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ANDREW SISSON

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INTERVIEW

Q: This is August 1, 2024, and this is Alex Shakow, who has the lucky opportunity now to interview Andy Sisson, Andrew Sisson, about his 35-year career in AID (United States Agency for International Development). I'm looking forward very much to that. Thank you, Andy, for being prepared to offer up your life story to us in this oral history.

SISSON: Thank you.

Q: So, let me start by saying that it's really—and my apologies for my sore throat here. It would be wonderful to know a little bit of background information. But it would be very, very helpful to know about when you were born, where you were born, what your background was, what your parents did and where you went to school, that kind of thing. So, why don't you talk and I'll interrupt you on occasion to maybe ask more specific questions. So, let's start with when you were born.

SISSON: I was born September 28, 1955, in Boston, Massachusetts, right down the street from Fenway Park, which is where the Red Sox play. And I think that's the reason why I grew up a citizen not only of the United States but also the Red Sox Nation. And I've been a diehard Red Sox fan from the beginning, up until—

Q: I also was a great Red Sox fan in my youth and Ted Williams was my hero. So, he was gone by your time, I'm afraid.

SISSON: He wasn't playing when I met him as a little kid in my neighborhood. Shortly after I was born my folks moved to Newton, which is a suburb just west of Boston, and I think the primary reason they picked Newton is it had a great public-school system. And I think it still does to this day. And I met Ted Williams at a local pharmacy when I was a little kid.

Q: You mean he was buying drugs at the same time you were?

SISSON: I don't know what he was doing there. But he was sitting at the soda fountain. And I think he was friends with the owner. It was just up the street.

Q: And did he give you his autograph or did you—?

SISSON: I didn't ask. I should have but I was—

Q: How old were you?

SISSON: Maybe seven or eight.

Q: Anyway. So, do you have siblings?

SISSON: Yes. I have one younger brother who now lives in Las Vegas.

Q: And what did your parents do, other than move you to Newton when you were young?

SISSON: So, my father, after he—he was in France and the UK during World War II and when he went home in 1945, he went to law school. But he dropped out to take over the family business, which was running a liquor store in the South End of Boston. And he did that for a while with his mother and then, urban renewal in Boston wiped out that whole section of the city. So, my father became a volunteer—he was a volunteer but then became a professional with the Boy Scouts of America, organizing troops and Cub Scout packs. And that's what he did for his second career. So, he probably started that in his fifties and then—and did that until he passed away at age sixty-one.

My mother was a homemaker but shortly after he passed away she became a librarian in Newton.

Q: So, you and your brother were brought up in Newton and the life of the Boy Scouts was very much a part of your childhood (coughs) excuse me—upbringing.

SISSON: Yes. In fact, we got into the Scouts before my father did as Cub Scouts. And my mother was active with the Cub Scouts. But my father became a volunteer and then he became the head volunteer for the region. After he lost his business the Boy Scouts asked if he would like to do the same thing but get paid for it. So, by then I think I must have been a teenager and he did that. But my brother and I both became Eagle Scouts. And you're right, Alex, it was an important part of our life. We learned a lot of things

through scouting, besides friendships and camping. I've been reflecting on this for our interview. My first leadership experience was through the Boy Scouts, being a leader of my troop, which was elected. And then, I got voted out of office while I was in the troop through some sort of very cleverly staged election where some of my supporters were absent from the meeting and I lost. And I was really upset. It was, obviously, a blow to my ego and—but in retrospect, you know, I think it was a valuable lesson in accountability, in—and the guy who beat me in the election put in place some great ideas that I never had. So, that was valuable. But I also, when you're a scout, you learn other skills, like camping and hiking and being part of or leading a team.

And I worked for a couple of summers at a Boy Scout camp in New Hampshire. I took kids from inner-city Boston on hiking trips and camping trips, canoe trips in the White Mountains, up to five-days. Some of these kids had never left the harder areas of Boston, like Roxbury or South Boston. And this was their first time up in the mountains. And it was great. I loved it.

Q: Was this at your initiative or had the scouting troop done something like this before? Or was this project somehow related to merit badge, you know. How did these sessions or these trips up into the White Mountains happen? Was this a tradition that others had followed before you?

SISSON: I got hired for the summer by the Boston Council of the Boy Scouts to go to their summer camp in New Hampshire and be in charge of their trips for two to five days. Boy Scout troops from Boston would take their kids up to the camp for one or two weeks and then they could sign up to do a trip with me if they were interested. So, many of them did and I would take them out. But it was up to them. And they would usually have their scoutmaster with them for the trip, not always but most of the time. If the scoutmaster were there then he would be in charge, making sure the kids stayed in line, didn't get into trouble. But sometimes that was on me.

Q: And did you find that these kids who were for the first time having this experience did find that adjusting to this kind of experience was hard to take? Or did they just immediately fall into it and want to follow your guidance and your leadership?

SISSON: I think almost all of them just immediately were taken in by it and enjoyed it a lot and it was easy for me. Occasionally there was some kid who acted out, who had a hard time adjusting, but it worked out, just talked with them.

Q: And how about you? Had you spent time up in the mountains as part of your own childhood? And did your father or your mother take you up there along with your brother or was this something that you initiated on your own?

SISSON: I think my love for the mountains and rural New England started with my dad taking my brother and me up to Vermont for weekend drives through the countryside. We didn't do any real hiking but we just drove around the countryside and explored places in that part of New England. So, maybe that's where it started. But with the Boy Scouts,

once I was eleven years old we went with my scout troop up into the mountains or on hikes or canoe trips into rural areas nearby every month. And then, as I rose up in the Scouts I would be more of a leader, taking kids with me and we would go on these trips.

Q: Do you still go on those kinds of trips to the mountains at your advanced age?

SISSON: Often, whenever I can. But I'm not leading kids on trips. Usually—well now, one of the reasons why I've been happy to settle in North Carolina after I retire is it's a gorgeous state. And my wife is more into swimming and the coast, so we've got the Outer Banks three hours away to the east. And I've got the Blue Ridge Mountains two and a half hours to the west. And I dream about going there all the time and go whenever I can. I try to squeeze in two or three days of hiking whenever I can. I just love it up there. Occasionally I take people with me. Recently I took a couple of foreign students on a few hikes near where I live now.

Q: That's terrific. Where are you living now?

SISSON: Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Q: So, you have all of the beautiful state to explore and other places too. But I can see that that's a very important part of your life.

Were you in the public schools of Newton the entire time that you were in high school and elementary school?

SISSON: Yes. And my parents made a good choice. I was privileged to get a great public-school education. I had great teachers along the way. I can still remember a few that were really important to me growing up and it helped me get into a good college.

Q: How old were you when you moved to Newton?

SISSON: I was a baby.

Q: Your father running a liquor store in the South End of Boston kind of reminds me of a Dennis Lehane novel, you know, that—I mean, that must have been a very tough life for your parents and—but you don't remember or know anything about that.

SISSON: I remember my father working six days a week, really long hours. And then, Sunday he would sleep. He worked hard. And then, that work ethic carried over when he became involved with the Boy Scouts much later, also working on Saturdays. And from my mother, I got a real love of learning. She went on to get two different master's degrees and she—

Q: Library science or—

SISSON: Library science was the second one. First, she got a master's in education, thinking she would want to be a public-school teacher. She realized after doing the student teaching that that was a mistake and she didn't want to be a public-school teacher. But she enjoyed being a student to get her master's degree.

Q: Did she do all that while she was raising you and your brother?

SISSON: Yes. She would write her school papers on our dining room table.

Q: So, the work ethic was not just from your father but from your mother too.

SISSON: Absolutely. Another thing I saw, my dad turned out to be a good public speaker and charismatic in a way. He had a real ability to connect with people. And I appreciated that even as a teenager. I saw him in action occasionally and he was good. Young people really liked him.

Q: That's terrific. Were your parents born in this country?

SISSON: Yes. My mother was from Brooklyn, my father near Boston. Only my father's mother was born in the U.S. My other three grandparents, who I never knew, they were already gone, were born in Russia.

Q: When did they come to this country?

SISSON: So, three of my grandparents came here in the late 1800s. My grandmother, the one that I knew, was born in Boston in 1889. I should mention a couple of other relatives who had—a few other relatives who had a profound influence on me growing up. So, you mentioned my parents were most important but my father's older sister and brother-in-law first got me interested in the notion of public service. They became very important to me, especially in my late teens and early twenties. He was a very senior official and rose up through the ranks in the U.S. government. And she had a senior role with the Montgomery County Public School System.

Q: Montgomery County, Maryland?

SISSON: Maryland. And so, I learned a lot from them, just hearing their stories and—

Q: What did her brother-in-law do?

SISSON: He was a labor lawyer with the National Labor Relations Board. And rose up through the ranks and around 1961 or '62 Kennedy appointed him to be the general counsel of the NLRB to run the agency.

Q: What was his name?

SISSON: Arnold Ordman.

Q: O-r-d-m-a-n?

SISSON: Yes. And then—and Johnson reappointed him and then he was out when Nixon came in. Normally that would have been a political appointee but they couldn't reach agreement on who that would be so they picked him. So, he had a lot of great stories and he was a role model.

Q: So, he was a careerist in labor relations work?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: I see. Okay. Terrific. And did you see a lot of them? I mean, even if he was in Washington and you were in Boston ?

SISSON: Yes. When I was in college particularly we would have a week of Spring vacation and I would spend a week with them. At a minimum I would see them then. Maybe some other times during the year.

Q: Right.

SISSON: And in the Nixon era and beyond, after he was no longer running the agency, he was out, he became a labor law judge. So, he had lots of great war stories. He was inspiring. And then after he passed away, I got to know his wife, my aunt, much more, and learned what a phenomenal person she was. One thing—

Q: What did she do in Montgomery County?

SISSON: She led special education programs for the county, like bringing in music and art. And she was the ultimate networker. Nothing I would ever closely hope to match. But she was an inspiration. And she was also in a way a no b.s. kind of person. She had—my parents were gone by then -- a real ability to counsel me, to get me off my high horse and look at things more objectively. She helped me with that even during my USAID days.

Q: That's wonderful that you had that kind of relationship with her. That's—and that developed from an early age, I mean, and continued on for—

SISSON: For years. Into my career. She outlived my parents by more than a decade.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: And she celebrated her eightieth birthday with me in Malawi.

Q: No kidding.

SISSON: She was an amazing woman. An important influence for me for a long time.

And then, on my mother's side, her brother and sister-in-law also had an important influence on me as well. I don't want to go into—take us too far down this rabbit hole but he joined the U.S. Navy at the end of World War II at the ripe old age, I think, of eighteen or nineteen. Immediately after that he joined the Haganah in Palestine, which was resisting the British and promoting an independent state of Israel. And he worked on the ships as a medic that helped Holocaust survivors in Europe try to get through the British blockade and settle in Palestine. He had quite an experience doing that, including being stopped by the British on the ship "Exodus" and imprisoned in Cyprus. The British sent those survivors back to Europe, later the subject of the movie "Exodus" starring Paul Newman. After escaping from the prison, he helped settle a kibbutz in Israel on the Lebanese border in the late forties. So, he was a tough adventurer.

Q: And that was really an influence on you, right?

SISSON: Yes, later on. So, for instance, I worked on a kibbutz as a volunteer, a position he helped me get. This was my first experience traveling overseas. I picked fruit and made friends with some residents of the kibbutz and other volunteers, and explored the country a bit. And maybe my uncle's lifelong sense of adventure rubbed off a bit on me. Once we went on a short trip together, hitchhiking through the Negev desert in the south, and I had a small backpack for luggage. When I saw he was carrying nothing at all I asked him where his stuff was. He smiled and pulled out a toothbrush from his pocket. Maybe that's where my desire to travel light began.

Q: Has religion played an important role in your life? I haven't asked you about your religious affiliation but I just wonder whether there's any kind of influence from religion in what you have done or are interested in.

SISSON: Yes. I'm Jewish, and grew up with a reform Jewish tradition. That included my bar mitzvah, learning some Hebrew, and some religious studies. But my family was not particularly religious and I did not keep up traditions after I left home for college. However, besides the religious traditions, there is an important element of just basic identity. And I experienced a bit of antisemitism growing up, in my neighborhood and at school. Later I became interested in Israel, and not just the religious aspect but experiencing and exploring other dimensions, which I did as a sophomore in college – visiting Israel, as I just mentioned. And I have identified with Israel ever since. I've been there many times and I have family there. So, while I'm not religious, Jewish identity, including ethics, is important for me.

Q: You are more, even more attentive to this kind of thing than I am. But it's those things you're talking about, the identity, the ethics, that kind of thing, but I don't ever remember experiencing what you did in terms of discrimination as a young—as a child or anything of that sort.

SISSON: That was unfortunate. But one of the things I've liked about the religion is the freedom to interpret and question. Maybe that's less possible the more orthodox you are. I

remember as a teenager having a discussion with my rabbi, questioning the whole thing. And he welcomed that. And I appreciated that opportunity for flexibility and interpretation.

Q: Yeah. No doubt it is there. I mean, we've been at ceremonies where the rabbi's an atheist, so (Sisson laughs).

So, you mentioned earlier that the school, your high school and so on was very good. Was it that influence that led you to Williams College or—?

SISSON: Yes. There were a couple of factors that took me there. One is that with my dad it became ingrained that I would go to a liberal arts college somewhere in the rural northeast—I did not want to go to a big city school.

Q: Had he been to college?

SISSON: Yeah. He went to Northeastern University in Boston.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: And then he started at Boston College Law School but then, as I mentioned, he dropped out. While I was a Scout my scoutmaster told me about Williams College—this is the first time I'd ever heard of it. He'd been a proud alumni. He'd been a star baseball pitcher for the college I forget when, probably in the fifties. And so, Williams got on my list. I visited a bunch of liberal arts colleges. I thought I would like Dartmouth but found they were snobby. I thought I would like Amherst and they were snobby. I visited Williams and there were a couple of things about it I really liked. One was its fabulous chemistry department and I thought that would help me become a chemist, my main interest in high school. And somehow I'd gotten interested in impressionist art and there is a private museum in Williamstown called the Clark Art Institute with an incredible impressionist art collection. So, I had an interview at Williams, which was largely about how much I loved their chemistry department and enjoyed the Clark Institute. I walked out of the interview thinking, "This is where I want to go." I went to the college admissions office in the same building and checked off the box indicating I wanted to apply by early decision -- which means if they admit you early you commit to go there – and handed in my application.

Q: Yes.

SISSON: So, it was the only college I applied to and I got in and it was a good choice.

Q: I take it you had done well in high school.

SISSON: Yes, I was a good student. I took advanced placement courses and I could have done Williams in three years but did not. It's funny. I told my uncle, the one who had all this Israel experience, that I wanted to go to Williams. He said, "Don't bother applying.

They don't take Jews there." (Shakow laughs) But I applied anyway and I got in. And there were a few Jewish kids there. It definitely had a bit of a rich boy tradition which I found uncomfortable at times. But overall, it was a great place for me.

Q: Did you ever meet Tom Fox, who was at AID and very prominent in the NGO community?

SISSON: I did.

Q: He was a Williams graduate and a long-term and enthusiastic alum of the—

SISSON: I did meet him but I forget where. I think he was the president of Vita or some other NGO (Non-Governmental Organization).

Q: Yeah. Williams has had a number of really outstanding graduates over the years and it is a terrific school. Did you major in chemistry?

SISSON: After getting through most of the major I changed my mind and moved to political economy instead. And that happened through something really fortuitous. My advisor was this marvelous Marxist in the political science department named Kurt Tauber.

T-a-u-b-e-r. And he really looked the role. He was German or Austrian, with an accent. He had a tweed jacket, a pipe. He had his volume of *Das Kapital* by his side that had been totally covered with notations. I never took a Marxism course with Professor Tauber but he was a fabulous advisor. And—

Q: Did you get to choose your advisor or you just—

SISSON: No.

Q: —you were just dropped into his—

SISSON: His lap. And we were going over my course plans for the next year, and he suggested taking a course about the economics of poverty. And I did.

Q: Was this something he was teaching?

SISSON: No. It was somebody in the economics department named Randy Bartlet, a very popular teacher. And I loved it. It opened up my eyes to a part of the world I was clueless about. He was a great teacher.

Q: So, it was international—

SISSON: Poverty. And domestic as well. He began the course by asking people anonymously to indicate their family income. It was a large class and I learned my family

had the second lowest income. And there were a lot of wealthy kids in the class. It confirmed I knew that Williams was a school for largely affluent families.

Q: Sure.

SISSON: Anyway, it was a fabulous course and that led me to do other courses in economics, like international development, courses in political science, political economy and my junior year I changed my major.

Q: I see. So, this happened kind of in the second year that you were there.

SISSON: Yes.

Q: Yeah. So, that clearly provided you with the kind of background that would have been helpful as you went on to work on your PhD and things like that. I mean, this really moved you from chemistry into areas that were much more relevant to development.

SISSON: My career.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: Totally. Let me just add, I didn't even know about the economics department at Williams when I applied. But after I started getting into it I discovered Williams had a very strong economics department, particularly in international development. Williams had only two master's programs, at least at the time, one in international development for foreign students, and one in art history. So, it had a large faculty in economics focused on international development. And as an undergrad I got to take a couple of courses in the master's program and met foreign students. That led to me getting a summer job in Peru and all of this got me on track to my interest in international development.

Q: And when you say this summer job in Peru, this is between your sophomore and junior years or—?

SISSON: This was after my senior year.

Q: Oh.

SISSON: While at Williams my senior year I became friendly with a Peruvian couple. He was from the Central Bank and he was doing the master's program. We became good friends and he invited me to Peru following graduation, offering that I could stay with them and he'd get me a job. And I went.

Q: Let's get back to that in a minute. But so, while you were at Williams, in addition to the academic work were you busy, were you active in other parts of the university, the college program? Were you interested in government or anything like that? Or were you focused pretty much on academic work?

SISSON: I had three outside interests. One was from almost the very beginning. I was a coxswain on the college crew.

Q: Had you done this at Newton?

SISSON: Not at all. But when we began college we got introduced to everything, activities, sports. And I'm small, I was very small in those days, so I thought maybe I'll try out wrestling. And on the way, walking over in the gym to the wrestling recruiting table somebody from the crew snagged me because they needed somebody small to be a coxswain on the crew. So, I ended up doing that for four years. And that also was a valuable experience because that was being part of a team and we had a very good team. We did very well in competitions. So, that was one activity.

Another was hiking. I joined the Outing Club and I went hiking and cross-country skiing around the area, the Berkshires. The third was, while I think I was a sophomore, it might have been my junior year, this very inspiring speaker from Yale came to talk, Reverend William Sloane Coffin. And he talked about hunger and poverty. And that inspired a group of us to start an organization called the Williams Hunger Action Project. And we focused on local poverty, local nutrition issues, but we also were interested in international stuff. And so, I got involved in that.

Q: And what did you actually do either locally or internationally through this group?

SISSON: I don't remember for sure, I think we had a vegetable garden and food bank. And on the international side we had guest speakers. We looked at food policy and thought about that. I'm not sure we accomplished much but we certainly started learning about it.

Q: Did you find that you—there were quite a few of the kids at Williams who were interested in doing this kind of thing?

SISSON: Quite a few. There was a lot of interest in economics and international development but the Williams Hunger Action Project wasn't that large a group.

I was also in student government for a year. I didn't want to run in an election, but I got appointed somehow when there was a vacancy and it was okay but I never wanted to run for anything.

Q: So, did you have to do a senior thesis or something like that at Williams or was that the way it worked?

SISSON: No.

Q: No.

SISSON: No senior thesis but we did have to do term papers for some courses.

Q: Yeah, right.

SISSON: But that's it.

Q: So, what did you—sorry.

SISSON: One very important thing with Williams was they financed, for me, a winter study, which is when I went to Israel and worked on a kibbutz, which is a collective farming community. And this was my first real international travel.

Q: And when was this?

SISSON: This would have been midway through my sophomore year. In-between Fall and Spring semesters Williams had a winter study program so I squeezed in a five-week trip to Israel.

Q: Now, did you initiate this? I mean, did they—were they offering more than one to Israel or how did—?

SISSON: I initiated it. It was an independent study. Williams has this fabulous program and you can pick all sorts of interesting things to do for the Winter Study between Fall and Spring semesters. Most students enroll in a one-month intensive course offered by the college. My freshman year I signed up for a course on policy concerning forests in New England, which included a week at the University of Maine Forestry School in Orono. My sophomore year I came up with this idea to work on a kibbutz in Israel. My project was "Socialization Processes on an Israeli Kibbutz." And there was actually quite a bit of unrest in Israel at the time and some violence, particularly in Jerusalem. And I remember my grandmother trying to talk me out of going. Offering to pay for it if I went at a later time. But I wanted to go and got Williams to pay for my plane ticket.

Q: This was 1974 or something like that?

SISSON: It was January 1975

Q: And what did you do when you were there in the kibbutz?

SISSON: I picked fruit mostly. Also landscaping and deliveries. I actually went into Gaza with a delivery once.

Q: Did you have to organize this yourself? I mean, did you find the kibbutz? How was this program put together?

SISSON: I tried to put it together on my own and I reached out to an agency that lined up volunteers for kibbutzim around the country and that—I never got a reply. So, I spoke to

my uncle, the one I mentioned earlier, telling him I wanted to volunteer on a kibbutz and he fixed it. He knew people. He called somebody and that's where I went.

Q: Which uncle is this?

SISSON: This was my mother's—my late—her older brother. The one that had been in Israel earlier.

Q: So, that was a formative experience. Could you speak English during this period or did you have—

SISSON: Absolutely. The volunteers were from all over the world—we lived in our own little block. We spoke English. And with the Israelis who lived on the kibbutz I spoke English and they spoke good English, particularly the young people. There was an Israeli family that kind of looked after me while I was on the kibbutz and I stayed in touch with them for decades.

It was a great experience, not only just experiencing picking fruit but learning about the kibbutz – how it is governed, how children and youth adopt a kibbutz mentality. For instance, I spent some time at their high school and attended a junior-year math class focused on statistics. They already had calculus. But when the teacher gave them a pop quiz and left the room, the students all helped each other. I also learned that if a student loses interest in studies, they are kicked out and they work on the kibbutz full time. I also got to see some of the country and for the first time traveling on my own, which really confirmed my interest in international travel.

Q: Did you experience or see the great contrast and the life of the Palestinian and the Israelis? I mean, at that point was that your first real exposure to this, I want to say conflict, but this situation prevails in that area?

SISSON: Not much. I spent some time in the old city of Jerusalem when it was possible to freely walk around, and saw mostly Palestinians, and met them in the shops. On buses I went through some Palestinian villages. Clearly, they were much less prosperous but I didn't really encounter them except for shopkeepers in the Old City and some of the laborers on the kibbutz.

Q: And when you were delivering into Gaza?

SISSON: It was no problem. I was just accompanying the truck driver. He made deliveries and in those days, whether it was on the West Bank or in Gaza, it was—freedom of movement was fine.

Q: So, these concerns that your grandmother or someone else might have had were not really justified?

SISSON: They were not. She was seeing what was on TV so she was right to be concerned. But I didn't have any of those problems while I was there.

Q: Did you have a third winter experience? I mean this was between your sophomore and junior years. What about between your junior and senior years?

SISSON: I did two other more winter studies courses on campus. One of them was just reading great books and talking about them in class. The fourth one I did was an independent study on sleep.

Q: On sleep?

SISSON: Sleep. On what lack of sleep might do to you, let's say in an academic environment. I remember researching that and doing some self-experiments and enlisting friends to help me. Just a vague memory. Kind of crazy.

Q: Sounds wonderful to do some self-experiments with sleep.

SISSON: (Laughs) I discovered I can get by without much sleep.

Q: Ah, it doesn't work the other way. You didn't get an opportunity to spend more hours sleeping as an official duty.

SISSON: But I did as a college student sleep in very late sometimes, but not during that study.

Q: Oh, my goodness. (Sisson laughs) Well, it sounds like you enjoyed Williams very much and then it also was very productive for you in the sense that education was a great experience, right?

SISSON: Yes. It got me into international development. I became a teaching assistant for a professor on international development. The friendships I made at the master's degree program, the foreign students, was important. Getting connected to some other teachers. It was a great mix of academics and personal experience. And it set me up really well to go onto grad school.

Q: So, I couldn't tell from your bio what happened between your graduating from Williams in 1977 and your—getting your PhD in 1983. Did you start immediately at Fletcher in 1977?

SISSON: Yes. I spent the summer of '77 in Lima Peru, working as a research assistant in a local university, traveling, and enjoying being with my friends and their families. I came back from Peru at the end of the summer and I went to Fletcher at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts. So—

Q: And did you work initially on an MA?

SISSON: Yes. I went to Fletcher expecting to do an MA and the reason why I wanted to go to Fletcher or another professional graduate school was so I could get a job in international development. And I checked out different schools while I was a senior and I liked Fletcher and that's where I wanted to go for a couple of reasons. One is they had a good program and the students who I met there that were in the international development part of the program enjoyed it. And the school just had a great vibe. So, I went to Fletcher. And I enjoyed it even more than college. It was great in many ways.

Q: For example?

SISSON: Besides some strong academics, what attracted me about Fletcher was something called the Fletcher Mafia. And I heard about this when I was applying, that they are great at—the Fletcher Mafia, the network, helping people get jobs. That really was key for me. And I saw that very quickly. I got two excellent summer jobs while I was at Fletcher. The first was with the State Department. Its Africa Bureau ran a summer internship in their embassies in Africa, and after my first year at Fletcher I got into this program and at the age of twenty-two, I was the acting economic and commercial officer of the American embassy in Madagascar.

Q: Wonderful, wonderful.

SISSON: And that was my first exposure to Africa and my first exposure to the Foreign Service. Traveling there was an adventure. I spent a night on the way sleeping on a park bench in Copenhagen and another in a YMCA hostel in Dar es Salaam.

And then, the second summer job—I had a professor in Latin American politics who came to me after the course was over, found me in the cafeteria and asked me if I spoke Spanish. When I replied that I did, he asked if I wanted to work in Guatemala that summer. I replied that I didn't know, I already had a commitment for a job that summer -- I think at the World Bank. And he said to let him know by 6:00 that night. So, I got out of that other commitment, called the professor and said I wanted to go to Guatemala.

Q: Did he tell you what you would be doing in Guatemala or just, "You want to go to Guatemala?"

SISSON: Something about working with USAID in Guatemala concerning an energy project. And then I had a conversation with somebody from the USAID regional office, based in Guatemala City. And I negotiated a contract for $20 a day plus $10 a day for housing.

Q: Pretty big.

SISSON: And it turned out to be helping the regional office design a regional project in fuel wood efficiency and reforestation. So—

Q: Did you happen to know anything about those subjects or was it just that this—

SISSON: Absolutely nothing. (Shakow laughs) So, my first summer in Madagascar I learned about agriculture, particularly—I mean, as economics officer, I mean, you do all this sort of quick, sometimes shallow reporting about anything and everything, such as on an aid donation from Yugoslavia or on rice production. The second summer I learned quite a bit about forestry and energy issues, such as cookstoves and charcoal, and I walked around and interviewed people all over the countryside in three countries. I greatly enjoyed talking with farmers and others in the countryside. They were forthcoming. But once, a farmer agreed to talk with me only while I carried her heavy sack of fertilizer up a steep hill to her field. That gave me new insight into how tough it was to be a farmer in the Guatemalan altiplano.

I also worked with USAID professionals in those three countries and with the regional people in Guatemala City. In particular, there was an anthropologist from Washington who came in and helped design the project and write the Project Paper. I helped write the social soundness and economic analyses. That experience was important for me, confirming my interest in the Foreign Service, but I wanted to do it with USAID. I enjoyed the life, working on projects, and the people were fabulous. So, those two summer experiences that I got through Fletcher were important.

The other important thing that—I could go onto something else that was important at Fletcher that put me in this direction but—

Q: And?

SISSON: The other thing was at the beginning of my second year I was now focusing on international development as one of my concentrations for my master's degree, and an economics professor got hold of me who was not there my first year. And he found me in the cafeteria—

Q: That seems to me where a lot of these contacts take place is the cafeteria at Fletcher.

SISSON: True. Fletcher has this wonderful tradition of morning coffee for the whole school, and coffee and cookies or tea from 10:00 to 11:00 and you could come if you were available, for free.

Q: No classes, just—

SISSON: Well, there would be classes so if you had a conflict then you couldn't go. But I think there were always at least a few minutes available to go. I struck up some amazing relationships through that, one of whom went on to life imprisonment for selling intelligence to the Israelis, but some other more positive relationships as well.

But at any rate, this professor found me over morning coffee, sternly asked if I would come to his office now. I'd never met this guy so I'm thinking, what's going on here?

And he asked me to sit down and he immediately asked me to be his graduate assistant. And that turned out to be one of the most important relationships of my life. One is, I did work for him and helped him—and saw what a really entrepreneurial professor was like in action because not only did he teach, but also a lot of consulting and writing. And during that year he was putting a proposal together for USAID through Tufts University to do work in Cameroon, to work with the Cameroonian Social Sciences Research Institute on capacity building and do research in rural areas. He asked if I would like to be included as a junior researcher in the proposal, doing dissertation research for a PhD. I replied that I wasn't interested in a PhD but definitely wanted the field work. And he agreed. So, Tufts won the grant and after my second year and after this experience in Central America I went off to Cameroon for a year and a half. And the research was funded by USAID but I was working with the Cameroonian Institute, both in the capital of Yaoundé and in the north. We also did a trip funded by the project where—I had two Cameroonian colleagues and we traveled to Liberia and Senegal, visiting social science institutes in those countries and looking at rice projects. Because our task in Cameroon was looking at two of the most important rural development projects in the northern part of the country, irrigated rice and improved cotton projects.

Q: These were ongoing rural development projects?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: And were they AID projects or—

SISSON: They were funded by—the rice project was funded by the Cameroon government, the French government and the World Bank. That was called SEMRY, Société d'Expansion et de Modernisation de Riziculture de Yagoua (Company for the Expansion and Modernization of Rice Cultivation in Yagoua). And then, there was Societe de Developpement du Coton du Cameroun (Company for Cotton Development in Cameroon), which was funded by the French and the Cameroonian governments. So, my Cameroonian colleagues and I lived together and did research together up in the north, looking at the social and economic impacts of these two large projects on farm families.

Q: So, you also, in addition to the Spanish you spoke, you spoke French well?

SISSON: Yes. I picked it up—I improved my French in Madagascar as a grad student, and then it improved in Cameroon, particularly when I was living and traveling with these two Cameroonian guys. One of them was married and had his wife living with us in the north. And that experience doing the research in the north was invaluable for me in many ways. One was just learning about rural development and particularly how farm families make decisions. And also, on the management side, learning a bit about running a small project. We recruited and trained six or seven enumerators and a couple of interpreters, and we had a budget, a car, and a bank account. We had to deal with local government officials for hiring people or firing them, getting one out of jail. Working with traditional leaders in villages where our research focused. Dealing with logistics

issues. Navigating deplorable roads and constantly getting our vehicle fixed. It was a good learning experience in that way as well.

Q: Yeah, it sounds like a wonderful experience.

Who was the professor that you were the assistant to who got you into this?

SISSON: J. Dirck Stryker.

Q: He was working for AID at some point too, right?

SISSON: Not as an employee. His long-term affiliation was as a tenured professor at Fletcher. But he had contracts with USAID and with the World Bank. And he also set up his own consulting firm. And through that consulting firm I worked for him in Guinea. After finishing up my field work in Cameroon I stopped in Guinea on the way home and did some work for him and the World Bank in Guinea.

Q: Yeah, I mean, he's—it's a very well-known name and I think—I'm just not sure where along the line I met him but that was very lucky that he was smart enough to choose you as his assistant. Had he seen—I mean—how did he happen to light upon you in the coffee shop?

SISSON: I have no idea what—he must have asked around, probably looking at how students were doing, what their interests were.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: You know, maybe—I wouldn't be surprised if some of the better graduate students had already been hired by other professors.

Q: (Laughs) That's your modesty showing.

SISSON: And he became a great friend. I became part of a poker group with him and his wife and some other faculty. He gave me an office when I came back from Africa. He invited me for Thanksgiving. He even offered to put me up but I got my own apartment. He was really kind.

Q: Sounds like it. Did you make—

SISSON: And generous and fun.

Q: Did you make a lot of money in the poker game?

SISSON: A little. I was usually slightly ahead. Our associate dean and her husband, who was a college professor nearby, played regularly, and he took everybody to the cleaners

every time. And there was a senior professor at Fletcher in economics, fabulous teacher, who wasn't great at poker and we usually took him to the cleaners.

Q: And yet, these people kept coming back. It must—the social value must have been enormous.

SISSON: Yeah. It was a hoot.

Would it be worthwhile, Alex, if I shared with you a couple of my biggest lifelong takeaways from my Cameroon experience?

Q: Absolutely. Let me just ask one question to clarify something. You said that you had told Dirck Stryker that you were not interested in a PhD but that you did want the field experience. Clearly, that changed at some point. Now, I don't know if that's part of your Cameroon experience or how you want to play that but tell me how this change took place.

SISSON: It was while we were in Cameroon. My colleagues and I, after we finished the field work, got back to the capital, did a lot of analysis, wrote some papers for the government, and made some presentations as well. And by the time we'd done that preliminary analysis of the data and done some writing I realized I was most of the way through a dissertation. And Fletcher offered, when I came back, that they would waive the tuition and I could just finish analyzing the data and write the dissertation. So, I was maybe two-thirds of the way done by the time I got home. I did more data analysis and then turned it into a PhD.

Q: I see. And when was—

SISSON: I was largely done. Just took the opportunity.

Q: And when was this that you came back from Cameroon?

SISSON: Let me think.

Q: Eighty-one?

SISSON: Yeah, I came back then, and was at Fletcher in '82 and part of '83.

Q: Okay.

SISSON: Writing it up, I did my first draft while I was still at Fletcher and then I got hired by USAID and revised my dissertation while I was with USAID in Washington.

But the most important reason why I'm grateful to Dirck Stryker has nothing to do with any of this. It's through him that I met my wife.

Q: Ahh. Very important. How did that happen?

SISSON: When I came back from Cameroon I was on a panel he organized to present our research to others at the school. My future wife was in the audience. She was getting a master's program while I was overseas. And then, more important, Dirck hosted a party for his students and that's where I really got to meet Karen. And yeah, that was the beginning of a—

Q: She was immediately mesmerized by your discussion of Cameroonian agriculture?

SISSON: I'm not sure how mesmerized she was but she let me take her out. And we discovered pretty quickly we had a lot in common. And as we'll get into the narrative about my career, you'll see that she's been really important to me.

Q: Good. Well, I'll make sure that I ask you about that.

You wanted to say a couple of important things about Cameroon and I want to ask you about your conclusions about your—and your dissertation too but go ahead with the Cameroonian experience.

SISSON: And so, one of them, which was not in my dissertation, was my up-close exposure to local-level conflict. Earlier, when I was in Madagascar for the summer, there was actually a curfew starting at 7:00 p.m. my first month because there had been violent student protests about a new government policy concerning affirmative action. That had ethnic roots. But when I was in Cameroon, I experienced local level conflict in two unusual ways. One was between my two Cameroonian colleagues. One was from an ethnic group in the north and was very much at home living and working with us in the north. We were not that far from where his family was. The other was from the most powerful economic group in the country in the south called the Bamileke. When I was traveling with them in Senegal, I saw a front-page article in a Dakar newspaper about the Cameroonian Bamileke, and the headline was "Bamileke les Juifs d'Afrique," the Jews of Africa. And it was about how powerful they were in business and how industrious they were. And when I was in Yaoundé, in southern Cameroon before moving north, my Bamileke colleague and his wife were extremely hospitable hosts. I visited them often. They lived in a very poor area of Yaoundé and they had little money, but they invited me for dinner frequently. But when we moved to the north he was clearly very uncomfortable. And it became apparent it had to do with ethnic tensions. The Bamileke were resented in the north and he felt threatened. And after just one week the northerner pulled me aside, after it was already clear the two of them were having problems. And he said, "Andy, you and I are more alike than I am with that Bamileke." That was an incredible thing to say because the northerner lived in the most traditional village you could imagine. No running water. No electricity. No road except a dirt track, which was covered in the rainy season. His family, which I visited, lived in a traditional circular compound where his father had a hut, his wives had huts, my colleague had a hut, his two wives had huts. Their livestock were in the middle or out back. And he told me he and I were more alike than he was with our Bamileke colleague. And the two of them were in a

really stressful situation the whole time. That was uncomfortable, so much so that I wanted to move out of the house and get my own place on the other side of town, but the number two government official in the prefecture asked me not to do it, that it would look bad if I did. He asked me to just hang in there, which I did.

Q: How did that sort itself out? I mean, did this person—did the northerner and the southerner manage to stay and work with you to the end despite their—these tensions?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: It's a fascinating experience.

SISSON: It was hard. It was hard on a personal level because we were still living together but they weren't talking to each other. But we did presentations together, both in the north to the people running these projects and back in Yaoundé. And back in the States they went on to get master's degrees funded by USAID, both in Massachusetts, and they reconciled in the States, which was a good thing.

Q: And when they went back home did—

SISSON: They both went back into the Cameroonian institute but I only stayed in touch with the northerner, who was amazing. He grew up in this incredibly traditional setting but because he was the number one student in the primary school he got to go to secondary school and a government boarding school. He was number one there so he got to go to university, which set him apart from almost every other kid in the north. He got hooked up with the USAID-funded program, went to Boston University, where he got a master's in anthropology. He ended up getting a PhD and years later became a professor in Norway.

Q: Norway?

SISSON: Northern Norway. So, here's a guy—I mean, you have no idea, Alex, how hot it is in northern Cameroon. It was really, really, hot. But he had no problems adjusting to the winter in Boston. And he ended up teaching at a university in Tromsø, in northern Norway. A great story.

My second exposure to conflict was villagers from two different villages who actually fought over water supply from irrigation. A farmer got killed in that. My northern colleague wrote about that.

So, that was my first up close and personal exposure to conflict. It didn't affect my work but it made it more uncomfortable.

Q: But an extraordinary experience. I mean, here's this kid from Newton and your experience already at this young age is remarkable in terms of learning a lot about how the rest of the world runs or doesn't.

SISSON: I enjoyed talking to farmers and fishermen and other people who were doing interesting things in rural areas. I did that a lot in Central America but now I did it with large surveys and many one-on-one interviews. And going back to my dissertation, we were trying to figure out how these two large projects influenced farm families in their decision-making. And I learned through this that they were very rational and had really good reasons for doing what they were doing and that could include taking on new technology or not. A great example of this was a Frenchman who was the technical project director in the rice project. He was frustrated with a group of farmers in one village, and he thought they were lazy and weren't doing what they were supposed to at a certain agricultural season, such as not weeding their fields. And as a result, their rice production was lower in that area than in other parts of the project zone. We discovered in our fieldwork that the farmers had a great reason for not weeding their rice fields. They were making a lot more money doing other stuff at that time of year, and a combination of risk management and income generation influenced their decision-making. We also learned other things about unintended consequences of big projects, like negative health impacts and gender. For instance, husbands would use the rice revenues to pay the dowry to get more wives, and then they could have more fields to do more rice production. So, there were some really negative consequences.

But trying to understand what makes people tick, what makes them want to do certain things I found fascinating. And that sort of field level dynamic is something that has been important to me throughout my career.

Q: Also fascinating.

So, your dissertation though was on rural development. Talk for a moment about what the dissertation was and what your conclusions were briefly.

SISSON: So, we were looking at how farmers took advantage of the opportunity to participate in projects that could potentially increase their income, two cash crops, rice or cotton. And what did that do for their income, their use of family labor, their nutrition, risk, those were the kinds of things I was looking at. One of my colleagues was looking at social issues, like village dynamics, including the water dispute. And my other colleague was looking at geographic issues, use of land. So, one of our conclusions was that farmers were extremely rational and one reason why the farmers were not participating more in rice production is because the government wasn't paying them enough for their paddy and they had other options. And we recommended that the government pay them more because it was a monopoly, the government was the only legal purchaser of the paddy. And to my pleasure later, the government did raise the purchase price. So, those were some of the things that came out from the research.

Q: But the rural development programs, of course, as you know better than I, were quite controversial at that time. So, without trying to, you know, go through all that, was it your impression that rural development projects could work if they were properly designed? Or what's your overall sense of that dispute?

SISSON: These were not broad rural development projects. They were focused on agricultural production of two different crops. They weren't trying to do a lot of other things.

Q: But the title of your dissertation is Rural Development Projects, right?

SISSON: Right. Economic Implications of Rural Development Projects. But they were focused. The rice project, the World Bank held up as one of its most successful rice projects in Africa. And in terms of productivity, tons per hectare, it was a success. In terms of raising farmer incomes with some major caveats, it was a success. But there were two big negatives, which I didn't talk about in my dissertation but we put out there in our research findings in other ways. One is we teamed up with a French doctor from a tropical medicine institute in France and his research found that something like eighty percent of the farmers that were participating in the rice projects got schistosomiasis because the snail propagated in the irrigation canals. That is a tremendous negative health consequence. And then, I mentioned the growing findings about family dynamics and the role of women and multiple wives. And in the cotton project the economic returns were much lower and risks higher. So, I left Cameroon thinking, this is a really mixed bag. And I was comparing them to other economic activities, such as traditional crops, fishing, and raising livestock, where sometimes the farmers could earn more.

Q: Right.

SISSON: But the government held them up as, you know, rural development projects, as did the donors, so that's why I used the title.

Q: Okay. So, you come back, you finish the dissertation, then what?

SISSON: I'll tell you one other story that circled around later, after I left Cameroon. Leaving Cameroon, I mentioned that I stopped in Guinea, Conakry, on my way home to help my professor with a World Bank project. It was analyzing some economic policies related to Guinea's structural adjustment and standby agreements with the World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund). I was focusing on food subsidies and I did some research for that in the capital as well as two secondary cities with a couple of professionals from the Guinean government. And I got in trouble with the local authorities near the end of our research because we wanted to do a sample survey and we met the local authorities. We had a letter signed by the governor saying we could do this. And we met all the local leaders and that worked just fine in the other places where we were doing the research. But back in Conakry near the end, our last research site, when my two colleagues and I said we wanted to pick a random sample and interview them, the local authorities refused and said they would tell us who to interview. We were unhappy about that. And the government—this went up to—this was a very dictatorial state and President Sékou Touré and his cabinet actually decided the future of this little research effort and determined that I would no longer work on it. They decided that the research would continue but they would appoint somebody from their statistics office who would finish the surveys, and then I would get all of the questionnaires, including the ones that

we'd already finished, and then, back in Medford, Massachusetts, I would analyze them and write my part of the report.

So, this was not a comfortable moment in Conakry and my two Guinean colleagues were extremely worried about their personal future because government officials were in prison for being crosswise with the regime.

Q: Did they tell you what their problem was? Was it just they didn't want any—the wrong results to come out? Is this—

SISSON: I think it was the wrong results and they did not want a foreigner deciding who to interview locally. They may have thought—they were suspicious of me.

Q: Was it of you personally, of AID, of—and did you get any support from AID locally?

SISSON: This was a World Bank project.

Q: World Bank, sorry. Did the World Bank have a resident representative in Conakry?

SISSON: I don't recall, but there were World Bank and IMF staff visiting.

Q: Anyway, they didn't get engaged so it was you against the government?

SISSON: Right. as far as I know. And it just happened fast. So, I don't know if—this was near the end anyway so I didn't get sent on a plane that night but I left soon afterwards and a Guinean from their statistics institute finished up the survey in Conakry.

At any rate, I get home. I'm looking at all of the survey questionnaires and I can see that the ones from Conakry, which were done after I left, had answers that were made up. They were just fiction. I threw them out. And then, many years later I was in Rwanda with USAID, and USAID was funding some study tour for the director of Guinea's national statistics agency. He visited me in my office in Kigali, and it was the same guy who made up the numbers years earlier.

Q: And did he acknowledge that the numbers were made up?

SISSON: No.

Q: Or did he come through as a very erudite—

SISSON: Very affable. And I did not have the courage to—

Q: Oh, you're so good, you're so good. So, did you publish the study or did you give World Bank the documentation or did you just say, I can't tell you that this is correct?

SISSON: I still could do analysis based on the other cities and the results—so I produced a report and, more importantly, some analysis that fed into a much larger study that the consulting firm, headed by my professor, gave to the World Bank.

Q: I see.

SISSON: So, I was listed as a co-author of the overall study and the findings were dramatic. Basically, what we showed is for the most part poor people were not getting the subsidies. Wealthy people and well-connected people were getting the subsidies.

Q: Well, probably not a surprising finding in many of these studies. And the government did not change its policy, presumably, either.

SISSON: One last take away from the work I did in Cameroon and this World Bank study is even though I was getting my PhD, I did not want to be an academic worried about publishing and I didn't want to go into consulting, producing studies. In fact, Dirck got another contract with the World Bank and offered me a job in Madagascar working as a long-term researcher there. But I didn't take it. I got offered a job as an IDI (International Development Intern) with USAID at much less money but went that route rather than producing reports.

Q: So, you came back, you finished your dissertation.

SISSON: Yes, and I got married.

Q: Now you got married immediately, before—after the dissertation was completed or—?

SISSON: It was almost completed. I got married in September and joined USAID later that year. And—

Q: You came back from—and that was when your relationship with your girlfriend could happen.

SISSON: It started shortly after I came back from Africa.

Q: She was not with you in any of these foreign posts, right?

SISSON: Right. I met her after coming back. So, remember now, I was back at Fletcher for a while writing up my dissertation. I joined USAID in February 1983, moved with Karen to Washington, got married in September, and finalized and defended my dissertation later that year.

Q: You got a lot done in 1983.

SISSON: That was a busy year. A lot of nights and weekends, but it was a wonderful time.

Q: And was your bride working?

SISSON: In those months, not yet. But she was busy. She was working on getting us settled into Washington, helping me finalize my dissertation (she's an amazing editor and helped me with this throughout my career), and did all the planning for our wedding and impending move to Somalia. However, she was very interested in international development, and while I was still courting her in Massachusetts she got a summer job with the World Bank. She previously had an internship with the UN before I knew her. And when we went overseas for my first assignment in Mogadishu, Somalia, she got hired as a personal services contractor by the mission.

Q: Okay. So, I think this is probably a good time to break because you have all this career development that has taken place before you then joined AID and in 1983, there you are an AID employee. And there was no issue involving this—it was easy enough for you to move from Fletcher to become an IDI? I mean, was there any—was there a long process of getting approved as an IDI, just to get that on the table?

SISSON: It was a standard process. I forget if it was six months or a year. I sent in an application. I went to Washington for interviews, which were really interesting. I had to get a health clearance, a security clearance. I'll tell you two quick stories about those clearances.

One was I had to get fingerprinted near Fletcher and went into a local police station, where a big cop grinded my fingers to get fingerprinted with his massive hands. And it hurt. In his thick Boston accent as he's doing this, he asked, "So, what's this foah ("for"), anyway?" I replied, "Well, I'm joining the U.S. government." He goes, "Oh, yeah? What are you gonna do?" And I said, "I'm joining the government agency that runs foreign assistance programs to help countries in need overseas." And he said, "Oh, yeah? Are you gonna give any to Italy?"

Q: Are you what?

SISSON: Am I going to give any money to Italy?

Q: Oh. (Laughs)

SISSON: So, I said, "Yes, officer," thinking: please don't break my fingers!

The other story is when I came back from Africa I was sick with a parasite and lost a lot of weight and energy. And I'd seen doctors but could not get it fixed. I suffered with this for a year. But then USAID required me to get a medical clearance, so I went to a VA (Veterans Administration) hospital in Boston for a medical exam. There, I got a thorough exam from two nurse practitioners, they identified the parasite, gave me some pills, and I was better in three days.

Q: No kidding? Yeah.

SISSON: So, I suffered for a year and then these two nurses fixed me in three days. I felt so much better.

Q: Marvelous.

SISSON: Anyway. So, the clearance process turned out to be quite useful.

Q: Yes! Wonderful.

SISSON: So, that's it.

Q: Wonderful. This has all been fascinating. Thank you very, very much.

All right. Let's break here and when we resume you can start telling me about what it was like as an IDI and then on into the many places that you worked for AID, in Africa and Asia and elsewhere. But this whole period leading to your AID experience—I cannot imagine anything that would be more valuable to somebody coming in to work for AID than the kinds of things you did and the kind of experiences you had. So, I really admire that very, very much. I mean, you were lucky but AID was very lucky as well, so.

SISSON: Thank you. I've been very fortunate. Already I've talked about the importance of having a great teacher and mentor in Dirck Stryker, and during my career I've had many others.

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Q: Well, welcome again. I have the pleasure of interviewing Andy Sisson. This is number two of the oral history interviews and it is the sixth of August today. And we're going to start just at the point we left off the last time, which is that Andy is finishing up his PhD and he has become an international development intern for USAID.

So, tell us a little bit about that transition., I know you were still working on your PhD to finish that up at the same time that you were starting as an IDI but what was being an IDI like in those days? That was 1983

SISSON: It was the entry-level program into USAID's Foreign Service. And there were some individuals who got into the Foreign Service in other ways but this was the standard recruitment process. My entry class, we were nineteen, began at a training site across the river in Roslyn, Virginia. Starting in February '83, we had a few months of classroom training and learned about USAID as an organization, its systems, its processes, and philosophy a bit.

Q: Did they teach you much about the history of USAID and before?

SISSON: I'm sure they did but I don't remember it specifically. We got to be very close to our classmates, who had an interesting mix of backgrounds, but all of whom had some overseas work experience, good education, and they were interesting. So, it was a chance to build some friendships and a network from the beginning.

So, we did the classroom training and then we had training rotations. Since I got hired as a project development officer, my home base for training rotations was an office that did project development for the Africa bureau. And I was just—

Q: Did you have any role in that direction? I mean, if you'd wanted to work on Latin America or something like that would you have had the opportunity - or somebody looked at your record, they saw what you had been doing and they said, "This man is destined for Africa?"

SISSON: It's the latter. I got hired as a project development officer. A little surprising. I thought I might get hired as an economist whereas a project development officer is really involved in project design and management, which is the heart of USAID's business.

So my home office was the office that did project development for the Africa Bureau. And I was in the division focusing on West Africa and Sahel. So, I did several months with them and then some other shorter rotations, mostly around the Africa Bureau of USAID.

Q: Did you have a mentor assigned to you during this period when you were still an IDI and moving from one office to another?

SISSON: Absolutely.

He was Glenn Slocum.

Q: Oh, yes.

SISSON: He was the division chief for West Africa and the Sahel. I was really lucky to have him as my mentor, as my overall supervisor for my training program in Washington. And we remained friends throughout our long careers.

He was not only a fabulous mentor while I was—in the early days but a good friend and a wise advisor throughout my career.

Q: In the early days what was he able to help you to understand how AID works or what is it that is important about development issues based on his vast experience? Or both?

SISSON: Both. A lot of it was learning about how USAID approaches development, particularly in Africa. Part of it was learning about the bureaucracy, what goes into a good project, and who are the players, at that time very focused on USAID, the different parts of the Africa Bureau, and other bureaus. Who do you need to work with to get

something accomplished or to even identify a problem? I got some wonderful advice from Glenn's boss, Jonathan McCabe, who was the office director. As I was finishing up my training program he called me into his office and he said, "Andy I just want you to remember one thing. You're going to be right most of the time but you're not going to be right all of the time." He was basically telling me to be open-minded and humble.

Q: And had he evidence that you had not been humble?

SISSON: I think I suffered from that occasionally. And you know, a lot of joining a big organization, certainly in my case, is learning to work well with people and ultimately—eventually being a good leader and supervising and mentoring people and maybe even at a higher-level thinking about how the whole organization gets organized and runs. But it's very much about interpersonal relationships and not being arrogant and not thinking you're the smartest person in the room. And you learn—I learned that in different ways, whether it's informally or formally or feedback. But I'll never forget what Jonathan told me in those early days. But I saw Glenn was a master at this. He was a great role model for me.

Q: Well, this carried you through for how long? I mean, you were in this rotating position. This was all in Washington though, right, at that stage?

SISSON: Yes. I finished the training rotations at the end of the year so I was basically in Washington doing these training rotations for about--

Q: This is 1983?

SISSON: Right, for ten or eleven months. And I finished my dissertation and defended it at school at the end of 1983. And those rotations were excellent. I worked with some impressive leaders, intellectual leaders for development in Africa.

Q: And the names of some others that—?

SISSON: Well, one who I really admired was in the agriculture division named Tom Worrick, who tragically died in a plane crash in Ethiopia. He was a wonderful supervisor and a kind man. I met Gloria Steele, and it became immediately obvious to me how talented she is. And that was the beginning of a friendship that endured beyond my career with AID, and she was a great mentor for me throughout. I met lawyers, economists, like Jim Elliott, who was an economist in the planning office. There were many.

Q: And so, you had more than a usual kind of exposure to the academic community, to people in developing countries who had academic and other—and practical skills. What was your assessment based on your first year of the quality of people that you found in AID that you were working with?

SISSON: In terms of looking at development issues I was impressed. I did come across bureaucrats who were interested in being bureaucrats and making sure you stayed within

the lines and some of that I could find frustrating. Writing procurement waivers under legal review drove me crazy. But the people who were thinking about development issues were fabulous. I remember we were trying to figure out if our investments in Democratic Republic of Congo, which in those days was called Zaire, was just all wasted money. Was any of it having a payoff? We looked hard at that. We looked at lots of evaluations. We thought hard about what's working, what's not, what are the problems. So, there was rigorous thinking about projects, who are the beneficiaries, what goes into project design, what contributes to success, what contributes to failure, how do you measure results. Within the Africa Bureau's development planning office, there was a lot of good thinking about broader issues about the continent of Africa, the macro issues, and there were some impressive people working on that, like Hariadene Johnson.

I finished up my rotations in late '83 and by then, I knew my first assignment was going to be Mogadishu, Somalia. Then I got six weeks of a Somali language tutor. It was provided by the Foreign Service Institute but I did the training somewhere in the city. My wife joined me for that training and then we went out to Mogadishu in January '84.

Q: How much Somali can you learn in six weeks?

SISSON: Not much. (Shakow laughs) I got tested at the lowly one level in speaking, so I learned—

Q: Well, that's not bad for six weeks, you know.

SISSON: I learned just some basics. But what I also gained to a degree was an entrée into the culture. Language is the fundamental ingredient for culture.

Q: Right.

SISSON: With our Somali language instructor we learned a bit about Somali culture. For example, one thing to know about Somali language is it has only recently become a written language. And while the dictator, Siad Barre, was notorious for being really awful in many respects, one of the two good things he did was to—he decided the script for the language would be Roman script and not Arabic. Until then, Somali wasn't a written language. But ending the debate about the written script enabled them to have dictionaries and textbooks and other books in their language, and that was great.

The other was encouraging girls to go to school. I learned that in the Somali language there were no words relating to computers or that kind of technology. But there were about a hundred words describing camels. (Shakow laughs) I learned that makes sense because camels were central to their still largely nomadic society.

Q: Well, I presume that they became adept at adopting portions of English or other language words into their own—

SISSON: Absolutely. That's what they did, like "computer."

Q: That's what happened in Indonesia too as you no doubt discovered later on.

SISSON: I realized I do not have a gift for learning languages but it is fun to try to get into it, and the Somalis appreciated that I was among the few foreigners who had even tried to learn it.

Q: Yeah. That makes a big difference.

What was your task? I know you were a project development officer, but what does that mean when you actually got into the field? How big a mission was this at the time? And so, please describe a little bit about what it was like to be a newly assigned staff member in that mission.

SISSON: I still had IDI status in Somalia. I was still a Foreign Service officer in training. So, a major objective was for me to learn how USAID works in the field just as I was learning before how it works overall as an agency in Washington. It was the largest USAID program in Africa because of the Cold War. And I came to appreciate that many of its staff, particularly its senior staff, were excellent. I learned more about how projects are done or how non-project aid, like commodity import programs or food aid, operate. I also learned about the operations of a USAID mission. My home base, like in Washington, was the project development office within the USAID mission, but I also did training rotations in several other offices, such as the program, finance, food aid, and management offices. One of my tasks was analyzing the operations of the USAID guesthouse, or getting involved in contract negotiations or dealing with food aid. I did a training rotation with the deputy mission director, who was my overall mentor and coordinator for my IDI training in—

Q: Who was that?

SISSON: Gary Nelson. He was terrific. Super smart, very knowledgeable about development and also about interpersonal relations and not taking yourself—myself too seriously. He had a great sense of humor. And very informal but he could be tough when it was appropriate. I loved working with him. On the wall by my desk here in Chapel Hill, I keep a graduation diploma he created for my finishing the IDI program in Somalia, awarding me the "special degree of Master of Bureaucracy." It is the only diploma I have on the wall, and it's very funny.

Q: Great. Were you the only IDI there at the time?

SISSON: Yes. Another came later who overlapped with me, Rodger Garner.

Q: So you were there for a year or two years?

SISSON: About two years. And it was valuable for learning not only about how USAID does business internally but working with host country institutions public and private.

Very important for learning about USAID's collaboration with the larger embassy and other donors. Even though I was a lowly IDI, low down in the bureaucracy of this big mission, because I was an IDI I got to be in the senior-level meetings and I saw how our USAID director interacted with the ambassador. And how important that relationship was and how he dealt with it, which was impressive.

Q: Do you remember who the AID director was?

SISSON: He was Lou Cohen, a very experienced USAID director. And our ambassador was Robert Oakley.

Q: Oh, yeah.

SISSON: Oakley would come to our senior staff meetings and he would grill USAID staff, where's this PIOT (a document for procuring technical services)? Why isn't it done yet? He was demanding.

Q: Was his wife active there at the time too? It seems to me that his wife was—somehow or other this was a connection to AID and with Mrs. Oakley.

SISSON: I don't recall her being in Somalia but she also became an ambassador.

Q: Okay. You had a good experience there, broad-ranging, as I understand it. So, this was good training all around -- so the system worked?

SISSON: Yes. I got good training in a lot of aspects of how USAID operates, whether it was project work—I somehow ended up being in charge of the analysis for developing a new country strategy and wrote parts of it. I learned about food aid and concerns about disincentives to local agriculture. I also got a sense of the broader political context. As I mentioned, this was an immense AID program and even then we knew that a lot of the program was not performing well. The reason why we were providing so much foreign aid to Somalia was because of Cold War interests and its strategic location, not because they were a great partner doing a great job with our projects. A good example of this while I was there was our working on projects to rehabilitate ports in the southern city of Kismayo and the northern city of Berbera. The only reason we were doing that was for strategic interests because Somalia is on the Gulf. The Russians had already rehabilitated the port at Mogadishu and then there was a flip. They allied with Ethiopia, we went from Ethiopia to Somalia, so we did the other two ports. We also built the longest runway in Africa in Berbera. Those infrastructure projects were successful. We built stuff and it got done. But anything relating to institutions, like health projects, livestock management, pastural development issues, by and large those projects struggled.

Q: Was the distinction between these infrastructure projects and some of these institution-building projects, that the infrastructure projects were largely contracted to major U.S. construction companies.

SISSON: Exactly.

Q: Whereas the other projects were implemented by AID staff or by NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) or by universities or what—if you could distinguish between the two?

SISSON: Happy to. The infrastructure projects were done by large, American construction companies. And at least in the case of Berbera the U.S. Navy played a supervisory role. And it was like an enclave when I visited there, a bit like their Little America. You could get American ice cream, which was fantastic since this is one of the hottest places on the planet. It was totally separate from the Somali economy.

Q: Right.

SISSON: Whereas our normal projects were implemented by universities, by contractors and by NGOs. It depended on the project. For instance, we had a large program to support refugees that had come from Ethiopia. Ethnic Somalia stretches across much of the Horn of Africa and there's a large Somali population in Ogaden, Ethiopia. And there had been a war between Ethiopia and Somalia and a lot of those Somalis fled and came into refugee camps in Somalia. We provided a lot of support to those refugees via the UN and directly through American NGOs.

Q: Mm-hm.

SISSON: We worked with—I remember working with DAI as an example of a contract firm.

Q: Did you see any evidence, any lingering evidence of Italian influence in Somalia?

SISSON: Yes. There was a pasta factory and you could get really good pasta in Mogadishu. There was still a large Italian presence on the ground. A lot of Somalis spoke Italian. The northern—if you picture Somalia as the number seven, the diagonal bar had been an Italian colony and the very northern part a British colony. And for one week they were two separate independent countries, and in a suspect referendum they merged to become the one country they are today. But the north now does not recognize that referendum and they have declared themselves an independent country. They've been independent for ages. There are also clan politics that are important.

So, I learned how important it should be to have host country leadership and ownership of projects. That was largely absent. People in the Somali government by and large didn't come to work. If they did, you could catch them maybe for an hour.

Q: Were they—

SISSON: Because they needed to earn a living doing something else.

Q: Were they being paid by the government?

SISSON: Minimally.

Q: Yeah. But not enough to live on?

SISSON: Right. A lot of corruption at the higher levels, such as around refugee support. It was problematic. And that's, I'd say, one important reason why our projects struggled.

Q: Did the inspector general of foreign aid come into the country and raise hell or do you remember any kind of—?

SISSON: I don't remember that. I'm sure—I remember vaguely some pretty negative project evaluations.

Q: Internal evaluations?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: Midterm or final evaluations.

Q: And what was your wife doing while all this was—?

SISSON: Thanks for asking. She got hired as a personal service contractor.

Q: By?

SISSON: By USAID. And she was working on a project to resettle refugees. And she applied—I mentioned last time, Alex, that she also was pursuing development studies at the Fletcher School. She applied a year after me for the IDI program. And she got far along in the recruitment process and then because of budget problems USAID canceled the class. She applied again while we were in Rwanda. Same thing. She was about to be interviewed, USAID canceled the class.

Q: Uh, how frustrating.

SISSON: But she also applied to the State Department through their exams process. And we agreed that if one of them hired her first that's where she would go.

Q: Do you think of all that you and your wife learned in this process?

SISSON: Yeah. Overall, Somalia was an excellent first tour for us. I had some great mentors. I enjoyed Somalia a lot. I learned to windsurf there, ran around the countryside with a group called the "Hash House Harriers," had European friends, some Somali

friends. But the country was utterly dysfunctional. We had no running water. It was trucked to our house and I would constantly go up on the roof to fix the tank and the pump. We often got electricity from a noisy generator that angered our neighbor, who was a cabinet minister in the government. The phone only worked when my wife drove downtown to bring a phone technician to the house. Gasoline was rationed. The government didn't function. It was kind of wild. And I got exposed to a USAID mission with many talented people and a director who was entrepreneurial.

Oh, there's one other thing I learned, I would say, at USAID besides, you know, the bureaucratic side, which can be kind of stifling. I don't know where I got the idea but I proposed hiring a summer intern. Maybe it's because I'd been an intern, as I described to you earlier, and how important that was for me, being an intern with the State Department in Madagascar, an intern with USAID in Central America. It was fantastic for my professional growth. So, I wanted to hire an intern to help me in my brand-new experience overseas in Somalia. And the director agreed. So, I hired an intern to help me develop public diplomacy materials for USAID. And I got fifty applications and—

Q: And these were to be Americans?

SISSON: Yes. I went to only three graduate schools in the U.S. and I got fifty applicants and one was clearly the most qualified. But there were a couple of others who were just absolutely fantastic, if not as qualified for the job I had in mind. So, the director said, "Well, hire them all." (Shakow laughs) And then we hired the three, and the director ended up hiring two more. We ended up having five graduate school interns in Mogadishu.

The interns I recruited, all three of them went on to long-term contracts with USAID. They were great. One produced a television show and several newspaper articles about USAID. So, we were in the local media. Another teamed up with a French NGO and designed a rural road project in the northeastern province of Somalia, which we funded from our large local currency account. So, what that taught me at the very beginning of my career is it's possible to do something different if you take the initiative, you sell people on it, and you can try new things. And I was lucky I had a director and a deputy director and supervisors who encouraged me, who said, sure, go for it.

Q: Had there been intern programs that you knew of in other AID missions? I mean, this—did this idea come to you just because of your own experience in the State Department or were there existing AID intern programs that you knew about?

SISSON: I did not know of any but I'm sure there were. The impetus for me came from my experience. And I would put my Central America experience with USAID at $20 a day in the internship category. It was not training like going through rotations but I got tremendous mentoring.

Q: I'm surprised that these people weren't held up by security clearances or—

SISSON: In those days it was easier. USAID does have internship programs and to its credit they switched from volunteer to paid internships so that more could apply, not just those who could live without funding.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: So, that's great. I know that the Africa bureau has had internship programs. Overseas, I don't recall where, but I've had interns in a couple of missions overseas later, but it became very hard because of the security clearance process.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: In my early days it wasn't such a big deal.

Q: But that's wonderful. I mean, that you were able, as basically an IDI, to establish such a program in Somalia and get all these people in. That's very impressive, I must say, and that your initiative produced these people who obviously were very talented.

SISSON: Mm-hm.

Q: What were the three graduate schools you turned to?

SISSON: Well, one was my alma mater, Fletcher.

Q: Sure.

SISSON: And the others were two of its competitors, Columbia School of International Studies and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

Q: And were any of the interns from any of those alternatives or were they all—?

SISSON: Good question. The one I hired to work with me on public communications came from Columbia.

Q: Oh. I'm surprised you weren't stricken from the alumni roles of the Fletcher School for that reason. (Laughs)

Okay. Well, it sounds like you had a very productive two years in Somalia. And I wasn't quite sure what you were saying about your wife. Did either USAID or the State Department come up with a job before you left Somalia for your wife?

SISSON: For her? No. So—no, that happened in our next assignment.

Q: Okay. So, what was your next assignment?

SISSON: Rwanda.

Q: Did you go home first or did you just go straight to Rwanda?

SISSON: We went back to the U.S. for home leave.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: I said we had a great tour in Somalia. But it was a hard tour. You probably know that we had this term in the Foreign Service called medevacs. People who get evacuated from post for medical reasons, like late in my career when I broke my elbow and was evacuated from Sri Lanka to Singapore for surgery. In Somalia, while I was back in Washington, a senior colleague caught me in the hallway and asked me, "Andy, what is going on in Mogadishu? You have broken the State Department record for psych evacs." Psych—medical evacuations for psychological reasons. And we had a lot of people who had issues, if not total breakdowns.

Q: These were AID people or the State Department?

SISSON: AID and State Department. Yeah, like one guy literally taken out in a straightjacket. And some people just could not deal with living in a place like that. And remember, this was not a war zone. It was difficult but it was peaceful in those days.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: But it was hard. A lot of people, like me, enjoyed it but some people had a very hard time.

Then we went to Rwanda for what was initially a two-year assignment. Later, I got approved for a two-year follow-on assignment but shortly before that began, sometime in my second year in Rwanda, my wife got an offer from State Department to join their Foreign Service. Nothing from USAID had materialized. But she got an offer quickly from State after doing the exams so she took that. So, I backed out of my second two-year assignment in Rwanda so we could try to figure out where we could be together. We were actually hoping she could get assigned to Rwanda for her first tour but the only vacant position had already been filled.

Q: Okay. But then you—

SISSON: So, I was only in Rwanda for two years.

Q: And what was going on in Rwanda at that time and what were you doing? Anything special?

SISSON: I was in Rwanda in '86 and '87. And it was well before the genocide. It was peaceful. A dictatorship but peaceful. There were some signs of ethnic tension. But there were people from both ethnic groups in senior positions in the government.

It was a classic development program. A small development program. A small USAID mission. It was called the office of the AID representative. I was the PDO, the project development officer. The portfolio was involved in many sectors and as a project development officer I helped design new projects and manage ongoing ones. I led a couple of project evaluations. And then, I became the project manager for a project as the tour went on.

Q: And the project was in, what, agriculture?

SISSON: Agriculture focusing on analytics.

Q: How much independence did the mission have as contrasted with pressure from Washington, the region to engage in X or Y? I mean, was this a fairly independent place at that point? I'm just trying to think. I mean, Peter McPherson was the USAID administrator at that time, very well-liked, much appreciated. And strangely, during the Reagan period, when people would have thought that the USAID program would have been in big difficulties, what was your sense of how independent the mission was?

SISSON: I'd say fairly independent. Let me—but it brings back—I think what you're getting at is how much does Washington get involved in the big decisions or the little decisions.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: And I should go back to Somalia for a sec because as I mentioned, it was the largest USAID program in Africa and the reason why was because of Cold War strategic interests. So, you would think Washington would have a heavy involvement in decision-making in Somalia and it did. On the other hand, the director was very adept at getting what he wanted. There were people in Washington who were very concerned about the weak performance of many of the programs but he forged ahead and sometimes overcame that Washington opposition. In Rwanda there wasn't that kind of interest. This was a pretty sleepy place. One problem was we—and I mentioned in Somalia we had a very strong career professional, Robert Oakley, as ambassador. In Rwanda somehow, we got a political appointee.

You'll love this. During the Reagan era there was a *Doonesbury* newspaper cartoon satirizing the auctioning of ambassadorships. And there was a cartoon of people in tuxedos and gowns in an auction hall and the auctioneer—I'll try to go through this quickly—the auctioneer says, "Okay, Sweden goes for $100,000." (Shakow laughs) "The next ambassadorship up for auction is Rwanda. Do I hear anybody offer $50,000?" Nobody bids. "Do I hear $20,000?" Nobody bids. "$10,000?" Nobody bids. So, then the auctioneer says, "Well, I guess it's going to go to one of those career types." And the wife nudges her husband in the audience and says "the career types are good in those sticky places." So, the cartoon mentioned Rwanda as I was going out to Rwanda. And there had been a history of career ambassadors in Rwanda who had good reputations, but somehow

we got a political appointee with the State Department and had mostly Latin America experience. However, we had a solid DCM and other fine State officers at post, and we had a small but competent USAID mission.

Q: At some point in Rwanda, maybe this is much more recent, health programs had been quite well done. The government was really interested in health and family planning and that kind of thing. I take it not at the time you were there particularly.

SISSON: We were very interested in health. HIV-AIDS was becoming a very serious concern. And our health officer became focused on that. We had health programs, education programs, a lot in agriculture and as a PDO I was involved in all of it.

Q: Interesting that you were moved from one of the largest—the largest program in Africa to one of the smallest. Presumably Rwanda was one of the smaller ones. Did that—were you affected by the size—I mean, was there anything dramatic about the difference between being in those two different kinds of programs? Any kind of thought about what you enjoyed more? Or were they just so different that you could enjoy both without any kind of hesitation?

SISSON: I think for my career development and personal interests it was a great move going to a small mission like Rwanda.

Q: Did you have running water there?

SISSON: Yes. We had running water, we had electricity. It was more functional. We had a government that showed up for work and I had some wonderful government colleagues that I worked with all the time. That was a joy. That was not possible in Somalia.

Q: Right.

SISSON: In a small USAID mission I could head an office and interact with the AID representative and all the other senior staff all the time. And in a small office everybody pitches in to do everything. I was the acting program officer for quite a while. I was the acting AID representative a bit. I was once asked to be the Charge d'Affaires for the entire embassy since so many people were on leave, but I couldn't since I wasn't yet a commissioned officer. I got to meet the ministers of agriculture and health and work on issues with them. So, I would not—I could not have that level of exposure or involvement in such a big USAID mission but in a place like Rwanda you had to do everything.

Q: And this did nothing to result in your exaggerating your own importance or (laughs)—

SISSON: Could be.

Q: —those skills you had learned in earlier assignments where you could operate effectively in Rwanda where you had more responsibility.

SISSON: I learned that I could do the work. I was getting better at projects. I started to supervise people, which was good experience, working in teams. And the higher-level engagement with government. Also, I was working more with people in other parts of the embassy, like the economic officer or the political officer or the admin officer or the deputy chief of mission, even interacting with the ambassador. That was all wonderful experience.

Q: So, then you moved to what? To REDSO (Regional Economic Development Service Office). I know your wife got this job and so what happened to your joint careers at that stage, which is the end of 1986, beginning of 1987?

SISSON: Right. So, I—

Q: By this time how old are you?

SISSON: Thirty-two. As I mentioned, I'd been expecting to come back to Rwanda for a second two-year tour but then, when our efforts to find my wife a position in Rwanda fell through—

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: —I got out of the second tour. And then, we struggled to find someplace in the world where we could be together.

Q: Did personnel help you in this or were you just pretty much on your own?

SISSON: Not much. The challenge was that in those days there weren't many State/USAID tandem couples and the State Department wasn't interested in helping deal with the problem at all. And that tended to be the norm throughout our career. USAID was more creative, more helpful. So, ultimately what we could work out was I could get assigned to REDSO, the Regional Economic Development Services Office for West Africa.

Q: Located where?

SISSON: Abidjan, Ivory Coast. And she got her first tour next door in Accra, Ghana. And we worked it so that I would live with her in Accra, Ghana, but work for REDSO in Abidjan and spend a lot of time in both. So, that's what I did. And we were apart for about six months, mostly for her initial training in Washington. Then, she went to Ghana and I was going back and forth between Ghana and Abidjan. And my priorities in my REDSO job were project work in Ghana and Togo.

Q: And the head of REDSO facilitated this?

SISSON: Yes. I am grateful to Art Fell.

Q: Oh, yeah.

SISSON: And his deputy was Howard Handler.

Here's an interesting tidbit I learned while I was in Somalia that became really evident as I went through Rwanda and then REDSO. I think it was the deputy director in Somalia who said, "Be careful who you piss off because they could become your boss someday in another post." (Shakow laughs) Because he encountered that in Somalia where he became the supervisor of somebody he had a very different kind of relationship with years earlier. So, in Somalia there were three people that I worked with, and years later I became their supervisor. Same with REDSO. The deputy director there, I became his supervisor in Montenegro later on. All of it great, at least from my point of view. So, that goes back to the advice I got from Jonathan McCabe, you know, you're not always right.

Q: But you work well with people. I mean, it's obvious then, so, and that's the key to what you've been saying.

SISSON: It improved.

Q: What a tough life, though. I mean, how much—how long did it take you to get from Abidjan to Ghana in those days with—

SISSON: It was a half-hour plane ride. And you're going to laugh. Swiss Air had a connection that flew from Accra to Switzerland with a stop in Abidjan. And they would let us do that little connection. I didn't have to fly all the way to Switzerland. And I could pay for an upgrade to first-class on that half-hour flight and the upgrade would cost $10. (Shakow laughs) So, it's the only flight I wish were longer (Shakow laughs) because I really got my money's worth with delicious food on that really short flight.

Q: Gee. Did they allow your wife to do the same thing? She never went to Abidjan?

SISSON: She wasn't doing it because she stayed in Accra.

Q: (Laughs) And how often did you—did Swiss Air run these flights?

SISSON: Frequently. At least once or twice a week.

Q: Really?

SISSON: And then, after about six months I got transferred to the USAID mission in Ghana full-time by the Africa Bureau. They transferred me to Ghana because that was becoming a high-growth, high-profile mission and they just wanted me there full-time.

Q: So, that, I mean, that sounds like a really lucky development in your married life.

SISSON: It was. And workwise for me, Ghana turned out to be great. It was—

Q: How long were you there?

SISSON: Just a year and a half. I'd already done six months through REDSO and by the time I transferred, my wife was there six months or so, and as a first-tour State Department Foreign Service officer she could only do one tour. And she was a consular officer there. She was recruited by State for the economics track but like most State Department foreign service officers, she did her first tour as a consular officer.

Q: So, what was great from—leave aside the fact that you were married, you were able to work together or live together, what was great about Ghana from your standpoint in a substantive professional sense?

SISSON: It was exciting building a new program with a government that was starting to reform and starting to turn the corner. Ghana had a really checkered political history. Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings had taken power for the second time in a coup. Previous leaders were executed on the beach. It was a pretty harsh place and there were still a lot of checkpoints, quite a bit of fear, but he brought in a fabulous guy to be minister of finance named Kwesi Botchwey. And a good team in agriculture and health and some excellent people as civil servants. And I guess just things got so bad in the economy that they had to make some changes. They worked with the World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund), and Kwesi Botchwey put in programs that started to turn the corner.

We were working on aspects of that, particularly in agricultural policy reform. Such as getting out of the parastatal business in a couple of areas. You could see it starting to happen and one of our programs was not only working on agricultural policy reform but improving rural roads to open up the rural economy. I had a couple of excellent colleagues in the Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Finance, one of them named Haruna Mamaah, a senior economist who I just heard from recently. I appreciated traveling with them, learning about Ghana in the rural areas and far north.

Q: Was this direct USAID work with these ministries or were you also with university programs? Where did the expertise come from for this? Internally or—?

SISSON: Both. We were involved in policy reform in the agricultural sector. And we had a mix of project assistance and non-project assistance where the government would undertake reform and we would provide budget support to the government.

Q: Were these done in concert with the World Bank and the Fund or were these—

SISSON: Yes.

Q: USAID initiatives or—?

SISSON: They were USAID initiatives but done in concert with the Bank. So, our lead mastermind, conceptualizing, for instance, this agricultural policy reform program, was the USAID Africa bureau's chief economist, Jerry Wolgin, who was a fantastic colleague.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: And so, there was good coordination and ultimately it was a good program.

Q: Did you work directly with the Bank and Fund people and if you did, did you have any reaction about that kind of collaboration?

SISSON: I don't recall working with them personally. But I worked closely with the government on this.

Q: Right.

SISSON: I don't remember interacting with the Bank at the design level. I'm sure Jerry did and our mission director, maybe I joined them for meetings, but don't recall. Actually, he was an AID representative.

Q: And who was your mission director, the AID representative?

SISSON: Gary Towery. And interestingly, one of my supervisors from Somalia became my supervisor again in Ghana. He was great in both places. And many years later I became his supervisor, when he was a deputy mission director with me in Pakistan years later.

Q: Who was this?

SISSON: Ed Birgells.

Q: What comes out in these discussions is how important people are in working in this kind of field. The interactions with your colleagues, in terms of what you learn and what you're able to accomplish, seem quite important, right?

SISSON: Absolutely. Colleagues and especially interacting with host country folks, whether they were in the government or civil society. I started learning about that, obviously from my graduate school days and just talking with farmers and herders. But starting in Somalia and increasingly in Rwanda and Ghana, working with, say, Ghanaian government officials all the time, with Rwandan government officials all the time. And how important those relationships were. Let me go back to Rwanda for a moment to elaborate. In Rwanda I co-led a large evaluation team of our agriculture program. My co-leader was a Rwandan from the ministry of agriculture. And it turned out to be a very critical evaluation that concluded the project should be continued but needed to be

overhauled. I wasn't supposed to be the team leader but somebody from the regional office fell through so I got stuck doing it. But having Rwandans on the team and a Rwandan co-team leader who was close to the minister of agriculture meant we had a thorough and useful evaluation. And after we briefed the minister of agriculture, he immediately went up to the project site to look at it himself. And then, with his support and our agriculture office director, we carried out the evaluation recommendations, redesigned the project and it turned out well. But for me, that was a great lesson in not only the substance of project success or failure but the importance of relationships.

Q: Yes.

SISSON: And he became my closest colleague in the Rwandan government. His name was Serge Rwamasirabo. I worked with him on other projects and with other people on his team. And that was a joy. And similarly, in Ghana, getting to work with the Ghanaians was just fantastic.

Q: Did—it sounds as if you've had, in some cases, these relationships that go on for many, many years. Was there any issue that you found in your various assignments, starting with Somalia and then Rwanda and then Ghana, where you could have a professional relationship but a social relationship was not possible? Or were you able to bridge that gap so that you were able to have social relationships with these people, they were not—what is the proper term?—but I mean, sometimes people will tell you that they're embarrassed to show you their home or other things like that.

SISSON: It was harder in some places than others. In Somalia I don't recall personal relationships with counterparts but friendships with people in the private sector who invited us to their home. In Rwanda it was difficult to have friendships where people would invite you to their home. I would go out for beer or dinner with them, roast chicken was a staple. Did that a lot. But rarely was I invited to somebody's home. And I'm not sure if that's because of modesty or because the Rwandan society is more closed than many others and for different reasons. Ghana, more open, more hospitality. And other posts later on in general I could have those friendships. I certainly tried but over time I would, often with the help of my wife, who was fantastic at this, build relationships with people outside of government, maybe outside of my work per se.

Q: Yeah. I'm only asking because at some point, you know, all these professional tasks that you undertake or that any AID person undertakes, those tasks are enriched by being able to establish close contact with the people that you're working with.

SISSON: Absolutely.

Q: The impression exists that State Department people never mix, they just live in their own little bubble. These are exaggerations but the AID people have more interaction as a general rule at a working level. Perhaps that is not the case anymore and I'm not sure what your impression is, but interesting and not surprising that Ghana—

SISSON: I think that—

Q: —I mean, there is the language—language is a factor too.

SISSON: And Ghana was easy with English which we all spoke. And in Rwanda, almost all of us spoke French. In Somalia, I'm not aware of any American diplomats speaking Somali, but there was an American consultant I worked with a lot who spoke fluent Somali. And educated Somalis spoke English.

What you're saying about State Department people not getting out, that's less my experience. I've worked with State Department colleagues who did get out. And in later posts, such as India, some State Department officers spoke Hindi while AID officers did not, and this was a tremendous asset.

Q: And your wife got out too.

SISSON: Definitely, partly because she came up from a development background and you know, she went to school in Peru for a year and she's got a lot of development experience and she just loves getting into other cultures and she's fabulous at making friends.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: So, for instance, in Rwanda there were senior staff on the embassy side who were excellent. One went on to be an ambassador. And they got out and traveled. And in Ghana, the deputy chief of mission and others did as well.

Q: Anyway, it's just—it's one piece of—

SISSON: But a different way of looking at it is, and I saw this, and we can talk more about this later with regard to Pakistan -- I think USAID folks have a stronger inclination to talk to a wider diversity of people, like before you're going to decide what to do for a strategy in a country, you can't just talk to the business association or senior government officials. You should get out into the countryside and speak to families and mothers and whoever. I think that may be a difference.

Q: That if the job is being done the way it should be.

SISSON: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

Okay. Now I see from your list of AID assignments that you go from Ghana to India now.

SISSON: Yes. This—

Q: That's quite a leap. So, tell me about this. I mean, you and your wife both had the appropriate amount of time in Ghana. Is that it?

SISSON: Her two-year first tour was coming to an end so she needed to get another assignment for her second tour. And we ended up in India because that's the only place where we could figure out where we could be together.

Q: How did you manage—I mean, not to dwell on it at great length, but how do you go about finding a way that both can get in the same place? I mean, is it—you go through a list of 100 countries and you see where the jobs are? Or what—?

SISSON: What's supposed to happen, even then, is bid lists come out for both agencies and both employees and the two agencies work together to try to figure it out. That never happened for us. In fact, the timing was a problem–either her bid list would come out and mine wasn't out yet or vice versa. State seemed to have no interest in helping us figure it out. So, what would happen is her list, say, would come out and I would phone around, does anybody know if India is going to be on the list? Can you make an exception so I can get assigned to such and such a place? So, through personal networking we were able to figure it out. And by people helping us. And we did it. And what it meant also, though, was compromising and at one point or another neither would get our top choice. But we did well because except for that first time when we were apart for six months, we were never apart again for more than a month or two, which was very fortunate.

And we went to India. And for me, that was not an ideal assignment—

Q: Why not?

SISSON: —but it was okay. For one thing, I had little interest in India. (Shakow laughs) But over time I came to learn it was a fascinating country. To give you a clue of what it was like at the beginning, before going to post I met the DCM, the deputy chief of mission who was in Washington for something. I was on my way out to post and I had a courtesy call with him in the State Department. And his opening words to me were, "Andy, I have no idea why we have an AID mission in India." (Shakow laughs) In other words, he thought we were irrelevant. And when I got there I got that impression, clearly in terms of working with the larger embassy, what was going on with our programs, the relationship with the government. And it was a very large AID mission with a lot of levels in the bureaucracy, and I was head of the project development division with three levels between me and the director. It was bureaucratic that way and really bureaucratic working with the Indian government. That was frustrating. Also making it tough during my first months in India was tremendous unrest due to a new government policy where lower castes would get preferred access to the university and government jobs. And there were massive uprisings against that. Thousands of buses got torched, including the USAID bus. And for months we were hunkering down, we couldn't travel and couldn't really get to appreciate India.

But there were some positives. I developed a great collaboration with an executive vice

president of India's largest development bank and we had good programs with them. There were some excellent people on the USAID team, some of whom were really innovative. Great FSNs. And the mission director was very entrepreneurial.

Q: Who was the director?

SISSON: Robert Bakley. And he was very astute at working USAID's way into the electric power sector with potentially high impact and I worked on that, which was fun.

But two things happened about a year into our tour that made India great for both of us. On my wife's side, she started out being in the economics office, working on scientific collaboration. And a year in she got transferred to be the ambassador's special aide. It's interesting how these things work. She was compelled to work there for a few weeks while his staff aide was on R&R. Karen's boss didn't want her to do it because he needed her doing work on science collaboration. And the ambassador's secretary said, "You don't understand. (Shakow laughs) She's going to be working for the ambassador." And then she worked for the ambassador for three weeks and they really hit it off.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

SISSON: William Clark, Jr., a career Foreign Service Officer. Karen was at home in that situation. She worked well with the ambassador and with his sharp secretary. And the ambassador asked Karen, near the end of her three weeks if she would like to stay. So, while the incumbent was still on R&R, he was reassigned to her job in the economics office (Shakow laughs). And that was a marriage made in heaven. She was great in that role and really happy in that role. She traveled with the ambassador all over India. They were guests of the King in Bhutan. She met the Tatas. It was an excellent assignment.

And we got a new director in USAID named Walter Bollinger. And for me, that was fabulous.

Q: Right.

SISSON: I liked Bob Bakley a lot, but I learned from Walter about leadership, and he became my role model for what a USAID mission director should be. And he did it from about the third day he was in India.

Q: What did he do that even on that third day—I mean, I also have very high respect for Walter Bollinger but I've never worked for him so what was it that he did that was so remarkable from your standpoint?

SISSON: So, remember I'm buried in the bureaucracy of the USAID mission.

Q: Right.

SISSON: And I'd been leading the design of a new project focusing on agribusiness. And it was basically all done but not yet approved. It was just—I could not get it through the last hoops before Bob Bakley left. I had to go through this process with the new director, and I didn't know how that would go. About three days after he arrived, he came to my office, and he sat down and said he liked the project design but it was too complicated. He told me to simplify it by dropping one of the major components. And he added that I should decide which one to drop and he would approve it, without any clearances in between. And that's what happened. For me that was a great lesson in keeping it simple and empowerment, and honoring a commitment. That happened at the beginning of his tour. It was a good learning experience.

Then, somehow, I got roped into a lot of meetings with him and I appreciated the way he made decisions. He focused. He would get as much out of the project people as he could. He'd get other information. But he didn't wait to have 100 percent. And then, he would decide. He'd say, "thank you very much, I'll let you know my decision by the end of the week." And he followed that.

Another example was more fundamental, which was turning around the entire USAID program vis-à-vis the embassy, the ambassador, and the Indian government. And the way he did that began with a think piece he drafted on the future of USAID in India. And he shared it with all of the USAID staff for comment. So, I give him a paper with my comments, agreeing with this, disagreeing with this. I was pretty direct. And he wrote me back, thanking me for it. And he followed his plan. He didn't do much of what I recommended but he transformed USAID in India. He decided where to prioritize and got hundreds of millions of dollars from AID Washington for new programs.

Q: And that focus, what were the essential pieces of that focus?

SISSON: One piece was health in the poorest province of India, Bihar. I'd recommended getting out of the health sector but he got money to go into Bihar. And the other was a large new program in environment, which I had supported. And he also built a relationship with the ambassador and I don't know how he really did it except for one little thing. One night at dinner my wife, who was now his staff aide, said that she needed to find his son a summer job between years at college. I came up with a few options for him at USAID, which she liked. So, I went to my boss, who was not enthusiastic but agreed I could take it to the director. Walter didn't think about it for more than a second. (Shakow laughs) "Absolutely. And I don't care what the kid does as long as you supervise him." So, we hired him to write a history of USAID in the agriculture sector. And he came and I paired him with our top local employee who took him on trips to learn about our agriculture work. He wrote his report. I heard that he actually worked with his parents on this. That could not have hurt with improving USAID's relationship with the ambassador.

Q: So, nobody said, "There must be a conflict of interest between Andy and his wife and all that's going on here." (Laughs)

SISSON: Absolutely not. But remember, around the world, the State Department had a program where kids would come back for the summer and get jobs in embassies. And USAID would often be turned to from our State Department brethren, "Can you hire a kid for the summer?" And our kids would go work in other parts of the embassy. So—

Q: So, this was not very unusual that—

SISSON: It's standard. What was unusual was how this particular case happened. But often, going back to your point about relationships, what we experienced in this case was drawing on relationships.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: And we benefited from strong staff at both USAID and the larger embassy. In USAID we had office directors who were Senior Foreign Service officers.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: And in the State Department side, while the DCM had discouraged me with his initial questioning of why USAID was still operating in India, it wasn't an issue especially after Walter got the program into a higher gear. And most important, my wife enjoyed her work more and mine improved a lot.

One other thing that Walter Bollinger did that was great was he eliminated a level of the bureaucracy. And the boss I had between me and his boss, when that guy left Walter just eliminated the position. That helped.

Q: Yeah. How big a mission was the India mission at that time altogether?

SISSON: I don't remember. It could have been 100. It was pretty big.

Q: Yeah. Okay.

SISSON: We had several technical offices that had multiple direct hires as well as really talented local staff.

Q: Okay. Let's see. So, there you are in India and you've described this change of opportunities. And that came to an end in 1991?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: And then did you come back to Washington?

SISSON: Yes. My wife needed to do a Washington assignment. So, again, I needed to find an assignment.

Q: But you had also been away for quite a few years. I mean, you had been, what is that, seven years abroad, right, or something?

SISSON: Just six.

Q: Six. So, how did you find a job once again in the Africa Bureau?

SISSON: The Africa Bureau was creating—it had Jerry Wolgin as chief economist. And he had a team of economists working on economic analysis and policy for the Bureau. But the development planning office was creating a new economic advisor position, focusing more on policy and issues around the budget and donor coordination. And they were recruiting for that job. And I reached out to Jerry for advice, and he supported me going for that new position, which would not be on his team but next door. So, that's what I did. And it turned out to be an excellent assignment.

Q: This was not seen at that time by Jerry as being any kind of a competition with his office?

SISSON: I don't think so. He was certainly generous in supporting me for getting it. And remember, it was just me plus eventually an American PSC (Personal Services Contractor).

Q: So, what was it that you did in these three years that was—that stands out to you now in retrospect?

SISSON: One was we were redesigning the system for how USAID allocated its foreign aid budget to African countries. We had good legislation for the Africa Bureau at the time called the Development Fund for Africa, which gave the bureau quite a bit of latitude, including pretty much freedom from earmarks. And Jerry had played a lead role in the design of the system where two criteria for deciding how much aid a country would get were its level of poverty and population size. One of my tasks was to help redesign the system to bring in other factors, particularly concerning democracy and human rights, governance and corruption. After much debate within the Africa Bureau, the assistant administrator, Scott Spangler, agreed to these reforms. And with the support of State Department, we redesigned the system. I led a working group with people from State and USAID to do this. Later, they were part of the process to examine information coming in from the field and make judgments about country performance and then allocate the budget. And that was very useful to stand on, so when somebody said, well, now we want you to give more aid to Country X, we could say, we disagree because you were part of the process which led to this allocation. And by and large that stood up well.

Q: The Development Fund for Africa really emerged kind of in the last several years of the 1980s, right?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: But was it—when you got there in '91 it was no longer the operative budgetary approach to aid to Africa, was it? I mean, the Development Fund was no longer in business, was it?

SISSON: It was still in business.

Q: So, I mean, the remarkable aspect of the Development Fund was that it was negotiated very closely between AID staff and the Hill.

SISSON: Yes.

Q: And championed by members of Congress and so on. But I thought that it had kind of, you know, kind of ran out of steam by 1991 but you're saying that that same freedom was available to you, that you did not have pressure coming from the Hill or others to meet earmarks or anything of that sort, that during the first three—

SISSON: There was pressure to do away with it from the new administrator, who said, it was an earmark for Africa. And—because we had, I think, an $800 million budget.

Q: This was Brian Atwood at that point?

SISSON: I think so.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: Ultimately we lost the DFA. But at least for the first couple of years I was there it was operative. In fact, the administration was interested in an approach like this agency-wide. We briefed the NSC (National Security Council) on it. But ultimately that's not what happened and we did lose the DFA after I left.

Q: But this was the major responsibility you had while you were there in this role as the policy—senior economic advisor?

SISSON: That was my first responsibility, leading the redesign and then running the process, including getting inputs from the embassies, organizing reviews with State and USAID offices in Washington, doing these massive spreadsheets and coming up with allocations.

Q: How—I mean, this was intended to be a bit like the process that the World Bank goes through in its IDA (International Development Association) allocations, you know, based on poverty levels, population and that kind of thing. And yet, in a situation where the budget is not assured as—which IDA has, basically, were you able to maintain that kind of distribution as you worked it out as to what rationally was the level of aid to Rwanda as compared to Ghana as compared to Malawi and so on? Were you able to maintain that even in the face of uncertain budgetary levels?

SISSON: Well, for at least a couple of years we did have a certain budget level. We knew what the DFA envelope was going to be. There could be additions, something else would factor in, but we did have a budget allocation.

Q: So, in '90—for fiscal '91 or '92—

SISSON: Or say '92, '93.

Q: —'92, '93, the money was still there.

SISSON: Yes, to my recollection. Atwood didn't become Administrator until 1993, well into the fiscal year.

And even then, we compared the actual amount of aid that went out to countries, how much did it change from the numbers cranked out of the performance-based budgeting system to see if there was purity or not. And it was rare that the actual allocation varied by more than 10 or 15 percent.

Q: That is absolutely remarkable and that it went on for as much as maybe four or five years that way. That's great.

Did—at an earlier stage, ten years before, one of the big problems in Africa was that it had so many small projects where the funding was provided on an annual basis that there was virtually no new funding available because it was consumed by all these individual activities. Did you, as a result of the Development Fund for Africa and the work you were carrying on, actually find that you could fund new projects and that they—you were not constrained by 100 little projects that were absorbing the funding?

SISSON: To a degree because what this enabled was shifting of funding to higher performing countries. So, some countries saw their budgets squeezed and they were pushed to make painful decisions, like drop programs whereas—

Q: And did that actually happen? Did that happen? They actually did it?

SISSON: Yes. Kenya took a hit because the corruption was bad and there were human rights issues. There was an argument about Kenya funding, the regional office arguing to protect it. But it was important to maintain the integrity of the aid allocation system. So, Kenya's budget was reduced and that freed up some money to go to higher performers. Incidentally, that gave us ammunition to advocate to the Japanese to cut their aid to Kenya, which I believe they did.

The other priority—I was the lead for the bureau on donor coordination. And at that time, I worked closely with the World Bank and the UN, who were leading two major Africa donor coordination initiatives. One was called the Special Program of Assistance for Africa, led by the World Bank, which was an impressive undertaking that brought together all of the major donors for Africa to discuss economic issues and coordinate

financing. And the UN played a large role on non-economic policy issues, leading the Global Coalition for Africa, which Ambassador Hank Cohen headed.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: I was the lead staff person for both of those and there were some very interesting, high-level meetings with African leaders, including at times presidents. Robert Mugabe hosted one before he went totally off the rails. Former presidents Nyerere, Mandela and Obasanjo attended that one, and it was fascinating. There were some meetings just with donors. And I did a lot of staff work for that. I traveled to western and African capitals for meetings. That got me a lot of direct time with assistant administrators or deputy assistant administrators, such as Carol, working on SPA (Special Program of Assistance for Africa) or John Hicks, working on Global Coalition for Africa. I also traveled with Deputy Assistant Secretary Prudence Bushnell to Cotonou, Benin. I remember her patience going over my draft reporting cable – something I had little experience in drafting -- emphasizing how important it was to get the summary right.

Remember that at the same time that economic reform was taking place across Africa in the early nineties, there was also political reform taking place as the Cold War was ending and relationships were changing. There was a big push for democratization across Africa and that was a reason why we injected democracy and governance concerns into our performance-based budgeting system. We also wanted to put that on the agenda of the Special Program of Assistance led by the World Bank. Initially they resisted, but eventually we got it to happen to a certain extent and that was an interesting process. The bureau was really behind it and very excited about it and over time we did it.

Q: The bureau meaning—

SISSON: Africa Bureau.

Q: Africa Bureau.

SISSON: Of USAID.

Q: Yeah. Who was the assistant administrator at that point?

SISSON: John Hicks.

Q: Right. Right.

SISSON: Carol was, I think, the senior DAA at that point.

Q: Yeah. And who did you work with most at the World Bank, do you remember? Was Stanley Please somebody that you dealt with at all?

SISSON: We worked with their vice president for Africa, Kim Jaycox.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: And his senior staff. I remember once when we were first proposing it my boss from the Africa Bureau, the director of the development planning office, and I went over to meet a bunch of people at the World Bank and there were about ten of them lined up across the table from the two of us and just grilled us. It was hard.

Q: I'm sure you performed admirably under that pressure.

SISSON: It was quite a grilling. They were not enthusiastic. But we built alliances and we took it step by step and it was fine.

Q: In the end did you have—did you enjoy working with the Bank people and—

SISSON: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: I especially enjoyed working with the EU (European Union). They were our closest collaborators on this. They were out front as much as we were on promoting democracy and governance in Africa. In doing staff work on this initiative, such as how are we going to get this into the SPA, I had a co-leader from the EU working with me on this. They actually gave me an office in Brussels and their guy would come to Washington. It was fabulous. We made it happen.

Q: This was the first time you had—in your career that you had actually worked very, very closely with the international community. I mean, you had worked occasionally on projects with people but this was the first-time real immersion into the international aid network. Is that right?

SISSON: Yes. And from a regional or worldwide perspective this was brand new because when I was a junior officer in an African country or in India I would work with donors a bit on projects but not much.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: But in the Africa Bureau I had the good fortune to be in this role.

Q: I'm looking at the time now and I think we're probably going to need to break before your term in Malawi comes up. But is there anything other—anything else in connection with that Washington stay that you want to mention before we break off?

SISSON: I'm grateful to some terrific USAID colleagues. I mentioned Carol. Larry Saiers was a brilliant DAA. In the Africa development planning office, Marge Bonner was the director, Jim Govern was the deputy director, Carlos Pasqual was my division

chief. They were all wonderful to work with. After Carlos moved on to another role, Dick Day came in, who was an excellent supervisor. The PSC I recruited, Gail Schwartz, was extremely capable and became a good friend.

And at this time Brian Atwood came in and all kinds of USAID reorganization stuff was going on.

Q: Oh, yeah, absolutely because the—Jesse Helms wanted to have the AID program moved into the State Department, what remained of it, and USIA (United States Information Agency) was, you know, Voice of America, that was what was going on and—

SISSON: That's right. So—

Q: And Brian Atwood was fighting at every turn to keep AID independent and the assistant administrator for administration was screwing up the personnel system, so.

SISSON: I remember that now. Larry Byrne made some decisions that really hurt USAID's operating expense budget.

Q: Right.

SISSON: Not so much the development budget, like the DFA, but he made an investment in some management information system that sucked up resources—

Q: A computer program, right.

SISSON: —that really hurt the—it was a failure. But one of the other things he did was ask the Africa Bureau to have a team to reorganize itself under the new leadership and I was on that team. And Atwood had another working group on democracy programming in the agency and Larry Garber headed that group. That's when I started to get to know Larry and enjoyed working with him. That was a useful exercise. Overall for me, that Africa Bureau assignment was excellent.

Q: Terrific. Okay. If before we meet the next time you think of any great stories about Larry Byrne we can put them into the next segment.

SISSON: I'll just note here that I had a TDY (Temporary Duty) to Malawi and that was a real influence for me getting my assignment there following my tour in the Africa Bureau.

Q: Well, you can tell us about it next time.

SISSON: Yes.

Q: Okay. That's been two fascinating hours and I appreciate it very, very much. I'm going to cut the recording now so that we can decide on what to do next.

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Q: Okay. We are ready to start with Andy Sisson and session number three. It is August 16 and when we left off we were just about to move to Andy's service in Malawi. But, you mentioned that you had done, from your Washington assignment, a TDY in Malawi that was quite significant and important to you. Do you want to start off mentioning that?

SISSON: Sure. It was an excellent TDY. The mission was great, the country was beautiful, and I saw an exciting reform program underway concerning democratization and liberalization of the agriculture sector. I did it from the Africa Bureau and it gave me a good sense of a transformation process underway and an impressive USAID effort. And that was important not only for my education and appreciation for what good stuff we were doing but it was key for me getting my next assignment. As I've mentioned, my wife and I at this point were a tandem couple, and we weren't getting anywhere finding an onward assignment together. And so, having done a TDY in Malawi, back in Washington I reached out to Cynthia Rozell, the mission director, saying I was stuck. There was an opportunity for Karen in the embassy but nothing obvious on USAID's bid list that looked at all like a fit for me. Cynthia offered to create a good position for me, and she made it happen. She did some sort of reorganization and created a slot that I could bid for and that's where I went. I am in her debt for that.

Q: And the State Department had a position for your wife in the embassy?

SISSON: Yes. It was clear cut for her. She became the economic and commercial officer, which was a very good assignment for her.

Q: Okay. So, this was 1994, I guess. Was your TDY in '94 or—?

SISSON: I think it must have been '93.

Q: Okay. But in '94 you went out and your job was? The job she created for you?

SISSON: My job title there was director for the office of education and institutional development. It was a general development officer position focusing on programs in the education sector and a growing portfolio in democracy and governance, including civil society. One of our best civil society projects was a grant to FINCA for microlending, where over a thousand women got microloans to support their businesses.

Both sides of that portfolio were interesting. The mission had great programs underway. Carol Peasley had been director before Cynthia, and she and her team made tremendous strides putting in place a reform program, both in agriculture and education, as well as supporting a new democratization process. And Cynthia came in after her and built on that.

My team was running a girls' primary education program to get more girls into school and stay there, working with the university law school, and an overseas participant training program. And then, more work on the democracy building side, such as supporting the election commission and building their capacity, the high court and building their capacity and working with the parliament, as well as some grants to civil society.

Q: And all this was done with the complete cooperation of the Malawi government?

SISSON: Yes. We had—by the time I arrived a huge political change had taken place and the dictator of something like thirty years, Kamuzu Banda, lost in an election and to many people's amazement, he actually honored the result and stepped down and a new government came in. But over time we realized old habits die hard because in the history of Malawi there had only been one political party and the people who came in, including the president and the leading politicians, had all been in Banda's party. So, they made some important changes but some other habits die hard.

Anyway, we had excellent cooperation with the government from the president's office on down.

Q: Was this program or these various pieces of the program carried out and implemented by direct hire AID staff or did you have a variety of contractors, NGOs or others implementing these programs?

SISSON: It was a mix. Direct hire Americans oversaw all programs but we had Personal Service Contractors (PSCs) and local staff (Foreign Service Nationals – FSNs) who often served as project managers. And depending on the project, they were implemented by partners who could have been NGOs, universities or contractors. We also had a substantial non-project assistance program, government-to-government grants -- basically foreign exchange budget support -- as the government carried out reforms. The major reform programs in the agriculture sector concerning, for instance, the marketing of tobacco and in the education sector concerning school fees, those programs were non-project assistance and USAID direct hire, assisted by other staff, were in dialogue with the Malawian government constantly about these reforms. Whereas project elements would be for more traditional implementation.

Let me give you an example—the girls' education program that I was involved with. We had a mix of both non-project assistance and project assistance. On the NPA side one key reform was the government dropping school fees that they charged families to send their children to school. And for a very poor family paying the fee for all their children was prohibitive. What they often did is just paid the fee for their oldest boys and not girls because for a variety of reasons, including poverty and cultural preferences, girls just didn't get sent to school. They were expected to stay home and take care of the family and the home. So, one of the key reforms was that the government agreed to drop the school fee for girls.

Q: And that was encouraged by USAID as part of the program? I mean, that was—

SISSON: Yes. This was an important achievement of the USAID program before I arrived.

And one rationale for it was the government would lose budget that it would have gained from the fees for sending girls to school so our budget support would compensate for that budget loss. That's an example on the budget support program side. But at the same time, we were working on girls' lack of access to school through project interventions. Two activities that were interesting to work on were revising the curriculum and community-level engagement. For instance, if you looked at all the textbooks they reinforced stereotypes. The pictures of the boys in the textbooks were boys who became airline pilots, lawyers, engineers, government civil servants, and they had jackets and ties on. All the pictures of the girls were carrying babies, water, firewood or working in the kitchen. So, we worked with the ministry of education to redo that. We learned that girls had no role models. Through survey work we asked, do you have a role model—they had none. So, we wrote pamphlets, the role model series, of girls who had become successful professionals, like Malawi's first woman airline pilot. And we wrote these with the ministry, we printed them and they went to every school in the country.

Q: This all sounds like very exciting and successful projects and programs, in which the non-project assistance was integrated with the project assistance. Were assessments and evaluations done which suggested that these programs were really working and that you were actually accomplishing what you had set out to do or what the Malawians had set out to do with your help?

SISSON: Yes. It was a well-studied project, maybe because it was seen as something of a pathbreaker for the continent of Africa. Bottom line is girls' enrollment increased over 50 percent in the space of a few years. The downside, which also came through with evaluations, is that the quality of education was a huge problem. And when the new government came into power they said, this is great. We're going to drop school fees for everybody, boys as well as girls. It was a campaign pledge, they got elected, they came into power. They dropped school fees for boys and then enrollment further exploded and there wasn't the capacity in the education system. And there was this terrible phenomenon of schools under trees because there just weren't enough classrooms. Education quality suffered. And our continuing investment in education, as well as the government's and other donors, focused on that -- community involvement in schools, fundamentals like building classrooms, teacher training, school management, parent teacher associations, dealing with school management issues.

Q: And you were there for, what, four years?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: And during this period would you say that many of these objectives, raising the quality of the educational opportunities and that kind of thing, were actually achieved ?

SISSON: It was too early to say. The access improvement information was clear, the quality problem was clear. Major investments and improving quality got underway but in terms of saying beyond input delivery whether there was impact, it was too early to say.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: I don't think that story was clear by the time I left.

Q: But the government, the ministry of education, the president and others, recognized that these deficiencies as reported by your evaluations and by what you were able to see, they understood this issue? I mean, you were not fighting with the government over these issues, they were in the kind of work you were trying to do and it was something they supported. Is that right?

SISSON: Absolutely. We had very close collaboration with the ministry of education. I worked with two ministers of education while I was there, both powerful politicians. Their lead civil servant, the principal secretary, was a man named Sam Safuli. He was one of my closest colleagues in the government, highly competent, and a good friend.

Q: And was this a program where there were other donors involved, the World Bank, the UN, other bilateral donors? Or was this a primary area of concentration for AID?

SISSON: Other donors were involved. I don't remember which ones, other than UNICEF, but we had a donor coordination group.

Q: And did that work? Did the coordination work? You weren't stepping over each other or—?

SISSON: It was good but I don't remember the details.

Q: Sure, right.

You know, the way you described this sounds like a kind of ideal AID country program where you— in cooperation with the government, support by them, interesting ideas, recognizing what was good and what needed to be strengthened. This is a very unusual story, right?

SISSON: Certainly, in my career, there have been successes and failures. This education program, called GABLE, Girls' Attainment in Basic Literacy and Education, was widely seen as an important program and relatively speaking, a very successful program. There was a lot of interest in it. And the government took pride in it. It was their program. They were the ones who made the reforms.

Q: Right.

SISSON: And they made further reforms, like dropping the school uniform requirement, which was even more expensive for families than the school fee. And they redid their curriculum and they went out into the communities. They did a lot of good things and they took pride in it. And in my career that's not unique but it was special. As I look back on my career, working on this program was one of the real highlights. It's one of the first times I was responsible for managing a program. And it was already underway and doing well before I came. We were working on the second version of it and improving it. The relationships were already strong before I came, thanks to mission leadership.

But I should also talk about a couple of things happening on the democracy side, which were also exciting. As I mentioned, they'd had elections. There was a lot of learning to take place about what really is democracy. There were a lot of misperceptions about this.

Q: On the part of AID people or of the government?

SISSON: Even the public. After the elections a lot of telephone poles started disappearing. They were holding up telephone lines and electric power lines. People just took the wood and used it in their homes. And you had all these dangling powerlines. And one of the explanations was, well, people thought with democracy they were now free to do whatever they wanted, including taking telephone poles.

And on an institutional level, which is where we got involved, we developed an exciting program with the parliament, starting with their speaker, and the implementing partner was NDI, National Democratic Institute. It had established very good collaboration with the parliament. After the election, the speaker asked if we would support him in holding a constitutional convention to rewrite the constitution for a newly democratic Malawi, including a parliament that is central for that democracy, and to lay a framework for the parliament to be independent and represent citizens. And we did it. We supported them in holding the convention. And the speaker was a real champion for the parliament becoming a more independent body.

Q: And this was with NDI support?

SISSON: Yes. NDI provided the support. They brought in experts about parliaments from around the world. We had somebody from the U.S. but also South Africa, Portugal, other countries. So, Malawi would get exposure to different options.

That was exciting. There were demonstrations in front of the conference hall as this convention was taking place and they were the first public demonstrations advocating for something in the history of the country. And even though I was still a pretty junior officer I am grateful to Cynthia not only for giving me the opportunity to come to Malawi in the first place, but for the ability to work directly with the speaker, the chief justice, same with the minister and principal secretary in education, chancellor of the university to help advance our programs and help them in their reform agendas.

Q: This was pretty early in AID's work on democracy, was it not?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: Did you have any trouble getting approval from Washington to work in this area? What kind of support did AID Washington give you in this?

SISSON: Very supportive. We were always looking for more budget. And after the Cold War ended and the democracy wave across Africa started, a rationale for giving so much aid to Malawi fell away because they were no longer a Cold War partner. And Banda fell as a sort of consequence of this transformation, but we still had Washington support. While strategically Malawi fell off the radar screen in Washington, it was a good reformer and still got considerable aid.

Q: Was this a good thing?

SISSON: In retrospect it was an excellent thing. Later in my career, as I went to higher political priority places, the Washington attention and the VIP visits were non-stop and often exhausting. But in Malawi, if we got a high-level visitor from Washington we were thrilled. Once, Hillary Clinton was going to come as first lady and we had everything all set up on the ground and then her aircraft couldn't land because the runway wasn't long enough. That was ridiculous. But the deputy secretary of state came.

But the VIP visit I remember the most was Senator Nancy Kassebaum's. And we chartered a plane and she traveled around with us. We took her to visit our girls' education program in the countryside. She was a real supporter of our programs.

Q: It sounds like you had a lot of fun when you were out there.

SISSON: I did. Malawi is called by many the "warm heart of Africa" and it really is. It's a beautiful country with mountains and a huge lake, and it's friendly and hospitable. Within some of our inner-circles we would call it Africa for beginners because it was pretty easy. It was a hardship post but it was not like Somalia or some of the other—

Q: What were your living conditions like?

SISSON: We had a nice house. Things worked most of the time. We were a couple hour drive from Lake Malawi, which was one of the world's largest lakes, beautiful. In a couple of hours, we were in the mountains. So, it was a gorgeous country and peaceful. And we had good Malawian friends and did a lot with them. So, it was a very nice assignment.

Q: And your wife enjoyed her job at the embassy?

SISSON: Yes, she did. We had two ambassadors while we were there, both excellent, Peter Chaveas first and then Ellen Shippy, and both have remained lifelong friends. And

they set a good tone for the embassy overall, and collaboration between USAID and the rest of the embassy was great. They were very supportive.

As economic/commercial and labor officer Karen had tremendous contacts. She did the usual reporting. There weren't a lot of American business interests in Malawi but a bit. But one thing she did that was really notable was during a labor dispute, and I recall it becoming a bit violent. And Karen got involved in mediating that conflict, bringing both sides to our house, had a big, well-lubricated lunch in our yard, got people talking to each other on neutral ground, and that helped calm things down.

Q: That's kind of an unusual role for a foreigner to play in a country, particularly an embassy official. Did she do this on her own initiative or was this something that she was asked to do?

SISSON: I don't remember. I'm sure it was with the full collaboration and understanding of the ambassador. Knowing her, she did the right checks beforehand.

Q: Well, that is a fascinating role for anyone to play and to succeed is terrific.

I guess we could talk all day about Malawi because it sounds like you really had these very interesting tasks to carry out and a receptive government to do that. any other final points on Malawi before we move on to the next stage of your career development?

SISSON: Just one. So, I mentioned the chief justice, Richard Banda, who I worked with on our judiciary program. His wife is Joyce Banda and we knew Joyce in her own right when she was an important women's leader in Malawi who started a number of organizations, including the National Association of Businesswomen that USAID supported. So, I was in Malawi '94 to '98 and she was one of our partners while I was there. I didn't have much contact with her but other people in our USAID team were very close to her. Fourteen years later she became the president of Malawi.

Q: Right.

SISSON: She became a politician after I left, then became Vice President and President, which was fantastic.

Q: I know she was a good friend of Carol Peasley's too and maintained contact with her through various troubles and tribulations that did hit in more recent years in Malawi.

SISSON: Absolutely.

Q: Well, okay, so you left Malawi in 1998 but then, according to your list here, you went for training to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. In those days, was it unusual for AID to send people for training of any kind, let alone to the Industrial College. How did that happen?

SISSON: Not so unusual. USAID at that time was already sending a couple of students every year to the Industrial College and a couple more to its sister college next door called the National War College. And these were generally up and coming officers usually at the Foreign Service-One level and USAID would send them for a year. And the tuition for those students was free. The Department of Defense didn't charge for those students to come but the quid pro quo was USAID also providing faculty for each of those colleges.

So, once I got promoted in Malawi to FS1 I was back in DC for something and had a meeting with Carol Peasley, who suggested I go to the National War College. I had no idea what that was. She explained what these colleges were, with very similar programs. I applied to both and got into the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, ICAF. It was later renamed Eisenhower College after its most famous graduate. And I went there for their master's degree program.

Q: But by this time, you already had a PhD, right?

SISSON: Yes. I'd wrapped that up years earlier as an IDI in Washington.

Q: So, you had an MA before or was this just you were collecting these degrees?

SISSON: (Laughs) I got a Masters on the way to getting my PhD at the Fletcher School.

Q: What did you get out of that, other than the master's degree, what did you get out of a year of training at that point? And by the way, if you were an FS-1 by the time you left Malawi or during your time in Malawi, that was a pretty rapid rise in your career. I mean, you'd only been in AID for what, ten years or something like that.

SISSON: It had been a little longer. I joined AID in 1983. So, by the time I was promoted I'd been in about fourteen years.

Q: But that still sounds good. But what did you get out of the Industrial College?

SISSON: A lot. It's a master's degree in national security strategy.

Let me tell you about my first morning at this college. I got in very early. I wanted to get there ahead of everybody else and check it out. It's on an army base in Washington called Fort McNair, which is the U.S. Army's oldest, still functioning army base in the world. It was the armory for the Union army during the Civil War. There's a lot of history there which I would enjoy regaling you with because it's fascinating. It's a beautiful place on the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers. And there's Generals Row of large, stately houses going down the main thoroughfare for top U.S. military leaders. And several buildings associated with National Defense University, including the Industrial College and National War College.

And my first day there, 7:00 in the morning, I was walking down the hallway and passed an enlisted man. I said, "Good morning. How are you?" And he barked at me, "Outstanding, sir." So, I thought, this is interesting. I then found my homeroom where my small team was going to be based, and I saw another enlisted man putting office supplies on each of the students' desks. He had a ruler, measuring the placement of each item on the desk. It was so precise, incredible. And this is when I realized this is going to be like another Foreign Service post where you need to learn about the culture. It was going to be really different.

And so, part of the experience was learning about U.S. military culture. But it was also cross-cultural. They wanted AID and other civilians there so military officers could learn about the civilian side. The program was about learning about the interagency process and higher-level policy and strategy making, national interests, strategic goals, resources, limited means, who achieves what. I'd had very little exposure to that before. It was valuable to learn about how the U.S. government approaches strategy, not just diplomacy, but also the role of the military, intelligence, Treasury, foreign aid, and how the private sector could be brought to bear on issues.

So, my curriculum was stuff I'd never focused on before. I learned all about the Civil War, walked around the Gettysburg Battlefield, and made friendships.

Q: Were you expected to prepare a paper by the end of the period? I've seen some examples of papers that people were asked to write on subjects that they wouldn't normally do in an AID environment.

SISSON: We normally did a short paper for each course, not a long semester term paper.

Q: And one other thing that people always say to me, and I was wondering whether this was true for you, too. Was the interaction with military people, not just in terms of the cultural things but whether these contacts that you made were useful throughout the rest of your career. I mean, whether there Were people that you met there and that were helpful in dealing with issues, you know, many years after your time at the college.

SISSON: Certainly, shortly afterwards, yes. Soon after the college I went to Kosovo and those relationships were helpful, where there was a large U.S. military presence. I vaguely recall this being the case later in Djibouti. But later on in my career, the U.S. military presence, even in Pakistan, was more limited so not necessarily. But for me, it gave me more understanding of what the U.S. military was about and I gained great respect for them. And respect for their commitment to the same kinds of values I've had as an American development diplomat, their willingness to put their lives on the line, and some of them really did. But also realizing that sometimes they approach problems differently. I traveled with my fellow students twice, once on a domestic trip and once to Europe and I also did a project with colonels from the army and air force on humanitarian assistance. I don't remember the details of what we did but it was clear that the way we approached the topic, including planning and evaluation, was different, and in some ways the mindset was different. And that was good.

For instance, the military, as standard practice, would do an after-action report. And they were readily available. But if you tried to get an evaluation of whatever out of USAID it was like going into a never-ending rabbit warren. And this drove my military colleagues nuts. And also, the way they approached an objective was different. It was fascinating. Anyway, I appreciated working with them on that project.

Q: Well, once again, it sounds like you were having fun. I think this may be just an aspect of your character, that you're able to capture the really interesting and most important facets of whatever you're involved in.

SISSON: Thank you. I'm not sure about that but I certainly look for what's interesting and appealing. And I will recognize what's not. And there are aspects, for instance of the AID bureaucracy involved in project management which are mind numbing.

Q: Right.

SISSON: And some people view that as great stuff and they're really great at it. That's not my mindset. It's other people's mindset and you have to have those people working on it because they do the job well and keep us out of trouble. But I would tend to shy towards the stuff that I understood was more important for me to focus on, particularly as I moved up in leadership.

Q: Well, I mean, if the alternative is getting steeped in the bureaucratic structures I'm glad you made the right choice. (Sisson laughs)

Okay, so what happens next? You come out of the Industrial College and are you given alternatives to choose from or are you basically assigned to your next job, which was as the deputy director in the European bureau.

SISSON: So, that's what I bid on and got. I had my sights on becoming a deputy mission director and someday a mission director. That was my career objective.

And going to a school like ICAF sets people up well for that and that's what Carol had in mind when she suggested I consider it, because it's a great professional growth opportunity, a director and a deputy director in senior management are working across a broader range of the interagency process, a broader range of considerations wherever you are. That's what a master's degree like this helps you prepare for.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: So, after ICAF, USAID's director of human resources wanted me to be deputy mission director in the Dominican Republic, and I thought that would be great. However, the mission director picked someone else. I am forever grateful that she did not take me for that job since that led to my working with Gloria Steele for a few months, and to my next assignment. As Gloria's deputy, I focused on the aftermath of the Kosovo war in '99

and worked with her excellent team to quickly develop new USAID programs in Kosovo and neighboring countries affected by the conflict.

Q: Was this after the Dayton Accords?

SISSON: Yes. The Dayton Accords for Bosnia were finalized in 1995, four years earlier. The Kosovo conflict, between ethnic Albanians and Serbs and NATO driving Serb forces out of Kosovo, took place in '99.

So, I finished ICAF in the spring of '99 and went to work with Gloria and her team to quickly design projects in this new environment in the Balkans as the war had just ended. And in September of '99 they sent me out on a TDY to Kosovo with the idea of me becoming deputy mission director. And I went out for what was supposed to be a month TDY and I was acting director for almost that entire time. Kosovo became the most transformative assignment for my career—

Q: Why?

SISSON: First of all, it got me into mission leadership. It got me into a different kind of world of post-conflict that I had not been exposed to before, a country that was a top political priority to the United States and NATO. And a really messy interagency situation. I mentioned that in Malawi things were harmonious, everybody worked together well, and we were happy if somebody from Washington came to visit. It was kind of the opposite in Kosovo.

And it's because it really mattered for U.S. foreign policy. I got pushed into the deep end of the swimming pool barely knowing how to swim. And we were dealing with a lot of issues, like setting up a mission, hiring people.

Q: Had we ever done work in Kosovo before? I mean, it was all part of Yugoslavia, I suppose, but—

SISSON: Yes. We'd had limited programs reaching down into Kosovo, managed out of the USAID mission in Belgrade, which was closed by the time I arrived. When I came on TDY at the beginning of September there were four FSNs working on programs, a few others on the logistics side.

Q: And that's all?

SISSON: A couple of Washington TDYers. There was an OTI (Office of Transition Initiatives) program going, quite robust, an OFDA (Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance) program because there was a massive returning refugee issue, and me. And I remember sharing this little room with three FSNs and I was the acting director. And Craig Buck had been assigned to be director while he was still the director in Bosnia, having built a program in that very difficult place. And he was the incoming director in

Kosovo and he'd come earlier that summer and gotten some things going, and he came for a week during my TDY and then returned to Bosnia.

Q: Did he come back?

SISSON: Yes, he did. During his week in September in Kosovo he asked if I would be his deputy and I readily agreed. I forget what other marching orders he gave me but in general, he was good to work for. He was clear and delegated responsibility while I was acting director, and he encouraged me to make decisions.

During this month, I started to learn a lot about USAID working in such an environment, what is OTI and what are they doing, what is OFDA doing. Some fantastic NGOs working on the ground, like International Rescue Committee. But I also saw a lot of chaos, donors tripping over each other, NGOs tripping over each other, the military getting ahead of civilian aid agencies, making promises that were unrealistic, tensions between USAID and State, certainly tension between us and Treasury, where we both wanted to do the same programs, and tremendous tensions on the Kosovar side. It was a traumatized place when I landed. Virtually all the ethnic Albanians had fled what was shaping up to be a Serbian genocide. And they quickly returned after the NATO campaign and found thousands of their loved ones dead or missing, their homes destroyed and their businesses gone. So, in many meetings I had with Kosovars, there was a lot of crying and just utter shock. And we would have all of these VIPs flying in, even in these early days, and I remember, we had a delegation from the American Chamber of Commerce coming. For all of three hours. So, we lined up a meeting or two, and then we had lunch with business leaders. And all that happened in this lunch was the business leaders cried and complained about everything they lost. They were not ready to think much ahead about what the Chamber could do to help. The Chamber wanted to help but it was hard to have a conversation about that. And you can't build up a relationship and a dialogue during a three-hour visit.

Q: Sure.

SISSON: We had lots of one-day wonders and many of them happened on the weekends. This happened throughout my tour. Finally, I complained to Washington and asked why these visitor's multiple-day trips in several Balkan countries always scheduled Kosovo on the weekend. You probably know their answer. They replied that they knew we had nothing else to do besides work so it made no difference.

Q: These are not people you invited to come in. They decided on their own to come, this is an end of hostilities kind of visit?.

SISSON: It was largely Washington-generated.

This was a high political profile foreign aid priority at the time. There were a bunch of presidential coordinators for different things. And some of them drove us nuts as they were going around the Balkans making promises and deals, not just in Kosovo, but say

they'd make a stop in Montenegro and say, "We're going to do this," and then—anyway, it was not as well coordinated.

At the higher-level policy level, I came to appreciate the policies were well thought through, but on the assistance side and implementation side, it was a work in progress, building the coordination. And over time we did.

Q: But how many years were you there? Three years?

SISSON: Not quite. So, I did the TDY in September, which suddenly got extended to October. And then, I went back on a long-term assignment at the beginning of the year for two and a half years.

At the end of my September TDY, I was on my way to the airport to go home, finish up with Gloria in DC for a couple of months, and then transfer to Kosovo. And on the way to the airport, I got a call from the chief of mission telling me not to fly home but to come to the embassy immediately. Which I did. And I'll never forget this. When I came into his office, he said, "Andy, sit down. You are going to shit in your pants." (Shakow laughs) And maybe we'll edit this in the—

Q: No, no, no, no. Don't edit this.

SISSON: And he said there was a terrorist threat targeting the USAID office in Pristina and we needed to move it that week. So, we did. I got together the few Americans who were there, including the head of OFDA, the head of OTI, and others working on our team. I had never experienced anything like this, a terrorist threat and needing to move an AID office immediately. And I'll never forget what the OTI director, an old Balkans hand, said, "Damn, this is the seventh time."

Q: You were saying you just had a little—

SISSON: I was in one room in a house and other people, like OTI and OFDA – were in other rooms. But we had armored vehicles, generators, IT systems with computers, files, and furniture. We moved everything in four days.

Q: And you found another place to put it?

SISSON: We had a couple of houses on a hill nearby that we were planning to turn into an office the following year.

Q: And in fact, did terrorists attack your—

SISSON: No. No, they did not. I remember there was a suspicious looking car parked out front of our office that week. So, I asked the chief of mission about that, and he laughed and said that was one of the good guys. (Shakow laughs)

Q: You were able, despite the complete chaos at the beginning and fear and problems like that, to get something done? Did you learn some lessons that you could convey to others and use yourself in future years in terms of how to address an impossible situation of this kind?

SISSON: Yes. One was this experience of moving our office. This was the first time I gained a really up close and personal appreciation for the experience and talents of colleagues working in war zones or post-conflict zones that I'd never encountered before, people who were just great at it. One of the guys working with us had been a colonel in the Army Rangers. He was comfortable in this environment. The OTI lead, the OFDA people, one of whom had been a Navy Seabee. Also, our small number of local staff were unfazed by this. They remained positive and focused. It just gave me profound respect for other sides of our operations, that you need to get to know who you're working with and appreciate them and take advantage of their experience and talent. I was lucky.

Another was just this whole interagency food fight kind of stuff and how important it is to manage that. And I think my year at the Industrial College was helpful because it got me working with the military and with the intel world and other students and faculty and that was my first real exposure to that, which was useful.

Do you want to hear more about the Kosovo tour because it turned out to be pretty productive?

Q: Yes.

SISSON: So, I went back in my new formal role as deputy mission director in January of 2000, but when I arrived I was acting director. It was winter. There was no electric power in the capital when I arrived. I was briefed by our EXO (Executive Officer), who was already on the ground, and he told me about our staff who were sick and that we had only two days of generator fuel left. And it was dark, cold, icy and snowy. The conditions were hard. But we had a very robust program of humanitarian support underway and the coordination got better quickly.

When I crossed the border by land coming up from the Skopje, Macedonia airport we spent hours at the one border crossing. And not only were civilians and private people getting held up but all of the humanitarian relief as well. OFDA worked with NATO to redesign that border crossing so that emergency aid could bypass all of that. That was a great fix.

We got a lot done. One of the things I really liked about working with Craig Buck is he was focused on the mission, clarity of objectives and achieving results. And building the right team to do that in a difficult work environment. People who would be willing to work seven days a week and who had the stamina and the sense of purpose to just—to work hard and do it. And to a large measure we did. We had a strong team. And just to brag a bit about a few of the things we accomplished. We took the lead in creating a ministry of finance. It was called at first the Central Fiscal Authority but later the

ministry of finance. We recruited through a contract the first minister, who had been the director of the budget of the government of Australia. And his deputy—

Q: But was he a Kosovar?

SISSON: No, he was an Australian.

Q: Oh, okay.

SISSON: I'll explain. And the deputy minister, so to speak, who we recruited under our program, had been the budget director of the state of Washington. But their job wasn't just to put in place taxation systems but to train Kosovars. So, they did both. The Kosovar put in place became the understudy minister of finance and then he took over. I should add that we worked with the Treasury Department on this program. If I recall correctly, USAID recruited the director from Australia and Treasury was involved in recruiting the deputy from Washington state. We then put in place—

Q: Over what period—how long did that take? A year?

SISSON: A year or two. So, within a two-year period, from 2000 to mid-2002, at the end of 2002 there was a taxation system in place earning revenue, customs agents recruited, trained and collecting import duties, and then a value-added tax. Kosovo became self-sufficient on its recurrent budget.

Not on its investment budget, such as rebuilding roads. That was different.

Q: Right.

SISSON: We were involved in setting up the Central Bank. We helped create a framework for a private banking system with public supervision, and staff from our Federal Reserve helped with this. This was different than the socialist days where there were only state-owned banks, which the Kosovar Albanians didn't trust because their bank deposits had been lost under the old regime.

So, the Europeans supported the creation of the first private bank. We supported the creation of the second bank called the American Bank of Kosovo with the first ATM machine in Kosovo. And then, we sold it to an Austrian bank and used the proceeds from that to establish a foundation to send Kosovar kids to the U.S. for university study. We rebuilt a lot of community-level infrastructure that directly benefited, we estimate about a quarter of the population of the province. Admittedly, it's a small place. It's two million people, the size of Connecticut, so it's easier to rack up numbers like that than in a place like Somalia.

Q: Yes, except that you were starting from scratch. I mean, the idea that you would have to do all these things with people imported from other parts of the world, that's not a

typical AID program but you learned lots of lessons about how to operate in one of these no-longer-unique situations, I guess.

SISSON: The key word to describe it is urgency. There was a lot—I mentioned how traumatized Kosovo was when we got there. There was violence. The ethnic Albanians had found all of their—many of their family members killed and missing and homes destroyed. Well, some went on revenge. And killed many Serbs and others who they saw supporting the Serbs. It was ugly.

Q: Did you see this kind of violence going on around you?

SISSON: I did not actually see killing take place but I heard gunfire at night and saw villages that were recently destroyed, Albanian villages, Serbian villages, Roma villages. Homes that were burned out. Mass graves. And people were not interested in peace and ethnic reconciliation. So, we were really trying to calm things down, build a sort of sense of normalcy where everybody thought it was safe, not just for the Albanians who were ecstatic. They loved us. They thought we—they credited us with stopping a genocide. But the Serbs were extremely fearful. So, we were trying to help build a Kosovo with the Kosovars and all of the Europeans and other donors that was a Kosovo for everybody. That was hard.

I worked with colleagues in the embassy to identify moderate Serb leaders, political leaders that we could support with AID programs such as rebuilding schools or water systems or improving local media in their communities—with an objective of those local Serb leaders encouraging their communities to participate in a multi-ethnic Kosovo. And one metric of that was their voting in the elections. We set up an election system with impressive work from IFES and—

Q: IFES is?

SISSON: The International Foundation for Electoral Systems. And we were very involved in running the first election with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), but after that Kosovars gradually took over. And they were free and fair. And in those towns where we reached out to moderate Serb leaders, sometimes we saw greater Serbian voting in those elections. So, on the political side participation in the elections was one metric.

I talked about the sense of urgency. One difference was we had a greater sense of urgency than the Europeans. We wanted Kosovo to stand up on its own two feet led by Kosovars running ministries, becoming more self-reliant.

Q: And the Europeans were less interested in this?

SISSON: They wanted to go slower because they didn't want it to become—they weren't ready for it to be an independent country. There were other political issues they were dealing with and they didn't want lots of breakaway provinces becoming independent

countries and fragmenting Europe. As a result, there was tension. We wanted to go fast and we found ways of going fast. We would not—

Q: Because we wanted to get out of there?

SISSON: We wanted to, not necessarily get out of there but reduce our presence and have Kosovo, like in any longer-term development program, reduce dependency, be self-sustaining with host country people leading. So, we found ways of moving fast. We didn't just start a project from scratch with full and open competition. We would do buy-ins to Washington programs we could do quicker. We would find ways to quickly award grants. It wasn't unheard of for us to get an NGO proposal on a Friday, review it on Saturday, write a decision memo on Sunday and Craig would sign it on Monday. It was possible to go too fast, such as one NGO submitting a proposal they'd used for another country and neglecting to remove the name of that other country.

Q: You didn't have to go to Washington?

SISSON: No, except probably at a more general, preliminary level.

We got great support from Washington. Gloria Steele was key for us in the bureau. So, we could move quickly. We had a strong team, some of whom had already worked in the Balkans. It was successful in rebuilding infrastructure, it was successful in the humanitarian side and in helping stand up some economic institutions and policies. On the DG (Democracy and Governance) side, certainly on the election systems the Kosovars did well there. We supported the media. This was another area where we had tension with the Europeans, where they wanted to support the public broadcaster, the state-owned television, and we wanted to support the private outlets and competition. And we supported the private outlets. There were some tremendous, brave Kosovar journalists that we worked with. Aferdita Kelmendi, who was the head of one of the television stations, was a real pioneer.

While I was there, for the first time there was an ethnic Albanian elected president. And soon after, the new prime minister was the first who was an ethnic Albanian. He was a medical doctor who'd been a mayor in the city of Mitrovica, who we knew from OTI. He was involved in community engagement in OTI's work. And he became prime minister and he had courage. Late in my tour, when I was acting director, he asked if I would join him to visit a Serbian enclave, which was a first. And he actually came in my vehicle, an armored vehicle and with embassy security, so that made a statement going into this enclave. But it was the first-ever ethnic Albanian prime minister going into a Serbian enclave. And I asked him on the ride there, what he expected to happen. And he replied he didn't know. And we sat down with the local Serbian leaders and they were angry and complained. And the Prime Minister listened and spoke to them in their language. At one point he talked about what the U.S. was doing to help. And I whispered to him that the Europeans should also get credit for what they were doing, which was more on reconstruction. And he whispered back to me, "but I trust the Americans."

Q: Well, that was a nice and unusual tribute to you and to the work there.

Have you kept up with any of the Kosovars or any of the—

SISSON: Yes.

Q: —and do you know, twenty-two years later, if anything still survives of what you began?

SISSON: Of the program, it's gone through many iterations but there is still a robust USAID program in Kosovo. And I haven't been following it closely but I'm sure it's doing well. I saw significant signs of progress when I returned to Kosovo on a personal trip five years after I finished my tour. I was pleased to see how much calmer Kosovo had become, without such an obvious NATO presence. Most checkpoints were gone and there was freedom of movement. I think the U.S. played an important role for that, and Kosovo has been relatively peaceful since.

Since I left, I've kept in touch with several FSNs. A few years after finishing in Kosovo, I brought one on TDY to Kenya to help on our Somalia programs. She is one of the best FSNs I ever worked with, and I nominated her for USAID's FSN of the Year Award, which she won.

There's one other connection that I'd like to mention. In my first days in Kosovo I was invited to the home of a Kosovar family by one of our local staff, and met his wife and their three teenage children. They were recently returned refugees experiencing tremendous loss after the conflict. All three children were exceptional in their own ways. I got to know their sixteen-year old daughter best, who was interested in foreign affairs and a career in diplomacy. When our chief of mission said he was retiring to become president of Graceland University in Iowa, he asked embassy staff to identify Kosovars for full scholarships. I proposed this teenager, and she went. She was an honors student there, and later she went to Harvard Kennedy School for a masters. Back home in the government, she played a key role in establishing Kosovo as a newly independent country. And at age 30 she became their first ambassador to Latin America. She has quite a story. In September, I'm bringing her to the University of North Carolina, where I teach a course, to give several talks. I'm greatly looking forward to it.

Q: That's really terrific. It appears that in each of your posts you've maintained relationships that last even to today, which is a very nice aspect of your career. The difference between, as you've described it, Malawi and Kosovo couldn't be greater but in each case you managed to find a way to accomplish quite a lot.

SISSON: In Kosovo, it was my first real exposure to running an AID mission. And I had a great master in Craig Buck. He was a very capable decision-maker with a vision. And I learned a lot from him in putting together a program and staying focused. And the importance of recruitment. And much more. And those lessons have stayed with me in future jobs.

Q: In future jobs did you have to hire somebody out of the Australian government to—

SISSON: No.

I don't recall ever doing that again. We would bring in people from all nationalities to help out but not in line management roles. Kosovo was exceptional—the UN was the government when I was there. I'm talking about setting up a ministry of finance or a Central Bank, and the security was from NATO. Overall, the government was the UN with four different pillars led by different donors or different entities such as the European Union and OSCE. And then, the challenge was well, when are the Kosovars really going to have the capability to take this all over? I was in charge of negotiating a bilateral agreement, a first-ever bilateral agreement with the host government in Kosovo and that host government was the UN. (Shakow laughs) Now, imagine how bureaucratic that was. And one of the hardest challenges was the rapid turnover. While I was there a typical State Department tour was typically six months. That was the assignment, six months. And most turned over at six months. USAID, I think it was a year but everybody stayed at least two. We just stayed. Three chiefs of mission while I was there. Two DCMs. And on the military side, we worked a lot with U.S. military. Kosovo was divided up into five sectors and the U.S. had responsibility for the southeast sector, with a general commanding 5,000 troops. We had several American generals while I was there. So, it felt like we were always getting to know new people and briefing them. And we established relationships.

Q: And how often did the UN change its—

SISSON: Well, getting now to negotiating this bilateral agreement with the UN. Their lawyers kept changing. So, we were thrashing it out with one and then he left, and a new one came in who didn't like everything in the draft, so we'd renegotiate. And that was hard.

Q: The idea of doing this, in a totally foreign country and the people you're negotiating with come from the New York office or somewhere else in the UN system. It's just mind-boggling in terms of what a special, different kind of situation it is. And in the middle of all this your wife was there too, obviously. I mean, that—

SISSON: You're right. Actually, the UN lawyer who finally reached an agreement with us was from Malta.

My wife had a more prominent role than I did. She was chief of the political/economic section. And by virtue of being a senior person in the American embassy and our tremendous relationship with the Kosovar Albanians, she was in on a lot of meetings with the president and other senior political leaders. Let's say some VIP came to town or the chief of mission on his own was meeting the president, often Karen would go. She was on the phone with the president's advisors often. So, she was better-known publicly than me, the USAID deputy director. And one clue I got about that was while we were also

running the USAID program in Montenegro. I was on a trip there with one of our FSNs from Kosovo. We were in Montenegro, working on something. And one night, as we were walking back from dinner, she just asked me in her direct way, "Andy, what is it like to be married to somebody who is more important than you are?"

Q: (Laughs) I'm sure you had a very good answer for this person. But—

SISSON: I tried! My wife did well there.

Q: And she, unlike the other people in the embassy, stayed that full time that you were there, right? So—

SISSON: Yes. She came a few months after me but she was there over two years as well. And that was fabulous for me personally because this was an unaccompanied post. No spouses, no kids, no kids coming for the summer to get a summer internship at the embassy. You're not allowed to have a vehicle. You're not supposed to be going out of town at night. I was one of the few people with a spouse.

We had a more normal existence than many. We would have colleagues over for dinner and they were kind of dumbfounded that we lived something like a normal existence.

And she played another very important role. I mentioned that there could be real tensions between the State Department and USAID, such as over who's going to do what program. For instance, who was going to take the lead in a new rule of law program. And somebody from State in Washington would want to take charge. Working with her behind the scenes we could iron a lot of that out, take the temperature down. That was great.

Q: Yes. Very lucky, very lucky set of circumstances. Well chosen over many years before to find Karen and to—

SISSON: Absolutely.

Q: Or for her to find you, you know.

SISSON: It was great.

And we were lucky there. And as I mentioned, we had, in Kosovo, a small, fabulous team of Americans and we quickly built up a Kosovar team that was very strong. And everybody wanted to work for the Americans so we had tremendous choice and got very highly-qualified people. I enjoyed working with them.

Q: Locally hired?

SISSON: Locally hired.

Talking about the quality of the people, I mentioned this sixteen-year-old who went to college in Iowa and became an ambassador. The person my wife proposed to go to Iowa was her admin assistant in the political section. She went to Iowa as well. She became minister of justice. So, these were very talented people.

Q: How many Americans did you have on the staff of the AID mission?

SISSON: Eight American direct hire, seventeen expatriate PSCs. And we built up to eighty FSNs.

Q: And you were covering Montenegro too during this whole period?

SISSON: The first year or so. Which was fascinating. And then, when Milošević fell and we reengaged with Serbia, USAID restarted a mission there and they took responsibility for the Montenegro program. Let me say—go ahead. You want to—

Q: No, no, no. Go ahead.

SISSON: Well, our highest political objectives were building peace in Kosovo and the Balkans, and reestablishing calm and normalcy and ideally peaceful relations between Kosovo and Serbia. Serbia also went through their own trauma. They'd lost to NATO. They were humiliated. So, one thing we worked on was electric power cooperation between the two. And there was actually a delegation of Serbian civil servants that came to Kosovo to negotiate with the Kosovars on this electric power distribution. This was a big deal -- they're actually talking. And our embassy in Pristina and our embassy in Belgrade saw things differently. One might say we were sympathetic to the Kosovar point of view and they were sympathetic to the Serbian point of view.

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Q. So, I'm glad that we are now back here for Session 4 on August 30. Why don't you pick up again on that story you were telling about the electric power issue in a joint adventure in Serbia and in Kosovo.

SISSON: Good. One of the most serious problems within Kosovo was extremely unreliable electric power. And previously, before its breakup, Yugoslavia had one grid for electricity sharing. That got disrupted, obviously, by the conflict. So, we were working with the Europeans and others to improve electric power supply, such as rehabilitating the electric power plant near the capital city. But in addition, improved or restored electricity distribution between Kosovo and Serbia seemed like a good opportunity, and we were supporting a dialogue where the Serb electric power officials would meet the Kosovars to discuss this. This was a good opportunity not only for dealing with the electric power problem but also beginning a dialogue between the Kosovars and Serbs in an effort to establish more normal relations between the two.

So, when Milošević was in The Hague, at the tribunal, we had an opportunity to restore diplomatic relations with Serbia. The U.S. assigned an ambassador there, reestablished our embassy there, and with them we were promoting this electricity dialogue. And a Serbian electric power team came to Kosovo to discuss trade of electricity and then they went back. What was funny for me was to see our embassy's reporting on that meeting and to see U.S. Embassy Belgrade's reporting on that meeting. And if you would read the two different cables you'd have no idea it was the same meeting.

Q: Did your wife write the cable?

SISSON: (Laughs) No. She did not. That would have been done by somebody else, I think probably somebody in USAID who worked in the sector.

But I don't remember. At any rate, it kind of reminded me of looking back at Kosovo's history, and there was an ethnic Albanian version and an ethnic Serbian version, which also differed greatly.

Q: Did they come to the same conclusion that the two embassies reported on this?

SISSON: Well, in terms of there being useful dialogue, I'm sure they did. I don't remember the specifics.

Q: But did this project actually get underway while you were still there?

SISSON: Oh, yes. We were focusing on Kosovo's electric power supply with the EU -- diagnosing the wide range of problems in an ancient coal-fired plant and then working on financing the import of replacement parts and providing technical assistance to the people running the utility. That was underway while I was still there.

In terms of really sorting out the electric power supply, that took a lot longer and ultimately there were improvements. Our local FSN expert working on this over the years at times kept me apprised of the progress, and finally there were major breakthroughs with the power plant.

Q: Even after you left you were kept apprised of what was going on?

SISSON: To a degree. Certainly, there were local staff that I've stayed in touch with over the years and one of them kept me posted on this because he was proud of what they achieved.

Q: I think, it's been clear throughout our discussions so far, and we still have quite a ways to go, that you have a remarkable ability to keep in touch with people that you worked with in each of these countries. Your rolodex of your friends in all the places that you served is quite current and I hope these people are still alive, some of them. But in any case, it is a remarkable tribute to your ability to work very closely with people and to

maintain those relationships over many, many years. I don't think that is necessarily common among AID staff.

SISSON: Well, thank you for that. Actually, at times I've lamented not keeping up better contact. But there are certainly some who I've stayed in touch with, and I've really appreciated that.

Q: Each of these places where you have been working present very unusual and difficult circumstances. Is there anything else at this stage on Kosovo or shall we move on to your next post?

SISSON: A couple of other things. I don't remember how much I told you about Montenegro.

Q: You didn't really say very much about Montenegro so please go ahead.

SISSON: It was fascinating. We really enjoyed working there. And while Milošević was still in power we could not work openly in Montenegro because it was still under the security thumb of Belgrade. But we could work quietly there and so we had—this was interesting—our office was just over the border in Dubrovnik, Croatia and it was a spectacular setting. And we would drive a car to the border, walk across this sort of no man's strip, and then get picked up in an unmarked car on the other side and go at some fantastic speed along the beautiful coast and up into Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, and have meetings and work on economic reform. Because unofficially, many of the Montenegrins wanted to work with us, including a lot of their political leadership. And then, once Milošević fell, things really opened up and we could establish an office in Podgorica. And one of the guys we hired as an AID representative had been my supervisor many years earlier when I was working in REDSO, West Africa, which was another good example of what comes around.

Q: Who was that?

SISSON: Howard Handler.

And before him there was Bill Gelman.

And so, we worked closely with the Montenegrins on economic reform, and also on promoting small business development.

Q: Were you able in the period before Milošević fell and while you were doing this kind of surreptitious crossing of the border and so on, were you able to actually spend AID money in Montenegro?

SISSON: Not through direct grants to the government but through grants to an NGO, for instance, to work on entrepreneurship or for bringing in technical advisors. That we could do. But we didn't do any government-to-government.

Q: Were these international NGOs or local NGOs?

SISSON: I believe they were international.

Q: Okay. So, there was no traceable granting of funding to Montenegro itself. When AID was listing the countries in which it worked, I wonder, if, on this grand dashboard of listings did it list Montenegro as a place that—

SISSON: I don't recall. That's a great question.

Q: I don't know. It'd be interesting.

SISSON: So, one funny story. I was with a local project manager, a Montenegrin, involved in our small business project, and we dropped him off at the parking lot so he could drive home. And he had a really nice car. And the entire large parking lot was filled with new, nice cars. And he smiled, he said, "I know what you're thinking. You're wondering how can I afford a car like this?" And I said, "You're right." And he said, "In this parking lot ninety percent of the cars are stolen from Western Europe." (Shakow laughs) And he explained how the market worked, that you could place an order, say, I want a blue Volkswagen Jetta. (Shakow laughs) And if it came with papers, then you paid more. So, that was informative.

Q: And the price of these cars was far below its original value?

SISSON: Absolutely. In Kosovo the same thing was happening. There was a market for this in Pristina.

Q: Why didn't you get your car that way too?

SISSON: That's not something that an American diplomat's going to do.

Q: (Laughs) Okay.

SISSON: So, just being careful.

Q: Yes, okay.

SISSON: And working with the Montenegrin government officials there, especially when we didn't have an office, was interesting.

We did it in coffee shops or hotels and got a lot done.

Q: Whose idea was that? It's a model, I suppose, for other places in the world because this is not the only place where this kind of situation exists now or has existed in the past.

SISSON: I don't remember the initial establishment of this. But we did it hand in glove with the State Department. Our office across the border in Dubrovnik, we shared that with the State Department. When I traveled into Montenegro I went with the number two from that office. So, all of this was planned, done together. But the leadership for our program and operational approach came from our mission director in Kosovo, Craig Buck.

Q: Right. But I wonder whether initially—you don't know whether some of these international NGOs had people in Montenegro and they were the ones that maybe initiated it with the State Department?

SISSON: Oh. I don't know. But some of these organizations were working in Yugoslavia before it fell apart. And they had activities in different places.

Q: Right.

SISSON: So, for a program like private sector development, that's quite possible. But for our economic policy reform program with the government, we brought in advisors through U.S.-based contracts.

Q: Okay. Any last thoughts before you leave Montenegro, you leave Kosovo after all this, these exciting times you had there?

SISSON: Just as a conclusion, I'm proud of what we were able to do in Kosovo. We helped establish some economic institutions, such as the Central Bank and the finance ministry, that were central to creating a market-led economy. So, for example, a banking system with private banks, even an ATM machine, a taxation system where by the time I left they were collecting taxes and covering all of their own recurrent budget. Those are examples of success. Also, the province was calming down. We were seeing elections that the Kosovars were running and except in the most hardline district Serbs were participating in limited numbers in the elections and in the government. So, there was quite a bit of progress. And I think the U.S. worked well with the international community, other governments and civil society, both international and local. The media sector was advancing with our help and the EU's. I think this was good. And studies on U.S. experience with reconstruction and nation-building, certainly a study done by the Rand Corporation under James Dobbins, discussed Kosovo as, relatively speaking, a successful example.

Q: That's great. Are there particular international organizations or NGOs that helped on the banking and tax work and other areas? I presume these were not direct hire USAID staff.

SISSON: Right. We had—we did have a couple of American direct hire staff who were masterminds of these programs and provided close supervision, designing scopes of work, recruitment, management. It was an intensive involvement on the USAID side. But

you're right, we did hire firms, often through some sort of indefinite quantity contract so that we could get them onboard quickly.

I don't remember the name but they were a widely used and widely respected firm. And after a couple of changes, an outstanding chief of party and a very strong team.

Q: Good. Okay. So, this is now 2002, if I have it correctly.

SISSON: Yes.

Q: And what happened? You had a month or so somewhere and did you go back to Washington and then you went to become a regional director in East Africa. Is that right?

SISSON: Yes. I had about a month of home leave back in the States and then I went out to Nairobi. And I was thrilled to get that job. It was one of USAID's largest missions, certainly in Africa at the time, and to go from deputy director to mission director in a complex mission and program like REDSO in East Africa was a big jump for me. And I am grateful the Africa Bureau took a chance on me because I had not been tested as a director. So, I went out there in the summer of 2002 and it was a fabulous assignment.

Q: So, it was fabulous because of what?

SISSON: I had a great job with a really interesting range of work. My wife had an excellent job with the State Department which also made life good. And—

Q: So, let me just interrupt you, sorry, I mean, that kind of coordination between State and AID you had been finding difficult in earlier years but you were able, within a short period of time, to arrange for these Nairobi assignments, for both State and AID. Was there a story to that?

SISSON: It was hard to work out. We talked to a lot of people, but I don't remember the details. The bidding process for senior management positions in USAID is different from the normal system. And on the State Department side my wife worked it hard. The advantage of a large post like Nairobi, though, is there are more options for good positions.

She ended up being the U.S. Permanent Representative to two UN agencies whose world headquarters are in Nairobi. One is the UN Environment Program and the other is UN Habitat.

Q: So, it provided something that was not too distant from the kind of work you were doing?

SISSON: Yes. She had a good job and I was working in a very interesting mission at a very interesting time.

Q: So, go ahead and describe what you thought were the key elements there. And of particular interest is how you were able to promote programs with a development impact at the same time as you were dealing with humanitarian issues for disaster relief.

SISSON: Good. So, our office, REDSO/ESA, Regional Economic Development Service Office for East and Southern Africa, eventually got shortened to USAID/East Africa. But the REDSO model had been around for quite a while in Africa and the traditional mandate of a regional office is to provide services to bilateral programs in the region, and that was our first mandate. And we supported twenty bilateral missions in East and Southern Africa, such as technical services in agriculture, environment, contracting, and legal. My first encounter with REDSO was when I was an IDI in Mogadishu, Somalia, and REDSO sent people to help us and I made a lifelong friend there with the REDSO environmental advisor. So, that's the first mandate, to provide as good customer service as possible to a bunch of demanding mission directors around the region.

Q: Did you have these technical experts on the AID payroll or did you simply arrange for contracts with other organizations and you hired them?

SISSON: They were on our staff. Could be Foreign Service, a personal service contractor, an FSN. Some of our local staff were technical experts who'd also travel around and provide help. We could also, if necessary, call on Washington for help or hire a consultant. But the bulk of it came from our team. So, for instance, we had three American lawyers and one Kenyan lawyer. We had a couple of Food for Peace officers. We had several people on our health, agriculture and environment teams. We had people working on conflict and peace and stability. It was a strong team. And so, our first mandate was services.

The second was running regional cross-border programs and classic ones were in trade. And we worked with African regional organizations. We had a few main counterparts there, COMESA (the Common Market for East and Southern Africa, IGAD (the Intergovernmental Authority on Development), which was based in Djibouti. There was a regional health organization based in Arusha, Tanzania. My closest regional counterpart was Joe Mwencha, who was the director of COMESA. He was based in Lusaka. Fabulous leader, trying to open up borders, build economic cooperation across the region. Together we collaborated with USTR (United States Trade Representative) to promote trade between African countries and the U.S. In fact, Joe Mwencha testified before the U.S. Congress on the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act. He was smart, eloquent and just a terrific counterpart.

Q: Were you able to spend AID money regionally?

SISSON: We could. We could make grants to them. Such as a grant to the African Union for doing a variety of things.

Q: Which they then used regionally?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: But you made one grant. It wasn't as if you had, you know, $10,000 that you divided into three country pieces.

SISSON: Correct.

But we would work separately with the different organizations.

Q: Right. But the organizations are the ones that are operating regionally. You are making a grant to an organization.

SISSON: Correct.

So, depending on the organization they would be strong in managing our funds or they'd need help.

So, at any rate, working on these regional programs, addressing regional priorities was our office's second mandate and a very interesting one.

And the third was being the mission for bilateral programs where it wasn't feasible to have much or any USAID presence on the ground because of insecurity or it was too new or small a program. So, the three that I worked on from the beginning were Somalia, which was in heavy conflict, Burundi, which had a civil war going on, and Southern Sudan, which was in a civil war with the north for independence. We had no staff in Somalia. We had no staff in Southern Sudan. We did have a small team, led by one American PSC, in Bujumbura, with another from OTI, and a few FSNs. That was our third mandate, to run those programs and travel in and out. In time we added Djibouti after 9/11 and for strategic reasons we reopened the USAID office in Djibouti, which itself was peaceful.

Q: And as you think of these three major parts, was your time spent equally among them? What was most interesting?

SISSON: I sometimes joked that in answering that question that there were three mandates but I spent about 120 percent of my time on Sudan. It was by far the top priority in Washington. There was—this was in the George W. Bush Administration -- there was strong bipartisan support for us supporting the Southern Sudanese. And mostly we were doing humanitarian relief. We had a strong OFDA team doing that largely from the town of Lokichogio in northern Kenya, just south of the Sudanese border, which served as the logistics hub for everybody working in Southern Sudan. And OFDA did a lot to establish that as a logistics hub, including building a runway. And over time, we were starting to put in place development programs to the extent we could.

The capital of Southern Sudan during the war was a town called Rumbek. And there was no electricity, no running water, remnants of a couple of paved roads, remnants of a

couple of electric utility poles. I met the acting governor to talk about working together, thinking about the long-term, and the chairs and table that we sat around outside the office were handmade from branches. The Supreme Court of Southern Sudan was next door and it was thatched huts. It was really basic. And our main interlocutor for developing our first strategy for a development program in Southern Sudan was an SPLA commander, Sudan People's Liberation Army commander, who also was a political figure and one of the lead negotiators for a peace agreement with Sudan. So, we developed a strategy together with his team under a tent in Rumbek and that was fascinating. It was great to hear him tell stories.

The head of the SPLA was John Garang. I should add, I was never a Sudan expert. USAID had some tremendous Sudan experts.

Q: And were they in Sudan?

SISSON: No. But they'd lived in Sudan in earlier days and they knew a lot of people, and came out to help. One of them was Alan Reed, who subsequently became mission director for South Sudan. We spun it off REDSO and I was involved in creating a stand-alone USAID mission in Southern Sudan and Alan became its first mission director. A superb choice. There were others like Brian d'Silva, who had gone to school with John Garang when he earned a PhD in agricultural economics at Iowa State. And John Garang was a visionary. It was a tragedy that he died in a helicopter crash in 2005. By then there was progress on the peace talks, he was briefly the first vice president of Sudan, and people were envisioning him as South Sudan's first president. Since South Sudan formally became an independent state in 2011, it has been troubled by leadership clashes. There are many problems both in South Sudan and the remainder of Sudan as we speak.

But when I was there this was a top administration and congressional priority. I was on the job for only three weeks and we had a CODEL come with four U.S. senators, including the majority leader Tom Daschle. And they grilled us. They asked smart questions. Congressional interest remained high during my tour there.

Q: Sudan is not exactly the center of the universe. What was the explanation for Sudan or South Sudan being seen as so important to—on a bipartisan basis at that time?

SISSON: Part of it had to do with religion. Sudan has a Muslim majority country but in the South it's largely Christian. And the repression of the South was extreme. So, it was seen in the U.S. as a human rights issue, as a struggle for freedom, and we had Christian and Jewish groups lobbying for support. The Senate majority leader after Tom Daschle was Bill Frist of Tennessee, who was a medical doctor who'd done mission work in Southern Sudan.

The president's envoy for Sudan, Reverend John Danforth, was a former senator from Indiana. He advocated for more support. One of the best questions I ever got from a visitor from the States was his asking me at lunch if our program could use $500 million

more. He liked my answer, “Hell, yes!” —road rehabilitation could have easily used up all of that.

Q: So, were you under a lot more scrutiny from Congress than most AID directors are?

SISSON: Except we had a lot in Kosovo, obviously. President Bush came to Kosovo, Senator Dole came to Kosovo.

Q: So, you were used to it.

SISSON: I suppose. There was a lot of focus on Sudan. And within REDSO we had an office that focused on these countries in conflict. Eventually we spun off Southern Sudan, but we built up a pretty robust program in Djibouti. We had quite a bit going on in Burundi and Somalia. And we added a bit of work in Comoros and the Central African Republic. The Administrator, Andrew Natsios, visited our programs in Burundi and Djibouti.

Djibouti was interesting. This was a direct outgrowth of 9/11. And the U.S. established a military base in Djibouti, which is a strategic location across from the Gulf States. And in 2003, I think it was early 2003, the Djiboutian president negotiated for extending the base rights and DOD (Department of Defense) paying rent for the base. But when President Guelleh came to Washington he also asked President Bush that USAID reestablish a program in Djibouti. And after that meeting I accompanied the Administrator Natsios to meet the president at his hotel suite in Washington and Andrew said I would take the lead in opening the USAID mission. And that went well.

We had tremendous support from the Djiboutians, excellent collaboration with the State Department in Washington and in Djibouti, just a terrific ambassador, Don Yamamoto. And over time, we built very good collaboration with DOD.

Q: What was the collaboration focused on?

SISSON: One was—ultimately the priority was countering terrorism and that was the main rationale for the presence there.

Q: Was AID doing counterterrorism?

SISSON: No. We had development programs there, but the underlying rationale for our presence there was counterterrorism. We were part of the country team, worked closely with the ambassador and with DOD, which was by far the largest U.S. presence there.

DOD’s attention was on the terrorist threat in the region, particularly from Somalia. And in addition, civic action programs in communities outside of Somalia but nearby. It seemed to me they had a kinetic focus in the early days and they were not especially interested in working with us. During my four years in East Africa, we had four different American commanders at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti, all one- or two-star generals or

admirals. And over time they became more interested in the civic affairs and diplomatic side and more interested in working with us. So, we didn't—

Q: But what did you work on?

SISSON: We had programs in education, health, and livestock exports. With DOD, our work together was information sharing, sharing of contacts, sharing of analysis, helping each other establish new relationships. We worked together a bit on strategic planning. We co-hosted a workshop on terrorism in the region and brought in some experts, including an Australian analyst named David Kilcullen.

Q: Another Australian.

SISSON: Yeah.

Q: You seem to focus on bringing Australians into the game.

SISSON: They've got a lot of talent. It was DOD that brought him. He was their advisor.

But our focus was programs with the Djibouti government and we started with three, education, health and livestock exports. And we kept the focus on that while I was there. There was pressure to add other sectors but I wanted to stay focused and move fast and show some progress. And that worked well. We brought in a retired USAID Foreign Service education officer to take the lead for us on the ground in Djibouti. He'd been an education officer, who I knew from my grad school days in Cameroon. And Marty Schulman was very effective in working with the Djiboutian government. He found ways to work the system so we could quickly design an education strategy and program with the Djiboutians, bring in advisors to work in the ministry of education, pick schools for renovation and actually have a high school renovated -- all within seven months. DOD at Camp Lemonnier helped with the school. It was fast. And working with the ministry of education and with the State Department on this was smooth.

And we moved almost as quickly in the health sector. And in livestock, we were tapping into a regional program, and when implementation lagged I switched it to a contractor and had them, under their existing food security contract, complete the work on a livestock quarantine export facility in Djibouti. And they got it done and it worked.

Q: Did Djibouti have a more established and responsible governmental system with administrative capacity as contrasted with South Sudan?

SISSON: It had a well-established government and we had very good people to work with. I can't say their ministries were deep very deep in talent, but there were, at the higher levels, qualified people.

Q: Right.

SISSON: And I should mention, the largest employer, after the Government and port authority, was the American base at Camp Lemonnier.

I found Djibouti to be a peaceful country and a good place to work. and I went there often. I felt safe, welcome, and every trip was productive.

Q: But you did have time to work on that even though you said you spent 120 percent of your time on Sudan?

SISSON: Obviously my numbers aren't adding up right. But I had to put time into Djibouti and the other limited presence countries. Later in my tour, as Southern Sudan became an independent USAID mission, I could focus more on the other countries. In Burundi, we helped with elections and had other programs, such as in agriculture and media development, along with humanitarian aid, and I visited there quite often. I only went to Somalia once, to Somaliland in the north, which had declared its independence from Somalia. Besides humanitarian aid we had a small development program there. Unlike the rest of Somalia, it was peaceful. I met its president and other leaders. One cabinet minister asked me why the U.S. didn't recognize them as an independent country, and my answer was lame, along the lines of you'd have to ask Washington. And he replied, "It doesn't matter. We recognize ourselves."

Our team focusing on this mandate of working in the limited presence countries was very strong. The two lead Americans on that team eventually became Senior Foreign Service Officers and mission directors.

Q: Who was that?

SISSON: Flynn Fuller, who was a friend going back to my Somalia days. And he ran the office and he eventually became a mission director opening the USAID mission in East Timor.

And later he was director in Cambodia. Maura Barry eventually became mission director in Jamaica and more recently a senior DAA in one of the bureaus in Washington. We also had a very capable PSC and a Kenyan team working on these countries. And in Djibouti and Burundi, we had limited American and local staff.

But that's not to take away—we had an incredible team throughout REDSO. Several of the staff became mission directors and Senior Foreign Service officers. I used to keep tabs. At least ten by my count became mission directors. It was an impressive group.

Q: So, it was a good training ground for leadership?

SISSON: It was a good training ground. I should acknowledge that I inherited a strong operation from my predecessor, Steve Wisecarver. He did a great job recruiting many of the staff who were in place when I came, and over time, they'd turnover and I'd recruit

replacements. For example, I brought in a new RLA (Regional Legal Advisor), Margaret Alexander, who was one of the best in the Agency.

Q: This is the Regional Legal—?

SISSON: Yes.

Margaret was one of my closest colleagues at USAID. I knew her from my West Africa days. And she was a brilliant lawyer, a great advisor, and a dear friend. And sadly, after she became deputy mission director in Nepal, she died in a helicopter crash there.

One of her staff in Nairobi went on to become a mission director. So, a great team.

Q: And it also sounds like networking, as you say, helped you get good people that you knew from other locations into your team. Is that a feature of AID that people you know you can manage to get to join you and that they then go on to take on more responsibilities? Are you saying that networking is an important element of staffing AID missions?

SISSON: Networking is very important and just spending the time on recruitment and maybe at times thinking a bit out of the box. So, for example, Flynn left to become a mission director. And during a TDY I met a young guy in another AID mission who was less senior, less experienced, but incredibly talented. And I thought, this is the guy I want to replace Flynn. And several people advised me against it, that he didn't have the experience. And I listened, but in this case I went with my instinct and we got him. And he turned out to be fantastic. (Shakow laughs) And one of my fond memories was of one of our team who was originally an opponent came up to me later and said, "You were right. This guy is great." (Shakow laughs) And he went on to bigger and better things, including becoming a mission director.

Another thing I tried was to champion the role of FSNs and put them in more leadership roles, like leading strategic objective teams or leading technical teams. And giving them more responsibility, a higher profile. And in a large mission like REDSO that was more feasible.

Q: Over time, I gather, AID has realized that FSNs are a tremendous resource and in many missions now key positions are filled by Foreign Service Nationals. Is that your impression?

SISSON: Yes. I wasn't the first. But I learned from my very first tour that our local staff are vital members of the team who have a lot to offer and could do even more with the opportunity. And as I moved into mission management I could work that more. And REDSO was a great place to do it because there was just so much talent.

Q: Let me get back to the question I was asking before—are there cases in your REDSO experience where you were working in a place where disasters were prevalent and you

were working on trying to do humanitarian aid and longer lasting development aid at the same time? Maybe this is an irrelevant question—

SISSON: It's not. Because we were. Depending on the time and place it'd be much more humanitarian work, less development or vice versa. But we've also learned, as an organization, and I think in the development field more broadly, that it's a continuum. And even the way humanitarian assistance is programmed, there can be ways of doing it that have more longer-term developmental benefits. But certainly, in Southern Sudan, Somalia, Burundi, where to varying degrees we were working on both simultaneously. For instance, while much of Somalia was in conflict, the northern region of Somaliland was peaceful, so we provided mostly humanitarian assistance in the south but a bit of development assistance where we could, such as in education, while in the north we could focus more on development. Also, in Burundi, there were parts of the country that were no-go zones. Even Bujumbura at times, parts of it were no-go zones. There was actually fighting near where our American PSC lived. And of course, in southern Sudan, we had a massive humanitarian operation going, largely out of Lokichogio in northern Kenya, run by OFDA. But in some places we had limited development activities, such as in agricultural development. And we were planning to do more as peace took hold. Overall, we did both humanitarian and development assistance, and how it modulated depended on the circumstances.

Q: The reason I ask, of course, is that this year's annual general meeting of the alumni association is focusing on that theme, of the nexus of humanitarian and development aid.

SISSON: Ah, good.

Q:The number of disasters is mounting every year, both human and manmade, and it's pushing the development side into a less featured area yet this is what AID was originally designed to do.

SISSON: Mm-hm.

Q: We won't pursue that further at the moment but that's the reason for my asking.

SISSON: It's an important question, particularly, as you say, conflicts are becoming ever more prevalent.

Q: Okay. So, shall we move out of REDSO and you went to F (Office of Foreign Assistance). Now F has a lot of meaning these days because it also is the term that is used by the people who are trying to eliminate a large portion of the Civil Service and make them political jobs. But that wasn't what F was. Please describe what happened. You left REDSO and you were assigned to this new—was it new at that point, new office?

SISSON: Yes. I was already assigned to be on the faculty of the National War College and that's what I wanted to do after leaving REDSO. And then, after F was stood up at the initiation of the secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, she brought in Ambassador

Randall Tobias, who'd been head of PEPFAR (United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief). He came out of the pharmaceutical industry. He'd gone from PEPFAR to become head of F, which is—

Q: Well, he remained in both positions while he was there, didn't he? I don't think he ever gave up PEPFAR. .

SISSON: He did eventually. Mark Dybul took it over.

Q: Right.

SISSON: But Tobias wasn't just head of F, he was also the AID administrator and deputy secretary of state for resources and management. And I had my arm twisted to give up the War College teaching job and go to F. And what I did—

Q: What was your position in F?

SISSON: So—but the deal I made—just to finish the thought—was I got it in writing that I would go to F for exactly one year and then, I would go teach. So, that's what happened.

My position at F originally was to be the foreign aid coordinator for the developing countries. And there would be another foreign aid coordinator for countries in conflict. So, that's a lot of countries scattered all over the place. And my job was twofold. One was to help set up F, how was this going to be structured and operate, and work with State Department, USAID and other agencies that were involved. And then, implement it for all these countries. Early on, talking with my friends particularly at USAID, it became apparent this was not workable and it needed to have a regional structure. I remember a USAID colleague complaining that with the initial F structure, if they had a problem, they didn't even know who to talk to. We convinced Tobias to move to a regional structure and I became the lead for the Africa team.

Q: Was there a person, other than Tobias, who was kind of the department director of F?

SISSON: Yes. There was a chief operating officer, Dirk Dijkerman, who was most responsible for recruiting me. Dirk had been a great mentor for me over many years and I respected him a lot. While Dirk was chief operating officer, Tobias brought with him from PEPFAR a few staff who had senior roles. I was working on Africa, somebody else did Middle East, others did other regions. There were budget gurus, there were IT gurus. There was a relatively small team for Africa, I think we were eight or ten people. And we were in charge of programming $2 billion in aid.

Q: And it was taken from AID, that is—

SISSON: And State. We didn't manage programs but one of the things that was deeply resented by USAID was F took away its policy and budget functions.

Q: Right.

SISSON: And decisions on which countries would get how much aid were ultimately made by Tobias. It didn't happen in a vacuum. It's similar to the State Department aid budget that went through the same mill. So, there was resentment from both sides, State and AID, and I was unhappy if I heard somebody thought I was a traitor to AID. A reason why I succumbed to Dirk and others and joined was the argument that they needed somebody in F, besides Dirk, in a leadership role who'd been a mission director and knew about these issues from a field perspective.

Q: But you were seen—that you could be seen as a knowledgeable, informed person and would not go against what the objectives of the AID program were?

SISSON: You'd have to ask somebody like Dirk, but I imagine that's true. They knew that I'd worked well with DOD and State in a high pressure, interagency environment.

Q: Right.

SISSON: At F, working on Africa, we were able to establish a terrific partnership with AID and State. Wade Warren was my lead counterpart in the USAID Africa Bureau. I forget her name, but there was a deputy assistant secretary from State AF, who was very good. We worked together closely. We traveled together in Africa. And we sold it to the field. We built a system where State and AID and other agencies worked together on the programming, getting substantial inputs from the field in enough time to make a difference. So, that we could do, at least within the Africa region. And then, we brought DOD into the process as well. It became a good collaboration.

Q: Yeah. I mean, as a former head of PPC (Program and Policy Change), this was always seen and only recently corrected, removing from AID its capacity to deal with policy and budget issues which go together very closely. And you know, it was only in this most recent period under Samantha Power that they've managed to seemingly get back into the AID policy work, largely the budgetary function. I mean, it was seen—

SISSON: Right. Completely. And if I had my druthers, long before I joined F, I would have liked to have seen USAID as a cabinet-level department.

Q: Right.

SISSON: With all of the authorities, and budget and policy being important ones.

Q: Yeah. Anyway, you didn't create F, your arm was twisted to get into F.

SISSON: I did the best I could.

Q: You did the best you could. You did the best you could, right. But then, you went over to the War College.

SISSON: The War College.

Q: And what did you do there? You were teaching for a couple of years?

SISSON: Yes. I was there for two years. The War College has a master's degree program in national security strategy and all students take the same seven core courses one at a time in succession. And I was a seminar leader for two of those courses. The college had an overall course director who was the mastermind of each course. But then, the college's students would be divided up into several sections of twelve or thirteen each, and a faculty member was assigned to lead each one. So, I was working with a curriculum that came from the course director and I would apply it, maybe adapt it a bit, for my group of students. I did that both years for two different courses. One was called *Non-military Elements of Statecraft*, which is what are the tools in a foreign policy toolkit besides the military. And later in the year, I was a seminar leader in the *Global Context for National Strategy*. Also, I helped create and teach two electives. One was on U.S. national security interests in Africa and I co-taught that with a top analyst from the Defense Intelligence Agency. And another elective on foreign aid and national security, which I taught with a couple of AID friends who were over at the sister Eisenhower College, Terry Myers and Steve Brent. That's mainly what I did.

I did other smaller stuff. I helped a DOD team that was creating a new strategy for CENTCOM (United States Central Command). I helped another part of DOD work on civilian-DOD collaboration. I was on committees within the college, such as for picking a new dean of the faculty. I was faculty advisor for a few students and coached others in a new leadership development program. Off campus, I helped run a program where our students tutored elementary school students at a DC school nearby, and I tutored a fifth grader. It was fun.

Q:Were most of the students that you taught from various parts of the military or did you have students from elsewhere?

SISSON: Both. The majority were U.S. senior military officers.

Q: What level?

SISSON: Lieutenant colonel and colonel. Or Navy equivalent of commander and captain. So, the students would be coming from the air force, marines, navy, army, coast guard. And there was a formula for determining how many from each. While most students in my class came from the U.S. military, one or two would be U.S. civilians, say from State Department or AID or the intel world. And there would be two foreign military officers, colonel or one-star generals.

Q: From?

SISSON: Other countries. So, they could be from Greece, Indonesia, Jordan, Bangladesh, Colombia. All over.

Q: So, this was a very different kind of setting and task for you as compared to what you had been doing for the previous fifteen years.. And you just said it was fun. Challenging?

SISSON: It was, except the structure and academic program were similar to what I experienced as a student at ICAF several years earlier. Learning how to be a teacher was a good challenge. And we got valuable coaching in that in the beginning. I wasn't the only one who was a new teacher.

Q: Did you ever think that you would become a teacher? Do you—did you enjoy it?

SISSON: I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to stay and they wanted me to stay. In fact, one of the things that was dangled was me leaving USAID and becoming a DOD employee to stay at the college. The only reason I didn't do it was I didn't want to be in Washington and I just—I hated the traffic and the commute. But I loved the War College. All of National Defense University, I think I mentioned before, is in a magnificent setting in Fort McNair, at the confluence of two rivers, and my office looked out at that intersection of the two rivers. And it was just a really wonderful learning environment. We had fabulous guest speakers, including President Obama. We had impressive students. We had an excellent faculty. I was welcomed there as a student years earlier at ICAF, and I was welcomed there as a teacher. But I did just the two years and left.

Q: And was your wife anxious to go overseas again too?

SISSON: Definitely. She retired in 2007, while I was at F. She had a Washington job with State for a year and then she retired. So, I finished up at the War College and then, we decided as our next post to go to Central Asia.

Q: And why did you decide to go to Central Asia? I mean, Kazakhstan is another new place for you, right? So, how did that happen?

SISSON: Whole new adventure. I'd been reading about the Silk Road and Genghis Khan and seeing it in movies and I just thought this would be a great adventure. I didn't know anything about the region. I'd never been there. Just try something totally new.

Q: And did it turn out to be this great adventure? I mean, that's now 2009—

SISSON: Yeah. It was.

Q: —and you only spent a year there.

SISSON: Thirteen months. It was a great adventure. We worked in five of the so-called Stans. We were based in Almaty, Kazakhstan but we had offices and teams and programs

in the other four, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. They were all fascinating with their own politics, their own culture and history.

And I was there for—it got cut short. In fact, it was a two-year assignment and my extension for a third year had just been approved when I got pulled to go to Pakistan.

Q: Is there anything that stands out other than the adventure and learning about these five Stans that stands out in that period that you were there, the thirteen months?

SISSON: Well, besides our teams doing good development work, in terms of looking at the countries, they were so different from what I'd experienced before. Uzbekistan had terrible human rights abuses. Turkmenistan did as well. And they were both highly insular. Turkmenistan had been dubbed the North Korea of the region. It was really closed. Not only did I need a diplomatic note to go there, even though I had an office there, but that diplomatic note needed to specify every meeting I was going to have while I was visiting, and every question I was going to ask in every meeting while I was there.

Q: Did we—did USAID actually have a program there?

SISSON: Yes, we did. We had a few projects, one working in vocational skills. We had a Global Development Alliance with Chevron, which was trying mightily to get a gas deal approved. But to improve their public image among other reasons, I'm sure, they co-funded a program with us. And Chevron has a long history of GDAs with USAID and they were good to work with. And although the government was so insular there were a couple of people in the government, such as in their science ministry, who were good to work with. But there was a high-level dialogue where two assistant secretaries came out and met with the minister of foreign affairs and top-level leaders from the Turkmen government, led on our side by Assistant Secretary Robert Blake. That was a pretty frank dialogue and our delegation called them on their human rights abuses. There wasn't much progress on that.

But what became our top priority was Kyrgyzstan, after it blew up. There had been a popular overthrow of the government and they literally burned parts of their White House, their presidential palace. And the ruling family was driven out of country and an opposition leader became president, Roza Otunbayeva. And we worked a lot with her and the new Kyrgyz government to provide humanitarian support and mount other programs quickly.

And then, there was another blow-up later in the year, ethnic violence in the city of Osh, and that was ugly. And we brought in not only OFDA but OTI to work on programs. Assistant Secretary Blake was wonderful to work with in both situations. The assistance coordinator at State in Washington had a fundamental role because the money for the region got channeled through them and F.

Q: Was that you?

SISSON: —that was Dan Rosenblum.

I knew him from my days working at F where he was my regional counterpart working on Europe. After I left the region, he became ambassador to Uzbekistan and then Kazakhstan.

Just a word on a trip we did together. Have you ever read the book called *The Great Game*? It's about Russian and British competition for Central Asia in the 1800s and early 1900s.

Q: It's a book I have that somebody gave me and I have not read it yet. So, should I?

SISSON: It's terrific. It focuses on a couple of intrepid young army officers from Russia and Britain, and puts it in the context of geopolitics.

One of those army officers walked across Turkmenistan into Afghanistan, meeting tribal leaders along the way. I recall this because Dan and I and others were going to fly from Ashgabat, Turkmenistan to Tashkent in Uzbekistan in the winter but our flight got canceled. So, we ended up driving across Turkmenistan in the snow, and I'm thinking, how could the Brit have done this walking on his own?

Q: Were the roads actually plowed?

SISSON: Yes, the roads were okay. The roads were okay on the Turkmenistan side. In Uzbekistan they were icy and we slid around a lot. So, at the border we walked across a no-man's zone for maybe a quarter of a mile and then we got to the Uzbekistan side. On the Turkmen side there was a modern small immigration building, they quickly stamped our passports and let us depart the country. We walked across the no-man zone in the dark, pulling our suitcases, in the winter. Got to the Uzbekistan side and the soldier at their immigration building made us wait outside a long time in the cold, taking his sweet time. Eventually we got through and we slid along the icy roads towards Tashkent. Quite a trip. Those were good experiences. (Shakow laughs)

Q: Well,what was the process in which you were selected as the Pakistan mission director?

SISSON: I was first approached for this a couple of years earlier while I was at the National War College. I was asked if I was interested and I discussed it with Karen, some people in USAID, and a very good friend and decided I wasn't interested. A key reason for me was that USAID did not have a great record of achievement there. A lot of money, not much success. A very difficult place to work, hard to get good results. I remember one mentor advising that if I went there, it would be less bad than if I didn't go. So, I said no.

But later, while I was on a fieldtrip with our ambassador in Tajikistan, I got a call from Washington asking again if I was interested. I gulped and they said I shouldn't worry, I

was their third choice. (Shakow laughs) One of the others would get it. Both of them outranked me, were very experienced directors and DAAs. One of them had worked in Pakistan and spoke fluent Urdu. So, I got all of this information.

I asked the ambassador I was traveling with and a few USAID colleagues for advice, who all said if I could get it, I should take it. Karen was supportive. And my good friend who'd previously counseled me not to take it had passed away. So, I agreed to put my hat in the ring. But soon after, the top two candidates fell through, and they came to me, and I was surprised. I had phone interviews while I was in Kazakhstan, then I went to Washington for more interviews, including the administrator and—

Q: Who was the administrator at that point?

SISSON: Rajiv Shah. And with the assistance coordinator for Pakistan, Ambassador Robin Raphel, who was based in Pakistan but happened to be in Washington.

Q: Right.

SISSON: I met with the USAID assistant administrator for the region, Alex Thier. I'd already been in contact with him. And then, I had a memorable experience with Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. So—

Q: What was memorable about that?

SISSON: Well, I scheduled an appointment and went to his office in the State Department and waited for hours in his waiting room to meet him. And finally, he came out and said he didn't have time to meet me. (Shakow laughs) And I'd flown from Almaty for this. But as he was walking back to his office, he didn't look back at me but asked if I had ever been to Pakistan. I replied that I once went to a wedding there while I was in India, and he said that was an interesting answer, and he continued walking back to his office. So, I left. While leaving the State Department I informed Alex what had happened. He was dismayed.

Q: But not surprised.

SISSON: (Laughs) So, I was almost at the Metro station and got a phone call from Holbrooke's assistant, saying he would see me now. I walked back to the department, again sat in his office for a long time. Finally, he came out and said he had to leave for a trip to Pakistan but I should join him in his car back to his house, and we could talk in the car. So, for perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes I was alone with him in his car, except his driver, and that was the interview. (Shakow laughs) And he began by telling me how USAID couldn't get anything done. So, I gave Kosovo as a positive example. He knew the Balkans and I explained why I thought we had a good record. And he grudgingly agreed but said Pakistan was much tougher. But what he wanted to know was if I was really interested in the job. Somehow I convinced him that I was and he appreciated that and informed Raj. And that's how I got the job.

And then I went back to Almaty to quickly wrap things up and take a TDY to Pakistan.

Q: Who was the mission director before—

SISSON: Bob Wilson. I overlapped with him for a day and we met in Islamabad, had a good discussion. I'd worked with Bob in Kosovo, where he'd been an outstanding officer running many of our projects. And he'd gone on to be mission director in Georgia and then Pakistan. So, I was called to fill in after him. And I spent a month there learning about the challenges there, and there were many, and what I thought we should do about it. And went back to Kazakhstan, wrote up a report for the administrator about my diagnosis and what we should do—I wrote it for him, for Alex and my new bureau. And got their reactions. I came back to Washington briefly for some consultations, including the administrator, Holbrooke and his team, and then completed my move to Pakistan.

Q:Based on your month of TDY, what were your conclusions about what needed to be done to make a difference in Pakistan?

SISSON: I already mentioned it was a very difficult environment politically and it had been for years, a strained relationship between our government and the Pakistani government. On top of that, the worst flood in the history of Pakistan had begun earlier that year, affecting 20 million people. So, in my early days out I went with the director of the National Disaster Management Authority, who was a Pakistani retired army general, flew in his helicopter over the region, went into a displaced persons camp and learned about the impacts of the flood and what many players were doing. I also learned about other challenges in USAID's program.

Most urgent was continuing our large humanitarian relief effort, led by OFDA. But we also had to take $500 million from our normal budget of over $1 billion, and move it to new programs to help Pakistan recover from the flood. So, besides our immediate relief, which OFDA was leading so well, we were figuring out how to help people get back on their feet, such as through a cash transfer program. Holbrooke worked hard to persuade the Congress to agree to that switch. But how do you take $500 million away from longer term development programs that were counting on that budget? That was hard.

Another significant problem—

Q: You're going to come back to how that—

SISSON: How we did that. Yeah.

Q: Okay.

SISSON: We had a large portfolio of 140 projects on the books and most of them were not moving. Many people had made promises to the Pakistanis with this large budget in mind. We had funding under a program that was called Kerry-Lugar-Berman after the

two senators and congressmen who led the way in making a massive U.S. investment in foreign aid to improve the relationship, promote stability and development. And we needed that for Pakistan to be a strong partner with us in our war effort next door in Afghanistan. We also had significant security interests in Pakistan itself. They had a hundred nuclear warheads and we wanted a stable partner and a good relationship. That was the overarching justification for a large U.S. involvement, including foreign aid in Pakistan.

So, we had a massive portfolio. Visitors from the U.S. government would meet Pakistanis, make promises to be fulfilled by USAID. There were a lot of projects on the books and AID was not delivering. The Pakistanis were frustrated, Holbrooke and the State Department were frustrated, the government and civil society were frustrated. Our reputation was poor.

Our morale was poor because as this was going on and USAID was seen as inadequate to the challenges, foreign service officers in the USAID mission, including a deputy mission director, were sent home. This was bad for morale. So, those were some of the challenges—

Q: They were sent home for?

SISSON: Non-performance. And—

Q: Is that a decision of the mission director or—?

SISSON: Sorry I can't go into that—

Q: Right. I understand.

SISSON: But it is a big deal for an officer—and these people had good reputations and good experience—for them to be sent home early. So, the mission was not in good shape. And I was asked to get it sorted out.

Q: So, it's like a small task that you were given. (Laughs)

SISSON: It was. And it was a tough environment, given our relationship with Pakistan, tensions among U.S. agencies working in Pakistan, and the flood. It was dangerous because of the terrorist threat, so it was an unaccompanied post for Americans. I need to provide a bit of history: our embassy was attacked in 1979, the Marriott was bombed in 2008.

So, it was a tight security situation. We were not allowed to just walk around wherever we wanted. We could not take taxis. We were in armored vehicles. When we traveled, we needed to get permission and have security with us.

Q: Was Karen able to go with you?

SISSON: Not at first. But eventually USAID recruited her on a Foreign Service recall appointment, and there were several layers of management between her and me. And she ran a large cash transfer program for flood recovery. She also helped set the Inspector General Office straight on another cash transfer program of which they had been unfairly critical.

Q: So, this is a case when you couldn't be asked, "How does it feel to have your wife in a more senior position than you." (Laughs)

SISSON: (Laughs) No. But she had an important role and overall, she enjoyed it.

Q: Sounds like it.

SISSON: And we hired the ambassador's wife. She'd been a foreign service officer working in public diplomacy. We brought her in to work in the USAID mission on our public affairs team.

Q: Actually, that sounds like a very good policy.

SISSON: She was qualified and we needed her help. And it's important to build the collaboration.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: So, Karen came several months after I did, which was wonderful.

Q: How did you manage to move the $500 million away from development projects into this flood relief activity?

SISSON: I had four deputy directors, one with me in Islamabad who helped with everything, and three others in three provinces where we were running large programs, Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. And all four of them had been mission directors, and were senior foreign service officers. The one working with me in Islamabad, Denise Herbol, was fabulous. She took the lead on figuring out the reprogramming with our mission team and others. It was hard work.

Q: Did you just cut out programs entirely?

SISSON: Part of my approach, where eventually I got agreement, was to slash much of the portfolio. But I did not get agreement right away. An overarching reason for this program proliferation, non-performance and poor morale, was the lack of strategic clarity. If you asked three different people in USAID, what's the top priority, you'd get three different answers. It was sprawling.

I argued, we needed a strategy so we would have a common sense of purpose with USAID, that it would be agreed with the State Department and that could lead to programming decisions, what do we cut, what do we beef up, where do we focus. And we could tell our story to the Pakistanis, so it's clear, this is where we want to work together. That's hard to explain for 140 projects.

Q: Right.

SISSON: Our ambassador agreed. USAID agreed. But when Alex Their and I met Holbrooke in Washington, he berated us, rejecting it out of hand and lambasting USAID. It was a tough meeting.

Q: He rejected the idea that you wanted to focus on a strategy?

SISSON: Yeah. Have a strategy and focus.

Q: What did he want?

SISSON: He was providing the direction. On the way out of that brutal meeting, we shook hands and he said, "Andy, don't let me down." That was the last time we spoke. He died tragically days later, very suddenly.

Until then he was in charge and he knew what to do.

Q: But was it different from your conception?

SISSON: I wasn't challenging our policy, I only wanted a more focused program so we could successfully implement.

But after Holbrooke died, the deputy secretary of state agreed to our approach, as did the USAID administrator. But the deal was, we had to draft our strategy in a month. So, we drafted a multi-year, $2+ billion strategy, in a month.

Q: (Laughs) Did you just go into a small anteroom and write it out on the back of an envelope?

SISSON: It wasn't a large document. What we did was, obviously, consultations with the State Department and the interagency, and limited on the Pakistani side. And I think the whole paper might have been about fifteen pages. An introductory section on why we're making these choices and then, short papers on each of the five strategic objectives. And the hard part was negotiating those strategic objectives. For instance, USAID wanted health to be one of them. If you went to rural Punjab and asked mothers what their top priority was, it was not electric power but the health of their children. But if you spoke to the government and the military and the business elites you heard it was electric power. So, electric power was number one but I wanted health to at least be number five. Plus,

my administrator, who comes from a public health background, wanted health in the strategy. So, we got a compromise. It was number five.

Q: And what were two, three and four?

SISSON: Economic growth, including agriculture, stabilization focused on the areas bordering Afghanistan, and education.

Q: Okay.

SISSON: Plus, the humanitarian effort.

Q: Right. So this was accepted as the focus and that helped you to knock some projects out of the box?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: And you did all this in a month?

SISSON: No. The diagnosis, the realization that we needed to find a way to focus and get people on the same page, I reached that conclusion after my TDY, my first month in Pakistan. After we got agreement to do it, we drafted the strategy in a month and we got approval for it in another month by the ambassador, deputy secretary of state and the administrator. And then, we implemented it.

Q: Was Pakistan the largest?

SISSON: It was number two. Yeah, leave aside Israel with just—

Q: Yeah, right.

SISSON: Afghanistan was one and Pakistan was number two.

Q: How successful were you at implementing this strategy and getting it accomplished in the relatively brief period that you were there? You were there for, what, two years?

SISSON: A little shy of two years.

Q: Maybe long as compared to the usual military assignment that that was not—

SISSON: It felt like ten. And when our Navy Seals got bin Laden, the relationship between the Pakistani government and the U.S. government became even more strained, making our work more difficult.

That led to more harassment of us. There were other things that happened, like the illegal detention of an American government employee. Again, the relationship suffered. Also,

an American contractor—whose USAID project had finished but was still in-country—got kidnapped by the Taliban. After I left post, he died while still in captivity. So, it was a tough environment that got worse over time.

But we were successful in getting the USAID ship on a better course, getting programs up and running and some well implemented. It helped that we dropped about half the projects on the books. We got a lot done in electric power. We built hundreds of kilometers of roads. We had an excellent partnership with the Pakistani army on that. We got a lot of community projects done in the border areas. We did a lot on the cash transfer and helped people get back on their feet following the floods. We did some work in the agriculture sector that started to move, like mango processing and dairy production. I can take more time if you want to go into more of the challenges but we did have some success, not nearly as much as we would have liked but moving in a better direction with some progress on the ground.

Q: Well, it's incredible to think that you could have progress of any kind in an environment of that sort. And staff morale strengthened?

SISSON: It improved. I had tremendous support from USAID Washington for staffing. I could move people around quickly. If I needed a new program officer, I could do it. I got a second deputy mission director for Islamabad, who I'd worked with in Mogadishu decades earlier, Rodger Garner. He was USAID's rockstar in project implementation, and I thank David McCloud, who was our DAA in Washington, for getting Rodger assigned to our mission. Rodger came out and with Denise, our other senior staff, got things unstuck. For instance, he worked with the Pakistani army and Water and Power Development Authority to get the electric power and roads projects moving. Denise and Rodger were very effective and worked long hours in Islamabad. And our three deputy mission directors in the provinces also did great work. Our success owes to the hard work they did bringing the staff together.

Q: So, it was very much a team effort, is what you're saying, right?

SISSON: Absolutely. The senior program officer, John Morgan, was also fantastic. We, the two Islamabad deputies, John and I met every morning and often later in the day, and it worked well.

Q: Well, why don't we hold it now at this two-hour mark; you deserve a little rest after all this. But once again, I must say,you have had a fascinating career.

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Q: I am delighted once again to see Andy Sisson. And we are, pardon the confusion over the reception. This is the sixteenth of September and this is session number five in our wonderful exploration of Andy's career. At the end of our last session we were focused on Pakistan and I'd like to make sure that Andy gets a chance to kind of sum up his most

important conclusions about his service in Pakistan at that most, you know, difficult time in the relationship between the United States and Pakistan.

SISSON: Thank you, Alex. I appreciate the opportunity to talk a bit more about Pakistan. Because of all of my foreign assignments it was the toughest job and the major reason being the political context was so challenging.

So, I think as I mentioned before, our foreign aid was intended to support a stronger strategic partnership between Pakistan and the United States. And when I went to Pakistan there was a lot of hope about that relationship and also the challenge of dealing with this monumental flood and reprogramming. So, there was a big picture strategy but also major operational issues.

Under Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and the USAID administrator, there was a mandate to increase the portion of our aid going directly to Pakistani institutions, either government or non-government, and not as much through intermediaries like American NGOs or contract firms.

Q: Had that been the characteristic of earlier years, mostly through intermediaries?

SISSON: Largely. And so, under Rajiv Shah's USAID Forward there was a push to do more direct programming. And politically, under Holbrooke, this was imperative in Pakistan. So, we became USAID's poster child for what's called government-to-government programming where we provided over half of our budget through the Pakistani government and a smaller amount through NGOs. And this was a challenge because there were serious concerns about corruption. So, we needed to put in place systems to ensure that the funds would be protected and used the way they were intended. One of the precautions we had in place was a large USAID Inspector General operation located adjacent to our mission, with a criminal investigation unit attached to it. And we put in place systems including a Transparency Hotline where Pakistanis could make anonymous allegations about corruption in our projects, which the IG would follow up. Sadly, that led to the termination of a project with a local NGO. I remember meeting one of the senior staffers on the Hill early in my time in Pakistan and he asked why our disbursements were so slow. I explained the corruption problem and he replied, "Thank God you're not spending the money so quickly."

I mentioned that over a period of months we did get our programs going in many areas. Our relationship with the Pakistani army's version of our Army Corps of Engineers—called Frontier Works, was very good for building roads and dams for electric power generation. They were a very solid partner. Another great partner—

Q: Was the army doing the work on building the roads?

SISSON: They contracted it out but we gave a grant to the government for the Pakistani army's Frontier Works to do the work. And one reason why they were such a good partner is, remember, we were doing these roads in the most dangerous part of Pakistan,

the border area with Afghanistan, so not only was the army providing a supervisory role for construction but also providing security.

Q: And were the contractors that they engaged Pakistani or were they the same international contractors that AID would have contracted with anyway?

SISSON: No. They were a mix of international and not the typical USAID contractors, for instance, from Türkiye. And they did good work.

Another excellent government partner was Pakistan's water and electric power development authority. But working with the provincial governments was more problematic. So, it took time.

SI went out for a month in late 2010 and then I came back in January 2011 and shortly after I returned, Jane Perlez, a journalist with the *New York Times*, came out to do an article on U.S. aid in Pakistan. And on May 2, in the earliest edition of the *New York Times*, there was a front-page article that she had written highly critical of USAID. Front-page *New York Times.* And I was, I think, one of two U.S. government officials who was quoted in that article. And her major point was that we were going very slowly and we were concerned about corruption, which was true, though by that time things were moving along a bit. At any rate, that was the early morning edition. But that article disappeared because that was the day of the bin Laden raid, when Navy Seals took out bin Laden in the town of Abbottabad, about thirty miles from the capital of Islamabad. The front-page of the *New York Times* was rewritten and it was all about bin Laden and the raid in Abbottabad, and the story about U.S. foreign aid in Pakistan disappeared.

Q: Not even a paragraph somewhere?

SISSON: Zero. And so, in some presentations I've actually shown a slide comparing the two front pages. I did not get one inquiry from anybody, including anybody at headquarters, about that critical front-page article in the *New York Times* because the bigger story had changed dramatically.

Q: Were you responsible for the timing of bin Laden because you were trying to put off these critical comments?

SISSON: Funny! No, I was not. (Shakow laughs) In fact, I knew nothing about it, as I believe that almost all of us in the American embassy were in the dark. But I found out a day after the raid that one of our students from the National War College was involved in planning the raid, squirreled away in our embassy in Islamabad.

Q: One of your students.

SISSON: From National War College. He—

Q: A Pakistani or an American?

SISSON: An American. I don't want to go into more detail than that.

Q: Right.

SISSON: I had a fascinating lunch with him a couple of days after the raid. But the story continues in a different way.

Shortly after this happened a high-level delegation came from Washington, met with the Pakistanis, and I was in a meeting they had with several cabinet ministers. And the ministers congratulated the U.S. government on the raid. But almost immediately afterwards the Pakistani position on this changed 180 degrees and it was—rather than congratulating it was outraged that if we're supposedly partners with Pakistan why did we not involve them in the raid, why did we not consult them before the raid. They saw this as a gross violation of national sovereignty and we were not interested in a partnership with them. They may have felt humiliation as well. The relationship between our two countries took a hit as a result.

Other things happened that also led to deterioration of the relationship. A big one was U.S. drone strikes in the border areas, going after terrorist groups. And that had consequences for USAID. First, there was generally just a deterioration in trust and strength of the partnership. There was major fallout in Punjab, the largest province of Pakistan, economically a powerhouse. In my early days in Pakistan, the relationship was good with the government of Punjab, led by the chief minister, Shehbaz Sharif, and his senior civil servants. After the drone strikes, he unilaterally terminated all U.S. government-to-government support in Punjab. Note that he was from the opposition party to the national government. But other provinces quickly contacted us, offering to take the resources we had programmed for Punjab. So we reprogrammed them to the other provinces. I'd add that the Punjab government did not reject our recovery aid for flood relief victims. We did a cash transfer program through the national government and provinces to reach almost 20 million flood victims, many in Punjab. And the U.S. led that effort. We put in $190 million but the World Bank, UK and Italy, maybe some others, made the overall effort about $600 million.

Q: Other than the flood relief, were projects that were underway simply stopped and no further funding permitted for any of them? You just had to stop everything right in the middle?

SISSON: Well, yes, if they were government-to-government, but they were not far along in implementation. For instance, supporting a government hospital. They were beginning to disburse but they were not far advanced because our government-to-government programs were taking a while to mount.

Q: I see.

SISSON: But later in 2011, we got the cash transfer programs up and moving and disbursing to all of the provinces. Shehbaz Sharif and the Punjab government did not reject the flood relief or cash transfers from AID. What's more, Sharif wanted to put his name on the funding certificates that people in Punjab would get in an effort to claim credit for the donor recovery support coming into his province, which we did not permit. I'm mentioning this because it influenced our relationship dramatically with Punjab. We still did a lot of private programs, which was good, particularly in agriculture and health. By the way, he is now the prime minister of Pakistan. So, that's one significant outcome.

Another area of deterioration in the relationship was increasing harassment by the government of U.S. embassy employees, including USAID's. And that manifested in different ways. Among our local staff, elements of the government were threatening them and their families, going to their homes and telling them not to work with the Americans, or harassing them on field trips. Another was not giving our American employees visas and holding up our project procurements at customs. So, I give tremendous credit to our FSNs who, despite these threats, really stuck with us. We believed that some of this at least was emanating from the Pakistani intelligence service, called the ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence). And as things deteriorated, I worked with a Defense attaché to set up a briefing for ISI on USAID in Pakistan, in an effort to build a relationship, build trust and ultimately cut down the harassment So, we went over to ISI, met a general and colonels, and I gave a briefing. They reacted positively, even pulling out maps and telling me where we needed to build schools or do other activities. And at the very end of the meeting, I brought up the harassment and how much of a problem it was. They denied they had anything to do with it. And sad to say, the harassment did not abate.

So, that is a bit of a picture of Pakistan. As I said, we got things going. Despite the challenges with Punjab our other programs eventually got going. We had some wonderful private sector programs working in the dairy sector with two private companies. We ended up giving grants to 150 Pakistani NGOs and that number was increasing. So, anyway, that gives you a flavor.

Q: That's fascinating. But two questions. One, you say that when you first were meeting with ministers soon after the bin Laden raid that they were congratulating you.

SISSON: They were congratulating the U.S. government.

Q: Did you have the impression that when the change took place that it was all directed by the prime minister? How did that shift take place? Was it just that there was popular reaction or ISI led this? Do you have any idea what changed it?

SISSON: I don't know—one was clearly the Pakistani army. I can't say if it was the ISI. But the Pakistani army leadership was outraged. And the Pakistani army is the most important political institution in the country. It has been for decades and it still is. Also, public outrage, political leader outrage. Which came first I can't say.

Q: Sure.

SISSON: But clearly, the army was at the center of it.

Q: And one other thing. The role of women and girls in Pakistan is very important in terms of the future.Was AID involved in programs to strengthen the role of women and girls in Pakistan?

SISSON: In the education sector, we supported the Pakistani government's National Reading Program, which emphasized girls' enrolment and retention. We were involved in the border areas with Afghanistan, such as supporting a teacher training college for women. And we were building a girls dormitory at a private college in Lahore.

We did have other activities focused on women. For instance, one of our dairy programs was a partnership with Nestlé—and Punjab was one of the provinces where we were working since it was private sector— and a focus was women dairy owners. Our interest in this partnership was poverty reduction and promoting women in the rural economy.

Q: I see. But we were not providing support to universities ?

SISSON: We were. USAID had been involved with strengthening Pakistani universities for years. And while I was there we were beginning programs focused on four or five major Pakistani universities, partnering them with U.S. universities to upgrade them in key sectors.

Q: And which American universities were involved? Do you remember?

SISSON: No. That selection wasn't completed before I left.

Q: Okay, talking about leaving,your next assignment was Indonesia. Did you get a little home leave or what happened to get you to Indonesia?

SISSON: It was a very short home leave because one bureau in USAID wanted me to keep going in Pakistan, while another bureau wanted me to get to Indonesia right away and lead the development of its new strategy. So, the compromise was, I went back to the U.S. for three weeks.

Q: And did your wife have an assignment in Indonesia too?

SISSON: No. She finished her recall assignment and went back to retirement.

And we got six weeks of intensive language training there before I started my job, which was wonderful.

Q:That's good enough for Indonesian, right?

SISSON: Well, it's good enough to get the basics but because I don't have great foreign language aptitude I did not get beyond that.

Q: That's the one other language that I, for a while, spoke fluently.

SISSON: Impressive!

Q: —Having come out of this highly volatile political maelstrom, what did you find in Indonesia when you arrived?

SISSON: Well, it's a very—in some ways a very advanced economy, in some ways a poor country, huge and highly diverse, and utterly fascinating and welcoming. So, one of the reasons I was interested in Indonesia was learning more about environmental issues, climate change issues, and being in a country that is so important in those areas. It was fascinating on many different fronts.

USAID had a long history of successful programs and good relationships there, and I saw that in my early days in Indonesia.

Q: And what did you focus on while you were there?

SISSON: The first priority besides meeting people was developing a new five-year strategy for USAID in Indonesia, what they called a Country Development Cooperation Strategy.

Q: Why? Why did you need a new strategy?

SISSON: The old one was expiring and there was a recognition that we needed a different kind of relationship with Indonesia, given how large an economy it was, something like the fifteenth or seventeenth largest economy in the world, the world's largest Muslim population and the third largest democracy. It's an important country for the U.S. and given how advanced it was, we wanted a strategy that focused on equal partnership, not on foreign aid recipient and donor. So, part of the process was building that partnership as well as changing the narrative. And that was—unlike in Pakistan where I mentioned that we wrote a strategy in about a month, in Indonesia we weren't under that kind of time pressure and we could do a comprehensive consultation process throughout the country. And we spoke to people from all walks of life, from the president's top advisors and cabinet ministers to religious leaders to farmers and civil society, and all the way through.

So, we came up with a strategy that promoted that kind of partnership, heavy on science cooperation, technology and innovation, and working with the private sector. And I think that strategy and that shift is what led the USAID administrator to ask me to come back and lead the start-up of the Global Development Lab, because that's what the Lab was all about.

But let me talk a bit more about Indonesia first.

Q: Yes, please do.

SISSON: So, as an example of the consultations, one of the most influential was meeting PhD students at Gadjah Mada University in Jogjakarta. It's an excellent university, one of the best in the country. And in this meeting with several doctoral students, they complained they were not getting any funding for their dissertation research, that the only source of funding was the government and there was an application process that was a black hole. They never even got responses. And I could see a couple of the faculty who were in this meeting really not enjoying hearing the students tell us this.

We went to the government agencies in charge of funding research, and we learned how screwed up that process was for funding and how it was not merit-based. So, our strategy included helping Indonesia deal with this problem. And we found a fantastic partner in the Indonesian Academy of Sciences, led by the visionary Dr. Sangkot Marzuki, who wanted to create an Indonesia science fund, which would fund scientific research based on merit. And he asked the National Science Foundation to come out and help him set it up. So, we supported that in our strategy. And then, by a stroke of luck he knew the new finance minister in the new government and got funding for the science fund.

Q: From the government—

SISSON: From the government.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: We provided some technical assistance to help him think through options but he and the Indonesian Academy of Sciences did it, with support from other donors as well. We invested a lot in collaborative scientific research between Indonesian universities and American universities. For instance, on maternal and infant healthcare between Johns Hopkins and the University of Indonesia, a lot on environmental research.

Q: How unusual in AID practice at that time was assistance for research and for graduate education?

SISSON: Supporting graduate education had been going on in some countries for years. One is sending people from developing countries to the U.S. to get master's degrees or doctorates. But increasingly, investing in institutions in-country, in universities to strengthen them. In Indonesia we had a program to strengthen fifty universities but we also had a program called Peer Research, which was funded out of USAID Washington to fund scientific research collaboration between Indonesian and American universities on specific topics. That program existed before I got to Indonesia but we expanded it while I was there. And as I mentioned in Pakistan, we'd had a history of supporting Pakistani universities before I got there and we built on that while I was there.

Q: But you were describing the strategy. So, what other features of the strategy would you highlight?

SISSON: One of them was improved governance, including fighting corruption. We supported the Indonesian anti-corruption authority, which was quite effective, unlike many countries' anti-corruption authorities. It sent governors and ministers to prison and we worked with them a lot.

We also worked on governance in other ways. One was we helped the court system introduce a computerized case tracking system. Previously, if somebody wanted to know where their case was in the judicial system, it could be difficult to learn and often they needed to pay off somebody at the court to get that information. With this case tracking system, everything was online and families could access it, journalists could access it. So, they would know where it was in the process, if another hearing was coming up and then, what was the final decision. There had been instances where these decisions were not put in any system, such as sentencing somebody to prison or finding somebody not guilty, and the wider public might not find out, journalists wouldn't find out. This was an opportunity for corruption. But through this case tracking system this information became public.

Q: And so, how long did it take—you say you didn't have the constraint of having go finish it in a month—how long did it take to pull together your collaborative strategy?

SISSON: And we did it in about a year.

Q: And did Washington consider it and did they agree with it? How was it received in Washington?

SISSON: Enthusiastically. It was readily approved. But I should say, any good strategy process, when headquarters approval is required, there are at least two reasons why you want to involve people from headquarters in designing whatever you want. One is because you may get some really great ideas and analysis.

Q: (Laughs) Right.

SISSON: The other is you get buy-in.

Q: Right.

SISSON: People are going to be reviewing what you come up with when they go home.

Q: So, you had people from Washington involved too?

SISSON: Absolutely.

Q: Good. And were there other or any other major issues, leave aside again the Lab, but any other major issues that you confronted in Indonesia or was the place running fairly smoothly in your view? You came with this enormous amount of experience in all kinds of settings and was this one of those settings that you found you could enjoy a little bit more without having to worry about political upheaval and that kind of thing?

SISSON: I could enjoy it more but there were, obviously, challenges. I should mention on the positive side this was a great country to do partnerships between the U.S. and Indonesian or international private companies. And we became a leader in USAID for these partnerships. By the time I left we had something like seventeen. So, for instance, we had a partnership with Coca-Cola to develop clean drinking water across the country and in partnership with them and others we brought clean drinking water to a couple of million more Indonesians. We worked with a local company and Intel on computer education. We had a partnership with private companies working in agriculture, such as coffee in Sulawesi and spices in Papua. And Papua is the poorest and still most restive province in Indonesia. It's the only province remaining where there's a bit of an insurrection still happening.

Q: This is the old western part of New Guinea?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: Yes.

SISSON: The eastern part of that island is now Papua New Guinea, an independent country. But the western half of the island is part of Indonesia and it's the poorest region. And it's had a lot of security problems. So, we had two rationales for investing in Papua. One was trying to reduce poverty, increase incomes and employment. The other, indirectly, was to promote stability. We had a partnership with an American company working on vanilla production in Papua and McCormick Spices played a role. We also had a program improving local government capacity there.

Q: Did you have any collaborative programs with the major raw material extracting company that was active—

SISSON: No. In fact, the most important American one there wanted to work with us and I refused. And I did not want anybody on the USAID team being seen getting a helicopter ride from them in Papua. They wanted the U.S. government and the USAID stamp of approval and they had a checkered record in Papua. So, no, we did not have a partnership with them or any of the others. We did, though, with Coca-Cola, with Intel, with Microsoft. One of my favorites was in the health sector with Becton Dickinson working on diagnosing multi-drug resistant TB. Tuberculosis is a widespread disease in Indonesia and for most cases it's highly treatable. It's not an easy treatment but it's treatable. But in Indonesia multidrug resistant TB was spreading. And this is terrible because it's extraordinarily hard to treat and it can be fatal. And the challenge was to diagnose it

properly, but that could require a month to figure out whether it was multidrug resistant or not. So, somebody could go around infecting a lot of people in that time.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: So, Becton Dickinson devised a technology where multidrug resistant TB could be diagnosed in hours rather than a month.

Q: And did they develop it in Indonesia or did they develop it somewhere else?

SISSON: They developed it internationally but we worked with them and the ministry of health to introduce it in Indonesia. USAID paid for the equipment but the ministry of health provided the support to move it into key hospitals and to provide staff for training and BD provided the training for free.

Q: That you had seventeen of these public-private arrangements is remarkable. Were these initiatives by the private companies or was AID instrumental in going to these companies and saying, look, here's an opportunity?

SISSON: Each one had a different story. Maybe we initiated it, like Coca-Cola had a worldwide corporate social responsibility interest in clean water. So, we tapped into that. Intel had a very strategic use of CSR. We tapped into that. But sometimes local or international companies would come to us, or their foundations would.

Q: And was Washington involved in this work? Did you find that wherever it emanated from that Washington was set up to provide guidance and tech support to you in how these were implemented or did you have staff in the mission that could manage these things?

SISSON: We had strong staff working on this. It became part of our culture throughout the USAID mission. We had two dedicated staff working on this, an American former foreign service officer and an Indonesian coming out of the private sector. But we did get support from Washington. For any partnership like this there needed to be due diligence to make sure the private partner was somebody we really wanted to work with. That's one area where we would get Washington help. Depending on the sector we would get technical help as well.

Q: And just generally speaking, leaving aside these private entities, did you find that the mission staff contained a significant number of Indonesians who had been working for the AID mission for many, many years and were in some cases the primary officers in a particular sector?

SISSON: Yes, indeed. We had a tremendous Indonesian staff, many of whom had been there for years. And I'll answer your question in two parts. One is, I mentioned Papua. Originally, I had turned the vanilla project proposal down, I made a negative decision about doing any new work in Papua because in some ways it was not a strategic fit with

where our new strategy was going. And I remember one of our senior Indonesian staff coming into my office, closing the door, and he explained to me why I was wrong. And he made excellent arguments. And I changed my mind. And I went public with the mission, saying, "I changed my mind and this colleague persuaded me and he was right, and this is an example why if you have an opinion or you disagree, let me know, because it's really important." And I also went on to say that decision change was one of the smartest things I did in Indonesia. Because that program became spectacular. We did a variety of things in Papua and it had that insecurity angle to it, but it had farmer income, public-private partnership. The next iteration was focusing on reforestation in Papua and climate change. It really took off. And I'm so grateful that my colleague changed my mind.

Q: Did you visit Papua?

SISSON: Yes. It was fascinating. It is unlike any place I've been on earth, vast and remote. So, that's one example. Under the strategy, I tried to elevate the role of our local staff, given how much I appreciated what they brought to the table. We created four strategic objective teams cutting across all offices on implementing the four strategic objectives of our new strategy. And Indonesians became the leaders of two of the four strategic objective teams.

Q: What were the four and which were the two that Indonesians became the leaders of?

SISSON: The two that they led were on social sectors and governance -- social sectors including health and education, governance including anti-corruption, local government strengthening, and civil society. And the other two focused on environment and on science and technology.

Q: And in Indonesia there is a long-standing World Bank role and presumably Asian Development Bank and others. Anything to be said about USAID collaboration with the international agencies?

SISSON: Our collaboration with the World Bank and ADB involved sharing information and perspectives. We didn't do any co-financing. Our closest partnership was with—among the internationals was with Australia. Indonesia is in their backyard and they know it better than we do. I got a flavor for this when I went a couple of times to Australia for meetings, and visited the Australia National University in Canberra. I walked down the corridors of the university and there was office after office of faculty focusing on Indonesia or other countries in that region, some I hardly heard of. Maybe one or two universities in the U.S. might come close to that but ANU's intellectual base is impressive. It was obvious in the academics I met and in their foreign ministry staff. And it showed up in their aid mission in Jakarta which had impressive leadership and a strong team. They were wonderful to work with. And we didn't just do analysis together, we commented on each other's draft county strategies and co-financed many programs together.

Q: Such as?

SISSON: A lot in the health sector.

Another area that we worked with the Australians goes to my Lab days. I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit but since we're talking about Australia. They sent a team to the Global Development Lab in Washington to learn what we were doing. And then, after I went back to Indonesia they invited me to their foreign ministry to advise them on setting up their version of the Lab, which I did. That's getting ahead—

But the toughest nut to crack was the environment sector. Indonesia overtook Brazil for having the world's highest rate of tropical forest deforestation. It is a major contributor to the global climate change equation. And with the State Department and leadership from Washington we engaged the Indonesians on many levels to work on reforestation, slow down deforestation. We had projects working on this. It was challenging. Not so much implementing a project but getting higher-level commitment to change. And one of the challenges was palm oil production, which is an extraordinarily lucrative export crop. Companies were clearing land, clearing out tropical forests to plant palm oil, which was a major export to China, India and all around the world. Palm oil is used in a lot of consumer products. And when we met government ministers and others on this they said the right things but it was hard to make headway on a policy level. And one reason we learned was that some of these leaders were actually investors in these palm oil companies. So, that was a challenge. However, gaining a significant national contribution to the Paris Agreement on climate change was a top priority for our ambassador and the U.S. government, and USAID contributed to those discussions. Over time, there was progress on that.

Corruption was a problem. It didn't affect our programs directly as far as I recall. It affected the embassy at large in different ways. And there was a problem with the International School, which the U.S. embassy has been supporting. And there was, I believe, corruption in the judiciary and other areas. But overall, it was a positive and productive place to work and a very enjoyable place to live.

So, if you want, we can switch to the Lab.

Q: What is it, how did you get involved with this?

SISSON: Okay. So, as I mentioned, we were putting in place a strategy focused on science collaboration, new technology, innovation, public-private partnerships. At the same time, USAID in Washington had two offices focused on science and technology and on innovation and partnerships. They were led by two visionaries who Raj brought in from the outside, Maura O'Neill and Alex Dehgan. Raj wanted to combine these and create something called the U.S. Global Development Lab and integrate what the Lab was trying to do into USAID culture and programming worldwide. Using science, technology, innovation and public-private partnerships to accelerate development, try out new approaches, come at problems differently. And sometimes hit a home run.

I'm putting together pieces why I get involved in the Lab. Raj knew me from Pakistan. He'd visited Pakistan, he was involved in recruiting me for Pakistan. So, two or three years later he asked me to leave Indonesia and come back and run the Lab, combine the two offices into one Lab and build it out. Perhaps one factor was what we were doing in Indonesia, including our new strategy and programs, and second, perhaps, was my briefing the deputy administrator who was at a donor meeting in Bali.

Q: Who was this at the time? Steinberg or—?

SISSON: Don Steinberg.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: He had made a long trip to Indonesia, arrived in the wee hours, and met me for breakfast at 7:00 in the morning before he started his Bali meetings. And he was so engaged, asked excellent questions and made great suggestions. I think it was my first encounter with him and it was fabulous. So maybe he related what we were doing in Indonesia back to Raj. I don't know, but he became an ally. So, Raj asked me in a phone interview to lead the Lab. I asked, "Why me, given that I hardly knew anything about technology and was just learning to use my iPhone." (Shakow laughs) And Raj laughed and said it didn't matter. He wanted career people for launching new initiatives. He found that they have a better record of integrating them within the agency and he thought I could do that. While I didn't agree to leave Indonesia permanently, I accepted going to Washington for six months to get it going. But I'd remain as director of Indonesia, going back on TDY to Indonesia a couple of times to check on things, and make my deputy the acting director while I was away. Raj agreed to all of that.

Q: Who was your deputy in Indonesia?

SISSON: Derrick Brown. And he went on to become director in Bangladesh.

Q: What do you think stimulated Raj to think that the Lab might be a useful resource for AID?

SISSON: Perhaps his experience with the Gates Foundation, because the tech world approaches innovation and starting something new differently than the way USAID designs a project. And Raj is a risk taker, a smart risk taker, and innovative. And he brought in people, like the two I mentioned, and others, and he was keen on trying new things. He enjoyed trying new approaches, such as at the Lab concerning digital development or geospatial analysis.

Q: Okay. So, you come back under these conditions that you have laid down and he agrees to all of them. So, what was it like, you know, trying to do this? This was, in your career, unusual. I mean, you hadn't been in Washington trying to bring all the forces

together in a completely new entity. This was new, right? I don't mean the Lab was new, we knew that, but this process was new.

SISSON: It was new for me.

Except I played a role in setting up F, the Office of Foreign Assistance.

Q: Ah, yes.

SISSON: And helping shape that and leading the Africa team. So, I had some experience but was not leading a bureau. At the Lab, I was helping establish effectively a bureau, while at F it was a small Africa team.

But this was equivalent to an assistant administrator, and working at that level within USAID and at a high-level outside the Agency was new for me. And it was exciting, there were tremendous positives. But I'll begin with something funny.

When I was flying back it was January 2014 and it was wicked cold. And I was sitting next to a woman from Asia on the plane. We got into a conversation and I asked if she brought a warm coat since it was so cold in Washington. She smiled and said she was from Mongolia. (Shakow laughs)

After I landed, I encountered a challenge I had not expected. I thought that the Lab had been approved, that it was a done deal, but it was not. Raj had decided he wanted to do it but there was this long decision-making memorandum going around from assistant administrator to assistant administrator for each of them to sign off. When I got there, it was covered in red ink and I had to get this approved. There were many disagreements and it came down to turf and funding. And also, there was some fatigue within the agency about new initiatives. There had been many by this time. And here's the Lab, the next one. At any rate, we worked it out, we got it approved. That was not fun but it was a useful introduction to the bureaucracy that I was going to be dealing with.

Q: Were you taking people from each of the assistant administrators' areas or was the assumption you would bring in new people and had money for the new people?

SISSON: We did not take many of them. But staff were already in the two offices we were combining, and we were recruiting primarily from outside USAID. Maybe we would get somebody from a field mission who would do their Washington rotation in the Lab. We did get one or two civil servants who'd come out of the Washington USAID system who were already in the Lab. But I may have been the only Foreign Service officer in the Lab and I wanted to get more. We had funds to recruit in different ways. We could take advantage of some Washington contracts with firms to bring in people. And there were AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Fellows. We had twenty in the Lab, these impressive young scientists who wanted to make a difference. We had other talent from the private sector, people who'd worked in start-up financing, the banking sector, who came from the World Bank, private banks. I think Raj

may have brought in one or two from the Gates Foundation. They all helped us look at problems differently. And I enjoyed working with them. The personal education side of this was wonderful. And building alliances to help this take root in the agency was a good undertaking.

Q: How did you decide what the priorities were going to be of this new entity?

SISSON: We knew that certain areas that were already underway were showing tremendous promise. One of them was the Development Innovation Ventures Fund, which was started under Maura O'Neill. And this was a fund available worldwide where people could come in with ideas on anything to solve a development problem and try something on a small scale, and we would fund a small percentage of the proposals. And if it was promising, then a small number of those we would fund at a higher level of scale, rigorously evaluate it, often with a methodology called randomized control trials. One of the brains behind Development Innovation Ventures, was not only Maura O'Neill but Michael Kremer, an economist at Harvard. Kremer went on to share the Nobel Prize for Economics for his work on randomized control trials. He was working with us at the Lab to introduce this. And then, we worked with us and other donors to set up a global version of this fund in London, co-financed by Australia, UK and Sweden, I believe, and a private foundation. And Kremer was a force behind that. So, this was already showing tremendous success.

Q: Why?

SISSON: A success being major impact. One lesson for me from this is that great ideas can come from anywhere. I mentioned that years ago I'd worked in East Africa. I was living in Kenya. One of the problems there was a tremendous number of traffic accidents and fatalities and the major perpetrators were crazed minibus drivers. They were called matatu in Swahili. And we would drive around the country and see fatalities on the highways from these crazy matatu drivers. It was horrific. So, the government put in place measures to stop this. They required speed governors placed on the accelerator so they couldn't go more than 100 kilometers an hour, seatbelts, no more than fourteen passengers in the minibus. Needless to say, this did not work.

Students and faculty from Georgetown University proposed an activity through this DIV funding mechanism to approach the problem in a different way, which was about behavior. Put stickers inside the matatu encouraging the passengers to tell the driver to slow down and drive carefully, and if the driver did well for a month he might get a little bonus. With randomized control trials we showed that this was reducing accidents and fatalities by 50 percent.

And so, it got scaled up and the Auto Insurance Company of Kenya got involved. That's an example.

Another program is Grand Challenges for Development where we specified the problem and then we looked for innovative proposals to solve it. For instance, we would

co-finance with Gates Foundation or some other donor to specify a problem, like saving lives at birth. We got some amazing innovations, such as one invented by an Argentine auto mechanic to help with problematic birth delivery. Later, Becton Dickinson was working with him to do clinical trials in Asia.

Another example was developed by Duke University for clean water supply. Their public health program and Pratt School of Engineering came up with a device for clean water in rural villages where there'd be community water dispensers using chlorine tablets. The uptake on using chlorine at a household level was low because it was prohibitively expensive for poor families. But providing clean, chlorinated water at the community level drove down the household cost. Duke came up with the design, tested it, adjusted it, and created a low-cost design that worked. The Lab supported that, and NGOs have scaled it up to reach about five million in east and southern Africa.

Q: So, was the key for you being able to get the right people to come in

SISSON: For me the priority was taking advantage of this amazing talent and new ways of conceptualizing solutions. And integrating this with USAID so it would take off. So, we did a couple of things to do that. One is I brought staff from the field into the Lab on TDY, Americans and local country staff, so folks at the Lab would learn about these people and get different perspectives on how USAID works in the field. Another is I traveled with Lab colleagues out to the field to establish partnerships with missions where they would define the problems where the Lab could help them, and then the Lab did. Other Lab staff also made trips to the field to build collaboration. A third thing we did is create a new structure within the Lab focused on providing service to missions.

Q: And how would you say, now looking back on all that, that you succeeded in getting that integration with the field that you were aspiring to achieve?

SISSON: I'd say one indicator is more field interest in working with the Lab and that definitely happened. Word spread. I spoke to the whole agency with Raj about this. We spoke at mission directors' conferences. Mission directors for countries we visited and collaborated with would become our advocates, talking with other directors. We also promoted interest in this through workshops overseas. So, there was increasing interest across the field. And that's where a lot of the programmatic decision-making takes place, so that was helpful.

DIV (Development Innovation Ventures) built up a great record and there were studies done, evaluations that showed what a great investment that was. Already the agency was very involved in public-private partnerships, and with the Lab we took that further. Getting AAAS fellows out to the field was good. I was supposed to be at the Lab for six months but I ended up extending that for a few months. And when I went back to Indonesia, I took two AAAS fellows with me and they became valuable members of the USAID team there.

Q: And I had heard much more recently, , that the original reluctance that you found among assistant administrators was reflected in the feeling that the Lab gradually was disassociated from the work of missions. Does the Lab still exist?

SISSON: Well after I left, it got folded into another bureau under the reorganization when the new administration came in. Still the Lab but no longer a separate bureau. And over time I think some of the functions have been split off.

Also, there's one other innovation that the Lab pioneered for public-private partnership which really caught on, which was co-creation.

Q: Co-creation?

SISSON: Co-creation where a private partner would play a lead role in conceptualizing a program from the outset, defining the problem and defining the solution with USAID. And we would both fund it and just short-circuit the whole procurement process. And I don't remember the details of how it worked but we had staff in the Lab conceptualize it with tremendous help from other people around the agency, particularly from the legal office and the management bureau and their contracting team. We came up with this new approach. And when I first brought it up with contracting officers and other staff overseas they said, we can't do this, it's illegal. But we said we can. And it eventually caught on.

Q: And that you were able to implement through the Lab or through the missions or both?

SISSON: Well, it was the Lab helping missions.

And when I went back to Indonesia, we tried doing one of the first ones there and it was hard. Eventually it happened but it was a ton of work. Eventually the Agency gained experience with it and it became more useful.

So, that's an example of a legacy in a different way. And the Development Innovation Ventures Program is still going on. Grand Challenges for Development are still going on. New ways of doing this sort of partnership are still going on. That's good.

Q: Would you say that, from your impressions of it, as you left this behind and went back to Indonesia, that Raj was satisfied, that this was what he had in mind, that when he brought you back this is what he wanted you to create and was he happy with it all? I know you'll tell me to ask him but (laughs)—but I'm asking you as to whether you had that impression from Raj.

SISSON: My impression was he was positive about it. He was very supportive of the Lab and me, involved but not directive. He provided a lot of advice, such as on expanding our work in digital technology, and he provided a lot of support, such as funding. And the assistant administrators knew this, and they were generally supportive. Others on the senior team, like the deputy administrator, chief-of-staff, others were very helpful.

Q: And when Gayle Smith came in and when Raj left the Lab was still continuing to operate?

SISSON: Right.

Q: As you created it?

SISSON: But by the time she came in I was back in Indonesia.

Q: Right.

SISSON: But don't say I created it as a sort of start-up. There was tremendous work already underway when I got there, and I tried to take it further.

Q: Sure, sure.

Who took over as the executive director?

SISSON: We did a recruitment to find somebody from the outside who would be a great leader for the Lab. And we recruited Ann Mei Chang. She had impressive experience working at Google as an engineer, in the State Department on women's issues and other international development experience in the NGO world. So, she brought experience from both the tech world, innovation, as well as government and non-government. And she came in and took over.

Q: And this recruitment took place while you were still there and so, basically when you left she took over?

SISSON: Yes.

Q: But it was a smooth transition.

SISSON: Yes. I knew that she was going to be the one. She wasn't onboard when I left so we had an acting executive director of the Lab for a little while, one of our top staff, until she came onboard.

Q: Okay.

SISSON: But she'd been identified by the time I left.

Q: Okay. So, then you went back after this six to nine-month interruption and did you actually take TDYs back to Indonesia during this period as you had told–

SISSON: Yes. Just a couple. And the mission was doing fine.

Q: Okay. And when you got back you had, what, another year or so there.

SISSON: Uh-huh.

Q: And did anything happen of great note during that last year that you were there? You were implementing your strategy, you had things going on.

SISSON: We were implementing the strategy, the public-private partnerships were taking off. Our collaboration with the Indonesia Academy of Sciences was taking off. Our program was moving well. I went to Australia and met their aid organization leadership and the foreign minister who wanted to learn about the Lab. I also went to South Korea and met the head of their aid agency who was also interested in learning what the Lab was doing. But I was really focused on consolidating the program in Indonesia. And on the whole it was going well.

I did get into trouble during another trip to Australia. I was invited to give a few talks at different places, either about the Lab or other topics. Carnegie Mellon University had a program in Adelaide and I spoke to their students about the Lab. Later, I was on a panel to talk to a group of businessmen about doing business in Indonesia. Somebody else on the panel talked about doing business in China. And I really didn't want to do this because that was not my area of expertise. But at any rate, I agreed and did it. And in the question and answer session, corruption in Indonesia came up and I spoke candidly about that. (Shakow laughs) And I did not know that there was an Australian journalist in the audience when I was speaking, and an article came out the next morning, page two, saying the USAID director was critical of corruption in Indonesia. At this time Australia was taking a fresh look at their aid program in Indonesia and there was a debate about how much to provide. So, the media fed into this—look at what the American aid director there is saying. This was dreadful. So, I alerted our embassy in Canberra and called my ambassador in Jakarta immediately. A friend of mine in the Australian Foreign Ministry chanted, "you're going to get in trouble," but I wasn't amused. And sure enough, the Indonesian ambassador to Australia saw the article and contacted their foreign minister. That was stressful, and I thought I was going to get thrown out.

Q: But it just blew over eventually?

SISSON: Yes. My ambassador handled it well with the Indonesian government, and others on the country team were supportive. And it blew over. One thought, is, I mentioned how in Pakistan the bin Laden raid sucked out the oxygen from the negative *New York Times* story about USAID—

Q: I was going to say, first of all, you were pushed off page one, you were page two but what event took place to get this pushed off? You have something here that—?

SISSON: Yes. And it was a tragedy, sadly. And it goes back to Pakistan. Just as this story about my words on corruption came out in Australia, the Pakistani government had invited a bunch of ambassadors on a trip into the mountains.

And on that helicopter trip were the Indonesian ambassador to Pakistan and his wife, courtesy of the Pakistani government. The helicopter crashed, they all got killed. That became the big story in Indonesia when my little story hit in the Australian newspaper. And so, hardly anyone outside the Indonesian government knew about it. Inside the government though, I'm sure this didn't help my relationships with at least a few of my counterparts.

Q: Your ability to create chaos—misdirected is—yeah.

SISSON: So, anyway, I had nothing, obviously, to do with that either but that tragedy was consequential for me.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: But more important, the country team, led by the ambassador, was another example of what a great country team it was. Superb ambassador, superb DCM.

Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?

SISSON: He was the second one while I was there. His name was Robert Blake, who I worked with in Central Asia.

Q: Oh, yes.

SISSON: And his predecessor, Scot Marciel, was also terrific. Kirstin Bauer, the DCM, was there for most of the time I was there. She was supportive, as were the public affairs people. So, they were ready—the ambassador, based on my phone call, was not blindsided -- when the ministry called him and we were prepared to go out with a press release or whatever for damage control, but it wasn't necessary.

Q: Good.

SISSON: But the ambassador gave me very good advice. Obviously, I apologized to him for my mistake. And he advised that you are never off the record, you never know if a journalist is going to be there or not, whether they're going to honor the agreement you made or not, just expect this could happen and speak accordingly. Very good advice.

Q: Yeah, I mean, the sort of advice that was great late in your AID career, I'm surprised that you hadn't heard that from somebody, you know, thirty years before that. (Laughs)

SISSON: I had learned about ground rules with the media, but I should have been smart enough to ask the organizers if the media was going to be there.

Q: Yeah.

SISSON: When I asked who was going to be there they said, the event was for businessmen. They did not mention anybody else. But I didn't know to ask.

Q: And maybe they might not have known either.

SISSON: Could be. So, that was a lesson. But it was also a positive experience about working with really good embassy leadership and country team.

Q: One more good example of the great collaboration you established with the ambassador and others and that working together over time establishes such a good foundation for events of this kind.

SISSON: Good point. But relationships in Pakistan were strained at times. They were respectful, transparent, but it wasn't easy.

Q: Well, that was a very difficult environment. At least in the case of Indonesia it was not so strained.

SISSON: Absolutely.

So there was less stress around the relationship so less stress between the field and Washington. So, the field leadership, like the ambassador and the AID director, were not under cross-agency rivalries and pressures from the administrator or deputy secretary of state or the secretary of state, which was different in Pakistan.

Q: So, you could go about your business without a lot of messing around.

SISSON: But the relationships mattered. Travel with the ambassador can help with that.

One piece of advice I'd include for people who might be interested in leading a USAID mission, is try to take the ambassador on fieldtrips. Get them out there giving speeches, meeting families, meeting local leaders. Put them up front. They have a great time and they get a better appreciation for the issues, local perspectives and for the wonderful work that USAID does to contribute to larger U.S. priorities. We did that to great benefit in Indonesia. And we did it in my previous posts.

Q: Yeah.

And in Indonesia it was excellent.

Ambassador Blake was superb. And I'd established a relationship with him briefly in Central Asia, where I accompanied him on trips to Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. And worked fast to support him after Kyrgyzstan blew up. So, we knew each other already long before I knew I was going to Indonesia. That was good.

Q: Okay. So, you left Indonesia in July of 2016 but you moved immediately to Sri Lanka?

SISSON: After a home leave. I was planning to retire and wasn't sure what I was going to do next, but Sri Lanka came open and I was asked to build up what was a small USAID program. It had recently become a priority, starting with Secretary of State Kerry, and it became a full mission with a large program with a change in government following a twenty-six-year civil war. So, the emphasis changed to promoting reconciliation. Given my interest in conflict and stabilization I thought this was a great opportunity. I withdrew my application to retire. And my wife had wanted to do a tandem assignment in Sri Lanka years earlier but we couldn't work it out. She had an opportunity for a great job to be an economic officer in Sri Lanka but we couldn't find anything for me so we didn't go. That was a real compromise on her part. So, coming out of Indonesia, Sri Lanka was a bit on our radar screen as a beautiful, interesting country, and we went.

Q: How old were you when you took over that? I've forgotten when you were born.

SISSON: Oh, that's a painful question. I was about sixty when I went to Sri Lanka.

Q: Okay, so still you're a young man. And did you find it as interesting and as charming a country as you had anticipated? It had gone through a lot.

SISSON: In terms of the country, the people, the culture, the beauty, absolutely. Although it's area is the same as West Virginia it's very diverse, with mountains and forests and beautiful coastline and history. And very diverse cultures.

The political, social and economic challenges were serious, but it was a good environment to work on that. And what attracted me was one more time I would get to start something or rebuild something. It was an opportunity to build an AID mission with a large budget, recruit people, develop a new strategy and one more time promote stabilization, post-conflict in Sri Lanka. Great. The secretary of state announced this, and it was a front-page story in one of the newspapers in Sri Lanka -- new USAID director, this is what they're going to do. It's all good. Great relationships with the government. Terrific country team. The ambassador—Atul Keshap was wonderful to work with. And the Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Nisha Biswal, was very supportive, and I knew her from my Indonesia days. When I was back in DC briefing her on our early days building up the program in Sri Lanka, she was pleased. The basic message was we couldn't go fast enough.

That was around January 2017. But a year later Donald Trump became president and clearly made his intention known that he wanted to slash the State Department and USAID worldwide. And he specifically targeted Sri Lanka to zero out the budget. So, we go from rapid buildup, you can't go fast enough, to zero. And there's a new front-page story in the leading newspaper in Sri Lanka. The left half of the page is a picture of USAID and me a year earlier building the program, the right half of the page is Trump eliminating the aid program in Sri Lanka. Needless to say, this was not good. (Shakow laughs) So—as you know, you cannot, as a diplomat, go public and say what a crazy idea

this is. But fortunately, one of the lead Senate staffers, Paul Grove, one of the two leading professional staff on the Senate Appropriations Committee for foreign aid, immediately traveled to Sri Lanka and wanted us to help him build an argument for why zeroing out the budget was not a good idea. And the ambassador was brilliant, portraying this strategically as a huge mistake, that Sri Lanka is within ten miles of the world's most important shipping lanes for trade, for oil, and China is gaining influence there. This was not the time to do anything to walk away from Sri Lanka. Parenthetically, the other country that Trump wanted to zero out was Georgia. (Shakow laughs)

So, Paul went back to Washington. But ambassadors and AID directors were instructed to not go to the Hill and lobby for our aid programs. Do not do—

Q: Had Mark Greenbeen appointed as AID Administrator by then?

SISSON: Yes, I believe so.

Q: That's all right.

SISSON: However, Paul knew that I was going to be in Washington for a TDY so he contacted the Asia Bureau and said he wanted me to come to the Hill, and the Bureau could not refuse. So, I met him and his counterpart on the Democratic side, Tim Rieser, with one of our DAAs, and made the argument all over again. About post-conflict stability -- this is a tremendous window of opportunity to help Sri Lanka get past twenty-six years of civil war, reconciliation, plus the strategic argument about location and China.

Shortly after that, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, was testifying before Senator Lindsey Graham, the chairman of the Appropriations Sub-Committee on foreign aid, and Paul's boss. And Graham lectured Tillerson on why it would be a major strategic mistake to cut diplomacy and foreign aid worldwide and the two examples he gave with whiteboards were Sri Lanka and Georgia. And he drew a picture of the shipping lanes around Sri Lanka. Concerning Georgia, he said, they are our only NATO ally that gives us troops unconditionally to fight the war in Afghanistan, so eliminating our aid to them is not what you do to our partner. Needless to say, our budgets were not zeroed out, they were not reduced.

Q: Did you get a front-page story again in the—

SISSON: No.

Q: (Laughs)

SISSON: No. I already had respect for Tim and Paul from meeting them on Pakistan in earlier days, but this was impressive.

I was impressed by how Paul handled this in Sri Lanka. He didn't just meet us and the country team, he met civil society leaders, he met people in government, he met our implementing partners. In a two-day TDY he built his argument.

Q: An interesting example, a good example, of why relationships with the Hill are so important. Some of AID's best work has been accomplished in collaboration with the Hill and staffers on the Hill.

SISSON: So, I have one more story about timing and the media. And it was to our favor. Besides Sri Lanka, where—I don't know if we need to go into the details or the program—

Q: Right.

SISSON: —there was a solid program—

Q: Okay.

SISSON: —we were also the USAID mission for Maldives, which is a beautiful island paradise off the west of Sri Lanka and south of India. It's where people spend a lot of money to go on honeymoons. And I had the privilege of going there on TDYs because we were running marine biodiversity programs involving scientific research collaboration between American and local universities. We were also working on a couple of other things. But in my time in Maldives, I also learned about the terrorist threat and other challenges, such as a criminal gang problem, drug trafficking, many youth being on drugs, and Maldives sending more fighters on a per capita basis to the Middle East, to ISIS than any other country. And I talked about this with our country team in Sri Lanka, and they were concerned about it as well and agreed this is an area where USAID should get involved. Not in counterterrorism programming per se, but something that, for instance, would go after the problem of youth who were so frustrated that they couldn't get jobs, even if they went to university they couldn't get jobs, so some turned to drugs, gangs, and many leaving for the Middle East. To be honest, people in the Asia Bureau of USAID were not enthusiastic about getting involved in this because they were dealing with some bigger problems. But when Paul Grove was out talking about Sri Lanka and the AID budget cut, I briefed him on what was going on in the Maldives. And between that visit and my trip to Washington, the *New York Times* came out with an article on that problem, ISIS recruitment of terrorist fighters from the Maldives.

Q: Had you set them up for that?

SISSON: (Laughs) No.

Q: Had Paul Grove?

SISSON: Not that I'm aware of. So, when I went to the Hill, Tim and Paul were interested in that problem and asked how they could help. I said, we wouldn't be able to

fix it but thought we could help with a modest program. And they came through with the funding and we started a program in this area after I left post, focused on promoting resilience of at-risk youth. Another good lesson of the importance of the Congress and of the media.

Q: Well, you're a master of both!

SISSON: Just lucky.

Q: Look, this is—I mean, we've come to the end of your AID career. There are two things I want to do before we close out. One is that we said we would go back to the shift to Henrietta Fore—

SISSON: Oh.

Q: —when she became the administrator. You wanted to talk a little bit about that shift in the impact on the F bureau, right? And then, I'm going to give you a couple of minutes or longer to just encapsulate all this wonderful career. You were sixty-two years old when you retired, and that was seven years ago, to just give any final thoughts before we wrap up this lengthy program of discussions with you and your fascinating career.

So, you want to talk about Henrietta Fore just for a moment or two?

SISSON: Yeah. Let me just make a last comment on Sri Lanka. We ended up leaving a bit early because my wife wasn't well. She had contracted dengue fever, which was rampant there, and there was a risk that a second bout with the disease could be fatal.

Q: Ah.

SISSON: And we didn't want to take the risk so we went home. I was asked to be an acting AA (Assistant Administrator) in USAID, during the Trump Administration, but I declined saying I wanted to retire. And I retired in 2018, after a great run.

Going back to Henrietta Fore, we were shocked when Ambassador Tobias left so suddenly as head of F, Deputy Secretary of State and USAID Administrator. And Henrietta Fore was appointed quickly. She'd already gone through a Senate confirmation process years earlier as Assistant Administrator for Asia. And now, she was Under Secretary of State for Management. So, her replacing Tobias was quick. And she took over with wonderful leadership and grace. One thing she did was focus more on USAID, recognizing that USAID folks felt like their role in everything had been diminished since Tobias's priority was not on USAID. She started to rectify that by spending a lot more time with USAID. She worked on recruitment. She listened. I was actually, as I recall now, on a murder board during my last month at F, helping her prepare for her confirmation hearing. She wasn't confirmed until after I left for the National War College. But I was just impressed with her from the start. I don't have other details to add, only that it was a real pleasure working with her.

Q: Great. Okay. Look, after you finished up at AID you have been doing a lot of teaching, you're even currently teaching at University of North Carolina, I think. Is that right?

SISSON: Yes, mostly undergrads.

Q: This was a wonderful career that you had and the people reading through this will see how you managed a variety of interesting, very difficult circumstances. But any last thoughts before we close out this oral history interview?

SISSON: First of all, I'm grateful that I had the opportunity for this career. I got to do what I wanted to do from the beginning, which was work on international development and be a representative of America through the Foreign Service. I knew by the time I was in graduate school that this is what I wanted to do. And I was very, very fortunate, as you've heard at many points during these interviews, that I had a spouse who shared my passion for foreign service and international development and adventure, who supported me all along the way. She helped me in so many ways.

I'm also very grateful to many people who helped me throughout my career, colleagues, supervisors and mentors who helped me learn, grow, and accomplish some things. As I gained experience, I appreciated the opportunity to help others advance, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to give back now at UNC.

Q: Andy, thank you very, very much. It's been, as I've said before, fascinating to hear all this and I'm grateful to you for having been willing to sit for these numbers of hours and talk about that career. And your memory has been very good about pulling out some of these interesting stories and the facts of what you went through. So, on this note I'm going to end this oral history.

SISSON: Thank you very much, Alex.

Q: Thank you for all that you have done and all that you continue to do as you educate young people about what it's going to be like to work in these international areas. So, thank you.

End of interview