationalism, an extended identity crisis. This is not an idea that's original with me. I hope the problem is fading with time.

The ambivalence of Philippine nationalism bothered us, largely because we were used to Indonesia, where the nationalism, if complex, was also much more straightforward. One symptom in the Philippines was visas. It seemed that you couldn't have a human relationship with any Filipino without your friend turning up forty-eight hours later saying, "Would you mind getting a visa for my third cousin twice removed?" It drove me crazy. All our Filipino friends seemed to have more relatives in the US than we did.

Q: Were the bases a big issue then?

PRINGLE: They were, and the time of serious negotiations was at hand

I should mention that we were there when Vietnam fell. I was acting principle officer at our big consulate in Cebu, hundreds of miles from Manila. Back there, everyone else at the embassy was working around the clock to handle the flood of people exiting Vietnam, coming through Subic and Clark. But we were down in Cebu, with plenty of time to explore the island's old churches and go Scuba diving.

The Navy thought Subic in particular was indispensable, especially its ship repair facility. When the Navy finally left the bases, after we had returned home, they were not in fact missed all that much. We found we get our ships repaired in Singapore and elsewhere in the Pacific. Today, with the threat of China looming as never before, some Filipinos would be delighted if we reopened Subic.

Q: What other issues with our military? The young seamen killing the prostitute and that sort of thing? Did that pop up?

PRINGLE: There were such incidents, but fewer than you might think, and largely restricted to the red light areas around the bases, several hours drive from Manila.

Q: Your scuba diving, did you ever go look at sunken landing craft and Japanese tanks and aircraft and things like that?

PRINGLE: There was lots of very interesting diving there. We would have gotten the training in Indonesia, but it wasn't yet possible at the time. But in Manila there was a retired American Army officer married to a Filipina, and he gave excellent scuba courses. In time the hobby took us around the country into some very interesting situations, such as the time we attended a scuba party on the Island of Negros with a group of wealthy sugar plantation owners, all of them friends of President Marcos.

Q: Barbara was teaching during this time?

PRINGLE: She was. She taught at the Ateneo de Manila, which is the old, very prestigious Jesuit University. The Ateneo hired her to teach Medieval European history, which she was trained in at Cornell. They wanted that subject taught because the Catholic Church as we know it today was formed in Europe during the Middle Ages.

In addition, I taught a seminar on Southeast Asia and met a number of promising students including Reynaldo Iletto, who later did graduate work at Cornell and has had a successful career teaching Southeast Asian History at the Australian National University and elsewhere.

Q: Before we move on, is there anything else?

PRINGLE: We curtailed before completing a three-year tour because we understood by then that our oldest child was showing signs of learning disabilities.

Q: How old were your children at this time?

PRINGLE: Six and eight. The younger had been born in Malaysia while we were in Indonesia, the reason being that although there were good doctors in Indonesia, the level of hospital sanitation was unacceptable. Expectant mothers had to go out of the country. So our daughter was born in Kuala Lumpur. It could have been Singapore, but the doctor there had just been named President, an honorary job under Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, and was no longer everyone's favorite pediatrician. Moreover we had friends in Kuala Lumpur.

Q: So you needed to curtail a bit in Manila because your oldest child was having some learning problems?

PRINGLE: Indeed. It was Barbara who taught him to read, and then with help from her mother found out what was going on and what to do about it -- the whole idea of teaching

children with learning disabilities in a special way had only recently begun to be understood and the government had just passed regulations requiring such classes to be offered in public schools. And we wanted to take advantage of that and have plenty of time to get the problem straightened out, as we did. Jamie, the child in question, is now a tenured professor of physical oceanography at the University of New Hampshire. Our curtailment from Manila was only a few months.

Q: Before we leave Manila, is there anything you want to add about that assignment?

PRINGLE: I am glad that we served there, although I was a bit negative at the time. We were so fond of Indonesia that we couldn't quite adjust, but looking back, it was a great experience -- I have not scratched the surface on all the interesting things we did -- and it was a good counterbalance to the Indonesian experience. It was very useful to work in a place where there was a robust, multi-agency American official presence, different from Jakarta.

Q: Now, at this point what did you do? You came back to the U.S., and went to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace?

PRINGLE: Yes. I decided it would make sense to recharge my academic credentials by taking a year off to write a book. My idea was to take a good look at American national interests in island Southeast Asia. We were always talking about our interests, but we never defined them beyond platitudes. Of course when I began to explore the topic I soon concluded that "interests" are indeed in the eye of the beholder. So I thought, why not admit to being a beholder, opinions and all, and do a series of essays on the subject, in Indonesia and the Philippines, as I saw them after tours in both countries?

I had no trouble getting leave without pay, and a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to do this. Then my old boss at INR, Tom Hughes, by now head of the Carnegie Endowment, told me "You know, the money isn't all you need. Rockefeller will require you to get someone to administer the grant. How about us?" He was right of course.

So I ended up spending a year at Carnegie, then located just off Dupont Circle in Washington. Instead of having to work alone in my own garret, I had a plush office, secretarial support, even a student intern to help with research, and a bevy of convivial colleagues with whom to trade thoughts. Moreover I was officially "Director of the Indonesia-Philippines Project," good for my résumé. On the side, I got to write an article for the house journal, *Foreign Policy*, in 1978, on the State Department's suicidal tendency to slough off its most vital functions, from foreign aid to intelligence to other agencies. The title was ""Creeping Irrelevance at Foggy Bottom."

Including my subsequent assignment to AF, this tour in Washington would last six years, from 1977 to 1984. It was a time when our children would begin to realize that they were Americans and put down roots in American soil. It was also critical for Barbara's teaching career. She had taught briefly at Washington and Lee High School in Arlington but of course she had lost that connection when we moved abroad.

Now she had to start over again. After a few months as a substitute teacher, she landed a job at the T.C. Williams High School, the only high school in Alexandria. However, the school could not offer her continued employment until perilously close to the beginning of the 1977-78 school year. Meanwhile, the Madeira School had offered her a job teaching European history, her major field of study and, despite the long commute, she accepted. From this point onwards she would, when we were home, teach mainly modern European history, first at Madeira and later at the Potomac School, two of the Washington area's best independent schools.

Q: What about the Indonesia-Philippines book?

PRINGLE: Columbia University Press published it in 1980. The title is Indonesia and the Philippines: American Interests in Island Southeast Asia. And it's a good book, I think. It helped to promote the idea of foreign environmental policy by arguing that it served our national interests and was of special importance in tropical Asia.

Q: And how did the two countries relate besides being close together geographically?

PRINGLE: Indonesia and the Philippines are tropical, underdeveloped, and insular in a geographic sense. Both have coral reefs, tropical forests, and dangerous, growing overpopulation. But the US relationship with them has been very different, and that of course has shaped our perceived interests. I did go into some interests that were not generally perceived, certainly not by policy makers. I thought, for example, that we were unduly preoccupied with "stability." It was something we could not really do much about, and our efforts to do so usually got us into trouble, mainly by supporting autocrats. My old colleagues at Cornell loved that part of the book.

Q: So that was from '77 to '78, is that right?

PRINGLE: Yes

Q: And then from there what did you do?

PRINGLE: Well, all of this was on leave without pay, so I had to get back to the office, despite the generous Rockefeller grant. (I should have mentioned that I owed a big debt to John Stremmler, who was my Rockefeller Foundation contact.) And I had to get the book published.

But first I had to get the State Department to clear the text. I worried that this would be a problem since I had been imbibing classified information on the subject for almost seven years. At this time the State Department was encouraging FSOs to publish, a good practice that has dropped through the cracks more recently.

Here is what I put in the book's preface about sources:

My official background requires a word of explanation about sources. The essay topics were selected without regard for political sensitivity, in the conviction that important foreign policy issues can be discussed intelligently on the basis of public sources, including interviews, and that the outside scholar can usually compete on terms of equal authority with the official despite lack of access to classified material. What the outsider may lack in raw material is often more than outweighed by analytic continuity and area experience, plus a little creative explanation of the government itself. I believe this expectation was borne out by my experience. In only a few cases have I been aware, on the basis of previous official access, of key facts or arguments which are concealed by official secrecy. In no instance was this information of critical importance for purposes of analysis or judgment. The facts presented are drawn entirely from unclassified sources indicated in the notes. (Robert Pringle, *Indonesia and the Philippines: American Interests in Island Southeast Asia*, preface, p. x.)

The State Department cleared the book for publication without any substantive changes, although I am not sure that my line of reasoning would fly today.

Q: Good for you. What then?

PRINGLE: Having finished the book, I had some to kill, so I persuaded AID to do a conference on development in Indonesia, for the Indonesia-Philippines Project (me) at the Carnegie endowment, with the help of Erland Heginbotham, an FSO friend.

By this time I had become convinced that the whole political-economic distinction is unreal. All major policy issues are both economic and political. Since I had no formal economic training I decided to take FSI's nine-month (one academic year) economics course. It was supposed to be the equivalent of a BA in economics.

Q: OK. And that lasted for about a calendar year?

PRINGLE: Six months. It covered the basics of introductory economics. The course included some math, which as usual I did not do well at, and a superficial effort to introduce the class to computers, letting us play with a main-frame computer the Department of State had acquired. The course also tried to teach us some elemental programming skills, how to write Java script. All that had virtually no shelf life at all, beyond making us aware that computers existed.

I was of course thinking about my next assignment. Dick Holbrooke was now the EAP Assistant Secretary and I did not care for him at all, a mixture of brains, ambition, opportunism and bash-the-communists conservatism. I was jealous of his rapid, in-and-outer rise, so much faster than that of people like me who stayed in the Service.

In any case, I thought this might be the time to take a break from Southeast Asia and develop an additional regional capability. And when Carl Cundiff asked me to join his Economic Policy Staff (AF/EPS) in the Africa Bureau I accepted. That was a momentous decision, because my new Africa specialization would dominate most of my remaining Foreign Service career, and indeed I never did really get back to Southeast Asia.

Q: How long were you with AF/EPS

PRINGLE: Three years. I entered as the junior person in the section, became the Deputy, and then by a fluke, the Office Director.

Q: OK, how was that? Were there things of particular preoccupation at that time?

PRINGLE: Most of the work, especially at first, was negotiating USAID budget allocations -- how much Africa as a whole got, and how it was allocated among countries. My special bailiwick was allocating Special Self Help funds -- USAID money that was allocated to Ambassadors for small projects, usually at the village level. Building schools was a favorite activity, as was funding village gardens and supplying them with tools, seeds, etc., often in cooperation with Peace Corps Volunteers.

There was much less red tape than with big, formal USAID projects, although there was some. For example, we couldn't use Self Help money for sports equipment. This greatly offended a few old-line ambassadors, who believed sports were the key to character and achievement, if not salvation. The job allowed me to visit many parts of Africa to report on Self Help activities, *inter alia*. The hardest part of job at first was matching the names of countries with their respective embassies. Which country belonged to Lilongwe?? Then there were all those Guineas. I certainly learned how little I knew about African geography.

AF/EPS did not do much economic analysis of a profound nature. The closest we got to that sort of thing was debt rescheduling, which is a pretty arcane business. We had one woman who specialized in that. She worked very closely with the Economic Bureau and it was a good cooperative arrangement.

I found that a lot of what I did was working with country desk officers, some of whom were whiz-bang at this kind of thing, and others who turned white at the mere thought of any numerical topic. I told them, "If you're having trouble understanding what an USAID program is, or you don't understand what the IMF (International Monetary Fund) does, we're here to help." That was a good way to go and it made EPS very much respected.

Eventually I became the AF/EPS Deputy Office Director. My predecessor as Director, the late Don Born, was a wonderful man, bright, compassionate and funny -- but a little absentminded. And for some reason he hadn't told the senior management in AF that this was a make or break promotion for him, and by the time they realized it was, they could not save him. It didn't break his heart; he was looking forward to a happy retirement with

a second wife after losing his first wife and some children in a tragic accident. And he got one.

Q: Chet Crocker was AF Assistant Secretary when you began?

PRINGLE: It was Dick Moose at first, then Chet Crocker. I got along extremely well with both of them.

Q: You and I overlapped a bit because I was director of AF/C for a while when you were in AF/EPS.

PRINGLE: Indeed, a job that I held later.

Q: Anything of particular note when you were there? I know I had a real problem because the people who made the decisions often had other priorities than we did, particularly when it came to the IMF and things like that.

PRINGLE: I certainly had similar problems. I always found in working with AID that it was important to get their confidence. It was a diplomatic task as much as anything else. If they thought that you, as somebody from the State Department, were automatically someone who didn't care about what they did, then you had a hard time. If you persuaded them that you were interested in what they did -- and I was - then you were halfway to success. And I did a lot of that, in AFC and in also, later, in OES (Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs).

In cases where AID did not like a country because it was developmentally hopeless, but we wanted to help, because it was strategically important, we could often fall back on other kinds of aid -- other "spigots" -- besides "development assistance." There was food aid under Public Law 480, especially useful when good people were starving under wicked rulers, and there was something new called Economic Policy Assistance (EPS), which provided cash with relatively few strings attached and came from the Department of Defense Budget. EPS made a lot of sense but most of it tended to go to really big customers like Israel.

Q: Did you have to deal with the Africa side of the NSC (National Security Council) staff on these issues?

PRINGLE: Rarely if ever, that I can recall.

Q: No. So you were there until 1983?

PRINGLE: Yes.

Q: What next?

PRINGLE: Ouagadougou.

Q: Ouagadougou. You went out as Deputy Chief of Mission.

PRINGLE: Correct.

Q: Who was the Ambassador.

PRINGLE: Julius Walker. I was very lucky to have him as my first Ambassador. He was smart, generous, kind, funny, and a talented actor. His hobbies included needlepoint. Shall we say he was not your stereotypical Texan, although what people tended to remember about him was that he looked misleadingly like Colonel Sanders of Kentucky Fried Chicken. His people skills were superb.

Every morning he set time aside to prune the Embassy's roses. You have to understand that the chancery had been the home of an Upper Voltan noble and covered a whole square block. It was composed of low-slung, mud-brick buildings with a big courtyard in the middle, with sidewalks, lined with rose bushes, laid out along an X pattern in the middle, where it could be seen by everyone coming from or going to their offices.

There the Ambassador could be found every morning, pruners in hand, ready to chat with us about whatever was on our minds between snips. It was a variation on Management by Wandering Around -- Management by Staying in One Well-known Place and Letting Others Wander to You. It's hard to think of a better way of breaking down barriers to communication in an informal setting.

He also raised chickens behind the Residence. For a while he sold his excellent eggs to the rest of us. We called them "Eggs Plenipotentiary." Then his wife, Savannah, said he couldn't sell them because it wasn't ambassadorial, so from then on we got them for nothing. Free range eggs, sort of.

Q: I remember him, very Texan, yes, Savannah, and his daughter still lives in our building.

PRINGLE: He came from a place called Plains, Texas, in Yoakum County, believe it or not, and his secretary in Ouagadougou was also from Plains, Texas and, somehow in this little teeny place they'd come together with no prior finagling about it, as far as I know. The secretary, who was also very talented, later became an FSO.

Q: Did Julius choose you as DCM? Is that the way it worked?

PRINGLE: He certainly had something to do with the choice but I don't remember the details. Whatever, I'm glad he did.

Q: What was Embassy Ouagadougou like at that point? Upper Volta had been independent for 20 years, hadn't it?

PRINGLE: It was typically Sahelian African and ex-French in many ways: landlocked, fewer than ten million people, very poor, and geographically incoherent. It had been part of French West Africa, a mega-colony, and it was gerrymandered out of existence in the 1930's to save money. But the main ethnic group, the Mossi, were Roman Catholic, and vibrant animists below the surface. The first black African Cardinal, Paul Zoungrana, was from Upper Volta. French Catholics lobbied De Gaulle to reinstate it as a separate country when he broke up French West Africa in the 1960 and gave the resulting dozen or so countries independence.

We had a handful of State Officers: Ambassador, DCM, Pol-Econ, Admin, part time consul, USIA (although that was still separate from State) and a communicator; his work space had to be lined with concrete; everything remained pure mud-brick, aka *banco* or adobe. There was not even a hint of a CIA station - we were too unimportant by far for that.

What we did have was substantial USAID and Peace Corp Programs, and growing political instability. The country had experienced a succession of coups d'état, led by military officers who were successively younger, lower-ranking and more radical. When we arrived, the youngest and most radical, Thomas Sankara, had just burst onto the scene. The whole US mission spent the night of his coup on the floor as bullets whistled overhead. Everybody was scared, in the sense that they didn't know which way he was going to go and they didn't know what made him tick.

Q: So Sankara was in power when you arrived.

PRINGLE: Yes. Well, to be exact, the coup took place the week before we arrived.

Q: So they hadn't changed the name yet. It was still Upper Volta.

PRINGLE: No, that wasn't for another year or so.

It was a tragic situation. Sankara was young, he was naïve, he was very smart, all those things. He liked the idea of being revolutionary, that came partly out of his French background. But he couldn't understand how to be a revolutionary without doing things that would hurt his country, and he was intelligent enough to understand that.

So what could he do? Well, he was reduced to puerile show trials of various kinds, mostly corruption trials where somebody was on the radio, being tried for having a refrigerator -- because that must have meant he was corrupt. And nonsense like that. A lot of it was just slogans, "Down with the Imperialists!" So we're looking at the French and the French are looking at us. "You first!" OK.

Sankara' dilemma turned out to be tragic. He couldn't kick out all the imperialists, whoever they were, out of the country. He couldn't break with the franc zone, because he knew that would ruin the economy, as it had for other French African radicals, like Modibo Keita of Mali. So he was left with the slogans. And with little pokes, sticking

Uncle Sam with a pin to hear him yell, like condemning our invasion of Grenada, or banning our annual Marine Ball, which really got Secretary Schultz's attention, since he was an ex-Marine and fiercely proud of it. Some of the rhetoric began to sound genuinely threatening. Uncle Sam began to wake up and ask, "Who's that down there, nipping at my heels? And why is he doing it?"

The more they nipped, the more we wanted to retaliate by cutting programs, pulling out Peace Corps, things that the country really needed and would pay long-term dividends regardless of who was running the place

Q: Did the embassy have access to the president?

PRINGLE: Yes, we did have access to him when we really needed it and couldn't get anywhere with his underlings. Getting permission to stage an emergency medical evacuation after curfew, for example.

And Sankara could be funny and charming when he wasn't getting his Revolutionary Guards to do idiotic things, like staging a pre-dawn exercise with live ammunition to repel imaginary mercenaries.

When the Peace Corps Director, Loret Miller Ruppe, called on him, she and her party found his office sweltering hot. They just sat there dripping. She was probably wishing for a Miller Lite, being an heiress to that fortune. Anyway, right at the end of the meeting he said, "You probably notice it's rather warm in here. I'll explain."

Sankara told how, before he staged the coup and became president, he had been prime minister. After that he fell from favor and was exiled to his home province, where he got to be great friends with a couple of Peace Corps volunteers. There wasn't much difference in age between them.

And when he became president he told them, "Come down and visit me in Ouaga any time," which they did. After some chit-chat one of them said, looking around, "Well. We see you have air conditioning now. You didn't have anything like that when you were back in Dedegou, living among the people."

So, Sankara concluded, "Now, whenever I have Peace Corps guests, I always turn off the air conditioning". I am sure Ruppe, who was a very smart lady and really into her job, remembered the experience.

Q: What about Leonardo Neher?

PRINGLE: He replaced Walker in the middle of my two-year tour. By this time, due largely to Schultz's personal annoyance, we had decided to get tough with Sankara, to slap back at him when he was outrageous. Neher, Nard as everyone called him, had new instructions to do just that.

Sankara promptly threw him a soft pitch down the middle, by having him present his ambassadorial credentials, after weeks of delay, along with the most anti-US envoys available, the North Korean and the Cuban, all this miles out of town in a village. That format was part of Sankara's revolutionary style. Then the only newspaper in the country, possibly written by the President, printed an insulting, threatening opinion piece about the new American cowboy in town, and Nard protested hard.

Sankara had already noted Nard's tougher line, and, perhaps most of all, his white mustache. At last, he thought, here is a real "cowboy," a genuine representative of the aggressive imperialists. The fact that Nard played to Sankara's "cowboy" image, however erroneous, may have helped lead to better communication between the two of them. We had already cut one aid project in response to Sankara's hostility, and the Peace Corps might have been next.

As he explained in his own oral history interview, Nard, now deceased, was convinced that his new, tougher, demeanor caused Sankara to back away gradually from his anti-American posturing. He may be right, but I think Sankara already realized that he'd "gone about as far as he could go," to quote Ada Annie in "Oklahoma" -- hence his frustration.

I don't mean to suggest that Julius Walker could not communicate with Sankara. A good example was his superb handling of the Princess Anne visit. This senior royal, a very talented lady, came in her role as Patron of British Save the Children, primarily to visit their activities in the arid north of the country.

Her handlers decided that no hotel in Ouagadougou was suitable for HRH and asked if she might stay with Julius, since they had no ambassador in Ouaga. Julius, well aware of how Sankara might react, posed two conditions. The British, not him, must put the question to Sankara, who agreed. Second, she would attend a small dinner hosted by Julius, and agree to meet with US Embassy staff. The British agreed, and the result was the most successful high-level visit to an embassy that Barbara and I ever witnessed.

The fact that the princess was a total class act, beautiful and smart, of course didn't hurt. She starred at the dinner with an account of her northern visit. (I got to sit next to her because, as her equerry said, "We've been talking to her all week, now it's *your* turn." As for the staff visit, she told us to get *everyone* we employed, not just a select few, and including local employees, to gather in small groups in the chancery courtyard, the same one where Julius tended his roses. Then, for the better part of an hour, she went from group to group, speaking to the Upper Voltans in flawless French and to the Americans in English.

She didn't forget the Marines who had to remain at Post One. She met the whole detachment there for a handshake and a photo. But of course they were rigid with awe. "I know how to handle this!" she said. "Now everyone look at me," smiling, whereupon she uttered the word "Shit!" You never saw such amazing grins.

By this time Sankara had bigger troubles than us. He felt increasingly frustrated by his inability to achieve more genuinely revolutionary results. In the process he became dictatorial, relegating his junta colleagues to the sidelines. And not long after Nard's departure they assassinated Sankara, a fate which he seems to have invited by his behavior.

Thanks to some far-left European writers, Sankara has been successfully apotheosized as an African Che Guevara. At least three biographies of him were in print within a few years of his death, all them ignoring the fact that he was all talk and no real achievement. Blaise Compaoré, his successor (originally his co-coup maker) went on to rule Burkina Faso for 27 years, during which time he was a tediously conventional African dictator known for his tawdry relationship with the Libyans and blood diamonds, among other things.

Q: Did Sankara's revolution have any impact at all?

PRINGLE: He was already playing footsy with the Libyans and we weren't quite sure what was going on, but we knew it might be evil. Every time a plane landed at the airport, which was close to our house, we would all be looking up to figure out whether it was Libyan or not. We tended to lean pretty heavily on the French who had better intelligence than we did, especially on the internal workings of his administration.

Q: The impact of his efforts on things like development, the welfare of the people?

PRINGLE: Not much. He was a little too much of a Lenin-style communist for that. Indeed there wasn't much he could do without the kind of foreign help he was scaring away, or knew nothing about. For a time he made all the civil servants gather on Saturday to build a railroad, by hand, to a supposedly valuable manganese deposit in the north. Everyone knew that was idiotic.

He was not corrupt as far as we could tell, but neither was he totally without the conventional dictatorial vices. When he decided to build a big new central market, he thought nothing of evicting the poor people who lived there. And he allowed the French to pay for the new one. When he decided that some of his enemies were plotting against him, he killed a number of them, including some widely respected people. He totally muzzled a once relatively free press. That kind of thing had previously been unknown in the country.

Q: It was a poor country, not many resources.

PRINGLE: Indeed, very poor. But the Burkinabé are very hardworking. Once things calmed down they had a good relationship with the World Bank and the IMF. By and large, when they said they would do something as part of a project agreement, they kept their promises, unlike the Malians, later in my story. The Malians oozed charm but had a tendency to say anything to make you happy and then do nothing.

Q: Did he rename the country when you were there?

PRINGLE: He did. The renaming is one of the better things that Sankara did. "Upper Volta" was pretty uninspiring.

At one point during Sankara's most radical phase, a wag-cum-columnist in the US wrote, tongue in cheek, "You think this doesn't matter, that we may lose Upper Volta to the communists???" Well, let me tell you, it *does* matter. *There is no Lower Volta.*" He was wrong, of course; Lower Volta is Ghana.

What Sankara did was to take words from two local languages. "Burkina" means noble or upright, in I forget which language. 'Faso" means land, or country, in Djoula, which is a trading language in much of West Africa. It is quite acceptable to drop the "Faso" and just use "Burkina." "Burkinabé" means someone from Burkina Faso.

Q: What was life for you there like, you and the family?

PRINGLE: We had our share of adventures. Not least the time the revolutionary militias decided to pretend that there were mercenaries descending out of the skies. They were mesmerized by visions of mercenaries, white South Africans mainly. First thing we knew there was gunfire going off from the little anti-aircraft gun down the street from us.

My daughter, then thirteen years old, came rocketing down the hall and landed in bed with us. It sounded like some one was pounding on our gate very hard. "What's this noise going on?" she asked. Well, they were shooting off every weapon they had, into the ether. I was chargé at the time, and one of the first things I did was to call off school.

Barbara had a secondary concern beyond our safety. She was teaching at the tiny international school and was hosting a certification team from the US. After the firing died down and things seemed back to normal, I wondered if we could not go just ahead with school and the certification visit? Barbara said "No Way, it's like a snow day, once you declare it, that's that."

Later I sent the government a diplomatic note saying they should remember that when you fire bullets into the air, they do come down somewhere -- they were being fired in the general direction of the Zone du Bois, where most of our people lived-- and can hurt people. The Foreign Ministry wasn't amused by this bit of sarcasm.

Q: What about your children?

PRINGLE: Leaving aside such adventures, it was a good post in many respects. Our son was in the U.S. at boarding school, except for vacations, but our daughter Anne attended the French lycée. The French rank all their lycées every year, and this was considered a good one, empire wide so to speak. We had heard all the stories about how tough and disciplined French schools were. What we did not realize was that *quatrième*, the

equivalent of our eighth grade, and the one Annie would attend, is a down year in the French system because it does not come before any major, make- or break- examination.

Indeed it was very relaxed. Half the teachers did not even get back to Ouagadougou in time for the beginning of school. They were delighted to have this charming American girl with them. The English teacher said *Magnifique!* She can show us how the Americans speak English! Anne came with very little French but found this did not impede her social success in the slightest.

She discovered that she needed to learn only vocabulary, never mind correct grammar, to communicate with her new friends. She wrote home that the students threw chalk at each other behind the backs of the *profs*. It seemed to matter more if you kept a good *cahier* (notebook) than if you learned much.

We began to wonder if French intellectual achievement had anything to do with their formal education. Despite not learning grammar, of all things, the experience gave my daughter a start in French -- and a critically important initial experience of a foreign milieu - which would be of lasting benefit to her in her later career as a scientist.

Ouagadougou was a great family post in other ways. The kids all hung out together. They loved a seedy fried chicken joint called *Le Pavillon Vert* (The Green Tent). Grownups went to the Marine House for happy hour on Friday. There was a "golf course" in the middle of arid bush traversed by sheep and goats, with oiled sand for "greens." The Embassy thespians put on a smashing production of Woody Allen's "Don't Drink the Water," with Ambassador Walker playing the clueless tourist, the Peace Corps Director playing the American Ambassador, a local missionary playing the evil communist official, and one of our Marines and the Embassy nurse for romantic interest. I have never seen a more totally enjoyable theatrical performance.

There were truly interesting cultural attractions in the villages, including magnificent African art and not-for-tourists dancing. Indeed one could fill a small book with things we did in Ouagadougou, the post where no sane FSO wanted to serve.

Q: Were there other things besides revolutionary rhetoric and concerns about links with the Libyans that preoccupied the embassy, or you in particular at that time?

PRINGLE: Safety was a concern. The curfew was not to be ignored; if you broke it you could get killed. The Marines, wonderful as they were, were also a lot of trouble. One of them got hit by a sudden disease and we had to call in a flying ambulance from Switzerland to evacuate him. The Ambassador, then Nard Neher, had to call Sankara to get him through the curfew. By that time he was in a coma, and he died a few days later. He had contracted the most virulent form of hepatitis from a Ghanaian (hence English-speaking) prostitute. I thought the Marine Corps would land on us like a ton of bricks for this, but they treated it like a normal consequence of hazardous duty.

Then there was our brush with *Putsch à Ouagadougou*, by Gerard Villiers, a notorious French author of dozens of really dirty books, all part of a series starring a Hungarian Count named Malvo who is a CIA agent. Villiers had a big staff that ground out his penny dreadfuls, and they had discovered that Sankara had a notorious security chief who liked to harass our Marines when he encountered them in town, a serious matter for us. The plot of *Putsch à Ouaga* involves a fictional struggle between this man and the aforementioned Count/CIA agent who has arrived to do in Sankara.

The unbelievable thing is that when Villiers let it be known that he was coming to Ouagadougou with his staff to do a book, the entire French-speaking community welcomed them like lambs to the slaughter, threw them a big party, and gossiped altogether too much. They were not so happy when many of the most prominent among them appeared in the book, often named by name, including the nubile daughter of the most prominent Lebanese merchant.

Other details were inaccurate. One of the early scenes has the Count/CIA agent having sex with the CIA station chief's wife in their heart-shaped swimming pool. As I mentioned earlier, we had no CIA Station in Ouaga and there was no heart-shaped swimming pool. The book ends when the CIA agent, after being tortured by the evil security chief, has to leave town fast.

Not long after *Putsch à Ouaga* was published, Sankara (who escapes unharmed in the book) sent Ambassador Neher a signed copy of it. When I asked Neher about it years later he said that he had lost it! I told him I would *never* forgive him for that.

Side note on Sankara: he had a bright, very attractive wife, but either she was very shy, or, as seemed to be the case, he kept her closeted. The great progressive and radical was not so liberal when it came to his own wife. I never set eyes on her, and Barbara did only once; it was a sufficiently rare occurrence that she wrote a memo for the Embassy about it.

Q: What was Sankara's relationship with his neighbors, the surrounding countries?

PRINGLE: Variable. As mentioned earlier, Sankara saw Jerry Rawlings as a soul mate. At the other extreme was President Seyni Kountché of Niger. He was a crusty general, somewhat to the right of Attila the Hun and a great friend of the Free World, the antithesis of our own young Thomas, who he detested.

Our Ambassador to Niger, William Casey, was a political appointee, a bit naive, and Kountché kept telling him what a dangerous scoundrel Sankara was. Casey would then report all his remarks whole cloth to Washington, copying his cables to us. If we had appeared to be defending Sankara against what we saw as exaggerations, our views would of course have been dismissed as clientitis, all the more so since Julius was already suspected of not being tough enough with Sankara. So there was nothing we could do but steam.

Then we learned that in the course of a call on his Nigerien counterpart, Ambassador Casey's CIA Station Chief (unlike us, Niger had a CIA station, probably because of its uranium mines) had parked his Volkswagen beetle in the wrong place at Kountché's presidential palace. For this mistake Kountché's nervous guards had riddled his car with bullets, by mistake no doubt, one of which grazed his head, effectively scalping him. He was not seriously injured, but for weeks he had to wear a big bandage on his head. We liked to think that Embassy Niamey minded its own business a little more after that.

Q: Were there differences in the way that Neher ran the embassy compared to Julius Walker?

PRINGLE: Not really. We all knew that Neher's primary goal was to stand up to Sankara. That was a bit chilling because it meant putting our more positive efforts such as AID projects at risk. Neher was totally genial and his wife was a lovely person. But nobody could beat Julius Walker when it came to having an almost a familial relationship with the whole mission. Many of us, me included, thought Neher might be on the right track. It was a tough job and I'm not sure I could have done what he did. Did it work? Sankara was assassinated too soon after Neher left to allow a definite answer.

As I mentioned earlier, his successor, Blaise Compaoré, was a conventional military dictator more interested in self-aggrandizement than in revolution. He had his own set of problems, including with us.

Q: You moved to Papua New Guinea as the deputy chief of mission in September, 1985. What was the situation there when you arrived?

PRINGLE: Before I answer your question, let me observe that no one in diplomatic history has made a more bizarre transition than from Ouagadougou to Port Moresby.

The situation there was normal, but the post was not and never will be. Embassy Port Moresby is accredited to three countries, Papua New Guinea, or PNG, with six and one-half million people, plus the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with fewer than a million people between them as of this interview. Together they comprise most of "Melanesia," a vague ethno-linguistic category most notable for its mega-diversity, with about one-third of the world's total stock of languages (not dialects). There are a few more Melanesians in Fiji and New Caledonia, still a French territory, and in the western half of New Guinea, once Dutch, now a province of Indonesia.

One reason I wanted to go there is that I thought it might get me closer to an eventual move back into South East Asia. Wrong. The Papua New Guineans, incidentally, consider themselves to be "Pacific Islanders," not "Asians." Also it sounded totally fascinating. I was right about that.

I think it's safe to say that almost nobody in the U.S. government cared a fig about Papua New Guinea except for CINCPAC, the Commander -in chief- Pacific. This was the US Navy's back yard and had been ever since World War II.

Q: How big was the embassy?

PRINGLE: Very small, smaller than anything where I served in Africa. We had only eight Americans to cover our three countries, which while small in size were huge in area (counting maritime economic zones) with big problems. We had no AID (Agency for International Development) mission there, which was tragic -- you can't be relevant in an acutely underdeveloped country without an aid program. But it was understandable given the size of the Australian aid program (larger per number of recipients than our aid to Israel).

A real USAID program was inaugurated after I left, but soon pulled back. We had some regional USAID projects administered from Fiji - but they were derisory, given our regional interests in the Pacific. We also had a tiny IMET ((International Military Education and Training) program, totally dwarfed by the Australian effort but better than nothing.

We depended heavily on US Embassy Canberra for administrative support. It was not a happy arrangement. All our paperwork took inordinate amounts of time to be processed. I decided, based on my African experience, that EAP - the Asia and Pacific Bureau -- had no idea how to manage small hardship posts

Q: Did you have Peace Corps?

PRINGLE: We did have Peace Corps and it had been very successful, but the director when I was there became so alarmed by the crime problem that he decided to terminate the PNG program. Part of his reasoning derived, I am sure, from the fact that he lived with his family in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods of Port Moresby. Most of the volunteers lived in much less dangerous rural areas.

Until the time that we departed there had been exactly one case of a Peace Corps volunteer suffering a criminal attack in more than three years. He was on a bus that got stopped and robbed. The thieves didn't hurt him. But the director just didn't like the whole scene, and you can't really blame him.

Q: How was the arrangement between you and the ambassador? Were you his alter ego? Did he let you run manage the embassy? How did it work?

PRINGLE: My ambassador, Paul Gardner, in addition to being a good personal friend, was a very experienced Foreign Service officer, a professional in every aspect of his job. So we could cut up the pie. The one thing I didn't like was administering the IMET program, which involved a huge amount of paperwork for a handful of trainees yearly. I didn't think it was appropriate for the DCM to be doing it. My predecessor had been a political-military specialist and he liked the IMET work, probably better than anything else. I found someone else to do it, and that freed me up for more important, policy-related issues, including PNG's relations with its neighbors, the very real

challenges to good government, the extraordinary natural wealth of the country, and of course our other two countries.

The Australians saw PNG as one of the bigger headaches they had inherited from the British. New Guinea had initially been divided three ways: the western half, bordering the Dutch East Indies, going to the Dutch (it is now part of Indonesia); the south-eastern quarter, abutting Australia, to the British, and the north-eastern quarter to the Germans, who had missed out on the earlier phases of the western imperial scramble. Then, after World War I, the Germans lost their bit to the British, who gave it to the Australians to administer, leaving behind a scattering of German names like "Finschhaven" on the land.

At the time I arrived there was still a lot of buzz in the air about a separatist movement in the Indonesian part of New Guinea, which might or might not set off a pan-New Guinea rebellion. It was something that the Australian intellectual elite liked to fuss about. There was some localized trouble along the border, but it was minor.

I soon realized that the Papua New Guineans were simply not interested in making common cause with the Indonesian separatists. They were largely ignorant of it, and totally self-centered, due to a combination of *extreme* ethnic fragmentation and almost pure democracy. In some provinces there were hundreds of people on the ballot papers at election time. There was no doubt about the genuineness of their democracy, which had been carefully nurtured by the Australians, but it resulted in almost complete chaos politically, and that continues to this day.

Q: The ballot was respected though?

PRINGLE: On the whole the elections were free and fair and nobody claimed otherwise. The problem was that the country was verging on being ungovernable, especially with regard to more coherent utilization of their resources.

Q: Mining?

PRINGLE: It was important and growing, including gold, copper, and some oil development, both on and off shore. But logging was even more lucrative, and a greater environmental challenge.

Q: Were there American companies that were interested in the mining?

PRINGLE: Yes, but the Australians were well ahead of us in that department. There was only a very small resident American business community in PNG. They were far outnumbered by missionaries.

One astonishing US presence, and among the largest, was and still is the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), an offshoot the Wycliffe Bible Society established in the 1930s. They originally had summer programs in Mexico, hence the name. Their goal is to translate the Bible, at least part of it, into every language in the world, so for them PNG is

big business. At the time we were there they had worked on 175 of PNG's roughly 700 languages, completed 45 Bible translations (some of them only the New Testament and Psalms), and were employing roughly 700 professional staff, half of them Americans, with translation teams at work in more than 100 locations.

We visited SIL's headquarters, at Ukarumpa, in the Eastern Highlands. It had primary and secondary schools for SIL dependents, a sophisticated computer capability (in 1985!) which had cut in half the time required to translate the Bible, a printing plant, and a fleet of four fixed-wing aircraft plus a helicopter used to transport translators to their field locations.

The Australians were convinced it was a CIA base -- What else could it possibly be? Indeed SIL probably had played that role for a while, in Vietnam, so there was some grounds for suspicion, but they certainly were not doing so in PNG. But I gave up trying to talk the Australians out of it. In a way it made us more important in their eyes.

Q: So did we sort of look to the Australians to take the lead on issues that might affect us maybe marginally? Remember in Africa we used to say, "OK, well don't get out ahead of the French, don't get out ahead of the English, the former colonial powers." Is that the way we looked at the Australians in Papua New Guinea?

PRINGLE: Indeed it was. There was a curious role reversal: they were the superpower, we were the peripheral ally -- although never, I should stress, forgotten for our role in World War II. Getting to an aspect of this that was really important, we had no PX or anything like it, but the Australians let us use their copious "liquor locker," no red tape involved.

We could have disappeared for a quite a while without our absence being noticed back home, except for CINCPAC, God bless him. He knew there had been a great war here once and that one might come again. (The way the Chinese have been behaving in the South China Sea lately this no longer seems fantastic.) CINCPAC did oceans first and foremost, but in his role as regional commander he also made sure we got, for example, overflight rights for B-52s flying between Australia and points north. A person, not just a title, he would arrive in his big four-engined plane, with a flag that popped up from its nose as it taxied up to the terminal, and a sailor with a satellite phone, then almost the stuff of science fiction, who followed him everywhere on his calls.

Early in our stay we were visited by a Seventh Fleet provisioning ship, making its rounds, with inter alia 70,000 dozen eggs destined for hungry sailors. "If we ever get hit by a torpedo, we'll be the world's biggest omelet," its captain joked.

Embassy staff were allowed to buy groceries from it but they had to be in lots of at least fifty pounds. I had trouble selecting things we could use, and finally opted for a case of canned whole chickens. US Navy chickens must be OK, I thought. But when Barbara arrived -- she joined me late due to our children's school commitments -- we rapidly discovered they were tough and stringy, almost to the point of inedibility.

Of course this kind of material affluence was, from a PNG perspective, the quintessential driver of "cargo cults," the idea that the incredible amounts of evanescent "cargo" that we had brought in during the war could be summoned back by religious means. There was a well-publicized Lyndon Johnson cargo cult on New Hanover Island that was still alive when we were there. Their idea was that if they could invoke this great Lord of Cargo by incantation, he could help them in ways that their own pitiful government clearly could not. Well, it was better than insurrection.

Q: What about common crime? One hears a lot about, or used to hear a lot about common crime in Papua New Guinea.

PRINGLE: As I mentioned earlier, crime was indeed a big issue. When I was about to leave for Port Moresby Ambassador Gardner called me and asked if I had any second thoughts about coming. His secretary had just gone home because of the crime problem. It turned that it was also because her husband, a retired Massachusetts State Trooper, couldn't find a job - which seemed weird on the face of it. Anyway, knowing that Paul was inclined to be a bit nervous about everything, we did not change our plans and are glad that we didn't.

Outside PNG it was widely assumed that the crime problem was caused by savages with bones in their noses, which was not true. In Port Moresby, where it was most acute, the criminals were mainly second-generation residents some of whom lived in low-income government housing. They specialized in break-ins, assaults and gang rapes. The latter especially made foreigners shudder. They were known as "rascals," a good pidgin English term adopted into Australian slang.

The crime problem had been studied to death, and I added another fat paper to the pile already on Embassy shelves. The causes were complex: a tradition of violence, rooted in tribal warfare, great sensitivity to "foreigners" intruding on your land, or water if you were coastal - most tribal wars began with land disputes -- and, no doubt the most virulent cause, detribalization and its ugly step-children, alcoholism and anomie. I knew a little about this kind of thing from my American Indian exposure. We had security guards, of course, but no one trusted them, with reason.

We lived on top of a big hill, Touaguba Hill. It had magnificent vistas, the best of any place we have ever lived-- out over the Coral Sea to the west, and the forested interior to the east. We could hear birds of paradise calling from the distant forest - admittedly a rather common species, Count Raggi's Bird of Paradise -- and beyond them, the "ranges" stretched into the roadless interior. You couldn't go anywhere important from Moresby by road. Back on earth, we were a five-minute drive from my office.

Peering over the northern edge of our swimming pool terrace we looked down on a large village on stilts, Hanuabada, which predated colonial rule. These people once lived by trading their pottery for sago, grown by different ethnic groups living in the Gulf of Papua. They sailed there in sail-powered outrigger canoes, modern versions of which

they still race on holidays (each boat sponsored by a local car agency or bank). But the people were not always welcoming and we were advised not to enter Hanuabada without a resident escort -- and we never did, although we traveled widely elsewhere throughout the country.

The bottom line was that you had to know where you were going and what the local risk factor was. We went all over the place, much as we had done elsewhere. We discovered that Air Niugini carries scuba tanks for nothing and is very good at packaging souvenir shields and statuary.

We had a wonderful time visiting the great Sepik River, as did our kids, who went by themselves, although our son Jamie, by this time a student at Dartmouth, did catch malaria. It was not a bad case and the good doctors at the Dartmouth teaching hospital believed him, on his return in January, where he had been and what it probably was, and treated it correctly. However, a month or two later, our Public Affairs Officer, Mike Anderson, was robbed in the Sepik, and later in on the same trip, robbed again in the Highlands.

Port Moresby was very difficult for people with teenage children and we were very careful with ours when they came out on school vacations, a mere thirty hours of flying time via Sydney from the U.S. east coast, but paid for by Uncle Sam.

In Moresby, it mattered that right next to us was the house of Colonel John Robbins, head of the Australian military mission. We shared a common wall. I remember thinking, in my nervous first days before Barbara arrived, "Well, if the 'rascals' attack, it should help to have the head of PNG's military program next door, because CINCPAC isn't going to send the Seventh Fleet to rescue me, but I can always climb over that wall into John's garden." Needless to say we became good and lasting friends with John and his wife Jenny. She was a talented artist and one of our paintings, of the view from both our houses, hangs in our bedroom

Q: What about in the hinterland? Was it much safer back there? What would be the consequences if you did go in without being invited?

PRINGLE: Again, there was some risk, but less than in Moresby. We simply never traveled without guides or good information. Some places, especially away from the Highlands, you knew you were perfectly safe. The wonderful islands off the north coast, and southeastwards along the tail of New Guinea, were quite safe.

Q: What about villages out in the hinterland? Did you go out and see a National Geographic special at large?

PRINGLE: A lot of the tradition was alive and well, in many places, but especially in the Highlands. This elevated plateau which runs along the spine of New Guinea was not seen by the Australians until they -- gold prospectors in this case -- arrived by small plane in the 1930s and made "First Contact," as it is called. They recorded the event in a famous

documentary film, in which an Australian, standing in front his airplane, shoots a pig to demonstrate his power. There turned out to be more than a million people living there (not counting the Dutch side), many more than anyone had imagined. Today the PNG Highlands have large-scale mining, a lot of coffee growing, all small holder, and several towns linked by a modern highway.

Two of the towns, Goroka and Mt. Hagen, alternate putting on the annual Highland Show. It was originated by government, then encouraged by missionaries who hoped that friendly competition by dancers would discourage more lethal activities. Today dozens of groups participate. The shows were (and hopefully still are) absolutely spectacular. One of our favorite events demonstrated how a tribal fight began in a quarrel over land. The actors end up banging each other with small logs with what certainly seemed like lethal force.

The shows have been good for tourism but have never eliminated real tribal fights. We once stayed in Southern Highlands Province at a fancy new hotel, the Ambua Lodge. We saw smoke going up in the valley below and asked what it was. "Oh," said the lodge manager, "just a tribal fight." Later, down in the valley, we saw enormous trenches being built by villagers for use in such fighting, whether for offense or defense or both we never figured out. If the fights got bad enough, the government would fly in the police field force, which would impartially burn down the houses of both sides.

There is a good story about this. After World War II, the Australians brought in skilled doctors, MDs who had been displaced from Europe but could not find jobs in Australia itself because they weren't credentialed there. They would go on patrol with the district officers, treating the villagers. One result was an amazingly high standard of health care for such remote areas. And since the warring parties in a tribal fight would often wag their posteriors at the enemy, to display derision and bravery, it resulted in the world's most authoritative medical literature on the treatment of arrow wounds in the buttocks.

But tribal fighting, despite its ritual, quasi-NFL aspects, was no laughing matter and hugely expensive to all concerned. It has become more lethal as people have started to use firearms, whereas until recently only traditional arms were allowed. It has no doubt contributed to the more general pattern of violence. Regarding the NFL aspects: among the Dani people on the Indonesian side, a fight would end when someone was injured, maybe by an arrow in the posterior. Everyone would pick up their weapons and go home. How civilized, I always thought.

This heritage of violence was linked not only with crime but also with binge drinking, another big problem, not least for the diplomatic corps. We learned early on that when entertaining you had to be wary of your guests drinking too much and getting into fights with each other, either in your house or going home. In a party at the Japanese Residence early in our stay we were amazed at how quickly the bar just vanished. The Ambassador's wife, a very correct lady indeed, explained to Barbara in somewhat embarrassed tones that while such a thing was not a normal part of diplomatic etiquette, "in Papua New Guinea, you *have* to close the bar."

During my tour, a talented young Highlander was named PNG's Ambassador to the U.S. It was the first time that anyone from that long-isolated region had achieved such an important assignment. He was a charming person, and we were all happy for him, but it ended in tragedy when, coming back intoxicated from a Washington diplomatic event, he hit a car driven by a journalist and killed him. It resulted in lurid publicity and his recall in disgrace.

Q: Was there still headhunting going on, or was that a thing of the past?

PRINGLE: There was endless war but very little if any headhunting, unlike in Sarawak. There was also very little cannibalism, unlike in Vanuatu, one of our other Melanesian countries. One important exception was the existence of ritual cannibalism in an exceptionally remote area. It led to a disease of the brain, *kuru*, and was studied by an extraordinary character, Dr. Carleton Gajdusek, pronounced "guide a check." His research led to the discovery of the retrovirus, and won him a Nobel Prize.

I had first heard about Gajdusek while in Jakarta. Unlike almost anyone else, he worked on both sides of New Guinea, and loved coming in to chat with us, especially with our statuesque blonde consular officer, Harriet Isom, about his latest experiences there. He was, among other things, an expert on New Guinea languages, and had recommended locating the SIL headquarters, mentioned earlier, at Ukarumpa, because it was at the intersection of several important linguistic regions.

We all thought he was amazing but more than slightly nuts. With his Nobel Prize he certainly had the last laugh, although he was, years after that, disgracefully enough, jailed after pleading guilty to child molestation in the DC area in 1997. His is a long story. There is a good Wikipedia entry on him.

Q: Was there any aftermath of the Rockefeller case that affected you when you were there?

PRINGLE: No, although it affected me, in a minor way, in Indonesia in the early 1970's. His demise, whatever caused it, came on the West Irian - Indonesian side. People kept coming to our Jakarta Embassy offering to give us his remains if the Rockefellers paid enough. We were instructed to throw these people out, and we did. The people in the area where he vanished were indeed headhunters, but I am fairly certain that no one knows what happened. The weight of informed opinion is that it was probably an accident at sea, traveling in a local canoe in stormy weather.

Q: Did we have any other major interests or issues?

PRINGLE: The big one was a dispute over tuna fishing. Our tuna boats had recently started fishing in the Western Pacific as areas closer to home were fished out or the tuna swam elsewhere. Many of our boats were ultra modern vessels with on-board helicopters owned by recent immigrants from Yugoslavia. The price of tuna had been declining, and

the owners were having trouble paying off their boat loans. The U.S. had not (and never has) signed the international Convention on Law of the Sea, concluded in 1982.

With regard to tuna, we went our own way. Everyone else in the world agreed that countries could regulate fishing within their 200-mile Extended Economic Zones (EEZs), endorsed by the new Convention. Only the U.S. argued that since tuna were "highly migratory" fish, hence international by nature, they could be caught anywhere up to the old twelve-mile limit. This made huge a difference in the Pacific, where small archipelago countries with tiny populations had EEZs which, when you connected the island perimeters, covered vast areas.

Along comes the Magnuson (or Magnuson-Stevens) Act, I forget when. Senator Magnuson represented Washington State and was a determined advocate of US fishing rights. According to his law, we could fish within the EEZs, and anyone who tried to stop us by seizing a U.S. flagged boat could be slapped with trade sanctions, an act just short of war. Not only that, the U.S. Government had to compensate the boat owner thus mistreated by paying him for the loss of his very expensive vessel, for which he was often up to his neck in debt and maybe not entirely sad to be relieved of. In other words, some boat owners had an incentive to get in trouble.

No one else was on our side. The Australian and New Zealand press pounded us. We were becoming the Big Bad Bullies of the Western Pacific. And then a patrol boat of the Solomon Islands, one of our three countries, seized the *Jeannette Diana*, one of the ultra-modern, helicopter- equipped ones, and forced it into Honiara, hitherto better known as the site of the Battle of Guadalcanal in World War II.

That was where things stood when I arrived in Port Moresby in late 1984. Since we had no resident staff in Honiara, Ambassador Gardener sent our consular officer there to calm down the Solomon Island government and make sure nothing bad happened to *Jeannette Diana*. Eventually this turned into a more permanent presence.

The ruckus dragged on for weeks and months, but eventually the tuna canning magnates, from companies like StarKist and Bumble Bee, came to our rescue. They, unlike the boat owners, understood and cared that we might be shut out of tuna fishing in the Western Pacific. A dramatic change of policy ensued. The boat owners were no longer heard from. The canners agreed to respect the EEZs of small countries like Solomon Islands. The canners even lobbied for and got some international aid, including from us, to help start-up tuna fishing companies in such places.

A new treaty encompassing these changes was completed and signed with all due ceremony in Port Moresby. Bewigged highland warriors stood behind the delegates as they initialed it, and we all got Charlie Tuna watches from the canners' reps. The neatest part of it all was that since treaties trump domestic law -- this is in the US Constitution -- the offending portions of the Magnuson Act simply vanished.

Q: What about Barbara?

PRINGLE: After a few months she got a job teaching at Port Moresby International High School (PMIH). Although it followed a Queensland (Australian) curriculum the teachers were all recruited in the UK, because they were cheaper than Australians! If you concluded that the school had to be less than excellent, you would be correct, and we were glad that our kids were attending boarding schools in the US. They got to come out and see us at vacations, an adventure in itself.

The next weirdness about our experience with PMIH was that it hired Barbara to teach Papua New Guinea Prehistory, of all things. To do so, she had to take a course in that esoteric subject at the University of Papua New Guinea. The university was respectable academically, but the location was in a notoriously crime-prone neighborhood.

One of her professors was a world authority on this subject, a Britisher then living in New Zealand. At one point he invited her to come with him on a trip to look for prehistoric stone axes. Some of them were as much as 40,000 years old, and they were important because they were linked to one of the earliest examples of a kind of proto-agriculture. It consisted of cutting back the edge of the forest to allow more sun, which made it possible to cultivate edible crops.

The place to find them was the Huon Peninsula, on the north coast. It had been uplifted over the eons, exposing a series of fossil coral reefs, which looked terraces. What you did was to walk down a stream channel cutting through the terraces, and look for the trade-mark "waisted" shape, where a groove went around the oval stone to allow it to be hafted to its handle. And Barbara was to the one who saw one, not her professor. That was a kick, although she had to give it to the National Museum when we left, even though they had drawers full of them. We did get to take pictures of it first. Barbara got new insights into the complex local community, and a new subject to teach occasionally back home.

Q: Were there other bilateral issues that you had to deal with, other than occasional support in the UN -- or other issues that preoccupied you?

PRINGLE: Not really, I was on my way to a job with OES (the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs) and I was interested in environmental policy, so I followed the relevant issues like logging, fisheries management and the nascent oil industry.

Q: There's an article in today's paper about the recovery of the remains of a B-24 bomber crew who took off from New Guinea, lost, and then finally located and recovered. Did you have any cases like that when you were there?

PRINGLE: We did indeed. There were more missing aircraft from the Fifth Air Force alone in and around New Guinea, about 350 of them, than the total number of U.S. aircraft lost and missing, with far more publicity, during the Vietnam War.

Q: Really?

PRINGLE: The Defense Department was eager to go after missing aircraft in Indochina, and had trained teams waiting in Hawaii to do it, but for years the Vietnamese would not let them in. So they began to sharpen their expertise by working in PNG.

The key player at our end was an extraordinary Australian named Bruce Hoy, who presided over an informal World War II Museum in a big Quonset hut near the airport, appropriately enough. He was a living encyclopedia of the war in New Guinea. He had copies of all the unit histories, and a network of friends in villages throughout the country who knew what he looking for.

So when they spotted some wreckage they would come in and tell him, "Hey, we think we've got something interesting." And Bruce would look through his files and unit histories to see if the wreckage matched something already accounted for. If not, it might be one of the missing airplanes. The next step would be to take a look on the ground and get some I.D., a tail number or something. If it looked promising he would contact Hawaii to see if they were interested.

The one we got involved in was a B-17E, tail number 41-2505. It had taken off from Port Moresby on April 17, 1942, from the same airport that is still the international airport today, still surrounded some of the revetments that once sheltered our B17s.

On the fatal morning, this one was on its way to bomb Rabaul, the big Japanese base on New Britain, which we never captured. At this time the Japanese were still bombing the Moresby airport almost daily, so the runway lights were not working.

The plane took off before dawn, loaded with bombs, gas and twelve crew members and immediately had engine trouble. But it couldn't abort the mission and land until the sun came up, because of the runway lights being out. As it circled around in the dark it clipped the top of the Owen Stanley Range, about nine thousand feet in elevation. Everyone on board was killed.

The crash site was soon observed, but our military thought it was another plane, a DC-3 whose crew had bailed out, and nothing was more done for over forty years. It was thought that this B17 must have crashed at sea. But some villagers came across the wreckage and told Hoy about it. He had a sixth sense about missing aircraft and got a patrol to go up and look, and they immediately identified it.

Hoy then notified Hawaii, and they sent a team over. The first step was to build a crude helipad so they could fly in the team. I was able to visit them there. The mountain forest at that altitude is sparse and spindly, nothing like the classic tropical forest of the lowlands. Fragments of the plane had rolled down the slope and a large piece of the fuselage was intact, most of it still with the paint on.

The tail number was clearly visible, with a machine gun poking out of the waist, belts of ammunition scattered around, and one 500-lb bomb on the mountainside nearby. The team had formed a kind of skirmish line on the steep slope and were going through leaf litter looking for human remains, especially teeth essential for identification in pre-DNA days. Most of the crew members were eventually identified and remains sent to next of kin for burial.

Our new consular officer, a genuine risk-taker, was with me, and he broke off a clip of .50 caliber bullets for a souvenir. Last I knew he was still using it for a paperweight at his State Department office.

Q: Were there other interesting consular cases that took place during your time?

PRINGLE: Nothing nearly as spectacular. I wrote an account of it of for *State Magazine*.

Q: You were there for how long?

PRINGLE: A little shy of two years, because then I got the Mali appointment.

Q: So you were off as ambassador to Mali in 1987.

PRINGLE: Late in 1987. It took a while to get confirmed.

Q: Is there anything you want to add about Papua New Guinea before we move on to Mali?

PRINGLE: I don't think so. It was a wonderful experience. I still think of that house on Touaguba Hill, with its incredible vistas, and the superb experiences we had traveling in one of the world's last, mostly unspoiled places, and scuba diving in the St. Moritz of that sport.

But I should say a word or two more about our two other countries, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Population-wise, they are both tiny -- even now (2015) they have fewer than one million people between them. Insignificant, you might think, until you realize that the Pacific is full of such countries. It is easy, if expensive, to get to their capital cities, Honiara (Solomon Islands) and Port Vila (Vanuatu). It is another thing to get to their more distant islands, and in fact we never got beyond a very few. Pretty much the only foreigners who do are those who travel by yacht, which translates into lots of money and time.

Like the rest of Melanesia, these are countries etched in American memories by World War II. If you know anything about the war, you know something about Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands. To the south, Vanuatu, and more specifically its biggest island, Espiritu Santo, was the staging ground for the Guadalcanal campaign. That's where Ezio Pinza had his plantation.

Guadalcanal itself, Solomon Island's biggest island, is where Mary Martin washed her hair, and Bloody Mary sang of Bali Hai, that Special Island. In fact, James Michener, whose *Tales of the South Pacific* were the basis of the musical, lifted the name "Bali" from Indonesia, far from the actual setting of his story. My guess is that these names, fictitious and otherwise, will still be resonating in our memories a century and more from now.

I've already mentioned Solomon Islands' role in our tuna problem. Vanuatu, another island chain, once known as the New Hebrides, was by my time important mainly for having the only left-wing chief of state in the island world. His name was Walter Lini and he was a sometime Episcopal Priest. Father Lini sympathized with anti-French rebels on nearby New Caledonia, still under French rule today, and tried to get the Libyans to support them. He also talked about something called Melanesian Socialism.

All this bothered us, and Ambassador Gardner would not let me visit Vanuatu, as an expression of neglect. I was only able to do so when he was about to leave, and I had to make arrangements for a new Ambassador, Everett Bierman, to present his credentials.

We were dubious about Bierman at first. He was a political appointee, formerly Chief of Staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for many years, and this was his reward from the Congress. But he was a kind and generous man, and also a devout Christian, and his wife even more so. Because of that, he was extremely popular with the large and influential Port Moresby Christian community and made many friends among them, going to church with them on Sundays when we were out scuba diving.

Back to Vanuatu -- During the era of colonization it ended up on the border between British and French spheres of influence in the Southwest Pacific. To settle a dispute over whom this island chain belonged to, the powers that were cut the baby in half -- maybe the word "Solomon" in Solomon Islands inspired that -- resulting in a French-English condominium, something straight out of opera bouffe. The two great powers divided up the top jobs and made sure their respective flags were hoisted to equal heights every morning.

In 1986 it was a great place to visit. The country's capital, Efate, had a wonderful museum of Melanesian art, managed by an American. Efforts were underway to preserve the country's pristine coral reefs, and it was becoming *the* place to go to see an unspoiled example of the real South Pacific. Air connections were terrible but I understand that this has since been fixed.

Vanuatu also had its own cargo cult, named after a deified American named John Frum. Independence had started with the so-called "Coconut War," inspired by some American loonies who wanted to set up an independent tax haven on Espiritu Santo. The Papua New Guineans had to send in troops to get it straightened out!

One of the kookiest dive sites I've ever experienced is the USS *President Coolidge*, a big liner converted to a troop ship, which sank at the entrance to Espiritu Santo Harbor in 1942. (All the troops on board got off safely.) Today you can swim around in the mammoth enlisted men's "head," with hundreds of white toilets cheek by jowl, so to speak, stretching into the underwater gloom. One could only imagine what this place much have looked, smelled and sounded like on a normal day at sea after breakfast.

Q: How did the appointment to Mali come about?

PRINGLE: There is no doubt that it was due to Chet Crocker, whom I admired and got along with. The unusual delay in my confirmation hearing occurred because Senator Paul Simon, then Chair of the Africa Subcommittee, was running for President. As a result, he was hardly ever in Washington, and was way behind on his confirmation hearings.

I should mention that I got a personal call from President Reagan in Port Moresby congratulating me. He did that with all his ambassadors-designate. At first we had no idea when he might call. His habit was to save up a number of nominees and call them in seriatim, with the help of the miracle-working White House switchboard. But I finally calculated that because he had scheduled a long foreign trip, I had a couple of weeks to spend some farewell time on a dive boat in some of the most glorious underwater scenery anywhere.

This worked well. Back in Port Moresby, when the big call finally came, the first thing the President said was "Well, it must be in the middle of the night where you are?" Indeed it was. But I thought the call, which had no serious substance to it, was a nice touch. After that we went home to the Washington area.

The unanticipated delay in my confirmation didn't matter much to us. Barbara and I were staying in a hotel in Foggy Bottom, paid for by Uncle Sam, seeing a lot of our daughter who was a boarding student at the Madeira School. But my colleague, David Shinn, who was going to be Ambassador to Burkina Faso, was in a terrible fix. Because he had been on a domestic assignment when he was nominated, the government would not pay his per diem, although he had already rented out his house.

Finally he asked Brock Adams, his own Senator from Oregon and also on the Africa Subcommittee, if he would mind holding a confirmation hearing for the backlog of Africa nominees. He did not, Paul Simon was glad to have him do it, and in almost no time we were confirmed and on our respective ways.

Q: When did you arrive in Bamako?

PRINGLE: It was late in 1987, soon after Thanksgiving. I can remember the first party we attended, shivering in a cold breeze blowing off the Niger River. It didn't get really hot until June.

Q: What were you preoccupied with there in terms of U.S.-Malian issues?

PRINGLE: A word about the country first. Mali had been the biggest piece of France's old mega-colony, French West Africa. Its population was roughly seven million people when I was there, double that today. It is just under twice the size of Texas and divided by one of Africa's greatest rivers, the Niger. For most of its length the area north of the river is almost entirely desert, and almost no one lives there (not counting some important towns on the river itself). But Bamako is far enough south so that its rainfall is approximately equal to that of Washington DC and by the time you reach the Guinea-Ivorian border the climate is semi-tropical. These geographic facts have dictated almost everything important about Mali.

Mali was a great country in the past because the Niger River was part of the main trade route between Africa and Europe, until the Atlantic Slave Trade caused it to shift to the coast. Timbuktu is where the old route left the river and turned north, because that was the shortest distance to the Mediterranean.

The trade made Mali cosmopolitan. It was, over time, the center of three multiethnic empires, an almost unique thing in Africa. Multiethnicity led to a heritage of tolerance among different groups. The "great empires," as the Malians call them, generated an awareness of history. Malians are sophisticated, charming, great diplomats, and (as this implies) they can be duplicitous when it serves their interests.

Right after independence Mali broke temporarily from the French. Under a left-wing aristocrat, Modibo Keita, it developed a strong relationship with the USSR. Keita's pseudo-communist authoritarianism offended most Malians, and the military took over in 1968.

Q: Who was president when you arrived?

PRINGLE: By the time I arrived in late 1987 Mali could be described as an old fashioned, relatively well-behaved military dictatorship. Moussa Traoré, its president, came from peasant stock, with no significant family, but he married a lady with a wealthy family and brains. They had a compact: she and her large family made money, while he kept the state on an even keel, coup-proof if you will, so they could do so. That worked until 1990.

Technically Mali was non-aligned. The Russians were still there with a ragtag military mission, members of which seemed to be living in something close to poverty. Most of the aid was coming from the West, including us. Our policy was built around economic aid and Peace Corps. The time was past when we got involved with dams or other big infrastructure. However, we were of course important members of the World Bank and the IMF and gave significant support to their critically important work. Our project aid was focused mainly on "food security," including livestock and related activities. "Food security" meant equipping Mali and its Sahelian neighbors -- "Sahel" is an Arabic word meaning "below the desert"-- to prepare for and survive catastrophic droughts like those

of the early 1980s. As of 2015 there have no recurrences of such catastrophic drought, which certainly does not mean there will not be.

Q: But our relationship with the Malians was pretty good at that point?

PRINGLE: It was good. It got a little worse towards the end. Before that, there was a high point, a full-fledged State Visit by the Malian president to the United States. Have you ever experienced one of those?

Q: No, but I was involved in that one because Chet Crocker was out of town and I was a Deputy Assistant Secretary and acting Assistant Secretary. So I got included in a small cocktail gathering they had right before the dinner, up in the Yellow Room. Cyd Charisse, the dancer, was one of the guests. Were there any results from that visit? Traoré must have been pleased to get the attention.

PRINGLE: He certainly was, he had a ball, as did Mme. Traoré. He was not exactly invited on his own merits. To explain, Reagan was coming to the end of his second term and someone noticed he had invited only one African for a State visit, Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast, during his eight years in office. Maybe another one would be a good idea? That poised a dilemma because all the others were either hopelessly corrupt or not really friends. So someone had the bright idea of asking the head of the OAU, who happened to be Moussa Traoré, who seemed at least harmless. It is normal to invite Ambassadors and their wives to participate in State Visits -- not for lower categories of visits - to make sure that the honored guests have at least one familiar face in the crowd at all times.

Before Traoré arrived I had to attend the requisite briefing for Reagan in the Oval Office, so we could tell him what Moussa would say when they met. Fortunately we knew that he was arriving by way of Senegal, in a battered rental jet, and while there the Senegalese President, Abdou Diouf, had asked him to ask Reagan if he could send back to Senegal a USAID plane being used to spray insecticide on a plague of locusts, which was then ravaging West Africa. And we knew that Moussa had agreed to do so.

When we this laid this on the table Reagan reacted immediately. "Oh heavens!" he said, "I remember, I remember when the locusts descended on Salt Lake City and the Mormons prayed and they got seagulls to come! They ate the locusts! And what he needs is some seagulls!" And I'm sitting there speechless. But Colin Powell, the National Security Adviser at the time, and ever the good soldier says, "No Mr. President, this really won't work. Seagulls will not cut it."

Of course we were all on tenterhooks to find out what would happen at the meeting, and sure enough Reagan recommended seagulls, although in the end we were able to get the spray plane sent back to Senegal. I think that Traoré, who was not as dull as he often seemed, probably appreciated and understood the seagull story. And I began to realize how Reagan had succeeded, more through charm than brains, although to be sure he was a bit dotty by this time.

The state dinner was annoying in one respect: we had sent in a list of suggestions for the guest list, people who knew and cared about Mali. Not one of them was invited. All the invitees were either friends of POTUS and FLOTUS, or Republican notables who perhaps had not been included in other recent State Dinners. The dancer and movie star Cyd Charisse got top billing in the news coverage. Barbara and I did not meet her.

There were enormous floral decorations on each table that made it impossible to see, much less talk to anyone across the table, and in any case not nearly enough French-speaking guests to talk with the Malians.

Later in the visit Traoré went to Ohio to get an honorary degree from Central State University, in Dayton. And Ohio's Governor Celeste, a former Peace Corps Director, gave another dinner for the Traorés that showed how it should be done.

Fortunately we were able to work many of our neglected suggestions for guests into a splendid State Department lunch. Notable among them was Dr. Pascal James Imperato, a distinguished public health expert. He had worked in Mali for USAID on smallpox eradication and written copiously about a wide range of Malian topics, from traditional methods of managing cattle migrations to all almost every aspect of Mali's art and history. He was also the author of the invaluable *Historical Dictionary of Mali*. He richly deserved recognition.

Q: I remember Reagan was somewhat amused by the bulk that Traoré presented in this boubou that he wore to the state dinner.

PRINGLE: No doubt.

Q: Because he sidled over to me at the small Yellow Room gathering and said, "This guy looks like a fullback for the Chicago Bears."

PRINGLE: He was a big man, even without the *boubou*.

At the end of the visit, they took off from Columbus to go home. This happened by chance to be on Columbus Day. As the delegation arrived at the hotel, there was a great parade going down the street, high school bands, old cars, the whole bit. The Malians concluded it must be at least partly in their honor, which was almost certainly not the case. President and Mrs. Traoré watched from their hotel window, and most of their staff descended to the curbside to watch. They all flew back to Mali in their rented airplane that evening.

So ended a memorable trip. When we got home I thought "Washington has had enough of us for six months! Now is the time to take that fabled trip down the Niger on a river boat!"

And so we did: 813 miles by river on the good ship *Tombouctou*, in just under one week. The voyage can only be made when the river in flood, after the summer rains have

ceased, converting the huge "inner delta" of this Great Brown God from land that can be farmed and driven across into a lake.

Factoid: when the water retreats, tons of fish are trapped and caught. In a good year when the flood is robust, fish could comprise as much as five percent of landlocked Mali's exports. (This is in the past tense because the river isn't flooding as high as it used to, due to more use of water upstream.)

It was like traveling on a Missouri River steamboat in 1840. In the first few days we kept running aground on sandbars because the river is never dredged. The serendipitous result was that we arrived in Timbuktu on the night of the Prophet's Birthday, the only time when the entire town is lighted up, for all-night Koran readings, and the normally sequestered women appear in public.

All this and much more was the subject of a long report, with another version designed for the Embassy newsletter and those interested in how to make the voyage.

Q: It wasn't too long after that visit, was it, that Moussa Traoré was overthrown?

PRINGLE: Actually he was overthrown more than two years later, in March 1991.

Q: It wasn't on your watch?

PRINGLE: No, but pro-democracy agitation was well underway before I left.

Q: Well, you had a visit by Maureen Reagan when you were there.

PRINGLE: Oh yes.

Q: She was on her way to the 25th anniversary of the OAU and I was in the delegation.

PRINGLE: Indeed! I had forgotten that. We had a very helpful Secret Service advance group that told us, "This is how she is and this is how you should handle her." Man, was that ever useful. I mean it was *enormously* useful.

Q: I wish I'd had that advice, because I was the Maureen watcher on that trip. But I remember that she dedicated a Peace Corps training center, and they named it after her.

PRINGLE: There was more to it. At the dedication the bright young *commandant de cercle* (district officer), without talking about this with anyone beforehand, said, "And ladies and gentleman, I think this training center should be named after Maureen Reagan." Well, of course the volunteers were all hotly anti-Reagan, so we'd been trying to duck any such idea. But the Malians went ahead and named it after her.

The volunteers had the last laugh. As you were approaching by road there was a sign reading "Maureen Reagan Peace Corps Training Center," with type in two sizes: the

"Maureen Reagan" was on top in letters so small you couldn't read it. In addition, one of the first things the volunteers learned in their Bambara language classes was *nyegen*, meaning toilet. The boys' and girls' facilities were immediately labeled "Nancy" and "Ronald" respectively.

Q: So she was happy as a clam.

PRINGLE: She was fine with us. She was interested in Africa and it showed.

Q: She didn't like Loret Miller Ruppe who was head of Peace Corps at the time, and she was just gloating over the fact that when Ruppe heard that this center would be named after her, she was just going to have a fit.

PRINGLE: Oh really?

Q: I'm trying to remember whether during her visit Maureen presented any jellybeans. Usually she would present a bowl of jellybeans to the people she would call on.

PRINGLE: I know she did. We received a jar full, which I put on the desk of my secretary, Marilyn Mattke. One day it got knocked off by accident, and she was mortified, but I have to say we did not miss it.

Q: My experience with Maureen was that she would have her talking points, half a dozen of them. And then when she hit the end of her talking points she didn't have anything to say. And then she would usually turn to the ambassador or whoever was going to pick up the slack -- I don't know if you recall that meeting or not -- but it was kind of a hurried affair.

PRINGLE: I don't remember the meeting, so it must have been OK. It was still early in a multi-country trip and she was still in good spirits.

Q: Interesting. On another subject, how did you deal with your staff? What was your management approach as an ambassador?

PRINGLE: It was a small embassy, not that different from Burkina, and the same basic rules applied. As usual, there was a close link between effective management and the nature of the country and the size and characteristics of the post.

Mali's former role as a Soviet regional base of sorts was crumbling, although they still had a few MIGs that would barely fly, plus some heavy armor good only for parades. With no significant Cold War threat to worry about we had no political agenda at all, although that would change as Mali's democracy movement move got underway, and I will get to that later.

Our policy was to help Mali develop economically, in the belief, which I thought then and still think was valid, that the elimination of poverty through increasing rural income,

was the *sine qua non* of everything else that we and they might hope for: democracy, regional development, human rights, the works.

The Ambassador had to be genuinely interested in the development agenda. He had to know his USAID staff and Peace Corps volunteers, including local staff; understand what they were doing, and perhaps most of all, visit them in the field. This mandate to travel around an amazing and varied country was what made the job so fulfilling, as I had been told by one of my predecessors, Parker Borg, who also gave me good advice on how to do it.

One valuable bit of advice from Parker was to avoid staying in "hotels" except in a very few places, which meant going prepared to camp out, literally. Barbara's Girl Scout background was invaluable. You had to do this carefully to avoid offending local officials, on whom you did definitely have to call when in their districts.

In really hot areas you wanted a place where you could sleep on the roof because it usually cooled off nicely at night. Often that meant on the roof of a Peace Corps Volunteer's house, a stopping place which seemed logical to the Malians. Using the tent we brought along, on the other hand, meant stopping far from the district capital. The most awful place we ever stayed was the old Air France office in Gao, cavernous and dirty with no windows or doors that would open and, needless to say, no air conditioning. And of course we were always on malaria medication.

There were other little tricks of the trade. Take Peace Corps Volunteers out to dinner in the nearest town, if one was available. Always go equipped with a generous supply of home-made chocolate chip cookies in case it was not. Our cook could produce them in bulk.

The only major problem I had with our USAID mission was that its Washington leadership had decided to rebel against the new State Department system for allocating embassy expenses among the different agencies at post. USAID Washington was convinced that they were getting terribly cheated by embassies around the world, and that Mali was a particularly egregious case. And it was a fairly arcane business. Our Mission Director, Gene Chiavaroli, who was a USAID nationalist, supported his headquarters ardently. But Washington instructed me to nail State's flag to the mast and resist! (So much for Ambassadorial direction of the mission.)

I did not think we had been sent Mali to fight with each other about administrative costs, and the whole thing was driving me nuts. And then we got a new USAID Mission Director, Dennis Brennan. He was upper crust Irish by birth, hence could not join the Foreign Service. But he had all the instincts of a diplomat, and was also an old friend from Jakarta. He agreed with me, and suddenly my biggest problem evaporated.

Later we got a new accounting officer, Joe Hilt, the same person who had been teaching the course on mission administration and financing at FSI for ambassadors-to-be, as well

as another for their spouses which Barbara took. And he concluded that we (State) had indeed been significantly overcharging AID!

Q: What about morale - was it similar to Ouaga?

PRINGLE: It was, although the small-post ambience was not quite as pronounced. The Marine House was still a hub of social activity, especially after it moved to a splendid location on the river. The softball team was still very important, although again not quite so much so as in Ouaga. There was a good embassy club mainly for tennis, but quite far away, on the other side of the river.

The French had located Bamako well, between the Niger and a high escarpment where the presidential palace was located, looking out over the great river. The river itself was full of big Nile Perch to catch and birds to watch, but it also had bilharzia parasites so was not recommended for swimming.

There was an old canal running downstream to an irrigation project built by the French in the 1920's, great for hiking and birding. There were many more things to do and see for the venturesome -- the Dogon Country, the ancient city of Jenné, spectacular rock formations around Hombori, reminiscent of Monument Valley; the wonderful old river port at Mopti and of course Timbuktu, although that was a two-day drive, leaving aside the seasonal, week-long trip by boat. You crossed the river beyond Ségou and then followed a sandy *piste* northeast, being careful to stay between a scraggly telephone line and the river. There was no regular air service but a pretty good hotel when you got there.

Our chancery was weird, originally a bank built by the Israelis in the springtime of their relationship with Africa. It had lots of thick walls and narrow passages and was surrounded by crowded streets with no setback. My office looked down on a Lebanese café; I could practically touch it. We were not yet worried about terrorists and in any case we knew that the daughter of the café owner had married an American FSO.

I almost forgot the elephants. There was a herd of elephants, about 500 of them, the northernmost elephants in Africa, that migrated between Burkina Faso and the Niger River in Mali. They were relatively large -- just like the desert elephants of Namibia - but had very short tusks, maybe from using them constantly to dig for water. That may have saved them from ivory poachers, but it was also important that the Tuareg regarded them as sacred, harbingers of good fortune.

I found out about them from Noumou Diakité, a remarkable man, veterinarian by training, who, as a World Bank cattle project director, had used his tank truck to take water to the elephants during the great drought of the early eighties. (He also administered shots to the Peace Corps volunteers posted around Mopti.) They were hardly unknown -- there is a chapter on them in *Elephants of Africa* by Paul Bosman and Anthony Hall-Martin, a South African book published in 1986. But none of the foreigners in Bamako had heard of them, and most believed there was no big game left in

the country, except for one lone giraffe survivor said to be wandering around somewhere near the Niger border.

Diakité took us several times, once including our daughter, to see them from his project "headquarters" in Hombori - an old warehouse we called the Hombori Hilton. You simply drove out, asked the locals where the elephants were, and looked at droppings for age, to tell how far away they might be. These elephants were the opposite of those in more touristed places in Africa. They were not afraid of people on foot - they lived among herders all the time - but spooked at the sound of a vehicle engine. So you had to dismount and walk toward them, carefully and downwind.

Q: How did you arrange the relationship with your DCM? Who was your DCM?

PRINGLE: My DCM was John Lewis. John is a very bright guy and we got along well with him personally, but he was a bit irascible. He had a way of getting in disputes with other senior people in the mission. And I found myself often making peace between John and them. And I thought, "This is backwards."

Q: Yes, exactly.

PRINGLE: I honestly think that it was a problem - and I don't want to exaggerate it -that was part of being black and sensitive to being slighted. I probably should have counseled him more vigorously than I did. He had a corridor reputation based somewhat on his irritability, and I think it held him back in the Service.

Q: But he was your DCM the whole time?

PRINGLE: He was there then I arrived. Toward the end of my tour, he was replaced by John Boardman, who is equally bright and did a great job during my time with him, although he had had little experience in Africa.

Going back to the importance of economic development, we had one special opportunity where we were able to help, and that concerned the revival of Mali's gold industry. Ancient Mali had been renowned for its gold. A famous fourteenth century emperor, Kankan Moussa, had, while enroute to Mecca, taken enough gold to Cairo in his camel bags to destabilize Mediterranean gold prices for a time.

Despite evidence that this episode did occur, the idea of Mali as a gold power was still being generally dismissed as myth. That was because no one could figure out where it came from, partly because the Malians had tried successfully to keep the source a secret. When we arrived there was only some village-level artisanal mining going on, with calabashes, not pans, plus one "modern" Soviet mine, which our intelligence told us, quite incorrectly, was robbing the Malians blind. Later it turned out just to be a badly designed mine, and we saw how unbelievably crude it was when we visited it, although we enjoyed a great Siberian New Year's breakfast with the miners, who were loving the Malian climate.

Enter two modern players. The first was a senior geologist for Utah International, an American company working in the region. The second was UNDP, the United Nations Development Program.

The Utah International geologist was convinced that there had to be significant gold in the ancient rock plateaus of Mali; it was just a matter of finding it. UNDP, as part of its own agenda, began to investigate places where there might be serious gold, concentrating on sites where there was evidence of ancient mining, and/or modern artisanal mining.

Armed with the UNDP survey, Utah International began to look at some of the old sites more closely. They found one place where ancient miners had gone as far as they could go into earth that had probably been rich in gold, and their testing confirmed that this ore body continued into bedrock. The result was Mali's first successful gold mine, at Syama, to be followed in the next decade by several more. Today Mali is, once again, a major gold producer, although not enough so to have become wealthy.

We were good friends with David Huggins, the Utah International manager, and gave him every support we could. Later, Barbara was able to hold a fresh bar of gold still warm from the furnace.

By this time Utah International had been purchased by a much bigger Australian company. When the Australian Ambassador, based in Senegal, and accredited to dozens of countries, called on me I confessed that everyone in Mali still thought Utah International was American. He laughed and said that was fine with him; no one in Mali had heard of Australia so it was probably better to have them thinking that the Americans owned it, which I guess was a compliment.

Q: How did Barbara take to her job as the first lady of the embassy?

PRINGLE: She was of course well aware that being an ambassadors' spouse was not an average situation, and that Mali was going to be an exceptionally interesting post, and of course she speaks excellent French. She knew that I would be doing a lot of traveling, and she opted not to seek full time work, so she would be free to accompany me. She was after all the camper in the family and we knew that we would be doing quite a bit of real camping out. Closer to home, we acquired a small Suzuki 4x4 so she could negotiate the mud and ruts of Bamako's byways without relying on my absurd official car.

She of course managed the Residence, the bookkeeping for ORE, the servants with all their myriad needs and personal crises, and the organization of entertaining. And she began a major volunteer activity working with AMALDEME, the only facility for neurologically handicapped children in francophone West Africa.

AMALDEME was founded by an extraordinary Malian woman, Kadiatou Sanogo, whose inherited status as a French citizen had provided extensive medical care as well as education to two of her children who were born handicapped. Comfortably well off, she

dedicated her life to providing similar help to Malian children. When we arrived, she was just starting to construct a permanent facility, and wanted to include a school. Barbara, trained in special education, aided her with pedagogical advice as well as fund-raising endeavors.

The fund-raising had two aspects: obtaining used furniture, mainly rugs for disabled children to sit on instead of desks, plus real desks for teachers, and hosting various Women's International Club events at the Residence. These events started a social trend in Bamako -- masked balls. The first ball was a gala affair attended by bemused guests in everything from formal wear with fun masks, to what might be regarded as Halloween costumes, plus some Malians who didn't believe that the invitations really meant masks.

The Women's International Club was intriguing. It was popular with all kinds of Malians because it provided a lively alternative to an official but quasi-moribund club for diplomatic spouses chaired by Mme Traoré. To the extent that it was offbeat and informal, it avoided attracting her attention, which might well have killed it.

As had happened at every other post, Barbara's activities, observations and friendships enriched my own. As was often the case in such situations, the US Government was getting two employees for the price of one.

Q: What about the decline of the Soviet Empire? Did it affect you beyond eliminating Mali's role as a Soviet base of sorts?

PRINGLE: It certainly did, and it led to a fascinating new friendship with a totally new type of Soviet Ambassador. His name was Alexandre Trofimov (he always spelled his first name as in French). He was slim and charming, reputedly from the cultural side of the Soviet service. But what really set *le tout Bamako* on its ear was his wife, Tatiana, who was both very pretty and quite the clothes horse. Everyone was used to the dumpy, grumpy Soviet stereotype. Forget that!

The Trofimov's arrival coincided roughly with the advent of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, and I soon discovered, to my amazement, that I could learn more about what was going on in the Soviet Union by asking its Ambassador than by reading State Department cables or the *New York Times*.

In return, they sought our advice about doing hitherto unthinkable things, like exploring the countryside on their own. The first time they tried they got thoroughly lost on their way to see the Dogon Country because their driver spoke only Russian and they didn't have any Malian employees suitable for such a role, much less a car of their own. They became pillars of the diplomatic social scene, and the year after we gave our masked ball, they replicated it (after we had left Bamako unfortunately) apparently on a much grander scale. We have kept up with them over the years since then. The last time we "saw" them they were sweeping by us on screen, in a movie about the final days of the Romanovs, showing the last grand ball ever held in the Winter Palace.

Q: The Malians are of course famous for their art, music and culture generally. Did you get involved with that side of things?

PRINGLE: We certainly did. You could not miss the culture; it impregnated the place, and cultural issues led to what was my most interesting encounter with Moussa Traoré. I noticed early on that my driver, Sekou, was always listening on the car radio to long, chanted recitations of what he told me was oral history. It was my first clue as to the depth and persistence of Mali's heritage.

The next thing was beads, believe it or not. Our Peace Corps Director, Hilary Whittaker, used to make necklaces out of beads she bought in the market place. She did it for therapy; running a program of more than 100 volunteers is like being in charge of a very large boarding school, without being able to see the students. She sold her jewelry to the rest of us for the price of the beads because she felt that she could not, as a government official, make a profit from such activities. It was sort of like Julius Walker and his "Eggs Plenipotentiary" in Ouagadougou. Anyway, these Malian beads were extremely varied in age and origin, and they led to a lifetime avocation.

We also were greatly attracted by Malian textiles, and collected quite a few of them. And we acquired some wood carvings, but not many, because they had become quite expensive and increasingly scarce, especially antique ones from famous venues such as the Dogon country. Also, after Ouagadougou we couldn't fit any more in our house.

But the big fuss at the time was over ancient terracotta figures being excavated, mostly illegally, from ancient sites around the Niger Delta. They were going for up to seven figures in international art markets. Would-be looters were looking primarily for them, and/or gold, but there didn't seem to be much of that. As "by catch," to use a fisheries term, the diggers "caught" a lot of very attractive but not especially valuable old pottery, as well as glass beads, easily and cheaply purchased in local markets. But once a site is dug up in search of such treasures its value for scholarly excavation is usually ruined.

In March of 1990, just as the political situation in Mali was beginning to heat up, the United States Information Agency (USIA) dispatched a special envoy, Phillip Pillsbury, to persuade the Malians to sign a new treaty sponsored by UNESCO (United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization) which would allow any country to forbid the importation of valuable antiquities if the originating country asked it to do so.

As a junior officer serving in Bamako, Pillsbury had been close to the Traorés and had photographed their wedding. He called on them personally and asked for their support, and it is likely that Mme. Traoré told her husband to cooperate.

When I called to seek Traoré's support for the treaty I noticed, for the first and only time in our official dealings, a spark of interest and sympathy. I had a positive response from him in writing within a few weeks. I would like to think it reflected a typically Malian interest in culture, and not merely the urging of Mme. In any case, Mali became the first African country to sign the agreement. Traoré's successor, Alpha Konaré, a much more

highly educated person, is usually but incorrectly given credit for this. I am glad that Traoré survived the political turmoil that lay ahead.

I'd like to add a word on the risk of big-league art collection. After we left Mali it turned out that some of the terracotta statues that collectors and museums had been paying millions of dollars for were fakes. Something called thermo luminescence dating reveals the last time that clay was fired, and the collectors and art dealers had been using it, and thought they were safe. But the fakers had learned how to mix clay from old but worthless pottery into their creations, especially in those parts of a statue that they knew were usually tested, and they fooled the cognoscenti for quite an embarrassing while.

Q: You mentioned that our relations with Mali began to decline in the last part of your time there. Why was that? Did you see Traore's troubles coming?

PRINGLE: The problem was the growth of the democracy movement, which began slowly in the middle of my tour. Because of it, relations did not exactly get worse, but there was a sense of foreboding.

As was the case in many parts of Africa, democratization was powerfully stimulated by the death throes of the Soviet Union. Again, like many other African countries, Mali had a formally Marxist regime based on democratic centralism, with separate party and government structures. When we criticized them for being undemocratic, they would say "You have your kind of your democracy, but we have our own." They argued that it comported with African tradition. The wise monarch gathers his chiefs, they discuss the problem at hand, and a final decision is arrived at by consensus.

Those agitating for change began by arguing for democratization within the Party, which avoided the awkwardness of directly challenging an entrenched military dictator in the grip of his wife's equally entrenched family. This didn't fool Moussa and Mme at all, but they were willing to tolerate it up to a point. The funny thing is that the democracy movement was being quietly nurtured by a polite kind of cabal-cum-study group run by a Roman Catholic priest.

But, bit-by-bit, and very much excited by the Soviet example, it began to get louder and braver. Before long the movement's leader, former education Minister Alpha Konaré, who would be the country's first democratically elected president, was putting out a new pro-democracy newspaper, *Les Echos*.

What were we to do? We were not yet promoting democratization as a matter of policy. Mali was still a model of good civic behavior compared to many countries in Africa. We did, however, have a policy on human rights. I told Moussa, without being instructed, that it was his business how he ran his country, but that if serious violations of human rights took place, it would inevitably have an impact on our policy. In a kind of farewell address on US-Malian relations in August, 1990, when I was about to leave post, I said that at a time when aid funds were increasingly scarce, Congress would inevitably cut aid to

countries with bad human rights records. (It was always handy to invoke the threat of an uncontrollable Congress in situations like this.)

But I also said that our own democracy had many undemocratic features, especially as originally created by our founders, and we realized that other countries would have to adjust their own systems to the needs of the time, as we had done. And I noted approvingly that the Malian government had already espoused a policy of decentralization, which was to become a major and perhaps most valuable feature of its future democracy. The pro-democracy storm didn't break until after we left.

Q: Did you see the troubles in Northern Mali coming?

PRINGLE: No to the first part of your question, a qualified yes to the second. I saw nothing wrong with our policy of neglecting Northern Mali, defined as the desert areas largely north of the Niger, because well under one percent of the population lived there. We thought it was better to focus our resources on areas with some hope of economic progress that would help the entire country. The exception to that was humanitarian aid. The droughts of the early eighties had caused great suffering among the nomadic peoples of the north. We wanted to prevent that from happening again, by stockpiling grain for distribution in the next food emergency and through small-scale projects to help the nomads.

We were aware that Tuareg people had bitterly resisted French conquest -- the future Marshal Joffre made his reputation fighting them -- and had been once again ruthlessly repressed in the early days of Malian independence, but now they seemed to be settling down. They were not exactly orthodox Muslims, being mostly matrilineal. When they did rebel again in 1990, Islam had nothing to do it -- not at first.

Until the end of my tour the desert was at peace, a far cry from what it is now. You could travel from the Mediterranean coast to Mali, along the ancient trade route, and many people, mainly French and German tourists, did so. In that pre-GSP era the main danger was wandering off the track (*piste*) and dying of thirst - and that did happen. The Paris-Dakar auto race also used the route sometimes.

Thanks to the attaché plane, based in Liberia, we had visited a big Tuareg settlement at Tessalit, close to the Algerian border, where the camels and their masters danced for Barbara. People seemed content. Later, in November 1989, we visited the Tuaregs of Menaka, on the Niger River, not far from Mali's border with the country of Niger.

Two of this group's leaders had senior positions in the Malian government and in the Party. There was a very creative USAID-funded program striving to introduce better education, health and agriculture in a way that would not require them to abandon their economically necessary nomadic life-style, trailing their flocks into the interior when the spring rains came, and returning to the river after the grass dried up. There was also a big food storage facility at Menaka and a fleet of trucks to deal with future food emergencies. All this seemed sensible and encouraging.

But in June of 1990, Tuaregs in Niger, who were being resettled from Libya by a UN project, rebelled when they did not receive promised housing. Some of them were from Mali, and they came across the border, attacked the police post in Menaka, the same place we had visited only six months earlier, seized the vehicles being used by the World Vision project we had visited, and began a rebellion which -- without getting into a great deal of more recent history -- has really never ended as of 2015.

Q: Looking back on it, was there anything you could have done differently?

PRINGLE: I should not have accepted so easily our policy of largely ignoring the North. However, I don't think that more economic aid would have done much good. How we missed the boat, in the blinding light of hindsight, was in not even trying to understand the daunting political complexities of the desert world.

The French, of course, have long been mesmerized by the Tuareg, seeing them as the epitome of noble savagery. My very capable French counterpart, Michel Perrin, studied Tuareg politics as a hobby. He went north of the Niger and hung out with a French scholar who was doing research on them, and did a paper showing the organization of their *kels*, or clans, which he gave to me. We thought it was very amusing.

I should have sensed that it was not to be laughed at. It is the State Department's job to understand such things before they lead to crisis. We should have seen the potential for conflict, and started to build that kind of understanding. We would have been better prepared when EUCOM and others later decided that the Islamic insurgents who had become part of the Northern Problem would become a haven for terrorism and eventually, perhaps, threaten our oil interests in Nigeria.

It wasn't just the Tuareg we needed to understand, of course. It was the entire complex of desert population: Arabs (or Maurs), Peuhl, black Africans resident in the towns along the Niger River, mainly Sonhrai (or Songhay), and the various Algerian dissidents who would become became powerful players.

Above all we needed and still need to understand and deal with the nature of the Sahara. It looks neat on the map, divided into bits and pieces belonging to this country and that. But because it is largely uninhabited, it is not governed, and falls easy prey to transient banditry. Deserts resemble oceans more than well-watered land, but whereas we have (sort of) a Law of Sea --even if we don't fully recognize it-- there is no Law of the Desert. What law there is, is usually toothless.

We have seen this in other desert areas, from Somalia to our own Chihuahua. When there is big money to be made by transient crime, or trafficking, lawlessness becomes very hard to dislodge. Desert lawlessness requires cooperative *international* policing, much as piracy does on the high seas. The problem has yet to be solved, and I have done some very informal writing on it.

Q: You mentioned that extremist Islam was not a cause of desert unrest, at least not at first, yet Mali is an overwhelmingly Muslim country. Can you explain that?

PRINGLE: Again, you do have to differentiate between the unpopulated desert north of the Niger and everything else.

It is obvious the minute you set foot in Bamako that the Malians are devout Muslims, but I found that it was hard to find "political Islam" in the sense that I had known it, especially in Indonesia, but also in the southern Philippines. I knew the State Department was interested in the subject, and happily reported what my friend the Iraqi Ambassador told me about Iranian efforts to promote Shiism, which we both saw as a threat. The Saudis at the same time were promoting Wahhabism, as they were doing in Indonesia. All of that told me little about Malian Islam *per se*.

It wasn't until I met an American Scholar, Benjamin Soares, that I understood the importance of certain Islamic Sufi brotherhoods, also very powerful in Senegal. They are the backbone of Malian Islam. No one was fomenting radicalism very successfully in populated Mali, which did not prevent Algerian hotheads from getting involved in desert unrest after the Tuareg-initiated unrest of the 1990's got underway, and until the present.

At its core, Malian Islam was and is moderate and tolerant. For centuries it coexisted with animism at the village level. It was something you needed, like a passport, when you went "abroad." But you still needed the old spirits of earth and water if you wanted the rains to come and your crops to grow. So religions learned to live together. But, having said that, Mali was also swept by waves of "jihadist" reformers in the nineteenth century in reaction to French conquest. ("Jihadist" was the imprecise French term for them, meaning anyone claiming to be fighting for a "purer" form of Islam.)

When the Pope came to visit Mali late in my stay, some Muslim clerics complained about the major hospitality being prepared. Traoré simply had the complainers put in jail for the duration of the Papal visit, which went very well. They ran out of hotel space, so we hosted some Catholic prelates from Burkina Paso in our poolside guesthouse.

The director of the center for handicapped children where Barbara worked, Kadiatou Sanogo, came to the big Papal mass in the football stadium with some of her disabled children and their mothers. We were somewhat surprised to see her, because we knew they were all Muslim. She explained, "Maybe he can help. These children need all the help they can get."

Q: So how did your tour end?

PRINGLE: I had decided to accept a job as Director of the Office of Central African Affairs. AF was justifiably tiring of exiting ambassadors who felt it beneath their dignity to accept anything but another ambassadorship.

A small ambassadorship in Southeast Asia might have been interesting, but it was clearly a bridge too far for me. EA has very few small ambassadorships, and they needed all they had for their own clan -- and by this time I was an unknown quantity as far as they were concerned. In any case, for family reasons, we were ready for another tour in Washington. I knew I would enjoy working for Hank Cohen, and Central Africa turned out to be nothing if not interesting.

Before leaving I was treated to a tour of my major countries-to-be, with Barbara, including Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo (Kinshasa), and Cameroon. We did not have time for Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, or São Tomé and Príncipe.

Then we went back to Bamako for the necessary round of farewells. We departed for Washington on September 20, 1990.

The Malian political pot continued to bubble, but did not really explode until the spring of 1991, six months after our departure. Increasingly assertive demonstrations finally provoked Moussa Traoré, no doubt goaded by Mariam, to order the Army to fire on demonstrators, which they did on March 22, killing up to 200 people.

Before the dust settled, the proverbial army colonel whom none of us knew, Amadou Toumani Touré, better known as ATT, seized power, saying he would step down when elections were held. Much to the surprise of all us cynics, he did so, and Alpha Konaré, the leader of the democracy movement, was elected president and served two five-year terms. ATT stayed on the sidelines for a decade, then ran successfully for president twice.

Things fell apart in 2011, when another lethal wave of unhappy Tuaregs arrived from Libya thanks to the US invasion. They defeated the Malian Army, after which a military coup overturned Mali's democracy. The Northern Problem, which had been dormant since a peace-making in 1996, erupted again, more seriously than before. French intervention restored an uncertain peace and the Malians attempted to restart their democracy, but at this writing (2015) the north remains as lawless as ever and the Islamic insurgents have, ominously, become sporadically active even south of the Niger River.

Q: You were in Mali for three years. Then, in 1990, you came back to the department as Director of Central African Affairs.

PRINGLE: Right.

Q: That's quite a big patch there, because for one thing, it includes the former Belgian Congo (Zaire).

PRINGLE: Correct.

Q: And so your life got more complicated at that point, didn't it?

PRINGLE: Indeed (*laughs*).

Q: What confronted you at the start?

PRINGLE: The Rwandan civil war, the one that would lead to genocide in 1994, had just broken out as I arrived in AF/C. It was clear that the French were solidly on the side of the Rwandans and their Hutu dictator, Habyarimana. They saw the invading Tutsi rebels, coming out of Uganda and speaking English, as a threat to their French-language hegemony.

It seemed weird then -- as if Rwanda, which never been a French colony, was as important as Quebec! -- and it still does.

What else was going on? Well of course the whole Mobutu-Zaire mess was going from bad to worse, and would continue to do so throughout my stay in AF/C and well after that.

Q: So Hank Cohen is still assistant secretary at this point.

PRINGLE: Yes.

Q: And what were the countries you had? You had Rwanda, Burundi, Congo (Kinshasa), CAR (Central African Republic),

PRINGLE: Yes, plus Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and don't forget São Tomé and Príncipe. Same ones you did, I think. Ten altogether.

Q: Back to Rwanda. What was our interest? I guess we smiled favorably on the Uganda-based rebels, the Rwandan Patriotic Front.

PRINGLE: Not as I recall. Our major goal was to help achieve a genuinely neutral end to the conflict. While we certainly did not foresee the genocide, we did understand the potential for a very nasty ethnic-based civil war rooted in a long history of similar bloodletting.

It was like the Hatfields and McCoys on a much larger scale, with similar outbreaks of killing occurring back to independence and -- I suspect -- much further back than that. These were people with royal genealogies as old as the house of Windsor, or so I was told. Hank Cohen probably hadn't studied the history any more than I had, but knowing Africa as he did he well understood the serious potential for bloodshed. We worked with the French and Belgians to get negotiations underway and those talks continued, mainly at Arusha, in Tanzania, until the whole thing blew up in our faces.

Q: I guess there is still no agreement on how that explosion came about.

PRINGLE: I think there is no doubt that the genocide erupted because the extremist Hutus knew perfectly well that if they secretly killed their Hutu president, by making his plane crash, it would set off an orgy of Hutus killing Tutsis. They obviously did not realize that it would also end with their own defeat, much less that it would pitch the Tutsi rebel leader and own worst enemy, Paul Kagame, into power, where he remains, and eventually draw the whole region into a kind of African World War.

I tried vainly to understand the ethnic pathology that was the cause of this tragedy. Or is ethnic the right word? The Rwandans were divided into two groups, a hereditary ruling group, the Tutsi (or wa-Tutsi = Watusi), who were cattle-raisers noted for their tall stature and amazing high-jumping skill, and the Hutu, who were shorter, farmers (not herders), and had traditionally lived in a serf-like relationship with the aristocratic Tutsis. The Hutus outnumbered the Tutsis by more than six to one.

They had expelled many of the Tutsis during previous civil strife. Their paranoia was comparable to that of a previously enslaved group anticipating the return of their masters.

The relationship of servitude I have just described is often blamed on the Belgians who inherited Rwanda and Burundi from the Germans after World War I, but I never found this convincing -- many colonial powers have practiced similar "indirect rule," relying on a privileged chiefly class to save money, and the indirect rulers have rarely been popular. But I have never heard of another such situation as deadly as this one.

This morbid state of affairs existed despite the fact that the two groups practiced the same religion (many now Christians); spoke the same African language (only one language); lived together in the same settlements, referred to in French as *collines* or hillsides because that is how they were located; and frequently intermarried. To make the whole thing more incomprehensible, they were hard to tell apart; the "tall" Tutsis were often not any taller than the "short" Hutus.

In Washington no one could explain this situation - not that anyone paid much attention to it before the genocide - and I have never seen anything in writing that does. The copious literature on the genocide seems preoccupied with which foreigners to blame for it. The limited number of Rwandans and Burundians I met were usually not happy talking about it. The one exception was the Burundian Ambassador, who was not a career diplomat but an Education Ministry official. According to him, fear of being slaughtered by the other "side" never went away. Everyone in the densely settled *collines* knew who was who, and who had killed whom in the past. Feelings of dread and hostility were always there, if dormant.

Paul Kagame is still the dictator of Rwanda, a quarter century after the genocide. People talk about his efforts to establish a "greater Tutsi empire" in East Africa, but many think he has ethnic/class paranoia under control in Rwanda. I think that is unlikely.

OK, time for an anecdote. There are actually *three* ethnic groups in Rwanda and Burundi. The third one consists of a few forest dwelling pygmies, or Twa, once despised and

persecuted, less than one percent of the population. Once I was meeting the President of Burundi at National Airport in Washington. His plane arrived early and we had a long wait for most elements of his motorcade to arrive and pick him up. As we twiddled our thumbs and watched planes coming and going, he observed several aircraft with "TWA" painted on their tails in big red letters. Having a sense of humor, he observed to me, "Goodness! This really is a great country! You even have an airline for the Twa!" (He was a Tutsi himself.)

Q: Did Hank go over and take part in the peace negotiations?

PRINGLE: He certainly took part.

Q: And what about Congo? Or I guess Zaire. Had it been renamed by that time?

PRINGLE: No, I think it was still Zaire. So you know, we had been beating up on Mobutu from all conceivable directions to share power with members of the opposition, but the effort was crippled by the weakness of his opponents and total uncertainty as to who might replace him if we pushed too hard. Anyone working in Africa at this time had to be aware that things could always get worse. Whenever we were becoming totally fed up with him, Mobutu would do us some big favor or other. "Hey, look at me, I'm still important to you."

The classic case, in my memory, involved Chad. We (the CIA) and the French had helped the Chadians to defeat the Libyans in 1987, in the struggle for control of the contested Aouzou Strip between Chad and Libya. We captured huge amounts of Soviet weaponry in the process. The CIA was so proud of it that they put out a pamphlet in French entitled "The Battle of Wadi Doum," a copy which was gathering dust in AF/C when I arrived. And toward the end of this struggle, a battalion of Libyan students or former students surrendered, about 500 hundred of them. They ended up being parked in N'djamena, the capital of Chad, supported by the CIA, along with their commander, a certain Colonel Haftar. Remember that name.

Q: I was there when that stuff was captured, including 25 helicopters. And you would have thought that the Chadians believed that we were after their first born son or something. They just were negotiating like hell. They were very suspicious about giving up this equipment. And in the end we didn't get it. They turned us down. But anyway, that would have been before your time.

PRINGLE: Chad's president at this time was Hissène Habré. And during my time in AF/C, he was unseated by Idriss Déby, a former supporter of Habré who had rebelled and was now being supported by Qadhafi, or so we thought. A member of the Zaghawa tribe, he was coming to invade Chad from the west, from Darfur in Sudan, later famous for its own problems under Sudanese rule. And we were certain, since Déby was supported by Qadhafi, that Déby would attack the Libyan students-turned-soldiers in N'djamena, and there would be a blood bath.

The only thing to do was to get them out of there, fast. Two or three sorties of US Air Force C- 141s did it, supposedly breaking the record for how many people could be crammed into one of these planes.

But then what to do with Haftar and his troops? No other country in Africa wanted them, for fear of offending the Libyan madman. We in State's Africa Bureau said - just give them refugee status and bring them into the US as refugees. Uproar ensued. Finally guess who stepped to the rescue? Mobutu, of course, seeing an easy way to demonstrate his usefulness. But he didn't want them forever. After Zaire, we moved them to Kenya for a while, but finally we had to do what should have done in the first place and let them into the US as refugees. There is probably one of them driving a cab somewhere near here as I speak.

However their commander, Colonel Haftar, was taken under the wing of the CIA, and for the next two decades they supported him in the Washington area. Then suddenly, after our invasion of Libya in 2011, his name was back in the news, sometimes spelled Hiftar. As of 2015 he is back in Libya leading the major conservative (pro-US) faction hoping to end up ruling that unhappy country. Way back when, somebody at Langley must have been thinking ahead!

Q: Well, so Habré got overthrown. Déby comes in. Do you recall that this implied much for you as the head of A/FC?

PRINGLE: Not really. Once Déby settled unto office he became quite acceptable, maybe in part because Chad turned out to have substantial oil deposits in its south and we supported a controversial pipeline, funded partly by the World Bank, to get the oil to market.

Meanwhile I had discovered someone who really understood Chad, Professor William Foltz of Yale University. He explained that Chad's "political process" had traditionally hinged around a few warlike tribes, like the Zaghawa to which both Habré and Déby belonged. The not-so-warlike ones didn't count. Foltz showed again that good academics often understand their countries of specialization better than anyone else, and it is always a good thing to talk to them. In any case when, toward the end of my AF/C year, I decided to rank "my countries," for performance, Chad turned out to be the best of the ten. There was a certain tough integrity about the Chadians.

Q: I knew Foltz, I knew him -- We were together at Yale graduate school.

PRINGLE: He was definitely Mr. Chad.

Q: Were there other issues in AF/C? Were there things that stand out from that period?

PRINGLE: I remember AF/C as a conglomeration of anecdotes, crises and insoluble problems, most of which had to do with acute underdevelopment and "states" lacking any degree of geopolitical coherence. If they were too big, they were hobbled by ethnic and

religious issues. If too small, they weren't economically viable. A kind of Goldilocksian dilemma, except the "just right" category didn't exist.

Our intentions -- not just those of the US, but the western world generally -- were good, but our capacities did not come close to solving the problems. Peace Corps could always do good things, leave a good impression of the US, and above all give the volunteers a priceless educational experience. And I would stress that we could always find good people, trying to do the right things, and support them, financially through aid and exchange programs, or just morally.

We had to ratchet back our own expectations and learn to think long-term. None of these countries is ever hopeless, but they cannot be expected to transform themselves without a long struggle, any more than the U.S. did. We need to accept that and not think we can hand them a panacea on a platter -- and then when that doesn't work, and our Administration changes, bring in a new platter with a new panacea.

Q: Zaire must have ranked at the top of your insoluble problems?

PRINGLE: Absolutely. Our policy was to keep telling Mobutu to be nice and share power with his opponents, hopefully through democratic means. He never did, and when he did leave, in 1997, it was because of terminal illness. His behavior was consistently terrible. Sin number one was stealing money. People tried to quantify how much he had salted away, on the basis of no facts at all except his various villas on the Riviera, etc. But I have no doubt that he spent most of the money closer to home, buying political support for himself around Zaire, behaving the way that old-style machine politicians in the U.S. did. But, except for Mayor Daley, that was then, and this was now, so to speak.

Mobutu's sin number two was abusing the would-be opposition by all the usual means available to cynical dictators. I spent much time on the phone with Kinshasa, especially with the DCM, John Yates, trying to confirm what was going on. Part of the problem, from my perspective, was that the anti-Mobutu opposition had developed a strong lobbying effort in the US, linked to the House Foreign Relations Committee, and supported by a small but effective group of Mobutu-phobes, ex-missionaries and others.

The ringleader of this group was Dr. Bill Close, a socially prominent physician who had been Mobutu's personal physician but had then turned sour on him. He was now living in Big Piney, Wyoming, of all places, near Jackson Hole. He received regular reports from opposition leaders in Zaire. And whenever the dictator violated someone's human rights in particularly offensive style, he would call my boss. Robert Houdek, the Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for Central Africa. And Houdek would call me and ask if the Embassy had reported this latest delinquency. Then I would call John Yates who would usually say, "We're working on that."

Dr. Close was invariably faster than the Embassy, which indulged in old-fashioned virtues like checking facts and commenting on the allegation at hand, based on its own experience. Dr. Close never called me; he always went over my head to Houdek. which I

found irritating. As for Houdek, he was a great boss, and he had that most valuable of diplomatic assets, a sense of humor. He knew his phone was not secure, and he didn't want to be caught agreeing or disagreeing with Dr. Close. So he kept an old-fashioned OOUUGA! type car horn on his desk, and he and Close had a code worked out -- one OOUUGA meant "yes," as I recall. As for Dr. Close, he must have been OK, because he was the father of movie star Glenn Close.

But of course there were signs of hope in Zaire. It is bigger than the United States east of the Mississippi, and its resource base is phenomenal. The much-maligned Belgians did a better job of education than is usually realized, especially at the lower grades. They needed it for their not inconsiderable industry. There were black people driving trains in the Belgian Congo before World War II, whereas that didn't happen in South Africa until after the end of apartheid.

In 1991, after a military mutiny, we closed down most of our activities. Peace Corps was one the biggest. Because of the country's size and poor communications, the program had been decentralized, with several regional centers in places like Lubumbashi. When we pulled out, these centers were left in the care of regional administrators, who kept on working on their own for months after the program was closed down.

Such human quality was hardly unique. One of Mobutu's leading critics was Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya, Bishop of Kisangani. We liked to think he might somehow end up replacing Mobutu, although we knew that the Vatican would probably never let a priest get that deeply into politics. And he did drop out of politics. But when I recently looked into what had become of Monsengwo, now Cardinal Monsengwo, I discovered that he had been chosen by Pope Francis to be one of a small group of prelates he selected early in his reign to offer him informal advice independent of the Curia.

We kept debating what to do about Mobutu. There was a big policy assessment in 1991, which ended by deciding that we should stick with trying to persuade him to share power with his opponents. President Bush sent him three letters in 1992 along these lines. Our efforts were clearly going nowhere, so I wrote a Dissent Memo saying that we should go further and tell him flat out to leave. Unlike most Dissent Memos this one required no courage, because I knew that the Assistant Secretary, Hank Cohen, agreed with me; indeed he cleared the memo before I sent it forward. In the end, as I said, Mobutu left because of bad health in 1997, leading to protracted chaos.

Q: What about your little ones, Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe?

PRINGLE: My memories of Equatorial Guinea are primarily anecdotal. In January 1992, in the middle of a trip to other AF/C countries, I was instructed drop everything and head for Malabo, the capital of Equatorial Guinea. Its President, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, had been issuing veiled death threats to our Ambassador, John Bennett, who had been critical of his human rights record, and I was to tell Obiang to cease and desist. We had a lively Peace Corps program there by that time and were worried about the volunteers' safety as well.

"EG," as it is often called, was formerly a Spanish slave trading post, then a colony. Like São Tomé and Príncipe it is part of an archipelago which stretches from the African coast across the South Atlantic for hundreds of miles; the two countries' islands are mixed up with each other, making for complicated EEZs. EG is most famous for its history of genocide and acute human rights violations. In 1971 we had shut down a small US consulate there after the consul murdered his administrative officer because they were competing for the affection of a houseboy. This happened at the same time that the ruler, Francisco Macias Nguema, who was later overthrown by his nephew, Teodoro, was busy slaughtering an oppressed minor tribe, the Bubi. (They belong to the dominant group, the Fang.)

Our consulate went off the air, and an experienced FSO, Lannon Walker, had to be dispatched to find out what had happened. After that we closed the post, but the Spanish persuaded us to reopen it because they hoped we could help them, somehow, to guide the place into better behavior.

I arrived, was duly ushered into the presence of the dictator, under the eyes of his much-feared Moroccan security guard, and told him to stop threatening Bennett. He politely denied the charge, but the threats stopped. We probably would have closed the post again but at the time of my visit a small American company, operating literally out of a trailer on the beach in Malabo, had just made an oil strike which they claimed was the precursor of much bigger things, and they were right. EG is Africa's third largest oil exporter as of 2015. Teodoro, now a very wealthy man with international holdings, is still the ruler.

STP, "my" other small island paradise, couldn't touch EG for melodramatic history. When I visited in 1992 the Voice of America was just establishing a medium-wave transmitter there to replace one we had lost in Liberia, and it has been performing well ever since. Many Africans still listen to radio. Keith Wauchope, our Ambassador to Gabon, was also accredited to STP, and he came with me to give them a small patrol boat.

My other unforgettable anecdote from Central Africa concerns Gabon, an oil patch on the Gulf of Guinea controlled by French oil interests, mainly ELF. The nominal ruler was El Hadj Omar Bongo, who had become a Muslim to please his Arab friends, or so it seemed, and was on good terms with us. But in 1992 Qadhafi sent him a check for five million dollars, and since Bongo had just switched his banking business to Citibank, we (Treasury) were able to seize Qadhafi's check, and did.

Bongo was outraged, to put it mildly. You get my check back, he told us (the State Department) or I'm finished being your friend. Citibank would have been in tears at this point if big banks could cry. We had no idea why Qadhafi had sent him the check. He had a way of doing such things on whims.

The Africa Bureau wanted to give Bongo his check back and have done with the whole thing, since he had apparently done nothing bad. The E (for Economic) Bureau agreed

with us, being in general not disposed to hurt big American banks for no good reason. But practically all the bureaus involved with security, anti-terrorism or human rights wanted us NOT to return the check.

The result might have been days spent trying to compromise. But the acting Secretary of State, Larry Eagleburger, an FSO himself, had seen enough of that kind of thing. He told all involved to send him a "split memo," with the opposing arguments clearly stated by bureaus. It was, he said, his job as Secretary to review the evidence and make the decision as to whether to release the check to Citibank, and hence to Qadhafi, or not. It came back to us with the "release check" box checked.

Citibank called me and asked if I wanted to come up to New York for a thank-you lunch. My uncle had worked for them in 1917-18 -- they were then the First City Bank of New York -- as part of a comical effort to open a branch in Russia in the teeth of the Russian Revolution. I felt tempted to accept on the grounds that they owed the Pringle family something for that, but I did not.

Q: What about the other, ex-French Congo (Brazzaville)? Our relationship with Sassou Nguesso at this time? He, you know, went from being a Marxist to being one of our buddies?

PRINGLE: He was definitely one of our buddies.

Q: But you don't remember any issues?

PRINGLE: No, as I recall it was a pretty normal relationship. He was after all a sinner redeemed, a plus in the overall scheme of things.

Q: CAR (Central African Republic)? Was there anything of particular note there?

PRINGLE: I made one visit there, and Peace Corps volunteers took me around. I remember a missionary priest who put creatures, from spiders to snakes, in blocks of Lucite and sold them to the occasional tourist or big-game hunter headed for the country's considerable areas of wilderness. I understand that much of the wild area has since been ruined by uncontrolled poaching linked with political chaos. CAR has a population of over five million people today, and probably its share of Africa's mineral wealth, with the Chinese in pursuit of it as they are pretty much continent-wide.

By the time I joined AF/C, CAR's self-crowned Emperor Bokassa, the kind of African leader we love to make fun of, had gone to his reward, and more recent ethnic turmoil was still in the future. You could look across the river to Zaire at one point, and one wondered again at the illogic of national boundaries in post-colonial Africa.

Dan Simpson was the ambassador, and he referred me to a very talented young official who was hoping to protect CAR's extensive natural treasures, including a large population of forest elephants. He was typical of the good people one constantly finds in

less-than-good places, the kind that embassies need to recognize and help whenever possible, on the theory that the future may lie with them.

Simpson is now retired and running the editorial page of the *Pittsburgh Gazette*.

Q: Bob, you were in Central African Affairs from 1990 to 1993. Then you became Director of the Office of Ecology and Terrestrial Conservation in the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES/ETC). Can you explain that rather wordy transition?

PRINGLE: The office name is hard to explain, and I had to get used to being introduced, on occasion, as the Director of "*Extraterrestrial Conservation*." In fact, the "terrestrial" designation is to differentiate my office from several others in OES that deal with "marine" conservation - saving whales, etc. Marine issues began with the business of negotiating fisheries disputes. Such disputes -- both international, and between the various states -- were common well before the Constitution was signed. That is why the part of OES that does marine issues is one of the oldest parts of the State Department.

Most of OES's *raison d'être* is based on a Constitutional mandate which charges the President with negotiating treaties. One part of State's Legal Bureau, L, must approve all treaties -- think about the recent fuss over the XL Pipeline. And international conservation and scientific issues tend -- in contrast with most foreign policy issues -- to be addressed almost solely through treaties: the negotiation thereof, and the permanent follow-up organizations which some of them create.

As for my own interest, I had long been interested in conservation and its international implications, and I thought the job would be both interesting and possibly relevant to post-retirement employment. But the immediate reason I got the job was that OES/ETC needed someone with the title of ambassador to manage the negotiation of a new treaty to mitigate desertification, which had hit Africa particularly hard in the 1980s. My experience in Burkina Faso and Mali was obviously relevant.

The desertification treaty was a by-product of the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, where two major "framework" treaties were proposed, on biodiversity and climate change. Both of these were envisioned as "mother ships" for additional treaties concerned with more specialized subjects, but the climate change "framework " treaty has never been completed.

My office covered the biodiversity agenda, while another office in OES, physically next door to mine, had the endlessly frustrating task of following up on what was already "the big one," climate change.

During the Rio negotiations the US delegation had been especially anxious to get others to support a subsidiary treaty on forests. The Africans agreed to help, but only if we would help them get what *they* wanted, namely a treaty on desertification. (This kind of bargaining is known as "log rolling" in domestic politics.) We were initially opposed,

because we (and most other big aid donors to Africa) thought we were already doing enough on desertification through our bilateral aid programs. But the leader of our delegation, the White House General Counsel, finally agreed to a deal, against the advice of subordinate agencies, and we were thereby committed to working for the desertification treaty.

Q: And you were there from '93 to '95. What else did OES do besides deserts and fisheries, and how did it differ from AF?

PRINGLE: The first thing I had to do was make my office, looking over 23rd Street, livable. My predecessor had chain-smoked despite a building-wide no smoking rule; he simply closed his door. I couldn't stand the smell, but when I asked to have the windows opened (at least for starters), building management said it could not be done. What madness, especially for what was supposed to be an environmental policy office, I thought. Finally, after weeks of complaining about it, it was fixed, which took more weeks.

Despite this ugly beginning, I liked to think of ETC as the office of "All Things Bright and Beautiful," with the exception of fish and marine mammals. We had an officer who dealt with international forestry issues. As noted earlier, forestry was supposed to be the subject of another treaty in the Rio family which has never been concluded. That has not stopped endless international forestry negotiations from going on.

We had someone else who dealt with CITES, an existing treaty which regulates the trade in endangered species, plus other wildlife issues. We were also technically responsible for RAMSAR, dedicated to the preservation of wetlands. It is named for a town in Iran and -- concluded in 1971 -- is reputedly the oldest international environmental agreement. Finally, we worked with environmental attachés, officers assigned to embassies abroad to work on environmental issues.

Minor issues included the care and feeding of a UN (more specifically UNESCO) organization called "Man and the Biosphere, " or MAB. It had a US employee attached to us (OES/ETC). However we had no space for him, so he was lodged in an ancient structure across the street from us, in the back of the original Naval Observatory, where Lincoln's body had been taken after his assassination. I don't remember his name; presumably the UN paid his salary.

He didn't seem to mind his lugubrious surroundings. I used to walk over and chat with him now and then when I needed a break, and he came to our staff meetings. "MAB," as it was known, was a useful concept in that its "biosphere reserves" were designed to create different degrees of biodiversity protection by means of a core area, which was the most protected, surrounded by one or more rings where more human activity was allowed.

Biosphere preserves are supposed to balance conservation with sustainable development and preservation of cultural values, based on the somewhat utopian theory that these

things should all be interdependent. Barbara and I once visited a similar arrangement in Indonesia, the home of a mysterious people, the Baduy. It had a core area whose inhabitants stayed there, plus an outer ring whose inhabitants could visit Jakarta to buy necessities, including their own special batik cloth.

Biodiversity preserves were not popular with Congress, for whom they summoned up visions of black helicopters labeled "UN." We had only a few of them in the US, and they seemed to be mainly a label applied to existing protected areas. Things may have improved more recently, because there are thirty-five of them in the US today.

Q: How did OES/ETC compare with a regional office like AF/C?

PRINGLE: Four differences are worth mentioning. First, like some other functional bureaus, OES was staffed largely by civil servants, and this has become more the case in recent years as FSO's convert to civil servant status to avoid foreign assignments.

Second, because of the legal nature of treaties, we had a strong partnership with L, and they had individual lawyers who worked full time on individual treaties. I was amazed to discover that they were indeed "there to help us," to paraphrase the old joke about government more generally. In the regional bureaus, it had seemed to me that L was there more often to tell us what we could *not* do, than how to do it better, as was emphatically the case in OES.

Third, we spent an inordinate amount of time on UN work. For someone who, like most liberals, had a high opinion of the UN, this was a cold shower. Decision-making by consensus, plus lack of interest in the subject at hand on the part of most of the negotiators (as opposed to bashing the US), made for a stupendously unproductive, often endless process.

Fourth, OES was widely considered to be a professional dead end for FSOs, in the sense that it meant opting out of a promotion and assignment process dominated by State's regional bureaus. I knew that perfectly well. However, as I mentioned earlier, getting another ambassadorship would have meant enduring an arduous staff job in AF or EAP, with no likelihood of an assignment to anything other than another small, hardship post, probably in Africa.

A big DCM-ship was certainly possible, but I had already been a DCM twice. In addition, I had had open heart surgery just before I left AF/C, which further reduced the appeal of a place with no sophisticated medical facilities. And, worth noting, all of our foreign assignments had been hardship posts up to this point.

OES had a different kind of constituency compared to the regional bureaus. Environmental NGOs were probably most important, and this was reflected in our staffing. My supervising Deputy Assistant Secretary for much of my tour was Rafe Pomerance, formerly with the Natural Resources Defense Council. These links were strongest under Democratic administrations. They made sense and helped us do our jobs.

Not long after I arrived it became necessary to revise the migratory bird treaty between the US, Mexico and Canada, because the Canadians had given their native people the right to follow their own customary law with regard to hunting in areas which are the major breeding ground for ducks and geese, overriding an existing treaty dating from the 1920s and creating a major threat to waterfowl populations.

A new treaty was required to fix this situation. The first imperative was to educate the native populations, and this priority was stated in the revised treaty. We also needed someone to participate in the negotiations, and I thought who better than Peter Kaestner, an FSO and old friend from Port Moresby days, and one of the world's top-ranking bird watchers.

The rest of the delegation, from Fish and Wildlife and other conservation organizations, was astonished to find that the State Department had provided someone who knew as much or more about birds than they did. Kaestner became my deputy office director and together we were able to recruit Bruce Beehler, famous even then for his work as an ornithologist in New Guinea, to work on all kinds of conservation issues.

Q: What size was your staff?

PRINGLE: I had a deputy and four or five other officers. The number varied if you included non-permanent staff, but it was slowly growing, especially under Under Secretary for Global Affairs Tim Wirth.

Q: It sounds as if you had some leeway, not only with regard to staffing, but in choosing new issues to pursue -- and that you achieved some successes at OES.

PRINGLE: That is correct, and I can give you a couple of examples.

We began something called the Coral Reef Initiative, to help preserve the world's threatened coral reefs, a major source of biodiversity. Bruce Beehler's knowledge of the South Pacific was one reason I was able to hire him away from his job with Conservation International. He had small children and wanted to spend a few years in Washington, and see government from the inside. I never imagined that he would remain a denizen of Foggy Bottom, and he didn't, but he certainly added class to OES/ETC while he was with us. Later, he would discover the Golden-fronted Bowerbird in the Foja Mountains of New Guinea, but I digress.

Another new issue was the tropical forests of Africa. Central Africa – think the Congo River basin – has more tropical forest than any other place in the world except the Amazon, and it was becoming equally endangered. Partly with my encouragement, USAID started a small regional program, the Central African Regional Program for the Environment, or CARPE. (Carpe Diem is a well-known Latin phrase meaning "Seize the Day" – a great name, but not my idea.)

By this time I was into a new strategy for supporting our environmental objectives. The old way - through treaties - clearly was not working. The connection between treaties and "boots on the ground" remained maddeningly theoretical. Better, we were discovering, was to start something small and work up, leveraging resources from others, domestic and foreign, public and private.

In the case of the Coral Reefs Initiative we began by supporting non-governmental organizations with seed money. Then we lobbied the World Bank and bilateral donors to support the endeavor as it got going. At this point we needed a formal organization, hence the Coral Reef Initiative. USAID contributed something but not much compared to the participation of others.

CARPE began with a small USAID regional project. State Department regional bureaus were not typically turned on by environmental work - I called it the "Real Men Don't Eat Quiche" syndrome - but in this case they supported the idea. State support, always helped by our extremely supportive Under Secretary, led to more important USAID funding. More international donors joined in.

CARPE rode a wave of increasing awareness about the importance of tropical forests. My friends in AID were extremely grateful. The project has survived to this day, perhaps the best-remembered thing I ever did in government service.

This experience taught me that diplomatic skills, the same kind that FSOs are trained to deploy abroad, are equally effective in a domestic setting. Almost any endeavor can be helped by integrating it into a policy framework and assembling support from myriad sources. You have to find your friends, or potential friends, and then talk to them.

Q: What was the desertification treaty (or Convention) called?

PRINGLE; It was – and is, believe it or not, – "The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (UNCCD)." [Dear Reader: I did not remember this; I looked it up after the interview.]

The negotiations began at UN headquarters in New York. There was already a quasi-secretariat of some sort and a draft convention, which we were supposed to put in final. There was a long-suffering, senior UN diplomat, Swedish by nationality, who presided over the periodic negotiating sessions. For me they entailed going up from Washington to New York, often spending several nights there. I remember getting up early and jogging thirty blocks or so up to Central Park - good for my heart!

From beginning to end, these sessions were inevitably preoccupied by debate over who was going to pay for shifting the advancing deserts into reverse. The Africa Bureau of State and AID endlessly cited how much we were already doing, and thought up new ways of claiming that these things were relevant to the forthcoming treaty. (This is one of the oldest games in the foreign aid business.)

Another whipping boy was the question of fulfilling a UN resolution passed two decades earlier (in 1970) which obligated all wealthy countries, meaning members of the OECD, to give a minimum of 0.7% of its GDP to global development. That meant, of course, that the US had a huge unmet obligation, which we denied hotly.

The standard "non-aligned," developing country clique – India, Brazil, and others – never tired of ringing this bell. The worst offender by far was one Mme Ting, head of the Malaysian delegation and personally close to Malaysia's apparent Prime Minister for Life, Mahathir bin Mohamad (ruled 1981- 2003). Although not the only female head of delegation, Ting was the only one always referred to as "Mme." No one ever asked her why Malaysia, notably lacking deserts, was taking up so much of our time. On the other hand, the Chinese, whom I fully expected to be hostile, were sensible and sometimes very helpful.

What was not discussed much, if at all, was the cause of desertification. The idea that it resulted from overpopulation and excessive use of marginal, arid lands was not popular, although obvious on the ground, as I had seen in Burkina and Mali.

Q: So how long did it take to finish the negotiations?

PRINGLE: More than a year. The final negotiating session was in Paris, at UNESCO headquarters, a choice location not far from the Eiffel Tower, beginning on June 10.

When we arrived, *le tout Paris* was in a state of pro-American delirium. It was the fiftieth anniversary of D-Day (June 10, 1944). The newspapers were printing their front pages in English. Commemorative wine was on sale, the bottles painted with scenes of GIs riding in jeeps under crossed American and French flags. Big ceremonies were of course under way in Normandy. The British didn't seem to be getting quite their fair share of the adulation, I thought.

One of our delegation members, representing EPA (the Environmental Protection Agency), arrived late. He had never been in France before and had heard all the stories about how cold and unfriendly Parisians are, and he had no idea what was going on. It was raining, and as he walked from our hotel to UNESCO, a woman rushed up to him and thrust an umbrella in his hand. "Take this, " she cried, "You are an American!" It was not quite clear how she knew his nationality, except he was a big, friendly, presumably American-looking guy. As the story suggests, we had both other agencies and non-governmental organizations with the US delegation, the latter usually as observers.

On the day of the final session we were up against a deadline, if only because the UNESCO facilities we were using were booked for something else the following day. There were no other venues equipped for multi-language, simultaneous translation of the kind that we needed. I was head of delegation, but was sick, and my deputy, Bill Milam, was in charge at the climactic finish. It was just as well since, as our finance wizard (from

the E Bureau), he would have done all the work anyway. The meeting went all night, as final sessions usually do, leaving everyone exhausted.

It ended well for us, since we avoided efforts to approve a dedicated source of financing for the new treaty. Instead it stressed a "bottom-up approach," encouraging the participation of local people to fight the degradation of arid lands. Not exactly a Marshall Plan, you may think.

Of course that was hardly a real ending, because treaties never die. There was still ratification to be done (195 countries have ratified it as of 2015, including the U.S.), plus periodic "Conferences of the Parties" to approve implementation, plus a quasi-permanent headquarters to oversee all of the above, often but not always in a national capital. RAMSAR, for example, is in Gland, Switzerland.

I did not hear of the desertification treaty again until 1998, when I was in South Africa preparing for President Clinton's multi-country visit. Someone in Washington discovered that we had sponsored the treaty and proudly put it on the list of relevant American contributions to African economic development. It was duly included in the president's publicity handouts and got, for the first time as far as I know, some significant press coverage.

Q: Elinor Constable was your Assistant Secretary, correct?

PRINGLE: That is correct. I found her to be a most capable, sympathetic boss, although, it seemed to me, a bit tough on other women. She saw herself correctly as something of a pioneer, and I think she enjoyed being the only lady in the room. You mentioned earlier that she couldn't stand Maureen Reagan, and I can believe that. In any case I ended up writing some speeches for her, and also for Tim Wirth, always our biggest fan.

Q: Any more good OES anecdotes?

PRINGLE: Getting to know the world of environmental NGOs was non-stop educational. The prize for fascination went to Merlin Tuttle, founder and head (now retired) of Bat Conservation International. If you don't love bats you will in short order after meeting Merlin, who talks with a classic Texas accent. He is a man of great charisma; he taught the state of Texas to value bats, has done the same far and wide, and was legendary in the conservation movement.

He wanted us to help him with an interesting problem. The Mexicans were killing huge numbers of Mexican Free-tailed Bats that migrate between the US and Mexico. They were doing so because they could not differentiate between *good* Free-tailed Bats, which eat insects by the ton, thereby greatly helping American farmers north of the border, and *bad* vampire bats, which do nasty, vampirish things to Mexican cattle south of the border. (The Free-tailed are the same bats that fly in spectacular clouds out of Carlsbad Cavern every evening, when they are in the US.)

Tuttle, no purist, was willing to show Mexican farmers how to control (i.e., kill) vampires, yet spare free-tailed. (I won't divulge the gory details.) But he would need the cooperation of Mexican officials to do this. Could our Embassy in Mexico City help him?

Of course the answer was an immediate "Yes," after which Merlin opened an elegant leather, slim-line briefcase. And there, hanging upside down, was a baby with big brown eyes, batting (pun intended) her eyelashes at us. It was not a Free-tailed, but a much bigger African fruit bat, of the general variety now suspected of transmitting Ebola. Our State Department security guards had neglected to inspect Merlin's briefcase when he arrived for his appointment or she (the bat was a young female) might have been deported.

My final OES anecdote is about why never to schedule an international conference at sea. My forestry officer, Stephanie Caswell, was obviously getting stressed out by too much travel to conferences. I told her that if she ever wanted me to cover one of them for her, I would be happy to oblige, especially if it was in Indonesia.

Not long afterwards she took me up on the offer. The conference in question, jointly hosted by the Indonesian Government and the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO), based in Bogor (Indonesia), was to be attended by specialists from around the world working on an international tropical timber agreement. We were going to see some supposedly sustainable timber projects on the island of Borneo, using a small P&O cruise ship based in Bali.

All went well at first. We enjoyed a sunset cruise along the south coast of the Island of the Gods, anticipating a pleasant initial meeting the next day over breakfast. But as night was coming on, our ship turned northward into the Strait of Lombok, the sea immediately got ugly, and before long half of the conference participants were in their bunks, where they remained until well after breakfast time, too sick to move, much less talk, listen or eat. Some of them were sub-Saharan Africans and almost none had ever been on a sea-going vessel before.

The next day things gradually got better, although it turned out that our ship could not get into one of the ports we had planned to visit because it drew too much water. The first stop was quite fascinating for the professional foresters, and the second, a substitute for the one we couldn't get to, was the island of Komodo, famous for its giant lizards (Komodo Dragons), which I had never visited, and that was good enough for me.

Q: Did you get involved during your time there with any of the Amazon Basin issues? The deforestation there?

PRINGLE: We did, but Brazil was not at the time an easy place to work. I've already mentioned that the Brazilians at the UN were not helpful.

Q: So in 1995 then, after two years in OES, you moved over to the Foreign Service Institute. Correct?

PRINGLE: That is correct. I was enjoying my work in OES thoroughly and wanted to extend there for a third year. Strategizing to advance conservation goals, by means of lobbying, public relations and diplomacy, both internal and international -- was intriguing, and I was just getting up to speed on how the game is played. But I was up against the six-year rule -- no more than six years in Washington allowed -- and I could not figure out how to get around it.

Then I was offered a position as Dean of the Senior Seminar, based at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which lasted from August 1995 to June 1996, and gave me time to continue looking -- successfully, as it turned out -- for a more orthodox onward assignment. I cannot remember why I was offered the Senior Seminar job. I think someone else had to back out at the last minute. Once again, they wanted someone with the "Ambassador" label. The fact that I had academic credentials was irrelevant.

The Senior Seminar, now most unfortunately defunct, was created as a training ground for future ambassadors, but its real nature went well beyond what that simple phrase suggests. It was based on the idea that most senior diplomats know enough about foreign policy and the world beyond our borders. But many of them have been away from home too long, literally and figuratively.

They badly need a refresher course on their own country; indeed in many cases they have only a shallow knowledge of many aspects of current American society, politics, economics and ethnicity. And yet, when they go abroad, their counterparts expect them to know, above all else, about the United States -- and to be able to explain us to them, especially when, as is often the case, they want to know whether and how our national experience may be relevant to theirs.

The Senior Seminar had members from the armed forces, partly as a way of obtaining military air transport, but also because among the things its students needed to know better was our own military, a need that became acute after the end of the Draft.

The Class of 1996, of which I was Dean, had thirty-four students: eighteen from the State Department, two from USIA (not yet merged with State), two from CIA, and one each from the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, USAID, USDA (Foreign Agricultural Service), National Guard Bureau (Air Force), Department of Defense, FBI, and EPA.

The Seminar was organized around themes, including in most cases a trip to a relevant region of the country, and summed up in a written report. The Alaska trip focused on environmental issues, Native Americans, and the making of foreign policy by individual states like Alaska. The Midwest trip looked at industry and agriculture, and students split up for individual farm stays, where they got to hear the farmer's take on US farm policy.

The Southwest trip looked at border issues and immigration policy, including a side trip to Juarez and lunch with its chamber of Commerce. Memphis focused on the life of Black Americans in the nearby Mississippi Delta, paired with a visit to the Civil Rights

Museum on the site where Martin Luther King was assassinated. The Baltimore trip was about the justice system, warts and all. We toured a medium-security prison, where we met both prisoners and the warden, who was angrily critical of the state legislature for slashing his education programs, which were proven to reduce the rate of recidivism. Everyone went out in a police car on its unrehearsed nightly rounds, mostly in one of Baltimore's seamiest neighborhoods.

The New York-East Coast trip was about finance, a tour of the New York Fed (and a glimpse of all the gold it stores), a chat with George Soros -- and immediately after Soros, a near mutiny when we were ordered back to Washington because the government was shutting down due to the budget crisis. Several students wanted to ignore the shutdown, instructions or no, because it meant breaking some very interesting appointments at Yale, but I felt we couldn't really do that.

There were military trips involving, among other attractions, a visit to an aircraft carrier at sea and meetings with senior commanders (leaders like General Zinni of the Marine Corps) as well as many varieties of lower ranks at work. In Washington, visits to domestic agencies and the Congress alternated with non-governmental speakers selected by the students. They were able to attract an astonishing array of luminaries from all fields, including the future head of the AFL-CIO, Richard Trumka.

To summarize, Seminar members visited many of the most important regions of the US and learned about aspects of the American experience of which they often had no serious prior knowledge. I am confident they would agree that the Seminar proved to be pedagogically most effective: they not only learned, they remembered.

Virtually all of our State members went on to senior jobs, and many if not all benefited in tangible ways from the experience. To cite one example, Gregg Engle, who moved on to be Consul General in Johannesburg, had no sooner arrived at post than he was asked for ideas on a new museum being established in Soweto to commemorate the anti-apartheid struggle. Because we had visited the Civil Rights Museum in Memphis he was well equipped to help his South African contacts understand a highly relevant American experience, and to tell them who to contact in the US for further help with their Soweto project.

Maybe that was a bit serendipitous. But I think all of us benefited constantly from what we learned about current US policy toward minorities, including Native Americans; environmental policy, including national parks; America's agriculture and its relationship to government; immigration policy seen from the border, the changing role of labor unions, our military in all its variety, and perhaps above all, the way our Federal system works.

But by the time the 1995-96 session ended, the Senior Seminar was on its way to the junk heap, to be replaced by short courses on leadership and management by experts on those subjects as they are taught elsewhere in academia. The problem was that most people did

not understand the teaching power of the Seminar, much less how particularly applicable it was to the practice of diplomacy.

Even more important, of course, was that not all senior officers could take it, and it was said to be too expensive, although I don't think any serious effort was made to restructure the experience for a larger number of students, maybe in a shorter time frame. Those who had not taken it thought it must be frivolous - all that travel! It was not popular with the leadership of FSI, which was in the grasp of conventional academic norms.

I think a more honest way of explaining the Seminar's demise is that the concept – the practical importance of knowing your own country when serving abroad – was too original to survive in a sea of mediocrity. Could it be revived? I can think of no good reason why not, except managerial myopia. Incidentally, I believe the military have something partially similar in their Capstone course for newly minted flag officers.

Q: Did the Senior Seminar strengthen the leadership skills of the participants?

PRINGLE: I think it did, by giving them the ability to speak on critical but neglected more subjects with authority.

I confess that I've never been quite sure that leadership can be taught in a classroom, certainly not in the kind of tradecraft courses offered by FSI, some of which were in any case incorporated in the Seminar's Washington activities. I think leadership has most to do with knowing your job, getting along with people, being well endowed with common sense and sufficiently courageous to fight and win bureaucratic battles. I'm sure that list could be expanded. The Seminar exposed its members to a whole range of leaders who had these qualities, and the members themselves planned its agenda..

Q: The successor to the Senior Seminar is a series of shorter sessions. And then stages of training throughout. And I guess that's been one of the emphases at FSI, aiming for a continuum of training throughout a Foreign Service career.

PRINGLE: That is a great idea but I'm not sure it has ever been rigorously implemented. Shortage of money and absence of slack in the personnel system still seem to be problems. The military has always been astounded that we don't do more training. They spend up to a third of their total time in training. They can do that because they have enough budget and bodies to do both needed training and to fill necessary jobs.

Q: Did you have any trouble attracting people to the Senior Seminar? You didn't have to dragoon anyone out of the front line to get them?

PRINGLE: I'm not sure. I had no say in the recruitment process. The military we got were good, but I think it's safe to say that none of them were future generals. Most of the FSOs were already future leaders and they certainly did not need to be dragooned into the Seminar.

Q: So you moved on then in 1996. And where did you go?

PRINGLE: I heard that the Ambassador-designate to South Africa, James Joseph, was looking for a DCM and when I expressed interest he invited me for an interview. A minister by training, he had spent years working in South Africa and knew most of the senior ANC leadership. He was then running the Council on Foundations, which taught other foundations tricks of the trade.

Joseph was indeed the kind of political appointee who could contribute relevant qualities and experience not to be found in the career service. He made it clear that he wanted a DCM who would serve primarily as manager, both in country and, more importantly, in his dealings with the State Department. But it was clear that he was not the kind of person who would keep me out away from policy issues, and he ended up choosing me for the job. I had always been fascinated by South Africa, and this assignment seemed far more interesting than another assignment to a more typical African post, as indeed it turned out to be.

Q: Did it give you any qualms to go back to being a DCM after an Ambassadorship?

PRINGLE: I got asked that question. My reply was that it was like going from being the captain of a tugboat to being the executive officer of an aircraft carrier - it was pretty obvious - protocolary vanities aside - which was the bigger and more challenging job.

And at this point I simply had to take an overseas assignment or resign. The only drawback was that Barbara could not join me for the first year without losing her job at Potomac School. After that she was able to do so thanks to a good friend who was able to fill in for her. She not only enjoyed it as much as I did; she found some extremely interesting work to do, discussed below.

Q: And you were in Pretoria. Was the Embassy still divided between Pretoria and Cape Town?

PRINGLE: I arrived not long after Mandela had been elected. South Africa still had three capitals established after the Boer War: an executive capital in Pretoria, the former (Boer) Transvaal State capital; a parliamentary capital in Cape Town, the old British capital; and a third, judicial capital in Bloemfontein, where the government of the Orange Free State, a second Boer state, had been located.

Throughout the apartheid era, our Embassy had moved to Cape Town whenever parliament was in session, because that was where all the ministers, the Ambassador's primary contacts, would be. The embassy was small, primarily a political operation. The DCM and Political Counselor followed the Ambassador, and had their own second houses in Cape Town. If you surmised that this arrangement might have had something to do with the attractions of Cape Town, you would be correct. Plus we had a big consulate in Johannesburg, the biggest city in the southern hemisphere next to Sao Paulo, and one in Durban, over on the Pacific Coast.

All this was in flux. Our Embassy in Pretoria was expanding rapidly as other US agencies jostled to open offices there. We were not sure whether Mandela's ANC would keep the parliament in Cape Town, or whether we would keep our consulate in Johannesburg. In the end we did keep both those posts, for good reasons.

But for the moment it posed a bit of a dilemma for me. Ambassador Joseph would go to Cape Town with the parliament, no question about that; he loved the place, and that was where his prominent South African friends, beginning with Nelson Mandela, would be. But what about me? Should I stay behind, and manage our expanding presence in Pretoria? Or should I accompany the Ambassador, as his senior deputy?

I put the question to Ambassador Joseph who more or less replied that he would love to have me, but I should do what I thought best. Based on that, I decided to spend some time in Cape Town, especially during high-level visits there, but alternate there with the Economic Counselor, Ann Berry, and the Political Counselor, Reed Fendrick. I had some twinges of guilt about this because my supposedly managerial function was clearly more and more needed in Pretoria. I actually never spent more than a month per year in Cape Town.

Q: Then the DCM retained a house in both places?

PRINGLE: Indeed he did. I was extremely well housed at both ends. The Pretoria house was in Brooklyn, once a big farm, of which the DCM house had been the farmhouse, complete with a thatch roof. It had originally been the Ambassador's Residence, but a decade or so before my arrival the Ambassador had moved to more fashionable Waterkloof, on a nearby ridge, and the DCM inherited the house in the valley.

It was in fact superior in many ways to the new Residence, with a bigger yard, a spectacular garden and more space for entertaining, and a rather grim set of servants' quarters entirely separate from the house which we rarely used. About fifteen neighbors, all of them Afrikaners, bordered the property. We gave a party to meet them all, which made a big hit; apparently none of my predecessors had done it. Then we attended neighborhood potlucks when they were occasionally organized.

The Cape Town house was even better. It is a trim, English cottage-style number in tony Bishop's Court, separated from the Residence by a tennis court, which Ambassador Joseph never used but we did frequently. It has a stunning view of the back of Table Mountain and is within walking distance of Kirstenbosch, one of the world's great botanical gardens, and you can see both oceans, Atlantic and Pacific, from a second story balcony. It is now the Consul General's residence. It makes me feel homesick just thinking about it.

Q: So did that make you feel a bit schizophrenic, having to spend half your time in Pretoria and half your time in Cape Town?

PRINGLE: Well, I – I should say we – did not, we just enjoyed it. And the government made it easy for us, paying for the move of a car and household staff – who were used to this - to Cape Town.

Q: How was our relationship with South Africa when you arrived – it must have been pretty good compared with the past.

PRINGLE: Our relationship was solid at its core, but a bit rough around the edges. The *sturm und drang* of the anti-apartheid years was over. The much-feared insurgency of the radical Afrikaner right had never materialized. The ANC was proving itself quite capable of running South Africa, contrary to Margaret Thatcher’s infamous prediction.

However, we had a tendency to treat Mandela and his team as laudable but not quite ready for the big leagues, which infuriated him and them. And, not surprisingly, there were residual irritations and resentments dating from the bad old days when we – and our allies – had been on the wrong side.

One persistent irritation was the fact that we were dead set on taking the big South African arms conglomerate, Armscor, to court for violating our prohibition on passing anything they had acquired from us to a third party, in this case Israel, with which the old regime had had a cozy, pariah to pariah, relationship.

Armscor had been a bastion of the Afrikaner establishment, and perhaps we thought they would not become so close the new regime as fast as they did. The result was much fuss and bother until the case was settled, none too soon, because we were already interested in buying South African anti-mining technology, later to be employed in Iraq and elsewhere

The more explosive issue was Mandela's unwanted help in arriving at a settlement with Qadhafi over the Lockerbie Pan Am shoot down. Mandela considered the Libyan leader as a friend who had helped him in the past and deserved his help now. We wanted Mandela to go away and mind his own business, and White House staff let that be known to the Washington press. Well, if you thought that saints don't have tempers, you have another think coming.

I happened to be chargé at the time of this episode. Mandela had arranged a fund-raiser for a foundation run by former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere, inviting an array of captains of South African industry to a formal dinner at the Carlton Hotel in Johannesburg. And there we were, in the front row, when the great man, opening the program, unleashed his anger at the arrogant United States.

As was his habit, Mandela left after the first course, and Barbara encountered him on her way back from the lady's room as he was heading for the door. He greeted her with all his usual charm, allowing us to feel much better. The next day's issue of the *Sowetan* [issue of October 21, 1997] showed Mandela, labeled “world’s moral leader,” striding away

from Bill Clinton, who is dressed as Uncle Sam and labeled “world’s policeman, self-appointed,” flattened into the ground by Mandela’s giant footstep.

Q: Were there other occasion in which you saw Mandela?

PRINGLE: There were quite a few. The first and the one that lingers most powerfully in my memory, took place very early in my stay, before Barbara arrived. I was representing the ambassador, who was out of the country, at a ceremonial re-interment of the man who wrote South Africa's national anthem, “*Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika*,” “Lord Bless Africa,” in Johannesburg. Mandela was there, insisting on shaking everyone's hand and that of every member of the orchestra and chorus, as were most of his ministers. Bishop Tutu was there, running around cackling at his own jokes. It dawned on me that we were going to be present at the creation of a new state, a really important one. It would be like being assigned to Philadelphia in 1786.

Another occasion: once we were coming back from Cape Town to Pretoria, via Port Elizabeth. Mandela was there dedicating a statue of the famous anti-apartheid journalist and martyr, Steve Biko. There was a huge crowd on hand, including the British singer, Peter Gabriel, who had written a famous song about Biko, and the crowd, trying to get closer to Mandela, got unruly. I was in the grandstand, but for some reason they wouldn’t let Barbara sit with me. So she was sitting out in front looking up at Mandela speaking -- she got a nice picture of him – with me behind him in the grandstand, and the crowd pressing against the barriers all around. Finally Mandela scolded them into behaving themselves, and that took care of it.

But, leaving aside the interest of it all, it was also obvious that I was going to have, for the first time in my career, some real management problems.

Q: In terms of managing the embassy?

PRINGLE: Indeed. This was not the kind of small African post I knew, where everyone knew everyone else, and we all went to Happy Hours at the Marine House every Friday night. The old African hands sort of expected that kind of small-town ambience, and missed it. Others came attracted by the promise of first world attractions and more: fabulous game reserves and golf courses, good food, fine wines, American-style shopping malls, pretty blond girls, excellent health care, good air connections in all directions, even cheap, state-subsidized opera.

A big part of my problem was the rapid influx of new agencies and personnel. This unanticipated crowd overflowed from our new chancery, which had never been designed for such crowds, into a variety of older buildings on neighboring streets.

The new chancery looked like a cross between a bunker and a rocket ship. Located in park-like surroundings it had world-class set-back which the older buildings certainly did not. But its design isolated the Ambassador and DCM on the top floor, cut off from easy

association with subordinates, both South Africans and Americans, although there was a good cafeteria in the basement where everyone could meet at lunch.

My big headache turned out to be the arrival of several law and order agencies: FBI, Secret Service, Customs and Immigration, and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). At first we had no idea what they were up to. I can't remember who suggested it, but we set up a law enforcement committee, chaired by me to make sure their concerns were heard. Almost immediately the big issue was whether they could carry weapons and operate jointly with their South African counterparts in pursuit of criminals.

I told them they could not unless and until we had a formal, across the board agreement with the South African government to do so. Otherwise, if one of them accidentally hurt or killed someone, almost inevitably a black person, we could easily be in trouble. This was especially true since their counterparts were still almost entirely white Afrikaners, even though the new government under Mandela was, at higher levels, already largely black.

Race still mattered in South Africa and would for a long time, and there was enough residual anti-Americanism around to make this a legitimate concern. But our law enforcement crowd did not like it, especially one in particular, the DEA representative.

This later got me in trouble of sorts. In the middle of the Clinton visit in 1998 we were inspected by a State Department inspection (OIG) team. They wrote evaluations of all senior staff in the embassy, including me. The report accepted the view of some of our law enforcement officers that both the ambassador and I did not appreciate their professional requirements, and, isolated on the top floor of our streamlined bunker, were aloof from them.

The leader of the State OIG team had previously been a senior officer with the Justice Department team that was administering law enforcement assistance to African countries. I think he should have recused himself from the matter, but I did not press that point, hoping, naively perhaps, that common sense would prevail. I did dispute his interpretation as soon as I saw his report, pointing out that soon after the OIG inspection, the South Africans had approved the formal agreement, which the embassy had required, with ambassadorial approval, permitting our people to carry arms.

I thought then, and still do, that I deserved to be complimented, not chastised. The negative OIG inspection report was softened but remained part of the material reviewed by the senior officer promotion board in 1999. As a result I was "low ranked," hence not promoted. That meant I would need to retire within a year or so, for "time in grade."

I thought of appealing, but the American Foreign Service Association lawyer (ASFA) that I consulted advised me not to bother trying to amend the report further, because *any* negative material in a file, would result in low ranking in a field of otherwise flawless, walk-on-water reports. It would probably have taken a law suit to excise the offending material entirely, or so I was told.

The whole thing rankled, and still does, but since I would have had to retire for age anyway in November 2001, at age 65, it did not materially affect my career. I must say that in retrospect I think I was witnessing an early example of the kind of behavior, by the State Department, that would allow security personnel of all kinds to get well and truly out of control, culminating *inter alia* in the hideous Blackwater killing of seventeen Iraqi civilians in 2007.

Q: Well, did you have any input on evaluating the performance of the heads of other agencies that were at the embassy?

PRINGLE: I did not. Nor did I seek it, I must say. The thought never occurred to me.

Q: Going back to the relations within the embassy other than those outside agencies, did this morale issue sort of get resolved? How about crime -- Were there serious crimes committed against American staff?

PRINGLE: With regard to morale, I think we were getting there. We emphasized more embassy-sponsored social activities, having a strong, active Community Liaison Office (CLO) and including employees of all kinds in events hosted by the DCM and Ambassador. We had community picnics on national holidays, including at the Chancery and at Pretoria's urban game park. The Embassy's Admin Officer, Mike Hinton, brilliantly made arrangements for all embassy personnel to volunteer as poll watchers at the 1999 presidential elections, at locations ranging from golf clubs to the one of the most famous diamond mines in the world, at Cullinan, where the biggest diamond in the British crown was found.

Crime remained a problem. We had armed, "rapid-response" private security services, whose burly Afrikaner officers gave an impression of efficiency. To the best of my memory, there were no deadly crimes committed against American staff during our stay.

Car theft was a real problem. We were warned never to buy a certain model of Toyota van, used for minibus service; it *would* be stolen within a few days. And I had to warn people that the crazy driving on South African roads was in fact more dangerous than crime, if not as obviously frightening. You always had to have one eye on the rear view mirror to make sure somebody wasn't passing you at ninety miles an hour, or more, just as you were preparing to pass a smoke-leaking jitney going fifteen just ahead of you.

Q: In addition to old-fashioned crime, didn't you have a new-style Islamic terrorism threat?

PRINGLE: We did. It came home big time with the bombing of our Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania on August 7, 1998. We were the nearest post that could fly in help of any kind. The South Africans were most supportive, providing one of their Air Force Boeing 707's and crews to take our Embassy doctor and medical supplies, and more, to Dar es Salaam. I was chargé, so went to the airport to see them off. This was still the old, all-white, rough-and-ready SA Air Force, and the plane was no spring chicken. To my

amazement, they started it, after a balky beginning, with a burning, oily rag on a long pole, engine by engine. But then they got our guys to Dar before anyone else.

Then we began to get intelligence about threats from South Africa's not inconsiderable Muslim community, some of them of Indian descent, others the descendants of troublesome Indonesian Muslim clerics sent into exile at the Cape by the Dutch.

By this time April Glaspie was our CG in Cape Town, and she of course had considerable expertise on radical Islam and what to do about it, all the more so after having been badly handled following her experience delivering instructions to Saddam Hussein when she was Ambassador to Iraq. She felt that our CIA station was underestimating the threat from local extremists, and said so to them in no uncertain terms. I could add nothing to this discussion, and did not try, which may have annoyed April. A few weeks after the Dar-Nairobi bombings, the Planet Hollywood restaurant on the Cape Town waterfront was bombed, killing one person. But things calmed down after that, as far as I know.

Q: What about those three consulates - did you get involved with them?

PRINGLE: Morale was a big factor in managing our three consulates, which depended on Big Daddy Pretoria for administrative support, in addition to which I wrote the efficiency reports on their principal officers. Smaller embassies in Southern Africa -- including Windhoek, Gaborone, Mbabane, Maseru and Maputo -- also depended on us in many ways. That made for extensive traveling, much of which could be done by road through South Africa, in the course of which one always learned more about the state of our principal nation.

I didn't need to visit Cape Town - I was there frequently anyway because of Parliament. The same went for Johannesburg, of course - it was within commuting distance of us. At the time of my arrival we were thinking of closing down Johannesburg, since it had in the bad old days existed primarily as our "Embassy to the ANC."

But it also had a Washington-NY relationship with Pretoria, meaning that it was the hub of the business world, plus it had that enormous consular section I mentioned earlier. It became, logically, the location of the Foreign Commercial Service. The decision not to close it is looking good in retrospect, as Johannesburg begins to recover from its crime-ridden low point. It is a totally fascinating city so I am glad of that.

We rarely had turf problems with the consulates. We had three first-class consuls who reported independently on issues in their areas. We counted on them to judge when something needed ambassadorial attention.

The only problem I can remember was a relic arrangement, whereby the political officer in Cape Town was responsible to the Political Section in Pretoria. This created tension between the Political Counselor and the Consul General in Cape Town. These kinds of things can create unproductive tension when personality differences are also a factor, as they were in this case.

Q: Did you try to make that change? Did you lean on the system so that it might -- what you're suggesting is reasonable.

PRINGLE: I did not, partly because it was more an irritation than a major problem, partly because we all knew that the system was in flux. I suspect that things have changed by now, just as the DCM's role has clarified -- the DCM house in Cape Town is now the Consul General's, a sensible change.

My guess is that today this issue has been overtaken by events.

Q: But did the Johannesburg reporting function dwindle?

PRINGLE: The relative importance of the Johannesburg reporting diminished somewhat -- it was no longer, in effect -- and including Soweto -- the heart and soul of a future country, but it was still one of the largest cities in the southern hemisphere, and the way this great metropolis was governed was still an indicator of how well South Africa's transition to democracy was doing. For a while it didn't look good - foreigners were afraid to go there. Greg Engle, our first-rate Consul General did a lot of reporting on the politics of Joburg, which were still important.

Q: Did the original labor officers stay in Johannesburg?

PRINGLE: I honestly do not remember. During the anti-apartheid struggle, the labor movement was of primary importance. Since then it has been one element in the political spectrum, comparable to the role of the anti-ANC opposition in the Western Cape -- important to be sure, but not critical in isolation.

Q: What was going on in your third Consulate, Durban, the one some people think must be in India?

PRINGLE: Durban was just as interesting as the others, and almost as important. The city's hinterland -- Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal -- was economically booming and ethnically diverse, including whites, mainly English-speaking; blacks, mainly the famous Zulus, who still claimed that the British never had conquered them; and Indians, who came originally as plantation labor and no longer spoke Indian languages.

It was loaded with attractions including the Drakensberg Mountains, surrounding the independent country of Lesotho; an extraordinary collection of wildlife reserves, including Kruger National Park, the biggest of them all; non-stop beaches, including in the middle of Durban itself, and the railroad station where Mahatma Gandhi boarded a train, in the "whites only" section, for a ride that helped to shape his strategy of non-violent resistance. It also had some of the most awful slums in South Africa.

Our Consul was Fred Hassani. He was a crackerjack reporter, a naturally likable individual, and one of the most creative FSOs I ever met. He quickly established a

productive relationship with Mangosuthu Buthelezi, a prickly individual infamous for being a thorn in the side of ANC but still a dominant force in Zulu politics. Hassani attracted positive publicity without trying by frequenting Durban's pool halls. He did things like holding a city-wide contest for local school children to design the Consulates' annual Christmas-gift coffee mug.

He invited the American Opera singer Simon Estes, well known in Durban for his charitable works there, to a big reception. When at the last minute Estes caught a cold that threatened to damage his vocal chords and couldn't fly to South Africa, Hassani persuaded the world-famous singing group, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, also local heroes, to fill in for him. But in case that wasn't enough Hassani had a life-size cutout of Estes made so everyone could be photographed with him anyway.

Hassani didn't have any "Areas for Improvement," to quote the Efficiency Report form. What he needed was cheering on, because he was smart enough to discern that he could have as much fun and make more money outside the Foreign Service and was planning to resign as soon as he was eligible for a pension. Despite using every conceivable superlative I failed, and he left, and has done well, as anticipated.

I particularly missed him because, although I was fond of telling people that that there were no educational requirements for joining the U.S. Foreign Service, Hassani was the only person I knew who had actually done it, having neither a high school diploma nor a college degree. It's a long but true story.

Q: Beyond the consulates -- were there other morale or community-related problems?

PRINGLE: Education was certainly a morale-related problem. Many US mission families chose South Africa in expectation that schooling would be available for children with "special needs." The term itself was widely misunderstood -- did it mean mild dyslexia, or the availability of training for ballet dancers, or care for children with brain damage? Our big International School had overstated its own "Special Ed" capabilities, leading to exaggerated expectations and a few broken assignments, which were extremely expensive for the USG.

Barbara arrived fresh from her teaching job at Potomac School and well versed in the world of "Special Ed" from both family experience and training in learning disabilities. With a grant from the State Department's Office of Education, she visited the entire range of possibilities available to Embassy staff in Durban and Cape Town as well as the Johannesburg-Pretoria region. One of her major conclusions was that families whose children had severe handicaps would be able to find appropriate education more easily than those with lesser handicaps whose training depended on spoken and written language. Nevertheless, the only handicap that could not be coped with at all locally was deafness, because American sign language is totally different from any other and lip reading, even in the South African version of English, was impossible.

She used my DCM car and driver, Johannes, wherever possible, since she was on government business -- and Johannes, the father of a handicapped child himself, was very interested and helpful.

As this story suggests, there were a variety of spousal employment opportunities in South Africa, as there usually is in complex, relatively advanced countries, albeit not nearly enough. Barbara's other job was teaching American history to the Embassy's Marine security guards, part of a college preparatory program run by Central Texas State University. It was, I think, an unforgettable experience for them as well as for her.

Q: With Mandela a world-class icon and South Africa on the rise, you must have gotten a lot of high-level visits?

PRINGLE: Indeed we did. We also became a camping-ground for high-level emissaries like Howard Wolpe, former congressman and Chair of the House Subcommittee on Africa, who was trying to help achieve a solution to the endless war in Central Africa, an outgrowth of the Rwandan crisis -- and far more deadly than the genocide itself. Much of this "care and feeding of emissaries" function had to do with South Africa's excellent transportation and communication facilities.

The high-level USG visits were of course a bigger burden, albeit one that we were well equipped to handle. The first I experienced was that of Secretary of State Warren Christopher (March 1997). Then came Hilary and Chelsea Clinton (also in March 1997) and Madeline Albright in December 1997. Hilary had told us that she was going to come back with Bill, which she did in March 1998.

Most major visits included events in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Pretoria, but rarely Durban, which was a pity. The South Africa - US Binational Commission (BNC) was a periodic, hydra-headed, high-level visit, starring our two Vice Presidents. And of course there was a constant stream of CODELs. Everyone just had to meet Mandela, and if they didn't, guess who was in trouble. Going into any detail on all these visits would take up most of this account, so I will stick to a few impressions.

None of us doubted the great importance of high-level visits. Their best moments made all the toil required seem worthwhile. They were more about implementing major policies than about creating new ones. Nothing was of greater value in educating our key constituents. Our visits had impact beyond that: the fact that every VIP just HAD to visit Cape Town no doubt helped to keep that consulate from being closed.

I will never forget Hilary's address in Cape Town when, on her first visit, after delivering her prepared text, she answered questions that got at what really interested her educated audience, such as whether, in the future, Bill could play the role of First Gentleman (FIGUS?). In the BNC Al Gore shone as someone who understood South Africa's problems and was devoted to doing what we could to help achieve the Mandelian dream of multi-racial prosperity.

When the Clintons came together in 1988 they were very good guests, generating admiration and good will as well as amazement. They also provoked no small amount of fun-poking, mainly at the incredible resources deployed to support them: a delegation of about 1,000 (including press), more than eighty sorties of USAF aircraft, and a total cost (later estimated, because it was classified) of \$40 million plus. The presidential helicopter had to have four duplicates, as "decoys." The press also made much of allegations that Bill was only trying to get away from the Monica Lewinski scandal. One cartoonist drew Air Force One as a flying penis.

Trying to schedule the big POTUS visit was of course a nightmare at times, even though our advance party, under Dave Note, was as good to work with as could be asked for. The big problem was, once again, the Lockerbie shoot-down issue plus Mandela and his friends. We insisted on a one-on-one ONLY visit between Mandela and Clinton. But we knew that the Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Bandar, had been in town -- his four-engine private jet was rather obvious at the small Cape Town airport -- and that he and Mandela were probably conspiring to get Bandar into the meeting. We should have learned by this time that trying to bully Madiba would get us nowhere, but we hadn't.

Immediately after the meeting it was apparent that something terrible had indeed transpired. Both Susan Rice, then the Assistant Secretary for Africa, and her boss, NSC Director Sandy Berger, emerged looking furious. It turned out that Mandela had, as feared, produced Bandar, as from a closet.

I was sure someone would be fired for allowing this to happen, and it would probably be me. They wouldn't dare touch a prominent, political appointee ambassador. Who else to blame but the DCM? I drafted a lengthy cable explaining all the different ways we had tried really hard to prevent this misfortune.

There was no response. After over a week of silence from Washington, I called Johnny Carson, the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary in AF. What was going on? Relax, he said, it seems we had been informed that Bandar would be there. OK, I thought, was all that public anger on the part of Rice and Berger just play acting? Well, it seems that NEA had been informed, but not AF, at least not until later.

Thus ended the weirdest episode in my diplomatic career bar none, except that years later, long after the Lockerbie negotiations were concluded, it turned out that the South African - Saudi meddling had actually been in very helpful in reaching a settlement, however imperfect, according to a knowledgeable source.

I should at least mention the two visits by Secretaries of State, Warren Christopher early in 1997, and Madeleine Albright the following December. They were very different. Christopher was totally genteel and well-behaved, lawyerly and doing his duty. He met with Mandela, the main reason he had come.

Albright was starkly different. She blew us away, in the wrong direction, by keeping Embassy dependents waiting for a minimal visit, in which she spoke only to them, not

with them. Her staff was quite exceptionally obnoxious. On one occasion we were taking some her delegation to a meeting out of town when they *demand*ed that we stop for coffee, of all things, despite the fact that we were running late and knew that breakfast would be served at our destination. Then, at a meeting where I was sitting with the Ambassador, at his request, one of her senior staff sent an emissary and summoned me outside for I what I thought must be an urgent matter. It was just that his master wanted my seat! There was more of this kind of behavior. She did not understand that powerful people will be judged by the behavior of their underlings.

Q: What was your personal role in reporting?

PRINGLE: I had first-rate economic and political sections who did most of our reporting. But sometimes, mainly in the course of travel for other reasons, I could write about topics that illustrated the state of South Africa's progress toward a multi-racial democracy, our overarching policy goal.

One such report, written in March 1999, was about Peace Corps Volunteers teaching in non-government "farm schools" serving black farm labor on large white-owned farms in Mpumalanga Province. My visit was partly to see how the volunteers were getting along, and partly to see how the Afrikaner landlords were behaving. Our visit - Barbara was with me as usual -- revealed a fascinating mix of liberal and conservative behavior on the landlord side, some welcoming the volunteers and their efforts to improve rural education; others, a minority to be sure, obstinately hostile to it.

The subject was relevant to a widely accepted view that South Africa would soon face a Zimbabwe-type crisis if it did not turn ownership of more farmland over to blacks. That view was mistaken, in my view, if only because most South African blacks no longer yearned for forty acres and a mule any more than American blacks did. The rural region we were visiting was exceptional, different from the quasi-urban "townships" to which most blacks had been relocated under apartheid. The township blacks had been part of the country's industrial economy for almost a century. The real story in Mpumalanga was the varying attitudes of the landlords toward the children of their farm hands - and the dedicated participation of our Volunteers in trying to better their lot.

I wrote another report, also based on travel in early 1999, with the same kind of relevance to the big picture of South African progress, about a three year USAID project designed to improve rural health in the Eastern Cape, Mandela's home province. The hope was that the result would serve as a pilot project which would lead to health care improvement throughout black-inhabited areas, especially in the former Homelands, or Bantustans.

As was normal for such projects, the government of South Africa was supposed to cover local costs, while USAID paid for equipment and expert advice. It was to have been completed in three years. But by the time of my report it was already in deep trouble, having run headlong into the gathering HIV/AIDS pandemic, which none of the project's designers had anticipated. The South African government, especially and notoriously

under Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, was tragically slow to recognize the AIDS menace.

What I reported on was an early manifestation of much worse things to come. Local health facilities, inadequate to begin with, were being swamped with patients dying of "tuberculosis," when the real cause was AIDS. This left the South African government unable to cover rapidly increasing local costs, and the entire project overwhelmed by the developing national crisis. (It was still better than having done nothing.)

Q: So the Peace Corps was already there. Was it large?

PRINGLE: Peace Corps was of course new, and expanding, about a hundred volunteers--not so big given the size and importance of the country. You can argue that South Africa did not really need the Peace Corps, given its own wealth of human resources. But those resources were of course very badly distributed. So Peace Corps correctly focused on places where there was an acute and immediate need, and they could make a difference.

Q: And I guess the so-called "independent homelands" were being reintegrated into the country?

PRINGLE: They were. Some of them disappeared without leaving much of their old selves. Our favorite was Bophuthatswana, also the most advanced in its own day. It left behind a great little airline abbreviated "Air Bop," if only because no one could spell the full version. It had wonderful service and we used to fly down to Cape Town on it, once with our servants in tow - they nearly died of excitement, sitting in big leather chairs. Everybody loved Air Bop, but it was inevitably swallowed by South African Airlines, after the latter was taken over and revamped by a no-nonsense American manager. (Boo, Hiss!)

Q: Did Sun City still exist?

PRINGLE: Yes, also in Bophuthatswana. It was a high-end resort famous for its casinos and other forms of sin that were banned in South Africa (which entirely surrounds it) under puritanical apartheid, as well as celebrity guests and world-class golf courses. Within an easy drive of Johannesburg and Pretoria, it has thrived under the new order. We never went there, too busy going to game parks I guess.

Q: Where was South Africa going politically during the time you were there? Was it meeting expectations?

PRINGLE: The miracle of Mandela was still with us. It was not a surprise that his succession was peaceful. But the future was still uncertain, and many people, mainly but not exclusively whites, were gloomy about it, excessively so, I thought. But you really couldn't blame the pessimists. The idea that Mandela was a one-off, that he would never happen again, was not wholly unreasonable.

I think our policy was succeeding, but it was obvious that South Africa would settle its own fate and that foreign help would always be marginal. The key issue was -- and would remain for the foreseeable future -- whether the country could achieve a sustainable, multi-racial democracy that would correct the enormous inequities of the past, without driving out the white minority. It helped that we could offer sympathy and moral support, pointing out that we had racial problems of our own and experiences that we could share with them. That was one reason for the Binational Commission. In the short term, the biggest challenge would be not allowing things to fall apart after the departure of Mandela, who was surely one of the hardest acts of all time to follow.

I was there when Thabo Mbeki succeeded him, as everybody knew he would. He was a strange politician, brainy but quirky. His denial of the HIV/AIDS menace cost the country dearly and stirred additional and unnecessary doubt about the future of South Africa. But from the vantage point of 2015 it is clear that South Africa has survived the challenge and is certainly nowhere near becoming another failed African state. Unfortunately most outside observers do not understand South Africa's history, which, for all its agony, turned the country into a substantially middle income country.

The racial inequities have not vanished, but they are diminishing. The whites have not all fled. The big surprise is that so many Afrikaners have not only remained, but have been enthusiastic participants in the new South Africa. Returning a decade later, as Barbara and I did in 2011, we saw a big increase in black mid-level employment. No longer are all the rangers in Kruger National Park white, to cite one example; most of them are black. This kind of change is creeping slowly upwards through the system.

Huge problems remain, and every solution seemed to create new ones. For example, we had watched our neighborhood school in Brooklyn (Pretoria) go from being all white to being about half black or Indian in about two years. Many of the new black students were the children of educated people from the big, Soweto-style "township" north of town, who had left it partly to get better education for their kids.

And surprise, surprise: the township people were unhappy because their leaders, better educated, etc., were deserting them. One of the largest and close to insoluble issues is that South Africa's northern border is porous. The more blacks that are educated and move upwards in South Africa, the more people arrive from points north, seeking education and better jobs. The whole thing makes our relationship with Mexico look easy.

Q: So you were there for three years. Is there anything you'd like to add before we move on?

PRINGLE: I admit that I adored the place. It was partly the sheer beauty of it, partly the parallels between South African history and our own, and partly the importance of the challenge they were facing.

Just before we left I wrote an article for a Pretoria newspaper, aimed largely at unhappy or nervous whites. I listed all the reasons we would miss South Africa, from the climate to the constant appeal of being present at the birth of a nation. They ran it with a goofy photo of me holding crossed American and South African flags, and it got a lot of positive response, including from the rector of an Anglican church who used it for one of his sermons.

All things considered, South Africa was one of our best foreign assignments, another being Indonesia. Mali was another, of course, and not just because being an ambassador is always special.

Q: So-you left South Africa in the summer of 1999. Did you retire at that point, or go on to another assignment?

PRINGLE: I was coming back for a Washington assignment. I tried initially to get a diplomat-in-residence job at Howard University because it was a place I knew well from childhood. In the 1950s my father had become interested in problems of Negro education and had written about Howard, among other subjects, primarily for the Saturday Evening Post. As a result, my family had friends on the Howard faculty, in addition to which Ambassador Joseph gave me a strong recommendation, which I thought would do the trick. But State's senior personnel people wanted to hold the job in case it was needed for an important person of color -- this was a hypothetical, not real possibility -- so I had to accept the National War College (NWC) job or risk losing that as well.

Q: What was your position there?

PRINGLE: It was a two-year assignment as a faculty member with the rank of ambassador, helping to teach the core curriculum, a survey of national security strategy. But like everyone else teaching at the NWC I also taught a number of elective courses and participated in the travel program. I was best qualified to teach the Southeast Asian regional elective, because of both my experience there and my doctorate on the subject, but there was a permanent civilian employee already doing that, so I taught sub-Saharan Africa instead, and led the related travel, which turned out well.

I also did a course on national security and the environment, which had been something of a preoccupation at OES. At the NWC we were trying to get the idea across that environmental issues have political and eventually -- if they aren't solved -- military consequences. The most obvious ones are disputes over water and fishing rights. Part of what the National War College does is to teach about the causes of war, so they welcomed my elaboration of this concept, and the course was quite popular.

As for the Africa regional course, it was enjoyable teaching the subject to bright students curious about this mysterious place, and even more so traveling there to places I knew well with some of them - more on that below.

The emphasis in the core curriculum is heavily on strategy, beginning with old favorites like Sun Tzu and von Clausewitz, but including much more recent material.

Q: Your title was Professor of National Security.

PRINGLE: Correct.

Q: Did the classes that you taught tend to be mixed or were they mainly military?

PRINGLE: The students were mainly military, but with a scattering of civilians from other national security agencies, including State. They were mostly lieutenant colonels, or equivalent, on their way to being full colonels, usually soon after graduation. That step up was almost but not quite *pro forma*.

Q: And your impression of the quality of the students you were teaching?

PRINGLE: Excellent over all, with intriguing streaks of variety. We all loved to talk about service stereotypes and to what extent they were valid. The Marines were really good; they exuded leadership in a quiet way, always good students, and not into quirkiness. The Air Force, on the other hand, was sometimes brilliant, sometimes less than brilliant, and with much more variation. They had awesome technical people, sometimes real scientists, and also lady pilots -- mostly tanker pilots because they weren't yet allowed to get near combat -- who were bright and full of fun and games. The Army struck me as much more various in terms of ethnicity, class background and intellectual capacity.

As for the Navy, the stereotype was that the Navy felt its officers should be driving ships, not wasting time on training. And yet -- and yet, the Naval War College in Newport, RI, had the reputation of being academically superior to any of the other service war colleges (Army, Navy, and Air force). (The NWC, besides including all services, was at a higher level in the hierarchy of "military higher education.") But it did seem to me that the Navy was not sending its best people to the NWC.

Despite the persistence of service stereotypes (or mythology), everyone was seriously into promoting "jointness," meaning cooperation between the services. And they were eager to hear my views on what the State Department could and should be contributing to a "joint" national security effort. They felt strongly State should be doing a lot more to help defuse all the unpleasant political situations that eventually cause the military to be deployed. Such thinking, plus memories of CORDS in Vietnam, was clearly behind the later increased use of State people in Iraq and Afghanistan, on short tours without families.

Q: Your teaching on Africa, did it focus on the countries themselves, U.S.-Africa relations, or a combination thereof?

PRINGLE: It was a combination thereof. The first year (2000) I took my students to West Africa; the second (2001) to Southern Africa.

Students got to say where they wanted to go, and Africa was not a popular destination - not like Brazil or Tokyo -- and the 2000 trip to West Africa was initially undersubscribed. When this happened, our Dean invoked the traditional Army solution: "I need X number of volunteers, you, you and you," until the trip quota was filled. The result was a mixture of officers who really wanted to see Africa (mostly black, two of them women) and others who were at first quite dubious, but good soldiers about it.

However, it turned out to be great learning experience. Nigeria in particular was one surprise after another. There was the single-fare airline that took you anywhere in the country for the equivalent of fifty dollars, recommended by the Embassy. Everywhere there were machines to count money, since the highest note was worth only fifty cents, and you had to carry bricks of them. There was the drive to Kaduna, through what looked like well-watered land which no one was farming any more. Why not? Well, why farm when you have lots of oil?

In the same area we passed an oil tanker crashed and burning in the median of an interstate-style highway, with villagers crowded around the blaze scooping up cans of gasoline. The students took lots pictures to regale their colleagues back home with -- this was to be presented as the work of a (mythical) Nigerian rebellion which we had narrowly escaped.

When we got to Kaduna we drove through very real wreckage left by recent Christian-Muslim rioting in order to visit a magnificent new mosque, with its architect guiding us. It was midday and very hot, and lots of men were napping in dark corners. One of them emerged and plucked at the sleeve of our guide. It was clear he wanted us to leave. Not *all* of us, it turned out, just the two *women*, who happened to be black.

We flew down Port to Harcourt, capital of Nigeria's oil patch, where we heard radically different opinions on who to blame for all the endless violence, the wicked oil companies (including Chevron) or local people who lived by extracting money from the oil companies by violent means. On the edge of villages, little boys had kebabs for sale featuring huge insect grubs of some kind. That was another big hit.

On our return to Port Harcourt, we landed at the weedy end of a long runway, instead of at the domestic terminal from which we had departed. This was because (according to a lady already hawking soft drinks in the weeds where we arrived) the wealthy owner of another airline had just burned the terminal down to destroy evidence implicating him in corruption. Well, it just happens that this very same scenario occurs in *Anthills of the Savannah*, one of the novels that were on my reading list for the class, by the great Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe, better known for Things Fall Apart. After that my reputation as a sharp teacher was made.

We had many other interesting experiences but I won't list all of them except to mention that Ghana, our first stop, which had been a disaster area only a decade previously (when I was in Burkina), had put on a bright, shiny new face, and everyone was favorably impressed, especially with our deluxe new beachfront hotel in Accra.

The most notable and gratifying result of all this was that those students who had started the trip in a rosy glow of anticipation about Mother Africa were no longer quite as wide eyed about her, while those who were glumly anticipating a parade of poverty were thinking well, Africa is not so bad after all given the problems it is facing.

The second trip I led, in 2001, to southern Africa, was quite different. It included South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique. Past trips to Southern Africa had included Victoria Falls, but I substituted Mozambique because it was a far more typical developing country than South Africa, and, after years of civil war, rapidly growing in importance.

I loved going back to South Africa, of course. Thanks to the then-current DCM, John Blaney, I was able to host a party for the my students in my old house, Fiesole, and we had a rich and informative program elsewhere. There were eight students and a faculty co-leader on the trip, and all had a great time. But for sheer education it was not as effective as the West Africa trip had been.

Q: So you were at the National War College 2001.

PRINGLE: My State Department retirement took effect in the fall of 2001 but I taught at the NWC for another semester under contract, because I was doing a book on the history of Bali, Indonesia, and I was very glad to have use of the NWC's excellent library -- technically it is the National Defense University Library -- to do the research. They were, and I am sure still are, terrific at finding rare books and journals, and they had time to help me. Since I was not accredited to any university in the area, the only alternative would have been the Library of Congress, which has every book or journal you would ever need but -- underfunded as it is -- can't always find them.

One result was that I was at the War College on 9/11; we could see the smoke from the suicide crash at the Pentagon, quite close by up the Potomac, and for quite a while had no idea what it was.

Q: What else have you done since 2001?

PRINGLE: I finished the Bali book and it was published by a major Australian press, Allen and Unwin, in 2004. The full title is *A Short History of Bali: Indonesia's Hindu Realm*. I had no financial support beyond a \$2,000 travel grant from The US- Indonesia Society, but the book has done well and is still in print.

Clearly writing was not going to be a money maker, and I wanted to do some part-time work for the State Department (While Actually Employed - WAE), maybe filling staffing gaps in places I knew well. But regional bureaus determined who got WAE appointments,

and AF -- my most likely base for such employment -- had decided to use them only to fill administrative and secretarial gaps, despite real seasonal needs for part-time DCMs and other senior help.

So my only choice was to apply for a WAE position doing declassification work under the Freedom of Information Act. I tried it for a year or so, long enough nearly to bore myself to death. I felt I had to do so to pay back the Administrative Bureau for getting my security clearances reinstated. After that I thought I might be able to find more interesting WAE work abroad, but this never panned out.

Sometime in 2003 I heard about a position at the World Bank doing project review work. It was very part-time, but paid over seven hundred dollars a day, and provided interesting insights into how the World Bank works. So I did that for a while.

Then I did a study on Mali for the US Institute of Peace (USIP). I had been quite surprised when Mali's new democracy, born just after my tour as Ambassador, achieved several years of success including three free and fair elections in 1992, 1997 and 2002. The question was how and why such an impoverished, socially conservative country had managed this unusual feat.

I concluded that it had something to do with Mali's long and unusual heritage of multi-ethnic empires before colonial rule. I emphasized that many threats to Mali's democracy remained unsolved, including a northern insurgency, which, now Sahara-wide, ended it in 2012.

My work was funded jointly by USIP and USAID Bamako, which allowed me to return to Mali twice, to see how my impressions were holding up. The results were published by USIP in 2006 as a monograph in its "Peacework" series entitled "Democratization in Mali: Putting History to Work."

I also began to plan a book on Islam in Indonesia, a subject I had covered as a junior officer in Jakarta. It was inspired by widespread ignorance of Indonesia's large Muslim population, bigger than that of any other country in the world, a fact that was of growing interest in the wake of 9/11. I was able to get a substantial grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation to cover two years of work on a book about this topic. Like the Bali book, this one was written for a generalist audience, and as a kind of primer for professionals working in Indonesia. Titled *Understanding Islam in Indonesia: Politics and Diversity*, it was published in 2010 by Didier Millet in Singapore, with an identical U.S. edition by the Hawaii University Press.

Barbara did not retire from her teaching career until 2003. Her continued work, plus my part time efforts, allowed us to enjoy a happy retirement without cutting into our savings. We were now debt-free and able to stay that way. We soon discovered that far from being bored, we were as busy or busier than ever, able to travel frequently, visit with children and grandchildren, enjoy hobbies new and old, and become more involved with local church and government activities that at any time in the past.

Q: So you were in the Foreign Service how many years altogether?

PRINGLE: Thirty-four.

Q: What were the highlights looking back?

PRINGLE: Indonesia was certainly a highlight, and so was South Africa, and in between they were all rewarding -- there certainly wasn't one that I found to be a disappointment or where I didn't think we were doing a good job. Some were obviously much more important than others. The Philippines was typically loaded with historical baggage, as former colonies usually are -- your own children can be the hardest to understand.

All of our assignments except South Africa were so-called hardship posts. That was a plus for us, given that none of them was terribly dangerous, and because we enjoyed getting to know the different cultures in places that are isolated and often very traditional. The kind of things that counted in the State Department's assessment of "hardship" -- snakes, bad plumbing and absence of first-run movies -- were trivial compared to the satisfactions of learning about the human race, and being more useful professionally than we would have been in more sanitary, European-style settings.

Q: Looking back on your career, would you count any of your assignments as successes -- successes that you were involved in directly?

PRINGLE: We have just been over South Africa. Our objective there was to help the South Africans achieve a sustainable, multi-racial democracy that would preserve and build on the achievements of a particularly complex colonial past. No one thought this goal could be achieved in two or three years, or that we could achieve "success" in meeting it without lots of help from others. We could make progress toward the goal, and I think we did, despite annoying Mandela at times. And we even learned a lot from the South Africans -- in areas as diverse as anti-mining technology, or how to achieve peace and reconciliation after the bitterest kind of civil strife.

We work in teams, whether abroad -- "country teams" -- or in Washington, where teamwork is not well defined bureaucratically -- and where "our team" is often struggling with other USG teams for resources and to achieve the support of others -- senior officers, up to the president; the Congress, and public opinion. Even abroad, we often blame lack of "success" on Congress when we explain shortcomings of our policy to foreign counterparts.

I think I contributed to that kind of teamwork both in Washington, particularly in OES, and in the field. The essence of leadership is about finding good team members and motivating them to work with you, whether they are foreign friends or members of your country team.

My strongest suit was writing. And perhaps partly because of that I came to the conclusion that the primary objective of the Foreign Service -- I am talking here mainly about its State Department component -- is the creation and nurturing of expertise on foreign countries. There is a wrong-headed idea that we write reports to inform Washington, full stop. We also write to create experts and expertise. That is because analytical reporting requires research, thorough reading, interviewing and travel, and the testing of ideas against ones' peers in the field and in Washington. Kennan's famous "long cable" remains the gold standard for this kind of writing.

Admittedly most of us are not assigned to places as obviously important as post-World War II Soviet Russia. But we should have learned by now that some of our most expensive problems, in terms of blood and treasure, pop up increasingly where we least expect them. Seen in those terms, foreign area expertise is like money in the bank. It's quite useless until you need it. Then you miss it sorely. Would that we had created and nurtured experts and expertise relevant to Vietnam, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan and many others, before the need for it became critical.

Some will object that this kind of analytic capacity belongs with the intelligence community in Washington. But I am convinced that living -- not just visiting -- and working abroad is a critical enabler of such analysis, and that is why Foreign Service reporting is so important. In terms of my own success, I think I did contribute to U.S. knowledge of countries and regions where I served, not least by making sure that good reporting was encouraged and rewarded.

I should add that our ability to persuade others to support us and our objectives -- in other words, to practice diplomacy -- is linked to understanding our interlocutors' problems and circumstances. When people sense that you are trying to understand them, not simply looking down on them as lesser breeds without the law, they are usually more inclined to listen.

Q: Is it the case though that when there's a high level policy issue it's often a small group who make the decisions who may not be necessarily the best informed, so that the kind of expertise we're talking about may not even come to play?

PRINGLE: That is true. And even if you reach the actual policy makers, they may not listen. They have to deal with other realities, not to mention other agencies, the president, congress, and public opinion. That is their job, just as ours is to understand realities on the ground where we are. True enough, then, "You can lead them to water but you can't make them drink," but it helps if you can analyze, speak, and write. Then maybe you can persuade them to drink. For the Foreign Service, the ability to persuade is perhaps the most critical component of leadership.

Q: Maybe when mistakes are made we can analyze them and clean up the situation.

PRINGLE: Indeed, and there is such thing as damage limitation.

Q: Are there things that, if you had them to do over again, you would do differently?

PRINGLE: Yes, and one of them, mentioned earlier, involves the subject of expertise. As Ambassador to Mali, I should have pushed harder for serious political analysis of the desert north. As it was, our policy was too much linked with economic developmental objectives. We saw the desert as a kind of exotic sandbox, of little interest except when humanitarian disaster struck the few people who lived there. We didn't see the parallel between maritime lawlessness -- piracy -- and desert lawless, which is equally international or ex-national in character, yet still linked with local grievances. More recently we have seen how dangerous desert-based lawlessness can be.

I also wish that I had made room early on for at least one consular assignment, because I think it would have helped me later as a DCM and Ambassador. I don't feel that way about an administrative assignment, if only because you can't do everything.

Q: What was your approach to assignments? Did you just sort of wait along for what came up or did you strategize?

PRINGLE: I looked for jobs that I thought would be professionally and personally fulfilling, beginning with Indonesia, which I knew well from pre-Foreign Service experience. But I also discovered that I did not want to spend my whole career working on Southeast Asia, and that a second area specialization -- on sub-Saharan Africa -- would in fact help my analytic ability and be more rewarding across the board.

Having had one Ambassadorship, I was not interested in pursuing another one just to maintain personal prestige. And I did not hesitate to go after jobs which I knew would not "enhance my career" in conventional terms, such as OES, which turned out to be incredibly rewarding.

Q: During your career did you ever find yourself having to promote or defend a policy that really stuck in your craw?

PRINGLE: No. But I did try not to be in a situation where I knew that the policy was dead wrong. Vietnam was the best example. I sat in my carpool in Jakarta, while the war was still raging, and argued with friends who thought the war was a good idea. I would say no, I know enough Vietnam history to know that the Vietnamese will never serve as surrogates for the Chinese for a minute longer than necessary, as indeed has turned out to be resoundingly the case -- and as most outside experts -- not all -- had been saying all along. (I must have been insufferable at times.)

I was never asked to defend our Vietnam policy in public, nor would I have done so. I had no problem with what we were trying to do in Indonesia, or in any of my other assignments.

Q: What about family issues in the Foreign Service? If you were advising newcomers to the Foreign Service about what they could expect with regard to spouses and family what would you say?

PRINGLE: I would begin by saying that Barbara and I were lucky. We had our small children with us in Jakarta and Manila, from infancy through the beginning of primary school. Then they were with us in Washington long enough to put down American roots.

The advantages of this timing are now recognized but were not at the time, although (having lived abroad already) we did realize that small children are tougher than one may think, and that good servants are a godsend if you have them, as we did in both Jakarta and Manila. Today it is also more commonly realized that it is really the teen years you need to worry about, because children become less amenable to being moved around with the onset of adolescence and have complex social connections not easily abandoned. Good counseling is now available on such topics.

We were also able to take advantage of government payment for boarding school at posts that do not have adequate English language schools. That worked for us, and both of our children attended first-rate American boarding schools as a result. But many people do not accept the idea of being separated from their children.

The biggest drawback to a Foreign Service career today is the problem of spousal employment, or lack thereof. It is a problem that has grown steadily in the last couple of decades.

Barbara's family background conditioned her to use her education and experience as a teacher to move around but not necessarily up, to the top of her profession, which in her case would have probably have meant moving into school administration. It was fine for her to help financially where she could, but she never felt required to provide a second major source of income. Today that second income is widely perceived as necessary to insure middle-class status, most importantly through adequate tertiary education for one's children. Equally important is the new assumption that women not only can but should achieve professional success.

Q: Well, looking back then on these years in the service would you do it again?

PRINGLE: If I had the same circumstances -- and the same wife and a few other key things -- my answer would probably be "Yes." There are many things ailing the Foreign Service today, and quite a bit is being written about them. Portions of this critique, well expressed in the July-August 2015 issue of the *Foreign Service Journal*, [Ronald E. Neuman, "American Diplomacy at Risk, *The Foreign Service Journal*, July-August 2015, pp. 22-36] are reminiscent of what I wrote in 1978 in *Foreign Policy* under the title "Creeping Irrelevance at Foggy Bottom," about our suicidal tendency to spin off our most vital functions.

One much belabored issue is the relationship between the Foreign and Civil Services. There is a growing tendency to allow Civil Servants to serve abroad, if they choose to do so. With sufficient backing, they can cherry-pick foreign assignments, without any requirement to serve in the so-called "sticky places," or indeed to serve abroad at all. Meanwhile, Foreign Service Officers do not have equivalent access to Civil Service jobs while on Washington tours, even though such jobs were once and should still be considered as valuable components of a Foreign Service career. The number of FSOs serving in State's functional bureaus, the way I did in OES, is shrinking, while the number of Civil Servants in both regional and functional bureaus, once largely reserved for FSOs, is growing.

This trend is damaging, especially if you factor in the cost of spousal non-employment for FSOs, who are required to serve abroad regularly and at the pleasure of the government, not just when they want to. The problem could be resolved. For example, for every Foreign Service position abroad occupied by a Civil Servant, at least one Civil Service position of equivalent rank in Washington should be opened to FSOs.

Taken together, the changes now underway will, if unchecked, lead to the end of accompanied, two to four year tours, and/or the demise of the Foreign Service as a full career option. I have argued that such tours are important if not essential to its core function, expertise on foreign countries. Others can administer embassies, issue visas, and provide secure office space for other USG agencies that need them. But the Foreign Service is now in danger of losing what makes it necessary.

Developing such expertise takes a long time. It can't be done on the internet, or by Skype. It requires learning hard languages and living in sometimes dangerous or uncomfortable places. It is needed as never before, and I don't think that will change as long as we have a world fraught with conflict and turmoil, the components of which we must better and more consistently understand.

Q: Well Bob thank you very much for sharing your insights and experiences with us.

PRINGLE: Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

End of interview