

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

KATHLEEN STAFFORD

Interviewed by: Marilyn Greene
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INTERVIEW

Q: This is November 13th, 2012 and I'm Marilyn Greene interviewing Kathleen Stafford, who is the spouse of the chargé d'affaires, Joseph Stafford in Khartoum, Sudan. We're going to talk about — we're going to talk about chronology mostly, rather than go right for the headlines. We want to talk about kind of who you are rather than news events and so on specifically. So if you think that we'll have time for another session, I won't hurry through this part because —

STAFFORD: We'll have time.

Q: — we certainly want to get to the diplomatic part. Let me just do a quick check and make sure we're OK. These things scare me to death.

STAFFORD: It's OK, I take my time with technology.

Q: I hear something. OK, good. (laughs) Well, I did enjoy your exhibit so much. And I really loved the painting — of the two ladies with the babies on their backs?

STAFFORD: Oh, thank you. That was an image of our time in The Gambia. We can find time to talk about that.



Baby Talk—Watercolor

Q: OK Kathleen, tell me about where you were born and where you grew up.

STAFFORD: Well, I was born at Westover Field in Springfield, Massachusetts in 1951 since my dad was a navigator in the Air Force. He came from a military family. Then, when I was 11-months-old we moved to Hawaii.

Q: And he was stationed there.

STAFFORD: He was stationed at Hickam Air Base on Oahu Island. We lived there until I was five years old.

STAFFORD: I vividly remember going to hula lessons, my dad driving us around in what we called the Jalopy and his always pointing and saying “There’s Diamond Head,” and the sound of the breeze in the palm trees.

Q: That was Oahu.

STAFFORD: Right.

Q: Did you learn any Hawaiian language?

STAFFORD: I can sing along with that Christmas song, Mele Kalikimaka. My parents loved to listen to Alfred Apaka and I must have learned from our baby sitters and things like that. Words come back sometimes, but I think what the good thing about growing up in Hawaii, is that you grow up around people of all different colors. And so that was my introduction to life, seeing that people come in different skin colors, different hair colors, different languages, and they don’t look the same or sound the same so that was probably a wonderful way to start this career (*laughs*).

Q: Absolutely. Did you have brothers and sisters?

STAFFORD: I do, I have an older sister, who is a much better hula dancer, very graceful. And I have a younger brother who was born in Hawaii.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: So then when I was five we moved to Greenville, South Carolina, because there was an air base there. And that was wonderful idyllic growing up in neighborhoods with lots of other kids all around in the days of no organized sports. We made up games, played, “school,” put on plays, played dress up.

Q: What did your dad do?

STAFFORD: He was a navigator and at first was going to Korea and then North Africa

and finally to Antarctica for months at a time on a program called “Deep Freeze.” Later when I was about 9 years old when there was a huge cut back, a rift, and the base was going to be closed we moved to Memphis, Tennessee.

Q: That was a lot of moving around. Did you stay in one of these places a really long time?

STAFFORD: Never more than four years — Hawaii was the longest, I guess, four years, until my father retired in Crossville, Tennessee when I was 11, which was the biggest culture shock of my life. After living in large cities with lots of variety we moved to a small town in the Appalachian Mountains. Most of the people had never lived anywhere else, so it was very provincial. I was eleven so it slowly dawned on me that I was someplace very different from any place I had ever lived before.

My father retired at a very young age and became an air traffic controller, natural enough after being a navigator, and he thought it would be a nice quiet place to raise children, but it was really more provincial than he had imagined. So I was ready to leave— as soon as my sister packed and went to college I packed too, two years early. *(laughs)*

Of course When I think about it now though, I think my attending middle school and high school there was very good preparation for this life. I was the junior class president, and Editor –in- Chief of our literary arts magazine for two years and through that and my art classes was able to work with art and writing a good deal of my time in high school. I also had a great math teacher and thanks to her we went to regional competitions and usually did pretty well. Finally I was one of two girls who went to the “Girls State” Convention, in recognition of leadership.

So I learned from being class president that even with a class of more than 250 people a handful of people consistently did all the work. I made all sorts of banners, signs, and leaflets, decorated for fundraising dances and the prom and sold candy at the entrance of school. For the Jet Stream magazine, though I was editor one of my jobs was to canvas the town, asking for donations of patrons and benefactors. Sounds a lot like the activities of a DCM or Ambassador’s spouse doesn’t it?

My first university was George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Tennessee where I was on a scholarship, majoring in art and math. I really loved studying physics since it is applied mat. But I could see that the art program was disappearing across the street to Vanderbilt University and I was afraid there wouldn’t be anything to graduate from, and after I left in fact, in 1979 it officially became part of Vanderbilt. And so I transferred to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville for my sophomore year.

Q: And you continued to majored in?

STAFFORD: Art and math.

The Art department was growing and I had a large choice of specializations—watercolor,

drawing, printmaking, and painting. I became a printmaking major. The professors were wonderfully talented even if our buildings were old bungalows. That was fine though since printmaking is a very messy medium. You don't need a spiffy clean laboratory, just old walls to tape your work up to dry and old sinks to clean the equipment. It was just perfect. And I met Joe in art history class.

Q: Really?

STAFFORD: My husband, yes.

Q: Was he interested in becoming an art major at that time?

STAFFORD: It was just one of his electives. He was majoring in Political Science and Spanish literature.

And he was interested in art, — his mother had always stressed the liberal arts, — I remember, there were quotes of philosophers framed around the house and all sorts of books about art. His sister Janet, is an artist and his brother, Richard is a director and choreographer. So there was always that strong interest in the arts in the family. In a year and a half we were married.

Q: Before you finished college?

STAFFORD: Before I finished college, yes. The summer we married, Joe had finished the first year of his Master's degree in Political Science. He had been going to school straight through for 5 years with just enough time off to work each summer. So he took a job with Social Security. Back then, if you had a high grade point average (he was Phi Beta Kappa) you didn't even need to interview for a job with Social Security. There were openings in Birmingham, Alabama so without blinking an eye we transferred there. He worked for a year while I finished my degree at the University of Alabama with a printmaking major. Then we returned to Knoxville, Tennessee a year later and I worked while he finished his Master's degree in Political Science.

Q: OK. When did you start to know in your younger years that you wanted to be an artist, or study art anyway?

STAFFORD: Early on, elementary school, I'd say. My grandfather on my mother's side had been an artist and inventor so she always encouraged me.

Q: So early on.

STAFFORD: Yes.

Q: So your degree was in art.

STAFFORD: Well, yes. I was maintaining a double major for my first two years since I

loved math too so I was studying math and art. But then I realized I couldn't major in both, and architecture was just about the only combination, to put the two together.

Q: Right. Right.

STAFFORD: And that was a whole different program. And so I had to make a choice. In fact, I had to go to a career counselor and say, "Which of these should I major in?" After talking with me and they said, "It's obvious that you prefer art. So you should just finish with that," so I did.

Q: Was there a particular, like watercolor or oil, major?

STAFFORD: Printmaking.

Q: Printmaking.

STAFFORD: — Yes. So I was doing lithography, serigraphy, intaglio, etchings, and things of that nature.

Q: You're going to have to tell me more about collagraphy and what it is.

STAFFORD: Yes.

Q: And you mentioned in one of your — maybe it was at the museum — that you wanted to find a way to minimize the equipment that you needed to lug around. And so that was one factor. What's the difference between what you need for printmaking and what you need for this watercolor?

STAFFORD: Yes. Well, that is, to make collagraphs, that is the printmaking — I need an etching press. So until I was evacuated from the Ivory Coast, and was required to stay in Washington for nine months, I had not done printmaking since I graduated from university, which was thirty years earlier. It required an etching press, the large size I need can weigh between one and two thousand pounds. It would have been a really difficult thing to transport. So once Joe joined in the Foreign Service, I became a watercolorist. It is more portable.

Q: I see, OK.

STAFFORD: Because that goes under your arm (*laughs*).

Q: Yes. In a bag.

STAFFORD: That's right. I loved watercolor too. I was — I was also painting watercolors at university and loved the transparency and layers of color. It is easy to see the technique and human hand at work and I like the idea of leaving my mark. "Kilroy was here!" Now with the way I create collagraphs I can combine the two methods.

STAFFORD: So it is easier to explain collagraphs by explaining the etching process. People usually think of the old masters' prints like Rembrandt and Durer, or black and white illustrations in older books. In etching or intaglio a flat metal plate, of copper or zinc for example, is given a protective covering called a "ground" and then tools to scratch lines and textures are drawn into the ground exposing different areas of the plate. That plate is put into an acid bath which bites into the plate, leaving lines and rough areas below the surface. When the ground is cleaned off, ink is wiped onto the plate and off of the smooth areas. Paper is moistened and the plate and paper go through the press which puts heavy pressure on the paper and forces it into those lines and you have a "proof." Then you see what you have so far and then you do the whole process again or apply other treatments to get the kind of textures and marks that you want on the plate. You may keep perfecting the "plate" through dozens of reworkings. When you are finally satisfied with the plate you print an "edition" that can be 50 identical prints or 10 or whatever you like. Maybe up to a hundred. The master artists like Picasso or Goya might work with a professional printing studio and have even larger editions because at that point it is a question of physical labor and not so much the creative process.

Instead of a metal plate and acid, I take a piece of cardboard, drawing board as my "plate," build up a low relief with duct tape, glued cut out shapes from cardboard about the thickness of file folders, feathers, paper doilies, lace, anything I find that I can use to make the texture I want. Using modeling paste I force it into something like a cake decorator, but finer, and I draw lines, I might comb through that to make more textures or give a dynamic movement to the lines. Finally, I coat the finished plate with a thin acrylic varnish/water mixture to protect the plate so I can use it multiple times. Then I print bright colors by rolling ink on the surface of the plate, wetting the paper and putting it through the press. Then I clean all the ink off the plate, rub a dark toned ink into all the nooks and crannies just like someone doing an etching, and then I wipe the ink off the surface areas. This darker ink mutes some of the bright colors and gives them a shimmery effect sometimes. Also when I wipe the ink off I do all sorts of other methods to ink the plate because I am not aiming for consistent identical copies like most print editions, I am really painting on the plate, trying something a little different each time, so the inking up requires hours and hours for me. It is very idiosyncratic but it is very exciting each time. As far as I can tell, other collagraph makers do not do realistic looking people like I do but it was just the right medium for my African Icon series.

Q: And when do you do say the facial features and all that? Is that later on?

STAFFORD: Yes, since I can never get quite as much detail in these tiny places, I do a final step to define shapes and add calligraphic line with watercolor. Initially I used oil pastels to draw those fine lines because I was using oil based inks.

Q: Mm-hmm.

STAFFORD: But then being a watercolorist, I switched to watercolor to be even more precise. So you see the plate is just a stop on the way. It is the print that is the finished art

work.

Q: — anyway, but these you can't do without the press.

STAFFORD: That's correct, exactly.



Homage to Seidu Keita—Collagraph



Three Sisters—Collagraph

Q: Now, this is the watercolor.

STAFFORD: That's right, that's the watercolor.



Koumba—Watercolor

Q: That's — the colors in that are so vivid.

STAFFORD: Thank you.

Q: I just love that. Is that a particular boy or — I mean he's Nubian, but is he — does he have a name?



Nubian Boy—Watercolor

STAFFORD: (*laughs*) No, he does — I don't remember his name, but when I painted him he was on my mind for a long time. He was in one group of photos I took, always black and white in Egypt since that way the tonal study was already half done. Then I exaggerate the shadows and highlights to have a more dynamic composition.

Q: Oh, OK.

STAFFORD: But when I started this painting we'd had our son. And he had these little fat cheeks.

Q: Aw (laughs).

STAFFORD: And so as I was painting this child and our son's face just "appeared."

Q: I see.

STAFFORD: In fact that's what happens many times. I will be working on a subject and as I am working the face of someone I know just comes out of the paper. That is one aspect that makes painting so exciting, it is a dynamic process that starts with a subject but memory and just working with medium all intermix to make the final painting or print.

Q: When was your son born?

STAFFORD: Our son was born when we were in Cairo. It was 1985. I figured I'd had enough language training by then and it was time to have a baby. Or it was going to be too late. I was 34 at that point and we'd been married since I was 21.

Q: Wow.

STAFFORD: I didn't want to have any health problems from waiting longer.

Q: Right.

Q: And what is his name?

STAFFORD: David McKay Stafford.

Q: That's great. And so he's 20 —

STAFFORD: 27.

Q: 27

STAFFORD: Yes.

Q: OK. This is not according to the chronology, but I was wondering, this incident in Iran was classified for so long. Did David know anything about it before 1997?

STAFFORD: No. No.

Q: You had to keep it even — oh my goodness. Wasn't that hard?

STAFFORD: Well, you know, it just didn't come up. — after we escaped we didn't talk about the fact that the CIA were involved since the students who held our colleagues hostage always accused them of being spies and saying they would start the trials any day. The last thing anyone wanted was to say that CIA agents arranged our rescue. Also, we understood as soon as we were exfiltrated that the CIA wanted to reserve that practice for future use, so it should not be exposed. Finally — I think by the time we left Palermo in 1981 and the real hostages had been freed, our escape was not mentioned anymore.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: That was our second post. And someone did come to Palermo and it came up then.

Q: I see.

STAFFORD: And so then after that, once in a while people at post would remember Iran One time in Tunis, this was the year 1999 on the twentieth anniversary, we invited over everyone from the Canadian embassy to celebrate, you know, to thank them. And so I think that was the first time he was old enough to understand. Joe always considered it as an unfortunate episode that happened, that we were in the wrong place at the wrong time. So we never really talked about it a great deal. David would have been 14 and I don't think we explained that the Canadians had hidden us and helped us escape from Iran years before but we didn't talk about the whole story. We never discussed it with any family members for that matter.

Q: And David is now about the same age as the actress who —

STAFFORD: Right, right who play's me. *(laughs)*.

Q: How did that make you feel?

STAFFORD: Well, I think I was 28 and he's about 27, you're right.

Q: So you were of course played by somebody who wasn't even born.

Q: *(laughs)* well, why don't we go back — you said you can remember the chronology of your posts. *That would help me, because I never did find that list. So let's go through. The first one was?*

STAFFORD: The first one was Iran, that's right.

Q: That was your very first post?

STAFFORD: That was our first post.

Q: Oh my goodness. And you were working as a consular officer.

STAFFORD: Well, interviewing applicants as a PIT, part time-temporary employee.

Q: Did you go through all the training?

STAFFORD: I did. I think it was one of the first years they offered the consular course to the spouses.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: And I took the Farsi course too. It was the same class Joe and the other four new A-100 officers going to Iran took. Cora and I and Ann Swift, the head of the Political Section were all class mates for six months.

STAFFORD: So I had taken the Farsi course and the consular course so that I could go, so that I could work at the post. The plan was that other spouses would soon be allowed to follow. We went in September. Consular officers were needed to interview the 40,000 visa applicants who were on the waiting list since the Consulate had been closed for a very long time. So that's why Cora and I were able to go in advance.

Q: All right. And that was until '79 obviously.

STAFFORD: That's right (*laughs*), right. That's right, because we got out in January of 1980.

Q: And then did you go directly to another post?

STAFFORD: No, we were here in the States for a while to rest and see our families. Then because Joe was, not yet tenured, he couldn't have any more language training. But we spoke Italian from our year and a half in Rome prior to the State Department work. Joe had worked for an Occidental's import/export branch and I studied figure drawing at the Accademia di Belle Arti. So with our Italian we went to Palermo.

Q: OK. And that was in the '80s or later?

STAFFORD: That was '80 — that's right, May of '80 to '82.

Q: OK. All right.

STAFFORD: And then we went to Tunis to study Arabic for one year, because we already could read and knew the alphabet. We went directly to Tunis and skipped the normal first year in Washington.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: And so we had one year of Arabic. At the end of it Joe had almost a four-four after one year. Yes. He has the ear but he also puts in the hours.

Q: Wow. Amazing.

STAFFORD: Yes, it is. I was in his class (*laughs*). It was torture (*laughs*). Jerry Loftus and I and Joe. After about three months we're going in to class and our teacher turns on the radio to play the news and says, "OK, what did they say?"

Gerry and I would say, "We don't know," (*laughs*).

And Joe would tell us.

Q: Wow, that's amazing.

STAFFORD: (*laughs*)

Q: So that was not as a post —

STAFFORD: Right, just language training.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: Then we went to Cairo and that would have been summer of '83 to '86. It was during that time that I became pregnant with David. So I went back home for a while. Infant mortality rates in Cairo were 50 % at the time and since I was 34 by that time we didn't want to take any chances. We would have left that summer, but we extended so that after David's birth we could return to Cairo and stay put for a year. Then in 1986 we went to Kuwait.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: '86 to '88.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: And then we went to Algiers. So in between we had French language training.

Q: Mm-hmm.

STAFFORD: And then we were in Algiers from November of '89 until June of '90 because Joe had a car accident.

Q: (gasps)

STAFFORD: And so we came back.

Q: Does he still suffer?

STAFFORD: No, he's fine now.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: So then we were back in the United States for four years. I went back to school and obtained my M. Ed in education from Marymount. That was a killer.

Q: (laughs) I live right around the corner from Marymount.

STAFFORD: I love Marymount. The program was fantastic and even had graduate courses during the day which seldom is the case anymore. But we had to settle into Washington for the first time. David was just four years old and so there was a lot of juggling to do. Then, teaching the first year, you know, wanting to get it all perfect ...and spending more time on preparing all my classes than the time in the classroom.

Q: Did you teach at Marymount or at —

STAFFORD: No, I taught art in Fairfax County Public Schools. The first year I was the art teacher for two schools and went from classroom to classroom with a large cart. That was the hard part. Just making sure I had everything with me to teach art to 5 classes each day and clean up. I did enjoy the teaching though.

STAFFORD: Then we went to Mauritania in 1993 to 1996. Joe was the DCM. First with Ambassador Gordon Brown and his wife Olivia and then with Ambassador Dorothy Sampas and her husband. The Browns have kindly come to my Virginia exhibitions every time I am evacuated, they are loyal supporters. In Mauritania I taught at the elementary school on the compound. I spent so much time trying to get lessons ready at the school that sometimes they locked me in and I would have to climb up on a chair and call out to a passerby to ask the guards to let me out.

Q: What do they speak there?

STAFFORD: French and Arabic.

STAFFORD: Then in 1996 Joe went to Algeria, and that was unaccompanied.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: '96 to '98.

Q: What did you do?

STAFFORD: I came home and I taught art at Baileys Elementary School in Fairfax County. It was a wonderful school but challenging because I had 900 students from Kindergarten to fifth grade. It seemed to bring everything together that I had ever learned. I had some children come early in the morning to help me. We spoke Arabic together and I think it made them feel good and at home. And I had wonderful teachers, principal and staff to work with, and Robert Moore, my volunteer, a retired Army Colonel was named Fairfax County School Volunteer of the year. I could have stayed forever.

STAFFORD: So our reward for Joe's having gone to Algeria was going to Tunis.

Q: OK (laughs).

STAFFORD: We lived there in what had been the U.S. ambassador's residence in Carthage, outside the city of Tunis with absolutely beautiful weather most of the year. We could see the Mediterranean from our balcony that stretched across the front of the house. — We were there from '98 to 2001. And that was like a fairy land. Just so fantastic.

Q: Really?

STAFFORD: It's beautiful. Probably the safest place we have ever lived.

Q: Yeah. Really?

STAFFORD: Yes, David was 13 or so by that time, he could take a taxi at midnight during Ramadan and there were no worries. There were no drugs tolerated, Tunisians were very law abiding, there were no guns. People behaved as if they lived in small towns where everyone knew each other. Not the anonymity and the isolation a big city brings. It was very safe. Tunisians were educated and tolerant, used to seeing Europeans all the time and very beautiful architecturally and weather wise. It was so inspiring I had enough work for 3 exhibitions there, one each year.



Spice Market Tunis—Watercolor

Q: Right, right.

STAFFORD: So then after that, Ivory Coast from 2001 to 2004. I was evacuated for nine months when the military mutinied.

STAFFORD. And then 2004 to 2007 in The Gambia (*laughs*).

Q: I think I did learn that and that was the one thing I found on the internet was that particular set of dates.

STAFFORD: Because then he was the Ambassador.

Q: Was that his first ambassadorship? And the others were all consular posts or?

STAFFORD: Well, he was Ambassador in The Gambia and his position was DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) at four posts. Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, and the Ivory Coast

Q: That must have been frustrating (laughs).

STAFFORD: (*laughs*) Well, I learned a lot about the interior decoration department of the State Department (*laughs*). And I was the faux wife of the Ambassador half the time.

Q: Right.

STAFFORD: Because we would have a female Ambassador or there would be no wife at post but there were still parties that needed to be coordinated or different charity groups that needed our support or official visitors that might need to be escorted somewhere.

Q: Right.

STAFFORD: So after learning all these different skills for fund raising and organizing charity galas and printing signs I went to The Gambia where there was no diplomatic community whatsoever (*laughs*).

Q: You certainly are a flexible human being.

STAFFORD: (*laughs*) well, thank you. That is surely the most important quality to develop if we want to thrive in this role.

Q: OK, we're up to —

STAFFORD: I'm sorry, The Gambia in 2007, yes. Then we came back and he taught at the War College for a year and a half.

STAFFORD: And then in Christmas of 2008, he went to Iraq.

STAFFORD: It was supposed to be for a year, but of course it was difficult in December to find a replacement so he extended and returned the summer of 2010 in time to be briefed and debriefed and go to Lagos where he was the Consul General to a post with about sixty plus families and a very large American ex pat community with the oil companies.

Q: OK, and that was from 2010 —

STAFFORD: Until 2012.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: And then we were supposed to retire.

Q: Oh!

STAFFORD: And he did retire. And he was sworn back in the next day to go to Khartoum.

STAFFORD: I was secretly hoping that the Sudanese embassy would take their time giving us our visas like they do so often. But no (*laughs*). They gave us the visas right away. But then at the last minute it was decided I should take the crash and bang course whatever it is called course. And so he went off to post, because they'd had had such a big gap since the previous Ambassador left and the DCM was going to be leaving for Brazil. So he went off and then I joined him a week later.

Q: Well, he's the — he's the chargé.

STAFFORD: He's the chargé, because there is no Ambassador.

Q: Why is there no Ambassador?

STAFFORD: Because we, we don't have that level of a relationship with the Government of Sudan. President Bashir of Sudan is wanted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The genocide stems from the Darfur region and the ongoing civil war that supposedly just ended.

STAFFORD: And so the post really needed someone permanent there as it assists with treaties between North and South Sudan

Q: Right. Right.

STAFFORD: And they did have Ambassador Princeton Lyman as the President's Special Envoy who was assisting in mediating the peace accords between North and South Sudan. He would travel back and forth to Washington. But the embassy didn't have its

own ambassador or chargé— that is, a Chief of Mission So Joe needed to get out there.

Q: And now that you have been evacuated do you have a home to return In the United States?

STAFFORD: We do. Our son is living there in Vienna, Virginia.

Q: OK. And you have a place in Florida too?

STAFFORD: No, no. We never did. It was a “residency “state for years when we joined the Foreign Service because Joe was attending the University of Florida Latin American Studies Ph.D. program when we joined the Foreign Service.

Q: Oh. OK.

Q: Vienna’s a nice town, it really is

STAFFORD: Yes, it has some great restaurant’s and not too far from Washington. Our townhouse is a couple blocks from the metro so David can take it to his classes at the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School branch that’s here in Washington.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: He’s just about to finish up his master’s in finance. He is enjoying his professors and loves what he is studying. He talks about some of his classes and they do sound fascinating. I think he is very fortunate to have found something he really enjoys studying and working with.

Q: And he’s going to be what, a financial —

STAFFORD: Well he is interested in how corporations plan and run, all the factors that must be considered in making predictions. Then he is interested in the global economy, markets, hedge funds, commodity markets. All those trends have to be taken into account so I think it is the big picture kind of thinking that he enjoys. Things about which my understanding is very fuzzy.

Q: How did you feel about being close to retirement and then having it sort of jerked away?

STAFFORD: Well, retirement is kind of a fantasy for us anyway. You know, this moving around ever since I was a kid, it’s really hard to imagine staying put.

Q: No.

STAFFORD: — I am savoring the thought of throwing away all those appliance boxes we have to store somewhere all the time, and not packing up every three years. So it’s

something I'd think about, like the day I'm going to have my own kitchen. That's, that's the biggest part of the fantasy, is *my* kitchen.

Q: How about a studio?

STAFFORD: And *my studio*. Yes (*laughs*). Those two things. The kitchen just seems more real because I have always thought it would be wonderful to have a yellow and blue kitchen like Monet's in Giverny. I always thought of that as a bright sunny gathering place for good friends and good food and conversations about art. But we don't even know where we want to live. We know we don't want to live someplace cold, because we've lived so many years in the desert or the tropics. Joe grew up in Texas and Oklahoma. And so he does not like the cold, we just haven't figured out where we will go.

Q: Right. Well, you know what you're going to do. What will he do after? Does he — that's going to be tough.

STAFFORD: Mm-hmm.

Q: Hard time retiring.

STAFFORD: I think he will always work part-time doing something. As an advisor or consultant. I know he will want to remain active.—

Q: Teacher maybe?

STAFFORD: Perhaps teaching.

Q: What was his major in —?

STAFFORD: Political science and Spanish.

Q: OK. You haven't had too much opportunity to use the Spanish.

STAFFORD: No. In fact, his master's and his PhD work were in Latin American studies.

Q: Oh, that's funny.

STAFFORD: And we have never set foot — well, we drove to Texas one day and drove across the border just to do it. That is the extent of our exposure.

Q: That's funny. I know he has at least four languages. Which is his strongest second language?

STAFFORD: That would probably be Arabic.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: Then comes either French or Italian. I'd say Italian is his probably strongest one. Spanish would probably rise to the top if he had a refresher course because he even studied Spanish poetry and that takes a certain level of proficiency. And he has studied Portuguese and Turkish on and off.

Q: Farsi is what they spoke in Iran.

STAFFORD: That's right. But that has basically turned into Arabic, but with a refresher course knowing him he would get it back in a month or so. The grammar is not as irregular and not as difficult as Arabic

Q: How about you? What is your strongest?

STAFFORD: *(laughs)* Oh, my Italian has to be the best. I learned that when I was younger and when our Italian friends come to visit I have a chance to refresh my vocabulary.

Q: It's the art (laughs).

STAFFORD: *(laughs)* that's it. I had the Italian already, because we'd lived in Italy before we joined the Foreign Service. And we lived in Rome for a year and a half. Then I spoke terrible Italian. I didn't know it was so bad until they tested me in FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and they tried to keep a straight face but finally kind of just rolled over and laughed. Because my Italian was *so bad*. But I was speaking a lot of it *(laughs)*.

Q: But that's seems —

STAFFORD: Well, I had to unlearn all those bad habits. But I studied Farsi at FSI, then I learned the Arabic. That was eleven months of training in Tunis I think I had a 2+3 after a year because being in Joe's class I had to keep up. Then an Italian "refresher" And then I learned French. And by the time I got to French I thought, "I don't care about gender anymore, just give me the nouns and some verbs," and I threw it all together. And I threw in the Italian too, and I managed with that. And the Arabic will come back now, because it's coming back to me in Sudan even after almost 30 years of not using it. But it's, it's going to be slow because I'm older. I can see that.

Q: Is that the principal language that is spoken —

STAFFORD: In Sudan, yes.

Q: Are you able to go into the south, or is your husband? Or is that?

STAFFORD: As of October 2013 there are direct flights from Khartoum to Juba which did not exist last year.

Q: How much of the evacuation reasoning was due to the fighting in Sudan as opposed to what we read about the video and the —

STAFFORD: I think there was no connection to the fighting in Sudan since they just ended their second civil war which had already lasted for 20 years. There is quite a distance between Khartoum and Juba so there would not be a surprise ground attack and South Sudan does not have any planes. So they can't just come in and bomb Khartoum.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: There was some recent fighting. When Khartoum bombed near the South Kordofan State, South Sudan seized the Heglig oil fields and that incident required negotiations to solve. But far from Khartoum. So we — so at least in that respect, we're safe. I think the problem is Bin Laden was here for a long time. And so they have these ties. And, and they have ties with Iran. And so that's, that's more of the problem. Some cell that might attack an individual American, but I don't think they would want to be on the wrong side of the Sudanese Government.

Q: So they thought that either internal terrorists or people from Iran and elsewhere would endanger —

STAFFORD: There was an American embassy employee killed in an ambush about 5 years ago. So we all keep that in mind. Recently, I don't think the government realized the demonstrations would become so large and go out of control. After the German embassy was set afire the Sudanese government sent another 200 or so soldiers across town to join the first group defending our embassy. At the same time, someone paid for some of the busses to bring in so many demonstrators and it is not clear to us who that would have been.

Q: Mm-hmm, I've heard that.

STAFFORD: And some of them had the beards, they looked like fundamentalists/extremists. And so it is difficult to know where they all came from. When I go out to do grocery shopping or buy anything else the shopkeepers all seem genuinely friendly. They don't have to be. I have received a cold shoulder often enough in other countries who are not pleased with US politics. But the Sudanese I encounter are generally very welcoming. So it seems like the attack against the German embassy was due to Angela Merkel's hand shake with a cartoonist who had made fun of Mohammed

Q: Yes. Well, so there was an element of this going on in Benghazi then. The controversies over how much.

STAFFORD: Well, It sounds as though the attackers there were just waiting for their chance to attack this site and kill whoever was there, and it happened to be the Ambassador. But, for Khartoum, and all these other, around 40 embassies, consulates or

other sites, who had demonstrations it was in fact because of that ridiculous video? And so the, the video was not a big deal until the Egyptian publishers translated and put it out on the internet... So then of course the Muslim community was outraged as anyone could have predicted. It was impossible to tell people that it was not the work of the US government and thanks to our free speech laws it could not be censored even if the government disagreed with it. And I would imagine — this is my opinion — that the — since there had been demonstrations against the government because of austerity, because now they don't have all that money anymore, and the prices of everything are going up and the Sudanese dinar is quickly falling in value, so people don't have work, they don't have enough food. And so they were demonstrating against that for a long time. So my opinion is that they were venting as well.

Q: Yeah, yeah, sure.

STAFFORD: So that's probably —

Q: Kind of a focus for all their anger.

STAFFORD: I think at least partially.

Q: Did you see the crowds outside —

STAFFORD: Only on television.

Q: So your residence is anywhere near the embassy?

STAFFORD: Well, we're not close to the new embassy. Our residence is in an older neighborhood, closer to where the other embassies are.

Q: That is where the action was (laughs).

STAFFORD: *(laughs)*. That's right, because in Khartoum, — we're near the airport. And then the northern part of the city has the older city and many of the older embassies. So, we knew there were going to be demonstrations on Friday which is our weekend, Friday and Saturday. So everyone was told to stay at home and off the streets and keep their embassy radios on. Of course Joe and the Regional Security Officer and many others went to the embassy.

Q: Yeah.

STAFFORD: We were watching television and we saw that they were burning the German Embassy. And the same footage keep repeating over and over on CNN International and Al Jazeera. And, and so then we were just trying to listen to hear if or when the demonstrators were going down the main road near us. So our cook, Amadou, who's been with us for 20 years —

Q: Oh, he moves with you.

STAFFORD: Yes *(laughs)*.

Q: Oh, that's great. Where is he from?

STAFFORD: He's from Guinea. We met him in Mauritania.

Q: Oh, isn't that nice? Oh, wow. That's wonderful.

STAFFORD: I was at home and Amadou and Stilla, who's Filipina and Kenyan who's from South Sudan — we're all at home. And we always have three or four guards, one of whom always has a rifle. The local guard force. And so then we — they sent over three more for this particular day. And then after a while they sent over a truck full of soldiers outside our gate,

Q: Yeah. Did your husband come home or was he — he was at the embassy.

STAFFORD: He was at the embassy all day. So we're there during the day and we're watching these things on television and getting kind of worried. But we're thinking all the time that, we knew we had this new specially designed embassy far from the main road. You know, nobody could park close by with a truck full of explosives and blow things up. It was specifically designed with "fall back" a good distance from the main road so we were confident they could withstand an assault. And they really hadn't headed down to the American Embassy yet, which is a good 6 or 7 miles from the German embassy and the demonstrators.

Q: Did they destroy it completely?

STAFFORD: I think they burned it very badly. They are probably not used to being a terrorist target and my not have all the reinforcements U.S. embassies do. Every once in a while I would go out to the guards and ask them if they had heard anything. Because of course we couldn't, be calling Joe on the phone and disturbing him if he is concentrating on the embassy security. , we had our special home two way radios on.

Q: (laughs)

STAFFORD: But every couple of hours, Will Stueur, the Admin officer would make an announcement and say we're OK over here, everything is fine,

And, and then we would go out and talk to the guards, because of course the guards had their friends there and they knew their cell phone numbers. So they would be talking back and forth.

Q: (laughs)

STAFFORD: This great little network. So he'd say, "It's OK, Madam, you know, we'll take care of you. Don't worry."

And so Amadou goes outside and he says, "What's the flag doing up? Take the flag down." Because, you know, at our residence —

Q: Yeah, good idea.

STAFFORD: And the guard said, "We're waiting for the RSO (Regional Security Officer) to tell us."

He said, "He's busy. Take it down," (*laughs*). —

Q: Yes.

STAFFORD: Amadou looks out for us.

Q: What will happen to him when you come back here?

STAFFORD: Well, if he wants to stay on there, he can probably stay on. He's certainly one of the most versatile cooks in the city. It's really pretty complicated to bring him back here, because he, he has this wonderful place that he has built up over the years in Guinea that he just loves. And it's — he has his orchard and his, his wife is there and they have a high school age son still. So it's kind of hard to bring them all. We will stay in touch though and he knows we are always there if he needs anything. And of course we will continue to send some support.

Q: You get so attached to people that —

STAFFORD: Well, that's, that's it. And Amadou is one of the most honorable, hardworking people I have ever met. It is a good part due to him that I felt Joe would be well taken care of even if I were not in Abidjan or Khartoum with him. I knew Amadou would keep him well and go the extra mile, always for him.

Q: I want to ask you about your fear level, both here and in Iran and in these other places. Is there one experience in which you were most terrified?

STAFFORD: Well, there was one experience in Iran - - well, there were two really. — At one point when we first arrived in Iran, we went on a day trip. We planned to look for shards of ancient pottery up at the top of high, steep, hill, that had been the hide out of the Assassins marauders, bandits, and it was about a couple hours outside of Tehran.

Q: This was, let's see, what was this?

STAFFORD: Tehran, that was probably September- October, 1979.

STAFFORD: So on one of these weekends Joe and I went with Ann Swift, who was the political officer. So Ann, Joe and I and this young woman in high-heeled sandals were driving around asking people where to find this supposedly famous Assassins- hide out.

Q: Right.

STAFFORD: There were no signs of course so after consulting a few people someone said, “Oh, it’s over there.” So we figured out which of these mountains it is we’re supposed to climb up and we start climbing. Ann Swift was not feeling up to climbing so she waited below. We started climbing up the mountain that had been indicated and realized it was made of a crumbling sort of material, like shale.

It didn’t quite feel right, but since this young woman had high-heeled sandals, and she was climbing right up, I thought, “Well, if she can do this in high-heeled sandals then guess I can do it in my hiking shoes.” So we are climbing with her on this Shale Mountain and sort of crumbles when you hold onto it. So we’re going along and I’m thinking, “Don’t look down. Don’t look down. Just keep climbing.” Because you know — at a certain point I thought, “When I get on top of this they’re going to have to send a helicopter to take me back, because I’m not going back down that way.” Because you have to look down when you’re going down.

Q: Oh Lord.

STAFFORD: So we’re almost to the top, trying to cling to the edge and I go by this spot and realize there’s a bee’s nest underground. And I had this long hair and the bees start coming out.

Q: Oh dear.

STAFFORD: And I thought they were just going to get caught in my hair and get angry. So I thought, “I can fall off now or I can just sit here and calm down and wait ‘til this is over.” And so I did. I waited. And they didn’t sting me or anything. And so then when we were leaving Iran, I reminded myself that if I could do that, I could get through the airport.

Q: (laughs)

STAFFORD: So that was —

Q: So there was never any other mob scene that, that you felt threatened?

STAFFORD: Well, as we left the embassy and we walked out the back door.

Q: At the final —

STAFFORD: At the — yes — the day of the takeover, that’s right. We were walking out

the backdoor and we're supposed to be going toward the British Embassy, and there's a big mob. And so we knew that we couldn't continue going that way. That was pretty scary, lots of yelling and angry faces, and from that experience, now I do not like crowds. I know that with crowds, you can't reason with them, they're a monster without a head. So, I will avoid crowds at all cost. Whether it's a soccer game, demonstration, doesn't matter.

But the really frightening occasion was at one point, when we were with the Canadians, we'd gone over to the Sheardowns' for Christmas. We had been there at Thanksgiving and so this was a chance to see the others again and touch base, the other four "house guests," and the Sheardowns, — because as I had mentioned, Joe and I were staying with the Canadian Ambassador, Ken Taylor and his wife, Pat.

Q: Uh huh,

STAFFORD: And so we're at the Sheardowns' house and Joe and I were thinking, you know, Pat and Ken never have any time to themselves, maybe they would like to have a whole hour or two to themselves on their living room couch for Christmas. So when another diplomat offered us a ride later than they were staying we said OK. We stayed there a while longer, and when it was time for them to take us back to the Taylor's residence, our friends got lost.

Q: Oh no.

STAFFORD: And we're out on the streets about, about 1:00 AM or so with these fellows they'd been drinking in the new Islamic Republic, and they're lost and there's all these sand bagged road blocks and Revolutionary Guards with rifles, torches, fires burning to mark the road blocks and there we are lost. Joe and I had no papers to show them if we were stopped and I started thinking about just how bad it might be if we were stopped. I was really frightened then.

Q: If they had been stopped, would the drinking have been a reason for them to be —

STAFFORD: Well, They would have been angry, perhaps wanting to teach these decadent Westerners a lesson, retain us for a while, long enough to figure out who Joe and I were and then what?

Q: Not for DWI (drinking while intoxicated), but for the Muslim —

STAFFORD: Right, that's right.

Q: It's a crime.

STAFFORD: And then, of course there we were, and who are these people? And that sort of thing. So I was very frightened. And after that I said, "We're not going over there again. We'll stay right here in the house until we leave this country."

Q: OK. And what about the other countries? Was there unrest in Cairo or Tunis?

STAFFORD: Yes, in Ivory Coast. When we first arrived Cote d'Ivoire was stable, but there was violent crime, home break INS, robberies in restaurants and really car jackings were the worry.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: Every couple of weeks somebody from the embassy would have their car hijacked with them in the car. The way it worked, — if you went out shopping you had to quickly jump out of your car, lock it and run into the store, because if you're standing next to your car for any length of time, they would come up next to you with a gun and make you get in and drive away with your car. Even the Spanish ambassador for example was car jacked as she was buying plants from a stall on the main road. Everyone was fair game. They would drive your car until they were sure there was not alarm on it, take your money and jewelry and leave you on the side of the road and go commit a robbery with your car.

Q: You wouldn't drive your own car.

STAFFORD: Yes, I did.

Q: Yes. You didn't have a driver?

STAFFORD: Right. Spouses do not have cars and drivers assigned to them. I'll discuss my thoughts on that at the end of our interview.

Q: (laughs) OK. Was Iran the only time you ever served as a consular?

STAFFORD: Yes. I only worked at the embassy then so I could accompany Joe to post. In fact, they asked me to work at the consulate again in Egypt. Because my Arabic was very good at that point. But I realized that if I were going to have a child in the near future I shouldn't take on a job I wouldn't finish.

Q: Ah, OK. So one of the things I wanted to ask you was the feeling of being a spouse. What are your — a man or a woman. And you just answered part of it, because you didn't rate a driver. But were there other instances where you, you know, it was kind of exasperating to not be treated —

STAFFORD: I think the Department is working on this area, trying to become more family friendly. The area I see them doing well so far is when there is a medical need families can relocate out of an area. That is very fine and I am happy to see that. Other areas seem as knotted up as ever. People can agree that there is a flaw in the regs and

oversight, a situation that wasn't considered at the time they were written and no one has the authority to override the REG written in stone. Seems there should be a person, like the store manager that can come in with their pin number and sort it out, but there is not. Surely all large institutions need someone who can override the normal train of events and it shouldn't have to be the Secretary him or herself, or a committee that meets once in a lifetime to make exceptions. I really don't know how often that committee meets but what I have seen is that you can spend a great deal of time and energy looking for the person hiding under a rock who has experienced the same situation and can tell you how to resolve it. What a waste. It should not be so difficult and the Department should recognize that they don't want employee time spent that way.

Q: Right. Well, for people like you who have a, a career and have business to do, do you feel that you're treated with the respect and, you know, that you would be if you weren't the spouse of —

STAFFORD: Once again I am fortunate that my career is in the arts, and I have learned over the years that what matters is that I know my work is worthwhile even if other people take a while to convince that I am a "serious artist." Having a website helps and an extensive enough CV that I am taken seriously, whatever that means and I myself am impressed that prints of my watercolors are in the museum shop in the Smithsonian National African Art Museum on the Mall. That gives me some panache. It seems to matter more in America than in other countries. So much of our self-esteem seems to be based on our profession here which is really a little distorted, isn't it. I mean, that doesn't really define us, does it?

Joe comes to my exhibitions and even when he was the ambassador or the Consul General, which was a very big deal in Nigeria, he introduces himself as the "husband of the artist." So people also take their cue from him.

Q: Uh-huh, yeah.

Q: What about the U.S. Embassy staff, are they?

STAFFORD: They're great. They're generally — yes, they're great. In fact, come to think of it, they are so used to not seeing an accompanying spouse for the COM these days that they are even more appreciative of any contribution or offer to help with whatever projects they are working on.

Q: Are you acting sort of as their housemother, is that —

STAFFORD: Well, I felt that I should take on that role, at least in a crisis situation, like our evacuation from Cote d'Ivoire. I thought I should stay in Washington. Our son was in Boston in school, but I thought — I also never expected it to last so long, but I thought I should stay with the other families to help out then. Because they had small children and some had never even lived in the US before. This was 2002. It's important not to sound like a school marm of course, a trap I have to stay vigilant about avoiding, but people do

ask me for advice about life in the Foreign Service sometimes and since it is so different from any other way I life I try to offer my two cents, even if only as something to consider when making decisions

Q: They look to you — that's great. And you were gone for how long?

STAFFORD: Nine months.

Q: OK, all right. Yeah, that was a long time. Well, how does Joe get along without you when — I mean he just —

STAFFORD: He's lonely, we miss each other, but he works very long hours, if there is a drawdown he has lots of gaps and vacancies so there is more than enough to fill his 11 to 12 hour days.

Q: Yeah.

STAFFORD: But — he has these routines.

Q: Mm-hmm.

STAFFORD: Part of it is his exercise routine, all the time, no matter what else is happening. You know, every morning 5:50 we get up, I'm supposed to exercise. I do — I don't do as much as he does.

Q: You have something in your house in a room?

STAFFORD: Yes, he has one of those tread mills. And then in Nigeria we could run up and down the stairs. I know that keeps him going and keeps him mentally healthy.

Q: Mm-hmm.

STAFFORD: And then Amadou is there and I know he will fix the food that Joe likes and he can manage anything and he's very flexible, he can plan and prepare menus and carry it all off with the housekeepers so that's a huge relief.

Q: Yeah.

STAFFORD: But I, think people have been great in all the embassies. I think that's also because Joe makes a point – of inviting the Americans and local employees to our home. At least four times a year, he will host a FSN (Foreign Service National) luncheon, 20 people come in to have lunch and he will say "Tell me what your issues are and if we're addressing them." And in Mauritania we had a big whole family Christmas party 250 of the FSN's came to our backyard, for a Christmas meal. Pizza and chicken, not exactly traditional but something they and their children liked. They know that he really does care about his FSN's and he realizes what an important contribution they make.

Q: Yeah.

STAFFORD: And so they appreciate that. He opens the house for all sorts of Hail and Farewells, for the officers and their families too. It is surprising how often people tell us that that is not usually the case with these official residences, But that is what makes the difference

Q: I forgot the other question I was going to ask you about. But that's when you're away, what's happening —

STAFFORD: Oh.

Q: But I guess that's — was there one — you said the house in Mauritania was —

STAFFORD: Oh, that was funny. .

Q: What happened?

STAFFORD: That was our first DCM ship. We wanted to have a special party for all the local employees and their family members since they seldom came to the embassy compound. We were planning on around 250 people so we would be outside in the garden, round tables, we pulled out all our two dozen or so table clothes. We asked what people like and they said grilled chicken and pizza for the children so we had that and we had just finished setting up the bar tables under the shade trees. We felt very fortunate because there was no sand storm predicted and we put our desert turtles across the way in the Ambassador's garden so they wouldn't come nipping at anyone's feet. They were old, good sized turtles. Everything was going as planned and I was rather pleased we had about 20 minutes before the guests arrived when this cloud appeared and it was millions of locust that headed right for those shade trees.

Q: Oh no!

I wish I had a video because all of us, including 9 year old David were out there like the Key Stone cops, carrying the tables with drinks out from under the trees as this shower of leaves started falling from the locust feasting on our trees. I was so upset and we were still racing all around when the first families started arriving in their best clothes saying, "Oh don't worry Madam, this happens all the time", and we all laughed.

Q: What an interesting addition to the dinner (laughs).

STAFFORD: Right. And we thought we just had to worry about the turtles.

Q: Well, when did your teacher training come in? I think I missed that. Was it in —?

STAFFORD: That was after Algeria. That was 1990.

Q: Ohh, you went back to school.

STAFFORD: I went back to school, yes. Because I thought I should have some sort of definite way to earn income, because this art stuff was not doing it. So my friends always kidded me that I was the only teacher they knew that went into teaching for the money.

Q: (laughs)

STAFFORD: *(laughs)* you know, everything's relative.

Q: Are you making money on the art now?

STAFFORD: Yes, a little — yes, I do some, you know, enough to buy some more paint, an occasional family vacation, a Persian carpet, but not much more.

Q: Well, your materials are — your posters and cards and everything looks so professional and slick and it really is —

STAFFORD: Ohh, well thank you.

Q: — so nice. I was so impressed with that exhibit. It was just wonderful. And now you've had them in many other places.

STAFFORD: That's right, this is about the 13th one-man shows.

Q: Here or?

STAFFORD: Overseas.

Q: Overseas.

STAFFORD: Yes, only two here.

Q: OK, in what kind of venue do you usually exhibit?

STAFFORD: Well, early on I would exhibit with a friend-local painter. I exhibited usually with another woman, because those were my friends. And we didn't have enough work to have just a one-man show.

Q: Mm-hmm.

STAFFORD: And so in Sicily and in Algeria, the first time we were there -. And then my friend from Rome who I'd gone to the Academia in Rome in 1975 come down while we lived in Tunisia and she and I had an art show together. And then when I went to Mauritania, this incredible woman who started a dairy and received the Rolex Award for

Enterprise for that, made me teach her to paint in watercolors so she and I had an exhibition together. It was good because our friends were all introduced to each other, diplomats met new painters, the painters had new art patrons, and it was a good mix, just widening the circle.

Q: That's fantastic.

STAFFORD: So other than that, the other eight or nine have all been solo exhibitions. Egypt, Kuwait, Mauritania, two in The Gambia, Ivory Coast, two in Tunisia and two in Alexandria, Virginia as it turned out.

Q: OK. Well, you left Sudan in a hurry, I take it.

STAFFORD: Right.

Q: Where did you get all of the stuff you were exhibiting?

STAFFORD: We'd already planned on this as a, as — I was supposed to be retired.

Q: I see.

STAFFORD: I was supposed to be here.

Q: So the exhibit was already planned?

STAFFORD: Right. And so when we left Lagos I sent the work back.

Q: I see.

Q: OK. That's good. And do you have another one lined up?

STAFFORD: Yes. I'm supposed to — I did have another one lined up that was supposed to be happening about now, which would have been in Nigeria. And that was to help an Africa green project. And they liked my work and they wanted to use my work to decorate their conference and give gifts to their attendees. Because it was supposed to be about 15 ambassadors and prime ministers and things like that, because they really need to start doing green projects in Nigeria. They need to get back to agriculture, because they've depended on oil money since the 60's and neglected what had been a thriving agricultural sector. But then the American sponsors were too nervous because of Boko Haram and terrorist threats so that has been postponed.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: But Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Peace Prize winner, very outspoken in his critique of government, is in charge of the Black Heritage Festival. And that will happen in April. And so I'm going to meet him the end of this month in New York and

talk to him. And so I will work, I need to work on that. Now, they'll use some of the work I already have there. I left some work in Lagos too and so now I need to do some more work for that called *Bring Back Brazil*.

Q: Have to produce some more works.

STAFFORD: Yes.

Q: Oh boy (laughs)

STAFFORD: *(laughs)*

Q: Well, where will you work here?

STAFFORD: In my hotel room.

Q: Oh my gosh. You're in a hotel now?

STAFFORD: Well, you know, one of those one-bedroom apartment sort of suite things. I get news every 30 days about when I can return to Sudan so it is just a matter of time I am hoping.

Q: Oh, that's got to be tough.

STAFFORD: I'm a watercolorist. Goes under my arm.

Q: Yeah, that's great. That's really wonderful.

STAFFORD: It's flexible and portable and not harmful to your health. And the prints just take too long for me to — I can't do a large number of works with the printmaking. But I can do a fair number of watercolors.

Q: I was going to ask you about the comparing your posts in terms of — all the work I saw was of Africans. Have you done other kinds of faces?

STAFFORD: Yes, every place I've lived?

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: In Mauritania, I did —

Q: Oh this — that's right, it would be black history so that's why it was Africans.

STAFFORD: Well, that's really all I have left.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: Because everything else has been sold, especially anything architectural or is now in Lagos.

Q: I saw one that looked like — was it a mosque?



Qalawun Mosque—Cairo Watercolor

STAFFORD: That's right, that is Joe's. So we kept that. But now that I can make copies in this wonderful giclée—archival pigmented prints which means they are printed with

pigments like I use that are guaranteed for 150 years. With the scanners they use, huge things that can print up to 3 or 4 stories tall retaining every bit of detail from the original. Not like the old methods that used publication quality ink that fades in a few years.—just amazing.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: But I did lots of architecture in Tunisia, because it was such a wonderful place to be as a watercolorist. And Cairo. And Mauritania. And even Kuwait. You know, I painted all these different places, but they're all gone into private collections and some to museums. I should have taken more photos for my records.

Q: Is there any one of these countries where you would be happy spending the rest of your life?

STAFFORD: Italy.

Q: Italy.

STAFFORD: Except I don't know if my health insurance would work there. (*Laughs*). You know, I have to come back here. I would love to be able to live in two places if I could. But you know, it's the Italy I knew which probably does not exist anymore. Because the whole world has changed so much. But Tunisia was wonderful as well. But Italy has just — there's something about, you know, Italians love to have fun. It doesn't take much to have a wonderful life in Italy. I mean the food's fantastic. The climate's wonderful. You can always buy new shoes (*laughs*).

Q: It's so laid back. Let's see. Where were you in Italy? Which —

STAFFORD: First in Rome in 1975 and 76 pre- Foreign Service and then serving In Palermo, Sicily from '80 to '82.

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Q: OK. Honestly, I didn't realize Sicily was part of Italy.

STAFFORD: Well, Italians don't think so. They joke that it's part of Africa (*laughs*).

Q: OK. Well, what was Joe's position in Palermo?

STAFFORD: He was the admin officer.

Q: OK.

STAFFORD: Another learning experience. Our stuff didn't come for months. And so then I think we found out after about five or six months, when we bothered to check, that it was in Baltimore, it had never left. We took it for granted that everything would just

move along like as planned. We hadn't had a regular HHE shipment to Iran so Palermo was our first real normal post.

Q: Oh my god.

STAFFORD: So then, this being right after Iran our colleagues felt sorry for us, So they had this nice old conference table at the Consulate, so they loaned us that for our dining room. And they had an old green couch that had been in the Visa Section. So they sent that over. And we had this huge apartment, because they had taken two apartments and knocked down the wall. So we had this gigantic room, it was like four living room areas. And we had one rocking chair (*laughs*).

Q: But you had to be pretty flexible. Did you ever anticipate that it would be that way, that you would be required to do so much?

STAFFORD: No, I don't think so. — Not to this extent, you know. But I guess that's everybody's modern life now. Because I mean I just bought another computer and it's this, it's this Windows 8 and I have to think completely differently again. So learning these things, it's, like another language. And I think everybody has to —

Q: Before you get left behind, that's it. That's right.

STAFFORD: So I don't think it's just the Foreign Service. But I think the Foreign Service part that's so difficult is the long term planning, where are your kids going to go to school and are you going to get this post, and you have to be so healthy. You have to be so lucky with your health and every family member's health and things like that.

Q: Well, there's a whole section of questions on how you feel about the support you've received from the State Department and if you're working with DOD or any of the other departments. Have you felt that you got the kind of support and backup and well, equipment and ears to listen? That kind of thing?

STAFFORD: Well, I am happy that is included because I do have a certain perspective after all these hardship posts. I know the experiences are so different depending on which country people go to. One wonderful change from our first years is access to the FLO office. When we were in Iran I don't think there was a FLO (Family Liaison Office) office. And I know from my mother's experience, as a distressed family member that there was no real follow up to contact with her during the crisis. Nothing systematic. Now there is more support for families thanks to the FLO office.

Q: You couldn't communicate with her probably.

STAFFORD: That's right. Well, I couldn't communicate after my first phone call saying were safe and I would call back later which I never could because that might have exposed our hiding place and put everyone in danger. But we thought our families were being kept informed. But in our particular case it was very complicated. Joe's family was

in Russia at the time that we were in Iran. His dad was an engineer working on an ammonia pipeline. And so of course the telephone back then, you know, there wasn't much communication and certainly not with a Russian phone number. So their friend and colleague in London, — the home office — would call the State Department every day and ask if there was any news about the Staffords and they would say yes or no. And I think they checked the box for our family, not thinking about my mother with the last name of Frank, or knowing that the Staffords were in Russia and would not be communicating with the Franks. And so sometimes my mother would call into the Crisis Center phones and speak with someone who was a volunteer and did not know that we were hiding with the Canadians. And they would say, "No, she's out on the street." Or, "She's in with the other hostages." And then she would talk to somebody who did know where we were, but they couldn't tell her where we were. And so they would say, "No, they're safe, don't worry." But by the time I got back she was a wreck.

Q: I'll bet. I'll bet.

STAFFORD: So now they have the FLO Office, which I think it grew out of that ordeal.

Q: Uh-huh.

STAFFORD: And that has been a dramatic improvement.

Q: That's good.

STAFFORD: During the Ivory Coast evacuation in 2002, FLO employees met us at the airport and had transportation for us to get to our hotels. They were also helping evacuees from Indonesia and the night club bombing at the same time. And in 2002 we had a much better time getting all of our paperwork done and everything — then the military people. We had — our CLO (Community Liaison Officer), Marty Doggett, who's over there still in the FLO Office, helped some of the family members get their documents and signatures sorted out. She was — wonderful. Sometimes if you're dealing with people in the State Department who are civil service, they don't understand. I remember at the end of — that's why I was saying, that our Cote d'Ivoire experience changed one of the rules. Because it lasted longer than the six-month period when evacuations end and people return or are reassigned. So the housing money stops for people who've been evacuated. You have to go in to some other sort of status like separate maintenance which does not cover local furnished apartment short term rentals. But we had kids in school, because we had come back in October. And if our families lost their money for their apartments and had to go figure out some other place to live, they'd be pulled out of school again. So there was a big meeting and we went — we all went to the State Department. And some of the civil service people said, "Well, that's OK, you have three kids, you have three kids, you can go into a two-bedroom apartment," as if they could share that space when they are already stressed to the maximum. Some of the Civil Service employees had no idea what it was like, the stress you're under in the first place isn't visible because we are not wearing a cast or an arm sling. We look normal.

Q: Yes.

STAFFORD: So they did change the rules and say, “We will keep paying for your housing.” You know, that was all the money that people were given. But at least that way they didn’t have to move their kids from school. So I would say that we get lots of support from the FLO Office. But I am a U.S. citizen. There are other family members who are foreign born spouses. Now, if those marriages break up, those spouses have no rights at all. I don’t even know what the FLO office can do for them. Probably nothing.

Q: What about FSN’s? Do you think that they’re pretty well taken care of?

STAFFORD: That’s a difficult — because labor laws are so different in each country. I know overseas that being employed by the American embassy is highly valued. It may be because after 15 years employees may be eligible for a green card. But they are usually have better pay and benefits than other jobs offer. I have only served outside Africa and the Middle East for one post— Palermo and there the employees had 20 and 30 years of service so that tells me they were happy to be working there. Working at our embassy is usually a sought after position with the possibility of a green card after extended years of fine service.

STAFFORD: One area I find remarkable is the treatment of ORE staff. It is completely inconsistent and seems to be at the whim of the Admin officer. You know, since I’ve seen six or seven houses and talked with staff from other Ambassador’s residence or the DCM residence. Every time we leave their contracts stop, you know. It’s a personal contract because they’re in your home, not working at the embassy. So if nobody comes for five months —

Q: They don’t get paid.

STAFFORD: Well, they get paid, but they are not exactly under contract so whether or not they accumulate leave or have health care coverage or can replace their work shoes I don’t know. Usually posts are smart enough to realize that they’re probably some of the best domestic workers in the country and post has invested in their security clearance. So they will keep them. But maybe they don’t. People are always looking for ways to save money so they may be short sighted. One DCM decided to cut salaries in half because they didn’t have their regular work load. But their bills did not get cut in half, or their mortgages. I think some of that should be standardized regardless of the labor laws and if people have served official Americans for 20 or so years loyally that should be enough to earn them the possibility of a green card too. After all, as a security risk, who is closer to the Chief of Mission than the person working in his residence 8 hours a day or more? More and more of the time now too, residence gardeners are contract workers as well, not embassy employees, another money saving measure since health care and vacation and sick leave may not be in their benefits. In stead contractors can be very unfair with their employees or not pay them a fair wage, so they become disgruntled and as inhabitants of the residence it is not in our hands so it is all awkward. And what kind of security does that provide. It all seems very short sighted to me. Far better to have employees who have

a stake in the game and are supervised directly by the embassy.

Q: Makes sense. Well, how was the Ambassador's residence empty before you came?

STAFFORD: Six months.

Q: OK.

Q: Yes. One of the things I noticed, I spent some time in Cameroon and other places and observed the embassy. And it just seemed to me that the consular officers had a really hard job. You know, they have to be so tough.

STAFFORD: Yes it usually is a very tough job.

Q: Did you find —

STAFFORD: Yes.

Q: — it difficult to grill people and —

STAFFORD:

STAFFORD: Yes, exactly. And I only ended up on the Visa line for two months. Joe had two months in Rome seeing Iranian applicant's there, when it was one of the few places they could apply for visas while the consulate in Iran was closed after the February 1979 attack. People were so angry with him if he turned them down they would wait for him outside the consulate and follow him to a restaurant and then curse him. It has to be very difficult for young officers, in their first post to keep from becoming completely cynical—to keep an open mind. It is hard work, long hours, and so much fraud from desperate people. I think they need breaks working in other offices every so often. —

Q: Lines are long.

STAFFORD: Right.

Q: Well, let me ask you now about Iran. I don't want to not be able to, in case we don't —

STAFFORD: We have plenty. I can keep coming back, it's no —

Q: OK, OK.

STAFFORD: But I don't want to take up all your time.

Q: Oh no, that's all right. OK, well then I'll just go on a little bit more. We talked about your favorite country and where you'd like to live. But how about for a holiday? If you

had a month to go spend somewhere?

STAFFORD: Well see, that's the thing we — because we had these friends in Italy from when we lived there before, we'd always go back to Italy.

Q: Mm-hmm.

STAFFORD: And so I know that place on foot. I can find my way around, there is art in every church you never noticed before and every vegetable market is aesthetically pleasing with their displays. I have never traveled around France, only Paris so maybe it is the same. But it gives me so much pleasure just to walk around and look at everyday things.

Q: Which city?

STAFFORD: Rome. Is the city I know best? But Sienna is Joe's favorite. I know my way all around Rome without a car, with a car, you know. So that's just comfortable. And I speak Italian.

Q: Yes, that's —

STAFFORD: I've never seen the rest of Europe. I've been to Paris and London I'd love to go to Southern France. I have never seen those towns and museums and the light— just to visit all of it. As far as another — place to live, I could easily live in Italy. My idea is that when we are old we could go sit on a park bench and we could talk to people. There's not many places to do that in America. It's not like if you go to the mall and sit there, you know. You are still enclosed, no nature or fresh air or people with dogs walking by, or old friends who come sit with you. If you think about a place where you can go and just watch life, things like that. We don't have many park benches. And the park benches sometimes have homeless people there, so.

Q: Right, right. Well, that's a nice observation. There's a place where it's easy to go just watch people (laughs).

STAFFORD: *(laughs)*

Q: What was the favorite part of — what is the favorite part of being the spouse in charge of social events and keeping track of the staff? What's the most enjoyable part? And then I'm going to ask you (laughs).

STAFFORD: Well, you know, people really are very appreciative of whatever you do. Primarily just opening the house. I can't tell you how many times people have said that it makes such a difference to them that they can come in to the house. The lady in Lagos, the FSN who had done the inventory in the house for over 30 years had never been to any function there as a guest. And so she was very pleased, that kind of thing.

Q: Yes.

STAFFORD: And I would say that it's that, that is very rewarding. So it's — it doesn't matter if it's the Americans, the FSN's, and the local community. They just appreciate being invited in. And I love to decorate. So (*laughs*) I'm happy to get things ready for parties and all that, you know. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

Q: Where do you get the materials? On the local market?

STAFFORD: Generally, bring them all back with me.

Q: Oh really?

STAFFORD: Yes, I have boxes and boxes of —

Q: Of what?

STAFFORD: Patriotic decorations, Christmas decorations and gift-wrap and ribbons. And I had a good five boxes of Halloween stuff when we had — when we would have the children's Halloween parties or help the Marines decorate the haunted house. We have a couple of boxes of Easter decorations. And — we have a mirrored ball that twirls (*laughs*). Then when we come back to, to Washington, we live in a townhouse. So we have to get storage spaces if we move back here.

Q: That is a lot of work.

STAFFORD: Yes

Q: But you enjoy it and so that's important. And so what is the part that you like the least?

STAFFORD: Packing.

Q: Uh-huh.

STAFFORD: Packing and saying goodbye.

Q: Mm.

STAFFORD: Because you know, you do get very close to housekeepers, GSO staff, drivers, and gardeners. You find out about their families, and I hate to see — I always am worried about housekeepers when I leave, what's going to happen to them. And the drivers and the gardeners.

That is what is so very different about the Foreign Service life style. We don't have neighbors and librarians, and friends that we see year after year, our world keeps changing with every posting. We become attached quickly to people because we know

time is short. That is why when we do retire and leave this life behind, we leave behind so much more than an office or a job. It is a way of life. I don't know if there is anything comparable, since it is not even like the military life in so many ways. Often they live on base most often with other Americans who share their values and to a certain extent their background and culture. When we retire, it is retire with a capital "R."

Q: Right.

STAFFORD: So in the meantime we enjoy this rich life at our front door and savor this time. So leaving people behind is hard...

Q: Are there social issues and causes that you have engaged in the, in the countries?

STAFFORD: Yes. Well, luckily, especially when there's a larger diplomatic community, there's generally an international group of women or — which is too — which is kind of rough for the male spouses, I think, that are coming in to this. Because we women already have a social network in place, you know, we can just join this group of spouses. There are usually charity programs already established and then the embassy is not in danger of being accused of favoring one group over another. Regarding male members I asked the American Women's Club in Lagos if they would consider allowing our male family members to join and they'd say, "Well, we're thinking about it."

But I think it's going to be much more difficult for male spouses to find a rewarding —

Q: A niche.

STAFFORD: A niche, and friend, and friend — people that like to do things together, things like that.

Q: Do you have anything to do with the NGO's (non-governmental organizations) that are working there?

STAFFORD: Mm-hmm.

Q: So you'd cooperate.

STAFFORD: Well, In Sudan, since there is no American Women's club and the International Women's group is not international I would rather spend my energy on initiatives that are generated inside the embassy. The embassy nurse has been in Sudan for over thirty years. She likes the way a certain orphanage is run and so I will probably spend most of my time, energy and donated art work to what she has started. Then we know our contributions go where they are intended to go and in this case, after 20 years of war there are so many orphanages that none of them get enough support.

Then there are plans to have the first official function of the Sudan-American Friendship society be an "international" art exhibit that I will help with. It is a great way to meet the

artists in Sudan and great for the artists to have an “in” to the diplomatic corps which should be a source of sales for them.

Q: That’s great.

STAFFORD: That is a help. In the past I’ve made posters thanks to high school (*laughs*) and my short career as a graphic artist. I have made brownies by the hundreds for our food bazaars and charity events, Donated paintings for silent auctions, I did that for the new chapter of the Lion’s club we started in Tunisia. Then earlier, there were the PTA fund raisers and we did whatever they needed doing and last but not least all the decorating that went with each occasion so I have had lots of opportunities to use my aesthetic skills. (*Laughs*).

STAFFORD: But I think, you know, there are things that you can just usually just fall right into.

Q: Mm-hmm.

STAFFORD: Although in a place like The Gambia, when I was finally the real wife of the ambassador and not the faux wife, there was no organization of any sort of diplomatic spouses because there were almost no diplomats. All the ambassadors lived in Dakar, Senegal. So people turned to just taking care of their households. There was no diplomatic community. It was me and the British Ambassador’s wife, and she was never there. So you just help people, you know, doing something else.

Q: Why wasn’t there a community?

STAFFORD: Too — just tiny.

Q: Too tiny.

STAFFORD: There were a few West African embassies and most of the time they did not have a spouse. And they had no funds to donate to anything most of the time, or certainly not for organizing a gala dinner (*laughs*).

Q: (laughs) are you among the couples with the longest tenure in the Foreign Service?

STAFFORD: With our 34 years. I’d say yes, only because I believe Joe has been the last person from his A-100 class, the orientation for new officers, for a few years, and we are just still in due to this special assignment. We retired in June and he was sworn back in the next day.

Q: So how would you describe the changes that you’ve seen, let’s say in security, in — I had some other things — but overall? How have things changed since you began?

STAFFORD: Well, I would say there are so many more postings now that are danger

posts or unaccompanied, not safe for family members. I mean who would have thought that Indonesia would be a place you would be evacuated from? So there's that problem. Haiti—with their devastation after the earthquakes. So much of the Middle East is in turmoil or at war.

STAFFORD: Now everyone, not just an intrepid few, need to calculate and strategize about when they're going to be doing an unaccompanied post and it has to be planned very strategically so their family is safe, provided for, comfortable and has some sort of social safety net. So timing is everything in planning where the family will sit out the tour. That's a problem that really needs addressing. The FLO office has a decision chart that gives the pros and cons but I think real feedback from families who have lived through one of the scenarios would be helpful. I know it is not easy for a family to be brought back here to stay at Oakwood apartments, cramped together, as opposed to living in their own home with their friends and neighbors close by. And since it would be different for each family it is not easy to say do this or that. But a great deal of thought and research should be put into that decision about where the family will "wait it out" because that is what they do really.

Q: Right.

Q: Right.

STAFFORD: But I don't know what to do besides have a completely single Foreign Service. And how do you ever have any midlevel people if, after children get to school age the families don't want to go out anymore. I don't know what's going to happen. As far as communication with families and everything, that's drastically improved. That's wonderful, you know. I remember calling my mother when we lived in Rome in 1975 and saying, "I only have three more minutes. Hello. It's almost — the time's up! Goodbye!" (*laughs*). All I talked about was how little time I had to talk.

Q: Well, how has the internet changed it?

STAFFORD: When Joe was in Iraq I could Skype with him. I Skype with my sister. And now I'm going to try to Skype with him in Sudan if we can get a good enough connection. But it makes a huge difference. And people can see their loved ones, it is so much better, you can see a face and the expressions, and it is a wonderful invention.

Q: They know you exist.

STAFFORD: That's right. That's right.

Q: Yeah, that's good.

STAFFORD: And these long distances are so, hard on marriages. And I'm afraid, because all these unaccompanied posts and things I'm seeing more divorces. So that is very unfortunate.

Q: Yeah.

STAFFORD: And you know, especially for the foreign born spouses. I went to an event at Oakwood apartments and there were male officers preparing to leave their foreign born spouses in the US at Oakwood and they had never lived in America before. That can't be easy. They must feel very isolated sometimes.

Q: So it's possible that a couple will marry in one country where say, the wife is native. They go to another post, they get divorced, and she's stuck in a foreign country —

STAFFORD: And no help. And there's no mechanism to help her. They need US citizenship when they marry. That is key. But countries like Japan for example, I understand do not recognize dual citizenship so that puts people in a dilemma. There are lots of sacrifices people make that are not recognized or acknowledged.

Q: Right.

STAFFORD: Now, I don't know what the Military does. I don't know if they have a different policies. If non-U.S. citizen spouses receive some sort of counseling or assistance when there are problems. One good thing for spouses living in the Washington area is that they have the resources of AAFSW's Foreign Born Spouse group who can give some advice and moral support.

Q: There's a lot of competition in the State Department too. Yeah, the military's special — I'm trying to think. When were you in Iraq? Let's see.

STAFFORD: Oh, I never was. Joe —

Q: You weren't in Iraq.

STAFFORD: Joe was.

Q: Oh, oh, that's when he was alone there.

STAFFORD: That's right.

Q: What year was that?

STAFFORD: 2008 to 2010.

Q: OK, OK. My son was — is a Marine, and he, he was on carrier up there during that time.

STAFFORD: Now, does he talk about that? About families? How people do — does he have children and a wife?

Q: He does. He, he was the — he is a pilot. So eh was based —

STAFFORD: Wow.

Q: — you know, on a ship the first time, and the second time at a base. So it's a little different for him than for, you know, other kinds of Marines that are on, on the ground. But it's tough.

STAFFORD: But for example, when he was on the ship, were the other wives — wherever his wife, his family was living, were they supportive of her? Did the military —

Q: Oh yes. Yes. Unfortunately, I mean he wasn't there when she had their child.

STAFFORD: Their child.

Q: That it was tough. Yeah, they're good to them. Well, let me ask you a little bit about this. Going to kill me if I don't ask you about "Argo," (laughs).

STAFFORD: (laughs)

Q: Do you think you were portrayed accurately by the actress?

STAFFORD: I am *not* a crybaby! (Laughs) I watched it three times. Because I went to the premiere. And then, a friend was here from Lagos, so she wanted to go. So I went with her. And then I went with my sister.

Q: Has your husband seen it?

STAFFORD: No.

Q: Ohh.

STAFFORD: I told him about it and he just laughed. He said, "That's Hollywood!" And it is better than the first movie.

Q: This is "The Canadian Caper"?

STAFFORD: Yes, with Ken Taylor as the person who came up with the escape plan — because we couldn't talk about the CIA, of course. And the people making the movie didn't know anything about the CIA role. So we didn't talk to them either, because — they were going to make the movie, even though the hostages were still hostages. Then one of the networks, ABC or NBC came to Palermo. They said they wanted to make a "Thank you Canada" segment. So we said "Sure, come on over," and they came to our apartment. Then they sat down and they said, "We understand one of the embassies turned you away."

So we said, “That’s the end of that interview.” And we never really had much to do with the press after that.

Also, when first escaped we came back we would talk to the press about the Sheardowns and Roger Lucy, and the other people from the Canadian embassy that were so generous and great. And they never printed any of that. They only wanted to write about Ken Taylor. So after that, for years the Lijeks every five years or so and the others — and, and I think Bob Anders, I’m not sure about Lee Schatz, would get together with the Sheardowns, Roger Lucy and some of the other Canadians. We were never here, this side of the Atlantic, when the reunions took place. But the others had a different relationship. Because they all stayed in the house together. We were at the Taylors’ house. And I don’t think the Taylors could come most of the times either. But it just never failed. We were out of the country and we couldn’t go join them.

So we never got to see them all. So when this movie was being planned the producers and script writers called someone over at the State Department. People started sending Joe emails asking if we would talk to them. And he said, “Well, I’m really not interested.”

The one time we did talk to them was in 1997. Joe was in Algiers. A journalist called me and told me that they were going to write about Tony Mendez. First I called Joe and I said, “Who should I talk to? Because we’re not supposed to talk about this.”

And so he, said yes, they do want us to talk about it, because it’s been unclassified and they want to honor Tony.

Q: So there wasn’t any big unclassifying ceremony? It just — oh, it’s already gone?

STAFFORD: *(laughs)*

Q: But that was in 1997, was it —

STAFFORD: Exactly.

Q: Yeah.

STAFFORD: Exactly. So then I told them about what happened and what I remembered of it. But this is already what, ’80 to ’97, 17 years later.

Q: Yeah, long time.

STAFFORD: Right. So, so we did talk about it then a bit. And, and Joe was busy, you know, 18 hours a day working in Algiers, so he didn’t have a lot to say. So then these books came out, Master of Disguise by Tony and other writers for *The Wire*, I think. And in those, Joe is the hold out. — I think it was to add the drama, you know, because you have to do something. Joe is the person that they really had to work hard to convince.

And that job seemed to grow with each retelling. I really don't remember that much objection from him. Certainly not like the movie portrayed. He had been reading the papers and watching the news probably more than anyone. So he knew how our positions were changing from being innocent diplomats being sheltered, to people committing fraud, breaking the law, by leaving under false names and with false documents. If there were any flaws in this plan we and the Canadian protectors would have a very heavy price to pay, not to mention that our exposure would confirm everything "Spokesman Mary" had been saying on TV for months, that the embassy was just a den of spies and we should all be tried and punished. So he wanted some assurances, but it did not go on to the extent I have read. After all, we were only together for around 48 hours, start to finish.

Q: Right. Was that right?

STAFFORD: Yes, I don't remember it being any kind of big deal at all. And I thought, "Why did they do this? Because they needed some sort of, you know, tension. Just like in the movie."

Q: There is a lot of tension.

STAFFORD: There is. You know, I think that might be part of the reason they didn't include four of us staying with the Sheardowns because they wanted to build this, you know, squash us into this little tight place and have all this tension. I did read that Affleck required those six actors to stay in the stage set together for many days before the filming began so the tension among them would build. And also, they would have had to pay two more actors. They also said the story would lose focus. People would get confused if there were too many sites. The embassy, the Taylor's house, CIA headquarters, White House, etc. That's what they told Mark Lijak when he said, "Why don't you at least have the Sheardown's in here? At least mention them, do something."

Q: Well, at the very end when — or toward the end when they finally get on the plane, it's largely due to Joe's —

STAFFORD: That's right

Q: — antics. Does he have a sense of humor like that?

STAFFORD: No.

Q: (laughs)

STAFFORD: He does have a wonderful sense of humor, but he would never start doing something like that, I don't think. I mean everybody just laughs, says, "That's the most he's talked in five years," *(laughs)*.

Q: But he was depicted as the one who finally got you through.

STAFFORD:.. Isn't that great? The guy who didn't even participate in making the movie gets a heroic role! It was very satisfying to me after these other portrayals and in a very finely made film so that is just very nice.

Q: Were you very frightened when you were trying to get to the airport?

STAFFORD: Yes and No.

Q: No.

STAFFORD: No. Because I had been reading John le Carré wonderful spy thrillers and I brainwashed myself.

Q: I see.

STAFFORD: Reading his novels you get the impression that if you act like you know what you're doing that everybody else thinks you know what you're doing. That, and you try not to draw attention to yourself.

Q: That's good advice.

STAFFORD: Yep. But even more compelling, there was the realization day after day sitting on the Taylor's couch in spite of their gracious hospitality, that our presence was putting them in danger too, not to mention the loss of intimacy and privacy it caused them. They had been complete strangers and they took us in when we were broke and desperate. It is very humbling. After all those months on the couch with those things on our minds we figured if we had Canadian passports and this story with so many props including tickets that showed where we had been before and pocket litter to back up our story, concrete stuff, and two exfiltration experts, there wasn't any choice but to leave. We needed to just give this our best shot.

We also did not know what conditions the real hostages were being subjected to so we thought they were just tied up. It was far worse than that. We would have been far more fearful I think so it was good we didn't know what they were enduring.

Q: And there wasn't that chase on the runway, I take it. That was pretty —

STAFFORD: That was exciting (*laughs*). Our hearts were probably racing like that, but you can't show that on film. Tony, knowing what would happen should we be caught probably knew to be frightened but he didn't show it.

Q: I hope they make it! All right, well this might be a good place to stop. I want to ask you about Sudan and some other of your posts. But we've been here almost two hours and so —

STAFFORD: Oh my goodness.

Q: — maybe we should take a break.

STAFFORD: OK.

Q: As long as you promise to see me again.

STAFFORD: I wouldn't let you —

Q: OK, very good. Well, this is wonderful. Get this thing to stop. They have two going.

End of interview part one