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

KLAAS SKOSANA

Interviewed by: Daniel F. Whitman
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[Note: this interview was not edited by Mr. Skosana]

Q: Tell me about how it was when you were a child, and how you were when you were a child.

SKOSANA: I was born in Pretoria. My birth date is the 15th of July, 1969. I was born in Pretoria but raised in a province called Mpumalanga. When I was born, my mom used to work as a domestic worker for a Botha family. A Botha is a famous Afrikaner surname. One of the longer standing foreign ministers in South Africa was Pik Botha as minister of foreign affairs. My mother was working for a Botha family in Mountain View, Pretoria when I was born. Even though I was given the name Vusumizi, which means "take good care of the family," because when the young couple that my mom used to work for was away at work, I used to stay with their father and he was old. Their father's name was Klaas, so he called me by his name, Klaas. So I lived with him for three years when my mom was working for this Botha family, so when I went back to my home village, which is Fpoffberg, and when the young kids called me by my African name, Vusumizi which means "take good care of the family" I would not look at them. But the minute they called me in the name I was given of this Afrikaner old man, which is Klaas, I then looked at them. So every time they said in Afrikaans, "Klaas!" I would look. So everybody knew that to cut a favor with me, you have to call me Klaas. Otherwise if you called me at any other name I would not even look. The name I was given by my grandfather, the name Vusumizi, was because I was the first son of his last-born. So I am the head of the lineage. So the last- born of the last- born is given the name Vusumizi which means "take good care of the family."

So I grew up on the farm until I was nine. When I was nine, I went to an area of lands owned by chiefs as opposed to farmers. So I moved from the farm at the age of nine and then, when I arrived there, I went back to schooling at the age of nine. I knew how to hold a pencil and write on paper. What was interesting about that was starting school that late, I was able to complete a 12 year South African primary and secondary education program in only ten years. Because then, there was this thing called "mediate promotion." That is, it was believed that if the bird had wings to fly, let it fly. So they did not waste my time. I was promoted from step three to four, which meant that I did two standard lessons in one year. In that school, the teachers thought I was just too brilliant, so they promoted me from standard six to seven. So, because it takes 12 years to complete both primary and secondary education in South Africa, I completed that program it in under 10

years instead of 12 years.

Q: So you skipped two years I guess?

SKOSANA: Yes. I narrowed it by two years because I was promoted from standard 3 to 4 at primary, and then I was again promoted standard six to seven at high school. Which means I took away a year from high school and I took away a year from primary school.

Q: Ok, Nine plus 10 is 19. Nineteen, when you finished secondary school is that right?

SKOSANA: That's right. Then after completing my "matric" which is your grade 12, I then stayed for a year not doing anything but waiting for my initiation school. There is this thing called initiation school in South Africa where you go to the mountains for 2 months to achieve manhood. So I stayed in it for one year and did not go to school; I was waiting for tenure for initiation. The tenure for initiation normally takes place from May to July. They are two of the coldest months in the country, which start in May until July so that you can go to the mountains. So for two months, I went to the mountains and spent them in this forest of Mpumalanga. Obviously after your initiation completion process and achieve my manhood where we were taught about how to endure pain, how to respect, and basically how to behave in a society. We were also taught about the Milky Way Galaxy- you know, taught astrology, but by people that never went to university—people that studied the cosmos, and that would know and would have a name for most of the stars that you would see in the sky, and what they mean, and when they come through. So after my initiation I went and applied to universities. I came back from the mountains from initiation school on the 6th of July in 1989.

Q: I know that some parts of initiation are not public information, what more can you tell us? You mentioned enduing pain, respect, behaving in society, learning the Milky Way. Can you tell us what was the importance of identifying the stars and the cosmos? Is this anything you're allowed to talk about?

SKOSANA: Yes. Next, we basically learned to study the stars and what they mean. For example, the time to wake up, there is a certain star that told us it was in the morning; time for us to break the ice and start washing. We also looked at the movement of the Milky Way Galaxy to determine the time of the month. We also got to learn about the mood of the community from the sky. Whether there was pain, tension, mourning, death, or celebration by looking at the stars and we were being helped by the elderly to interpret it. We also had certain songs that we sang when we were reading the Milky Way Galaxy. For example, if the clouds were gathering and we were in the bush without any food or without any infrastructure, like a house. When you're on the mountains you would use what is there to build a shelter;, you must use the trees, shrubs, and leaves. You must eat what you kill. If you kill a snake, you eat it. If you kill a rat, you eat it. You have to survive with what is there. So when you come back, you must remember anything that you learn from the initiation school. It is so that you can survive, anyway, anyhow. Just like an animal, even though, as human beings we know that the next day—we know that there will be something in the fridge for us to drink, or something in the fridge for us to

microwave. But when you go to initiation school, you basically get taught that you can wake up not knowing where your breakfast is going to come from, not knowing where your lunch is going to come from, or your dinner, but still survive. That one aspect, the survival part that you can actually survive in this world.

Q: You said that by looking at the constellations or movements in the Milky Way that you could divine what the pain level was in society- where was cause and effect? In other words, was it like astrology where if the stars were in a certain position, that it would be likely there would be discord and conflict? Not guaranteed but likely?

SKOSANA: Yes, I think it likely would. I wouldn't say it was to be daily "factual". For example, if you read the stars and they tell you that there is tension or there could be tension in society or in the immediate community, it could be that somebody is very sick; it could be that somebody is going to die. It could be something related to sorrow. So if somebody asks you, you may know that somebody is going to die. It is not a fact, but the next day, you will hear that somebody is dead. But some nights, we would look to the stars and they would tell us that something wrong was going to happen either to us, amongst us, or in the community. On a seventeenth day when I was on the mountain, my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, passed away and we saw that in the stars but we did not know that it was going to happen in my family. Because we were on the mountain, very little was said about what is happening back home. You don't get to see them. So your grandmother would be dead, and you would not be told about it. She would be buried, and you would not be told about it. Even when one of the members with whom you are going through the initiation at the mountain happens to die, they do not inform the parents at home. You just dig a grave, and put that person in the grave, and then there is a certain drill that is done for people at home. Far on the mountain, I don't know how to say it in English but it is something that you fetch from the river, it's more like…

Q: Clay?

SKOSANA: It's more like clay, and you kind of paint yourself black and white with it so that you look like you are zebras when you are on the mountain. Then people at home can see you playing, and they count your number and they say, "OK, we sent to the mountain, 12 boys. We can see 12 boys playing on the mountain." But what the old men will do, if among you someone is dead, they will not tell people back home. In order for people back home not to know that so and so is dead, they will take one of the elders, the supervisors, to dress like you guys are going through initiation. But if people back home look at the mountain on one of those sunny days, they can say, "OK we sent 14 boys there, and there are 14 boys on the mountain." Only on the last day, when you empty your shelters on the mountain, coming back home, that your parents back home are going to know that if somebody died while you are on the mountain. They become very sad. Because they are never even allowed to see the grave.

Q: Until they return?

SKOSANA: Yeah, this is the sad part. It is a part of initiation, because a lot is sort of hidden, and you do not talk openly about your experiences, about your subject-matter, what you learned, everything gets transmitted from one generation to the other. For example, there were languages that were spoken on the mountain while you are there for two and a half months, and you only get to know about that language when you are there, you only talk in that language when you are there. And when you come back home you do not speak that language again. It is not allowed. That is how we separate people that were up in the mountains to those who have never been to the mountain or haven't gone through the completion. So when we use certain words, and you don't understand them, we know you have not gone and we can ostracize you. You are not a man, you are still a boy. You have not been taught how to handle difficult situations or how to handle your wife, as a man. That is why in my culture and my community, if you marry somebody, and you haven't been initiated, you are not looked at as a man or as a husband. If things were to go wrong, like if you get divorced, it becomes even more abominable and they will tell you: "What did they expect from a boy? You haven't achieved manhood". So it was to be expected that something went wrong. Because you don't know how to endure pain or treat a woman or a wife and all of those things.

Q: Very interesting. This is the first thing that we've talked about in this interview. Two questions, relating this initiation experience to contemporary modern life. You latter worked in the most sophisticated and western of environments, the US embassy, but also was this initiation of a certain ethnic group? Or was it universal? If you meet people in your daily work today, does it matter whether that person has been initiated or not?

SKOSANA: Yes, it does matter. But I will tell one thing, historically; it is something that was done by all Africans, especially South Africans, black South Africans. But through the time of Shaka (king of the Zulu), when there were wars and battles all over the show Shaka spoke before the Zulu and said, "I should not be having people spending time on the mountain getting initiated into manhood, when my other soldiers are getting killed here."

Q: This would be late nineteenth century? Is that right?

SKOSANA: Yes, in the nineteenth century.

Q: This was the wars against the British, right?

SKOSANA: Yeah, Shaka If you can just link it to Shaka. I remember the beatings. So for the Zulu they stopped it. And then in South Africa currently the Vanta, the Shandan, the Ndebele. And I am Ndebele. So only two of the black nations don't do it. The Swazi people and the Zulu people.

Q: When you say the others, would this be 100% of the males? Do you have any idea of the percentage of young males that do go through the initiation?

SKOSANA: Yes, for the Ndebele I would say about 90%.

Q: Wow. Even today?

SKOSANA: Yeah 90%. The rest who don't go have taken a religious belief, taken to Christianity very strongly. They say, "We don't need to go away, we have the Bible and the Bible guides us. And I know you are wasting time for our kids and now they are going to school. But for me it personally—it had a great, great impact and it built my sense of identity and it also gave me a big sense of self-respect and respect for other people. It also gave me a lot of fulfillment, because after I came back from initiation school, people would talk to me and ask, "What clucks like a man? What do you think of this or that?" I take time and apply my mind to it, as opposed to just responding quickly and answering quickly. So I think it still matters today, but let me tell you about what has happened. When this AIDS epidemic developed, signs had been coming forward that said people had been initiated were less likely to catch the virus. The tide has tensed now. For example, as I am speaking to you now, in the paper there is an announcement that there is a "call out", that all men must go for circumcision to a hospital, not as part of the culture, but a part of an AIDS program or contribution – not that you will not get AIDS, but it is part of a measure that the government has set in place.

Q: I see. So the government is putting out this announcement?

SKOSANA: Yes, it is out there and still is now. Yes, they are told to abstain from sex or to use condoms. But for initiation, one of the additional measures is circumcision of old people. They just go and get circumcised.

Q: Why does the government do this? Is it the idea that people will have a greater sense of identity?

SKOSANA: No, it does not have anything to do with identity. It has to do with AIDS prevention.

Q: Ah! I see.

SKOSANA: Yes, HIV/AIDS.

Q: A couple of questions about initiation. One, I think you mentioned it yourself, the traditional initiation and then the super imposition of religion, Christianity for example. That's one question and then the other question is: when we spoke about his a year ago, Klaas, after initiation when you are presented with a task or dilemma or a question, that initiation taught you to respond with some delay to any question, that would give time for contemplation before providing an answer. Can you comment about one or both of those questions?

SKOSANA: I think that type of training just makes you more attentive and it trains you to apply your mind to situations. You don't usually respond and say "Ah!" even if you have an answer. You just become a little more attentive and you become more aware that

in order to participate in a conversation—that it is more important to actually listen, and listen actively; and not feel that you actually understand and then respond quickly. I think the other thing is when you put yourself in somebody else's shoes, and I am just kind of phrasing this from what I have read, but some people tend to jump into other people's shoes, with their own shoes on; if you get my drift.

Q: Totally, yes.

SKOSANA: So if I say, Whitman, just put yourself in my shoes, and you will see it from my perspective. 100% of the time, you don't take off your shoes first. But now going to the initiation school teaches you to actually take off your shoes before you actually jump into somebody else's shoes. So that you genuinely see the problem, or attempt to see the problem from their point of view, and then respond in a considerate and factual manner.

Q: Now, that is a fascinating metaphor and of course what come to mind immediately are the inadequacies, the mistakes and the short comings of the exercise of foreign policy. And I don't only mean American foreign policy. I think many countries in dealing with foreign cultures unfortunately do exactly what you described: they jump into someone else's shoes without removing their own first. It's a beautiful metaphor. Any comments about - Because you have observed diplomacy from close up, would you say that diplomats are wasting time until they have developed this skill?

SKOSANA: Look, my comment is: it is very easy to assume that you know a lot. So let me be a little controversial for you. What we often find as Africans and South Africans, is that what Americans see as confident in public, the people of Africa can see it as arrogant. Because we believe in humanity and we believe in this thing that I described, that even if I know all of the answers, I do not want to give the answer immediately, I have to contemplate and think and so on. Your approach let me say…an American approach would say, "If I know it, I know it" or "if you've got it, flaunt it" or "fake it until you make it". Our approach is different. "If you have got it, confront it". That is why, even when we won the world cup, I mean the right to host the world cup, if you remember what former President Nelson Mandela said, you will begin to understand how we approach issues. He said "never accept our victory with humility". Let us not be cocky and naughty and say "We did it! We are a young democracy, we are the only country in this world who achieved democracy very late but we are already hosting a world cup that started in 1934 when some countries have been participating in this for more than a century. We have been participated for more than ten years and we are already hosting it." No, don't do that. What you will see is the way Africans approach things. What I tended to find… Ok, I will give you an example from a president's view. When you are interviewed some time ago about why the African National Congress, the ANC, was not willing to be closer to America and when America is said to be the home of democracy the ANC was aligned to the Soviet Union at the time. And then the President said something like "Ok there are two questions…."

Q: Is this Mandela?

SKOSANA: Yeah, President Mandela at the time, he was not president at the time…

Q: Of course.

A: That was before the elections in 1994.He said "We went to America, and told Americans what our struggle was all about." And then he said "we could not even speak to general officials in America either at the White House or the Pentagon and then we went to the Soviet Union, where we were received by the highest ranking general who understood our struggle." Then we took a position and said, "We don't care whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches the mice." You will remember that your own foreign policy is America. Stock up a little but after 1994 because when you wanted to come to South Africa, set up those kinds of international commissions and so on, you could not find footing because all of ANC people who trained in Russia and trained in Cuba. You attributed to having a democracy, that democracy is 12 years old. And we were speaking the language of democracy in South Africa. But the question was why was America on good standing with the African National Congress? But the Americans thought they knew too much. They just said, "Oh, Mandela is a terrorist… so and so must be a terrorist," and we would be labeled as a terrorist. So those terrorists went to Russia, fought for democracy;, they achieved it. And after they achieved it, America's was "join your comrade," which meant that they stepped up the binational commission So the relationship was not that smooth because the relationship was good and smooth with the Soviet Union or Russia. It was the Soviet Union before it crumbled. So it took a lot of effort on the U.S side to…

Q: catch up.

SKOSANA: We remember during constitution making process, we sent officials from South Africa to the University of Delaware to be taught how to draft legislation and all of this. But it wasn't a smooth thing. When the Deputy President Thabo Mbeki spoke and Vice President Al Gore spoke, it was not very easy; they did not speak the same language because the relationship was started once democracy was achieved, and not before. When U.S support was needed the most, it was not there. I'll tell you the reason why that was the case or how we could get support from the U.S. But no the Americans thought they knew too much, without even listening to us. They just view you as a terrorist. They never tried to listen. You know what I'm saying.

Q: Yes I do. At the same time at the academic and intellectual communities in the US it was very, very different. Many people would drive their cars in front of the South African Embassy in the mid-'80s, they would honk their horns out of protest. The association of Mandela with terrorism I think was a government belief. We will never know how many American disagreed with that but many disagreed with that. Are you saying…?

SKOSANA: There you have a point. But I think my comments should not be interpreted as painting all Americans with the same brush. I just lifted the issue up to foreign policy level where you attempt to summarize the mood of the nation then.

Q: So going back to the wonderful metaphor, "walking in another man's shoes, without taking off one's first". This goes back to the initiation process. You are you saying that those who have established policy, those would be a small number of people, have failed to have these insights. Is that what we're seeing?

SKOSANA: Let me understand you. What is your question?

Q: Am I getting it right if I say, the metaphor you started with, the person who thinks he can walk in a another person's shoes without removing his own first. Is this what the people who made this policy and this was a small number of people do you say that this is what they forgot to do? Remove their shoes to actually see the situation from the viewpoint of the other? Is that the point?

SKOSANA: The point is that the majority of people that go to initiation school would tend to take off their shoes before they jump into yours and those that have not been, they would do it differently. I will just give you an example, and I may also be wrong, but given the history, one may not be that guilty, if can make that assumption. If you remember prior to 1994, the biggest number of people that got killed or that died during the political strife in South Africa were in Kwazulu Natal. We even called it "the killing field" of Kwazulu Natal. There were many factors at play. One of the factors was that the Zulus made up numerically a majority, if you look at all other ethnic groups in the country. But for the Zulus, you have around eight to ten million, you've got the Sotho in the 30's, you've got Xhosa, you've got the Swazis, and you've got other smaller nations, which is ours, the Ndebele. So just before the election, if you wanted to be ethnocentric, Xhosas were in charge Because Mandela is Xhosa; all the big shots, were in exile and killed and so on. Jacob Zuma our current president, well, the only problem for Zulu, plus a couple of Indians like your Dullah Omar and so on, on the Indian community side. So now, when the elections approach you, the Zulus wanted to, and invoking their history, the founding of Ndebele right up to Zimbabwe and all of that. They wanted to establish that under the leadership. They simply wanted to do that because of their history of the Dutch electorate… in this world where they are run over by the Zulu and all that… But even today…they are fighters. They just want to fight, and we see them as men now, looking at the big picture now, when we get into the initiation school. When I say we, I am talking about our manners, our culture, of all the other nations that go to initiation school that happen to have leadership. You can tell that we look up to them, and they have a lot to expect. They are boys. So they keep fighting, they are fighting even now, and they are never at peace. Even amongst themselves. But they listen to when Mandela speaks, they listen to Thabo Mbeki speak; it's different. We also have our own, shall I say pre-traditions, where we kind of sat down and those are boys any way what do you expect? The unfortunate part is that it is exactly what is happening. It seems to support this unscientific assumption that if you haven't done it, you are likely to misbehave, and they are misbehaving. Which may not have a causal reason in fact.

Q: You mention that Zulus do not do initiation traditionally, so maybe they lack the humility that they need for good leadership. Is that possible?

SKOSANA: I think that is what happened. You have got to be a defendant of the people. You have got to listen to the people. We believe that you are respected for respecting when they come out of initiation school. We believe that you cannot just command and demand for respect if you are not respecting yourself. So that is what we need in leadership and that is what African leadership should be about. We don't respect the Gbagbo approach and the Mugabe approach, we respect people that would say, "I have had my time to think right, and I have not been able to do so, in the ten years, but let me get another chance." You broaden the scope of participation and encourage others to act in their voices and in their efforts. So, yes, leadership is about humility, and humility is what we are taught. Can I just throw something in, a metaphor? It is not of African origin but it speaks to Asian and African culture. There is a Chinese proverb that asks a question, it says something like, "Do you know why the ocean receives or enjoys homage from the great river and the small mountain stream that is ambivalent and the answer is, because the ocean lies low." Are you with me? Even though the ocean has got more water than any river you can see, even the Amazon Basin or the Nile River, small mountain streams, all of the rivers pour into the ocean, but the mountain river continues to pay homage and pour their water into the ocean. Why? Because the stream is humbled. It is lying low. That is why even the big and small are still obliged to throw their little droplet into the ocean. That is a Chinese saying but it speaks so much to the African culture. That, in order for you to enjoy the respect and fellowship of your fellow men, lie low, like the ocean. Then you will enjoy the patronage and the homage of the mountain streamlet and the rivulets, and it will even give you more water.

Q: You mentioned Ghbagbo which is the big news this week actually in Cote'Ivore. In the western press, fortunately or unfortunately, there is much discussion about current African leaders are refusing to leave. There is Mugabe, Gbagbo, Bongo and Biya; are you seeing that these people who get the attention of the international press, in fact, are violating African culture by refusing to leave?

SKOSANA: Yeah, in my view, I think so. If you remember how Nelson Mandela stepped down, to make space for Thabo Mbeki and how Thabo Mbeki was unfitted, truthfully, and how was he supposed to step in. Regardless about what the media said about Zuma - people looked to tradition and said, in terms of the Asian's exhibition - who should be taking over as president of this organization? Why was Zuma's position not contested for- even by the ex president or others. It is because there is respect for culture; there is respect for lineage and the structure. Because Mandela said that so and so will have to take over at a certain time and has been part of the movement from whenever. The African culture did now allow the media to ravish women just because they are involved in a scandal. For example, the Arms scandal…

Q: Well yeah, the possible kick-backs from the arms contracts.

SKOSANA: The arms scandal, the shenanigans on the women's side. And also lately, he is marrying many wives. People have said "What has he done? As a human being and as a contribution to the emancipation to the African people, and what could he still do?" He is still our president but you look at the facts that were stacked up against him, which

were well documented in the media. His trail, he has problems. And you look at the fact that today he is the president of the country. And he has baggage. He would want to go, unless the nation felt differently. You can see the big respect for certain cultural patterns- and you see this coming, and think that you could easily whip up a storm, and the storm is going to overtake people. It is not very easy within the African society. That is what the nations do not understand. They think if they can predict quickly and then the nation will come up against them. I will give you another example; you know when South Africa was being introduced to the international community after 1994. They started thinking that just because Nigeria's national team is Super Eagles. The Ghanaians are called the "Black Star." The Zimbabwe's are called "Chipolopolo" which means "The Bullet." Then maybe the South African National Team…the team must be called something like "The Black Warriors, or the Elephant Warriors." a\And they have been listening and eventually said, "You know what? We have been calling these guys Bafana, Bafana" and then media said no, but "Bafana means boys' boys and what does that mean? It means nothing. Call these people "The Black Warriors, or something" is part of the African culture, whether they have men, or old men, or whatever, we are going to call them Bafana, Bafana. So even in the world cup, we still called them Bafana, Bafana because it is a part of our culture, part of our calling outside of the sports field in South Africa, that every time you play you always say Bafana, Bafana! It is not easy to change certain culture tendencies. When you see a foreign policy maker, you need to understand the norms of that.

Q: In so many African countries, how is it that so many of them go against their own culture, in allowing a person to perform without humility? And I am referring to Gbagbo, Biya, and Bongo. You said a moment ago that these individuals do not really represent African culture. Why do they prevail in so many African countries?

SKOSANA: This is a very difficult question to ask. I think in many ways hunger, starvation, the corruption has part of the contribution to that. Once people get power, they built what is called in politics patronage and clientelism. Where if I'm in power, I will make sure that I give them things in that particular community and that community will vote for me and once I'm not in power I lose out because I do not get any benefits and I would. I would argue strongly that corruption, hunger, and starvation are contributing factors to people clinging to these things. Because once they are in power, unfortunately many of them develop a strong appetite for once… a strong appetite for western lifestyles, and as a result it becomes difficult to relinquish their lifestyles, and be humble again, and want to leave; like I just described when I was talking about initiation school where you are taught that in fact you can survive without your Mercedes Benz and you can survive without your second house. Not just a question of survival, you can thrive and be a bodily, healthy, happy human being without all of this technology without this the western way of doing things. But, unfortunately, because the way the world is today, and because of the development in telecommunications, video conferences, and TVs and so on we back flip to keep the culture going. And this minute I'm talking to you right now about for not taking our freedom seriously. But we forget what they wish right now. It is the hip-hop American culture, the belief that at the age of 24 that you can have a brand new BMW, the African view of hard-work and wanting to leave. People just

believe that they can finish grade 12, practice a career, and become a Puff Daddy or become a Michael Jackson over night. That is what is now seriously destroying the fabric of our culture. They don't want to go to school; they just believe that if they could make it big on television and be famous, and then fortune will follow. They believe in fame and fortune but they do not believe in working for it. Unfortunately it is just the way the world is today— looking for a quick buck.

Q: What you describe seems to be almost universal. Sometimes people say this haste or hurry for fame and fortune is basically an American thing that spread to other countries. The people who stay in power beyond their utility, sometimes they are because outside countries tolerate them, or even assist them, in staying where they are. So this disrupts the formula. The formula is no longer a local thing. There are outside influences; sometimes good, sometimes bad. How much of this outside influence do you think is to blame current leaders who defy the good African traditions?

SKOSANA: I think there are other influences, like I said, with the regard to television and telecommunications. I mean look now, I'm talking to you in the United States from within South Africa. Thirty years ago I was working bare-footed on somebody's farm in Mpumalanga with my cracked heels and blood flowing from my feet. Because of that I was using oil to improve my feet. But now, today, as I am talking to you, I am in my house in Centurion. You know the former name of Centurion is Verwoerd. Verwoerd is the guy who was an architect of apartheid. But now look where I'm seated. It would be difficult for me to go back to the farm and live like I used to. Now I have access to a car, I am running my own company, and I have access to a manufactory. So what I am trying to say is that the western culture has found its way and sort of disrupted our African way of doing things. I will tell you what is going on today currently in the country. There is a business man who is 40 years old. When he turned 40, he ate sushi from a half-naked woman, basically using her as a tray. It was very controversial. The guy was 40 years old, three years younger than myself, and he is a multi-millionaire and he spent nearly a million Rand on his fortieth birthday. We are talking about an incident that took place less than three months ago. But the media lambasted him left and right;, women organizations were marching and saying, "doesn't even contribute to ladies' orphanages or old-age homes, but you are spending a million Rand on your birthday and you get those half-naked women, who men use their tongue and eat from them." And he tells them "I am a self-made man. I am rich and I am enjoying my money and I do not need anybody's permission to spend my money. In fact, I am not even getting contact from the government." You know that guy was very arrogant, and some of the things he said, in African situations you just do not say these things he said, because in order for him to get contact wherever he got them from, it was because of the variable political landscape. Even though he didn't get them from government procurement, but he got them because he was allowed to work in the street, now that apartheid is no longer there. He was allowed to go into some boardroom of some corporation in the country, because of freedom. But the money I made was not from any government contractor. So "shut up! I am doing what I want with my money". So I am saying that, that guy, have has been dumbly so influenced by the western culture. He is a self-made person, and has forgotten about the death of Biko (Steven) and how those contributed to the mostly in the income

in the country, which has resulted in him being able to negotiate successfully, the deal that he now has. He benefited from change. But just because he didn't get a contract from the government department, he is self-made. And that is not true, and that is very un-African of him to comment about, and we tend to say that "unto whomsoever much is given of him shall be much required" which is what the Bible says. We believe that if you have a little more, then share with those less fortunate. What is currently happening in the country, is that you are finding people buying wood and I mean four million Rand. And growing up I thought, I'll build my mom a house and if there is more money then I can build my aunt, uncle, whoever maybe a 50,000 rent house. But, once you get the money, you forget all about that. Once you get the money, you forget about our African roots.

Q: I guess we are talking about globalization which has plus and minus in every country, advantages and disadvantages. This is a great moral, political, and policy lesson. We left you back in 1989. I think this was the year of your "matric" and also the year or your initiation? Is that right?

SKOSANA: Yeah, I matriculated in 1988; and then in 1989 I then just waited. I didn't go to school. I waited around until May. May 6th and July 6th I completed the whole three month program for initiation, and then, only after that, did I applied to university. Then I got admission at Wits University.

Q: Which university is it?

SKOSANA: University of the Witwatersrand, but it is well known as Wit's University.

Q: Wit's! Ah, Witwatersrand. The sound here is not perfect;, I'm afraid. I hope this is recording well. So you went to Wit's in '89 is that right?

SKOSANA: I went there in 1990, because in 1988 I completed Matric, and then, in 1989, I completed my initiation, and then in 1990 I started at my university.

Q: This meant moving from where? From Pretoria to Johannesburg, is that right?

SKOSANA: Even though I was born in Pretoria, I was raised in Mpumalanga. So that meant moving from the Mpumalanga province to the Gauteng province, and also to Johannesburg.

Q: Your intention was to go into what field of study?

SKOSANA: Because I had already completed a 12 year South African education in only 10 years, because I was said to be "Intelligent" or to have a consistent above average performance, my parents had great expectations for me. My father wanted me to be a medical doctor, and I wanted to be an accountant, and my mother wanted me to be a lawyer. But when I went to the university, because of my subject combination, I qualified to do law. It is a practicing degree. But then after I started law, I realized it was really going against my whole nature. Because at the beginning I understand law to be able to

litigate and I looked at litigation as trying to protect the rights of people, even on the wrong side of the law. I found that very difficult. That if somebody has killed someone, you can't to go to the court and claim that "my client has in fact killed someone". You plead not guilty, even though you know the person is guilty. And when the court finds that they are guilty, only at that point do you look at litigating the government I found that it was against my whole nature because I believe that a clear conscience is a soft pillow. That is the motto by which I live. That is, if I tell you the truth, you give me the truth; the truth will set me free. I do not want to be carrying people's baggage and luggage on my shoulder. So after that I changed my mind all together. Then, because I could not be a medical practitioner as my father wanted, because I did not have science and math, and I could not take accounting because my math was not good. I wanted to do an Econ (as in economics) degree. That is Bachelor of Commerce. Because I believe that if I stayed in commerce, I could do anything. I could be in marketing and sales, manager, I could be an accountant and I could be a business person, so I thought it was a safe career to go through. But because I am less technical and more on the philosophical, idealistic of the human brain, I believe in ideals and thought-leadership and all of that. I will find comfort in Commerce;, I will find admission in medicine, and because of my emotional makeup, my psychological makeup., I didn't take comfort in law, where you exploit your knowledge of the law to exonerate people that might actually need to be punished. So then I veered toward international relations. I did my bachelor in international relations in African politics. My vision of a qualified class was, that is, I realized myself as a Boutros Boutros Ghali of those days, if you remember. I visualized myself as a Kofi Annan and I visualized myself as a Ban Ki-moon and I visualized myself as an unconventional statesman, statesperson.

Q: Which you certainly were.

SKOSANA: I read the biographies and the autobiographies of people such as Winston Churchill, such as the Kennedy's, and so on. … in South Africa and Afrikaner). I was more internationalists in my approach. I took much interest to understanding multinationals- for instance, your McDonald's, Nike, Coca Cola penetrated the planet literally, etc. I mean, you see a Coca Cola sign in rural South Africa, and I took a great interest in that. So when I completed my degree in international relations, my idea was that I would work for the United Nations or UNESCO or any organization that has got a strong international perspective. I enjoyed studying American international hegemony in terms of the world order. You know, how America was influencing the world. Henry Kissinger's books I used to read, Francis Fukuyama's books I used to read. You know all these Americans that wrote a lot on international systems and the international order, and also how countries use their economic powers to control other countries politically, and so on. So I was very much internationalist in my approach. So I was saying to you the editor of the newspaper that I worked for when I graduated was the son Walter Sisulu. Remember Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela, those were the three guys who took South Africa to what it is today. I was closely mentored by guys that were sons of political stalwarts I then started writing a lot on local government, and the paper that is opposition to the previous government, but the new government could not really find its they also have been funded by some European Churches and some American

philanthropic organizations and then once there was democracy in the country, they funded…

Q: Are you talking about the funding of the newspaper "The New Nation" is that right?

SKOSANA: Yes "The New Nation." So the other paper lost it's funding. It lost its funding from oversees, the European churches and American philanthropic organizations, because at the time there was no advertising, and remember that these newspapers made money from advertising. So there was no advertising, because it was opposing the apartheid government. So any company that is advertising in the newspaper would draw conflict with the apartheid government and so on. So it had to be funded by European churches and organizations and other American NGOs. Like George Soros and so on.

Q: And then when Mandela came, you're saying then suddenly the money went to Mandela rather than to the NGOs and the media organizations that had conducted the struggle.

SKOSANA: Yes, yes then the paper folded. Then the guy who was running the paper went in a different direction. For example, Zwelakhe Sisulu, the editor, became the chief executive officer of South African Broadcasting Corporation, if I remember, when he was the first black CEO of South Africa Broadcasting Cooperation.

Q: Son of Walter and the first black CEO of SABC, well that's…

SKOSANA: So when the paper folded, he took over there. And then one of the guys who was my immediate supervisor, Gadu Thugwana is now the communications director for the city of Joburg (Johannesburg). The other one is now the head of television at SABC South African Broadcasting cooperation. His name is Amrit Manga, who is the head of television news at SABC now. The three guys that I just enumerated were "key guides" at the New Nation publishing company which I was a young journalist.

Q: This was in Johannesburg?

SKOSANA: Yeah. Before I came into the Embassy. So I joined USIS fresh from New Nation Publishing Company.

Q: So it was US's gain and New Nation's loss, because we got you.

SKOSANA: Yea., after New Nation, I was recruited by USIS from New Nation. That's when I met…

Q: That was Rosemary Crocket?

SKOSANA: It was Rosemary Crocket. Yeah. My supervisor talked to me before you came. She was the Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S embassy in Pretoria up until about 1995.

Q: How did she find you?

SKOSANA: Incidentally, there was an ad for a cultural affairs assistant in my own newspaper, New Nation. So I responded to this, and I was called in for an interview, and after this I was given a written test. Then I simply answered the American test and got the job at the embassy. I went directly from New Nation to USIS (United States Information Services); there was no other job before that and what was interesting was that I started with the embassy on Mandela's birthday, the 18th of July, which was Nelson Mandela's Birthday in 1994. I was also born on the 15th of July, so I am three days older than Mandela. So three days later from when Mandela celebrated his birthday, I started at the embassy.

Q: This was by the way about 12 months before I arrived, in 1995…

SKOSANA: In 1995—that's when the National Commission started, and US sent us help to set up assistance to help us getting it up off of the ground. You did that and it was a very good thing, for which I am still grateful and thankful. Remember, you facilitated my (study in the United States. That was actually my very I had traveled in a plane locally, but never outside the country. I think that when you signed that study tour for me, to go to the United States and visit various parts of the U.S, so that I could speak knowledgeably about the U.S. and so on, that was fantastic. I mean, the memories that I have of that…Actually in my office, as I am speaking to you, there is still a box of every little paper you can think of about my visit to the United States. I have a box for when I visited Columbus and Atlanta. My program schedule of the people I met and visited while I was in the United States; it is still in the box in my office. Actually, I was in the Kruger National Park before we talked, and I was tempted to go through everything in that embassy box because I still have letters of appointments, for when I was appointed., And I still have letters of resignation from when I arrived from the embassy, and letters of reference that you wrote for me, and I still have my program schedule of people I met in Columbus, people I met in New York. And, the professor that gave us a lesson in America and the history of America at George Washington University. And all of the places where I stayed; their addresses, all of it in the box here next to me. I must thank you again for allowing me to have the opportunity to go. The last time I went to the U.S, and what I came back with was positive and it was great and it was life-changing. If there is any one thing that I brought back, it was to just be aware of the possibilities. Let me share with you quickly, when I went to the U.S, I had no clue of what a foreign country and a wealthy country looked like. I was mesmerized by the metro system, the subway. I had never seen it in my life. You know the subway and how it works and all that. I had never flown for 13.5 hours in a plane. The slogan for South Africa right now is "Alive with Possibilities". That is the slogan the country uses to market itself internationally. But what I learned when I was in the United States, was the possibilities and what was possible in this world. I will give you an example; when I thought Joburg was big, I went to New York and saw the number of skyscrapers that was there, and said, "Jeez! I thought Joburg was big, this city has 200-300 skyscrapers!" Then when I looked at the enormity of the American economy, I said, "Jeez, South Africa can actually grow from where it is

20-fold, 100-fold. I then visited a company called Lincoln Electrics when I was in the US. The company does welding machines. When I went into the plant, I was so shocked about its size. It was like the whole community from where I come from, but it was only one company. When you come into this company you'll find that it has a legacy. The company has been around for over 100 years. The company has a map, a world map, and on this map they have little red dots for where it has penetrated. It is in Australia, it is in Europe; it is all over the world. I think it just wasn't in Africa. It did not have a distribution center in Africa, but it had distribution centers all over the world. I was looking at it and said, "Jeez. If a company can do this, really, then in my own small country of South Africa, if you start a company so it actually can grow into a world-player like this." So what I came back with was to see that impact in every sector of industry in South Africa, we had just scratched the surface. Whether it is farming, manufacturing, or infrastructure; when I looked at America's infrastructure, you know the beltways and highways and what not, I thought that it was huge— it was mammoth I can see the positive. So I know that if I am doing ten things here;, I know that because I have seen in America;, I can actually do a million of others. So it was just the perspective that I got. I am lacking the vocabulary to it describe it to you, but I am hoping that you can catch my drift.

Q: Absolutely. I should explain why the U.S Embassy invests this modest amounts in doing this, if you are going to be the pivot, the person, the intermediary between the two cultures, American and South African, and as an employee of the American embassy, it is totally necessary for the U.S Embassy, that you have this experience, that when explaining America to South Africans that you have direct personal experience, and that's what it is all about. So the embassy does not do this as philanthropy or to make Klaas Skosana a more worldly person. I mean yes, they do that, but the reason that they spend money at it is to make you more able to do the job that you had at the embassy. So it helps everybody. It was not just a gift.

SKOSANA: Yes and the other thing that was very interesting was--there are two other observations that I will share with you and though there were many others—there are two in specific I would like to share. I went to the Martin Luther King museum and then I saw his shoes. The actual shoes that he wore, and I was reduced to tears because I used to like democracy, so speeches of people like Winston Churchill, speeches of people like the Kennedy's, even Abraham Lincoln, the guy that describes democracy, the government of the people, by the people and for the people. I really appreciated and admired the orator skills of Martin Luther King. I can tell you that at one point I thought that I was going to be an orator. I thought I was going to address the crowd of people and change people's perspectives and view one's life because of Martin Luther King's influence. When I was in the embassy, I used to go to the embassy library to play videos of Martin Luther King.

Q: So that's where you during those missing periods where I was looking for you.

SKOSANA: So when I saw his shoes and clothes at the Martin Luther King Center, I was humbled. I concluded that his shoe-size was smaller than mine; my feet are bigger than his actually. But he made the greatest impact in the world through his ideas, and I was

greatly motivated. Then I went to the Jimmy Carter Center and read about his involvement in the Middle East peace process. I then remembered my international relations studies at Wit's University. A central theme of international relations, the Middle East process is deep. I mean, for the past century I would argue, it has been a burning issue and it is never getting resolved. Israel and Palestine has been longer than Afghanistan or whatever. I studied those things at the university, when I studied them it was like Jimmy Carter would just come and resolve things. Or Barack Obama would pay one visit to Israel and get things resolved. But for whatever reason that problem has never been resolved for almost a century. Then you wonder, what is it? Culturally, biologically, politically, or whatever— whatever is making it impossible for the Israelis and Palestinians to find peace. At one point I thought I was going to be the one that was going to make peace between them when I was studying.

Q: Maybe you will. (laughter). Absolutely why not? So when you went to the Carter Center, what went through your mind?

SKOSANA: You know what; I was humbled by the Carter Center. I was humbled by the simplicity. I saw a picture of Jimmy Carter wearing a cardigan and he was sitting with some people, on an African camp with a fire. They were just warming themselves around the fire, and he was wearing a cardigan. For me, for a former president, to go and sit with rural people in an African country, and to go explore and find a vaccine for… I can't remember if it was malaria or whatever, but I was greatly humbled. And that's when I thought, "You know what? We take our blessings for granted and we should be living our lives with an attitude of gratitude all the time and know that every people of this world elevate us to higher pedestals. We are also capable of coming down to the very level of poverty stricken people are. When we are higher, we must not be oblivious to the plight of the people. So that is what I got out of the Jimmy Carter Center. Also, out of the Carter Center and the Martin Luther King Center, I got the feeling that sometimes we have enough recognition, and we have enough of a legacy as a people, but it is important to have a sense of legacy as a person. That is, as Dan Whitman or as Klaas Skosana. I have built this house, and this house is for my kids and the three coming generations. Or I am building this center for an orphanage. You know? Because we learn from people, who learn from others and change my whole perspective. At one point I thought, I am not going to build a house in a rural area because I am not going to live in a rural area, and so on. But then later on I said, "No, if I have the money, I can build the best mansion I want to build anywhere in South Africa-whether I die tomorrow and my kids live there, but I should leave a mark that is going to outlive me." When I went to Scotland, I saw a cathedral that has been in existence since the 1100s and when I look at the masonry and the definition on certain stones and stuff like that, I thought that, "I guess when I die I will leave something that will last for centuries. Not that for when the minute I disappear from the world, forget about me." But when I visited the U.S, including the memorial on the bombing of Hiroshima and all that, I thought that it is actually important that you document or leave your footprint to say, "I was here and when I was here, this is what I did." Then when the people come fifty or one hundred years later— they will know that I walked past here. That would make me happy in my grave if I had a way to celebrate it. I think a sense of… that you are making history that I saw in America. When I went to this

little place in Columbus, I met an old man that had retired from the Ford Corporation, and I was asking my questions. When he answered the questions, I said, "How is this possible?" For instance, they will give you a booklet in the United States that says, in this certain town there are 16,000 Slovaks, 5,000 Russians, 6 English people and 9 Pakistanis, but how do you arrive at that detail of information? We don't have those things in South Africa. But as I was saying, those are scopes of growth for us. If I know that it is possible, I can only suggest to the Statistician General of South Africa to say "let's begin to develop information to that level of people". Even though people are so mobile, so fluent, but do I know how many Ndebeles live in Pretoria? Do I know how many Germans live in Pretoria? It might be a good exercise, to gather and process information to that level. When I saw that in the U.S, I was actually very impressed. It may not be completely accurate, but at least it gives you a sense.

Q: It is ironic because we sometimes think of America as the country that does not dwell on the past, that it is more concerned with the present and the future, sometimes this is an advantage and sometimes this is a disadvantage. We are notoriously bad at history in our education system, but ironically, you felt that when you saw these statistics of a record that was kept of the demographic breakdown of a town or Columbus, Ohio. This goes against the stereotype but what is very interesting is that you had this impression.

SKOSANA: Yes. Fifteen years ago I was in America in April of 1995, but you see those are the things that have been standing out now, which doesn't seem like much to remember but it left a lasting impression.

Q: Very interesting. Let's go back chronologically, back to 1994, when you joined the U.S Information Service at the U.S Embassy in Pretoria. You told me that initially you worked for Rosemary Crocket as the Cultural Assistant, and then tell me some of the things you did there, and then tell me something about your work with the bi-national commission, the Gore-Mbeki bi-national commission starting a year later.

SKOSANA: Yeah, at first it sounds a little boring because it was a new environment all together. I mean, I interviewed such as Natalie Spock of the Pretoria Art Museum, and I knew nothing about Arts and the cultural museums. You just don't do something that make you teach, you know. And I didn't understand why the U.S was involved in this thing until we had an exhibition. It related to the Black History month, which was called "Song of my People," which was photographic exhibition. And I said, "Jeez. This does change your attitude, when you look at the pictures of a black American lady giving birth to her child, and her husband crying because he had never witnessed a child's birth." So whether he thought his wife was dying, or was going to turn it over but the nerve was flashing over his head in the picture watching his wife giving birth and he was crying. It had a great impact because I thought to myself, "I had never seen anyone give birth except those moments on TV" but with my own naked eyes, I had never seen that. Then later on when I saw it, I respected my wife quite a lot, and I didn't have the inclination to want to put her through that. So we did exhibitions such as "Songs of my People". But I think one of the greatest projects that stood out for me under Rosemary Crocket, was a student leadership project that USIS funded together with Mellon foundation and the

Soros foundation, What is it called? Yes, the Open Society Institute. USIS collaborated with the Open Society Institute; they funded student leaders from South African universities to do conflict management and conflict resolution. I think the idea was very, sort of, novel and in a way I must say that I have lived up to expectations. For example, you have a president of the SRC (Student Representative Council) from the University of Cape Town, and because the universities were used by the political organizations to mobilize students, you had organizations such as SASCO (South African Student Congress) which was aligned to the ANC. You had organizations such as PASO (Pan-African Student Organization) which was aligned to the Pan-Africanist Congress outside the university. So it was very interesting, that when we recruited these guys to workshop meetings, you were actually recruiting future leaders of South Africa. That was a very important project for me because then it gave me, even though I was out of university, but I was listening to students who were not just ordinary students, who were student leaders who had hotlines to political organizations talking about the future, the struggle, the visuals, and so on. So the embassy did a very good job of talking to these people. Once we got them in the workshops for conflict resolution, for negotiations, when he had points of disputes between students and university administrators who were predominately white, black students would just burn the tires and trashed the campuses, all of that. But the idea of USIS was to teach them negotiation skills as well. Maybe the reason they trash campuses and put things into the swimming pools because black people don't like seeing white swimming pools and campus's. When black students were toying about accommodations, the white students were complaining about lack of enough parking on campus. They were just in opposite directions. I mean, the white student is worried about where to park his car, but we don't even have cars, let alone accommodation.

So what was interesting for me was that USIS intervention was that these were indeed future leaders. And the fore fight of whoever conceives the program, Rosemary in conjunction with both American that was at Wits (Witwatersrand) University and his name was Dr. Ronald Cutter. Now apparently he lives in Tennessee at some university there. You know that program for me was very successful because, we brought some American professors and doctors and among them was a Terrell I think he was from the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, and we went to a workshop where people were trained in conflict resolution and management, in negotiation skills and so on. Then after that, the student leaders from South Africa had the opportunity to visit a university in the United States and to assess the relationship between the university student representatives as well as administrators in the United States. It was interesting to listen to them on the issues, because the struggle which we were facing in the country was not only the struggle for accommodation and exclusion, but we were also using universities as terrains for political struggle. So it was not only about university issues, but it was also about the emancipation of the country as a whole. So the point that I am making is that the people we send to the United States, among them, are David Makhura. He is now the Provincial Secretary for the African National Congress in Gauteng. So then, very soon, he will be the Premier of the province. Once he is the Premier of the province, who knows, he may end up being the president of this country because he has been in the education department of the ANC during his student days. Now, he is in the movement, and in the

lime-light, and the growing as a politician, for the past 20 years. He is now the provincial secretary general in Gauteng.

Q: So he is well positioned to be, even currently in a position of leadership and that, was part of that conflict resolution?

SKOSANA: One of the guys that was also a part of that group is a multi-millionaire. He started an IT company, his name is Patrick Makhubedu, and he is now a multi-millionaire from IT. One of the guys that we sent overseas was Sipho Maseko and he is the CEO of a mining company. I've forgotten the name of his mining company.

Q: Now was this luck? How was it that the right people were chosen like that? Was it because they had defined themselves as student leaders on the campus?

SKOSANA: Yes. That is the point I am making about the foresight of this project for USIS—that the identified people were leaders at the university either as a student representative or as a leader of some student wing of a political organization. Now some of these peoples are actually ministers in government; some of them are CEO's of companies. Some of them are very influential; one of them even employed me. He was the CEO of a development corporation. So one of them was also the CEO of Eskom Enterprises and Eskom generates electricity for the country and for the fabric. So the point that I was making, was that project was very good in the sense that it spoke to people that were young leaders and as young leaders, they had all the signs of being future, business; all political leaders and indeed they are. Indeed they know what they have seen in the United States and if there were any aspects of the American experience that had a big impact on them, they would remember them today; and being people in influential positions, they can be in the position to say that this can work or this doesn't work, because I saw it in America. So for me, working for the United States Embassy at the time--that was one of the biggest projects I worked on, the student leadership project. The second one was the Gore -Mbeki Bi-national Commission which, you know very well, was huge. It had two chancellors. The chancellor on the South African side it was Deputy President Thabo Mbeki then, and the chancellor on the American side it was Deputy President Albert Gore. The arrangement was that the South African delegation had its vice president Thabo Mbeki would go to the United States, evaluate programs, and then the next year the vice president will come to South Africa. I think that solidified relations; the government to government relations; between the United States and South Africa because there was a lot of visibility when Thabo Mbeki went to the U.S and there was a lot of visibility of the relationship when Vice President Gore visited South Africa. The operation was that we were on the ground making sure that what they agreed on at the government-to-government level was actually happening on the ground. Like the project that I decided on South Africa at the time being was in the Constitution making process. As young, new, relatively inexperienced leaders being expected to run government—how do you run government if you cannot put together a piece of legislation? Some people that were involved in the drafting of South African laws were sent to the University of Delaware to do the legislation drafting process. And they came back, and there were statistics of the speed at which the laws in South Africa had to

change. Like the education laws they had to go to the U.K to try and see what the United Kingdom did after World War II when there was that gap between the educated older people and the young people that had just come from World War II, who had to fix up the economy. What sort of education systems they put in place. So, they found a situation where South Africans needed to learn, and learn very fast. Through the Gore-Mbeki bi-national commission, they needed to go and study people. Go to Wisconsin, and see how the city there was run, and how they could then translate their leanings from there to say, running the city of Cape Town or the city of Joburg or the city of Tshwane. So it was a big project, and what it did for me personally, is that I was able to use my generalist skills to negotiate with the South African government people when I was working on programs on which the U.S and South Africa could collaborate. I had access my own government official, when I was upgrading to the American Embassy. I was called the Minister of Culture, then, under Mandela, and say, "I am inviting you to the independence day celebration at the ambassador's house." They would show up, because they were called by the U.S ambassador. I could call him straight away and say, "I would like to send you to the United States to observe the following things, because I realize you are working on these things in your department." And they would come running. So I had access to them. But today if I were to call my Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry and say "I want an appointment with you," they would not even allow me next to the door. They would say "deal with my PA (personal assistant) or deal with my PDG When I called from the American Embassy they would listen to me. (laughter). It was very good networking.

Q: It was enormous fun for everybody involved and greatly benefited the participants. I have a couple of questions about the BNC (bi-national commission). First of all, the philosophy of it was that it would have equal, bilateral benefit. Theoretically, it was not an aid program, U.S helping South African, but it was supposed to go in both directions. I do not know if it was exactly 50/50, but there were programs where the U.S benefitted. So there is sort of a question there—did you feel that both countries were benefitting? A second question closely tied to that, why did the U.S fund the BNC? Why did they do so? What was in it for the U.S?

SKOSANA: Now, I've got the following ideas in regard to that. To your first question of whether I think both countries have benefitted, I think from a government-to-government relationship point of view, they both benefitted because there were conversations, communication, exchange of ideas and open-door policy to say, that if there was something wrong, for example if America was involved in Iraq, and it was the belief of the South African government; that it should not be the case. Mandela would pick of the phone and call Bill Clinton, or pick up the phone and call George Bush and talk to him directly. Or call Tony Blair, because of those lines of communication over there. Then, later on after the U.S went to Iraq, it was revealed that in fact, Mandela called George Bush, spoke to him, and shared his perspective, that because George Bush had to carry out the American foreign policy, it was heated. And now over 5,000 American soldiers have died and all of that. It was South Africa's perspective was that it could have been done differently. So what I am saying is, for a government-to-government relationship it benefitted both countries. From the funding point of view, Mandela had just come into office, so we had a new president and two new vice presidents. Because vice president

Thabo Mbeki and vice president de Klerk, because of the government of national unity it had to incorporate the former government. So it was not easy from a funding point of view to fund this. So we had to use America's infrastructure to do that. As to whether the Americans benefited, I think they benefitted from the exposure to the South African situation because there were professors that were working with universities. At one point the deans of the universities from South Africa visited the United States, and people from the United States came to South Africa. There was a time when the director of national parks in America, the guy that was responsible for the Grand Canyon, Niagara Falls, they came to South Africa to see and how our parks systems are working, how we are conserving and preserving our national culture heritage and so on. So there were some aspects there that proved to be mutually beneficial, because our Kruger national parks is old and our preservation systems are top notch in our country, even though we are a relatively young country. But there is a lot that countries are learning from, how we are conserving and preserving our natural heritage.

Q: In fact, we remember Kathy Shallow going out to national parks all the time with the BNC, to the great benefit I think of the Americans who went with her, I think.

SKOSANA: Yeah. It was mutually beneficial, but from a funding point of view, it needed to be approved first. Then we bought them tickets; we gave them a stipendium; we booked them hotels, and working through other structures in the U.S. and booking them in various places. It was not easy.

Q: With your enormous labors, we did send a lot of people in both directions, I think everybody benefitted on both sides. Do any other BNC programs in particular come to mind? I remember the forensic nurses from Colorado who taught the South African police how to prosecute rape using forensics. There was the American Disabilities Act. There was Deval Patrick who came to assist in drafting affirmative action do any others particularly in your memory?

SKOSANA: Yes. There was also a visit by Professor Ronald Takaki from the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Ronald Takaki was on cultural education. There was a big debate over ... It was an assumption that if you learn more about other people's cultures, then naturally, you will be tolerant of them. But there was a debate that maybe the more you know about other people's cultures, the more intolerant you will be. Professor Takaki from the United States was saying that the more you know about people's cultures, the more tolerant you will be. Other projects, such as the one I mentioned earlier at the University of Delaware, where people were trained for drafting legislation. There was also a project on safety from the city, that New York super cop… Michael Bratton, he drove criminals out of New York. He was sent to South Africa to stamp out the criminals of Joburg. I think also, if I remember well, the mayor of New York, Giuliani, and he came to South Africa to assist with the management of the Mega ET I think There were so many I can't remember. Others were in marine biology. In South Africa they learned how to manage the coastlines and marine stuff. I coordinated that project. There was another good project on self-reliance. It was done by a guy called Velia Kotata and I cannot remember the institution he came from, but he came to South Africa to discuss

issues of self-reliance and basically assisting NGOs on how to write funding proposals, so that they could be funded by other philanthropic organizations.

Q: Very important at that time when international aid pretty much abandoned NGOs and sent their forms of aid to the central government. The NGOs were suffering terribly. So this was four years of being in the middle of everything in the middle of the world in a sense.

SKOSANA: Yes. I remember one day, Bruce Wharton— the information officer who is a big shot now, likely to be an ambassador soon—I remember that we were in a small meeting, but people were talking outside of the American Embassy about some shooting somewhere and so on. I just remember how excited I was when he said, "I was talking to the Pentagon right now, and the situation is blah, blah, blah." I thought, "Jeez, the word Pentagon!" As outsiders, I felt like I was kind of in the center of American military power. So he was saying that he was in contact with the Pentagon, and the Pentagon was advising him that as long if it were just a security situation around the embassy. I can't remember what was the story… there was people outside the US embassy because the US was bombing some place in another country.

Q: I think it might have been the Clinton bombing of Khartoum? Possibly?

SKOSANA: Yeah, I can't remember if it was Ethiopia or somewhere else. But there was security situation around the embassy in Pretoria where there was a threat that they were going to bomb it because the US was involved in some war with another foreign country, and he needed to get some guidance from the military experts in the Pentagon. So he just mentioned that he was talking to the Pentagon now. I also remember that you one time asked for my prediction about how Holomisa would end up. I made very positive predictions that he was going to be the most formidable opposition to the ANC, and I gave him reasons. But along the way I think he disappointed me. Up until now when COPE (Congress of the People – political party) also came and COPE is also collapsing.

Q: COPE is collapsing? COPE was working with the Democratic Alliance at one point? No? The whole thing is falling apart?

SKOSANA: No, the whole thing is falling apart. Remember that the former Deputy Prime Minister under Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, they started a new organization basically to form an opposition to the African National Congress. There is far too much in-fighting, it is just not getting any foothold on the opposition. I predicted that (Bantu) Holomisa was going to be the most formidable opposition to the ANC, but that was not the case. He is still there, just not as I predicted.

Q: So can you sum up the five years at USIS Pretoria?

SKOSANA: The learning curve was steep because I had to learn to entertain together with Rosemary, because I was hosting dinners with executives and for institutions of higher learning. By two years, I think it gave me what it had to give me. I mean I traveled

internationally for the first time. I learned a lot about the United States. I learned a lot about my own country while I was working for the American Embassy. In fact, the four years that I spent at the American embassy is the biggest number of years I have spent at any company because after that, any company that I worked for, I worked for three years except for my own company that started in 2007. So I have been running my own company now, for four years, so it is going to be the longest company I have ever worked for, which is my own. Second only to the embassy because I stayed at the embassy for four years, and I had never stayed that long in any company.

Q: Now I should ask, what motivated you to leave?

SKOSANA: I think what had happened, in my view, was that I had outgrown the embassy in a way. The structure was simple. Working within the embassy, you are an FSN (Foreign Service National) and by definition you can be a cultural officer, for example. I can't do Dan Whitman's job because I am not an American. Not that the American government does anything racist about it; I'm just not an American. You can only grow so much in terms of responsibilities within the embassy, and I think I had reached that point. I could have only been a cultural affairs assistant or even a senior cultural affairs assistant grown with my years. But my responsibilities would have remained the same. I would have always had to welcome the milkman then after three years he leaves, and I welcome Bruce Wharton, then he leaves and I'm still occupying the same position.

Q: Other employees were content to stay year after year, but you were different; you were a bit more restless, and you had more of a sense of personal mission- I think you did.

SKOSANA: Yes, I think you are right. I found Sheila Malan at the embassy. Sheila Malan is still working at the embassy. She was also there when I came for an interview in 1994. I think that when I arrived at the embassy, she had already been working there for seven years. So it is about more than 20 years.

Q: So it's a mixed picture; it's good but it's not good because of those restrictions. Just as you say, you can only grow so much as an employee. It would be the same if I were to work in the South African embassy in Washington; it is always that way. The purpose of this project is called "Outsmarting Apartheid," and it has to do with people who worked – in your case, you worked at the embassy after the transition – during the transition others such as Sheila, Gill, Frank, and many of the grantees come from the 60s, 70s, and 80s. Do you have any comment about the various programs such as Fulbright, Humphrey, Citizen Exchange, the many in the art expeditions that you referred to? If I called to mind those programs and the notion "Outsmarting Apartheid," does this bring any thoughts to your mind?

SKOSANA: Yes, it does. It reminds me of Fulbright. There are people that I know that went on a Fulbright scholarship and came back with MBAs from overseas universities, which they could not even do locally. To be admitted locally, they would have been

asked about experience and all of those things. But they just went overseas and they would come back with MBAs from Harvard and so on. So I have very good memories of people who have traveled to the United States to study. All of them when they came back contributed immensely to the country as a whole, and to themselves as individuals. Personally, I benefitted from the study tour, and it was only 31 days, a month, but it's like I spent years in the U.S because I was exposed to various parts of the U.S. I knew that when I was walking down the street of Washington DC, the chances of me meeting somebody who had a Ph.D was great. It seemed like everyone I spoke to was a doctor or something, and the chances of finding them on the street were real. Very serious people, educated in Washington, DC, and you go to New York and you find people jumping out of limousines and people who had wealth and fortune when you go to New York. So I am saying, the people that participate in these programs, you need an ordinary study tour of two weeks, a master's program from a university, or a one-year MBA program. Many of them came back to contribute quite immensely. I saw a list people that I sent to the United States and what positions they are occupying today, and I think they all have positive things to say about what they have seen in the U.S. You take what you can take from a country. You cannot focus on everything about a country, but fix your brain on a few aspects, and you will remember them forever, like the things I shared with you earlier. So I think that intervention of the United States was commendable, and it did, in many ways, "outsmart" apartheid because it exposed people to various perspectives. Aside from that, I do not think I would have owned a house at my age. I mean, I started working at the embassy at the age of 24 or 25. In 1995, I already owned a house in the suburbs at that age and that is unheard of when you look at my starting block, because I could not have afforded a car and a house if I was working for an ordinary company. But because I was working for the embassy and earning twice as much per week and the embassy could produce a letter saying that this person is working for us and can have a housing allowance, I managed to have a house at a very young age. I started working for the embassy in July, and by November, I already owned a car; I was driving my own car. In the following year, in April, I owned a house in the suburbs. Not even one of those houses in the village, but it was in a suburb. So I think in my case it attributed to "outsmarting apartheid" because after I sold that house for the first time, I had a bank balance of over 100,000 rand because I sold the house nine years later, as a profit, I think I got the house at 134,000, and I sold it for 200,000 something. Even though I was working all of those years, you would only have enough in the banks to pay your bills and by the time your next salary comes in you are actually down to zero. But after I sold the house, I had over 100,000 rand cash, which I would have never saved or accumulated, and that was all because of the embassy. Some things may have not gone that well for others, but for me, it gave me good grounding. It basically influenced the way I did things henceforth. I have been accredited a lot on my opinion of issues, and it was because of my start in public diplomacy within the embassy.

Q: Did the apartheid regime- was it a tactical mistake for them to even permit these programs because the many people who have been interviewed all feel, that as you say, they had a new sense of what was possible, they had much wider horizons, and this eventually contributed to the undermining and the dismantling of the apartheid system. Do you think that the apartheid regime lost track of its own narrow interest when it even

allowed these exchanges?

SKOSANA: Yeah. The apartheid experiment, I just believe that it was unworkable from the get-go. How do you give people two types of education systems, for people living in the same society? How do you say, "You shall not be my neighbor, but you shall cook my food, and not use my plate or utensils to eat"? It is just a misnomer; it is does not work. You are saying, "You are sub-human. You are dirty," but you are saying, "Come wash my clothes, come clean my house, or come look after my kids when I am not there. But don't be my neighbor, don't live next to me and don't get the same education as myself. When you drink coffee, do not use my cup." But you are saying, "Prepare a cup of tea for me." You are just stupefying yourself. It was once said that our Bantu education was made for us to be better tools for whites. But when you look at it, how do you expect me to help you, when you don't give me enough education to be able to help you? I don't know, I just think they made a mistake all the way, or rather, not a mistake; what they did was unworkable. It was just a matter of time for it to collapse. How do you expose me to some kind of education, and say, "Read this book, not a book about democracy but about culture. Because if you read about democracy, it might be a little clever. How do you control my access to the library, because I will read about Martin Luther King. I mean the person that influenced Mandela, for example, was Jawaharlal Nehru, the politician, and look where he comes from and where he was raised (like the Mahatma Gandhi). Mandela was influenced by somebody that was not from South Africa. He read about him. He did not meet him or see him.

Q: It is a platitude to say that a little knowledge is dangerous. I guess it is true, however, that you cannot educate a person a little bit and then confine their knowledge at any point. It is no longer confinable. So you think that these…?

SKOSANA: It's like at university; I did International Relations, but today I am a businessperson. I market office business products. What does that have to do with the peace process that I studied? What I am trying to say is that the university will give you grounding and thinking skills, but it will not teach you to analyze apartheid, divorce rates, or demographics or whatever. You take that knowledge and transpose it to many areas of life so the experiment was unworkable from the get-go. So to answer the question directly, the answer is wrong. If they really wanted to do a good job, they should have given no education at all.

Q: The United States was either wise or lucky in coming along at the right time (that would be the 60s, 70s and 80s) and using these various programs to accelerate the type of knowledge that you are talking about, I think, the type of knowledge that can be transposed from academics to business or vice versa. I think we brought us up to the present. It sounds as if the rain has stopped a little bit. Let me just ask for any other refection that you may have about your own professional development, the state of your country at this time in the new year at 2011, and a possible future, if any, of foreign programs that beneficially affect both sides of a bilateral international relationship. I guess I am asking about the past, the present, and the future. Any reflections at all in conclusion?

SKOSANA: In conclusion, I would say that I am thankful and humbly grateful for the opportunity I was given to work for the American government and get exposure to how the American society functions, especially in understanding how the government system works, such as the Democrats, the Republicans and the Independents. That came to South Africa, and we now have a democratic government. We are not implementing something that is unknown in the word, and we know that things that were implemented have worked elsewhere. When one day, one becomes the president of this country, I will obviously draw on a lot of what I have learned while I was working for the U.S Embassy. I think it gave me a very good grounding in the sense that there are things that you may take for granted, as a person, but ideas do drive the world. I remember somebody making an accession, the reason that the U.S. and the U.K. are always are always on friendly terms was defined by a visit by Margaret Thatcher, long before she became the first woman prime minister in the U.K. or to the United States. She prioritized the relationship with the United States. Any other prime minister of the U.K. since has simply walked on her footprints and I have had others curry to the U.S. American foreign policies' influence on what has happened in South Africa. That around 1974-76, De Klerk, before he became the president of this country and became powerful in politics, he actually visited the United States as well. He understood democratic processes and so on, even though he needed to use apartheid stepping stones to elevate himself politically up to a point of relieving Mandela. So I am saying that it is these ideas that shape our world views, and the U.S. has indeed contributed to the way I view things, like from studying the work of Francis Fukuyama, Henry Kissinger's electorate, visiting the Martin Luther King Center, Emory University, George Washington University, visiting the Jimmy Carter Center and just seeing the humility of a former president in addressing social issues in the world – I mean, it shapes your world. So the next time you hear the leader coming out of Africa leading the South African society into the next century or whatever, all of those ideas will be calculating in my brain, for me personally. Talking about the country's future, I believe that South Africans as a nation are very ambitious people. We have had apartheid, for good things, for life and for progress. We believe in ourselves and we do not like failing; we always want to win. Sometimes we are very impatient with our own progress; we think we are moving too slowly. Just like that example that I gave you: the World Cup being around for a century, but countries such as Uruguay have started playing since 1934. In 2010, we were hoping we could win the World Cup, and somebody was asking: "There are countries such as the Netherlands have been to the World Cup finals more than three times and have never won the World Cup. Who did we think we were?" How did we think we could win the World Cup when others have played for a century and have never won? But somehow we thought that because we were given the opportunity to host the World Cup, that we will hold the World Cup. We are the first African country to do that. There are well established countries that have put in deeds before, but never got it. The point that I am making is that we are very positive people, full of passion and energy, and I think that if the collective mood can be circulated to individual performances, we can go much further. One of my revolutions for this year was that. I am saying that South Africa put in a deed to host the World Cup 16 years ago, tried 16 years later, and they got it. So I am saying that if South Africa (being the young country that it is) could win the right to host the World Cup, as an individual what is it

that I can do to win newer projects? Surely, I can do that if South Africa as a nation can do that. You should come and look at the highways and how they have transformed as a result of the World Cup between Pretoria and the airport. I see this everyday, but when I look at them and the impact of the World Cup, the stadium, the state of the communication, the result that has been made out of a kick from FIFA is amazing. In the future, as a nation we can do so much – what is it that I can do for myself, personally? I can fix the gap. If a country can win the right to host the World Cup that has been in existence for over almost a century within 16 years of its attempt, what is it that I can attempt, within this century, of my life, the tenure of my life? I mean, our slogan says that "South Africa is alive with possibilities." So if I were to answer the question, sequentially, I have given you ideas on the influence that America has on the world and that the American Embassy has had on me as an individual, as an employee. Practically, I would not have owned a car within four months of my working life; I would not have owned a car within a year. Remember, I started in July, then, rather soon after, I had a house. Who could have done that? I mean, that set me for life in a way.

Q: So, a sense of possibilities and a sense that limits can be self-imposed and sometimes if you could just see how limits are broken in other places, you can break them yourself. You have hinted twice in the last five minutes that you would be willing to be the president of your country. So if I am reading you correctly, may I say President Skosana, it has been….

SKOSANA: No, you cannot say that. If I am called upon the circumference of the situation to do that, I will do it. But right now, I am establishing myself in the business world. I am more comfortable as a business and social leader than as a political leader. My plan is to establish myself as a credible and a reputable business person. I will then use the freedom I can get by being a well-to-do person to influence things socially, then go back to the villages, build orphanages, moral regeneration centers, and so on. If, by doing that type of work, there is a calling for political involvement, I will. But for now, it's business and social involvement, then after that it's "social entrepreneurship," then after that I can look at politics and laugh.

Q: Well, this is marvelous, and maybe a personal prejudice, but I think that the private sector is the future. Governments have shown that they succeed sometimes, they fail many times, but the private sector, when it succeeds, it succeeds. What they call social responsibility now, I think, is the future of development. Let's say that we have come to a conclusion in this discussion, but there will be many more, and it has been an enormous privilege to get your thoughts today. Thank you so much.

End of interview