

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

EMMA SCHLAUDER

*Interviewed by: Fran Leskovar
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INTERVIEW

Q: All right. Today is May 8th, 2025. This is Fran Leskovar from ADST. Can you say your name for the record? Please spell out your last name.

SCHLAUDER: Yes, my name is Emma Schlauder. Last name is S-C-H-L-A-U-D-E-R.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about yourself? Where did you grow up?

SCHLAUDER: So, I'm originally from Connecticut and then greater New England, as I spent a lot of time in the other states. I grew up in a naval family. My father was a submarine officer, though when he deployed or moved to other bases, my family remained home in Connecticut. We'd spend most of our summers in Maine. I grew up with an early love for history due to the sites I lived near, and developed an early love for travel as my maternal grandfather, Grrdad, as I always called him, was constantly traveling and exploring new places.

Q: Right, so where did you go to school? What college?

SCHLAUDER: I started out at Boston University for undergrad, studying history and archeology, with a minor in classical civilization, before I continued on to my master's program, which was my Fulbright at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom. I later pursued a Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Management through Harvard Extension and will be starting a History PhD at George Washington University this fall.

Q: How did you find out about Fulbright?

SCHLAUDER: So, Fulbright had always been on my radar. My family was very into education and I had always known, from a very early age, that I wanted to go straight through to a master's and then aim for a PhD. So, programs like Fulbright were familiar, but it really was during my junior year of undergrad that it really came into focus. I received an email from an office on campus encouraging me to attend an info session on Fulbright. I attended, was honored to be invited because it was such a selective group and decided that, yes, I would pursue the application. Studying abroad is something that I had

been doing quite frequently throughout all of undergrad and I really loved the prospect of going abroad for grad school. I was lucky enough that when I followed through with my application, I got called for an interview and then the rest is history.

Q: Can you tell a little bit about your Fulbright experience?

SCHLAUDER: Yes, so my Fulbright year was 2019 to 2020, which was eventful for numerous reasons, but it was a wonderful program despite the COVID-19 pandemic that ultimately came about and union strikes amongst the faculty. I studied a Masters of Science in human osteology and funerary archaeology. It is a mouthful, but it is essentially studying burials. So, I learned all the scientific ways you could approach the human skeleton, what you could learn from it, but also the artifacts themselves, what that tells us about the individual and the culture that the burial represented. The program was for a year, and while there I was part of a very international cohort. My program only had a few Brits in it. Basically, everyone else was from another country and just represented the world. Sheffield was a great location to jump off and visit other places in Britain and Europe. When the pandemic hit, obviously no one knew what was happening. I remember we kept getting emails saying, "We're watching it, nothing's going to happen," until we got 24 hours notice of the libraries and university closing. At that point I had been debating what to write my thesis on. I had an idea in mind, but I realized very quickly that with everything shutting down, it would not work because it actually required a lot of interviews, oral histories, and so I took my shopping cart, went to the library, and loaded up on every book I found that dealt with my backup topic. That's ultimately what I did my thesis on, which was Bronze Age Denmark. Throughout the pandemic, it was interesting to experience lockdown, but it was also quite fun because I had my bubble, or group of people that you were allowed to interact with. We got out into the Peak District a lot to go explore and enjoy the outdoors.

Q: What did you learn from your Fulbright experience? Lessons learned.

SCHLAUDER: Lessons learned. I've always loved the international approach, but having the opportunity to meet with other Fulbrighters and then meet with other students where the role of international student was reversed, as I was now that student, was wonderful to see how they work through different problems, how they approach things, and what they think. I remember the very first day of Fulbright orientation, we walked into this room-- there were about 50 of us in the cohort-- and we all sat at these round tables. Of course, everyone hates icebreakers, so no one was talking to each other. Then someone in the room mentioned imposter syndrome, and it just went out down the line from table to table. Suddenly we were all the best of friends because we all bonded over the fact that we fully expected someone to get up and announce that there had been a terrible mistake, they'd actually meant to send us all rejection letters, and we were supposed to catch the next flight home. So, with that, just an easy thing, all of us became very close and we suddenly realized that yes, we had this amazing opportunity but none of us were taking it lightly. We all realized what an important thing it was, and we were going to make the most of it.

Q: So how did your Fulbright experience make America safer, stronger, or more prosperous?

SCHLAUDER: Wonderful question. So, again, I'm a historian and archaeologist. Most people will not think that's an obvious one for making America safer, stronger, and prosperous. But in fact, it is. For starters, with history, I mean everyone says it, but you need to learn from the past, so you don't repeat it. And it is very much true. And working with history, particularly now, is ever more important because we're uncovering more things that weren't recorded. Archeology comes into play as that's the physical evidence, not just the written. But it also helps to combat misinformation and provide more resources so people can fact check. Misinformation is nothing new, but it certainly spreads a lot quicker in our modern world than it has in the past. And so having those resources means people can go and check things before they get caught up in a whirlwind of misinformation. As for archaeology, people don't think about it, but the biggest employer of archaeologists is a field called Cultural Resource Management, CRM. Per federal rules and state rules, there is almost nothing that the federal government or state governments can do in terms of construction without having some kind of archaeological survey performed. So, for everyone who wants the roads fixed or expanded, if they want to build a new missile launch site on a military base or just expand something in the federal government, you need to have archaeologists come in and approve it before you can even start. So archaeologists are one of the first steps before getting anything done in this country if it's something related to the government.

Q: Right, so what is your hope for Fulbright?

SCHLAUDER: My hope is obviously that Fulbright continues to last and expand. It is an invaluable asset. It was formed to counter the fear of isolationism. I spoke in the panel earlier today. Isolationism, the debate over that is nothing new. It's as old as the country itself when you go back to the founding. But there's always been the recognition that even if you're going to lean more towards it, you still need to keep the door open. And Fulbright is this soft power, soft diplomacy asset that works wonderfully for that because it is a show of force and strength, but in a much more subtle way. And it does not instill fear in others. It allows everyone to come to the table on an equal playing field. But at the same time, for those that we are trying to counter, it means that we can get in and speak with them much more easily but still keep an eye on how things are going.

Q: Anything else you have?

SCHLAUDER: No.

Q: Alright, thanks. Alright, this is the end of the interview.

End of interview