

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

**STEVEN WAGENSEIL**

*Interviewed by: Peter Eicher*  
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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Let's start at the beginning. Maybe you can tell me when and where you were born.*

WAGENSEIL: I was born the first of September, 1947 in Danbury, Connecticut, brought up in Brookfield Center, Connecticut, which is right next door, where I went to elementary school through the seventh grade. My father was a travel agent, owned a travel agency in Danbury.

*Q: Are you a Connecticut family?*

WAGENSEIL: Oh, no. My folks had settled there after the Second World War because my dad's father had a house in Brookfield. My grandfather worked for the New York Telephone company as an engineer. He retired right about the time I was born in Brookfield so my folks bought a house near my dad's folks.

My dad is originally from New York City. My mother was born in Colorado and brought up in Pasadena, California. They met and married during the war. They were both in uniform.

Not an old Connecticut family by any stretch of the imagination, although I was brought up with the image of the New England Pilgrims and all of the mythology of Plymouth Rock and all that kind of stuff as part of my heritage.

*Q: Do you know the history of your family? When they came to the United States?*

WAGENSEIL: I do, to a certain extent. My grandfather's grandfather immigrated from southern Germany in 1852.

*Q: That was the Wagenseils?*

WAGENSEIL: That was the Wagenseils, yes. His name was Jacob, actually came through Hamilton, Ontario, I believe, and wound up in Port Huron, Michigan where he settled down and raised a family. My great grandfather was the town clerk and then the sheriff. My grandfather was born in Port Huron, went to the University of Michigan and then moved to New York to get a job, met my grandmother and the rest is history.

*Q: And your mother's family?*

WAGENSEIL: My mother was born in Colorado but all of "her people" are from Texas and before that from Arkansas and Tennessee, Virginia and what all. English, Irish immigrants.

*Q: You say them met during the war. What were they doing during the war?*

WAGENSEIL: My mother was in the Women's Army Corps. She was brought up in Pasadena and was recruited by the WACS to be, well, it wasn't a publicity stunt but it was to help them with support for the soldiers and so to have some public relations effect. She was an attractive young woman and was actually featured on the cover of Life

Magazine; actually she and her platoon marching past and she was front and center. I still have a copy of that somewhere. She was working in the WACS and supporting the soldiers. My dad was a military policeman and his unit was transferred out to California at some point and they met out there.

*Q: He was enlisted or drafted?*

WAGENSEIL: He was drafted, in 1940.

*Q: This was the army rather than the marines?*

WAGENSEIL: The army, yes, indeed.

He went to college and dropped out for a variety of reasons a couple of times, I guess and wound up being drafted and was serving his one year of compulsory military service from 1940 to '41 or '41 to '42, I can't remember. He was on his Christmas leave expecting to be released from service in January when he got word that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor and he was stuck for the following four and a half years. He was a military policeman and went ashore Omaha Beach on the third wave of the Normandy Invasion.

*Q: Did he tell stories about that?*

WAGENSEIL: He never told a single story. He was very traumatized by the war. He was in the Battle of the Bulge and I never heard him tell any battle stories. It was very traumatic for him. When I was a kid, we were always told if dad is sleeping on the couch, don't wake him up because he woke up very brusquely.

*Q: That's interesting because you hear a lot of people who were in World War II don't talk about their combat experiences.*

WAGENSEIL: He never talked about it. He told a couple of stories about when he was supporting the general but nothing about himself.

*Q: So they got married in California during the war?*

WAGENSEIL: They got married in California in January of '44. They were immediately separated. Dad went off to the European Theater as the Normandy Landings were being prepared, and my mom was on tenterhooks until he came back. Actually, he was on board a troop carrier, being shipped from the European Theater to the Pacific Theater when word came that the Japanese had surrendered so the ship turned back.

*Q: That's a nice twist. Then came back and they married in California?*

WAGENSEIL: They were married in California the beginning of '44, before he went to the European Theater, then he came back, they both demobilized and settled in Connecticut where my dad opened a travel agency.

*Q: Why a travel agency?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, he had worked at the New York's World's Fair in '39 and saw how much people were interested in the rest of the world. People, children of immigrants, who had been in the U.S. for a generation or two but were maybe interested in traveling back and so forth. He saw during the war that transport was becoming easier. It was not necessary any longer to take a ship for a week or something to cross the ocean, but that it would be possible, he realized, to fly across the ocean. People are going to want to do that, he thought. Having been in Europe or the Pacific in the service they are going to want to go back. They will want to travel. He said there's a market there and he got into it.

*Q: Was it a successful business?*

WAGENSEIL: Very successful. He built it up into quite a little successful business. He ended up having three separate offices in three towns in western Connecticut. Because of that business and the fact that he was traveling, he took his family with him occasionally traveling.

As a kid I remember going not just to Maine and Cape Cod in the summers but also we went to Bermuda on a cruise when I was about three and went down to the Caribbean quite a bit. Every year we'd go down for a couple of weeks in the depths of the winter because my mother from California hated the snow. So as a kid I was virtually at every island in the Caribbean except for Hispaniola. I went to Jamaica; I went to Cuba as a kid. I went to Trinidad and everything between. So I was bitten by the travel bug at an early age.

*Q: Were you the first child?*

WAGENSEIL: I was the eldest of two. My brother, Ross is three and a half years younger than me.

*Q: You grew up living in the same town in Connecticut the whole time?*

WAGENSEIL: Grew up living in the same New England farmhouse in the same town in Connecticut. As I say, I went through the seventh grade in the local elementary school and then because the town didn't have adequate upper school, and we'd have to drive to Danbury High School where they were on double sessions because the buildings hadn't caught up with the population growth, my folks took me out of public school and put me in private school in Danbury, a boarding school and I was there for five years, basically.

*Q: So you were living in the boarding school.*

WAGENSEIL: I was a boarding student, yes.

*Q: Throughout your high school years?*

WAGENSEIL: It's a little complicated, but all of my schooling was complicated. I was there eighth, ninth and tenth grades and then during eleventh grade, junior year, I went to school in France for a year.

*Q: Was that like an AFS program?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, no. It was independent. My parents were just divorced. My dad remarried with a French woman. The headmaster of my boarding school was going on a sabbatical year. My dad was his travel agent, arranging the trip. He said to the Headmaster, "John, where are you going to put your kids when you are in France?"

John said, "Well, I found this nice little school up in the middle of the mountains somewhere, a private school and we'll put our kids there."

Dad came back out to where I was waiting in the car and said, "Hey, guess where you are going to school next year?"

I said, "Where?"

He said, "You're going to France."

I said, "What?"

It was that sort of consultative process.

*Q: Had you been taking French in school?*

WAGENSEIL: By the time I got to France I'd had two years of high school French.

*Q: Had you ever been to France?*

WAGENSEIL: I had never been to France. I had never been to Europe.

*Q: So you went over with the headmaster and this woman?*

WAGENSEIL: I went over with my dad on a ship and met up with my new step-mother in Paris, then took a train down to catch up with the headmaster and his family at a two-star restaurant on the road to the school and proceeded to the school and settled in and so forth. My parents left me there.

*Q: And it's where?*

WAGENSEIL: It's a little school called Le Collège Cévenol that is in the Haute Loire Département in the Auvergne region, a protestant school founded by some Reformed Church preachers before the Second World War and in a very isolated area. It was at 1,000 or 1,200 meters of altitude. We used to say the village had more cows than people, except for the students.

It was a school with a very international student body. There were about a dozen or 15 Americans there but there were kids from Africa and Vietnam and all over. All the classes were in French and so was everything else. I was kicked out of my English class because the teacher, who was Scottish, said I was disruptive because I was correcting his pronunciation.

*Q: Were you boarding there?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I lived in a dorm with French roommates and French classmates. I was there when John Kennedy was shot.

*Q: That must have been pretty tough, being an all American boy dropped into the middle of the French community.*

WAGENSEIL: It was a bit disruptive but I'd already been disrupted when I went off to boarding school at the age of 13. I was sort of used to being self-sufficient.

One good thing about the school in France; my boarding school in Connecticut was all boys. The school in France was coeducational. Even though it was a very strict protestant Reformed Church environment, with a walk down to the village for church every Sunday morning for fire and brimstone from the pulpit, it was a coed school and so there were some advantages. (Her name was Kristen.)

*Q: So you learned French as you went along?*

WAGENSEIL: I had already had two years of French class and I had total immersion for a school year as a junior so I was basically fluent in French by the time I left there. The first things I learned were the words you weren't supposed to use in polite society but I was 16 and that's what everyone else was using. I did learn grammar and vocabulary and stuff like that.

I came back to Connecticut for my senior year in high school but because my junior year had been disrupted or disruptive, I didn't have a transcript that colleges were interested in so as I was applying for college I wasn't getting very far; I struck out basically everywhere I applied. Of course, this was a New England prep school so I was shooting high. My guidance counselor, who had been my Latin teacher and later my English teacher, said, "Look, the first year you were at this school I was away. I was on an exchange program with a school in England. Why don't you go there? Do a post graduate

year, go to England for a year and that will reinforce your weak areas in history and English so that you can apply for college successfully?”

I talked to my dad about it and of course I went off to school in England for a year.

*Q: And this again was another impromptu kind of thing?*

WAGENSEIL: It was an impromptu decision but it wound up being channeled through a semiformal program. There was a woman in Manhattan who coordinated kids from schools in America who wanted to go to schools in England; Mrs. Van Pelt Bryan, obviously some snooty, upper class Manhattan name. The problem of course was that we had already identified the school that they wanted me to go to and she said, “No, no, no. Usually I just sort to of pick a school for you.”

The counselor from my school said to her, “No, he’s going to **this** school. It’s already been arranged with the school,” through my teacher’s connections. “All you have to do is make it happen.”

So she reluctantly did that.

On the English side we were under the auspices of the English Speaking Union, which is this beautiful vestige of the empire with a nice clubhouse in Mayfair and connections and parties and tea dances and what all. I went off to the school in England.

I remember I got to London. I was by myself. I had to go to the designated store (Selfridges) to buy the school uniform, of course -- the blazers and the tie and matching slacks and so forth and so on. It was all packed up in a trunk for me and I took the train up to the school as close as possible and took a taxi to the school.

I checked into the dormitory where I was to be living for the next year and the matron, who was this wonderful old battleaxe of a caricature herself, said, “The first thing we have to do is get you out of those illegal clothes. “

I said, “I beg your pardon?”

She said, “Those clothes; they’re illegal. Take them off.”

I had on normal clothes. While I was on campus, and in fact, the rules were -- on the way to and from school, you had to put the uniform on so you could be identified in case there was any trouble, to protect you.

I was there for a year.

*Q: Where exactly?*



WAGENSEIL: It's in Holt, north of Norwich about two or three miles from the North Sea where the wind comes whipping right off the plains of Poland. The school was called Gresham's School. It was founded in 1555.

*Q: Oh, my goodness. I hope the dormitories had been updated in the interim.*

WAGENSEIL: Somewhat.

*Q: It was one of these places where you have to shower in cold water in the morning?*

WAGENSEIL: Oh, yes. You only had to shower twice a week. You got to bathe once a week and you could shower every day after sports, whether you wanted to or not. You had to go outside through a covered passageway to the loo, which could be a brisk experience.

*Q: Again, living in a dorm?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, yes. The dorm was a single long room with beds in cubicles with partitions that sort of went from mid-calf to just about above your head. You had to have the window open every night. The room was heated with three steel pipes that ran the length of the room and sort of had tepid water running through them and that was the heat.

During the winter term, we played field hockey in the snow and used a blue ball so you could see it in the snow.

*Q: And cricket and rugby and such?*

WAGENSEIL: Rugby in the fall, cricket in the spring, hockey in the winter. I played rugby a little bit. I played field hockey a little bit and during the Spring I participated in a theater group that put on Shakespeare's Timon of Athens. Scholastically, I took A-level courses in English, French and European History for the A level exams and applied to university while I was there and got in.

*Q: That's interesting that the universities were more interested in taking your British A levels than your French background which I would have thought would have been a plus at the university.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, they were, both were. The problem was that when I was applying for college from the school in Connecticut, as I say, my transcript was weak. It had holes in it. I didn't have the right amount of American history at the right time and so forth and so on. I had good College Board scores but they wanted to see the transcript and I didn't have it, so I plugged those holes, got good grades as a senior in high school and then I got the A levels. That was enough to get me into college.

*Q: Let's retreat a little bit and go back. You left home at age 13.*

WAGENSEIL: I was 13 when I was sent away to school.

*Q: Before that do you recall talking about things flying around the dinner table?*

WAGENSEIL: I was brought up in a household that was interested in national and international events. I remember going to the movies with my parents, my family and we'd always watch the newsreels. One newsreel that sticks in my mind is footage from the 1956 revolution in Hungary. I have a vivid image in my mind of refugees crossing the border into Austria, fleeing to the Austrian side, these people coming up a river bank or stream bank from the stream that was the border, as well as pictures of people in Budapest throwing rocks at tanks and stuff like that.

I remember also one day when I got home from school and my mother said, "Sit down. Watch this." She plunked me down in front of the television, watching the McCarthy hearings. She said, "This is important." My mother was no fan of Senator McCarthy. Watching the McCarthy hearings she realized this was going to be an important moment in history and she wanted me to see it. I remember watching and saying, "Mom, what's going on?"

She said, "Just watch it, just watch it."

*Q: So your parents were interested in political affairs?*

WAGENSEIL: My mother was more so than my father, I think. As a result of that, I became interested in what was going on. I remember election campaigns and that sort of thing as a kid.

I remember during the 1960 campaign my grandmother, my father's mother, who was from Scots Irish origin -- very, very much a Northern Irishman -- saying to me, "That man Kennedy is dangerous. You realize if he is elected the Pope will have his thumb on the button."

I said, "Come on. That's not real."

She said, "Yes it is. The Pope is a very real bad man."

I had no idea what the Pope was, who the Pope was. I had some of that.

Then of course when I went to school in France, in 1963 to 1964 De Gaulle was president. I think at that point was right around the time that De Gaulle pulled France out of NATO's activities so I became interested in international issues there. As I say, I had traveled in the Caribbean during the 1950s, and in 1959 when Castro took over Cuba, my mother, first of all she was thrilled because Batista was a bad guy, and then she was horrified because she realized that Castro was a bad guy too.

*Q: That happens. In France you would have met a lot of international kids. Was that an exposure you didn't have before?*

WAGENSEIL: Correct. There was a kid there from Vietnam, a kid from West Africa, kids from virtually every country in Western Europe. I don't remember any kids from Eastern Europe.

*Q: Did you find yourself associating any with the Americans who were there?*

WAGENSEIL: Half and half. I had French buddies. My roommate was a French kid from Marseilles. I had a European girlfriend.

*Q: And you traveled around Europe a little bit?*

WAGENSEIL: Around France with my parents, my father and step-mother. I went home at Christmastime to finish the college application process, and then during spring vacation dad and my step-mother came to France and travelled around a little bit in France, visiting her relatives. We had made a stopover in England on the way and then of course when I went to school in England, I traveled around England and France spring vacation. So I had a little experience in Western Europe.

*Q: And there were magazines and newspapers around the house as you were growing up?*

WAGENSEIL: We had the Herald Tribune, the New York Herald Tribune, the paper I remember most reading (in addition to the Danbury paper which I delivered every afternoon for several years) and then when I got to boarding school in Connecticut, they had the New York Times every day. We would read that so I got some exposure to international issues and national issues.

*Q: Were you already interested yourself by this time?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. Basically I had started being interested.

*Q: Were you a reader at a young age?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I was a reader at a very young age. My parents and grandparents read to me when I was a kid and then I remember at some point saying to my grandmother, "I can read that" so I read to her. I was a fast reader and voracious reader, ahead of my classmates in elementary school.

*Q: Do you recall any kind of special influence?*

WAGENSEIL: As a kid in terms of reading?

*Q: Yes.*

WAGENSEIL: You know, the usual kids' stories; Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island, that kind of thing. I got interested in science fiction as at ten or eleven.

*Q: It's good preparation for the State Department.*

WAGENSEIL: Absolutely. Perfect conceptual disconnect.

*Q: And you got into college. You were going to...?*

WAGENSEIL: I went to Yale.

*Q: So you ended up doing reasonably well?*

WAGENSEIL: I did, thank you.

An interesting thing in my freshman class, the Director of Admissions at Yale at that cycle was a guy named Inslee Clark. They called him Inky Clark and we were known as Inky's boys because he had basically selected this freshman class, handpicked us, and there were at least a dozen in the class who had been to school in England the previous year, and another eight or ten as I recall, who had some type of exchange student experience that I could identify just looking at the freshman face book, which was on paper at the time.

*Q: Yale was your first choice at this point?*

WAGENSEIL: Yale had been my second choice. Harvard had been my first choice but once Yale and I made a deal, I quickly spurned Harvard and became true blue.

It worked out fine because Yale had a very good French Department and I majored in French which was easy because of course I already spoke it and could read and write it so I didn't have to work very hard at it, which left my time free for my real interests which were girls and singing. I got into the glee club system and during my senior year was the Manager of the Yale Glee Club.

*Q: That surprises me even speaking French at Yale that you wouldn't have found the coursework particularly taxing. Most of the people in the French Department probably already spoke French by the time they got there, no?*

WAGENSEIL: Most of the people in the French Department, yes. There were some who started out majoring in the language. There were those who took it as a freshman level class, starting beginners' class. They had to go to language lab and do vocabulary class and stuff like that. I didn't have to do any of that.

Most of the people in the Department as majors, people who were majoring in it when I was a junior and senior, spoke it fluently and of course, virtually all of the professors, if

not every single one, were native French speakers. Not having to take the freshman and sophomore level grammar classes and vocabulary classes freed me up to do other stuff, which I did.

My freshman year French class was actually a seminar by a professor from the senior faculty, it was the only class he taught to undergraduates. Not only was I the only freshman; I was the only person not at least a junior in his class. We sat around in overstuffed armchairs in his living room and talked about renaissance literature and stuff like that.

*Q: What years were you there?*

WAGENSEIL: I arrived at Yale in '66 and graduated in 1970.

*Q: So you would have been in one of the colleges on campus?*

WAGENSEIL: I was in what is called Saybrook College, yes.

*Q: And Skull and Bones, I trust?*

WAGENSEIL: No.

*Q: You couldn't tell me even if you were, right?*

WAGENSEIL: I'd have to leave the room. The reality is that most of my energies had been devoted to the Glee Club and I was very much in the Glee Club network and that was where my focus was. I was not of the ilk that ended up being tapped for the Skull and Bones. In addition, I had not been singing in one of the undergrad *a cappella* singing groups, one of the small singing groups that feed up into the Whiffenpoofs.

*Q: I was going to ask if the glee club was the same as the one with the funny name.*

WAGENSEIL: The Whiffs are a separate organization and most of the people in the Whiffenpoofs had been in the Glee Club somewhere earlier in their career. I was approached by a couple of the Whiffs to see if I might be interested but I felt I wasn't, because I didn't really have the experience singing a cappella in a small group. So, I didn't do that but I had plenty to occupy my time.

*Q: This would have been a big glee club, I trust.*

WAGENSEIL: It was the principal musical institution on campus and had been created, had been founded a hundred years previously or something like that so it had a rich tradition, world tours and national travel and stuff like that. It was I would say maybe 60 guys at its peak when I was there.

*Q: Was Yale still all men at this point?*

WAGENSEIL: I was a member of the last all-male class. My senior year they admitted women for the first time as freshmen and permitted women to transfer in as sophomores and juniors. (There were requirements you had to spend two years on campus to graduate from Yale so you had to be at least a junior and senior there.) There were no women in my graduating class but we had women a year behind us. In fact, my senior year was also a year of transition for the glee club, which started out all male and the following year ended up being a mixed group.

*Q: So as the Manager did you organize trips and world tours?*

WAGENSEIL: Organized concerts in the States during the school year and arranged for buses to get everybody there. You know, stuff like that.

Senior year, in October I think it was of 1969, we were on the Ed Sullivan Show.

*Q: That is a highlight.*

WAGENSEIL: They called the glee club up and wanted us to come and sing, basically as background for Lee Marvin. Paint your Wagon was just coming out and Lee Marvin “sang” a song in it, so they wanted to showcase him on TV.

*Q: I never thought of him as a singer.*

WAGENSEIL: The star was going to appear on the program and sing his song from the movie but they needed some people who could actually sing behind him to support him. We actually opened the show with a medley of football fight songs from Harvard and Princeton and Dartmouth and Yale, that we used to sing at every concert. So we were on the Ed Sullivan Show.

Also on the program at that time was Woody Allen, and Topo Gigio. It was a fascinating experience. Who else was on? Donovan was on, I think.

Anyway that was the central part of my extracurricular activities.

*Q: Were you getting involved in political affairs at all at this time? This was a pretty heady time in the United States.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, indeed. I was not politicized. I was intrigued and interested in the Vietnam conflict and in international relations and so forth. My French stepmother was herself one-quarter Vietnamese and had served in the French military as a nurse, a hospital administrator in the French army in Vietnam. She was at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, got out about two days before it fell, and so I had some vague interest in Vietnam but I wasn’t politicized about it. I was concerned about it. I was, I had a college deferment so I didn’t see myself at risk for the draft. I wasn’t mobilized by that.

*Q: Although wouldn't that have changed when you were in college with the lottery?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. They had the lottery I guess my junior year, my senior year; I can't remember when it was. I had number 225 and they went up to 215 in my local Draft Board, so I "won" the lottery.

So I wasn't politicized by that although I was very much aware of it.

*Q: Was there a lot of disturbance on the Yale campus?*

WAGENSEIL: There had been some demonstrations and of course a lot of us went down to Washington to demonstrate. In fact, I was on Capitol Hill, just came out of a meeting with a congressman when I heard about the shootings at Kent State University. It was that day.

There wasn't much anti-war demonstration on the Yale campus. What convulsed New Haven was about the Panther trial. Some of the Black Panther leaders were put on trial in New Haven and college president Kingman Brewster was quoted in the international press and certainly the American press as being 'skeptical' of the Black Panthers' ability to get a fair trial in New Haven.

Basically the campus closed down. There were large demonstrations in support of a fair trial; not in support of the Panthers per se but in support of a fair trial.

I and my roommate who had come to Yale on a ROTC scholarship and was in the Navy afterwards and he was very square and I was fairly square, we served as proctors or monitors for the demonstration to help ensure that there was no violence or anything. It was all very well behaved and typical Ivy League respectable.

*Q: You would have been on campus also during the '68 election, both the assassinations and the McCarthy movement and so forth.*

WAGENSEIL: I was very much on campus during all of that, yes. I was swept up in that intellectual ideological, yes.

*Q: It was hard to avoid it during those days.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes indeed. Everybody was affected by it, one way or the other.

I was a collateral victim of teargas the night of the Black Panther demonstration. What happened was the demonstration was very peaceful. There were 200,000 people in the center of New Haven and we all felt very proud of ourselves at having been so mature and so forth. We went back to our dorms and I was sitting in my room with a couple of guys eating pizza when we heard the sirens downtown. It was May, the windows were open. Shortly thereafter we all started coughing because the teargas which had been

sprayed on the folks that were arriving three blocks downtown drifted up the street through our window. But that was as close as I came to any of that stuff.

*Q: Were there race riots in New Haven?*

WAGENSEIL: Not riots. There were demonstrations. There was a lot of tension in New Haven. There is an area in New Haven called The Hill which is very much lower socioeconomic class, not far from the campus actually and there were some problems there. It didn't burst into flames but there had been some problems there. People on campus got kind of energized and started to help tutoring kids in school and stuff like that. I didn't do that, but others did.

One year ahead of me in college was a football player named Calvin Hill who went on to be a Dallas Cowboy but Calvin got people organized into tutoring. There is a daycare center in New Haven called named Calvin Hill Daycare Center.

But New Haven didn't really didn't burst into flames like Washington or Los Angeles or anything like that at the time.

*Q: So come 1970 it is time to graduate. Had you thought much about the future?*

WAGENSEIL: I hadn't thought very far. I had thought a little bit and decided what I wanted to do was to avoid work. I had thought at the time -- because I was in the French Department and I was working and so forth and I had some good inspiring teachers -- I thought I wanted to be a teacher and thought maybe I would go on and get a degree and then become a professor or something like that. Teach high school, not college. I wanted to get out of academia for a little bit so I joined the Peace Corps.

*Q: While you were there did it seem to you there were a lot of opportunities for a French major?*

WAGENSEIL: Once I decided that I didn't want to go on to grad school right away, I basically decided I want to go in the Peace Corps. I didn't really look beyond that but there may not have been many opportunities.

*Q: I remember graduating more or less the same time in international relations and two of the members of my class joking to each other that they were now qualified to work in a Chinese laundry or a French restaurant or something like that.*

WAGENSEIL: I had a couple of classmates like that. Three of my close buddies from glee club or the dorm drove a taxi for at least a year in New York because they couldn't find anything else. One guy who was in my class knocked himself out to get into medical school and got in his second choice medical school and he lasted about three months. He burnt out. He just couldn't stand it. This wasn't what I wanted to do.



My sights had not been set very high. I was thinking if I wanted to be a teacher teaching high school, you don't need a whole lot of credentials at that level so I didn't feel my horizons were too limited but I wasn't ready to start that right away.

I figured most of the people in the Peace Corps are teachers so I'd get some practical experience and then come back and go some place interesting.

*Q: Before we start the Peace Corps, let me just ask about your summertime. Were you going back home and working or?*

WAGENSEIL: I started a summer job actually, after my year in France in 1964, working on Block Island, Rhode Island. My dad found a job for me working in a summer hotel and I worked out there for a total of nine summers.

*Q: Always back to the same hotel?*

WAGENSEIL: To the same two hotels owned by the same company. I started out working in the hotel laundry cleaning the tablecloths and towels and stuff and then worked my way up to be Assistant at the Hotel Front Desk.

*Q: You were qualified for a Chinese laundry.*

WAGENSEIL: That's right. Over the years, I tended bar and mowed the lawn and I waited tables and I washed dishes. I worked up and eventually the senior desk clerk and sort of assistant manager of both hotels for the last two summers.

*Q: So you had a connection Block Island too.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, there's a connection to Block Island.

Actually, while I was working there my folks came out and bought a house out there. It became sort of the foothold of the family for summer vacations.

*Q: Did your brother grow up the same way and did he also get an international bent?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, yes and no. He sort of grew up the same way. When my parents divorced, I was already in boarding school and I stayed in boarding school which was near where my dad was living. My brother wound up living with our mother and she was living in Puerto Rico at that point. He went off to a boarding school, sort of a junior boarding school in New York State, then went to the one I had been going to. He got there the year after I had graduated so he, of course, had the burden of my having preceded him. While he was there he spent a year in school in France also. My having gone to school in France sort of started the tradition for the school. Now it sends a couple of kids every year.

*Q: That same school you went to?*

WAGENSEIL: No, different places.

He went as a sophomore, I went as a junior. It was a slightly different experience. Because I was at Yale he went to Harvard. He applied to Yale and was easily accepted but I don't think he enjoyed it.

*Q: You were just talking about your brother got into Harvard.*

WAGENSEIL: Right. He went to Harvard and majored in sociology, I guess it was, and graduated four years after I did and hated every minute of Harvard as far as I could tell. He had an idiot for a roommate freshman year and was not really comfortable and never got into the college spirit, as far as I can tell.

*Q: But he didn't join the Foreign Service, did he?*

WAGENSEIL: He didn't join the Foreign Service. He had a sociology degree and he went to work for my dad down in the Caribbean for a number of years. My dad had some investments down there. Then he came back to the States and realized his sociology degree was totally useless so he went back to college and got himself an engineering Bachelor of Science and then worked his way up to a doctorate in environmental engineering.

So, he was working on the environment and he was doing hurricanes in the Caribbean so it is international but is not the same sort of thing.

*Q: Do feel that you forged contacts at Yale that have been good to you throughout your life?*

WAGENSEIL: No, not particularly.

*Q: You are not necessarily a close friend of George Bush and Bill Clinton and so forth?*

WAGENSEIL: Bush was there two years that I was there. He was two years ahead of me, class of '68. Some of my classmates knew him. I knew who he was because his grandfather was a senator, Senator Prescott Bush in Connecticut so I knew the name and there were some stories about him in the paper but I never knew him personally. I certainly was not in the same crowd. I lived in a different college and moved in different circles than he did.

Bill Clinton and Hillary Clinton were at law school and that's a totally different crowd so I had no contact with them.

Actually, only one of my classmates that I know of joined the Foreign Service, John Evans who actually was in my dorm and has just finished his tour as ambassador to Armenia.

He was consul general in St. Petersburg when I was consul general in Strasburg and he served on the Russia desk when I was working on the OSCE on Russian Affairs. We sort of had contacts over the years but there was no support network or anything like that that got me in the Foreign Service. (And another classmate got into the Department later: John Bolton was appointed as Assistant Secretary for International Organizations, and later, as you know, had a Recess Appointment as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.)

*Q: OK, so you were headed off to the Peace Corps. Is that something you did immediately after you graduated?*

WAGENSEIL: Not quite, because the summer after graduation in 1970 the glee club went on a tour of Europe. Eight countries in eight weeks, which was great fun but because of a combination of circumstances we toured as a coed musical group for the first time and there were 52 of us, 27 guys and 25 girls.

*Q: The girls caught up in a hurry.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, we kind of bent the rules a little bit to get enough singers. Basically, anybody who wanted to come who could tell us what music was, was eligible. There were not yet enough Yale women singers who were available who could afford it or whatever. So we expanded the horizon to include women who had been singing at other colleges that we sang with -- like Smith and Holyoke and Connecticut College and Vassar and Marymount -- so we had 27 women, 25 guys. About half the women were actually at Yale and the others came from other schools but they had been girlfriends of singers or their friends had been girlfriends of singers or something like that.

*Q: So you got to see Europe, seven countries.*

WAGENSEIL: England, Holland, Germany, Denmark, France, Switzerland, Italy and Spain in that order; eight countries in eight weeks.

*Q: You were the organizer?*

WAGENSEIL: No, I was not. I was not the tour manager. There were three other kids who were tour managers who arranged all of that. I had been managing the post season, if you will. So I didn't have any of those responsibilities -- but I was the pitch pipe. I had the little machine in my pocket to go hmmm and set the tone for the next thing we were going to sing.

*Q: Is that an especially important role in glee club?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, it is. If you blow the wrong pitch then you are singing in the wrong key and it doesn't sound right.

*Q: The pitch pipe produces many different notes depending which song you are about to sing?*

WAGENSEIL: It is like a harmonica but it is round and has an octave of tones on it. You spin it around, find the one you want and blow into it gently and they can hear the hmmm, whatever it is and you can begin singing.

*Q: Did you sing with an orchestra as well?*

WAGENSEIL: For the tour we were a cappella and occasionally we would sing with piano. Most of it was a cappella.

*Q: You would sing in the evening performance and see Europe during the daytime?*

WAGENSEIL: A little of both. We sang concerts in churches, we sang radio broadcasts, we sang in festival halls, Westminster Cathedral and Chartres and the cathedral of Segovia in Spain.

*Q: It must have been really nice to sing in these big old cathedrals.*

WAGENSEIL: Great fun. Talk about great acoustics, marvelous acoustics and a very inspiring kind of thing. We were singing some sacred music and singing that sort of thing in a cathedral is quite inspiring. We sang spirituals, we sang sea chanteys, and we sang American sort of traditional songs, a whole bunch of stuff. I don't even remember what we were singing.

It was great fun. We sang seven weeks of concerts, that's 42 days. I think we sang like 50 concerts or something. Broadcast on Dutch radio and the French Language Radio from Geneva and Danish radio, we sang in Milan, we sang all kinds of interesting places.

*Q: Terrific. So that took up the whole summer?*

WAGENSEIL: That was basically the whole summer.

*Q: Had you already applied for the Peace Corps?*

WAGENSEIL: I had already applied for the Peace Corps and basically had been accepted but because I was not available until after the tour I missed the cycle of volunteers who were being training in the summer months to be teachers, starting in the fall so I was not in fact, a teacher.

*Q: Let me take you back just one step. The Peace Corps was actually competitive to get into. It was not a sure thing, necessarily, was it?*

WAGENSEIL: Not really, no. But I don't know anybody from an Ivy League college who didn't get in.

*Q: That's still much more centered than it is today, I guess with students right out of school.*

WAGENSEIL: Basically, yes. You'd be a generalist, what they call them. Most of the students, volunteers were fresh out of college.

*Q: When you were accepted, did they accept you for a particular country?*

WAGENSEIL: What they did was, they said, are you sure you can't be a teacher? I said I'd like to be a teacher but I am not available until the middle of August. They said, well, we don't have any training starting in the middle of August; we'll get back to you. A couple of weeks later they called back and they said, "How would you like to work on some kind of civic development program in francophone Africa? I said, "OK" and then my dad and I looked at each other and said, "Where's francophone?"

*Q: You didn't know what francophone meant?*

WAGENSEIL: No, we didn't.

*Q: After being in French school?*

WAGENSEIL: I didn't realize francophone, I didn't know anything about Africa so I didn't know for certain that francophone meant a region, not a place. It could have been the name of a town, I don't know.

Anyway, I wound up in Cote d'Ivoire, or as we called it, Ivory Coast.

*Q: In civic development.*

WAGENSEIL: It was in fact a rural housing development program. I think originally there were 18 of us when the training started. It whittled down to a dozen in teams of two scattered about the country in different towns working for the ministry of housing and urban development, helping the local citizens build modern houses.

*Q: Was that something they trained you to do before they sent you out there?*

WAGENSEIL: We had ten weeks of training, "hardship" training in the Virgin Islands. We had language training in the morning. In the afternoons, they gave us training in surveying, bricklaying, cement mixing, making reinforced concrete beams and sort of fundamental basic engineering.

*Q: In which language?*

WAGENSEIL: A local vernacular for Ivory Coast is called "Djoula." It is sort of lingua franca all over West Africa. Djoula means "trader" or "merchant" and it was the language

of the itinerate merchants who would travel about and so became kind of the lingua franca. I actually used Djoula later in markets from Nigeria to Senegal. I could go in and buy a dozen tomatoes or a pineapple or a pair of flip-flops in any market in West Africa using the knowledge I had of Djoula. It is a dialect of the Mandinka tribe.

My partner, John from Brooklyn, and I were assigned to a town in the northwest corner of Cote d'Ivoire, called Odienné where we were working with the local ministry of housing and urban planning. This was a very fortunate outcome. John had studied geology in college so he knew how to survey and I had studied French so I knew how to talk.

*Q: For ten weeks, was this presumptuous in any way to train a young college graduate for ten weeks in housing construction and send them off to help other people?*

WAGENSEIL: We were really expected to verify that the people were doing the job right. We weren't actually building the houses. We weren't foremen at a worksite or anything like that. We were kind of inspectors for the government office, going around to make sure that the walls were plumb and the windows were level and the beams were big enough or that the roof was properly attached things like that.

It was a very fortunate coincidence for me and my partner that we were assigned to Odienné because at that point the Ivoirian government had a policy of celebrating Independence Day in a different town every year. Their independence was the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, if I remember correctly. They would announce two years beforehand that "two years hence we are going to celebrate in this or that town." During that year the government would put all of its development energies into that town so that it was sort of a way of developing the country, spreading the wealth around. It wasn't all concentrated in the capital or in big urban areas.

In 1972 they paved five roads in the town, put in a whole new electrical system, a whole new water supply. They dammed a river, seven kilometers up the road, and built a pipeline down to a new water tower and laid pipe all over the city, and they built a new wing on the hospital, a new wing on the secondary school and built a couple of new school buildings and they built several new government office buildings and 30 room hotel and a football stadium and all this other sort of infrastructure stuff.

*Q: All that while you were there?*

WAGENSEIL: While I was there, in 1972.

At that same time the citizens were basically obliged to replace their mud huts with modern rectangular cement block tin roof houses. And we were there to ensure that those houses were built to code, in effect.

We also got involved in supervising the construction projects the government was doing, so I was supervising the construction of the 30-room hotel and the football stadium, a little bit, the airstrip of the airport a little bit and various other things.

*Q: That's a great education and learning practical skills.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. The locals built a thousand houses in two years, we supervised the building of those thousand houses and all this other infrastructure stuff.

*Q: And were they doing it pretty efficiently or did you have to tell them tear down this one because it is not up to snuff?*

WAGENSEIL: A couple of times there were some problems. The main problem was they made the cement block on site. They made them by hand. They'd mix up the sand and tamp them in a mold and then turn them out to cure for a couple of weeks and then you could build a wall with them. That was OK. We had to make sure they had enough cement in the mix, because of course cement is expensive and had to come up country by truck.

There were certain approved plans that they had to use and we sort of helped them lay the house out on the site and then stake it out so they could build the foundations properly and so on. We had to make sure the foundations were strong enough. The windows were made out of wood and it's expensive to get some carpenter to make a window for you and so people would cheat on the windows. They shouldn't be less than a meter, they should always be a meter. There were rules about how big it had to be for ventilation and so forth.

We always got this stuff, "Oh, no. If I make it too big my daughter can crawl out in the middle of the night." My answer was, "She's going to crawl out if she wants to no matter how big the window is." So, we kind of had to supervise that kind of thing.

One time I was riding about the town on my motorbike which they had given me for mobility and I went by this site I had responsibility for and I noticed that the walls, the courses of cement block seemed to be sort of sloping. I stopped the bike and got off and looked and yes, they were clearly tending downhill. I walked over to the site builder, the foreman, and said, "The walls are not level." They were plumb but they weren't level and that's not very safe.

He said, "Yes, they are."

I said, "No, they are not."

"What do you mean?"

So I took him across the street and said, "Look at it. Doesn't it look like you are going downhill?"

“Yeah, it does but I have the spirit level. It’s in the middle.”

I said, “Oh, really?”

He took me over and we put it on the block and yes, the bubble was on the middle of the thing.

I said, “Can I try something?”

“Sure.”

So I took and turned it around so it was going uphill and the bubble was totally out of line. What happened was the level line had gotten cockeyed.

Fortunately, it only lacked three courses or four courses of block so I said, “OK, take down one course and chalk it up and start over again.”

Anyway, we had that kind of responsibility.

*Q: What were living conditions?*

WAGENSEIL: At that time Cote d’Ivoire was one of the richest countries in West Africa, which isn’t saying a whole lot but it was still pretty prosperous. The town had electricity and running water when we got there so it was fairly well to do. My partner and I were put up in a house rented for us by the government. It was an almost finished house; it had cinder block walls and windows and an aluminum roof and running water and electricity. The floor in the living room had not been finished. It was just bare cement. It wasn’t tiled. It had running water with a toilet and shower inside and we had a fridge and so forth. So that was pretty comfortable.

As I say, I had a little motorbike that I used to get around and we also had a little Citrôen 2CV, little trucks like a corrugated cardboard back on a pickup that we used to move material around. That was OK.

It was hot. We were up in the Sahel and it was hot and dusty and dry and uncomfortable. The rainy season basically meant we’d get a thunderstorm every couple of days for a couple of hours and then it would all dry out. The mud would be different shapes but it would solidify after a couple of hours. So that was kind of uncomfortable. We had no air conditioning or anything like. We did have electricity. We had to boil the water but otherwise, it was acceptable.

*Q: How were you received by the local population?*

WAGENSEIL: Generally, pretty well. As individuals we were welcomed. They were very interested in America and they loved us and were very hospitable towards us. Our



responsibilities were such that the people knew that they had to work with us to build a house so they had to come to our office to get the title for the land. This was always a major problem because people would realize that somebody else had bought their land, the land that their house was located or had half of the hut or something because of course, the plots that had been surveyed in the town by some French firm years before didn't correspond with where the compounds were laid out necessarily. So, we had to negotiate them through that and then help them pick a plan. There were certain floor plans or models that they had to choose from. I want two bedrooms, I want three bedrooms. You can't have nine bedrooms; you'd have to have two houses, that kind of thing.

But when they realized we were not there to penalize them but to help them, to assist them in building a house so they would look nice, we would be immediately accepted and welcomed.

The people in the village -- a town of about 12,000 people I think all together when I was there -- they had money because they were merchants and there was some farming in the area. They had rice farms in the lowlands and watercourses, but they were mainly sort of the younger son or the nephew or somebody who would go off to the capital and get into business and become a merchant or businessman somewhere and then bring the money home. So they were able to afford to build themselves new houses. This was not a hardship or at least not a crippling hardship.

*Q: But they were required to build them?*

WAGENSEIL: They were required, the law that was adopted as of 1969 or '70 before I got there basically said you cannot build an old style, mud hut inside the town limits. You must have a house according to these floor plans which were rectangular, rectilinear with a pitched roof. Then, of course, it sort of became keeping up with the Joneses.

*Q: To assign a couple of young Americans out there was the theory that this would help avoid corruption to have outsiders involved in it?*

WAGENSEIL: The Peace Corps program was to help the government with its modern housing program around the country and so as I say there had been a dozen of us who finished the training program successfully and were assigned in six teams of two in different towns. Two of the teams had basically nothing to do. They wound up in towns where there was nothing going on or the local head of the office had wanted nothing to do with them or something and so they admitted that they spent the whole time playing cards and drinking and chasing girls.

Two of the teams had a moderate amount of work to do so they were busy half the time. And two of the teams were extremely busy all the time, and I was one of those fortunate teams that was busy.

*Q: What was going on in West Africa at this time? It was a pretty quiet place. There were no big wars or anything at that time.*

WAGENSEIL: No, no big wars at that time.

*Q: This was '71 and '72 except maybe Guinea Bissau.*

WAGENSEIL: I wasn't paying much attention if it was.

Ghana, which had started out as bright shining star of African independence, had slipped into economic decay and very deep socialism and was basically a basket case.

Mali to the north of Cote d'Ivoire was also on a military regime, socialist kind of government.

Upper Volta as it was at the time was just sort of poor and bewildered.

Guinea to the west was under President Sékou Touré and of course, he had broken with the French in 1958 and declared independence -- without their permission -- which was a terrible act of lèse-majesté. He was a socialist and very cozy with the Soviets and the Chinese as well.

So the border between Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea was closed which was funny because of course the border transected the tribe that I was working with.

*Q: And that was the border probably closest to where you were.*

WAGENSEIL: It was indeed the border closest to where we were. It was about 23 kilometers from where we were. The chief of the tribe in Odienné was Gaoussou Touré, and he was actually first cousin of President Touré of Guinea. At one point there was a wedding in the town and Sékou came to the wedding, totally incognito and so forth and fooled nobody. Everybody knew he was there. The government was powerless to stop it him because he was the uncle of the bride or something. That border was closed and had been closed for years.

I drove to the border and the road sort of basically ended. There was a little stream and you went right up to the bridge and at the far side of the bridge there was not even a footpath. I mean there was a footpath but barely.

*Q: A customs post or anything like that?*

WAGENSEIL: No, nothing.

*Q: So it was easy to get back and forth if you wanted to.*

WAGENSEIL: There was like a little police office in the village two or three clicks before the border but of course, nobody went through the village if they were crossing the border illegally.

Liberia was Liberia so everything was cool and calm in Liberia and so those were the countries that were around Cote d'Ivoire at the time.

*Q: And in Cote d'Ivoire was President Houphouet?*

WAGENSEIL: Félix Houphouet-Boigny was the president for life. The people that I talked to sort of acknowledged yes, well, he keeps getting reelected but that's because there is nobody running against him and nobody is running against him because nobody else can get elected. He is a shoo-in so why bother?

*Q: A reasonably prosperous Cote d'Ivoire at the time.*

WAGENSEIL: Very prosperous.

*Q: Based on what?*

WAGENSEIL: Agriculture. They had cocoa and coffee, and pineapples They had lots of timber. The southern half of the country was forest. They were busy cutting it down. I gather now most of it is gone, unfortunately. They were logging tropical hardwoods as fast as they could. At the Port of Abidjan was one whole area of the port that was just logs, these huge logs about two yards in diameter floating in the sea.

*Q: Were you pretty isolated up there in your town?*

WAGENSEIL: Very isolated. John and I in the housing program, two other Peace Corps volunteers working as English teachers in the local secondary school. There were two Germans volunteers, a couple of French Coopérants Militaires who did not associate with us at all because they were French and we were not.

*Q: They were volunteers as well.*

WAGENSEIL: That's right. The Coopérants are not military service. It is kind of like a volunteer service to avoid being in the army. They were civilians. One was a teacher and one was a doctor or something.

The Germans were a doctor and a nurse.

There was one American couple, missionaries, who had been living there for like 18 years and had made only one convert. It was a Muslim town, a whole Muslim region. They had one convert, a blind man who came to their services on Sunday because he liked the music but basically it was very isolated.

It was about a thousand miles from Abidjan; 400 kilometers of paved road and 600 kilometers of dirt road.

*Q: And you got there by road?*

WAGENSEIL: Got there by road, yes. Bush taxi. When you arrive, everywhere is the same color, sort of dirt color. The tourists were liable to go all the way by bush taxi or to take the train up to the north of the country and then go across the northwest corner by bush taxi, which was only slightly less onerous.

*Q: Did you get out from time to time?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. Shortly after we got there, Congress did not pass the budget in time and Peace Corps and various other agencies were on a Continuing Resolution which at the time was unusual. Now it is kind of commonplace but at the time it was unusual and so Peace Corps issued instructions to all its missions around the world to restrict activities to 75% of the previous years, spending less until the budget situation was resolved. So basically the Peace Corps country directors said, "OK, everybody stay put. Unless it is a medical emergency, stay put where you are. Don't come to Abidjan and we won't come to you either unless it is a medical emergency."

So we were basically cut off for months. I broke a tooth and I had to go in but I had to show them the tooth before they approved my travel. They wouldn't sign the paperwork until I showed them my mouth.

The other thing was our country director was an unsuccessful candidate for governor of Maine. He was a Canuck so he spoke some form of French and because he had not been successful as a candidate but his party had won the White House, they offered him something and he wound up as the country director for the Peace Corps in Cote d'Ivoire for which he was not in any way qualified except he spoke something like French.

*Q: How about your French? Did you find that the French you spoke was odd in Cote d'Ivoire?*

WAGENSEIL: No, in fact, it gained me respect because I was able to interact with the government officials and the French AID cadres as an equal. They spoke European French, proper French. The French aid officials and so forth were extremely self-important. There were more French living in Cote d'Ivoire than there had been before independence. So there were some people saying what does independence mean? We haven't gotten rid of the French yet. Because I was able to speak the language, I was able to be treated as an equal which made work easier.

*Q: Africa, even though you had traveled quite a lot must have been very different from your previous journeys. What was your reaction to the whole thing when you suddenly are off in a sleepy little African village in the middle of nowhere?*

WAGENSEIL: I had spent a certain amount of time in the Caribbean. My dad had business investments in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. We had visited Cuba before Castro and Jamaica and Trinidad and Barbados, so I had some experience with third world environments, third world living conditions. I wasn't living in that but I had seen people living in it. I was not shocked or horrified or anything like that. I sort of understood what was happening.

I had not had any direct experience with Muslims before. Of course, everybody in the town except this one guy who converted to Christianity because he liked the music was Muslim except for the government officials who were transferred there from other parts of the country, many of whom who were Christians.

Having lived in France and lived in England, I was already experienced to a certain extent in culture shock if you will or cross-cultural experience so I was able to adapt pretty well. It wasn't terrifically uncomfortable for me. I felt pretty comfortable there.

At one point I remember there was a ceremony, a wedding ceremony or village festival or something like that. I was at this party and there were people dancing around and whatnot. I was having a great time. I was interacting with everybody and I looked around and realized I was the only white at the whole event. I was in the middle of it. People were talking to me and I was talking with them, dancing together and drinking together and eating out of the same bowl. I just felt very at ease. I felt very smooth and comfortable. I felt I fit in.

*Q: Did you like Africa?*

WAGENSEIL: I think I was enough of a realist to understand its problems, at least the part of it I saw. While I was in the Peace Corps, I only saw Cote d'Ivoire. We had stopped at Dakar airport in Senegal, and Roberts Field in Liberia, for refueling or something on the way out there. I knew nothing else except what I saw in Cote d'Ivoire but I liked it, I found it interesting. It was an anthropology class, field trip for two years; fascinating. I had a great time.

*Q: Did you get out of the country during that time?*

WAGENSEIL: Not while I was in service, well, that's not true. I didn't get out to Africa. I did come back in the middle of my second year for my college roommate's wedding. I flew back to Michigan for the wedding. That was my reverse culture shock.

*Q: But as a general procedure, you were not entitled to a leave or something halfway through your two years?*

WAGENSEIL: There was no paid home leave or anything like that, no.

*Q: Was there pay at all?*

WAGENSEIL: We were given a stipend which was not a whole lot of money but it was more than most volunteers in other countries got because Cote d'Ivoire cost of living was high. But because I was way out of the center of the action, I was able to save quite a bit of money because there was nothing to buy, no place to go. Once you get up there, you stay there. I was able to make my trip back for Pete's wedding out of my own savings.

Talking about culture shock and so forth, I flew back to New York and my dad picked me up at the airport. We landed JFK at the crack of dawn and drove back up to our house in Connecticut. We stopped on the way for breakfast somewhere. We went in to Howard Johnson's or Friendly's or something and sat at the counter. The waitress brought us the menus and a glass of water and I turned to my dad and said, "Is the water safe?" It was just automatic; the first thing you think of "is the water safe?" That was sort of automatic habit. When you are in the Peace Corps you don't drink any water unless the water had been boiled.

*Q: So as you were approaching the end of your two years in Cote d'Ivoire were you thinking of your future?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, I was. I was sort of wondering. I had not gotten into the teaching cycle and Bill and Judy -- the two volunteers who were there as teachers -- were miserable because they found that the students really didn't care. They were there to teach English and the students were totally unmotivated about English. This was in the corner of Cote d'Ivoire, farthest away from Ghana where they do speak English. The neighboring countries were all francophone. The kids there didn't see any value in it.

Also at least half the girls in the school got pregnant at some point and dropped out for a couple of months and then came back and then weren't able to resume their studies and so forth. It is very frustrating when you have a good student and she is intelligent and she is learning and she is beginning to speak a little English she gets knocked up and she can't continue and she's got a baby and blah, blah, blah.

*Q: So this wasn't apparently a very strict Muslim society, if I can interject.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, it depends on how you look at strict. These young girls were 16, 17 or 18 years old and that's very much the marrying age.

*Q: So they were actually getting married?*

WAGENSEIL: Eventually, yes.

*Q: So Bill and Judy were not happy.*

WAGENSEIL: They didn't inspire me to go back to teaching or to go on with my intention to teach.

There was another coincidence. The driver of the American ambassador in Abidjan was from the town I was working in and as usual, the unofficial network, the bush telegraph, is much more efficient than the official communications. We knew that the American ambassador was going to make a visit before the local authorities did, before the foreign ministry did so when the ambassador arrived, Ambassador John Root, pulled up in his car, we were there to greet him.

He said, "Oh, hello.

I said, "Mr. Ambassador, I am Steve Wagenseil. It is nice to meet you. Welcome to Odienné."

He said, "What a coincidence."

I said, "It is not a coincidence, sir. I knew you were coming. We expected you in here about 11 o'clock this morning. What can we do to help?"

So, I showed the ambassador around the town. This was after I had been there about a year. By then the construction process was starting for the independence celebration so we had a lot to show him. I told him about the local political dynamics and who is in and who's out and blah, blah, blah.

As he was leaving he said, "Please, if you ever come to Abidjan, come to see me."

I said, "Well, that's a problem because our travel budget has been cut."

He said, "I know. If you ever come to Abidjan come to the embassy and we can have lunch or something."

Eventually I did and he introduced me to a couple of people at the embassy; the political officer was Charlie Twining and the consular officer was Arlene Render and I got to know them. I realized that -- contrary to what I had been told when I was at university in the Vietnam era -- people working in the American embassy were not blood thirsty, warmongering, imperialist dogs.

*Q: You were just talking about the meetings with American Embassy people in Abidjan while you were in the Peace Corps there.*

WAGENSEIL: I realized when I got to know these folks that they were not blood thirsty, war mongering dogs as we had been led to believe in college but they were in fact honest citizens, nice folks trying to help the country and help the world, telling America's story and representing our country and trying to understand the host country. It seemed like an interesting thing to do.

So while I was in the Peace Corps I signed up to take the Foreign Service test. I took it in Abidjan at the Embassy in November or December of 1972, just before the end of my service.

Arlene Render was the consular officer who supervised the exam.

*Q: Were there a bunch of people taking it in Abidjan?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't know, there were eight or ten of us including a couple of volunteers I had been serving with.

*Q: They were Peace Corps people?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, I think so. One person who was the child of a missionary family somewhere and a couple of other folks who were Peace Corps volunteers in my program or in other programs in the country. The exam was basically the whole day at that time.

*Q: This was the written exam?*

WAGENSEIL: The written exam.

*Q: So do you recall anything about the written exam?*

WAGENSEIL: It was extremely challenging. It was the whole day and you start out with the multiple guess questions and then at the end of the day after your brain is totally wrung dry, there is a writing sample that you had to do. The challenge was to be able to write anything coherent at that end of that long process. We had like a four-hour session in the morning and then a lunch break and like a three-hour session and then a 20 minute break and then the writing sample. It took the whole day. It was the most difficult exam I ever took.

In retrospect I think the only reason I did at all well on it was because while I was serving up country in the Peace Corps my only source of outside information was shortwave radio and Time and Newsweek. We'd get the Time and Newsweek a couple of weeks late of course but they would come eventually plus other papers from time to time; the local paper was useless but it was there and then we listened to news on the BBC and VOA and Radio France International morning, noon and night just to have something some knowledge of what was going on in the world.

So I was very well informed with current events on domestic U.S. politics, international politics, and trade issues. I remember, I was so starved for news I would read every single word of Time Magazine. Not just the news stories, not just the economic affairs, not just the stock market analysis -- totally foreign to me but I would read it. I read every word of the ads, everything, just to have something to read.

You do that for a couple of years and you learn some stuff.



*Q: Do you recall if the exam had a lot of questions about current affairs?*

WAGENSEIL: Not current affairs per se but the state of the world. I can't remember any questions about it. You were asked about history and literature and cultural things.

*Q: At this time were you selecting your specialty as you went into the exam?*

WAGENSEIL: No. They didn't have that at all. I didn't know anything about cones or specialties or anything like that. I just wanted to be able to work in an embassy.

*Q: This was '72?*

WAGENSEIL: This was '72.

*Q: By '73 you had to select your specialty when you took the exam.*

WAGENSEIL: I took the written exam at the end of '72 and then one had to wait for the answer to see if you could go on to the next stages of the application process.

*Q: And you were waiting in your little village? Or had you already finished in the Peace Corps by this time?*

WAGENSEIL: I was just about to finish. I signed out of the Peace Corps in January of '73. Like virtually every volunteer that I knew, I did not go home right away. We were given a separation allowance but it was a certain amount of money for every month that we had served in the Peace Corps. You were given two thirds of it on the spot and one third of you cannot get until you get home. It was meant to help reinsert yourself into American society or give you a little nest egg so you could go back to school, rent an apartment if you were going to grad school or whatever. It was enough to begin traveling around Africa with "a beard and a backpack," as so many people did at the time. I spent about six months getting home.

I traveled from Cote d'Ivoire by road, by train, hitchhiking, trucks or whatever from Abidjan to Ghana, to Togo into Dahomey, to Nigeria, back through Dahomey and Ghana up through Upper Volta, back down to Abidjan, up through Odienné, up into Mali. (At the Malian border, the truck arrived just at sunset and the border was closed, so I slept on the roof of the cab to get some relief from the heat, then proceeded to cross the border and ride up to Bamako the next day.) From Bamako I travelled upcountry to visit Timbuktu (Tombouctou). Amazing!

Took the train from Bamako to Dakar (an 18-hour ride that took 26 hours); I arrived in Dakar at virtually the same instant as Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia on a State Visit so I couldn't reach anybody. I had been given the phone number of somebody from the American Embassy in Dakar as a possible contact. I couldn't get through on the phone so

I was sort of stuck in Dakar watching all this parade go by and wandering around in the middle of the city.

Eventually from Dakar I took a plane, I paid cash to ride to Casablanca

*Q: Were you doing all this traveling by yourself with only a backpack?*

WAGENSEIL: I would hook up with a fellow for a couple of days or a group of us would travel for a couple of days, stayed in a Peace Corps hostel in Accra. There were people from all over the region sort of passing through, made some friends, and traveled a couple of days with them. In Nigeria met someone else and traveled a couple of days with them but no group, no organized thing. Pretty much making my own way.

I got to Casablanca in May. I had left word in Abidjan when I left Cote d'Ivoire the second time that I was heading towards Morocco. If the results of my Foreign Service test came through, they should be sent to Casablanca.

So when I got there and checked in at the consulate yes, in fact there was a message from the Board of Examiners and yes, I had passed the written test and would I please let them know when I was home to schedule an oral exam -- which I eventually did when I got home but that was a while later because I was still traveling.

*Q: Even after Casablanca you continued to tour?*

WAGENSEIL: There was a young Moroccan guy who had a little shop in Cote d'Ivoire and as I was leaving he said, "Where you going?"

I said, "I don't know, travel."

He said, "Are you going to Morocco?"

I said, "Maybe, never been to Morocco."

He said, "Oh, if you ever go to Morocco, please look up my family in Fez" so I did, eventually.

His parents lived down a little side street in the Medina in Fez. I found it. I knocked on the door and this matronly woman opened the door and I said, "Are you Madame Bennouna?"

I said, "I am a friend of your son" and I had a picture of me and her son together.

She said, "Ah, my son" and she swept me into her embrace and swept me into the house and I stayed with them for two weeks. By then I had received word that I had passed the written exam.

I stayed in Morocco for about three weeks and then traveled up through Spain, to France, to Luxemburg where my dad had a ticket waiting for me to fly home on Icelandic Airlines, which was the cheapest way to cross the Atlantic at the time.

I came back to the States and I guess I went to Washington right away to take the oral test.

*Q: This would have been in?*

WAGENSEIL: August of '73. I went to Washington to Rosslyn and had the oral exam.

*Q: What do you remember about the oral exam? Did you shave?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't remember. I may have given my beard up by that time when I got home because I went back to Block Island to work.

*Q: Back to the hotel?*

WAGENSEIL: Back to the hotel to replenish me.

*Q: What do you remember about the exam?*

WAGENSEIL: It was in the old FSI building in Rosslyn, I think. There were three what I considered elderly distinguished gentlemen sitting in armchairs and they were positioned in such a way that I couldn't see all three of them at the same time. They were scattered about so that I could see two of them but not the third. One of them asked me a question about China and trade and I said, "I have no idea."

He said, "Good answer."

Otherwise, it was questions about European affairs. It was questions about Africa, questions about the Cold War situation we were in, questions about what I thought about the Vietnam War, stuff like that.

*Q: This would have been in the final stages of the war at this point? Still Richard Nixon at the time.*

WAGENSEIL: Absolutely. I remember the cable that was sent to Casablanca with my results of the written exam was signed by Rush but I didn't realize the last word of the message was a signature so it said, "You have passed the Foreign Service exam. Please schedule your oral exam as soon as you get home to America. Rush." I thought that was an instruction not a name.

So this was in like August of '73.

*Q: And they told you your results immediately?*

WAGENSEIL: Basically, yes. I sat through the oral process and that was 45 minutes or so and went out and sat in an antechamber.

*Q: Did you feel pretty good about the test when you went there?*

WAGENSEIL: I was totally in a daze. I had no idea if I had done well or not. I knew that I had totally blown the question about China and trade but I had come up a total blank on that but at least I had been honest about it but I wasn't sure how important that was.

So I sat there. I think there was one other person being interviewed. I had to wait while that happened so I was there for about an hour sort of sitting in this room trying to pretend I was interested in an old copy of Business Week or something.

Eventually they came out and said, "Well, you've done quite well, yes. Congratulations. We will be in touch" meaning the Board of Examiners. "Make sure the secretary has your address and phone number."

*Q: So it wasn't actually a yes, you've passed?*

WAGENSEIL: It was a yes, you've passed.

*Q: And congratulations to the rank order registry which may or may not get you a job.*

WAGENSEIL: Exactly. I was given a rank order. I don't remember what the rank was if they ever told me but I knew that I had passed the oral exam but then the question was does it eventually grow up to be a job.

That as I say was in August, I think of '73.

Then I went back to Block Island and finished working. I stayed there until the end of October because I didn't have anywhere to go basically and I didn't have a job and so I stayed out there working. The summer season was over and the hotels weren't open. I was working on maintenance, carpentering, putting a roof on the hotel and stuff like that.

Starting on Halloween in '73 I resumed my travels and I traveled, this was in the days when you could buy a Greyhound bus pass. Three months for \$99.

*Q: With everything?*

WAGENSEIL: With everything and I traveled back and forth across the United States by bus.

*Q: My goodness. What an adventurous young man.*

WAGENSEIL: It is called the *Wanderjahr* in German; the year of wandering.

I traveled from Connecticut to Rochester, across Niagara Falls to Michigan to Indianapolis and Bloomington, to Chicago, to St. Louis, to Topeka, to Denver, to Portland, Oregon where my mother's father was living, Then from there I flew via Seattle to Hawaii where my college roommate and his wife were living and stayed there for Thanksgiving, flew back to San Francisco and then down by bus to Los Angeles where my aunt and uncle lived and then down to San Diego where my cousin lived and then back to Los Angeles and across to Flagstaff and Grand Canyon and from there through Albuquerque to Lubbock and then down to Houston and down to New Orleans and then down to Florida, where my mother was living, for Christmas and New Year's, and then up to Washington for medical tests with the Department ( I had some unresolved medical questions from my Peace Corps service) and then back up to Connecticut.

So in the period from the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, '73 to the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, '74, I traveled all through West Africa and up through Europe and then back and forth across the United States. In that 12 month period I had an average speed of four and one half miles an hour, every hour of every day. I kept a journal and recorded how many miles I had done every day.

*Q: Was that your first time going across country as well?*

WAGENSEIL: Not quite because as a kid with my mother and brother we had flown out to Oregon to visit her parents when I was 7 or 8. I remember on that flight in the mid-50s propeller planes and Lockheed Constellation or something equally miniscule, we had some bad weather and my mother and I were the only two people passengers on the plane who were not sick. I was helping the stewardesses hand out bags. So I had been out to visit my grandparents in Oregon once before but that was it.

*Q: So it was a real chance to get to know the States a little bit.*

WAGENSEIL: I figured it was time. I had been up and down the east coast a bit; been to Florida to visit my other grandparents and had been to Washington, DC as a kid and New York and Maine and whatnot but I had never been to see the countryside. I didn't want to fly because you can't see it. Riding in a Greyhound bus you see a lot of miles and miles.

Once or twice I was actually obliged to spend money for a hotel but basically I'd crash with friends of parents.

*Q: Was this an itinerary you had more or less arranged on your in advance or did you just sort of get on the bus and when you got to the next station get on another bus?*

WAGENSEIL: I really wanted to go to Oregon to visit. I had an invitation to go to Hawaii for Thanksgiving. I knew my aunt and uncle lived in Los Angeles and my mother was in Florida.

*Q: Quite a year and getting to know the world.*

WAGENSEIL: It was great fun. I caught up with some friends from school and got to see some very interesting places; the Grand Canyon and the Mississippi River, the wonders of Lubbock, Texas.

I learned after the fact that my mother had an uncle was there. I could have stayed with him but I didn't know that.

*Q: Somewhere along this expedition did you hear from the State Department?*

WAGENSEIL: I had passed the oral exam so I was in the roster but I still had this medical question so I had the first medical exam for State Department in Boston, no. I take it back. I went to Boston to talk to the Diplomatic Security Field Office because they had to do a background check and then I did my medical exam at an army base in Hawaii. They found something there so I had to come up to DC. After Christmas in Florida I came to Washington and went into the Department for medical tests and eventually passed that and got a medical clearance. I had my security clearance, my medical clearance, passed the oral, passed the written so I was ready to go by March, April of '74.

*Q: And had they offered you a position by this time?*

WAGENSEIL: No, I was waiting. I was working for my dad in his travel agency in Newtown Connecticut, living at home and sort of working in the office. I was helping out. I wasn't really much help but it gave me something to do.

Dad had organized a little tour group to go for three weeks to Yugoslavia and Austria. Normally, when he organized one of these tour groups, he would go to accompany them and sort of assist and do liaison with the tour operators and whatnot. For a variety of reasons, he could not go this time, and so he sent me.

So in March and April of '74 I accompanied them to Belgrade.

A busload was 30 so it was 28 people on the tour, plus me and the tour guide but of the 28, 26 were old ladies, including four men and two teenage granddaughters and me on this bus.

I flew in a couple of days early to coordinate with the tour operator and bus company and check the hotel. We went from Belgrade to Mostar, Sarajevo, to Dubrovnik, up through the islands to Split.

*Q: So the beginning of the Yugoslavia experience.*

WAGENSEIL: The first of my Yugoslavia experience, yes. And then up to Salzburg and Vienna. The tour group flew home from Vienna and I traveled by train from Vienna through Austria down into southern France where I met up with my folks. My dad said,

“Oh, I meant to tell you, last week somebody called the house looking for you and I took the message. Someone from Washington.”

I said, “Who was it?”

“They wanted to know if you were interested in a position in the Foreign Service.”

“What did you tell them?”

He said, “I said I didn’t know.”

“You said what??”

So that was in April or May of ’74 and as soon as I got home I called the Board of Examiners and I said, “It’s me. Yes, yes. I am interested.”

The fellow on the other end of the phone said, “Oh, yes, Mr. Wagenseil. Well we looked at your academic background and your Peace Corps service and so forth. We figured it is most appropriate to offer you a position as a Foreign Service officer class 6, which would give you an annual starting salary of \$11,503. Would that be OK?”

I had just spent the last year and a half on about \$3,000 including traveling all over the place.

I said, “Would that be OK? That would be very OK, thank you.”

So they offered me a spot in the 113<sup>th</sup> class which started the A-100 course in June of ’74.

*Q: As we left off yesterday you had just been accepted for the Foreign Service and were about to make preparations to head to Washington.*

WAGENSEIL: That’s correct. I was invited to join the 113<sup>th</sup> class and reported to Washington and FSI in the middle of June, 1974.

*Q: What do you remember about your entering class?*

WAGENSEIL: The A-100 class. We were, I think, 48 in the class and to my surprise it was not all State Department people. At the time I didn’t realize there was a Foreign Service for the Department of Agriculture. The Treasury Department had somebody with us. I am certain a number of members were from the CIA, although I couldn’t say which ones -- or shouldn’t. We had several people from USIA, of course.

Names you might recognize: Chuck Redmond, Molly Williamson.

We had a reunion back in December.

*Q: This last year?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, of a number of us, nine or ten of us who came together. Michael \_\_\_\_ who was in our class had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Afghanistan and one of his early assignments was in Tehran and he was actually held hostage for 411 days or whatever it was, included 200 days in solitary confinement in the dark in the basement in the embassy in Tehran. The meeting was at his house in Vienna.

*Q: So you had 48, a good sized class.*

WAGENSEIL: A very big class, a little unwieldy, in retrospect.

The one thing I remember, looking back on what they were telling us and teaching us, was what they didn't teach us. Basically, they didn't teach us anything about how to be a diplomat, now to be a Foreign Service officer. We had -- to the best of my recollection -- no instruction whatever in diplomatic interaction mode, no instruction whatever in political analysis, no instruction, no intellectual curiosity about economic affairs or anything like that. Virtually everything I remember about the A-100 class was bureaucratic. They spent the longest time telling us at great length about our pension opportunities or our retirement plans or something and I was paying absolutely no attention and somebody turned to me and said, "Why aren't you paying attention to this?"

I said, "Because it is going to change before I retire at least twice."

They told us all about medical clearances and bureaucracies of the different bureaus and so forth but I don't remember any instruction about how to be an FSO. I gather that subsequently they started doing political officer classes and econ officer classes and stuff like that but I never had any of those. I never benefited from that. The only professional training I had during the course of my career was the consular class; ConGen Rosslyn it was called which I received before my first consular tour and some mid-level courses of a couple of days here, a couple of days there and the DCM class that I got.

*Q: Were you a pretty typical member of your class? Graduated college and done something else for two or three years?*

WAGENSEIL: I think so. There was one officer in our class, Ann Casey who was right out of college. Of course, she got the headlines in the Foreign Service Journal as being the youngest FSO. She was 23 or something at the time. I was sort of about the middle of the cohort.

*Q: How would you describe the group as a balance between men and women? Were there minorities represented at this point in your class?*

WAGENSEIL: There were minorities. There were I think a couple of Asian Americans, three or four African Americans, maybe five. Gender balance? Yes, I think there was. It



was three to one or four to one male, which at the time really seemed balanced in the Foreign Service. It was a very mixed group of people.

I had no understanding of what the Foreign Service was or did, except what I had encountered either interacting with the embassy officers in Abidjan. So I was thinking it was all about political reporting and that sort of thing which is what interested me, I suppose.

I realized some of the people coming in were coming in because they wanted to be, or were interested in or were better at administrative affairs or they were interested in consular affairs. I knew there were people in the world who had been doing economics and things like that. Joining the State Department to be an admin officer seemed a total surprise to me at the time.

*Q: By this time had they told you you were going to be a political officer?*

WAGENSEIL: I guess they had. I really don't recall at what time it was made clear. I think at the time we had the option or we had options and I think we were just sort of accepted as junior officers and then we would be asked to pick a cone or specialize or indicate a preference later, after a promotion or after at least one assignment or something so that we got some broad experience doing various things or at least were exposed to various things before we had to lock ourselves in to a particular cone.

I do remember people saying, "Well, yes. Of course, you'll have to do at least one consular tour and we hope you will like it and stay with it."

*Q: How did the assignment process go at that point?*

WAGENSEIL: It was a bit of a beauty contest, I suppose. We went around, we had guest speakers of one kind or another who told us about various things that were going on; different bureaus and what they did and which bureaus were the most important ones and which were the least important and what kind of jobs people were doing.

It was made clear to us at the time that unlike other classes, recent classes, we would not all immediately go to Vietnam. About two years previously, my understanding is, that everybody in the entering class of every cone, of every agency went straight to Vietnam. It was made clear to us that was not the case. There were of course jobs available in Vietnam if anybody wanted them.

*Q: We must have been just about leaving Vietnam at that point.*

WAGENSEIL: This was '74 so we were very much still in Vietnam.

*Q: What would have been going on at this time? The Watergate hearings, I suppose?*

WAGENSEIL: The Watergate hearings were indeed going on. Woodward and Bernstein were riding high. The Washington political environment was very much aflutter. Secretary Kissinger had been on his diplomatic shuttles, Middle East shuttles, negotiating.

*Q: And to China by that time?*

WAGENSEIL: No, not by then I don't think.

*Q: I was asking you how the assignments process went. Did they give you a choice of some kind?*

WAGENSEIL: We were sort of trotted around and taken through the Department and shown various offices and whatnot, met various people and I realized in retrospect that those were sort of interview moments where the executive officer of NEA or the principal DAS of EA would sort of see the junior class come trotting by and say, "Oh, that looks like a viable prospect. Let's get his name," that sort of thing.

Then they began to tell us about what was available and some jobs were of more interest to some people and some were of more interest to others.

*Q: Did they give you a list of what was available?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't think we ever got a full list. I think we were each given a somewhat restricted list of six or seven possibilities. Somebody came to us from SS and tried to recruit us to work in the Op Center and to work on the Line. There was somebody who came from ARA to talk with us about all the wonderful options in the southern cone of Latin America. We had a bunch of guest speakers.

People obviously were paying attention because we got a list that sort of reflected what we had been interested in and asked questions about. And the bidding process began. You indicated you were interested in this or that job and you'd go for a second meeting with somebody.

*Q: Were you interested in something in particular at this point?*

WAGENSEIL: I had been in the Peace Corps in Africa so AF was interested in me. I had been to school in Europe and I speak French so EUR was interested in me to a certain extent. Consular Affairs was desperate for warm bodies at all time. I guess I did three or four interviews, I don't really remember.

One job that sort of caught my attention was working in the Press Office.

*Q: In the Department?*

WAGENSEIL: In the Department, yes.

*Q: At this time all junior officers were not directly assigned overseas?*

WAGENSEIL: No, in fact out of the 48, I guess 30 were State Department and out of the 30 I would say 8 or 9 of us had Washington assignments in our first tours. One went to the Op Center, one went to EB, one went to ARA and I wound up in the Press Office.

*Q: In the Press Office as what?*

WAGENSEIL: My official job title was Information Officer – Media, which means nothing at all.

My job description implied that I worked in the Press Office on the second floor handling the broadcast media in liaison with radio and TV journalists. In fact, I was the special assistant to the spokesman.

*Q: In the Department who at that time was?*

WAGENSEIL: Ambassador Robert Anderson. I was surprised as I got close to the job. I had thought the Press Office supported Public Affairs and of course it wasn't. It was a very separate operation. It was under the Secretary directly and the office symbol was S/PRS.

Bob Anderson was the spokesman. He had taken over some five months before from George Vest who had taken over some three months before that from Bob McCloskey who had been the State Department spokesman forever. Vest was sort of kicked upstairs by Secretary Kissinger.

*Q: What were you doing in this role as special assistant?*

WAGENSEIL: I was the young man who ran around on behalf of the spokesman. I remember the spokesman's office was on the seventh floor, just around the corner from the Secretary's office. I was in the outer office with the secretary.

The one thing I was exclusively responsible for was fielding and organizing and vetting requests for interviews. Secretary Kissinger was a hot property. Every journalist in the world wanted to interview him. We got in dozens of interview requests every month and every couple of weeks I would do a memo from the Spokesman to the Secretary saying we have received the following interesting interview requests.

But also I was sort of responsible for helping the spokesman get his daily briefing book together and get through the day.

My first week on the job, Greece organized a coup that overthrew Archbishop Makarios in Cyprus and put in a strongman named Samson. About four days later, still my first week, Turkey invaded and threw out Mr. Samson. This was in July.

*Q: You resolved that one right away.*

WAGENSEIL: Right away. This was in July and there were about 12,000 American tourists trapped on the island. It was a madhouse. The daily briefing was at 12:30, if it was on time, every day.

The Bureau's Public Affairs officers had press guidance for the Spokesman by about 10:30 in the morning, and he would then go see the secretary and get guidance from the Secretary on what he could and could not say about whatever the U.S. expected to come up. Obviously with a war going on in Vietnam, and the war going on and evacuations and other things in Cyprus, it was kind of a frenzy with lots of people running in and out of the office my first week. I had no way of comparing that with any other time so I was kind of impressed with the frenzy. In fact, that frenzy continued the entire time I was in the office with one issue or another.

It was a fascinating job because as my first responsibility in the Foreign Service I had to learn about our foreign policy about everything everywhere, because one minute it would be Associated Press asking about our trade policies with Thailand and the next minute it would be the BBC asking about what we were going to do about Nigeria and the next minute it would be the Los Angeles Times asking if it was true that we had decided not to invade someplace. There was a constant flood of questions about everything and I had to learn what the answers were. I didn't always give the answers but at least I had to know what questions not to answer.

*Q: So a good introduction to American foreign policy generally.*

WAGENSEIL: A fascinating introduction to the business of the State Department and the way the Secretary of State at the time was working.

*Q: Even as a junior officer in your first assignment, were you entitled to answer these questions from the press or did you have to refer them to someone else?*

WAGENSEIL: If there was cleared press guidance that the spokesman had used that day or the previous day about a question, I grew comfortable enough to use it. I didn't do it the first week, obviously. In the course of rotation through the office staff I was Duty Officer from time to time and I'd get calls after hours and I would have the briefing book with me and could answer questions from that source as the Press Office duty officer.

*Q: Was this standard to your assignment?*

WAGENSEIL: I was there a year and a half, so yes.

*Q: The Press Office was under Kissinger, who always has the reputation of having been quite secretive and so forth. Did you notice that? Was that a handicap?*

WAGENSEIL: That was very much of a challenge. The sort of standing line among us was that we would spend the entire day organizing, creating and putting out official press guidance about a particular issue and then we'd stay and watch the evening news on the networks and discover a senior U.S. government official who spoke with a very heavy German accent had leaked something which was entirely contrary to what we had been saying officially. Then we'd be into damage control mode until 8 o'clock or something at night. There was a lot of that. Kissinger played the media, the journalists like a string orchestra and they loved it; they ate it up. He was accessible to them and they basically knew he was playing them and yet access is everything in the media business and especially in Washington in the mid-'70s. This was long before CNN and 24 hour news coverage on TV. They almost never had a camera of any kind in the daily press briefing.

The only time there were cameras was if there was a formal press conference and the secretary would get give a press conference or if we had a guest speaker like the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs who was announcing that the U.S. government was returning the crown of St. Steven to the government of Hungary after having held it at Fort Knox since the end of the Second World War.

*Q: Did that actually happen during your watch?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. It is in Budapest now. It's in the middle of the national parliament building.

The atmosphere in Washington was really quite weird. The Watergate hearings were underway. The president was under extreme pressure and about six weeks after I started working there, National Security Adviser Haig came over to the Department unexpectedly and announced he wanted to see the Secretary of State, and of course, he received him immediately. We learned afterwards that was the moment where Haig delivered President Nixon's letter of resignation to the secretary of state who was the official recipient of such communications. President Nixon resigned that afternoon and flew away in a helicopter and Vice President Ford took over.

That was a time of certain upheaval in Washington environment. During the course of the subsequent months the Mayaguez incident, then we lost Cambodia, then we lost Vietnam. I remember being in the office for 37 hours straight as Vietnam was falling, with teletypes clattering and guys running up and down the hall, and waiting. The Op Center was a maze of telex machines clattering away at 65 baud a minute. It was fascinating to be right in the thick of it all.

*Q: Was it a good place also to understand how the Department worked generally and to make contacts with other people in other bureaus?*

WAGENSEIL: It is an open secret that there is a hierarchy of snobbery amongst the various bureaus and certain bureaus regarded themselves as the most important bureaus and other bureaus were looked down upon as being less central to the conduct of U.S. world affairs.

*Q: Who was important?*

WAGENSEIL: Obviously, the regional bureaus view themselves as predominant. The functional bureaus were somewhat of an afterthought. I remember Dixie Lee Ray, who had been the longtime chairwoman of the Atomic Energy Commission and a very important person in the atomic energy business in America, was downgraded to be an assistant secretary of State when that independent body was folded into what became OES. I remember seeing her wandering kind of lonely around the corridors.

*Q: The Press Office, I presume, was closer to the top of the hierarchy.*

WAGENSEIL: Very much. In fact, the State Department phone book that was published in the fall of '74, the back part of the book is the alphabetical index of last names. The front part is the sort of organizational phone book and at the top of the first page was the secretary, Henry Kissinger with his office phone number and at the bottom of that same page was me. The Office of the Spokesman was part of the Office of the Secretary. It was the secretary and his staff and then SS and then SSS and then press. The deputy secretary was on another page and then the undersecretaries and so on.

*Q: You found yourself in a good position to understand how the State Department worked, to understand the alphabet soup of all the bureaus and so forth.*

WAGENSEIL: It was a great introduction.

*Q: Unlike me who spent my first two years in Fiji and came back without a clue what happened in the building.*

*Someplace along this year and a half you must have been starting to think what next.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. There were a number of jobs that came in. I really can't remember if it was supposed to be a one-year tour or a two-year tour or what happened. There were a number of jobs and EUR was courting me very aggressively because as I said I had studied in Europe and had some understanding of the continent.

*Q: Let me ask if that appealed to you.*

WAGENSEIL: It did and it didn't. I wasn't terrifically comfortable going back to Africa just yet. I had studied some Spanish in college but I wasn't really interested in Latin American affairs and the rest of the world was a vast unknown. So EUR was attractive and of course, EUR got a lot of attention and a lot of resources. It would be an interesting assignment. Everybody said it is fast tracking. Get in EUR and you'll go straight to the top.

In the final analysis came down to two jobs; one at the consulate in Milan for which I'd have to learn Italian which really didn't excite me and the other possibility was to be the special assistant to the ambassador in Spain.

The ambassador at the time had been there about seven or eight months was Wells Stabler. Ambassador Stabler had been a deputy assistant secretary in EUR.

*Q: A career person.*

WAGENSEIL: A career officer and I had met him many times in the course of the Cyprus crisis and its follow-up, so he knew who I was, and Ambassador Anderson lobbied on my behalf and so forth. Ambassador Stabler was reluctant actually to take me -- even though he knew me and knew I was competent -- but he was concerned about the fact it would be two special assistant jobs back to back. Ambassador Anderson said, "No, no. It is very different. Under your wing he will get the chance to see how an embassy operates and see how it's done properly."

So that worked and I got the job in Madrid.

*Q: Did they give you Spanish training?*

WAGENSEIL: I had ten weeks of Spanish training at FSI.

*Q: Which brought you up to a 3/3 or whatever?*

WAGENSEIL: 3/3 plus or something like that. It became obvious in the last week or so that the Spanish they were teaching everybody at FSI was Central and Latin American Spanish, not Castilian Spanish. When it came time for me to take the test to graduate from language training I said to the tester, "I realize I don't have the Castilian accent."

He said, "OK, as long as you know there is a Castilian accent, you are ahead of the curve."

I finished that. I did the language training from February to May, something like that.

*Q: We are talking 1976?*

WAGENSEIL: This is '76, yes and I went out to Madrid in May.

*Q: Was it common at that stage for Ambassadors at large posts to have full time special assistants?*

WAGENSEIL: I assume so. Madrid was a, I guess you could say it was a small European embassy. I had no way to compare it but in retrospect, certainly it is smaller than London and other missions that we have seen. At the time Spain was just coming out from the

Franco dictatorship. It was not a member of NATO. It was not a member of the Common Market. It was not a member of the Council of Europe.

*Q: Franco had died.*

WAGENSEIL: Franco died about six months before I got there. He died at the end of '75. Right about that time I got my assignment confirmed.

*Q: The political situation was what?*

WAGENSEIL: When Franco died the King ascended to the throne, as it were, under the arrangement he took the throne and became Head of State.

King Juan Carlos inherited the government, the prime minister and the cabinet that Franco left behind, in sort of an uneasy relationship. Nobody knew what to make of Juan Carlos at the time because he had the reputation of being a good looking young prince who was out of a job. He had an income, he had a castle or two and he had a beautiful young bride whose brother was the king of Greece. He had no particular training or job skills in serving the Spanish military, theoretically.

*Q: So this is not a democratic government?*

WAGENSEIL: It was not a democratic government. I got there in May. The beginning of July, the second of July, the king fired the prime minister he had inherited, and Madrid was abuzz because nobody knew what was going to happen. This was the King's first independent action. Everything else had been sort of scripted and this was unscripted.

As it happened, that occurred the morning of the day that the embassy held its Fourth of July reception. The Fourth of July celebration in 1976 was on a Sunday and the embassy reception was on Friday.

You know how it is with Fourth of July receptions. You invite 350 of your closest friends and maybe 200 come. This time, everybody came, everybody came with more people. It was a madhouse. We sort of suspected that was going to happen when we heard the news that morning. The reception at the ambassador's residence was just packed.

It wasn't an amorphous mass of people. It was a lumpy mass because there were clusters of people in different corners of the room, with this or that political personality sort of holding court, and people trying to woo his favor so that if he became chosen as the next prime minister, he would remember them and say, "Oh, yes."

One man, who had been interior minister or something under the last Franco government, had been very much talked about as a possibility for a future prime minister, and when he arrived he sort of walked into the room like Louis XVI, or something. He expected sort of everybody to bow down to him and the crowd to part and so forth. He got a lot of attention. There were clumps of people going to see him. You could see sort of runners



going from one group to another. It was fascinating sociology at work. The buzz was “who is going to be prime minister? What is the government going to do? What is Juan Carlos going to do? Is Juan Carlos taking charge or is he just shuffling the deck a bit? Is it going to be some rightist clique that grabs the reins of power and keeps the hardline or what?”

Of course, there was a lot of nervousness about civil war breaking out again. If the army isn't happy are they going to do something? Is there going to be a coup? That was always the question; is there going to be a coup?

In the end the king chose as his Prime Minister Alfonso Suarez, who nobody had really ever heard of. He had been the director of the national television network, a competent manager, sort of upper level middle bureaucrat, faceless kind of person and in my opinion, turned out to be a perfect choice to run the government as it found its footing within the democratic structure.

When I got there, Felipe Gonzalez the leader of the Socialist Party was underground; he was in hiding. He was a wanted criminal. ?? who was the leader of the Communist Party, was underground. He was a wanted criminal in the Francoist universe. It was at the time illegal to speak Basque or to show the Basque flag. It was illegal to speak Catalan or to show the Catalan flag because this was still Franco regime.

Nobody really knew what was going to happen in Spain.

They had elections in late '76 or early '77; the elections for the parliament, the first democratic elections in Spain in 40 years. Massive voter turnout, of course, hotly contested and clean, as far as we know although there were some suspicions when the computer broke down at the beginning of the evening. It was a fascinating transition. The world was watching.

Spanish society was going through all kinds of waves of change. Every week there would be a new newspaper or magazine at the news stand. The most exciting magazine had been a society magazine with pictures of dukes' and counts' daughters getting married and stuff like that. Then you got something a little more racy and eventually when I left, Playboy was available.

*Q: Did the United States look favorably on this transition to democracy or were they afraid that the Commies would take over? It must have been in the middle of the Cold War.*

WAGENSEIL: We were not really concerned about the Commies because it was pretty clear, we were more concerned about the Spanish military or Spanish establishment would dig its heels in to any transition to democracy away from the hypocrisy they had and things would go backward to a whole right-wing kind of regime.

The Spanish Communists were not -- as far as I can tell -- perceived as a threat by the U.S. The Socialist Party was known to be strong but wasn't seen as strong enough to take power -- or if it ever came to power, not strong enough to impose socialism (which was a code word for communism) on Spain, which had such a strong history with Catholic faith and so forth.

*Q: So we generally did look favorably on the democratic opening, but with some concern as to where it might lead.*

WAGENSEIL: We were very much, we were very cautious about where it might lead but very much in favor of it leading somewhere -- because this was the mid-'70s. The Revolution of the Carnations had taken place in Portugal a year and a half earlier; the transition from the Salazar regime in Portugal had gone well. It had been a pretty good transition. That was seen as a good thing.

Portugal of course, had always been a NATO ally. One of the things the Embassy in Madrid had worked on tirelessly was to bring Spain into the European communities, first of all, with NATO. The Spanish military never wanted, never comfortably accepted the idea of NATO, dating back to the Spanish civil war and the perception that NATO didn't like them. Of course, it didn't like them at the time because Franco was seen as an ally of Hitler in his governing techniques.

So, the Embassy had a clear open policy of a military relationship with Spain through the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation -- which dated back to '52 or '53 -- which gave us airbases and ship visits. We actually had a port facility that the US Navy used. So that was very much a part of our relationship.

But it was not NATO, and the Spanish kept saying "It's not NATO. Remember just because we have a treaty with you, we are not NATO members" and we kept saying, "Yes, yes. Of course not."

We spent a lot of energy on this. I remember briefings that were done for Spanish officials saying that the Soviet threat is a threat to Spain as well. It is not just tanks coming across the Fulda Gap into West Germany. It is also the air threat to Gibraltar and the Spanish mainland. We had maps with airplane travel radius distances showing that their bombers could easily reach southern Spain from bases in Poland or someplace. The Spanish military reaction was always sort of, "Yes, but they are not going to attack us. Why would they attack us? We are not bothering them." So, the embassy was focused a lot on that.

This became of more interest to me because the second year I was in Madrid I transferred from the ambassador's office to the office of political/military affairs.

*Q: Before we get into that, let me just ask you a question about what you yourself were doing as the ambassador's special assistant. Was it pretty much an in-house job?*

WAGENSEIL: I was mostly in-house. Arranging his schedule, arranging his trips, I'd take notes at meetings.

*Q: Take notes at meetings in the sense you would actually go out with him to meet with Spanish officials or note taker for internal meetings?*

WAGENSEIL: Sometimes I would go with him. He went out on trips to Andalucia and Valencia and things like that. It was interesting. I had nothing to compare it with so I didn't know how exciting it was or was not. In fact, I remember I begged off accompanying him to something that I probably should have accompanied him to because I think in retrospect it was probably an important meeting that I would have found very interesting, but I just didn't go. He let me not go.

The Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship required a meeting every six months or at least once a year at minister level. Secretary Vance came to see us and co-chaired a lot of the meetings with the Spanish foreign minister and I was the note taker for that bilateral ministerial meeting.

A lot of it was just sending correspondence and arranging the Ambassador's internal schedule, or calling up the counselor for consular affairs and saying where's your report, helping to coordinate representational functions at the residence, and interacting with the protocol secretary and all of that.

Learning also the ins and outs of an Embassy and the care and feeding of the DCM, the care and feeding of egos in various political sections, various sections of the embassy. Not the political section so much but others.

*Q: Then you moved. They had a separate section for political/military affairs.*

WAGENSEIL: In fact, there was one officer and a secretary and I became the second officer but because we had this treaty relationship which was in lieu of a NATO relationship we had major basing rights. We had all kinds of military attaches; a whole floor of the embassy was military attaches.

At the Torrejón Airbase outside Madrid we had a two-star Air Force general in charge of that. There was a two-star Admiral who was sort of the head of the military treaty relationship in the military office and the embassy Pol/Mil office was the civilian counterpart and control if you will. So, when we had a military meeting there was all kinds of brass. That was very interesting to see how that was happening and what was going on -- and what was not going on -- and what people were trying to do, how to convince them.

*Q: The move toward NATO was becoming more palatable to the Spanish by this time?*

WAGENSEIL: Let's say it became less repulsive to them. NATO had a love/hate relationship with the Spanish as I said, because the Spanish military and Franco had been

allies of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, but once Franco was removed from the equation, NATO as an organization became a little more interested in Spain. We, of course, were pushing all the time for that in Brussels and Madrid. The French had pulled out so Spain was seen as an alternative venue.

I suppose by the time I left in the middle of '78 the move was well launched.

*Q: The political/military section, was that big with a presence of attaches and generals and so forth were you kind of a sideshow trying to catch up with what was actually going on or were you really in the midst of it?*

WAGENSEIL: The Counselor for Pol/Mil affairs was a very forceful personality who clearly had the Ambassador's support, clearly had the Department's support and was unchallenged by the Pentagon, as far as I could tell, in that support. So that if he said, "I am sorry, General but you can't do that" the general usually wouldn't challenge it and would discuss why or how to do something instead. I don't remember any instance of sort of fighting about it.

*Q: Did you start to do political reporting at this stage?*

WAGENSEIL: No. It was all office work and filing things and keeping files and so on. The Embassy was doing fantastic reporting. We had some sharp Political officers who were following things and of course, the Ambassador and DCM were writing reports.

I had been reading cables when I was in the Department so I had some idea of what they should look like. But I was never expected to do any political reporting. In fact, the one report that my boss asked me to write from his side was something totally beyond my competence -- but also beyond my job description and beyond what anybody else in the region expected that I would be able to do. He wanted some kind of analysis about whether the Spanish military's wish list for a budget corresponded or did not correspond with the budget resources, whether the military's needs matched its suppliers willingness and all this kind of thing. This sort of huge, kind of Rand Corporation think piece that he wanted me to write. I just told him, "I can't do that. I have no... I didn't know where to begin on that."

"It's important."

I said, "That may be but it is way beyond my capabilities."

He said, "But you've got lots of time."

*Q: Life in Spain must have been pretty nice at this time.*

WAGENSEIL: I was a bachelor.

*Q: So it wasn't nice at all.*

WAGENSEIL: I was working as the ambassador's aide at the American Embassy in central Madrid in the Spanish society which was undergoing tremendous modernization and liberalization and changes of all kinds. I was having a ball. I had a nice car and apartment and drove around the country, met lots of people, visited lots of places and saw lots of things and so forth. It was great, a fascinating job.

*Q: Along the way you were thinking about what next?*

WAGENSEIL: In the course of the cycle you start talking with people in personnel about what is going on. I had received my first promotion after about a year or so in the Press Office. I had gone from 7 to 6 or whatever it was but I was still a junior officer and waiting for my next assignment.

I remember being told, either by cable or by telephone that I would have to do a consular tour. I would have to get my ticket punched as a consular officer. I understood that. Then they started talking about where it might be and eventually ended up assigning me as the Consular Officer in Bamako, Mali. Because I had served next door in Côte d'Ivoire as a Peace Corps volunteer and spoke Dioula, which is a cousin to Bambara, the national language in Mali, in fact. I was willing to go.

I remember whoever it was in personnel said, "That's OK with you?"

I said, "Yes, sure."

He said, "You're not going to fight?"

I said, "No, that's fine."

So they were happy to assign me to Bamako.

*Q: This was going to be a two-year assignment too?*

WAGENSEIL: This was a two-year assignment so I came back in the late spring of '78 for the ConGen Rosslyn course which was I guess, four weeks and stayed with a friend in Georgetown.

*Q: Was that a pretty good experience in terms of learning consular work?*

WAGENSEIL: It was and it wasn't. Obviously, ConGen Rosslyn had to train consular officers for all kinds of consular work -- for consular work everywhere -- and so we got a lot of stuff about immigration law and visa law and we got a lot of stuff about handling social security checks and American citizen services and passport verification, all kinds of things which are clearly relevant to the consular function but weren't relevant to me when I got out to little old Bamako where I as the vice consul was it, as the sole consular office for this small embassy in a small country.

*Q: You were the only consular officer?*

WAGENSEIL: There was another fellow at the embassy who was also accredited as a vice consul and could fill in when I was away but didn't want to. He had other responsibilities.

*Q: And it was a full-time job?*

WAGENSEIL: It certainly was. No, that's not true. I was busy all the time but I wasn't only doing consular work. I think the one solid calendar year I was there -- which was 1979 -- I think I did something like 84 visas the entire year of which only one was an immigrant visa.

*Q: Hardly a visa mill.*

WAGENSEIL: Not a visa mill, no. The problem was that virtually no one in Bamako qualifies for a non-immigrant visa because they are all 214b, intending immigrants. People coming in and they are dirt poor and they just want to go to America, the land of opportunity. I turned them away before they even filled out the form. I saw them come in. Don't even bother. The inspectors came by and said, "You shouldn't do that. You should tell them all to apply, fill out the form and then refuse them so you get your numbers up."

I said, "Why bother? Let's be honest with these people and don't build their hopes up." So I was there, that was one responsibility.

There was one thing I spent a lot of time doing, unfortunately. The Republic of Mali had no entering visa requirements, but it did have exit visa requirements. We had a lot of AID contractors and the embassy wasn't very big and the AID mission was probably twice the size of the embassy and the AID contractors again were twice the size of the embassy the AID mission and with Peace Corps volunteers and so on there were always people leaving so I spent a lot of time getting exit visas for people.

Another thing I had to do from time to time was overflight clearance. Mali is a big country in the middle of Africa and every time a plane wants to go across somewhere it probably crossed Mali. The concept of the Malian air force catching up with an American plane was inconceivable but still we had to do the paperwork and get clearances and so forth.

The other thing I was doing was I was in charge of the Ambassador's Special Self-Help Program -- a pot of money that AF gave to its ambassadors to finance projects for people. The ambassador would go out to a village or something and the school director, the doctor or someone would say, "Oh, we need a little money to start a vegetable garden." "OK, sure. Talk to him" and I was the him. They'd come in and talk about this and we would give them \$100 or \$150 or something and they'd go buy vegetable seeds.

*Q: That was a nice thing to be able to do.*

WAGENSEIL: It was. It was a certain amount of work because you had to vet the requests and double check the accounts and so forth. There was some accounting required for this.

The thing I had the most fun doing; the agreements were bilingual, in French and English, and I used to type them in parallel on a page. It was kind of a form and I would type them all by hand. Type them in French and English and then get them signed by the ambassador and the project manager.

*Q: How big was the embassy at this point? It must have been very small.*

WAGENSEIL: We were small. Let me see; ambassador, DCM, political officer, part econ officer, consular officer, a couple of communicators. I don't know, maybe ten? No, let's say 15 counting the admin, GSO, whatnot.

*Q: So quite a change from the embassy in Spain, for example.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Steve, you were just talking about the embassy in Bamako.*

WAGENSEIL: The embassy in Bamako was small, the State Department contingent was small because we didn't have much going on in Mali, of course, but we had a larger AID mission. There were probably 20 people, 25 people working at the AID mission.

*Q: In the same building?*

WAGENSEIL: No, no, across town. It wasn't until I'd been there probably six or eight months that I realized that the people at the AID mission only worked in the AID mission. They never got their boots dirty. They were busy writing reports to each other and filing forms for Congress and stuff like that. The AID development work -- agriculture research, artificial insemination of cattle whatever they were doing -- was being done out in the field, by contractors. I learned this because one of those contractors died and I had to take care of repatriation of remains and stuff like that which was my most onerous single consular task.

The AID mission was a large operation with its own inertia. Mali at the time was a military regime under General Moussa Traoré, who I called GMT.

*Q: As I recall it was kind of a leftist regime?*

WAGENSEIL: It was socialist in its sort of domestic policies. They had the People's Pharmacy and the People's Bookstore -- which were almost always empty of anything;

people, customers, products, anything. The foreign policies were not particularly leftist or anything. This was in '78 to '80.

*Q: So relations with the U.S. were OK?*

WAGENSEIL: Relations with the U.S. were OK. They weren't wonderful. We didn't expect much from them and they didn't expect much from us except assistance which we were giving them.

*Q: May I ask you who the ambassador was?*

WAGENSEIL: I will get to that in a second.

There was a large Chinese Embassy on a huge compound on the edge of town and I guess there was a Soviet Embassy but I don't remember it very well.

While I was there we normalized or something with China because I remember at one point we arranged for the showing of Alex Haley's Roots series as a film, two days film session at the local cinema and the Chinese diplomats came as a clump -- as they used to do. They sat right behind us and were very effusive in their greetings and shook our hands and all smiles and so forth. We didn't like each other but were at least polite to each other which we had never been before.

The Ambassador when I got there was Patricia Burns. Pat Burns, career officer. I guess she was in Consular Affairs originally. This was her first Embassy. She left after about six months of my tour. She was replaced by Anne Forester Holloway. Anne Forester Holloway had been the director of Ambassador Andy Young's Washington office when he was the U.S. Ambassador to the UN in New York. Every ambassador in New York has an office in Washington where he hangs his hat when he comes to harass the Department. She was the director of the Washington office. For her troubles, she was rewarded with the embassy in Bamako.

*Q: So you were there during the Ford/Carter transition?*

WAGENSEIL: The Ford/Carter transition happened when I was in Spain. I was in Spain. I got to Spain in '76 and the election was in the fall. Jimmy Carter won that election and took office in '77.

*Q: Carter being president presumably U.S. relations with Africa were on the rise?*

WAGENSEIL: There was increased warmth, yes.

*Q: Did Andy Young come out to Mali?*

WAGENSEIL: Not while I was there. I don't know if he ever did.



*Q: Did anybody important come out to visit?*

WAGENSEIL: I can't think of a single person.

*Q: How about the Cold War? Was that much with the Chinese? You said you didn't have anything to do with the Soviets. Was this still an overshadowing issue in our relationship?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't remember any major sort of Cold War issues in our relationship although perhaps the fact that the Malians were sticklers for over flight clearances was a residual effect of the fact that they thought the Americans were going to fly bombers and blow up somebody. I don't know. There wasn't much of that. There was no, at that point this part of Africa was not a playing field for the Cold War battles that had taken place for example in Vietnam or in places like Angola or Mozambique. Mali was very much insulated from all this. I certainly never really thought about it in that context...

*Q: Still France is still the predominant foreign influence?*

WAGENSEIL: I think yes. France was still the benevolent power and the French Embassy was very important. French business interests were present, there wasn't much business going on but the cars people drove were Peugeots and Citroens. Just a sprinkling of Japanese cars coming in at that point. The embassy was driving Fords and Chevys, for which we couldn't get parts for, of course.

*Q: What about Libya? Was that an issue?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, Libya was a bit of an issue. Libya had an embassy there but it was small, certainly ineffectual but Libya was perceived as sort of an unsettling influence in Africa and the Sahara. There is no common border between Mali and Libya so there was no concern about that as there was with Algeria. They were concerned about Libya. There were some thoughts that Libya might be up to no good in the region, not necessarily in Mali but again, our relations with Libya were not very good and so the embassy's relations with the Libyan Embassy were not very good.

*Q: There must not have been very many embassies there.*

WAGENSEIL: No, there weren't. The Brits were not represented. I think it was just the French, there may have been an aid rep from Italy, the U.S., the Soviets, the Chinese, the Senegalese, and the Ecuadorians.

*Q: Did you have American tourists?*

WAGENSEIL: There were tourists, mostly former Peace Corps volunteers doing the beard-and-backpack kind of itinerary.

*Q: That you were so familiar with.*

WAGENSEIL: That I was able to identify with. Very few organized tours. Alex Haley had just released Roots which was a big success and so the wave of African Americans coming back to the continent to find their families was just beginning, but it didn't penetrate to Mali.

*Q: How about life?*

WAGENSEIL: Actually, life was not bad. It was very much a hardship post. It was dirty and dusty and hot and isolated and uncomfortable, but because of that, there was a great sense of community amongst the international community -- the expatriates, the embassy people, the AID people -- and we did a lot of stuff together. We partied together, we played softball together, we had weekends together, and we dated each other. It was an isolated community. The Marine Security Guards showed movies twice a week at the Marine House and that was sort of a big social event every week. There were a couple of nightclubs where we'd go dancing, and we'd see everybody there. So the mood was actually not bad because we used to hang together and socialize a lot and that was very supportive. Some of the AID employees and some of the AID contractors who were over there had families and so there was some of that so that was nice. There was no school so there were very few kids there.

*Q: Did you interact with the Malians?*

WAGENSEIL: Oh, yes, very much so. The Malians could come to the Marine movies and the movies were in English. Few of them could afford it but we would see them at the clubs and that sort of thing.

One thing I want to mention as a consular officer I had an assistant, a Malian who served as a clerk for me. He was the younger brother of the Foreign Minister so I had some access. In fact, the embassy had occasionally used me to get to the Minister when the ambassador couldn't.

I wasn't frequently socializing with Malians as best buddies but yes, I had good interaction with them. I have to mention this because it is a significant fact that I fell in love there and got married there and at the wedding maybe a quarter of the people who came to the reception were Malian friends of her family, professional contacts.

*Q: Your wife is from a Lebanese family?*

WAGENSEIL: That's right. Her parents were in business in Bamako. Jamilée had been born in Bamako and her father had been born in Bamako because his father had been one of the first Lebanese to follow the French colonial path. He had run a shop in Timbuktu for a while.

My bride was born in Bamako and taken back to Lebanon for her elementary school but then came to Bamako as a teenager for secondary school.

*Q: Were the Lebanese much in control of small business?*

WAGENSEIL: They were not in control but they were certainly present. I would say that maybe 35 or 40% of the medium-small businesses were Lebanese or Lebanese affiliated; small parts shops, restaurants, bakeries, clothing.

*Q: Was there sort of the anti-Lebanese feeling like you had in Uganda and other places?*

WAGENSEIL: No. The Lebanese were not to my knowledge perceived as exploiting the Malians or anything like that. They lived basically pretty simply, better than the average Malian, perhaps but no ostentatious palaces or gold-plated Mercedes or anything like that. They interacted with the Malians basically as equals. They all spoke the language. My father-in-law spoke fluent Bambara.

My wife had gone to high school there with the local kids.

*Q: A French language high school?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. She got her baccalaureate.

*Q: This must have been an interesting wedding, as well. Did you have family come over to join you for it?*

WAGENSEIL: My dad came for the wedding.

*Q: Still a travel agent?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. My mother had come at Christmastime in '79 for our engagement party and then the wedding was in April 1980. My dad came out for four days. Jamilée's cousins, aunts, uncles came from Abidjan and Dakar. The Lebanese community gathered round and the embassy rallied around. The wedding took place in the cathedral in Bamako. I had to get permission from Rome to marry her because...

*Q: Rome as in the Pope?*

WAGENSEIL: As in the Vatican because I am not Catholic and I had to get permission for me to marry her in the cathedral.

*Q: May I ask if you also had to get State Department permission to marry an alien?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I initiated that process as early as I could, to be granted the "authority to marry an alien." She was furious about that. The regional security officer was based in Abidjan and came up to Bamako to interview me and meet her -- and to sneak around her parents' business and whatnot.

One thing that I had been concerned about was that she had actually been working as a secretary at the Embassy of Libya when we met, but she left that job when we became engaged. I guess DS wasn't worried about it.

We finally got permission to marry nine months after we were married.

*Q: Permission from?*

WAGENSEIL: From the Department. We got the letter from the Department saying "the Department finds no objection with your intention to marry Ms. ..."

The wedding was in the cathedral and because Bamako was subject to frequent power outages and because it was very hot, the Embassy GSO basically commandeered every floor fan in the embassy inventory and stationed fans strategically around the cathedral and then he had a generator set in the parking lot outside the cathedral to run the electricity for the wedding.

The cathedral was packed and the reception was at the Hotel de l'Amitié, in their gardens by the pool. There were 350 people there; everybody from the Embassy community, a lot of other diplomats, friends that we made, the Lebanese community virtually entirely and then probably 50 or 60 Malis. A great party.

*Q: She was geared up for the Foreign Service kind of life?*

WAGENSEIL: I am not sure she realized what she was getting into. Of course, I didn't realize what I was getting into when I joined the Foreign Service -- or when I got married.

She had some exposure to the Foreign Service, diplomatic service, having worked in another embassy, and she had been to receptions and whatnot. Joining the State Department that way was coming into it sideways, however.

*Q: It is a big step. Were you married in time for her to participate in the selection of your next assignment?*

WAGENSEIL: Basically, the rules then were if you married "an alien," you have to come home so that your alien spouse -- that was the term they used -- so that your spouse could get to know America, so when next you go out to represent the United States of America, you could both represent the U.S. So, there was little question that my follow-on assignment would be back in Washington after Bamako. At that point it was just an issue of what office I would be working in.

*Q: Do you recall being given a choice in that or were they still just pretty much telling you what you were going to do next?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't know if there was a choice. There was discussion about what was available or what the possibilities were. No, I didn't want to do more work in Consular

Affairs. No, I didn't feel I was competent to go into Econ, EB or something like that. But having served in the Peace Corps and having been in Bamako, I was recruited by AF. We got married in 1980 so we came back in that summer. I was assigned to work in the Office of Central African Affairs (AF/C) where I was the desk officer for Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tomé y Príncipe. I had four countries which have four official languages.

*Q: Four different languages?*

WAGENSEIL: Cameroon is bilingual, French and English. Equatorial Guinea is Spanish. Gabon is French and Sao Tomé y Príncipe is a former Portuguese colony.

*Q: So Africa -- you were basically familiar with it but you really hadn't done the desk work in the Department before.*

WAGENSEIL: No, this was new. It was fascinating. Cameroon, a fairly large country with an English speaking aspect to it. English is an official language so it was I think perceived as more accessible to Americans than some of the other countries, right next to Nigeria which of course everybody had heard about. So, there was interest in Cameroon from the average citizen, the business community and stuff like that.

Gabon was the heart of darkness in some ways. Dr. Schweitzer was there.

*Q: Schweitzer was still there?*

WAGENSEIL: No, but he had been there, so everybody had heard of him.

Equatorial Guinea was ruled by a madman who had assassinated his uncle, another madman, and taken over the presidency. And nobody heard of or cared about Sao Tome, which was these two little dots in the middle of the ocean which spoke Portuguese, which nobody cared about.

*Q: It was still not a Portuguese colony?*

WAGENSEIL: No.

*Q: And we didn't have embassies in some of these places?*

WAGENSEIL: We did not have embassies in Equatorial Guinea or Sao Tome although President Carter had indicated that he wanted that we have an embassy in Equatorial Guinea. There had a number of years previously a horrible case of murder by one U.S. embassy officer of another at the tiny embassy in Malabo. They had closed the mission down at that point.

The ambassador in Cameroon was accredited to Equatorial Guinea. The ambassador in Gabon was accredited to Sao Tome so I had two ambassadors -- the care and feeding of -- and four different countries as my responsibility.

*Q: You got there during the Carter administration and stayed on to the change to the Reagan administration?*

WAGENSEIL: I got there in 1980. The elections were that fall and the transition the following spring.

*Q: Were there any big issues you were dealing with that spring to mind?*

WAGENSEIL: Not big ones, just basically juggling four countries.

Gabon was almost entirely in the French orbit. The French were pumping their oil -- from offshore platforms in Gabon. That was all pretty much French territory. We had some business interest there and some businessmen who were interested in the possibilities there. I got courted by -- I was approached and interviewed -- by banks and investment firms and this and that analysts and stuff like that about Gabon, because they were looking for opportunities.

Cameroon was kind of in a bit of a bind because at this point Col. Qadhafi was very active in Chad. Chad sits between Libya and Cameroon. There was a separatist issue in northern Chad. There they were active problems. Cameroon was supporting the backlines of Chad which was on the frontlines of confrontation with Qadhafi. So I had some of that.

I was backup to the Chad desk officer who had her hands full; Marie Huhtala was the Chad desk officer.

I remember Arlene Render -- who had handed me the Foreign Service test in Abidjan years before -- was at the next desk and she had Rwanda, Burundi and the Central African Republic. Other desks in the Central African Affairs office were Congo (Brazzaville), Zaire, and Angola. Of course, we had no representation in Angola at the time. The Zaire desk was a universe unto itself which I did my best to avoid.

*Q: You had four countries from the U.S. policy perspective but not really on the front burner.*

WAGENSEIL: The ambassador in Cameroon, Hume Horan, made one of his periodic visits to Equatorial Guinea and had a meeting with President Obiang. President Obiang said -- and the ambassador duly reported -- "Look, if you want to put a naval base here, you are welcome. Come on in."

The ambassador reported this and one of the Tags on the cable was NATO so it popped up in the EUR reading file -- which nothing from Yaoundé would have otherwise. Somehow it came to the direct attention of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State

at that point was General Alexander Haig, who reportedly said, “A naval base? In Africa? Tell me more! In Guinea? Tell me more!!”

So I was tasked to write a briefing paper for the Secretary of State about Equatorial Guinea and the possibilities, pros and cons of whether there should be -- whether the U.S. should pursue the idea of a naval base there, a military base there. They couldn't be in NATO because they are outside the NATO area, but a military base in Africa? This was exciting.

But it quickly became apparent that the secretary had not caught on to the detail that we are talking about Equatorial Guinea -- not for example, Guinea Conakry or Guinea Bissau where there were things going on. So, the briefing memo I prepared -- which my bosses signed all the way up the AF ladder -- started out saying “Equatorial Guinea is a country in Central Africa; see attached map.” So that very exciting idea quickly withered and died.

Otherwise, there wasn't much going on.

*Q: AF, even as a bureau in the hierarchy of bureaus within the Department I presume it was not seen as the center of importance.*

WAGENSEIL: AF basically was considered last in the queue of the regional bureaus.

- At that time, the accepted wisdom -- as I understood it -- was the most important region was Europe (EUR) because of the Soviet threat and our military relationship with NATO. That was our existential threat and so it was the most important.
- It was followed by the Middle East (NEA). Secretary Kissinger invested so much time and energy there because of the relationship with Israel and our concerns about the Cold War flare up, the East/West flare up in the Middle East; Egypt, Israel, Sinai, Suez, etc.
- The next most important would have been East Asia (EA) because of our trading relationship with Japan, growing relations with Korea, closely following Vietnam where we had been engaged in a bloody ground (and air, and naval) war.
- Latin America (ARA) was just next door, and we really have to pay attention to your neighbors.
- So, Africa (AF) just naturally came in last in the queue.

Everybody kind of understood that -- even though there is an African American connection. People care about the continent and so forth but it is far away and it's poor and we didn't have much trade going on. We were busy elsewhere.

*Q: Did you enjoy the job on the desk?*

WAGENSEIL: I did. It was fascinating. It was great fun. I had the chance to see how the Department worked with itself. I got more time with other bureaus; with Consular Affairs, with EB, other agencies. I interacted with the Pentagon and the AF Regional

Affairs Office and all of that. Interacting with USAID and the Agriculture Department concerning food aid. So, it was very interesting. I got the chance to see how the business of the Department ran. I had been on the Seventh Floor when I worked in S/PRS which is one aspect but not really at the working level. Here I was at the working level. I was the wheels. I wasn't on the outside. It was good, it was fun. It was a lot of work. I worked pretty hard.

One thing that happened while I was in the office we began to approach office automation, word processing. The IBM Selectric typewriter was a big deal when I started in 1974. When I got to AF in 1980 they had these big stand-alone machine that were called word processors. It was about the size of a Hammond organ, it used 8 ½ inch floppy disks for memory storage and transfer, and it had a printer sort of attached to it -- built into it -- and this green screen CRT with a keyboard into which you typed. You could do sort of word processing.

*Q: Not WANG machines yet?*

WAGENSEIL: This was before WANG. Actually, I got pretty good at it. I got pretty good at using the machine. At one point we were doing a briefing memo for the AF Assistant Secretary and I prepared the memo and I showed it to my boss, the deputy director of the office. He made a couple of changes, showed it to the office director who made another couple of changes and said, "All right. Go back and give it to me before the end of the day."

I came back in half an hour with a revised memo. He said, "I want the new version."

I said, "This is the new version."

He said, "How did you do that?"

I said, "That's what that machine is for down there."

So, this was early in the days of automation.

I enjoyed the job. It was a good chance. We had Rwanda and Burundi in the office and there were always problems and issues and questions and fears.

*Q: You must have found yourself becoming a real Africanist by this point.*

WAGENSEIL: I was. I had served in the Peace Corps and in an embassy in West Africa. Here I was working hard on Central Africa and whether I wanted to or not, I was learning a lot about Zaire and about Rwanda and Angola and Brazzaville so I sort of began to pick up vibrations.

*Q: AF having their hands on you, you wanted to keep them?*



WAGENSEIL: Yes, indeed. In fact, I was very much encouraged to consider onward assignments in Africa. Chet Crocker was the assistant secretary at that time. It became clear to me that Chet Crocker wanted me to go to Zimbabwe which had recently become independent. It became independent in 1980 and I was due to transfer in '82. Chet's wife was Rhodesian so he had a very interest in the future of that country.

So my onward assignment after AF/C was Embassy Harare. Actually I think when I was selected for the post it was still AmEmbassy Salisbury, but by the time I got there it was Harare.

*Q: Two years was enough to get your wife adequately American by the State Department's standards to allow you to go back overseas or was that a continuing issue?*

WAGENSEIL: I am not sure she is American enough now.

*Q: I mean as a bureaucratic issue.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, it was enough and the rules were, for the spouse of a Foreign Service officer facing an impending overseas assignment they can expedite naturalization, so even though we had been in country less than two years, her naturalization was expedited. She was naturalized before we went out.

*Q: So you were ready to move out of Washington again and hit the field one more time?*

WAGENSEIL: I think so. We were living in the city, had a little townhouse up on Capitol Hill. I was working very hard and working long hours and she wasn't very happy in Washington. She finally got some part time work.

*Q: It must have been very hard for her as well.*

WAGENSEIL: It was a transition and culture shock. I wasn't able to be as supportive as was probably necessary because I was busy on the job. I think she was ready to go, and I was certainly ready.

*Q: OK, so this was when you headed out to Zimbabwe?*

WAGENSEIL: 1982. Zimbabwe had been independent for two years when I got there, even more because the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 led to independence in 1980 and I arrived '82. I was the second political officer at the post succeeding Jimmy Kolker. Gib Lanpher was the DCM when I got there and later served as the ambassador there and Bob Keeley was the ambassador when I arrived.

Zimbabwe at that point was very much perceived as the great hope of Africa, a success story, the chance to show that it was possible to transition from a colonial system to independence in a relatively peaceful manner and of course, therefore, presented an

example for the big one next door, South Africa -- which everybody hoped would be coming soon.

So, there was a lot of attention, a lot of support for Zimbabwe from the international community. At Independence, the U.S. had pledged something like \$225 million dollars in aid over three years and other countries were providing a lot of aid as well. It seemed to be on track to be a success story.

Robert Mugabe was prime minister. The president was the Reverend Canaan Banana.

*Q: I remember there were a lot of jokes about that.*

WAGENSEIL: There certainly were and of course, in recent years, over the last five years or so, Reverend Banana was accused of homosexual conduct while president. That does not conflict with the rumors I heard when I was posted there.

As I said, Mugabe was the prime minister. He had a couple of whites in his cabinet including Dennis Norman as the Minister of Agriculture -- which was a key position because of course, the white farmers were the economic backbone of the country, what they called the commercial farmers.

The Minister of Finance was Bernard Chidzero, a Zimbabwean who had been working at the World Bank here in Washington and had returned from exile, if you will, to help his country get off to a good start. Chidzero was very highly thought of, and his service there was very much perceived as A Good Thing because he knew the outside world in ways that the guerilla fighters that had been in the bush when Mugabe and the others really didn't. Obviously, to succeed and prosper in the international environment once the sanctions were lifted, Zimbabwe had to know how to play the game on the international stage.

*Q: Was this a grand coalition government with Mugabe and Nkomo and whites and everybody together?*

WAGENSEIL: Not really. ZANU which is the Zimbabwe African National Union was Mugabe's party and it had been behind ZANLA which was the independence army, guerilla army that Mugabe was with. Joshua Nkomo was the leader of ZAPU, the Zimbabwe African People's Union, and their army was called ZIPRA.

*Q: We were talking about Nkomo and Bishop Abel Muzorewa's role in the government?*

WAGENSEIL: They didn't have a role in the government, per se. They were in parliament. ZAPU had six seats. The Lancaster House Agreement, which led to independence, said there should be an 80-member parliament and of those maybe 15 were seats reserved for whites and the others were contested by the black community. Mugabe had won the elections at the time of independence because Mugabe was a member of the Shona tribe and Nkomo of course, is from the Ndebele tribe. The

population ratio was about 60/40 or 70/30 and so the votes and the seats in parliament reflected that, giving Mugabe a majority sort of automatically -- which of course, he has used ever since.

Nkomo and Muzorewa were in parliament, but they were in opposition. There were some whites in parliament and a couple of whites in the cabinet but it was not really a coalition; it was run by ZANU which later became ZANU/PF, the so-called "Popular Front" as an attempt to form some kind of coalition with some of the opposition ZAPU people -- but that never really worked.

*Q: Was there a lot of bad blood? Mugabe and Nkomo had both been liberation leaders. You would like to think they would be able to continue to get along after the struggle was over.*

WAGENSEIL: Wouldn't that be nice? But of course, they were liberation leaders of opposing armies. ZANLA and ZIPRA were the two armies and they had received support from different outside sources. Mugabe and company, ZANLA were supported by the Chinese and the Cubans and the North Koreans, while ZIPRA was supported by the Russians. So, there were some significant differences of approach between them.

More important than that was the ethnic difference; the Shona and Ndebele relationship. It is the old struggle and you see it all over Africa. You see it in Kenya. You saw it in the American West; the farmers and the ranchers. The Shona were sedentary, farmers. The Ndebele were cattle herders and somewhat nomadic. The Ndebele -- who are a branch of the Zulu in South Africa -- used to raid the cattle of the Shona and of course, steal the women along the way. So, there is a real difference of identity, a tribal difference. It is much more behavior.

*Q: Well, Mugabe claimed to be a Marxist even then, didn't he?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, he did. And ZANU was very much a Marxist "vanguard party," at least when I was there -- they proclaimed their role to be the vanguard of the country and to lead the people and to show the way for the people; not, as it were, to represent the people or to respond to what the people wanted. They were much more inclined to tell the people what they wanted and then go ahead and do it.

This of course, didn't sit very well with the U.S. government or the British government or most of the Western governments that were trying to be helpful, but that's what they were doing and as long as they were behaving themselves -- by and large -- in domestic affairs, it was OK.

The ethnic friction between the Shona and the Ndebele, between ZANU and ZAPU boiled over while I was there. I was there between '82 and '85, three years. There was a serious -- I wouldn't call it a civil war but it could have been misread as a civil war -- in Matabele Land which is the southwest of the country around the second city of the country, Bulawayo and over towards Victoria Falls and the border with Botswana.

It is not clear to me exactly what was happening but there were, it was alleged that the South African government, which of course was still the Apartheid government, was trying to undermine independence in Zimbabwe by supporting the Ndebele. Whether that is true or not, the Zimbabwe government sent the Fifth Brigade -- which was a specially-trained brigade of the army -- down to Matabele Land to crush the fighting. The Fifth Brigade which was entirely a ZANLA operation just used the harshest of tactics -- burning villages and all sorts of atrocities -- which we learned about only with time because of course, information flow was difficult. We had no one stationed in Bulawayo so we had to rely on fieldtrips, talks with residents down there, journalists and priests who would tell the story. The priests were actually very active in getting the news out because they saw these atrocities first hand in the communities they served.

*Q: These were black Catholic priests?*

WAGENSEIL: Mostly local Catholic and Episcopalian or Anglican parish priests and the bishop of Bulawayo and the bishop of Harare. The CCJP, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace -- which was sort of the strongest, the only human rights organization which had been active during the Rhodesian times -- carried that role forward and was a very vocal critic of government actions, which led to a lot of friction with the government.

The whole environment was soured by this friction.

People had said that at the time of independence in Zimbabwe that everyone had feared there would be great black/white violence, retribution from the Rhodesian time and so forth. But in fact -- aside from one incident where a farm was attacked by some renegade fighters shortly after independence in 1980 -- aside from that all the violence was black on black and mostly Shona on Ndebele, because they (ZANU) had the government, they had the army and they had the numbers.

*Q: How did the U.S. government react to that?*

WAGENSEIL: We lobbied. We tried to persuade the government to behave itself. We tried having contacts with the army, with the intelligence service (the CIO, Central Intelligence Organization) with party leaders in Parliament in Harare, whatever leaders we could push or pull to try to get the government to modify its behavior, but there was not much traction.

I remember when I first arrived in Harare I was being given a tour around town by someone from the embassy and we passed the British High Commissioner's car or something and the person showing me around said, "Oh, that's a very important person."

I said, "Well, isn't the U.S. Embassy the most important?"

He said, “No, no. The British High Commission is far more important. The American Embassy is really small potatoes here.” That was, of course, because of the British colonial relationship and the historical connections and the fact that settlement was done at Lancaster House which is in London, the U.S. just didn’t have the traction to get things done the way we would have liked.

The British didn’t have traction on the Fifth Brigade atrocity fighting either. The British had military attaches and training brigades -- I don’t know what all -- but they really just couldn’t penetrate because they were dealing with people leading the military who had been guerrilla fighters and who were very politicized and the political leaders were very immoderate in their dealings.

*Q: You don’t remember U.S. threats to cut off aid or anything at that stage?*

WAGENSEIL: I don’t recall any threats to cut off aid, not on this issue. There was great concern. I am sure there was some huffing and puffing but there was no threat to cut off aid about that.

It did sour Washington’s perception of the Mugabe government and this was 1982 so this was President Reagan. Marxists were not in great favor at that time in Washington -- not that they ever were -- but certainly the Reagan administration was not very happy about it.

*Q: And was he adopting domestic policies that were Marxist as well at that time?*

WAGENSEIL: Not so much. At that point the commercial farmers, the white farmers were as I said; Dennis Norman had been put in the Cabinet as the Minister of Agriculture. He had been the president of the Commercial Farmers Union, which was the union of white farmers who had all the good land and had developed it and had put in dams for irrigation and fertilized and so on.

The black Zimbabweans who had land were mostly restricted to sort of marginal areas, what had been called the “tribal trust areas” -- Rhodesia’s version of South Africa’s Bantustans, in effect.

The government under Mugabe and Dennis Norman and Chidzero as Minister of Finance were protecting the country’s wealth. One major factor was the agricultural industry. It was very, very fertile land, made more fertile by intelligent farming. The commercial farmers profited from the land but they employed a lot of Zimbabweans, black Zimbabweans, to work with them. And the farmers I met were intelligent enough to realize that they had to take care of their employees or the employees wouldn’t take care of them -- take care of the machinery and the land. So, they were housed and they were schooled and they were given food subsidies and so forth.

When I was there I remember vividly driving around the country at various times and you’d come to an intersection or a village or town in one of the commercial farming areas

and you would see literally a mountain of sacks of maize, three, four stories high like a pyramid, all neatly stacked up. The silos just couldn't hold all the corn that the land was producing and so they would stack it up in burlap bags in big pyramids.

There was a surplus and they were exporting to their neighbors. They were perceived as the breadbasket of the region. I remember even Zambia and Malawi were taking corn shipments from Zimbabwe. The staple food is "mealie meal" which was a porridge made of corn.

I remember when we were there because of the sanctions that were still in place against South Africa -- and also because the Zimbabwean dollar was not convertible -- there were shortages in Zimbabwe and the first four or five months we were there, there was no rice. You could not buy rice in Zimbabwe. If people made a trip to South Africa for some purpose or elsewhere they'd come back with a bag of rice because they don't grow rice there and there is no way to import it. They didn't have the currency -- the foreign exchange -- to import it.

So, there were some shortages but by and large, the economy was doing pretty well and the domestic policies were pretty straight forward. They put a lot of money into schooling, schools. They were building new schools and trying to hire teachers. The private schools, very much English model with blazers and ties for the school boys, were permitted to continue and function without any problems and in fact, a lot of the government officials were happy to send their kids to these schools which were now integrated.

*Q: Had they not been integrated before?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't know for certain but I imagine they weren't or they weren't until recently.

*Q: In general, Zimbabwe did not have the apartheid system they had in South Africa, did they?*

WAGENSEIL: It was not the same. It was not as strict, as I understand it -- not having been there before independence -- but they had the separation of land with the commercial farming areas and the tribal trust lands which were white and black, respectively. There were certain restaurants, certain parts of town where the black Rhodesians were not welcome, were not allowed to live, could not afford to live, before independence. The white suburbs were very nice, very nice houses. We had a great house. Most everybody in the diplomatic community had very nice houses and others were being built as fast as possible to accommodate the influx.

The other thing that was interesting; there had been a lot of black Rhodesians in exile, Chidzero being the most prominent. There were hundreds of others who had gone off to England, to Australia, to Sweden, to the U.S. -- to go to school, to university, to find a job, to get an education, to start a life -- because UDI (the Unilateral Declaration of

Independence, by which Ian Smith broke with The Crown) was like in 1965 or '66, and independence was in 1980, so there was plenty of time for an exile community to build up.

Most of them came back. They were eager to return to their homeland and to help build the new society, the new Zimbabwe. In a way it is a tragedy, thinking about it now because some of these people who left behind everything they had built in California or in Virginia or in Sweden or in Oxford went back to Zimbabwe and now are really stuck. They can't leave again.

*Q: Together with the influx, did you have an out flux of white farmers?*

WAGENSEIL: It wasn't the farmers so much, although there were some farmers who left right at the beginning, 1980. Certainly there were farmers who panicked and fled; packed up, sold everything at fire sale prices and ran south. It was called the 'chicken run'.

By '82 -- when I got there -- people seemed to be, the farmers certainly seemed to be prospering and staying put. There was an out-flux of sort of the white, middle class or lower middle class shopkeepers and whatnot because they were facing competition from the blacks. Blacks were opening shops, opening businesses, starting things in competition and some of the whites said I can't stand this so they packed up and went south or went to Australia. Some went to England but they were miserable when they got there because it was not the paradise they had always thought.

*Q: And most of them were Africans. They had been born and raised there.*

WAGENSEIL: They were born and raised there, maybe children and grandchildren of English immigrants, great grandchildren in some cases, but they were not really English and of course, at that point the UK was changing also with the immigrant populations from India and the Caribbean and various other former colonies so they had this fairy tale vision of home -- but you can't go there because it doesn't exist anymore.

*Q: What was the role of Ian Smith and the other whites in the government?*

WAGENSEIL: Ian Smith was the leader of his party. His party had all the white seats in parliament, 15, whatever it was. His party controlled them and so Ian Smith was sitting in parliament in opposition to Mugabe. It was very interesting to go to parliament; I loved going to parliament and watching the debate because it was very, very, very British and restrained and decorous. That was kind of wild because you'd see these people who had been hurling invective at each other and here they were saying, "The honorable member from XXX" and "I believe him to be mistaken because YYY."

One thing just to show how kind of schizophrenic it was; the first time I went to the parliament -- walked in the lobby -- and over the door to the inner part of the building where the chamber was and the steps up to the gallery and all, there were three pictures over the doorway; to left was President Banana and to the right was Prime Minister

Mugabe and above them both was a picture of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. I said, "What on earth is that?"

They said, "Oh, no. We are still part of the Commonwealth and she, of course, is head of the Commonwealth. And that's why we have a British High Commission, not a British Embassy."

It all made sense to people, not me necessarily. There was this kind of very surreal situation.

Of course, you had ZAPU in parliament, Ian Smith and Mugabe's party.

They debated bills but Mugabe's party had the vast majority and it was kind of mechanical voting process. "All those in favor?" and all the hands would go up.

*Q: Weren't there some guarantees in the Lancaster House Agreement that served that things could not be changed for a certain number of years?*

WAGENSEIL: There were guarantees. The white seats were reserved for ten years and certain other elements including, I think, land reform were restricted for the same period so until 1990. I don't remember the details of the restrictions but I know there were some guarantees that were meant to ensure a smoother transition.

*Q: How was the civil service working? That must have been very white at first and I suppose they were trying to integrate it?*

WAGENSEIL: By the time I got there -- two years after independence -- the integration of the civil service was proceeding apace. As I said, there had been a lot of black, Rhodesian exiles who came back and a lot of them moved into the civil service, in part because that is where gainful employment was. They had been trained or they had worked as lawyers or accountants or doctors in the U.S. or Canada or the UK or Europe so they were able to move fairly easily into the civil service slots.

A couple I knew, he was a Zimbabwean, and she was an African American. They met in the States and went to law school together in Berkeley and then came back to Zimbabwe. He came back and she came with him. He went into the Ministry of Justice and she went into private law practice. So, integration was underway but for example, in the Foreign Ministry the leaders -- the top three or four echelons -- were all blacks, but there were a couple of whites scattered about that we had dealings with.

*Q: So, there were people who got along as I suppose there are in many countries. From what you are saying most of the trouble was in fact between the different ethnic black groups, rather than black/white.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, I think that is true. The whites who stayed, stayed for business reasons or farming reasons and they were unlikely to try to cause any trouble in the



commercial sector. The whites who stayed in the civil service had to stay in the civil service to remain employed, so they behaved themselves, kept their mouth shut, whatever.

A couple of things I want to mention; there was shortly after I got there in 1982 a kidnapping in Matabeleland because of the fighting that had been going on. Three white, 20-something tourists disappeared in Hwange National Park, two Brits and an American. They were kidnapped from a car but this obviously led to a lot of activity. We were running around frantically. The British High Commission mobilized all sorts of resources.

*Q: Were these Americans?*

WAGENSEIL: One American, two Brits. The army went out looking for them very quickly. The police force was mobilized. The British brought in some SAS specialists. I am sure we had some specialists as well, and several of us rotated assignments to go down to Bulawayo and kind of be available -- be on call -- in case some news broke as to their whereabouts.

The American was the son of the founder -- or the owner -- of Westin Hotels. He flew in and offered rewards for his son's safe release. There was a large manhunt for quite a while, until six months later the authorities got a tip and went to a village about five miles from where they had been kidnapped and dug up a grave behind a house and the bodies were there. Apparently, they had been held at gunpoint inside a hut in the village a day after they were taken. As soldiers swept through the village looking for them, their captors hid them.

This was a big deal in terms of press play in the UK and the U.S. at the time. This, I think, was one of the triggers that was used to justify the Fifth Brigade assaults in Matabele Land. It was just a couple of rogue former soldiers or whatnot who were looking for some ransom money and realized quickly they had bitten off more than they could chew.

*Q: I guess that kind of incident could put a damper on tourism. Was tourism starting to build?*

WAGENSEIL: Tourism, in fact, was doing quite well. The game parks and Victoria Falls were of course major destinations. It is a long way away from the States so it wasn't that easy and there weren't any direct flights from anywhere except Africa or London. There were tourists coming in and some groups organized. There were good hotels. This did have an impact on tourism, clearly.

The other thing that happened: Joshua Nkomo was accused of rebellion against the state or something like that. This was again part of the Matabele Land-Fifth Brigade conflict and Nkomo fled the country. He was charged with plotting against the state. There were arms that were dug up on a farm or two belonging to ZAPU supporters. The allegation

was that ZIPRA had cached the arms to prepare for revolt. They would storm the capital or something like that and NKOMO, their leader, was accused of treason and he fled the country and wound up in London and made the domestic political relationships worse.

At the same time, several members of the Zimbabwean Air Force -- formerly officers in the Rhodesian Air Force -- were accused of plotting rebellion against the government; they were white officers serving in the Zimbabwean Air Force. I think there were three of them or five. Again they were arrested, accused of plotting, charged with hiding weapons and so forth.

One of my jobs as political officer was to go to the trial. There was at that point a very lively free press in Zimbabwe, meaning access was open. These officers were of British descent, obviously. I think one of them had served in the Royal Air Force before immigrating to Zimbabwe, to Rhodesia and becoming one of the Rhodesian Air Force.

Their allegiance was very much suspect. They were accused of plotting rebellion. I remember the first day of the trial the presiding judges, I think it was a panel of three, and the chief justice was white, all very resplendent in the wig and robe and so on. The courtroom was packed. I was sitting next to a guy from the British High Commission and somebody from the French Embassy and so on. The accused came into court in uniform, their Zimbabwe Air Force uniforms. There was a huge hubbub from the prosecution. Basically, the prosecution said, "No, no. You can't wear your uniform."

And they said, "Why not? We are still commissioned officers. A man is innocent until proven guilty. We have not been stripped of our commissions. We maintain our innocence and we maintain our right to wear the uniform."

The government side just went nuts. The case was adjourned. The accused were taken away in handcuffs.

When the trial resumed a week later, they had agreed to appear in civilian clothes -- not in prison garb but in civilian clothes. That was a huge public relations coup, very much covered by the BBC and whatnot. This was before satellite TV and so forth. It would have been quite an image on screens around the world if it had been broadcast.

The trial lasted a month, six weeks, a huge long thing, lots of testimony. At the end of the day, again the courtroom was packed with people for the verdict and the verdict was Not Guilty -- no: Not Proven. On the preponderance of the evidence, the government did not establish -- anything. They were immediately ordered released. A huge hubbub in the court, the wives rushed forward and embraced their husbands. Of course, we had been talking to the wives nonstop and reporting back what was going on as had the BBC and the Guardian and everybody else.

They walked out to the courtyard of the court building where the Police slapped on the handcuffs and held them for two more days on suspicion of being bad guys -- some trumped up little thing -- after which they were granted permission to leave the country

and they all went off to England. I think one of them went to South Africa but the others went to, went first to England and then to South Africa because they couldn't go directly to South Africa. That was clearly a no-no, but the deal was they'd go to England; they could go home and so forth.

The government didn't win its case but it got rid of them.

*Q: It is interesting. It shows at least the courts were working to some extent, even if their rulings didn't have binding effect.*

WAGENSEIL: I think very much it speaks very well to the rule of law and the courage of the justices who were sitting at the time and their adherence to legal norms.

*Q: Who would these have been? Would these have been people who had been in exile trained as lawyers? There couldn't have been very many lawyers in the Rhodesian system.*

WAGENSEIL: There might have been a Rhodesian who went off to Oxford or something and then became a judge in Kenya or in Nigeria. The Commonwealth has a mechanism whereby it can provide legal assistance to countries and I think at least one of the judges was supported by or sent through the Commonwealth legal assistance program.

There had been accusations against ZAPU that it was plotting rebellion and that they were arms hidden and whatnot. That case also did not go the government's way. Again, the evidence was weak, the testimony was contradictory. It was all very -- it was perceived by a lot of people as -- trumped up.

*Q: Did Joshua Nkomo come back?*

WAGENSEIL: He came back eventually but I don't think he came back while I was still there. His health was never the same. He was getting older and he was grossly overweight and his health wasn't good. I think he did return before he died. He wrote his autobiography while he was in exile.

*Q: Let me ask you about what you were personally doing. Were you the only political officer? Was there a big section? How did it work?*

WAGENSEIL: When I got there, it was small. I was the political officer. We had an ambassador, DCM, consular officer, myself, a commercial officer, a fairly large admin section because we had to do most of the work ourselves since there wasn't any -- the admin chief perceived that there was nobody competent to do anything -- so we had plumbers and carpenters and what all, and of course communicators. The embassy was housed in a house; it was located in a house in suburban area east of the center of town. The ambassador's office was formerly the master bedroom and the DCM's office was the other bedroom and my office was sort of on a walkway overlooking the swimming pool

and the communicators worked in what had been either the bomb shelter or the wine cellar but that served as the vault downstairs.

Shortly after I got there a project was started to renovate an office building in town, small office building to be the chancery. Actually, my wife worked for the project. She was the secretary to the FBO project manager as the renovations took place.

After a year and a quarter at post we moved the Embassy into larger premises and we had more people, so by the time I left -- I had been the political officer -- it eventually became the "political/economic" section. We had three officers and there was a "political section" doing other things.

The commercial section was full of hope but not much more. The embassy grew.

*Q: You, then, had as your portfolio all politics?*

WAGENSEIL: I had domestic politics and international relations. The ambassador was very active in this and the DCM, as well. There was a woman, a CIA employee on the analytical side who came out on a detail to the Embassy to work as a political analyst in our section, the POL/ECON section, to get some field experience. She came out and she was there for two years. That reinforced our section quite a bit. She did a lot of work on Matabele Land, in fact.

I had the foreign policy portfolio, as well.

*Q: Today is February 14, 2008. This is Peter Eicher continuing the interview with Steve Wagenseil. This is tape number four, side a. Steve, you were just saying you had the foreign policy portfolio at the embassy in Zimbabwe and you had a good story you were about to tell me.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. This would have taken place in 1984, if memory serves. Zimbabwe, having been independent for three or four years, was not shy. It was perceived by others and certainly perceived itself as the "great black hope" of southern Africa and perhaps the example for transition that could be followed in South Africa.

Mugabe certainly wanted to play a role on the world stage and so Zimbabwe sought a seat on the UN Security Council. We were quite taken aback at this in the embassy and did our discreet best to caution the Zimbabweans that this was a significant job and required manpower and a lot of time and experience and wouldn't it be better if they waited a little bit and they didn't. They pushed for it and of course the African group in the UN thought this was a wonderful idea, a way to stick a finger in the South African eye yet again, and so they supported Zimbabwe's election to the Security Council and there was nothing anybody could do to stop it. So, Zimbabwe took a seat on the Security Council.

And so, I spent a lot of time demarching the foreign ministry about UN business all the time. And I had, of course, been privileged to go into the ministry with the annual UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) instruction cable, which was 27 sections long and one time I took it in with me; it was an accordion fold of computer paper -- teletype printout -- which was about seven inches thick, and I just walked in and I laid it on the desk of my interlocutor in the International Organizations office, who was in fact himself an Ndebele -- Josey Hlabangana was his name. And I said okay, this is what we want you to do. And I put this huge pile of paper on his desk and he looked at it and he said, "Oh my God, do I have to read that?" And I said, "No, you can't, it's classified, but I'll tell you about it." Anyway. And that was quite an interesting series of conversations. But anyway-

*Q: I can imagine. By the way, I was the Africa officer in UN Affairs in Washington at the time.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes...

*Q: And probably responsible for some of that.*

WAGENSEIL: Sure, sure. Well in any case, as you know, having been the Africa expert in IO/UNP, the war against South Africa in Angola & Namibia had taken new heights and the Cubans were very much involved and they were feeling kind of feisty in international affairs and they got involved in Grenada and they were in fact enlarging the airport in Grenada. And the U.S. Government thought that was not a good idea and the U.S. invasion of Grenada took place. In fact, Jamilée and I were back on home leave, I think it was, when that happened, much to our surprise.

We returned to Harare to discover that there was a resolution pending in the Security Council criticizing the U.S. for the invasion of Grenada -- prompted, of course, by the Cubans but actively supported, wholeheartedly supported by "Comrade Bob" -- Prime Minister Mugabe -- and lots of other like-minded countries. The messages flew fast and furious back and forth, you probably wrote a couple of them if you were still on the desk at the time, and I was over demarching the ministry all the time, the ambassador was in seeing Foreign Minister Shamuyarira with no luck, and it just got worse and worse.

As it happened, Prime Minister Mugabe had a long-scheduled visit to the United States at that point and was in Atlanta, I believe, the day before, which was over the weekend, Sunday of that week, before the vote was due to come up in the Security Council. And Andy Young, who of course was very, very, very highly thought of in black Africa, Andy Young at the U.S. Government's request lobbied Mugabe hard, please not to support this resolution, to no avail. Mugabe then came to Washington and he was actually, as I understand it, in a meeting with Assistant Secretary of State Chet Crocker, who was and is married to a white Rhodesian, when the vote occurred in the Security Council. And Zimbabwe supported the resolution. And if I remember correctly the U.S. had to veto the resolution. If that's not quite the case then the resolution only got nine non-permanent

members in support. Something happened. Anyway, the resolution was defeated but only by a hair and Zimbabwe was clearly on the wrong side.

As I mentioned earlier, in 1980 the U.S. had pledged \$75 million a year, which was a lot of money back then, for Zimbabwe's post-independence development. We had given a year's worth and we had given part of the second year and there was about \$35 million still to deliver, when the vote occurred in the UNSC. And I had the dubious privilege of going into the foreign ministry the day after the vote in New York and informing my poor interlocutor that we were not going to give them the rest of the money. That vote in the Security Council cost them \$35 million or something like that. He said "But, but, you promised." And I said, "I'm terribly sorry, those are my instructions. You may tell your Minister."

Well, within minutes the Minister was on the phone to the Ambassador who basically said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Minister but we had made very clear our position on this issue and you should have taken us more seriously. Actions have consequences." End of conversation. That, of course, did not endear us in general to the government, which by then was increasingly difficult for us to deal with.

*Q: I also want to get on to the Front-Line states and relationships in the region but I think we'll have to wait for the next time. But I wanted to ask about Zimbabwe on the U.S. radar screen. I mean, you've talked a little bit about it now with some of these stories and incidents but basically did you have the sense out there that now that the Rhodesia problem was solved Zimbabwe was no longer a priority for the United States anymore?*

WAGENSEIL: No, I don't think so, I don't think so. I think the U.S. still thought that Zimbabwe was important. The administration clearly felt that there were significant investment opportunities for American businesses in Zimbabwe -- given its wealth in minerals and in agriculture -- and that successful, peaceful transition to black rule in Zimbabwe was very important for a possible future transition in South Africa, and so the U.S. was heavily invested in that.

*Q: Okay. Well good, I think we still have a little bit more Zimbabwe-*

WAGENSEIL: A lot.

*Q: -but I know you've got to go so let's leave it there until next time.*

WAGENSEIL: Good.

*Q: Today is March 18, 2008. I'm continuing the interview with Steve Wagenseil. Steve, say a couple of words just to make sure this is working correctly this morning.*

WAGENSEIL: I think it's working; seems to be flashing at us.

*Q: Okay, where we left off last time you were in Zimbabwe. I think we've talked a lot about internal Zimbabwe politics and we can go back to that if anything occurs to you but I wanted to ask you about foreign policy at this point and where the Zimbabweans were focused and how they fit into the bigger Front Line states and South African affairs at the time.*

WAGENSEIL: Well I've talked a little bit already I think about the Zimbabwean perception of their importance in the world, which led them to seek a seat on the Security Council.

*Q: I think we did, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: And led them to vote against the United States in a resolution critical of the Grenada invasion. And so that was certainly part of their vision of themselves in the world but of course they had a much more focused regional vision in southern Africa because they had achieved black majority rule after a system of racial segregation right next door to racist apartheid South Africa. This is what they always called it; it was always -- it was one word, "racist-apartheid-South Africa." And they sort of saw themselves as the vanguard, I mean aside from the Marxist philosophy, very much the vanguard of liberation for the African peoples of the continent and so on. And there was at the time, if I remember correctly, RENAMO (Mozambican National Resistance) was busy in the hills of Mozambique fighting the government of the time in Mozambique, and SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organization) was very actively fighting for the independence of southwest Africa. SWAPO the South West Africa People's Organization.

*Q: And RENAMO, if I can just pause for a moment, was kind of a creation of the Rhodesian security forces, wasn't it?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, I don't remember the politics of it. I wasn't really handling that particular account; that was done by others in the embassy. But there was a RENAMO/FRELIMO (The Liberation Front of Mozambique) struggle, yes, and I guess if I cast my mind back that was probably what it was. But it was very much -- there was a struggle going on to the east of Zimbabwe -- in western Mozambique -- and on a couple of occasions I remember when we wanted to visit resorts in the Eastern Highlands we were told not to go to this area or not to go near that border crossing or whatever because there were problems -- or fears of problems -- or fears of getting caught up in something, or seeing something we shouldn't, I don't know.

And obviously the Zimbabwean press didn't cover that story in a transparent manner so it was impossible for me at that point, pre-Internet, to really know what was going on. We'd get "The Herald Trib" like a week late or something, if we ever saw it, and the "Rand Daily Mail" from Johannesburg of course had a different view on the world. So that remains fuzzy. And the relationship with Botswana was fine; Botswana was seen as sort of to the right of the Zimbabwe government but not dangerously so for Harare's perspective. Zambia was okay. The fight in Angola was very much on people's minds

and of course the fight from Angola into SouthWest Africa. Angola was -- it was Jonas Savimbi, and UNITA (The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) which was being supported by the West, the United States, I guess, against the Angolan revolutionary government under the MPLA, whatever it was called.

*Q: Did some of these liberation movements open up offices in Harare, do you remember, when you were there?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't recall there being offices although, now that I think about it, there were probably -- there was somebody there who was the local rep for SWAPO and for, I guess for RENAMO. I know, I mean there was a Mozambican embassy but -

*Q: Well RENAMO would suddenly have been the bad guy instead of the good guy when the government in Rhodesia changed.*

WAGENSEIL: Right. They went to ground but I'm sure there was still somebody around.

*Q: How about relations with South Africa? That must have been particularly interesting.*

WAGENSEIL: Well it was intriguing because as a landlocked country Zimbabwe depended entirely on others for access to the outside world. Zimbabwe had no oil, so it had to get oil either from Mozambique, and there was a pipeline from Beira, if I remember correctly -- but that was always threatened by RENAMO -- or from South Africa by truck. And most of the imported goods came in from truck from South Africa, came up from the port at Durban or some place.

*Q: So, despite the revolutionary credentials they didn't take any quick steps to try to cut off trade with anybody?*

WAGENSEIL: They couldn't really cut trade off with South Africa without starving themselves. I mean, not starving themselves because they were -- at the time in blessed memory -- they were self-sufficient in grain. As I said they had these mountains of sacks of maize. And the roads were well-maintained and in good shape, the railroad as well, and we had reliable electricity and water in the towns. But everything else -- I mean, they had no rice production, and when I got there in '82 for months and months there was no rice on the shelves, which kind of caught us by surprise. But no, they imported everything through South Africa, basically, and Zambia didn't have anything to sell them. They weren't buying any diamonds from Botswana.

The other thing, of course, was that Zimbabwe did not have a convertible currency. It was the non-convertible Zimbabwe Dollar. There was an exchange rate with the Rand but it was very much to South Africa's advantage and anybody who had British Pounds or U.S. Dollars or Swiss Francs or Deutsche Marks or whatever, would hang on to them.



I remember we, shortly after we got there we decided to buy a right-hand-drive car from a dealer in South Africa. This is what everybody did, and so we flew down to Jo'burg from Harare, and there were flights every day, no problem, on Zimbabwe Airlines and stayed in a hotel for a couple of nights. We bought a locally manufactured VW Rabbit with a diesel engine made in Germany. We paid I think an extra \$600 U.S. for the diesel engine but it got twice the mileage for half the cost per tank so we clearly came out ahead on that -- especially later when there was a serious oil shortage, gas shortage. And we flew down, we drove the car back up, spent the night at the border and drove into Harare the next day. And lots of people did that.

And like the country, the city still did have good facilities. Jamilée was pregnant, and the RMO told us that it would be okay for her to give birth in Harare because there were still approved hospitals and adequate medical care, European-trained doctors, etc. So our first son, Anthony, was born in the Mbuya Nehanda (formerly Lady Chancellor) Hospital. And they took very good care of her and of him, even though there were some last-minute complications.

The other thing of course was that as diplomats we were entitled to import spirits, alcohol, and there was a quota system imposed by the government. The foreign ministry had to oversee it but it was imposed by the Treasury, I guess, and if I remember correctly each diplomat on the diplomatic list was entitled to three bottles of spirits and four cases of beer every month, something like that. I mean, there was a quota, I can't remember exactly what the numbers were.

And you could order gin or rum or whatever -- and of course they have distilleries in South Africa -- but you could also get imported spirits and pay -- as long as you had the hard currency, because that was the other gimmick, you had to be a diplomat and you had to have hard currency to pay for it. And then the embassy or a centralized system at the MFA, I forget how it worked, would arrange for the shipment and a truckload would come in and you'd go collect your quota. And they did this like every three months or something. We learned later that the biggest importers of alcoholic beverages were the embassy of Iran followed by the embassy of North Korea. Both Iran and North Korea had prominent and active diplomatic presences because of course their links to the anti-American movement was supportive of Mugabe's Marxist worldview.

*Q: This was philosophy; was post-revolutionary Iran.*

WAGENSEIL: Absolutely.

*Q: Ah, okay.*

WAGENSEIL: The Iranian revolution was in 1979 or something; this was in 1982-'83. But the importation of spirits by the abstaineous Iranians was clearly to finance their embassy. And the North Koreans were next and they apparently didn't drink a drop but they all imported their total amount every time and sold it on the black market and that's how they kept the embassy finances running.

The South Africans had a presence in Harare and as I recall it was actually called a South African trade mission. It may have been a trade mission, which was a diplomatic fiction and the South African trade rep was "the guy" representing the South African government. and he was at all the diplomatic events -- except National Day. I mean, he skipped Zimbabwe National Day because he represented the hideous, ostracized racist South African apartheid regime.

*Q: That's right, that's right. And there's a lot of negotiations going on at the time, especially on Namibia, trying to get the independence of Namibia. Was Zimbabwe much involved in that as a Front Line state?*

WAGENSEIL: They were very heavily involved rhetorically, thundering from the pulpit as it were about the importance of the fight, the struggle. And there was lots of rhetoric about the unjust apartheid regime, the South African occupation, blah, blah, blah, but I don't recall their actually *doing* very much.

Because we were posted in southern Africa or even in Africa, every week or so we would get a cable from the Bureau of African Affairs saying, "Where is Sam?" And this was the classic-

*Q: I remember those, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: -- cable that indicated that State was looking for Sam Nujoma, who was the leader of SWAPO and who was very peripatetic -- and not one of the State Department's favorite people at the time -- and he was always flitting about and one was always asked, have you seen him recently, has he been to town, is he coming to town, what have you heard, and yes, we saw him a couple of times, he came through.

I remember one time I went out to the airport to see somebody off who was leaving and I escorted this visitor to the VIP lounge and shook hands, waved good-bye -- and as that person was walking out to the plane, walking in from the same plane was Smiling Sam accompanied by two or three people. I realized it was a whole bunch of people from the Ministry or the Presidency or something to meet him there. So I just hung out in the VIP lounge, sat in the back row and listened to his press conference and reported it all. He didn't really have anything to say but he was saying it in Zimbabwe and so of course the Department wanted to know what was going on -- what he was there for. I think he just came for overnight to check signals with the Mugabe government.

But Zimbabwe wasn't really active because they had no border. I think the borders touch. There's a tri-point...--

*Q: With Namibia.*

WAGENSEIL: With Namibia, yes.

*Q: But now they had a border with South Africa. Was there any effort to allow the ANC (African National Congress)/PNC (Pan Africanist Congress) to infiltrate South Africa?*

WAGENSEIL: I think that the ANC and PAC were kept on a fairly short leash. It was probably more likely to be the PAC because that was more Mugabe's flavor, Chinese rather than Russian, or at least that was the label. But the South African armed forces were so much better than the Zimbabwean army and better equipped and all that I think they realized, I think the Mugabe government probably realized that the South Africans would have come in and crushed them like an eggshell if they tried to launch an attack across the Limpopo, which is the border. So, they kept their noses clean in that context. There was a lot of rhetoric -- a lot of blah, blah -- and the Zimbabwean ambassador in New York or Brussels or Stockholm or someplace would be ranting and raving, but in Harare it was kind of downplayed a little bit, just because of practical economic relationships. I mean, the other thing was of course that no, they didn't really sell any maize to South Africa but they had to buy everything from South Africa and they had to have an economic relationship. If South Africa had closed the border with Zimbabwe they would have really been in the soup, I think, while if Zimbabwe had closed the border with South Africa South Africa wouldn't have cared. So, it was all pretty lopsided. And that was about the size of it.

There was a large diplomatic community in Harare, in part because it was okay to be there.

*Q: This is worldwide diplomatic community or mainly Africans or-?*

WAGENSEIL: No, no. We had Spain and France and as I said North Korea.

*Q: Well I guess it was kind of the flavor of the month, huh, the new African country that finally transformed to majority rule.*

WAGENSEIL: There was certainly that but there was also the fact that countries which didn't want to have relations or a presence in Pretoria, like Sweden, could have a listening post in Harare and be close enough and I'm sure they traveled down and did reporting and all, as they did from Lesotho at the time. But also it was the flavor of the month, yes, it was new, it was independence, it was "the shining hope of black Africa" kind of thing, and so the French wanted business opportunities, the Germans were looking for business opportunities, I'm sure the Spanish were there for business opportunities although I can't imagine what there would have been for Spain. And there were Latins of various flavors. I can't remember who all was there but it was a pretty large community because I remember when there was a diplomatic fundraising ball or whatever, the raffle, I don't know, there'd be a big turnout and there were a lot of people that we weren't allowed to talk to because it was North Korea, Cuba, etc.

*Q: I can imagine, yes, the revolutionaries.*

*Now at the time Zimbabwe was really economically pretty healthy despite the sanctions and it looked like it could be one of the hopes, if you will, of Africa; did you have a sense already at that time that it might also go down this unfortunate road that it has gone down and end up being such a basket case?*

WAGENSEIL: No, I think -- I'm not an econ officer so I wasn't looking at that, but the theory basically was that it had everything going for it. It had good agricultural land, it was very, very successful as an agricultural producer. They had a lot of industry based on agriculture, food production; they made their own corn flakes, breakfast cereals, flour mills and so forth and so on.

They had great mineral resources. They had a steel mill in Zimbabwe because there was a point -- the place in Zimbabwe called Redcliff where there was of major vein of iron ore about three miles away from a limestone deposit and about 150 miles or something like that -- across a level plain -- from coal. So, they built a railroad from the coalmine to the iron mine, trucking in limestone, and made steel. And they did and they were self-sufficient in steel throughout the Rhodesian -- the Ian Smith era. It's one reason they survived. They had all these things going for them.

The only thing that gave people pause, and I remember I was concerned about it and again -- I'm not an econ officer but -- was that the currency was not convertible and they made no effort to make their currency convertible. They could easily have struck a deal with Britain or the common market as it was at the time or somebody, Australia, to peg their dollar to the Aussie dollar or something but they chose not to do that for sovereignty. That was Mugabe's favorite word, "sovereignty." We are sovereign and we'll do whatever the hell we want and phooey to the rest of you. He used stronger language than that. But that decision not to join the international community in terms of currency made me a little nervous.

*Q: And of course I suppose all of the communist inclinations could have been a danger sign?*

WAGENSEIL: Well there was -- Certainly. I mean the Marxism rhetoric... Again, the Russians, the Soviets were there in force and the Chinese were there and the Cubans were there, so one had concerns about those influences and of course they had great access because they'd been very supportive of the independence struggle.

But at the time the Minister of Finance was Bernard Chidzero who had worked at the World Bank here in Washington for 18 years or something and he was seen as a steady hand on the tiller, and the government had, at that time, really made no move to expropriate the farms of the commercial farmers. The "commercial farmers" is the euphemism for the white farmers who were all -- they ran large enterprises with large, profitable land and big farms with equipment and tractors and lots of employees and so forth and so on. And they certainly out-produced what the Zimbabwean farmers could produce on their little tiny plots or their marginal land. I mean, the system was that the commercial farming areas were the good land and the "Tribal Trust Areas" were the

marginal or rocky soil -- that you couldn't grow anything in anyway -- so it's okay to give it to the blacks, and that's the way the system had been. The Zimbabweans, of course, wanted to change that and they talked about changing it but throughout the time I was there (1982-85) it was always on the basis of willing seller/willing buyer, so there were no forced expropriations of land. There were some commercial farmers who gave up, what they called the chicken run; they sold and ran away, they went to South Africa, they went to Australia. But more often than not their properties were bought by other commercial farmers because of course the black farmers, black middle class was just getting started and didn't have the resources to buy a farm with all the tractors and the threshers and the silos and so forth and so on. But yes, one was concerned about the rhetoric, but one saw the practice and one said well okay, he's behaving himself... They're doing it right, they're not scaring the farmers away. In fact the Minister of Agriculture was white; Dennis Norman was the Minister of Agriculture, he had been the head of the Commercial Farmers Union and when Vice President George Bush came to visit under the Reagan Administration I remember there was a meeting with Minister of Agriculture Dennis Norman and that was the subject of their conversation. In fact, I have a picture; I was the note taker. And it could have been a very -- we had a lot of contact with Norman because he wanted to have contact with us -- and of course with the Brits as well -- but he did not seem to fear economic catastrophe or expropriation or anything.

*Q: So when you left, which was '85?*

WAGENSEIL: Correct.

*Q: Things looked pretty good still.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, 1985 was halfway through the 10-year period built into the Lancaster House Agreement that kept certain guarantees in place in the constitution for the white community. It kept seats in parliament for them and I can't remember exactly but there may well have been some guarantees about land ownership -- "willing seller, willing buyer" requirements built into the Lancaster House agreement to ease the transition. And actually the elections, the first elections of independence in Zimbabwe took place just as we were leaving, five years into the country's history, and the white by-elections, the white elections were taking place on a separate schedule from the majority black elections and I observed white elections in several towns and then we were scheduled to leave and two weeks after we left was the black round of elections, which again ZANU/PF, or ZANU, won handily because of the show of support for Mugabe.

But it seemed to be working and there was not really any harsh rhetoric about how the Lancaster House agreement was unfair or inequitable or should be thrown out. There was none of that.

*Q: So maybe that takes us to the end of Zimbabwe, the middle of '85. Where were you heading after that?*

WAGENSEIL: After that I was transferred to Dakar. I was assigned as the political officer at Embassy Dakar, Senegal.

*Q: Was that a job that you wanted?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. It was back to Francophone Africa, back to West Africa, which I knew. I had been to Senegal a couple times from service in Mali and passed through there after my Peace Corps service, actually. So, I was interested. It was a stable, moderately wealthy country and I was to be the head of the political section, so yes.

*Q: What kind of political section was that?*

WAGENSEIL: Not very big, a couple or three people.

*Q: Was it still the days of Leopold-Senghor?*

WAGENSEIL: No. Senghor had stepped aside three years previously, something like that, in one of these coordinated, orchestrated transitions. He resigned as President and the person who was Prime Minister moved up. Abdou Diouf became President without an election, in effect, but very much in the tradition of the Socialist Party of Senegal, or PS (Parti Socialiste du Sénégal), which was the dominant party. It wasn't very socialist, frankly, but it was -- it carried that label from its origins, in the labor movement in France.

*Q: Now Senegal at the time of independence was one of the premiere French colonies, perhaps along with Côte d'Ivoire.*

WAGENSEIL: Right.

*Q: Did it still retain that status by '85?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, Senegal had been the seat of the Governor General of French West Africa. Dakar had been the seat of the Governor General, whatever he was called, and the Presidency building had been the Governor General's offices, prominently located on the cliff in Dakar. So yes, Senegal was very much one of the premiere countries in French-speaking West Africa. It was not as economically successful as Côte d'Ivoire had been because it had less rainfall, simply put. It was much more arid, more of the Sahel and no, well a little bit of rain forest in the Casamance region below Gambia. But that was not a very productive area.

The main product, the main agricultural trade was peanuts, which Senegal grew in profusion and shipped them off to France or pressed them and shipped the oil off to France. The French mercantile empire was such that the -- Indochina grew rice for the French Empire and everybody in the French Empire of the time -- you know, before -- ate rice grown in Indochina, in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos. Senegal, which of course could easily have grown rice along the Senegal River or the Gambia River, wasn't supposed to

grow rice. Neither was Mali, neither was Côte d'Ivoire at the time under the French. Senegal was assigned the role of growing peanuts, which were pressed for oil and shipped to Marseilles and made into Marseilles soap, which was then shipped back to Saigon, you see. That was the way the French --

*Q: I good mercantile system.*

WAGENSEIL: Absolutely. And it made sense at the time, I guess. But the Senegalese had never eaten rice, of course, before the French got there and brought rice from Indochina. Senegalese had eaten millet and sorghum and stuff like that -- which grew in the region -- but those were frowned upon as being sort of lesser, sort of peasant food and the "truly sophisticated" eat rice, you see, which has to be imported from Vietnam or someplace. The Thailand Embassy was a big player in Senegal for that reason.

*Q: Now politically, which is what you were following, and you were there, this was a three-year tour?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, 1985 to '88.

*Q: Eighty-five to '88. What was the context here? Was Senegal still one of the African leaders? Was it still subservient to France?*

WAGENSEIL: Well it was stable. It was somewhat prosperous although it had been affected by the droughts which afflicted the Sahel. It was very much a leader in the intellectual sense and I'll talk about that in a minute. There was a French military contingent based there, the BEMA, 20 32nd BEMA, which is a French Marine brigade. But it was not really perceived as a leader in Africa, I don't think, because it was so French, it was so French-French. I mean, Leopold Senghor was "the poet president" -- he was a member of the Académie Française, he had married a French woman, he had a house in the Loire Valley, he had written books of poetry in exquisite French, and certain people in the rest of Africa didn't see him as very African.

*Q: Did the Senegalese French textbooks still start with "Nos ancêtres les Gaules"?*

WAGENSEIL: Probably, yes, yes. But on the other hand, I mean there was a certain snobbism in Senegalese society, a certain strata of Senegalese society which said yes, this is the ideal. We all want to grow up to be black Frenchmen as Monsieur Senghor has successfully done. And so, there was very much an effort to get a good education, to go to France if at all possible for university -- or graduate work anyway -- and to drive a nice European car, a Peugeot, probably everybody wanted to drive a Mercedes -- because of course that was seen as the best European car -- but they would settle for a good Peugeot or-

*Q: Citroen, I guess.*

*This is tape four, side B, March 18, 2008. Peter Eicher continuing the interview with Steve Wagneseil.*

WAGENSEIL: President Diouf had come to power in a non-democratic transition, if you will. I mean, constitutionally correct because the president resigned and the prime minister became president according to the laws but there were those who complained that it wasn't democratic, there wasn't an election. And Senegal didn't really seek, I don't think, any leadership role in African affairs at the time. I mean, Africa was very different than it is now; it was much less interested in helping each other out or intervening to help others. ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States) existed but it wasn't active, there was no ECOWAS force in Liberia or anything at the time.

*Q: And was French influence a preponderance still?*

WAGENSEIL: French influence was absolutely preponderant. The French embassy was the big shot in town. As I said there was a French Marine battalion there, brigade or something, I guess. And French business was very much everywhere; French banks, French import/export companies, shipping, everything. And it truly helped that our ambassador, U.S. Ambassador Lannon Walker, was absolutely fluent in French, married to a French woman -- and also that I, fluent in French, married to a woman fluent in French; that helped a lot.

*Q: Who was the American ambassador?*

WAGENSEIL: Lannon Walker.

*Q: Ah.*

WAGENSEIL: And actually his predecessor, Charlie Bray, had, I'm told, required that everybody -- that every position at the embassy was a language designated position. Everybody who came had to have some level of French. You couldn't come in with nothing, you had to have at least a two, I think, or a one plus, and that made a difference in our being able to get the jobs done as diplomatic representatives.

*Q: Now this would suggest that all government business was still transacted in French rather than Wolof or one of the other local languages.*

WAGENSEIL: Absolutely. No Wolof, everything was done in French.

And coming back to Dakar's place in the French colonial empire, the French colonial expansion started in Senegal, started in Dakar because that was the first point that they reached on their explorations as they sailed around the coast of Africa. And so that was the first colony and the penetration into Mali came from Dakar. And then Abidjan was settled later and the penetration up to Upper Volta came from Abidjan and so forth. And the first schools were set up in Senegal, in Dakar, and then later the first High Schools and then the first University. So, the educational system was the most advanced, in



Senegal, and as a result the first high school graduates in Francophone Africa were Senegalese and the first university graduates in Francophone Africa were Senegalese.

And that led to the growth and flowering of what I fondly call the Senegalese Mafia, the Senegalese Human Rights Mafia. Kéba Mbaye was a judge on the International Court and taught at the University of Dakar. One of his protégés was Ibrahima Fall, who became the Dean of the Law School at the University of Dakar and was, when I was there he was the Foreign Minister of Senegal -- and later we knew him as the Assistant UN Secretary General for human rights and head of the Human Rights Center in Geneva. And dozens of other Senegalese educated in this chain got into human rights work, working for the UN or working for Amnesty International or the International Commission of Jurists or whatever. So there was very much an aristocracy of Francophonie, if you will, and they were very proud of that. But all was sort of under the aegis of the Métropole and the French government.

At the same time, of course, they had to interact with their African brethren and I remember at one point there was a visit by Colonel Qadhafi from Libya who flew in for a couple of days and that was a bit of a spectacle -- Senegal agreed to greet him and meet with him and so forth. I think he probably invited himself. But you know, they professed African brotherhood and fondness forever and stuff like that.

*Q: Relations with the United States, I suppose, were good?*

WAGENSEIL: Relations with the U.S. were good. We had good access. They were very much on the American wave length. They were anti-communist, anti-revolutionary. They did not support Qadhafi's adventures -- for example -- they didn't support SWAPO, they didn't support the ANC -- except, you know, lip service -- but they weren't actively supporting the freedom struggle anywhere particularly. They felt very strongly that independence is the sort of thing that you earn, you know, by good behavior.

*Q: Although they would not have been a big Cold War player in any sense.*

WAGENSEIL: No. No, no. We did have one ship visit while I was there, I think, but it was, you know, a mine sweeper or something, doing kind of a ritual passage around the coast.

As I say, the French had a military base there, and that clearly identified their leanings.

*Q: So as head of the political section what would you have been spending your time on?*

WAGENSEIL: I was mostly interested in, I covered foreign affairs, foreign relations, -- you know, the annual UNGA Demarche and so forth -- but also domestic politics because there were presidential elections coming, and as I said since President Diouf had not been elected there were several people ready to challenge him.

*Q: So Senegal was not one of the one-party states in Africa?*

WAGENSEIL: It was not, no, it was not a one-party state. There was not even the pretense -- there was no attempt to be a one-party state. It was avowedly a multi-party state, but not surprisingly the system was structured in such a way as to favor the predominant party. Other parties were permitted to exist and to have rallies and candidates and newspapers and whatnot, although they didn't get very far because they didn't have much following, because most of the Senegalese were quite happy with the way the system was going -- they were pretty well taken care of and they got their jobs through the government or whatever, so there wasn't much challenge. The intellectual crowd -- a certain strata of society -- were the ones who cared about politics in a philosophical sense.

The political class was not very big and only a limited number of people would argue about representation in the parliament -- or the number of seats there should be, or who should be in those seats, and how to allocate constituencies, and all those technical things that so preoccupied people. The political debate was not really sort of on a conservative/liberal scale or anything like that; it was "Who's in power and who's out?" and "How do I get in?"

*Q: Was it tribal politics or Senegal, I suppose, was more cohesive than some countries.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, they were much more cohesive. I mean, there were, there was, there had been some frictions -- troubles, not exactly a separatist movement -- down in the south of the country in the Casamance area, which is south of the Gambia enclave. It is a different geographic area, a different foliage and a different ethnic group than the majority Wolof but even there, they were split amongst the various supporters or various factions. No, Senegal was much more uniform than some other countries had been in. The split, the division that we were looking at, that I was most aware of -- I guess, because the embassy was looking at it -- was the split between religious factions and these are the "brotherhoods," the religious brotherhoods that sort of covered the whole country. The principal one -- the one that had been traditionally the one in authority, not in power but in positions of authority -- were the Tidjane.

*Q: These are Muslim brotherhoods.*

WAGENSEIL: Muslim brotherhoods. The Tidjane originated in Morocco, in Fez or someplace, and they all are Sunni but they were -- they just had to do with which "marabout" you followed. Marabout is the teacher or the religious leader that you're affiliated with, sort of like the Reverend Wright in Chicago.

*Q: Sort of clan to some extent?*

WAGENSEIL: To a certain extent clan but it cut across clan. I mean, it was much more of a social strata thing, I think.

*Q: As a political officer this must have been kind of hard to break into.*

WAGENSEIL: Well it was difficult. First of all it was difficult to understand because I'd never had any experience with it but secondly of course it wasn't anything that people would necessarily talk about easily.

The other main brotherhood and growing tremendously in power while we there -- and now of course even more so -- was the Mourides, which was an indigenous school. It was based in the town of Touba where a religious preacher had first come forth and he had been persecuted -- or at least prosecuted -- by the French colonial authorities for having criticized French rule. And he was arrested for anti-French rhetoric and jailed for a while, was an exile, came back and so forth and so on. He was very much seen as the spiritual leader of this entire brotherhood and they had a very successful work ethic that the followers were called upon -- from a very young age -- to work for the brotherhood and to tithe to the brotherhood and to follow the teachings and follow the instructions of the leaders and the young people. These followers were called the "Talibé" -- which of course is "the Taliban" in a different pronunciation -- but it just meant the disciples or the followers of the Mouride brotherhood. And you go out to Touba, which is the seat of this brotherhood, and you drive out into the wastelands of the Sahel in Senegal, in the middle of Senegal, and there is this huge mosque, I mean huge thing, and this very prosperous town.

If you travel in Europe anywhere -- or in New York City -- and there's a guy on the sidewalk selling sunglasses, an African on the sidewalk selling sunglasses or -- sunglasses if the sun is shining, umbrellas if it's raining or Gucci handbags or whatever it is -- he's a Mouride from Senegal. There's no doubt about it. There are thousands of them, and it's very much part of their religious philosophy to go out and make a fortune and to bring money home to the community. And we had people come into the embassy to get visas to come to the States and they'd come over and they were not intending immigrants. I mean, they really didn't have two pennies to rub together but they'd come over basically with one set of clothes and money from the village and they'd buy a suitcase here and they'd fill it up -- with baby clothes or shoes or T-shirts or whatever -- and bring it back and sell it for a fortune in Senegal, and they'd just keep making trips, six times a year, eight times a year. And likewise to Europe, of course.

I remember walking around a European city in Strasbourg, in Venice, in Madrid or something, and you'd see a guy selling sunglasses, an African selling sunglasses, and you'd just go "Na Nga Def," which is "good morning," and he'd respond automatically in Wolof.

*Q: I think I spent a long time with such a person in Venice buying a purse one time.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, yes.

*Q: It was great fun negotiating in French.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Now, does their being Muslim, how did that relate to their being good Frenchmen?*

WAGENSEIL: It was not a problem. The Senegalese Muslims were not extremists, were not fundamentalists, were not fanatical, and a significant portion of the Senegalese community was Christian or at least non-practicing Muslim. I mean I know a number of my contacts would interrupt an afternoon meeting or a morning meeting to pray but others didn't, and several of them offered me whiskey if I was there for lunch. They certainly accepted whiskey, they drank a lot of champagne on appropriate occasions, that sort of thing, so they were not particularly hard line about their Islam and they were certainly not fundamentalist in the Islamist tradition.

The Mouride brotherhood more so. They were much more the villagers, they were much more the farmers, the peasants, the lower socioeconomic class, and strict adherence to religious teachings was more likely to be followed in Touba. You couldn't -- there was no alcohol to be found in the Mouride capital town but they weren't fanatical about it, they didn't try to impose it on others.

*Q: So who won the election?*

WAGENSEIL: Ah. The elections took place, I'm trying to remember, I think it was in '88, early '88; it might have been '87, I've lost track. And there were six or seven candidates for president. President Diouf was head of the Socialist Party. Abdoulaye Wade was the candidate, if I remember correctly, of the Social Democratic Party (PDS). And there were a bunch of others from other parties, which of course effectively split the opposition vote. And under the leadership of Ambassador Walker we organized the diplomatic community to observe the elections. It was not organized in a way that you and I know election observation now, 20 years later -- systematic with check sheets and arm bands and all -- but we did try to split up the country and cover different districts and so forth and then we all got back together at the end of the day or the two days and compared notes and so forth and so on. Our conclusion was that the election -- there were violations of the rules -- people wearing party regalia while voting, women in Abdou Diouf tee-shirts or, you know, skirts, wraparound skirts with Socialist Party symbols on them and that sort of thing but...

*Q: Which was against the rules, of course.*

WAGENSEIL: Which was against the rules but probably not a problem. Our conclusion was that the results of the voting did reflect the will of the people and that President Diouf was elected because the Socialist Party was the most popular and he was the most popular candidate. But Dakar -- I don't want to say Dakar "burst into flames" -- but there were significant demonstrations, barricades, burning tires and whatnot as a result of the dissatisfaction of the heavily urbanized and outlying areas of Dakar. These were people who migrated to the city from the countryside over the previous years and who were most politicized and who had been the most active supporters of the oppositions. They thought they were robbed and thought the elections were rigged -- they were not fair and so forth

and so on -- and so there were demonstrations. And barricades and parts of the city were shut off and we had to send people home and pull the kids out of school and so forth for some time -- two or three days.

*Q: Some political excitement for you.*

WAGENSEIL: There was indeed, yes. And actually, Abdoulaye Wade -- who had been the principal challenger to Diouf -- was arrested and put on trial for organizing sedition or something. And the trial lasted like six weeks and I went to the trial. You know, I had met him many times and been in pretty close contact with some of his campaign advisors and been to several of his political rallies as I had been to others and so forth. I was the embassy observer at the trial and there were a couple of others from other embassies. He was defended by- wait a minute, I've lost his name- the French lawyer who's always defending the most radical revolutionary firebrand; there was just a book about him. Anyway.

And I was at the trial every day where there was a public session; it was at the Supreme Court building out on the peninsula of Dakar and I was there when he was acquitted. He and all of his co-defendants were acquitted of attempting to overthrow the government or anything because basically, as far as I can remember, the prosecution didn't have a case for any kind of organized rebellion. There was rebellion and it was in support of him but it had not been organized by anybody, it was pretty spontaneous, I believe.

*Q: So a reasonable judicial system as well.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. There had been challenges to the elections, to the voting, and the count was supervised by the Supreme Court and I met frequently with the Chief Justice and he walked me through the stages of the vote-counting process and I remember seeing metal footlockers in his office piled up, the seal still on them and so forth. He said, "It's all there -- it's all very straightforward and aboveboard." No, they were very, very proud of their rule of law and it was pretty good. It was all above-board and by the book and as a result, as I say, the government lost the case and he was acquitted and released, and of course as a result of that kids burned some more tires in celebration. And I remember us walking out of the court building onto the front steps and you look northward from the front steps towards the center of Dakar and I could see smoke rising and I said "Not again!" -- but it was just a celebration and nothing else really transpired.

As a footnote to that I'd like to mention that when I went back to Dakar in 2000 or early 2001 for a meeting preparing for the UN's World Conference on Racism, the African Regional conference was in Dakar and President -- at that time the new president -- Abdoulaye Wade, addressed the conference, the UN conference, and then afterwards there was a bit of a reception. He came up to me and said, "It's good to see you again" and I said, "It's great to see you, *Monsieur le Président*, times have changed." He said, "Yes, yes, yes," with a twinkle in his eye. So that was kind of cute.

*Q: Very nice, very nice.*

WAGENSEIL: But in terms of domestic politics it was pretty -- I mean, it was active, it was interesting but there was nothing really, aside from this flurry around the elections.

One thing I would say, I suppose, and maybe this will have to be edited out, I don't know what the rules are, but we had a pretty rosy view of the Senegalese political system and we were pretty comfortable. But we had a visit at one point before the election cycle really started from some analysts from Washington who came out and told us "It's all going to burn and there's going to be trouble here." And we said, "Ah, what are you talking about?" And they said, "No, no, no, we've done the calculations, we've run our models, we've analyzed the analyzed and whatever and you're going to have trouble." And the Embassy staff, led by the Ambassador and myself and the DCM, basically said, "Nah, never happen, no problems," and of course it did happen. Not as bad as they had predicted but not as smooth as we had predicted, which in retrospect was kind of sobering for me as a political analyst, but anyway...

It was pretty good. We had a nice lifestyle, we were able to travel around the country, visit different places, Peace Corps projects and AID projects and whatnot. And of course, I must mention, because I neglected to mention it when we were talking about my Bamako service, WAIST. Have you heard of WAIST?

*Q: WAIST?*

WAGENSEIL: The West Africa Invitational Softball Tournament.

*Q: Ah, no, I can't say that I know that. I thought you were going to speak about toxic waste or something.*

WAGENSEIL: No, no, no. No, WAIST is, I assume it's still going on, but it was great fun when I was posted in Mali and in Senegal. It's an annual softball tournament for people who play softball at the various posts in West Africa and every year they'd get together in a different place. And when I was posted in Bamako the WAIST tournament was in Bamako one year and in Dakar one year and when I was posted in Dakar it was in Niamey once and in Dakar one year. And it's usually, I guess, around Easter weekend, right about this time of year, and people fly in from different embassies and it's not all Americans, it's Canadians and Aussies and whoever wants to play softball in the local community on Sunday afternoons. And once a year they get up a team -- not everybody can make the trip -- get up a team, fly off to the host country and there's a weekend of softball, round robin and championship. And everybody has a great time.

And actually when I was posted in Bamako I was engaged and I flew to Dakar for the tournament and my fiancée flew to Dakar on the same flight, the same special ticket, to visit her aunt and uncle who lived in Dakar to shop for material for her wedding gown, wedding dress, because there wasn't any good material in Bamako but there was a good tailor, a seamstress who could put it together. And actually, while I was in Dakar on that

trip I went to a stationery shop and bought paper stock for the printing of our wedding invitations.

So, the WAIST had a special meaning for us and later, when we hosted them the WAIST in Dakar, we had people from Bamako stay with us. And we went to- or I went to Niamey for the WAIST the following year as my only chance to get to Niger.

So we had a good group of people. Again, Dakar had a very big diplomatic community.

*Q: Good schools? Did you have to send the kids to French school or did you want to send the kids to French school?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, Anthony was in a French pre-school or kindergarten or something at that point and Kevin was only born when we were stationed there. Jamilée was pregnant there.

*Q: Was he born in Dakar?*

WAGENSEIL: No, no, she came back. He could have been, I suppose. But no, the RMO told us there was no place in Dakar that was adequate, so he was born in Rhode Island, in Providence, because she came stateside. He was born in the summertime of 1985 so it was summer vacation kind of thing, and I flew back for two weeks.

The Embassy was starting an American school just as I was leaving and I was quite happy to be leaving and not be involved in that process because I saw it as a bit of a headache. To get started with an American school in a town with a very small Anglophone population and a very well established and rather jealous French educational system.

*Q: I bet, I bet.*

*Did the U.S. and State Department in particular seem to have much interest in Senegal at the time? Did you get visits?*

WAGENSEIL: We had some visits. But it wasn't frantic. I mean, you know, there were demarches and reporting requirements and as I said UNGA instructions and that sort of thing but nothing very energetic. We did get a fair amount of African American tourists -- looking for their roots kind of thing -- because just off Dakar harbor, in the port, is Gorée Island, which was the shipping point for the slave trade from the Senegambia area. And there's still a slave house that's maintained as a museum and of course every visitor had to be taken out and given the tour of "The Slave House" and so forth and show where men were chained to the wall and the "Door of No Return" leading out to the sea where they went through the door to the slave ships, never to return. But not a tremendous amount of VIP visits or anything like that. We did have the Secretary of the Treasury come through at one point, a guy named George Shultz, later to become Secretary of State, and we had a couple of congressional visits, but nothing very extraordinary.

But Dakar was also a locus for some regional offices of various U.S. agencies. We had an office attached to the embassy for the Federal Aviation Administration; a couple of guys who were based in Dakar who would travel around West African inspecting airport lighting and airline maintenance facilities and things like that. We had, if I remember correctly, somebody attached to the embassy who was working for the Department of Agriculture although the Attaché, the Ag Attaché himself was, I guess, based in Brussels and would fly down from time to time. Treasury, FBI, we had a legal attaché there for a while, if I remember correctly. We had military attachés, a full panoply of military attachés. My wife worked for the military assistance office; not the attaché's office but the IMET (International Military Education and Training).

*Q: And what else?*

WAGENSEIL: Oh, and we had, and this is important: the airport at Dakar, Yoff, served as the alternate landing site for the space shuttle.

*Q: Oh, interesting.*

WAGENSEIL: In the ballistics of the space shuttle there comes a time after the rocket has lifted off where it's gone so far that it can't go back to land in North America, it has to land on the other side of the Atlantic. And the airport in Dakar was at a place in the trajectory which could be an alternate landing site, emergency landing site. And we would have visits every once in a while from NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). NASA had some equipment at the airport and so forth, and when there was a launch they would have a team on standby at Dakar. And in fact, I was in the airport control tower -- with a contingent of people from NASA listening on the headphones -- when the Challenger blew up.

*Q: Oh my.*

WAGENSEIL: Because we had been designated as an alternate landing site, a Transatlantic alternate landing site, TALS or something like that. And in fact, it is said, although I don't know if this has ever been proven exactly, the launch was delayed from Cape Canaveral, Cape Kennedy, by two days because there had been a sand storm in West Africa, which impeded visibility at Dakar. The air had dust in it and as a result they didn't want to launch because of course if there's a problem during the launch and the shuttle has to glide to earth you only get one chance and you want to have the best possible visibility so you can find the airport. And as a result of this dust storm in West Africa the launch was delayed in Florida and the weather changed in Florida and the O rings froze and the shuttle blew up. And I heard it happen.

*Q: There's a little piece of history that most people won't know about.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. And that was pretty painful. The whole embassy, I mean, the embassy was obviously very caught up in this anyway every time. There had been a



launch, I think, twice before. And to actually hear the disaster happen live, you know -- I had the headphones on, there were a bunch of us there -- was pretty traumatic. There was a memorial service at the embassy a day or two later and the president came and I don't know what all; it was a big deal, put the flag at half-mast. And that did kind of color that relationship, and of course they never did it again; they switched to using runways in Portugal or someplace. But that's the sort of thing that sticks with you. And I still have -- NASA makes up a new patch for each shuttle mission with the names of the astronauts and the different symbols for the shuttle and the sun and the stars, whatever, and I still have the Challenger patch that I was given before the mission.

And we -- the embassy -- had a very good image, the U.S. had a very good image in Senegal. We had good access, people came to our receptions, people came to our social events, our cultural events and of course this got a lot of sympathy from the whole country for this event, this NASA tragedy.

I want to talk about bread. As you know, French bread is famous -- the long baguette, the crunchy crust, the flavorful inside, etc. And the conventional wisdom -- when one asks, "Why can't we make nice bread like that in the USA?" -- is that "It's the flour" or "It's the wheat." So naturally, Ambassador Walker, -- never one to ignore a challenge -- decided to put that conventional "wisdom" to the test. The fact that the USA had a lot of PL-480 wheat to sell and we wanted Senegal to buy some -- but the Senegalese bakeries were resisting our generous offer -- was probably part of this calculus as well. So anyway, the Ambassador wanted to prove that American wheat can be used to make French(-style) bread, and to do this in the face of active resistance, nay hostility, from the bakers and consumers of Dakar.

The Ambassador quietly organized a complex, well-designed plan to prove his point. The Embassy brought in (I won't say we "smuggled," because I don't recall how it was done) a couple of bags of flour -- maybe a pallet-load -- made from American wheat. The Ambassador persuaded (again, I don't think I ever knew the details) a bakery in Dakar to make standard baguettes with this imported wheat. Actually, of course, all wheat flour in Senegal is made from imported wheat -- it's just that the bakery guild had an "arrangement" with Les Grands Moulins de Dakar -- the French-owned flour mills -- to only use their flour. So the Ambassador had the flour, he had the bakery, now all he needed was to penetrate the market.

He did this by a complex, highly-coordinated process of bringing fresh, splendidly odorous, crunchy-hot baguettes, early in the morning, from the bakery to the desks of each and every decision-maker in the Senegalese Government -- for a period of two weeks, I believe. The bread was first brought to the Embassy (I believe that's right) and a pair of loaves were wrapped with a nice American-style red/white/blue ribbon, accompanied by a sealed card "with the Ambassador's compliments," and then the Embassy fleet fanned out across the downtown area, delivering the bread to each Minister, each Permanent Secretary of the Government. (And, of course, there was also a pair of loaves for the Minister's Secretary, the PermSec's secretary, so the delivery for the Minister would not get diverted, or "lost.")

The phones quickly started ringing. I think the French Ambassador was the first, but it might have been their Commercial Counselor. They were, as expected, outraged: “What are you doing? You know you cannot make les baguettes françaises with le farine américain...!” And more to the point: “Which bakery did this for you??” More slowly, there were calls from the various government offices, with the Ministers or whomever expressing thanks for the gift of nice bread, which, they admitted, was not that bad.

So the Senegalese government resistance to the purchase of American PL-480 flour was significantly eroded. But we never made the sale, as I recall, because the French quickly undercut our price, or reinforced their monopoly agreement with the mills, or strong-armed the bakery association, or something. In any case, the effort failed – but it made a wonderful splash for a week or two.

What else did I want to talk about Senegal? Senegambia, the Casamance, I mentioned Casamance a little bit there, had been some trouble, but it was basically quiet. It wasn’t entirely over, it is now, finally. I went down to Gambia -- I went down to Casamance by land one time, which involved driving down and driving across the Gambia, which is only about this wide, taking a boat across the river and actually never technically entering the Gambia at all. And I went down one time by plane and spent a couple of days there talking to people. And it was very different, a very different countryside; it was rain forest, much like southern Cote d’Ivoire in a way, green and big trees and so forth, and you could see why it was -- the people had a very different cultural background, different history and really didn’t see themselves as part of Senegal, which was sort of up there because the Gambia sticks in so far and there’s no way around, really, you have to go through Gambia to get to Senegal. I guess now there’s a road but it wasn’t very reliable at the time.

And at one point while I was posted in Dakar I was asked to be “Chargé for a Day” in Bissau.

*Q: Ah.*

WAGENSEIL: The Embassy in Guinea-Bissau had been without an Ambassador for the longest time. I think the Department was struggling with the question of whether it should even bother to have an Embassy in Bissau because it was such an unfriendly government. It was very much caught up in the revolutionary mindset of the PAIGC, Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde -- socialists, communists, anti-America or at least not pro-America -- but we had an embassy there and we had a very small staff of very junior personnel and so they were rotating -- I mean, most of the time they would allow the admin officer, who was an FSO 3 or something like that, to be the Chargé because nothing much was happening. But Ambassador Vernon Walters, our PermRep in New York, head of USUN, was planning a trip to Africa, including a visit to Guinea-Bissau. So the Department in its wisdom figured it needed someone a little more senior to head the Embassy to prepare for his visit and to accompany him on meetings and -- you know -- take notes and whatever. And so, I was asked to go down to be the

Chargé for a couple weeks, to set it up. And there had been others and our Consular Officer, Betsy Anderson, supervised the consular operation in Bissau -- and in several other places like Cape Verde -- and so she had been down to Bissau a couple of times. And the folks there would come up from time to time on a pouch run, come up to civilization and bring the diplomatic pouch. So, I had a fairly good briefing on what I would need to do to be the chargé down there.

And the first thing that people told me was to bring food -- because they really didn't have anything. The economy had tanked, there wasn't anything available, very limited imported goods and so on. And so, I took two diplomatic pouches with me. One was a diplomatic bag which contained a burlap bag with potatoes and onions and carrots and stuff like that and the other diplomatic bag, big orange bag, contained a cooler that contained chicken and beef -- because if the U.S. Ambassador to the UN was going to come on a visit one would have to have some kind of social event and feed people and that meant you had to have food. So, I took down these two diplomatic pouches and a little suitcase for myself.

And I was there, I think, nine days. It was supposed to be two weeks but the visit got scrubbed because Colonel Qadhafi was doing something weird or something and Ambassador Walters had to stay in New York. I mean, everybody said afterwards that basically the only purpose of his trip was to get another visa in his passport and to practice another one of his 17 languages.

But anyway, I was there for nine days and I left all the food behind for the staff who were ecstatic, of course, and I made some courtesy calls and got to know some people, did some reporting -- because there were some things that I heard from people and talked to people about. But that was my foray into Bissau.

While there, I went on a field trip one Saturday. The president, President Vieira, was going up to visit the agricultural fair in Cacheu, not very far from Bissau but it's not a very big country anyway, and the dip corps was invited to go along. The dip corps in Bissau, of course, was pretty small. But it was something to do and it was a chance to see some of the country so I went. And the road was absolutely, absolutely atrocious. We could only do about seven miles an hour because of potholes and whatnot. And the fastest part of the journey was on the ferry crossing across a river or an estuary or something. We got to Cacheu for the agricultural fair and it was a series of little stands covered with palm fronds with little bitty wooden tables with maybe three tomatoes, a hand of bananas, a couple of yams -- absolutely pitiful produce displayed -- and some scrawny chickens and one thin pig -- that kind of thing. It was really quite extraordinary, and if nothing else I realized how poor the country was from seeing that. And the president, accompanied by his various bodyguards walked along and said nice things to people and so forth, but that was quite an extraordinary experience.

The other thing that I remember in Bissau is visiting the store, the hard currency store for diplomats, which had Cuban cigars, Bacardi rum from Cuba, whiskey from Scotland -- all of the luxuries, chocolate from Switzerland, everything for people with hard currency.

And basically, the diplomatic corps, a very limited number of people who had business connections and certain government officials -- and you had to have the right kind of I.D. card to get in; it was very, very restricted. And I think there was probably a limit on what you could buy at any one time -- but the average Bissau resident couldn't even get near the place, of course, which was also telling. And that was my adventure in Bissau.

*Q: Very nice, very nice.*

*Okay. Well, this takes us about to the middle of 1988?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Okay, you've been out now-*

WAGENSEIL: Well we went-

*Q: For six years?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, six years. We went out in '82 for Zimbabwe so for six years. I mean, my career, basically, was two tours out, one tour back, two tours out, one tour back all the way through. Some people never come back. You and I have a mutual friend in that category, and some people never go out. But I sort of did it that way, two and one, and so it was time after two tours in Africa to come back to the Department, so I transferred back to a position as the Africa expert, if you will, in the office of UN political affairs-

*Q: A position I know well.*

WAGENSEIL: -in the Bureau of International Organizations, IO/UNP, where I was the successor to Nick Stigliani, who had served in, if I remember correctly, he served in South Africa while I was in Zimbabwe and then he served in Dakar before I got there, something like that. Anyway. And then I followed him to IO/UNP, was, I think, your successor there? Something like that.

*Q: May have been or maybe once removed, I can't remember exactly who was my successor.*

WAGENSEIL: In any case, in any case. So, I got back to the Department in summer of 1988 and-

*Q: He must have been my successor then because I had that job until 1985 so there wouldn't have been time for two.*

WAGENSEIL: That probably fits. Anyway... And August in IO/UNP was very much the pre-UNGA frenzy, as you doubtless recall, getting ready for the General Assembly and of course getting ready for the general debate and the VIP speeches and the secretary's presence in New York but that was all handled at higher pay grades than mine. I was

working mostly on all the resolutions about Africa that would come up, mainly the standard ones about “the Racist Apartheid South Africa Regime” and a couple of other things, Namibia, the independence negotiations for South-West Africa. And various other issues -- Colonel Gaddafi.

Can I go back to Senegal for a minute before I forget?

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: Sorry. One thing that happened while we were in Senegal was the U.S. Air Force did a major airlift back to the States through Dakar Airport with big planes, C-5s, C-141s, flying through, overnighing in Dakar Airport and all this stuff. I mean, huge aircraft, bigger than the terminal building. What it was, Colonel Qadhafi’s adventure in the Aouzou Strip in northern Chad had been unsuccessful. He had withdrawn in haste and left a lot of material behind and the Chadian government didn’t want it, and so we got it.

*Q: Ah. Soviet equipment as opposed to-*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. It was an effort to scoop up and analyze Soviet-made aircraft, tanks and whatnot, and so we had this huge flotilla of planes, for about a month, rotating through Dakar.

*Q: Geez. I wonder where they landed in Chad.*

WAGENSEIL: Well they landed up in the north. There’s lots of empty space to put down a runway.

But we had to stand guard on the planes a couple of times -- go out and spend the night sitting in the cockpit of a C-141 all by yourself -- and it had to be a cleared American to manage. At one point there were like six of them on the ground. So that was a glimpse of the might of the US Military.

*Q: Wow.*

WAGENSEIL: Anyway. So, getting to IO/UNP and the UN General Assembly and the debates about Africa and resolutions. And of course there were always resolutions and debates about Israel and Palestinian problems and all the other things that were going on, so then of course we had to lobby the African states to vote our way on those resolutions and so there was a lot going on. Resolutions about apartheid, U.S. speeches about the resolutions about apartheid and we had to write those or clear those -- all of that coordination process. So, there was a lot going on so I kind of plunged right into that when I got back to IO.

But at the same time, the perennial Namibia negotiations were finally bearing fruit. This was in 1988. Security Council Resolution 435 had been adopted 15 years previously, something like that, and had languished for the longest time. Poor Martti Ahtasaari

twiddling his thumbs waiting; he was made Undersecretary General for Administration and Management just to give him something to do so he wouldn't walk away from his Namibia responsibilities. And lo and behold under Chet Crocker the negotiations started to get somewhere. And shortly after I got to IO there was an agreement, signed in New York, by which the transition process was formally launched.

And a Joint Consultative Commission was set up, which comprised representatives of South Africa, Angola, the Soviet Union, Cuba, the United States and the UN, six of us. And the first meeting was in New York in the Trusteeship Council Chamber, in fact -- appropriately, I suppose, although it wasn't a Trusteeship Council event formally. And then there was another session a couple of months later: representatives from all these six governments met in a hotel in Johannesburg and one a couple months after that in Havana. I went along as one of the representatives from IO -- along with, of course, folks from AF and DOD and I don't know who all -- to these various events so I got to go back to Jo'burg and I got to go to Havana (or back to Havana because I'd been there as a kid in pre-Castro days) and eventually they got to Namibia.

The Jo'burg visit was fascinating because there we are, meeting at the Sun Hotel in the middle of Johannesburg, with a delegation from Moscow, a delegation from Havana, a delegation from Luanda, in the middle of Jo'burg. They were long negotiations worrying about commas and semicolons and all the important things that one worries about in these meetings. But we also got a guided tour of Soweto, and our guide was the South African Undersecretary of Foreign Affairs or something like that. We all piled on this tour bus and I find myself sitting next to an Angolan general with a Soviet -- or two Soviet colonels -- in front of us and a Cuban behind us or something like that, and I was kind of there because I spoke Spanish and so I could more or less communicate with these people. The bus was full of us delegates and we're driving around and getting the tour of the squatters' areas in Soweto and "there's Archbishop Tutu's house" and "Winnie Mandela lives over there" and so forth and so on. It was absolutely surreal but it did, I think, help in the confidence-building category, the bonding process -- showing that we're serious about this and we want to deal with you people and they want to deal with us and so forth. And as I said a couple of months later there was another meeting in Havana and we all flew down to Havana. And that was kind of surreal because we took off, the U.S. delegation left from Andrews AFB on a U.S. Air Force plane-

*Q: To go to Havana.*

WAGENSEIL: -and flew into Havana-

*Q: Where you meet the South African delegation.*

WAGENSEIL: -where there was a South African plane and a Russian plane and an Angolan plane, parked next to us on the ramp. And I remember it was very strange.

As I said, I had visited Cuba as a kid with my family, my parents, in like '56 or '57, maybe '57, for three weeks or something, and I had an instant -- it wasn't déjà vu; it was,

in fact, I had been exactly there previously. Got off the plane, walking to the terminal building in Havana Airport and above the building in big letters -- like they used to do in airports -- was the name of the airport. You know -- when you get off; it was like the name on the train station, just so you know where you are, the subway stop. This is the airport name.

So I had visited Cuba as a kid and --

*Q: Walking into the airport.*

WAGENSEIL: Walking into the airport and I look up at the sign and it says Jose Marti -- Cuba's independence hero -- and then it says Habana, H-A-B-A-N-A. And I looked at it and I said they misspelled the name. And then I realized I had done exactly the same thing -- the same double-take -- as a kid, and my mother had explained to be that in Spanish the "B" and the "V" are sort of interchangeable so that's how they spell it in Spanish. And I -- I saw it and I said ah, and then I remembered oh, okay.

So we were there for three days or three nights, in Havana, for negotiations with the Cubans and the Angolans and the Soviets and so on. And they put us in a government guest house -- which was a villa that had belonged to some Cuban doctor who had fled to Miami, of course, and we had a lot of conversations in the bathroom with the water running and that sort of thing -- because we assumed it was thoroughly bugged. And they drove us around in big old Soviet limousines, big clunky old things. And the thing that really freaked me out about the visit to Havana was it looked exactly the same as when I had been there before.

*Q: In 1956.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. There had been no new buildings to speak of. Everything was the same except it lacked paint. The paint had peeled off and not been replaced on the buildings on the waterfront, the Malecon, and the same cars were on the road and it was really kind of surreal.

*Q: Wow. So who was leading the U.S. delegation to these talks?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, it would have been the assistant secretary of state at the time.

*Q: For African Affairs?*

WAGENSEIL: For African Affairs, which would have been Hank Cohen?

*Q: Or was it still Crocker?*

WAGENSEIL: Actually it probably was still Chet.

*Q: Because this would have still been Reagan Administration in '88.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, it was the Reagan Administration.

*Q: This would have spilled into '89 though, right?*

WAGENSEIL: It did, yes, yes, so it may have changed partway through. Yes, it did. But Chet was certainly involved in part of it. And of course I had worked for Chet at the beginning of the Reagan Administration when he came on in 1981 and he had recommended that I go to Zimbabwe. So anyway, that made sense. So I was welcome as part of the team.

But Rich Williamson, was the Assistant Secretary for International Organizations when I started there and then after about a year he left and was replaced by a guy -- you may have heard of -- named John Bolton, who became the Assistant Secretary for IO. And the interesting thing about that was that John had been in my class in college, although we had not known each other but we quickly made that connection. It's about the only connection we have, but anyway...

*Q: And what exactly were you trying to do in these negotiations?*

WAGENSEIL: Well the negotiations were basically to bring about the implementation of Resolution 435 and the transition to the UN-supervised independence for Namibia. So it was to arrange the modalities of the UN Transition Assistance Group, UNTAG, which would come into South-West Africa and take over certain supervisory functions from South African authorities, which would bring in UN civilian police who were there to monitor the South African police force and to monitor the South African preparations for and conduct of the referendum, the elections- it wasn't a referendum, it was elections- it was agreed that there would be independence but there had to be an electoral process and so there was, I guess there was a census exercise of some kind, voter registration, and then the elections themselves, which were in November of '89.

And so we were in these meetings to put together all of the details and dot the "Is" and cross the "Ts" of this transition mechanism and what happens if something goes wrong well then who do you call and who does what and all that kind of decision-tree hierarchy. And the U.S. representative in Windhoek was Roger Maguire. I forget exactly what his title was; he wasn't consul general but he had some kind of title but he was in effect our guy on the ground for the transition. And as far as I know UNTAG was the first real UN peace building mission, nation building, with an electoral component in it.

And I went out on a field visit to South-West Africa, Namibia as it was being called, in September, I think, or October of '89 as things were approaching. And I got back and reported to Assistant Secretary Bolton on my trip. I was reporting back on what I had seen on my visit and I'd driven all over the country. And actually what happened -- I got there, I got to Windhoek and I had like a day of meetings set up for me and then basically the office there, U.S. liaison office, they had rented a car for me and they gave me a map



and they said “Go north.” And I drove up north and then drove around a little bit and came back.

Anyway, I reported back on what I had seen and John said to me, “There’s going to be a Presidential Delegation going out, presidential-appointed delegation going out, to observe the elections in two weeks and I want you to go along.” And I said, “I just got back.” He said, “I know, so you know what you’re looking at.” So basically, I turned around like two days later – with no time to recover from jet-lag -- and went back with this presidential delegation.

One thing interesting, when I was going out there on the first trip, I flew through Frankfurt, I guess, and there was a guy on the plane sitting next to me flying down to Jo’Burg who was German and we were talking about the “end run” that was happening because Czechoslovakia had opened its borders to Germans coming from East Germany going to the West, including West Germany, and in effect it was an end run around the Berlin Wall. And he had just been there and seen it, hundreds of people moving across. And we talked about this on the plane and I said to him, “What’s going to happen? Aren’t they going to try to stop this?” And he said, “I don’t see how they can.” Just a little prequel.

So, went down to Namibia, went back to Namibia with the presidential delegation, which featured Congressman Donald Payne and a couple of other congressmen; Howard Wolpe I’m sure was on it, and people from the Department and from the NSC (National Security Council) and I don’t know who all and we traveled around for, I think I was there for at least a week with them.

Elections, the voting was spread over five days and the place was swarming with journalists because this was a big story, this was The Independence of Namibia, and of course everybody saw this -- as they had seen in Zimbabwe -- as the predecessor to the downfall of The Racist Apartheid South African Regime, so there was a lot of media attention, international attention, and the UN was running it and so they’re looking at how the UN’s performing and of course the U.S. was heavily involved so we were getting a lot of visibility -- so forth and so on.

There had been an incident back in April, beginning of April, where, I think it was just as voter registration was starting or something like that, and SWAPO had sent hordes of people across the northern border of SouthWest from Angola, an armed incursion, in effect. And we heard about it as it was happening that morning. It was a Saturday -- of course -- and I was in the office -- of course -- and we got this news that SWAPO was making an armed incursion into Namibia. So I went galloping over from IO, went galloping over to AF.

Chas Freeman was the DAS (deputy assistant secretary), he was Acting Assistant Secretary, and he had just gotten the news, he was reading the cable about it as I came running in with a couple of other people. And we kind of stood there and looked at each other and somebody said, “What the hell do we do? God, this is an armed invasion, it’s

war, everything's going to come apart, blah, blah..." And I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. The negotiated agreement has a mechanism, there's a process you're supposed to go through when something like this happens." And so, we implemented that, we evoked it, whatever it was, I can't remember the details, and basically the genie was put back in the bottle. But it could have been really ugly.

So, everybody came to watch the elections saying, "What if the balloon goes up?" So, there's all this media attention and the typical election-day stories: people standing in the lines, getting up at 4:00 in the morning, walking 40 kilometers to stand in the sun for four hours so they could cast their first vote ever, that kind of thing. And there were huge crowds the first day and people were standing in line for hours and so forth, and some of them couldn't vote the first day and had to come back the next day. But everything was cool. It was calm, it was quiet, there were no problems.

On the third day all the journalists left, all but about five South Africans, I guess. They all left because A), nothing was happening in Namibia, and B) that day the Berlin Wall fell down. So, my premonition about the "end run" led to -- correctly predicted in my head that something was bound to change in Central Europe and it did. And that was the beginning of the end of the Evil Empire. But we kind of felt cast adrift there because...

*Q: Here you were the big story in the world and suddenly who cares anymore.*

WAGENSEIL: It was over, it was small potatoes. But we hung around waiting for the end of the voting and by the fourth and fifth day most of the polling stations had just closed up because there was nobody left to vote. They'd all voted -- the organizers had been over-cautious in spreading it out over five days. And then we had to wait for the results to be tabulated from around the country, and for the Special Representative of the Secretary General, to proclaim himself as to whether the election was --

*Q: And that was still Martti Ahtisaari?*

WAGENSEIL: It was still Martti Ahtisaari, and he did in fact proclaim that the results had been verified and that SWAPO had won the election and then would hold the majority of seats in the new parliament. And you know, some people regretted that, including some people from the U.S. delegation -- but nobody could really deny it; it had been free and fair.

One thing that we found out kind of funny -- when they were organizing the elections, the UN was bringing in people from all over the world to work on the elections alongside the South Africans who were actually doing it. And there were people from Poland and from Russia, from the Soviet Union, and I remember people in the State Department and elsewhere in the Reagan Administration saying "You're getting Russians to run these elections?" And the argument that we got back was "Well, they've had elections. They know the mechanics. The Poles have held municipal elections and local elections." And I remember visiting one polling station where there were two Soviets and a Pole on duty and in comes the U.S. delegation with a couple of Congressmen, and there was some

nervousness at the beginning; but it all worked out fine, we had a nice little visit. But as for real problems, there was no fraud that we knew of or anything. And the results, as I say, were certified by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General as reflecting the will of the voters, and so that was the end of it.

*Q: And accepted by South Africa as well? Who must have known this would be the outcome.*

WAGENSEIL: I think by then Botha and others had sucked it up and realized that they were going to lose this territory. A very interesting process.

And so that was in November of '89 and independence was set for March, I think, of 1990. But before that happened I was pulled off the African account. Working in IO/UNP (International Organizations United Nations Bureau of Political Affairs) is an extremely high pressure business. A lot of jobs in the State Department are high pressure; that was pretty bad because you've got the General Assembly, you've got Security Council crises, you've got to send out demarche cables, you've got to bring in the responses, you've got to lobby, you've got to write speeches for people in the Security Council or in the General Assembly and this is high visibility, high pressure, short deadline stuff all the time -- and not just about South Africa but always in the Middle East crisis and everything else that's going on in the world; it happens right there.

And my colleague who was the desk officer for Latin America, she just burned out. She had been putting in horrific hours working on the solutions to the Nicaragua/El Salvador/contra dynamic in which the UN was very heavily involved. And one night in January or February of '90, basically she laid her badge on the desk and said "I'm out of here" and she just disappeared. I came in the next morning --

*Q: From the State Department even?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, she quit. She bailed right out. I saw her a couple of years later, a funny story. But anyway, so I come to work the next morning and Molly Williamson, who was the office director by this time, called me into her office and said, "Steve, I need your help." (That's always a bad start to the morning.) And she said, "I'm taking you off the Africa account." She said, "Carol has resigned effective immediately and I need somebody to take care of South America for me, Central and South America. And I remember that you speak Spanish." And I said, "Yes, I do." She said, "Okay, tag, you're It." So, I was abruptly switched to the Latin America portfolio for the remaining four months or three months of my stay in IO.

*Q: Can I ask what happened to Africa? You'd seen Namibia so it didn't matter anymore or-?*

WAGENSEIL: Well what happened was that the office director and the deputy director who had been my supervisor, took up the slack and there was an intern who was working

alongside me there who kind of stepped in to fill in some of the menial work, if you will, and they had the independence ceremony without me.

*Q: Wow, what a shame.*

WAGENSEIL: I always felt shortchanged about that, but anyway... And so, I got to worry about the contras and the rebels in El Salvador and the decommissioning of weapons and all of that peacekeeping stuff and all of the mechanics of that for a few months as my tour came to a close in IO. And nothing else really of interest on my account in IO at that point except the South Africa/Namibia nexus.

*Q: Well that was the big thing for the whole two years in that job, I think.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: You brought it to fruition unlike some of us.*

WAGENSEIL: I was fortunate that it came to fruition while I was there, yes, and I had the chance- I mean, I remember while I was in SouthWest Africa I guess at the end of the CODEL or the presidential delegation, at some point I was driving through the countryside, coming back from somewhere to somewhere else, and I had the radio on and it was playing "Blowing in the Wind" by Dylan, and it was, "How many miles must a man walk down before you can call him a man," and I was thinking "Hey, you know, that's today, that's here -- this is happening right now and I'm part of it." And that was kind of emotional for me to think that I contributed -- in my own little tiny way -- to the successful, peaceful independence of Namibia.

*Q: Those are the big events of the world.*

*Well maybe, looking at our schedule that might be an appropriate time to leave it off and we can take a-*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I'll talk about how I got from IO to my next assignment. Okay?

*Q: We'll do that next.*

*Today is May 29, 2008. It's Peter Eicher continuing an interview with Steve Wagenseil.*

*Steve, you were just about to talk about your next assignment after IO and can you tell us, remind us what the date was and where you were headed?*

WAGENSEIL: This would have been in the summer of 1990 and having worked in IO/UNP for two years as the African expert and primarily on the Namibia independence deal I was in fairly good odor with AF/S (the Office for Southern African Affairs) and so they recruited me to be DCM in Lesotho.

The embassy in Lesotho was very small and Lesotho had actually been a very busy diplomatic post for many years during the apartheid regime because it was a listening post for what was going on inside South Africa. So a lot of countries that did not have relationships with apartheid South Africa had embassies in Lesotho because it was physically inside -- totally surrounded by -- the racist apartheid regime. So, there were Swedes and there were Chinese and there were Soviets and there were, I think there were Cubans there at one point and all these other people and they came in by flying over South Africa from Botswana or someplace and landing in the little tiny airport in Maseru. But before I got there I had to go through the vetting process, to be approved by the ambassador to be the DCM.

*Q: Well let me even step back before that; was this an assignment that you sought? You say the AF recruited you; had somebody come in and drop it on your desk one day or were you looking for it?*

WAGENSEIL: Well I wasn't looking for Lesotho but I was looking for something interesting after working in various embassies and State Department desk jobs and I thought that I was getting up there in the hierarchy well enough, with enough experience, that I could handle the job of being DCM in a small post. And it sort of made sense at that point. I believe I was an FSO 1 by that time and I had enough experience, especially in African Affairs, to aspire to be the deputy chief of mission in a small African post.

*Q: So this was one of several possibilities that might have of interest to you?*

WAGENSEIL: This was one of several possibilities. I don't recall what other posts I bid on at the time but basically the AF/S Office Director, the Deputy Director and the Assistant Secretary, the Deputy Assistant Secretary made it pretty clear I would be their preferred candidate and therefore I was recommended to the Ambassador-designate. Howard Jeter was the DCM at the time in Lesotho. This would have been in the, I guess the very beginning of 1990 when I started through this process; the previous Ambassador had left post and there was a new person who had been nominated by the White House and his name had gone up to the Hill --

*Q: Was it a career person?*

WAGENSEIL: No. This was a political appointee and I confess I don't remember his name but he was the pastor of a church here in Washington, and I don't remember the name of the church either, but it's a historically black, Evangelical, African/Methodist/Episcopalian something or other church in 14th Street or 16 Street, somewhere, in Washington, and he was a loyal Republican and was nominated for the position. However, once his nomination was made public an accusation came forward that -- while he had been serving as Pastor of his church he'd been serving as chaplain at Lorton Prison and administering, chaplain-like, to the prisoners -- he had "forced himself upon the unwilling person" of a prison inmate who brought suit against him. She didn't do it until after he became nominated for the ambassadorial post but as you can imagine that kind of slammed the brakes on his nomination process for a while and ---

*Q: A little embarrassing, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. So I had an interview with him in the Department and it was rather awkward on my part because of course I knew this accusation was out there but it's not the sort of thing you talk about with your perspective boss. "Say sir, did you really molest that vulnerable woman?" And so, we talked about all sorts of things, and of course he knew virtually nothing about the Foreign Service or being an ambassador or about Africa, I think, and so I spent a certain amount of time in this interview telling him what would be involved. He'd been briefed by others, of course, but it was kind of surreal. And then he approved me as his "choice" for DCM and so I went through the process of ending my service in IO and went to the DCM course at FSI which involved a week out in Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, or someplace, where we, you know, went through all the games that one goes through in DCM class but --

*Q: At DCM class -- has a reputation of being one of the great Foreign Service courses. Isn't it a month or something now? Was it only a week when you took it?*

WAGENSEIL: No, no, it was a month -- but we had, I think, one week offsite. It was a very good course. I wish I had had it earlier in my career and I wish I had it like every year. I mean it's really -- I found it really, really meaningful and useful although probably by the time I got to it it was so late in my career I was set in my ways on some matters and couldn't unlearn what I'd been doing before.

One thing I found in the Foreign Service, just to step even further aside from the thread of my narrative, is that when I joined the Foreign Service, I think when you joined, there was really very little training.

*Q: That's right.*

WAGENSEIL: I had a month at ConGen Rosslyn before I went out to Bamako and I had one mid-level course, I think, when I was in AF/C and then I had the DCM course. But there was no tradecraft. I remember the first time somebody told me "write a telegram" and -- No, it was "Write a Diplomatic Note" and I had no idea where to start.

*Q: Well indeed I hadn't even seen one until I got to a post-*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, yes.

*Q: -saw this funny language-*

WAGENSEIL: This was in Madrid. The Ambassador said, "Steve, write a Third-Person Note to the ministry about this." And I hadn't a clue. And then as for being a political reporting officer and all this stuff, I hadn't a clue. I made it up. I did okay but apparently now they do train for that, I'm told, which is good, very good.

But anyway, the DCM course was very good and I enjoyed it and there were several extremely good people in the course with me who all went on to greater things. And so, I had this month and then I went off to little old Lesotho and --

*Q: Now had the ambassador been confirmed meanwhile?*

WAGENSEIL: No. It was -- I'm trying to recall the sequence and I believe that about, I don't know, a couple of weeks before I was due to ship out, he withdrew his name. What had happened apparently was that after the prisoner had filed suit against him there had been a settlement, the terms of which were not discussed in any way but the fact that he had made a settlement was bad enough and Congressional staff basically told the Department don't even try; he won't get there. So, this was explained to him very carefully several times by increasingly senior people until eventually he got the message and withdrew. I'm trying to recall, I guess it was, yes, before I went out I did another interview with a different ambassador who had been -- a person who had been nominated to the ambassador and this was Leonard Spearman -- who was at the time serving as ambassador in Rwanda -- another political appointee. He was back in the Department on consultations or something, can't remember, in early 1990, and so we had a sit down in a lounge at the State Department somewhere and had another one of these conversations -- which was also a bit surreal -- because even though he had been serving as ambassador for a couple of years in Rwanda (he recently passed away so I can speak of him) it seemed to me he didn't see the DCM job the way I saw it. But he apparently liked me and gave me his blessing, but it was obvious there was going to be a delay. So, I proceeded to post and I went ahead of my family. I arrived there at the very beginning of July in 1990 and overlapped with Howard Jeter by, I don't know, a week or 10 days, including the Fourth of July celebration at the vacant ambassador's residence.

At this point I think the previous ambassador had, I believe, been gone from post for about a year by the summer of 1990, and Howard was leaving I was arriving. There had been this delay because the Reverend whatever-his-name-was had been sort of long delayed in arriving at post. So, there was this kind of handover ceremony during the Fourth of July reception at the ambassador's residence, which was this lovely building -- which was vacant -- up on the side of the hill in Maseru, and Howard and his family left a little while later and I moved out of the hotel into the DCM residence. The DCM residence is directly adjacent to the embassy compound. Between the embassy compound and the border with South Africa, from downtown Maseru to the bridge, runs right in front of the embassy and the DCM's residence. And that was convenient, of course, for the DCM. Actually, it was convenient for the embassy; it was inconvenient for the DCM sometimes. But anyway...

*Q: So you were chargé right from the start?*

WAGENSEIL: I was chargé from the get go for six months. And I guess- Actually I guess the conversation that I had with Ambassador Spearman took place by telephone. I can't remember. I guess the nominee pulled out after I got there. It's all so blurred in the distance of time. But I was chargé for six months and the next ranking officer at post was

the acting AID director -- I think she was the deputy AID director, but the AID director was also away on leave, of course, during the summer for a couple of months. I had a consular officer, an admin officer, a couple of communicators, of course, a moderately large AID mission of about eight or nine officers and who knows how many AID contractors, a Peace Corps contingent of four or five staff and 100 volunteers scattered around the country.

*Q: Wow.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, Lesotho's a very poor country.

*Q: It's also small for 100 volunteers. It's interesting, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: And then a USIA establishment of a couple of people, a couple of officers.

*Q: Okay. So, tell me about Lesotho at that point. I actually visited there once and at that time, it was back in the mid '70s, it was not only tiny but there was one little road into the country which was, I think if I recall, a one lane road that you shared it with the railroad track. Had it developed somewhat? What was the political position?*

WAGENSEIL: The bridge across the Mohokare River which formed the boundary, just outside Maseru, was in fact a one lane bridge with a railroad track down the middle of it.

*Q: Okay, so that had not changed.*

WAGENSEIL: As I recall that was still the case.

*Q: Fifteen or more years.*

WAGENSEIL: Because neither South Africa nor Lesotho felt any desire, basically, to expand it at the time. This was 1990, so apartheid was still very much in force.

As I said, Lesotho had been a listening post and there was a surprisingly large diplomatic community there; Soviet ambassador, Swedish ambassador, Chinese, etc., etc., although shortly before I got there Lesotho had flipped its recognition from Beijing to Taiwan and I'm pretty sure somebody got paid handsomely for it. But anyway... there was a lot of kerfuffle about that.

Directly behind the DCM's residence, down the slope from the DCM's property, was the site where the People's Republic of China had been building its chancery and there was this huge building that was sort of frozen in time and there was one guard who was paid to kind of make sure people didn't steal the bricks and whatnot. And I'll tell a story about that site later. But it was kind of right there and of course everybody was saying oh yes, they're building right next to the American embassy; what a surprise, as always transpires, especially in African countries. Anyhow. So we had- they had taken some



steps and they were taking other steps to harden our embassy a little bit against potential problems with the Chinese.

But Lesotho was very poor. It's called The Mountain Kingdom. It is the country with the highest average elevation in the world. No, that's not true. It is the country with the highest- lowest elevation in the world. Obviously, Nepal is higher because it goes up to Mt. Everest but Nepal also has a lower low point than Lesotho. Lesotho's lowest point is like 1,530 meters or something so it's pretty high. And the mountains of Lesotho aren't mountains in the Rocky or Himalaya or Alp style -- with sharp, jagged rock. They are more like the Appalachians -- a sort of rounded, weathered appearance, except for the Drakensberg Cliffs, which forms the eastern border with Natal in South Africa. But they're pretty high and they're very poorly penetrated by modern highways and all, so the Basotho Pony was a traditional means of transport up until maybe 15, 20 years ago. The people in the interior got around on horseback, pony back because they didn't have big horses, they had fairly small ponies.

The main resource, the main export of Lesotho was manpower. Traditionally the South African Mining Association had a recruiting office in Maseru and young men would come down from the villages and go sign up and go off to work in the mines in South Africa and be gone for 10 months out of the year and come back, procreate and then return to the mines, which was an absolutely miserable life for the miners -- and for their families. The only good thing about it was they sent money home and it helped keep Lesotho afloat. That and of course the fact that it was the listening post for embassies that were watching the bad guys in "Racist Apartheid South Africa." By 1990, however, things had begun to change in the outside world and things had begun to change inside South Africa and that relationship was very much in transition. There was a South African Trade Mission in Maseru and the commercial counselor of the South African trade mission was the de facto ambassador and everybody treated him as such. Very nice fellow, very accessible. Obviously wanted to talk to us all the time and to the Brits -- who were very important there -- and less so to the Nordics and the Soviets and all. And of course, while I was there -- if memory serves -- the Soviet Union evaporated.

*Q: Yes, that would have been just about that time there.*

WAGENSEIL: The Chinese- the communist Chinese had been, as I said, replaced by the Taiwanese but there were still a lot of ethnic Chinese businessmen in town and one had the feeling that some of them were perhaps, how should I say, serving two masters? Anyway. But the economy of Lesotho was very weak, it depended a lot on aid programs. I can't remember how much U.S. aid we were giving them but it was quite a bit and as I said we had about 100 volunteers scattered about, doing things like teaching English and all. English is the official language so Peace Corps volunteers were perfect for that. English and Basotho were the languages. I'm sorry, it's called Sesotho.

The other big thing that was going on, and this was a chronic issue which probably isn't resolved even today, the one thing Lesotho has, as I said, is altitude and so some bright souls in Pretoria or Jo'burg or somewhere had come up with the idea of saying, "Okay,

mountaintops. It rains up there. We down here in Jo'burg and Pretoria are thirsty; we don't have enough water. How about if we take that water off the top of Lesotho and pipe it up to Jo'burg?" And looking at a map it sort of made sense, in terms of elevation, altitude change. The only practical problem was that the water that falls in Lesotho flows south, down to the Orange River and out to the Atlantic. Jo'burg is, as you recall, in the other direction. So, there was this big project launched known as the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, a fairly logical kind of name, which involved damming a couple of rivers and drilling a huge tunnel through the mountains from the lake northwards, to empty into the watershed that would flow to Jo'burg.

There was a ferocious competition before I got there for the contract, and an American consortium bid on it. I think it was led by Bechtel but I may be wrong. No, it wasn't Bechtel it was somebody else, but anyhow Bechtel was involved. And there was a French consortium that won the contract. Of course, there were all kinds of accusations of hanky panky and bags of money passing under the table and this and that and the other thing, and the French Consul General in Lesotho won the rank of Knight of the Légion d'Honneur after the contract was awarded. So one assumes that he had more than a little something to do with this huge commercial contract going to the French team. The management of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project was sort of a joint organization between a South African Water Authority spinoff and a body that was constituted in Lesotho -- which of course included the leadership of Lesotho, the political and business (such as it is) leadership of Lesotho in partnership -- along with a couple of technicians who allegedly knew what they were doing.

*Q: So this was more than a concept. It actually-*

WAGENSEIL: Oh it took place. And it was -- it still is quite an ambitious thing. A huge dam was built while I was there and started retaining water while I was there. They dug this tunnel and I visited the boring machine, which is twice as big as your living room around -- in diameter, and three freight cars long. It kinda sorta eats its way through the earth like a worm through your garden. And to even start to build the dam first they had to build a road because of course it's way up there in the mountains. So, they built this wide road, fairly moderate grade, wide and moderate because the major traffic was supposed to be heavy trucks carrying up stuff like cement and rebar and things like that. And so, it wasn't like an interstate which can sort of have steeper grades and sharper turns and whatnot. It was kind of a slow drive. It was meant to be a slow drive because there would be big trucks carrying very heavy stuff up to the worksite. But it reduced the travel time. And it was always possible to drive up to Katse, which is where the dam was. It was always possible to drive up there in a four-wheel drive on the old dirt roads, but you had to figure anywhere between six and 12 hours depending upon weather conditions, landslides and roads out and mud and whatnot. They put the new highway in and you could get there from Maseru in about two and a half hours, which of course I'm sure has had an extremely negative effect on the interior of the country, for a variety of reasons including the spread of disease.

But it was just this huge project and of course the American consortium that lost did its best to file complaints and re-argue. And I had instructions from time to time – “go make another demarche” and “review the contract” and “what does it say in chapter 17b,” you know, whatever. But it was this immense effort and they built the first dam and got the tunnel running and so water started flowing to Jo’burg and the advantage to Lesotho is Lesotho gets money from it. South Africa pays for the water.

*Q: That’s nice.*

WAGENSEIL: And as it goes by, there’s a hydroelectric facility inside Lesotho but at basically the far north of Lesotho so providing some electricity to Lesotho and some to South Africa as well as the water going to South Africa.

*Q: So another little moneymaker.*

WAGENSEIL: Another little moneymaking element of the entire project. And basically South Africa’s paying Lesotho forever for this. So that’s good.

*Q: And I presume rates go up over time.*

WAGENSEIL: Well whatever.

*Q: It didn’t dry up the Orange River to suddenly send all the water off in the other direction?*

WAGENSEIL: Well there was some concern about that, of course. They did all kinds of studies and whatnot. There are stacks of books in the office at the embassy about -- you know -- water flow and seasonal changes and whatnot. In fact, it was argued that having a dam that could release water evenly -- flowing into the river on a more regular basis - would stabilize the flow and of course the catchment area for Katse Dam is a very small part of the entire Orange River catchment in Lesotho -- much less in the whole river basin -- so it didn’t really have that much of an effect or wasn’t supposed to have that much of an effect on the Orange itself.

*Q: I guess it’s kind of a unique situation, too, if one country on both sides, on all sides-*

WAGENSEIL: Right.

*Q: -of Lesotho. It’s usually the downstream countries that would be screaming bloody murder about a dam that would divert some of their water but you had the same country on both sides.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, it’s the same country. It’s the same country and in fact downstream, along the Orange River, I mean they had done studies about pumping the water from the Orange River in South Africa up around through the Orange Free State, to Jo’burg, and that was just much too complicated and too far and it was deemed to be much too

expensive and so forth, and it was cheaper, actually cheaper to build the road, built the dam, dig the tunnel and run it downhill instead of having to pump it.

And the area south of Lesotho along the Orange River is relatively sparsely populated. It goes through the Karoo or something, if I remember correctly. So, there wasn't the demand. Obviously Jo'burg, Pretoria wanted water so...

So that was the big deal for Lesotho and of course aside from the money that the dam would earn there was wealth from building the dam. Construction people who were spending money -- and of course as I said spreading disease and whatnot. It opened up the interior in a way that had never been open before with the road that was built, gave politicians easier access to the interior, which of course was good for campaigning and whatnot. It gave USAID officers and Peace Corps volunteers and all faster access to the interior and back to Maseru. So, there were some benefits to it although a lot of the country remained -- and probably still remains -- difficult to access because of the terrain. The main road, when I got there the main paved road of the country went around sort of from Maseru clockwise up around the edge of the country to the northernmost corner, if you will, and then down from Maseru counterclockwise around the west and southwest quadrant of the country. The east part of the country was very badly served, only dirt roads and whatnot.

Before I arrived in Lesotho there had been a number of "cross-border incidents" -- as they were euphemistically called -- where South African Forces had come in and shot people.

*Q: Was this related to the liberation struggle?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, yes. The assertion was that there were ANC camps, rebel camps, training camps, terrorist camps in Lesotho somewhere and they were planning to launch attacks across the border, and so the South Africans, who probably had extremely good intel, would come over preemptively and interrupt things. That would cause an incident and there would be something in the Security Council, there would be some kind of hullabaloo. That had all basically dwindled down by the time I got there. I mean, it had ended by the time I got there but it dwindled before that and so relations were pretty good. There were still some South African fellows around who had no visible means of support -- if you will -- and there were some black South Africans, exiles, who also had no visible means of support, and one kind of surmised that one knew what they were about. Anyway.

*Q: Well Lesotho must have been constrained in many ways. I mean, completely surrounded by South Africa I can't imagine how the government would have even thought about letting rebels set up bases and so forth. I mean, they could be completely choked off in so many ways if South Africa wanted to get tough.*

WAGENSEIL: That was true. On the other hand, if you cast your mind back to the '80s or the '70s, Lesotho was in some ways sort of blockaded by South Africa -- but it had a

lot of friends elsewhere, the Swedes, the Soviets, the Chinese and all -- so it had money, it had some resources. You can't fly in an entire economy as you can fly in diplomats and checks, but it had enough friends overseas, including the United States, for good reasons -- and others for bad reasons -- that it was able to get by. And of course, South Africa had enough troubles on the world stage without launching an outright invasion of a neighboring country. The odd incursion they could get by -- they could say it was "undisciplined elements" or it was "criminal elements" or something like that -- but actually to go in and take over the country at gunpoint was probably not even something South Africa was willing to do because they were busy trying to justify their takeover -- or their continued holding of Namibia -- in the southwest.

*Q: Did Lesotho border on the Transkei, which was supposedly independent at the time?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't believe it bordered any of the homelands.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: As I said the southeast border, the eastern border was extremely rugged terrain and I don't think it bordered there at all.

*Q: And what did the Lesothans do? Was it just subsistence agriculture?*

WAGENSEIL: Basically yes. I mean, they exported manpower and they were earning money from the water project even before they were selling water.

*Q: Cattle raising maybe or goats or-?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I mean, they had cattle and they had small farms and whatnot but I can't think of anything else -- I'm sure there was other stuff -- but nothing significant that was a source of revenue.

*Q: For many countries it was a listening post but for the United States, of course, we had people in South Africa and in somewhat less need of a listening post so you must have been following internal politics as well.*

WAGENSEIL: Following internal politics, which was pretty convoluted. The U.S. Government had, of course, long ago taken the decision to have an embassy virtually everywhere, although for a while there was a single ambassador accredited to Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

*Q: I remember that.*

WAGENSEIL: And he rode the circuit. And that continued for about 12 or 15 years, I think, but at some point in the '80s, it was decided to have a different ambassador in each place for whatever reasons. So that was the situation.

I don't recall the dates but King Moshoeshoe II -- let me give you 30 seconds of history. Lesotho had been an independent kingdom since the mid-1800s because of its geographical isolation. King Moshoeshoe I had sort of created the Lesotho kingdom as a refuge at the time of the Zulu invasion and the arrival of the Europeans and the Voortrekkers and I don't know what all. So it was kind of given independent -- it was acknowledged as having an individual status and eventually became a British crown protectorate, and then it moved directly to sort of independence on a separate track from South Africa and the Boers and all of that historical situation.

So, it had a different history and the South Africans really had no historical claim to it, Pretoria and the Afrikaners had no claim to Lesotho, and frankly they didn't want it. So, in the 1980s, I guess, I've lost track, King Moshoeshoe II -- who was, I think, the great-grandson of King Moshoeshoe I -- Moshoeshoe had been, I don't know, educated in Sweden, his wife was, I think, also educated in Sweden. He was a very radical king, very vocal in his criticisms of South Africa, I think, knowing that he would be protected by the international presence there and the international interest in his country and the international criticism of the apartheid regime. But a couple of years before I got to post he had been overthrown by a couple of generals and was living in exile. And the generals of the military junta, I forget what they were called, the Lesotho Committee or something like that, the Transitional Military Council -- one of those names, had been in power for a number of years. They weren't bad, they weren't particularly rapacious because there wasn't much to steal -- although of course one had one's suspicions about the water project. And we had moderately good relations with them, as did the British, trying to keep them at arm's length and yet deal with them. They were no particular friends of the Soviets or the Chinese or anybody; they were just kind of their own individual creatures. So, there was that element.

The foreign minister, Tom Thabane, was a civilian. There were a number of civilian ministers. There had been the former prime minister -- whose name I'd forgotten again (Leabua Jonathan) -- was still around in opposition and very active politically, and there were things going on of that kind. It's all a bit of a blur, I'm afraid.

*Q: So it was not a democracy by any means.*

WAGENSEIL: No.

*Q: It was a military government and the king was in exile where? Do you even remember?*

WAGENSEIL: I think he was in Europe. I think he was at Oxford or someplace.

*Q: But the monarchy continued-*

WAGENSEIL: The monarchy continued and in fact, after I'd been there about eight or nine months, the generals basically overthrew the king by remote control, in a way, and they installed the Crown Prince as king. So Moshoeshoe II was basically dethroned in

absentia and his son became King Lestie III. He was a nice guy -- I had met him a number of times and I met him frequently after that -- who was sort of thrust into a role that he didn't want. He didn't want to usurp his father, but he also didn't want to lose the chance to be King entirely, so he couldn't say no to this, because the generals would probably have found somebody else, a cousin or somebody, to take the job. So he took the job of King, but I believe he maintained some kind of correspondence with his father anyway. And his mother, the Queen Mother, was very -- was suspected of being very active behind the scenes in trying to keep everything from blowing up within the family. Obviously, she wanted her son to be the king but she didn't necessarily want to punch her husband in the nose. Anyway.

*Q: Was she there or was she in exile?*

WAGENSEIL: No, she was there. She was there, in Maseru.

*Q: Oh, I thought she was in exile.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, the king was -- because he was much more radical than anybody else in the country, probably.

Anyhow, so there was that kind of kerfuffle. And then at some point later on -- after the generals had overthrown the king -- a couple of colonels overthrew the generals. Basically, just a power struggle of one kind or another and --

*Q: You say "overthrow."*

WAGENSEIL: Well there was no shooting but it was kind of nervous-making. And the general in charge, Major General Justin Lekhanya, showed up at the embassy about 9:30 at night claiming asylum, saying "They're going to kill me, they're going to kill me!" The admin officer and I and the consular officer -- we had no Marine guards -- we kind of caucused and said "what do we do?" And it was -- communications with Washington are not what they are today -- so it would have been a little more difficult. We tried to get a message out to the Department saying the general's come in and we're holding him sort of at bay. We let him into the lobby of the embassy -- it was inside the building but outside the hard line -- and he spent, I don't know, eight hours there, through the night, and we're making phone calls and trying to contact people and "what do we do?" We didn't really think he was in any danger but we didn't want to call Colonel What's-his-name -- who had been the chief of police and whom we knew, of course -- and say "Hey, you going to shoot this guy or not?" You know, because then the colonel would say, "Oh why, do you know where he is?" you see. I mean, we assumed that people knew where he was. He had driven up to the gates of the embassy in his own red Jeep.

*Q: That's kind of a giveaway to have his Jeep parked outside.*

WAGENSEIL: Well we pulled it around behind the building, because it could have been visible from the road. Oh, and it was the middle of the night anyway.

The other thing, of course, was that the border's closed overnight, the bridge is closed, border crossing, both sides, because of course -- technically -- there were no diplomatic relations between the countries, so closing the border at night made perfect sense. So, he would not have been able to leave until dawn anyway. So, we kept him inside the embassy building and he thought he was safe until maybe 5:30 in the morning or something. Then he had by this time called somebody, some friend, some colleague in the government, I don't know who it was, to come pick him up in a different car and drive him across the border into the relative safety of South Africa -- the (ultraconservative) Orange Free State of all places. So, he left us safely and we -- as far as I know -- we got away with it. The colonels never accused us of facilitating his escape or something. They probably were just as happy to have him leave.

*Q: Anyway-*

WAGENSEIL: Well, having to arrest him, put him on trial, shoot him, whatever -- the traditional ways of dealing with your predecessor in a military coup -- weren't very popular by the time we got to like 1991 or whenever it was. People kind of frowned on that sort of thing. So, I think they were just as happy to have him out of the way. They never thanked us but they never criticized us.

*Q: And the colonels ended up being more of the same?*

WAGENSEIL: Moderately better, slightly better, slightly less difficult. But you know, they weren't repressive or anything like that. There was no jackbooted military regime, keeping people under house arrest like we see today in Burma or something. But --

*Q: Or like even what's happening all around it in South Africa.*

WAGENSEIL: Right, right.

*Q: Was there a parliament?*

WAGENSEIL: There was a parliament and we -- There were elections coming up and they were busy revising the constitution to prepare for the elections. I'm trying to remember exactly what the sequence was. And we, through AID, brought in an expert through IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) -- actually someone from Elections Canada, who came to consult with the parliament, to visit the parliament, to talk to the leaders and whatnot, to find out how we could assist them in building democracy. And that was welcomed by the authorities; it was seen as non-threatening to their particular positions. I mean, the parliament was a great little institution. It met in this chamber, obviously a fairly small parliament, single chamber and I don't know, maybe 50 members or maybe 60 members and one could go in and sit in the back row and watch them all and go talk to them -- very, very open. It was a small room. Maybe 60 people, it's smaller than the Conference Room in Geneva by far and a nice wooden structure, as I remember, an attractive semicircle. And one had fairly easy access to the MPs (Member



of Parliament). Again, the former PM was there as a member and so on.

We discovered, among other things, that parliament met and there were stenographers taking down everything -- as stenographers do in parliaments everywhere -- but those notes were never transcribed. There was supposed to be a Hansard published every day with the record of debate and so forth, but it wasn't. So we proposed helping set up a process whereby the record of debates would be prepared and issued and available to the public -- that sort of thing. And that moved forward. And this was, again, 1990, '91, '92, we're looking at early days of computer technology by modern standards anyway, but it was still possible. We were looking into getting them a computer system, word processing, printing machinery, whatever, to help facilitate that. I don't know what exactly ever came of that.

*Q: Did the king have any political power anymore? I mean, the new king?*

WAGENSEIL: Not really. He was very much a constitutional monarch. He had the responsibility of addressing parliament and making speeches on the king's birthday and whatever, stuff like that, but no real political role. He had moral authority; he had the people's affection. I went to an event -- I remember one ceremony at the university, University of Lesotho, some distance outside of Maseru, and I went out there with the public affairs officer, who of course knew all the faculty and whatnot, and the king was there -- I guess it was graduation day or something, I can't remember. And he was very well applauded, obviously seen as a nice guy, one of them. He had been to the university as a student before going off to Europe to get some kind of graduate degree. But the king was only about 30 or 32 or 35, if I remember correctly when I was there.

*Q: I seem to remember reading about the king of Lesotho having 34 wives.*

WAGENSEIL: No, that's Swaziland.

*Q: Oh, that's Swaziland.*

WAGENSEIL: That's Swaziland, yes. Very different, very different. And he made a point of making sure I knew that.

*Q: Okay, so much more a Western kind of monarchy?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, much more in a British model, if you will, or Danish or something, Danish, Dutch.

Anyhow. What else? The relationship with South Africa was evolving, of course, throughout all of this because South Africa was evolving. The Soviet Union died. The Berlin Wall had fallen down, the Soviet Union died and South Africa itself was confronting its own internal realities.

One particularly weird event or series of event: a fracas broke out in downtown Maseru at which a shopkeeper, a Chinese shopkeeper, accused a Lesotho woman of shoplifting. He said she had put a bag of rice in her shopping bag or something like that, and pursued her out onto the sidewalk or into the street out in front of his shop saying, "You stole something, you stole something." He was swatting at her and she was swatting back and so of course it caused a bit of a stir in downtown Maseru -- people swatting each other in a public thoroughfare -- and the Basotho public rushed to her assistance. He retreated into his shop and the crowd came after him and trashed his shop. He went out the back door, sought refuge in some other Chinese shop and so they trashed that shop, and it spread from there. And within a matter of 45 minutes or an hour there was this huge riot in downtown Maseru.

*Q: Which is not a very big place.*

WAGENSEIL: Which is not a very big place -- but which was speckled with Chinese-owned stores. And the crowds were going berserk. Obviously, there was economic pressure, people felt or accused the Chinese of gouging them on prices, unfair competition, and so the crowds were going after the Chinese shopkeepers. Shops were burned, there were tires in the street, the soldiers were called out. The police had no equipment to deal with it; the police were traffic cops basically. Soldiers were called out, they didn't have much better; they had guns that they would fire in the air and they had some tear gas.

Meanwhile, of course, we're going nuts. Here we are, I was Chargé -- the ambassador, I don't recall where he was then -- and you know, we've got Americans working in town, we've got a school with American students in it, we've got people living in various parts of the city -- on the other side of the riots -- and of course there aren't a lot of roads to get around. It was a one street town, and the radio is crackling and we're trying to coordinate all this. This was before cell phones and so on. And we wound up basically evacuating all the American kids from the school. It wasn't the American School, it was a local private school where all the expats went, and we pulled them all down to my house. I had a son there, Anthony was there, and Kevin I think was too little for the school but he was in daycare or something, and we wound up with like 80 kids in our backyard.

*Q: Today is May 29, 2008. This is Peter Eicher continuing an interview with Steve Wagenseil. This is tape number 6, side a.*

*Steve, you were talking about a little riot in Maseru and you had just evacuated the kids to your house.*

WAGENSEIL: Right. And we had- At that point Jamilée was working as the assistant to the consular officer so we had a fairly good idea of how many Americans we had registered and we expected about 45 kids from the school -- children of missionaries, children of AID officers and embassy people and whatnot. But we had about 80 overall, because when we showed up there with embassy cars to pick them up, kids came running up saying, "I'm an American, I'm an American!!"

*Q: You were limiting yourself to the Americans?*

WAGENSEIL: Well we were just -- the Brits had evacuated the British kids and the handful of French kids I guess came to our place. But these kids came up and say "I'm an American, I'm an American," and we can't say "prove it," you know. It turned out that there were about a dozen American kids -- kids who had been born in the United States of Lesotho students or whatnot, you know the way it works -- carrying U.S. passports, but not registered with the embassy because of course they were in Lesotho.

Anyhow, so we had all these kids at our house and they were playing in the backyard and whatnot, running around, and we got out all the games that we had, and we put tapes on the TV and we had some games going on. And then the thought occurred to me that directly behind our house was the Chinese embassy building site. Okay, different Chinese but still China and the distinctions are lost on the average citizen in virtually every country of the world, including this one, and I was on the walkie talkie or whatever we had for communications and found out that there were people who had spun off from the mob downtown. When the soldiers had stepped in to restore order they'd spun off and they'd gone off in different directions looking for things to do and yes, there was said to be a group of guys approaching the Chinese embassy construction site. Yes, the soldiers were aware of it, yes, they were taking position.

So, I'm standing out in my backyard and I hear machine gun fire or AK-47 fire outside my backyard and I've got 80 kids in my house. I was not very happy about that. I'm shoos them all inside and the back of the house was a big veranda, sliding glass doors and the lawn kind of sloped down to the fence, and below there was the building site. So, I'm shoos the kids back up off the lawn where they'd been having a great time, "In the house, in the house!" We get in the house and I slide the glass doors shut and I draw the drapes, and I say to myself "That's not much protection." I'm on the radio talking to people around town, trying to find out what was happening. Nothing happened, we were all okay, thank heavens, but it was kind of a bit of a moment there.

*Q: Meanwhile, I suppose, you were trying to notify parents and so forth, 80 kids?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, the radio net was frantic that day. Phones were working so we were able to call people. We had a cascade system of people calling people and of course everybody was calling around saying, "Did you get my baby from the school?" and so on.

The thing about it was that in the middle of whenever this was, 1991, P.W. Botha, prime minister of South Africa -- Was it Botha or was it de Klerk at this point? I've lost track. Anyway, the South African Prime Minister had decided he was going to call a referendum in South Africa. It must have been F.W. de Klerk. He called a referendum to say -- to get the South African voters to say, "Do you want to change slowly away from apartheid, or do you want to hang in there and tough it out?" -- in effect, I'm

paraphrasing. The referendum was a very hot topic in political discussion in South Africa, of course, for weeks before it happened.

*Q: Have we shifted from the Chinese or is this a corollary?*

WAGENSEIL: It's a corollary.

*Q: Okay, go ahead, because I have one more question about the Chinese.*

WAGENSEIL: Okay, I'll come back to it.

That was the day the referendum was taking place-

*Q: Ah ha.*

WAGENSEIL: -- in South Africa. And I later heard from an eyewitness that a vanload of Chinese -- beaten, bloodied, dripping, shirts stained and all -- raced across the border bridge and over to Ladybrand -- which is the nearest town in the Free State -- where there was a hospital. And they pitched up at the hospital for medical treatment, as across the street -- at the town hall or whatever -- the Afrikaner ladies with their big hats and their long white gloves, and the Afrikaner gentlemen in their knee stockings and shorts, were queued up to vote in the referendum about do we want to end apartheid or not. And here they are, you know, having tea and sipping cordials in the sun and this van starts to disgorge a horde of bloody Chinese. It apparently caused a bit of a stir in the gentry of Ladybrand. But anyway, they received medical treatment and came back and --

*Q: How did it happen that Chinese were the small shopkeepers in Lesotho instead of Indians or Lebanese or what you find in most African countries?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't know. The Lebanese weren't ever really in South Africa. They followed the French and so they were more in West Africa.

*Q: That's where they had Indians, in southern and East Africa.*

WAGENSEIL: There certainly were Indians in East Africa and South Africa; of course, that's how Gandhi got his start. But not that many in Lesotho.

*Q: Okay, so just a quirk of some kind.*

WAGENSEIL: A quirk of some kind. And probably because of the particular political, geopolitical and geographical situation of Lesotho inside the "Racist Apartheid Regime," maybe the Indians didn't feel comfortable there. There was a commercial niche that the Chinese were willing to fill because there was an embassy relationship and so forth and so on. I don't know, but there they were. And of course, the referendum went off peaceably and the South African prime minister got the result he wanted and the transition continued uninterrupted, notwithstanding the vision of the bloody Chinese.

*Q: So the riots in Maseru did not disrupt the South African transition process?*

WAGENSEIL: No. I mean, the advantage, of course, was that Ladybrand is basically a small town at the end of a narrow road from Bloemfontein -- which itself is at the end of a narrow road from Jo'burg -- so it didn't really penetrate the national consciousness until the next day or something, when a wire service story ran in "The Rand Daily Mail."

*Q: Well so for a small quiet country you had some interesting events.*

WAGENSEIL: We had some interesting events, yes.

*Q: And riots and major new economic development. Tell me about Ambassador Spearman and his role a little bit. Because here you have a very small country with not a lot going on in terms of the big global picture and yet you have a political appointee ambassador. Did he find that it was up to his expectations? Did he even have a lot to do? Did he care?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, yes, no and no. The reality is that Ambassador Spearman, as I said, had previously served, immediately previously, as the ambassador in Rwanda. He was an educator by profession. He had been the president of Texas Southern University, I think it was, in Houston. He was, as far as I know, the only black Republican in Houston, and so President Bush 41 had appointed him as ambassador to Rwanda and he'd been there a couple years and it was time to rotate on. And I'm telling tales out of school but as I say he's passed away so I guess I can do this now.

*Q: But it's an interesting part of the story, what the ambassador's role is.*

WAGENSEIL: Let me just share this because I think it's kind of intriguing. He thought -- I heard this from both him and his wife and so I was able to put the story together -- he believed that she enjoyed the life of Mrs. Ambassador. Their kids were grown and out of the house and all, so as his service in Rwanda was coming to an end, he was casting about for another embassy. He made that very clear to the Department and to the White House and so he got another embassy, especially when the Reverend whatever-his-name-was fell through for Lesotho. Mrs. Spearman, however, did not want to stay at another embassy; she wanted to go home where she could be closer to her kids and her grandchildren in southern Texas, not in South Africa. So apparently when he came home from his visit to Washington in early 1990 to tell his wife, "Darling, I'm being reassigned," it didn't go down very well. Made for a kind of an awkward situation.

*Q: Did she nonetheless give up-*

WAGENSEIL: She did come to post but they weren't there full time and there were some strains between them and between the residence and the embassy as a result of that relationship. And I won't belabor the point but it was awkward.

Ambassador Spearman was a very nice guy, jovial, could be extremely funny. He had the experience in Rwanda but of course it's a very different country, very different social situation, very different cultural situation, very different neighbors, and that did not translate to Lesotho. He had to learn a whole new thing for the Lesotho/South Africa relationship, and of course he had to deal with the presence of the former Soviet ambassador who became the Russian ambassador -- who actually was an ethnic Armenian. The Soviet ambassador had been the foreign minister of Armenia before Armenia was independent -- I never really understood that but anyway that's who he was. You know, because at that point the states of the USSR each had an internal envoy to Moscow.

*Q: Sure, it's great, and more members of the United Nations.*

WAGENSEIL: That's correct. But Armenia wasn't at the time but we have our own Armenian stories to tell, as you well recall.

But Ambassador Spearman was liked, he was good for outreach, he was good for sort of public relations and so forth with the government officials, with the diplomatic community; he was very effective and so forth. But all of the political reporting was left to me. I don't think he corrected or changed a word in anything I wrote.

*Q: Well that's good, I guess.*

WAGENSEIL: In a way it's good. I don't recall -- I mean, I'm sure that -- my memory's just gone blank but I really don't remember him writing any reporting. I mean, if he met with the king or he met with the prime minister he would write it up or dictate it to the secretary and then I would fill in the gaps, of which there were probably numerous, during the course of each paper. But there wasn't much of it. There wasn't much to report. And so, his role was kind of less than it could have been, I think, perhaps, especially given the situation in South Africa at the time, the dynamic evolution. And I did my best when visiting Bloemfontein on shopping trips, when going to Ladybrand on an occasional mission, an afternoon or something talking to South African ranchers that I came in contact with and so forth. I did my best to share that with the embassy in Pretoria for their reporting resources because they didn't have much access to the Free State. But you know, it was a sleepy post. And in fact, at one point we got one of these messages that embassies get every couple of years from the Department saying, "Oh my God, oh my God, the budget's disappeared, we have to save money, how do we save money?? Please send in your suggestions." I was chargé at the time, the ambassador was out somewhere, on leave I think, so I sent in a message saying, "Close this embassy. If you want to --"

*Q: That must have opened some eyes in Washington.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. "If you want to save money close this embassy." It was already a SEP post, Special Embassy Program post. "Close it, make it a consular agent shop and have a circuit rider come in for one week a month to talk to people." I said, "You know,

South Africa has changed, the Soviet Union is gone, the Chinese communists were gone, the listening post role is over, they're all now based directly in Pretoria, the South Africans aren't invading anymore, we've lost our big commercial opportunity to the French..." Basically I said, "I think there are arguments to be made for closing this embassy down. Not breaking relations or anything like that, but just scaling back in light of realities."

*Q: And what kind of reaction did you get to that?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't recall any written answer to my message, but when I came back to the Department at some point somebody said, "Did you really send that in?" or words to that effect, you know. I mean, they just -- they filed it.

*Q: Out of curiosity, did you check with your absent ambassador before sending that in? The kind of thing that could get under an ambassador's skin, I imagine.*

WAGENSEIL: No, I made a point of saying in the message I have not cleared this with Ambassador Spearman. He was on leave with his family or something and had left instructions "Don't call me." Anyway.

A word about life in Lesotho or life at Embassy Maseru.

*Q: Indeed.*

WAGENSEIL: There weren't a lot of resources in Maseru and it was common practice for everybody in the diplomatic community to go shopping in Bloemfontein about once a month.

*Q: Which was how far away?*

WAGENSEIL: An hour and 20 minutes. Something like that. And it was kind of surreal because driving through the Orange Free State to Bloemfontein you went through a Bantustan twice. They were two little islets of the Archipelago that kind of lay across the road so you'd be zipping along, there'd be a sign saying "welcome to" and "thanks for visiting," that kind of thing. But you can see -- as you drove through the village -- that that village in the Bantustan, I can't remember what Stan it was, was a lot worse off than the village previously or the village thereafter.

*Q: Interesting.*

WAGENSEIL: There was a real visible difference in lifestyles.

Bloemfontein was much like Bulawayo, a little bit like Harare; it was a big, sort of farm town and the streets were big broad avenues, laid out so that you could turn your ox cart around in -- that kind of thing. And tree-lined and broad and lots of bright sun and so on. But that's where the hospital was, the big hospital, and we went there for our doctors'

visits and went shopping. There was a big supermarket there and you'd take your cooler and stock up and come back. On the way back, we would stop at a ranch that did its own butchering and buy, for example, a cooler full of steak. A couple of people would stop by and buy a side of beef or half -- a quarter of beef -- and get it cut up, and stock the freezer for the next three months -- that kind of thing.

*Q: Did your black ambassador have any problems in South Africa?*

WAGENSEIL: No and he didn't hesitate. He didn't drive over necessarily himself. He did it once or twice but he didn't feel at all self-conscious or anything like that. He knew that South Africa was changing but he didn't seek to go there and he didn't go there very much, as I recall.

*Q: And life in Maseru? You were going to say a few more words.*

WAGENSEIL: Well it was a small town.

*Q: How small? Do you remember what the population was, either of the country or the town?*

WAGENSEIL: Not really. I'd hesitate to put a figure on it. But there were, I don't know, 10 embassies, a dozen embassies of one kind or another.

*Q: So sort of like a small Third World post.*

WAGENSEIL: Right, a small Third World post.

*Q: Picnics and-*

WAGENSEIL: Picnics and barbecues and pool parties and that sort of thing. Christmas outside where it's 100 degrees in the bright sun kind of thing, with a palm tree for your Christmas tree. But you know, everybody knew everybody, basically. And we had a nurse attached to the embassy, which was good because I had two small children who were constantly getting hurt. And-

*Q: You mentioned the school, which I presume was private.*

WAGENSEIL: There was; it was called the Maseru English Medium Preparatory School, MEMPS, "English Medium" meaning that the teaching was in English.

*Q: Yes.*

WAGENSEIL: It wasn't a medium school. Medium was English as opposed to Afrikaner or Sesotho. And that was basically where all the expats sent their kids -- as well as the middle class and upper middle class of Lesotho.



*Q: Presumably only went through elementary school or something like that?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, as I recall it went to maybe tenth grade. I really don't remember. Maybe it went all the way through high school. It didn't much matter to me because we hadn't reached that stage yet. But by the end of my tour Ambassador Spearman -- who as I said was an educator -- he had served previously in a previous administration as an assistant secretary of the Department of Education, as I remember, and he'd been in Texas somewhere -- he became very enthused about a proposal that someone brought to him to establish an American School in Lesotho. This was very difficult for me because I was on the board of the other school. I wasn't the chairman but I was very much a major member of the board and I did not believe that the community would be able to support two schools like that. There weren't enough Americans; I think there were like nine kids from five families or something like that who were recruited to be students the first year, children of missionaries, one AID contractor.

*Q: This school, the American School-*

WAGENSEIL: The American School. It did begin just maybe six months before we left. And I had to recuse myself from some of the decision-making process -- although I made my views known when a guy came out from the Office of Foreign Schools. I said, "Look, I'm conflicted here. I can't put anything in writing but you have to understand where I'm coming from" and I told him my thoughts about the new school proposal. And he said, "Thank you very much, it's very helpful." But they went ahead anyway. You know, one of my concerns was that the community, the diplomatic community was dwindling as embassies moved to Pretoria.

*Q: It gets harder and harder to support a school.*

WAGENSEIL: And I wasn't sure it was worth the State Department's money, because the State Department was prepared to put a lot of money into starting a new school. And there's the whole thing about recruiting and resources and building and textbooks and all this kind of stuff when there was already a school in operation which had been running for 68 years or something. And I said, "Why dilute the product?" Anyhow. So that was kind of awkward and I admit I have no idea what happened later on.

*Q: And generally did you like it there?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, we did. We enjoyed it quite a bit. I became a member of the local Rotary Club. There was, of course, only one in Maseru. I had been a member of the Rotary Club, one of the Rotary Clubs in Harare so I had that as a kind of entry ticket. It was "Harare West." I think there were three or five in Harare but there was only one in Maseru. And so that gave me access to some of the business community and a teacher or two, a banker, and that was interesting. And Jamilée, of course, was the mother of two young children so that gave her an automatic network of peers to complain with and sort of share mothering responsibilities and so forth. And life was fairly good. As I say, we had a nice house.

There was one little wrinkle at the house and I have to share this because it's kind of special. One morning I was taking a shower before going to work and I got a shock in the shower. I told Jamilée about it, she didn't believe me. And I told the admin officer, Mike Sinclair, and he didn't believe me. And I said, "Well, I mean, it wasn't a big shock, it was just kind of a little buzz." And so I didn't belabor the point. But the next day it happened again and then it happened a third time. And so I got an electric voltage tester from the embassy maintenance crew or something and I went in and I turned the water on and I put one lead on one of the water faucets and one lead on the drain and yes, there was a current -- 12 volts AC. So, the first thing they did of course was go to look at the hot water heater and no, that wasn't it -- the hot water heater was fine. It was properly grounded, there was no leakage, there was no juice there or anything. And people thought I was fantasizing, they thought I was nuts. But --

*Q: Except if you-*

WAGENSEIL: I showed them

*Q: -showed them scientific evidence that, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: And they did all kinds of tests and whatnot. Apparently what the problem was was that right in front of the house, on the street, the underground electrical cables ran very close to the water pipe and there was leakage. The insulation on the cables was leaking or something and so there was juice leaking through the damp soil, because they were very close together, because we made them dig it up and check. And so they had to re-insulate everything and move the cables and I don't know what all.

*Q: They did fix it in any case. You weren't shocked in the shower for the rest of your tour.*

WAGENSEIL: I was not shocked in the shower for the rest of my tour but it did last awhile and all those people who thought I was nuts backed away somewhat from that belief. They said look, if you're getting electricity you must be dead. I said no, it's not enough to kill me but it's enough to get my attention.

*Q: And you enjoyed being a DCM as well, the management role?*

WAGENSEIL: I did, yes. I'm going to have to go in a minute. Why don't we-

*Q: Well it's probably the end of Lesotho, I think, but if you want to talk some more about-*

WAGENSEIL: I want to talk about DCM-hood, yes, a little bit. Okay.

*Q: Okay. And I had one more question which I'll ask now; you can answer it later if you want to just so that I don't forget. This was before the AIDS day in South Africa? I mean, not AIDS Day but before the AIDS-*

WAGENSEIL: Before the outbreak yes, basically. It had started in America but it hadn't really reached the national consciousness in South Africa then, no.

*Q: Okay. Okay well next time we'll talk about DCM-ship in Lesotho and then move on to other assignments.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Today is August 4, 2011. This is Peter Eicher continuing on the Dictaphone the interview that I left off with Steve Wagenseil about three years ago it turns out and we'll see how far we can get to complete it.*

*Steve, say a couple of words and let's make sure you're easily audible.*

WAGENSEIL: Sure. I think actually I did speak to you more recently than three years ago but I'm hard pressed to identify a specific time.

*Q: Okay Steve, when we left off on the last interview you were about to talk a little bit more about your stint as DCM in Lesotho.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Start by telling us what years those were in case we don't have it on the last tape.*

WAGENSEIL: I was in Lesotho from 1990 to 1992, early July to early July.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: I think I did three Fourth of Julys there. And I served as DCM. Originally there was a political appointee nominated to take over as ambassador after a one-year hiatus but he ran afoul of the clearance and confirmation process, which I could go into again if anybody cared. It was a bit sordid. But anyway, I interviewed with him in the Department and he gave me the green light and so forth so I packed up and went off to Maseru but he never made it. Howard Jeter, who was my predecessor, had been chargé for a year; I wound up being chargé for six months before Ambassador Leonard Spearman arrived, again another political appointee by President George H.W. Bush.

*Q: Interesting that they did political appointees even to places like Lesotho.*

WAGENSEIL: Well he had been -- yes. But I guess there are some places where they figure they could park someone, make him happy and it's far enough out of the limelight that there's no real risk.

He had been the ambassador in Rwanda and wanted another tour and so the White House was willing to give it to him. He was an African American educator from Houston, Texas, and I don't believe there were many African American Republicans from Houston

interested in serving as ambassador, so I understand that the White House was happy to give it to him.

*Q: Okay. Well why don't you tell us about your first six months while you were chargé.*

WAGENSEIL: Well I had followed Howard Jeter, who did a great job, of course, and so I had a pretty easy move in. The main thing that was going on at that point was a negotiation or a bidding process for the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which is a big civil engineering project financed by South Africa using Lesotho as their water tower because it rains up in the mountains, and diverting the flow of the Orange River, which normally flows south and out to the Atlantic, building dams and reservoirs and then a tunnel to pump it north to Johannesburg, which was becoming more and more thirsty. It was cost effective for South Africa to spend a lot of money to build dams and roads and bridges and everything and dig a big tunnel. But the bidding process was not entirely transparent -- what a surprise -- and the American consortium that was a finalist was scrambling desperately to win the bid -- without breaking the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. They lost the bid; it went to a French consortium. But I spent a lot of energy trying to help make that happen.

The government of the time was a military regime. King Moshoeshoe II was in exile and there was a general (Major General Justin Lekhanya) who was in charge of the government and so I had to interact with the generals and the colonels and whatnot. The foreign minister, Tom Thabane, was a civilian. There was an opposition party which was very far out of power but it was basically trying to -- It's a small place. We had a Peace Corps contingent which was the most important thing we were doing there. I think there was an AID program but it wasn't very big and there was a USIA cultural center which was quite popular in the capital and had some good programs with the university. But it was basically a small mission and I, as the chargé, got to sort of visit all the projects and cut the ribbons and make the speeches for six months, which was pleasant.

*Q: Relations with the United States were pretty good?*

WAGENSEIL: Relations with the U.S. were good. At one point- this was- I've lost the thread of the chronology but we were into the Kuwait war sometime in my stay there and the general -- who was the head of the "Transitional Military Council" government -- at one point offered us troops to join the coalition to repel the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. I dutifully reported that to Washington, where it sank without a ripple because the Lesotho armed forces would not have been much help. It was a pretty blatant attempt in everyone's estimation to curry favor with Washington at pretty little cost. He was a little disappointed but not particularly surprised, I don't think.

*Q: Interesting, interesting. So next Kuwait war or Iraq war everybody was dying to have any little country join the coalition of the willing.*

WAGENSEIL: Right. But the first time around -- I think actually by the time it was proposed things were pretty well advanced and there was not any need to scramble for more names and more flags.

*Q: And relations with South Africa were pretty good at the time?*

WAGENSEIL: Well this was the main issue obviously in Lesotho's international relations up to this point. This was still -- South Africa was still run by, as they used to call it, the "Racist Apartheid Regime" -- all one word -- but Lesotho of course is entirely surrounded by South Africa and so their relationship was at best confused. And there had been a number of instances before I got there where South African forces had crossed the border and raided ANC safe houses and various other establishments in Maseru, near Maseru and on the other sides of the country. Basically, of course, Lesotho could not defend itself.

The interesting thing was that throughout the '60s, '70s and '80s Lesotho was a listening post for all the people who wanted to know what was going on in South Africa but couldn't go to South Africa, such as the Swedes, the Chinese, the Soviets and all. The diplomatic corps was quite large in little old Lesotho, which made, of course, for quite an interesting diplomatic experience. And I -- as the American chargé -- was appropriately wined and dined by the British High Commissioner and the South African (South Africa had a trade representative who was the de facto ambassador, of course, but actually did not work for the foreign ministry, worked for the trade ministry) and by the Chinese and the Russians and the so forth and so on- the Soviets.

*Q: So after six months the ambassador arrived?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Did that change your life?*

WAGENSEIL: It changed it in all sorts of ways, of course. Ambassador Spearman and his wife arrived, as I say, about six months so it would have been the beginning of '91, I suppose, assuming they came after Christmas.

The residence had been vacant for a year and a half but lovingly maintained with a full staff, which we were not allowed to use. I borrowed them on occasion when I was entertaining. Ambassador Spearman, of course, had, as I said, served as ambassador in Rwanda previously and the thing of which he was most proud in his service in Rwanda was that he was able to equip the caddies at the golf course with new matching Polo shirts with the logo of the golf club in Kigali.

*Q: Well that's a nice achievement.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. So, we were a bit at a loss as to what we would find for him to do in Maseru because there's no golf course. I think maybe there was a nine-hole course.

Anyway, he came in, obviously took over the bulk of the representation responsibilities and so forth, but during the time that we were there several things were happening in the real world. The Berlin Wall had fallen; the Soviet Union was evaporating; South Africa was in transition and the purpose of the embassy in Maseru was also in transition.

There was an incident, and I may have talked about this before, I can't remember if I told you about this, but one day in Maseru there was an incident involving a woman who was accused of shoplifting by a Chinese shopkeeper and he followed her out in the street and shouted at her, berated her, and the crowd turned on him and sacked his store and then systematically started sacking all the other Chinese-owned shops throughout the city and basically it turned into a real riot. The police came out; they didn't have any riot control equipment. The army came out; they didn't have any riot control equipment. The good thing is they did not open fire, but it was really kind of a mess. We, of course, went to lockdown and I sent the embassy cars up to the school, the local school where most expat children went, to round up all American kids, to bring them to my residence -- which is adjacent to the embassy compound -- for safe haven. It turned out that there were about 15 Basotho kids who just happened to also have American passports that we never knew about; they weren't registered but yes, they had passports. So, we brought them all to our house and made spaghetti for them and put on videos on and so forth. Heard gunfire in the backyard or from the backyard as the troops were trying to scare away the anti-Chinese demonstrators. The DCM residence was back to back with the property where China was building its chancery.

The interesting story about this event was that it was the same day that South Africa was holding their referendum -- de Klerk's referendum on should South Africa become democratic, in effect. I forget exactly what the question was but that was the fundamental issue. And so, all of the people throughout South Africa were voting. The nearest town to Maseru in South Africa is a small, small town called Ladybrand, which is very much a farming community just about 15 kilometers away, across the border bridge and down the road. Several of the wounded Chinese businessmen, shopkeepers and all, piled into a couple of minivans and escaped the crowd in Maseru, drove across the bridge, across the border and went to Ladybrand for medical assistance. And they pulled up at the hospital, which is right next to a polling place where all the South African *Mienheer* and *Mienvrouw* were lined up with their short pants and knee socks and their long dresses and floppy hats to cast their vote in the referendum in the Orange Free State. All of a sudden these wounded, bleeding Chinese pile out of the minivans and caused quite a stir, apparently. But at the end of the day everything was calm.

But South Africa was going through that transition while we were in Lesotho and so Sweden downgraded its establishment in Maseru and started an embassy in Pretoria. The Soviet Union was coming apart. The Soviet ambassador, who was an Armenian, he had formerly been, if my memory serves, he had formerly been the foreign minister of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia within the Soviet Union and then he became Russia's Ambassador in Maseru. He said to me at one point -- I asked him, "What are

you going to do?” And he said, “Well, I don’t know. Am I a Soviet citizen, yes? Am I a Soviet functionary? No, I’m an Armenian.” So, he was at a loss.

The Chinese relationship was in flux because there had been the usual struggle between Taiwan and Beijing over recognition. Lesotho was one of those countries whose vote in New York could easily be swayed with the proper pressure and so the government, the military regime had disrecognized Beijing and re-recognized Taipei -- and then six or eight months later flip flopped again -- I’m sure once the pockets were lined in the process. So, it was a very interesting time of transition and Lesotho became much less important.

One point during my tenure there a circular went out from the Department about budget cutting and saving money and all embassies were asked to send in suggestions as to new ideas of how to save money, cost cutting measures. And I wrote back, quite frankly -- I was chargé at the time, Ambassador Spearman was away; I think he was away on home leave or something in the middle of the year and I was chargé. I couldn’t reach him -- this was before email and Skype and so forth -- and so on my own account, after talking it over with some members of the staff, I wrote back to AF suggesting that the embassy be closed down, given these transitions.

*Q: That’s pretty gutsy without speaking to the ambassador first.*

WAGENSEIL: Well we had talked about it, if my memory serves and it’s getting a little fuzzy, but he, having been there for a while and realizing that the business was evaporating because the diplomatic corps was losing strength and the importance that, for that diplomatic corps was losing strength, you know, he sort of said to me, “What am I doing here?” I said, “Well, actually...”

*Q: Good question.*

WAGENSEIL: “...serving your country.”

Anyway, so I emphasized that this cable was written on my own -- over my own signature, not his -- but that there had been a time when one ambassador served Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland as the “circuit rider.” It made some sense to me in the context of the new South Africa -- where there was no need really for a listening post with the ANC outpost there, because the ANC was coming to power in Pretoria -- to consider downsizing the embassy. Maybe not to close it entirely but certainly downsize it -- leave it in the hands of a chargé most of the time -- have an ambassador accredited who would be based in Botswana and do Swaziland and Lesotho as well, or something like that. The Department never responded explicitly to me but the circular did come out some time later saying, “The principle of universality remains U.S. policy,” meaning they want an embassy everywhere they possibly can. So.

*Q: So maybe you prompted them at least to reconsider that.*

WAGENSEIL: Well I thought it was worth raising the question anyhow, especially in a time of budget crunch. Not that I wanted to talk myself out of a job but I seriously felt that I had to be honest with the Department. So that was it.

Serving as DCM under a political appointee was a challenge in some ways. Even though he had served as ambassador previously in Rwanda, it was a vastly different situation. He had a certain vision of his rights and privileges and I nearly got into real trouble with him when one time I wanted to use the car and driver to go to the foreign ministry to deliver a note that the Department had sent, a demarche, but his wife wanted to use the car and driver to go shopping or something, and he was in away Pretoria or Jo'burg on personal business. She called him and he called me and said, "You don't use my car." I said, "Sir, I'm delivering a demarche that's come in from Washington." He said "Well, you have a car." I said, "Sir, I'm going to see the Foreign Minister." He said, "You should take your own car." That kind of relationship. And there were some other little incidents of friction which I won't get into. I'm sure everybody who has served under a political appointee has heard them or told them as well. I don't mean to tell tales out of school but it's just a reality of the relationship between the career Foreign Service and inexperienced political appointees.

*Q: And he was there the rest of your tour?*

WAGENSEIL: He was there through the rest of my tour and for a little while longer.

One interesting tidbit, I guess I will tell this tale out of school, he had asked the White House for another embassy after Kigali, because he was certain that his wife liked the overseas lifestyle and wanted to have another African experience. She told me the contrary separately and told me that she was quite unhappy to receive the news that they were going from Kigali to Maseru, which is not really a step up in the hierarchy. So, I think that may have been part of the background. Anyway. He remained for, I think, another six or eight months after I departed so he would have served that two years as ambassador.

Towards the end of my tour I was going through the assignments process and I got recruited of all things to go to Geneva by my interlocutor here, who persuaded me that that would be an interesting place to go.

*Q: Well good. Anything else you want to say about Lesotho before we leave them? Were the kids happy there?*

WAGENSEIL: The kids had a great time, yes. As I say, we had a villa immediately adjacent to the chancery and there was a fence with a gate between it so I could walk home for lunch in about two and a half minutes. There were advantages to that; one time Kevin was playing at home and fell and cut his head and we took him across to the infirmary and the nurse got him stitched up in a matter of minutes. There wasn't any damage. But there was also a disadvantage because- I mentioned earlier the military government had been run by a general, headed by a general. He was overthrown -- by a



colonel or another general -- at some point in the process and he came and took refuge at the embassy or sought-

*Q: The former president.*

WAGENSEIL: The general who had been head of the military council-

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: -sought to take refuge at the chancery. The guards, of course, let him in the compound and he got into the front lobby just after closing one evening. I had gone out for a meeting or a cocktail or something and I got a frantic call from our admin officer who said, "You'll never guess who's landed on our doorstep." And -- knowing that there had been some tensions within the military council -- I said, "You don't mean it." And he said "Yes!" So we had to take care of him overnight, and early in the morning, the following morning, the border opened at 6:00 or whenever, he hopped in his personal pickup truck and drove across into South Africa and left us alone. But there was some frantic phone calling back and forth and I was on the phone with the Op Center -- the usual things.

The other thing that happened while I was there in terms of the government situation was that King Moshoeshoe II -- in his absence -- was deposed by the military council, who installed his son as the king. Prince Letsie became King Letsie and so I got to go and call on the king -- who was a 28 or 29 year old young man and slightly bewildered by this turn of events. As far as he knew his father was in pretty good health and he really wasn't expecting to be a monarch for a while. And I had the occasion to talk with him three or four times and I thought that he was really quite thankful to have someone like me to seek advice from. I mean nothing very senior, nothing very earth shattering. What could be earth shattering, given Lesotho's internal political situation? But still it was a pleasant little element of the relationship and I still have a very nice letter on letterhead from the palace -- from his secretary -- saying that "I am on orders from His Majesty the King to commend to you his best wishes on the occasion of your departure," or something like that, this nice little farewell note.

*Q: Very nice, very nice. And the palace was what?*

WAGENSEIL: The palace, well it wasn't really a palace; it was just a house. It was a big house on the edge of town not far from the parliament building, which is, I thought, a more interesting building. Parliament was like a large African hut. It was sort of circular with a conical roof. The palace was just a big old place, obviously well-appointed but not Buckingham Palace by any stretch of the imagination. And overall it was a fun assignment.

*Q: Very nice, very nice. Did you feel at all like you were back in the Peace Corps again?*

WAGENSEIL: Well I had many occasions to interact with volunteers, of course, and go out to swearing in of new volunteers -- I think there were three groups of volunteers who came in during the time I was there -- and either go out to the training center and visit them on-site. They had a kind of tough life because the mountains of Lesotho are pretty high and it gets cold, and not for nothing is the typical image of Lesotho herdsmen a guy wrapped in a thick blanket standing on a bare hillside.

*Q: I have a picture of one on my wall there that I took as I passed through.*

WAGENSEIL: Indeed, you do. Because it can be pretty cold. The hills are bare; there's no trees. It's treeless slopes and the occasional pony.

*Q: So did you leave with some regrets or happy to move on?*

WAGENSEIL: No. It was time, it was time to go. And as I said, my arm had been twisted telephonically by a friend who persuaded me to, sigh, give up the mountains of Lesotho to go to the mountains of Switzerland so I was ready for that move as well.

*Q: Well I'm very glad you came to Geneva, of course, but the readers of your oral history or the listeners to it will not know everything I know about your assignment in Geneva so you should probably talk about it on that basis.*

WAGENSEIL: Okay. I would have anyway, I think. I'll try not to give away any of your secrets, if that's alright. Not that I know any of your secrets.

*Q: I've already done my interviews.*

WAGENSEIL: I was assigned as First Secretary and Human Rights Officer in the "Political and Specialized Agencies Affairs" section, PSA, at the U.S. mission to the UN and other agencies in Geneva. I forget the full name but it's something like that.

*Q: I think that's right, yes, okay.*

WAGENSEIL: And my principal responsibility was the human rights portfolio, meaning at the time the Human Rights Commission, the sub commission on refugees and migration -- or whatever it was -- of the human rights commission, and "other duties as assigned." And of course, in a place like Geneva, there are always other duties.

*Q: Many.*

WAGENSEIL: Many. For a very brief while, I think five weeks or something, I was also the Telecommunications Officer, as my predecessor had been, so I went over to the ITU and got into that circuit for a little bit, but then there was a change in portfolios and I was relieved of the telecommunications... --

*Q: You lost communication, huh?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, so to speak. Because there was plenty going on in the human rights account. Also about a month after I got there, I found myself appointed as the day-to-day representative of the mission -- and therefore of the U.S. Government -- to the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia (known as ICFY), chaired by former UK Foreign Secretary Lord David Owen and former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. It was created during negotiations at Lancaster House in London in July or August of 1992, just about the time I was arriving in Geneva. It then moved to Geneva from London and set up shop in the UN's Palais des Nations and immediately started expanding, picking up all kinds of senior staffers and more junior staffers, people like Martti Ahtisaari and Geert Ahrens and Bertie Ramcharan and people like that were on the senior staff there. And what had happened was there was an incident in late August or early September (1992) where a plane was shot down over Sarajevo, so an emergency meeting of the ICFY was called. The DCM at the mission got a phone call while we were in the cafeteria having lunch and I saw him standing at the phone as I was sitting at the table and he looked around the room and he realized my plate was almost empty -- and therefore I was probably finished with my lunch -- so he called me over and said, "Do you have time to go to the Palais this afternoon?" And I said okay and wound up going there every day for months and months and months and getting involved in the negotiations and having many such face-to-face contact with all of the major players in the Yugoslavia negotiations.

*Q: This was while Yugoslavia was falling apart? The wars had already broken out there?*

WAGENSEIL: The wars had broken out. There was an active war between Serbia and Croatia; there was all kinds of fighting in and around Bosnia-Herzegovina and these negotiations were attempting to bring a ceasefire. As a result, there were frequent visits to Geneva by people like Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic, Bosnia President Alija Izetbegović, Bosnian Serb Leader Radovan Karadžić and lots of other lesser players in the whole constellation. I don't think I ever met General Ratko Mladić but he's about the only one I didn't meet.

*Q: So you did interact a little bit with some of the others?*

WAGENSEIL: Radovan Karadžić, who was the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, called the chancery, called the mission one day and asked to meet with the ambassador. Ambassador Morris Abram declined to meet with this bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser but said he would be glad to send a first secretary down and so I went down to the Palais one day and had an hour and 20 minute one-on-one meeting with Radovan Karadžić, which I'll never forgive you for. I had never met a psychopath before. I mean, a real one.

*Q: Really, that's how he came across?*

WAGENSEIL: He came across as totally disconnected from reality. He said, "Why are you (meaning the U.S.) picking on the Serbian people?" you know, and it went downhill from there. I mean, it was really quite extraordinary. And basically, he just laid out all of his grievances about how the Serbs were so badly misunderstood and they had been

picked upon since before the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and on and on and on -- going back to the Battle of Kosovo on the Plain of Crows, back in 1389, I think it was... Anyway, he was just obsessed and totally failed to see any other arguments, the validity of any other point of view at all.

*Q: Did he speak in English?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, he spoke English.

*Q: Well that must have been a fascinating interview.*

WAGENSEIL: It was quite extraordinary. I was trembling. I mean, I was nervous going in but afterwards I was even more -- distraught is not the word, but I was quite affected by it.

*Q: You must have been one of the only U.S. representatives who met with him.*

WAGENSEIL: In that context yes. I mean, later the Department sent out Victor Jackovich to be sort of the full-time senior level guy to deal with ICFY and all and the senior people in the negotiations. And Vic -- a native speaker of Serbo-Croatian-Bosnian, whatever you call it -- did interact with Karadžić and with Tuđman and with Mladic and others more often -- but I think I was the first to meet with Karadžić.

One time, Secretary Eagleburger came for a senior level, ministerial level meeting of ICFY and it was held in the old chamber of the Security Council, if you will, of the League of Nation at the Palais de Nation in Geneva. I don't know if the League of Nations called it "the Security Council," but it was that room and the meeting was held there. Eagleburger chaired the U.S. delegation and I remember we were upstairs on the eighth floor, ninth floor, whatever it was at the Palais, waiting for Larry to get in to see Vance and Owen -- I think it was still Vance or maybe Thorvald Stoltenberg took over at one point from David Owen. But he was waiting to see the ICFY leadership and the elevators opened and Karadžić came out unexpectedly. He said, "Oh, I have an appointment" and one of the ICFY staffers kind of rushed to intercept him and push him back on the elevator because he did not have an appointment. He was obviously trying to get in to see Eagleburger -- or at least to cool his heels in the same room that Eagleburger was cooling his heels in -- and that would not have been cool because of course the Department had been very critical of Karadžić for months. And I forget the name of the spokesman (Richard Boucher?), the Department spokesman who was traveling with the secretary at that point but he turned to someone and said, "Can we make a citizen's arrest?" And I think back and I say if we had done that then, how much different the war would have turned out. But anyway.

*Q: Might have been, yes, yes. So that kept going, I presume, for the whole three years you were in Geneva. And longer.*

WAGENSEIL: It went on longer than that. I mean, ICFY faded in importance because it became pretty obvious to them neither Karadžić nor Milosevic wanted a negotiated settlement; they wanted a military settlement -- which they were certain of winning -- so the whole purpose of an international conference was pretty much called into question. But for appearances' sake they kept up with it. That went on the whole time and it didn't really end until Dick Holbrooke kidnapped everybody, took them to Dayton and hammered them into submission.

*Q: At which time you left Geneva.*

WAGENSEIL: By which time I had already left Geneva.

Another thing, another little, tiny thing that I was asked to do on behalf of the U.S. Government -- sort of in the sphere of a political officer in the US Mission to the UN -- was what they called, briefly, the Friends of Georgia. There was a civil war going on in Georgia and the Secretary General of the UN had said, "Well let's try to bring everybody around the table," and so I was asked to go be the U.S. person at the Friends of Georgia, which met I think twice -- once at the French ambassador's residence outside Geneva and once in a hotel. Nothing ever came of it and action shifted later to New York and various other places before the civil war resolved itself basically without any help from the Friends of Georgia. But I learned a little bit about Georgia in that context.

*Q: Well it was a world in turmoil at that point, '91, '92 and '93.*

WAGENSEIL: It was very much in a world of turmoil of transition. We had the extraordinary experience, in the context of the Commission of Human Rights, of first of all, calling a special session of the Human Rights Commission to discuss Bosnia-Herzegovina, the situation in the former Yugoslavia, which is what it was called. And the U.S. prepared -- you prepared, I prepared -- we prepared a resolution for the Commission to adopt on Yugoslavia which would call for the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the subject. When it came up for a vote -- by the luck of the alphabet the United States and the Russia were sitting side by side (it was following the French Alphabet in Geneva, so the Etats-Unis and the Fédération de Russie) -- and we didn't know how the Russians were going to vote on this resolution criticizing their fellow Slavs. And they did the right thing. And I remember you and I looked at each other, sort of went "Whew, dodged that bullet!"

But it was very much a time of transition. It was maybe the best time in the human rights cycle because the Soviet Union had fallen, a lot of its client states had -- or were trying to -- shift. There was a much better acceptance of the universality of human rights as we know it. In a separate context, the OSCE (which of course included Russia) had had the Copenhagen Conference and adopted the Copenhagen Principles and various other things in the early '90s, which indicated that the world was different and that states recognized and accepted that concern for human rights was not interference in internal affairs. So, we benefited from that in that we had a role -- over the course of a couple of years anyway -- of success in the Human Rights Commission on resolutions which the U.S. thought were

important; former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Iran, Cuba. We were never successful, of course, in getting a resolution adopted about China because China pulled out all the stops for a no action motion.

*Q: But we sure tried, didn't we?*

WAGENSEIL: We sure did. And we came close, we came close. But the mood in the human rights community was quite positive at that point and it was a pleasure to be there.

We of course also had, in 1993, the UN's World Conference on Human Rights, which took place in Vienna, which we prepared for through interminable meetings until like 3:00 in the morning, in the drafting sessions and the prep com (Preparatory Committee).

*Q: So for all the better atmosphere there still was a lot of contention in the Human Rights Commission.*

WAGENSEIL: There was indeed still a lot of contention in the Human Rights Commission because, while the Soviet Union had disappeared -- or was disappearing -- and Russia, the Russians were not our enemy in that context, the Chinese were still very much opposed to the universality of human rights and the Non-Aligned Movement was still very strong and in many ways knee-jerk, reluctant or opposed to anything that we in the West -- the WEOG, Western European and Others Group -- would propose, so it was a struggle to get things done. The World Conference on Human Rights opened with a bit of a spat because it was taking place in Vienna and the Austrian government, led in this context by our good friend Christian Strohal as the lead officer in the Austrian mission to Geneva, the Austrian government had invited the Dalai Lama to attend the World Conference. When the Chinese got wind of this of course they went crazy and pulled out all the stops to block it. We did our best to push it forward, saying, "The meeting is taking place on UN premises in the UN building in Vienna and it's a UN conference and why can't he come to the meeting?" And the Chinese just put their foot down and said, "No way."

So that didn't work, but at the reception, the diplomatic reception the first night of the conference offered by the Austrian government at the Hofburg in Vienna -- beautiful reception rooms in the former Austro-Hungarian Imperial Palace -- the Dalai Lama was there, escorted by an Austrian or two. I had been tapped to be the staff assistant to the U.S. Head of Delegation, Undersecretary Tim Wirth, who flew out for a couple of days to sit in the U.S. chair at the opening and so forth -- the Secretary did not come -- and we're in the reception hall circulating and I look over and I saw the Dalai Lama, not far away, and I said to the Undersecretary, "Sir, would you like to meet the Dalai Lama?" And he said, "Well yes, I would!" So I walked over and I said, "I beg your pardon, excuse me Your Holiness, would you like to meet the head of the U.S. delegation?" And he said, "I'd be thrilled, I'd be honored." So I got to introduce the Dalai Lama to the head of the U.S. delegation -- obviously a man who needs no introduction from me, but still it was pleasant.

*Q: What a wonderful experience.*

WAGENSEIL: It was fun, it was fun. It's a nice memory. But because of that contretemps over the Dalai Lama's presence the Chinese were a bit on the back foot in some of the other issues and so I think all-in-all the U.S. -- and the Western European and Others Group in general -- got a lot of what we wanted out of the World Conference. We were able to get some things accomplished. The Non-Aligned Group was difficult, as always; the Islamic Conference group was difficult, in part because of the Bosnia situation -- which they clearly portrayed as an "Islamophobia" issue. That word, I think it was born in our presence. But the final "Vienna Declaration and Plan of Action" that were adopted in Vienna were, I think, quite valuable milestones for the promotion and protection of human rights. There has been some slippage in some of the elements, but I feel quite proud of having participated in that.

*Q: I recall it was a nice document and it paved the way, didn't it, for the creation of the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, it did. But it didn't think it did; I don't think it was meant to. When the final declaration/plan of action were being drafted in the final hours the Costa Ricans or somebody brought up a perennial idea around the UN circuit -- Costa Rica had been tabling resolution on this for years -- of the creation of a High Commissioner for Human Rights, as there is a High Commissioner for Refugees. And I think people were basically just exhausted and they said, "Okay, put it in." And what they did was they put in the final declaration/plan of action a recommendation that the General Assembly should "consider the merits of the idea" of whether there should maybe, someday, be a high commissioner -- thinking that "we'll kick this can so far down the road it will never see the light of day. Set up a commission, set up a study group, you know, refer it to committee and it will disappear." Lo and behold, before the end of that calendar year the General Assembly's Third Committee had taken action approving the suggestion, and the General Assembly voted to adopt the resolution to create the Office of High Commissioner.

The Ecuadoran diplomat -- former Ecuadoran foreign minister José Ayala Lasso -- who had chaired the Third Committee, maneuvered himself into the job and our good friend Ibrahima Fall, who had been Assistant Secretary General and head of the Human Rights Center in Geneva, whom I had known when he was the foreign minister in Senegal and I was posted there and whom I think the U.S. Government thought would be a good High Commissioner, was totally outmaneuvered by New York politics and discovered that he had a new boss sitting on top of him, which led to some very awkward moments in the Palais in terms of the size of the offices and who gets the windows and who gets the new carpet and so forth and so on. But there was a new High Commissioner appointed, which was good, and it has grown into a position of some recognized authority.

The first incumbent wasn't the greatest but he was -- I think he was adequate for the task. Unfortunately, on his watch, shortly after he took office, the massacre broke out in Rwanda or it didn't break out, it just happened. I mean, it was over so fast. And John

Shattuck, who was the Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL), took this up as a serious issue, went to Rwanda and East Africa, came through Geneva on his way home and made a big stink. And the new High Commissioner found himself all of a sudden tasked with deploying a human rights field team to Rwanda, a task which no one had ever done before in the UN offices in Geneva context or in the human rights context. They didn't have personnel, they didn't have procedures, they didn't have resources and they were scrambling to make it up as they went along. They leaned quite a bit on the High Commissioner for Refugees and her experience, Madame Sadako Ogata, and how they react to crises. But when they started out it had never been thought, as far as I know, that the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights would need to have field offices, that it would have personnel deployed outside of the rigors of Geneva. But no one could argue that Rwanda didn't merit field staff and so they were scrambling for a while, and the U.S. did its best to support them and advise them and so on. UN procedures, of course, as we know are even more complicated than State Department procedures, so it was a bit of a rough start but in the end, I think, again, the cause of human rights was advanced.

One other thing that I want to talk about if I have a few minutes: in my role working on Yugoslavia in the context of the Human Rights Commission, our resolution called for the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on the situation, and the UN chose former Polish prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki to be the first Special Rapporteur on Yugoslavia. This was an interesting choice. He had been a democratic prime minister of Poland; he wasn't well known outside of Europe, outside of Central Europe even. His background was as a journalist and he spoke no UN language except a little French. He had spoken French earlier. He was quite old when he got the job and so the office, the Human Rights Center at the time, under Assistant Secretary Fall, had to staff up to support him and so they recruited another Pole, a Polish professor, law professor named Roman Wieruszewski, to be his principal aide and then they recruited a couple of other people to be support staffers and so on. And as the war in Bosnia was proceeding, in the context of U.S. activities with the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, I was tasked by the ambassador -- by the mission, by Washington -- to provide Special Rapporteur Mazowiecki with certain information which had come to the knowledge of the U.S. Government. And, so five or six times, as I recall, I would collect a folder of slightly redacted information from people who control that sort of thing at the mission and lock it tightly under my arm and carry it carefully down to the Palais to share with the Special Rapporteur, who couldn't read it -- or to his staff who could -- and to explain what various terms meant. And that was an interesting element.

There was an inherent conflict in the relationship between the Special Rapporteur and the International Conference because Lord Owen and Secretary Vance and their team were tasked with negotiations, finding a political settlement of some kind for the conflict in Yugoslavia. The Special Rapporteur was tasked with blowing the whistle on all those bad guys and the horrible things they were doing, which of course would only complicate any possible political settlement.



Mazowiecki tried desperately to get into the ICFY conversations -- to have this information he had about violations and atrocities taken into account in the ICFY conversations -- and he was bluntly rebuffed several times by Lord Owen and Secretary Vance, who just said, "No, this will just complicate things. You have your reporting channels through the Commission to the General Assembly or to ECOSOC (Economic and Social Council-UN) at the time and thus to the General Assembly and we are, as you know, a separate standalone, and we don't need you." And he said, "Don't you even want to read what I'm writing?" And they said, "No." So that was a little lesson in realpolitik for me. Not my first and not my last -- but still it was somewhat disappointing.

*Q: I guess so.*

*Back to Rwanda for a second, there was also a special session of the Commission on Rwanda, which I think you handled if I remember correctly.*

WAGENSEIL: There was a special session on Rwanda, which I handled, and again we had to round up the votes. First of all, to have a special session you had to get a certain percentage of the members of the commission to accept it and so we did a lot of lobbying in Geneva and the Department sent out circular cables to all Posts, to all the ships at sea... We got the necessary votes to have the meeting and then the meeting was called and DRL's John Shattuck came as the head of the U.S. delegation and there was lots of testimony by NGOs and whatnot. We worked up a resolution which called for a Special Rapporteur on Rwanda -- and again it was difficult to argue with the realities of that situation. And of course, Rwanda was not really anywhere near as geo-strategically interesting to any of the major powers -- as Serbia was, for example, to the Russians or the Slavs in general. And so, the Rwanda resolution process was much easier than the Yugoslav process had been or was later.

One other thing that I remember in that context, there was a forensics expert, and I've forgotten his name, Cal something or other from Texas, who went out to Rwanda -- No, what am I talking about? No, he went to Serbia or Croatia on U.S. Government suggestion to look at the mass grave in Vukovar, that's what it was, in Vukovar. And came back and briefed the High Commissioner in my presence on what he had seen in Vukovar. This was before the age of digital cameras and so forth so fortunately he didn't have any pictures to show us but his description was very graphic and as we know, later investigation revealed that the mass grave had like 450 bodies in it or something like that, people who had been taken out of the hospital where they'd been treated for their war wounds and taken out of the hospital, driven off to an empty field and plowed into a grave. So that was sort of striking...

*Q: The Human Rights Commission seems to have done some good work but it ended up with a bad rep. What do you think about that?*

WAGENSEIL: Well it ended up with a bad rep because certain states learned to game the system. The Chinese, I think- the Chinese example showed the way for others as to how to defend themselves against resolutions that were critical of their activities, and that was

to get on the Commission itself, become a member of the Commission and fight it from the inside. And so, we had situations where countries like Libya and North Korea -- Iraq, Cambodia -- sought seats on the Human Rights Commission. And because of the regional grouping system of voting (one of my major complaints about the UN mechanisms) the Africa group would agree on two candidates, one from North and West Africa and one from East and Southern Africa. And if the North African candidate was Libya, nobody from the continent was going to oppose it. And if the East Asian candidate was Cambodia well, alright, or North Korea, okay. And so, the Bad Guys learned how to defend themselves by getting on the Commission, in some cases chairing the Commission, and gaining the system. There was also a lot of, in my opinion very short-sighted block voting by the Islamic Conference, the Arab League, the Non-Aligned Group, to defend their members. They weren't necessarily attacking us -- and of course they would proclaim great love and affection for the United States of America one-on-one -- but when they get together in their caucus, they come out with the most incredibly bad statements and choices and positions, votes and so on.

And we see this still, I gather, in the Human Rights Council, which has been created to replace the Commission. The fact is that the Israeli/Palestinian question colors all of the activities in the human rights context because it has been used to hijack the attention of the Human Rights Council -- as it was to hijack the attention of the Human Rights Commission -- to criticize policies of Israel, to defend the poor struggling Palestinian people and their suicide bombers. Because the Palestinians have some valid arguments, the U.S. has found itself increasingly isolated -- not defending Israel necessarily but defending the principle that any final settlement has to be negotiated between Israel and Palestine and not in Salle 17 in Geneva or wherever they meet these days. Or in the Security Council or the General Assembly. So, we find ourselves on the short end of the stick all too often.

*Q: Although from what you said earlier during your time at least, there were, despite the bad guys machinations, resolutions wanting Special Rapporteurs on most of the bad guys.*

WAGENSEIL: We had a string of I thought quite positive resolutions, yes. Not all Special Rapporteurs were great, especially some of the country rapporteurs were not as strong as we might have hoped. Some of the thematic rapporteurs were good: Vitit Muntarbhorn on children; Radhika Coomaraswamy on- what did she have? She had arrested women or something, I can't remember. I mean, there were some good thematic rapporteurs but some of the country rapporteurs disappointed the U.S. because they weren't as hard, as tough and as blunt as we would have wanted them to be. But of course the UN is not always an instrument of U.S. policy and it doesn't always do exactly what the U.S. wants, which is not a bad thing necessarily but it does irritate some people here in Washington.

*Q: And you enjoyed life in Geneva?*

WAGENSEIL: Oh, come on.

*Q: Had to ask.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, sure, sure. Yes, we did, we all did. We had decided we wanted to live in Geneva -- not in the neighboring Canton of Vaud, for example -- and we chose to live on the other side of the river from the Palais in a little town. Since my wife and I are both French speaking and the kids were French speaking we thought it would be fun to live, not in the international enclave or near other diplomats or whatever. So, we had a nice experience in Geneva, got to know some nice Swiss and got to know some nice people outside the UN context and got to visit hills and valleys and lakes and streams and all those things. It was a great time, a great time.

*Q: So you were there until '95?*

WAGENSEIL: Ninety-five; '92 to '95 in Geneva. And towards the end of my tour there, going through the assignments process, it turned out I had- I was offered two choices, two good choices. I had some bad choices as well, of course. But the open assignments- There was the possibility of one year at the Army War College in Carlisle, which would have meant moving back to the Virginia suburbs with my family and then commuting from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, down every weekend or whatever -- which didn't really thrill me although I recognize that it's an honor to be considered for the war colleges. If I had not had my family to think of I would have done it and probably career-wise should have done it but I didn't.

The other option that was offered to me, which I snapped up, was the position of Consul General in Strasbourg, France, which was an advantage because of course it was a Francophone post, it was only three hours from Geneva, three and a half hours, and we could visit it and scope out the situation. French speaking assignment so my kids could continue learning French and so on. So I transferred up to Strasbourg in the summer of '95.

*Q: Well that must have been an interesting place to be at that time as well.*

WAGENSEIL: It was fascinating. My portfolio was Consul General in Strasbourg; my district was the French regions of Alsace, Lorraine and Franche-Comté -- so the northeast corner of France, basically. But I also took up responsibilities for the Council of Europe, which is an international organization headquartered in Strasbourg, founded in 1948 at the time of the post-war efforts to build a better Europe, and one of the first things that I was tasked to do, I got a cable from Washington with the text of a letter from the assistant secretary of state for European Affairs to the secretary general of the Council of Europe, formally requesting that the U.S. be granted the status of observer to the Council of Europe. The U.S., of course, not being a European country, cannot belong to the Council of Europe but they had, a number of years previously, thought up the idea of having "observers" and it was pretty obvious that they wanted the U.S. to be an observer state. There were none up to that time. There were states that were candidates for membership.

But anyway, the U.S. request was the first formal request for observer status and it immediately threw several delegations to the Council of Europe into a tizzy.

*Q: Because?*

WAGENSEIL: Because- Well, one delegation in particular -- the French -- said no. "This is the Council of Europe. It's ours. You can't come to our meetings. Stay away." Or words to that effect. And the French ambassador, I'm sure on instructions from the Quai d'Orsay, was very, very vocal in private and in public, against the U.S. bid. What was- Virtually everybody else thought it was a great idea. The most surprising opposition came from the ambassador of the United Kingdom, who was a Francophile of the first degree, best buddies with the French ambassador. He decided that France was right -- or mon cher ami was right -- and the U.S. should not try to muscle its way into this organization.

There were at the time several states sort of circling around the Council of Europe, waiting to join, largest among them the Russian Federation. Russia had a consulate general in Strasbourg while their candidacy was pending. The problem, of course, with Russia -- and some of the other states that were hoping to get in from Central Eastern Europe -- was the Council wanted every country to be a democracy before they joined. Russia had not yet met that. And I had several frank conversations with my Russian counterpart, Serguei Prokhorov was his name -- he was a former legal advisor of the Russian foreign ministry, a very nice guy. And he told me frankly, "No, no, we're not in a hurry. We want you to be an observer first. We want you there when we join because we understand the Council of Europe's concerns about democracy and about our democracy and we want to demonstrate that we've met their criteria and your being an observer will give credence to our demonstration," as it were.

*Q: Were you called on to lobby on this issue?*

WAGENSEIL: I'll come to that in a minute

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: But that's an interesting element, too.

The other interesting situation was the consul general of Japan, whose consulate and residence was just around the corner from ours. Japan had for some time wanted to be an observer of the Council of Europe especially given the imminent membership of Russian Federation, which would bring the Council of Europe to its doorstep. But Japan said, "No, no, no, we don't want to be the first; we think the United States should be the first observer." So there I was, tasked by my bosses to seek, lobby for and ultimately acquire observer status for the United States of America, going head to head with the ambassador of France and the ambassador of the UK. I'm just a lowly consul general -- but of the United States of America. And so I was reporting back all of these conversations that I had with people. I had one very interesting, revealing conversation -- the Council of Europe has two official languages, French and English. When I was making my initial

round of calls I called on the Italian ambassador to the Council of Europe -- after calling on all the French officials that I as consul general would do, with the mayor and so on -- and then I called on the German ambassador. And it was interesting, the only -- "the" issue that the German was most concerned about was whether the Italian had pressured me to support Italy's bid for Italian to be an official language, because of course "it was obvious that German should be an official language, not Italian, given how many countries speak German, you see, in Europe." Big issues in a small town.

*Q: Yes, indeed.*

WAGENSEIL: Anyway. I reported all of the conversations I had and what people were telling me. The Committee of Ministers was chaired at that time by the ambassador of Denmark and she was very, very eager to have the U.S. be admitted on her watch because of course that would make her look good in Copenhagen's eyes, so she was pretty open with me about what people were saying in closed door meetings. I reported this fact and, at some point, the Department realized or awoke to the fact that our bid was being opposed by the ambassador of the United Kingdom. And so, the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs in the Department of State called the Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office in London, and said, "What is going on?" And the British ambassador received a rocket from Whitehall. I mean -- a rocket -- saying, "You are not to oppose, you are to support." He was furious.

*Q: I imagine.*

WAGENSEIL: He said-

*Q: With you, I suppose.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. He came to me and he said, "What have you been telling Washington?" And I said, "The truth." He was furious, truly caught with his pants down. Anyway.

So we got admitted.

*Q: We got admitted. By a vote or by consensus or-?*

WAGENSEIL: It was- Well, it was consensus by the time it actually came to be decided. It was at the meeting of the Committee of Ministers in like January of '96. And the U.S. Ambassador in Paris was of course designated as the Permanent Observer to the Council of Europe -- but of course she was not in Strasbourg most of the time so I was the-

*Q: Who was that at the time?*

WAGENSEIL: Pamela Harriman.

*Q: Yes.*

WAGENSEIL: So, I was the designated hitter, if you will, the Deputy Observer, and I got the chance to attend meetings of the -- sort of the working level meetings of the ambassadors. Not the Committee of Ministers per se -- which was restricted to member states -- but all of the preparatory meetings of the subcommittees and so forth, which were all the same people, the permanent representatives in Strasbourg. And it was quite fascinating because there were like 38 or 40 ambassadors with whom I was interacting all the time.

One of the things that came up -- and this was before we even became observers -- as I mentioned, the Dayton agreements finally brought an end to most of the conflict in Yugoslavia, and part of the Dayton agreement tasked the Council of Europe with certain human rights responsibilities. Hello. I've been down this road before.

So, I was tasked again to interact with the elements of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe that do human rights for the Committee of Ministers, for the Parliamentary Assembly as well as for the European Court of Human Rights -- which is a subsidiary body of the Council of Europe. So, I had a lot of interaction with them, again, delivering messages and escorting visitors and whatnot.

*Q: How much of your time did you spend on Council of Europe versus being consul general?*

WAGENSEIL: Arguably too much.

*Q: Yes. Which is what, half, three-quarters?*

WAGENSEIL: Let's say I spent sixty percent, maybe more. I don't know. I mean I wasn't on the clock but being Consul General in Alsace, Lorraine and Franche-Comté was very sweet but not much work. We had a privileged position. In the round of cost cutting which the administration had gone through when I was in Lesotho there had been a serious recommendation to close the consulate to the extent that it actually was put into the budget document at some point.

*Q: Wow.*

WAGENSEIL: This led to a very, very active, widespread public relations campaign by people in Alsace and Lorraine, officials in Alsace and Lorraine, and American businesses in Alsace and Lorraine to say, "Keep the consulate open." U.S. troops liberated Strasbourg in 1945, '44. The story of course is that it was French forces that led the entry into the city, and it was a French lieutenant who climbed up the top of the cathedral in Strasbourg and put the tricolour to fly bravely in the sun -- but the guy holding the ladder was an American. And the U.S. role in liberating Alsace and returning Alsace to France, Alsace and Lorraine, was very, very much remembered. So, the U.S. had -- and I believe still has -- a very privileged place in the hearts of the French in that part of the country, maybe more so than in Paris in some ways. And so, I didn't have much work to do, to

defend U.S. interests or promote U.S. interests; they sort of promoted themselves. But there were a number of major firms in and around Strasbourg and Nancy and so on. General Motors had a big plant making automobile transmissions, automatic transmissions for cars. All the cars that GM made in Europe --the automatic transmissions were made there. There was Timken roller bearings, Eli Lilly pharmaceuticals. And a bunch of other firms.

*Q: Did any of these have difficulties that you as consul had to intervene on?*

WAGENSEIL: No, not really. They were long, well-established firms, they had been there since the '50s and they had their own channels, of course, to all of the authorities. There were no difficulties. There were lots of events to-

*Q: Did you have lots of representational invitations, like the Fourth of July kind of thing?*

WAGENSEIL: Oh, sure, sure.

One of the main responsibilities -- which I felt very strongly about -- there are four U.S. military cemeteries in Alsace and Lorraine. Two from the First World War, two from the Second World War, with a total of like 20,000 graves.

*Q: Gee.*

WAGENSEIL: The biggest one, of course, is from the First World War, Meuse-Argonne, in Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, and for those of you transcribing this, good luck in figuring out that. It's in the web site.

*Q: You'll fix it in editing, yes?*

WAGENSEIL: I'd be glad to. It was like 14,000 graves or something -- 14,246. It was just -- the mind is staggered by this.

So every year at Memorial Day, on Memorial Day weekend, I would make two field trips, two speeches to wreath layings, you know, at different cemeteries each year, one on Saturday, one on Sunday or one on Friday and Saturday, depending on the ceremonies. And it's quite moving to see the way the French turn out for those U.S. Memorial Day ceremonies at these cemeteries in their town.

*Q: So there would be a big French turnout.*

WAGENSEIL: You know, a French band, you know, a company of Legionnaires or something. I mean, all kinds of -- showing flags and --

*Q: This is on American Memorial Day, which is not a French holiday.*

WAGENSEIL: Right. No, no. But they're very, very thankful.

I remember, we were riding into the little village where the Argonne cemetery is located - my wife and I in the official car, just a big old boat of an American car, with the flag fluttering on the fender. There was a young woman standing on the sidewalk with her two little kids. And she said, "Look, there's the Americans, wave!" as I drove by. I clenched right up, because my father served in the Second World War in the European Theater. I don't think he was there -- but he was near there -- and to be representing the United States on such an occasion is quite moving.

*Q: It is, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: Another time there was a ceremony at one of the smaller cemeteries, again, a Second World War cemetery, and the mayor of that town was also at the time the President of the National Assembly in France -- because of course in France politicians hold three or four jobs; they're the mayor of the town and they're a deputy in the National Assembly and they're a minister or whatever. They don't see any problem with that. And so, I found myself sitting next to the President of the National Assembly for like an hour at this ceremony and -- you know, you don't really chat during a ceremony like that; you sit in silence and remembrance. But when he clasped my hand it was a very firm grip and the speech he made was extraordinary. Now, he had no notes, of course, and when he stood up and spoke to the crowd, which is mostly people from the region, from the town of Épinal, and he said, "American troops -- GIs -- fought on this field and in those hills -- in the winter -- for 45 days, to free our town. Think about it." Behind him are these rows of over 5,000 crosses and Stars of David stretching out to the horizon. Very moving.

Anyway. That was a major -- an important element, it wasn't major but it was an important element of my representation responsibility.

*Q: It gives you a different view of how people view the United States as well.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Very good.*

*How were your relations with Pamela Harriman? Or did you have any?*

WAGENSEIL: I went up to Paris about once every three months, maybe four months, to meet with embassy staff. It's a very strange situation, my relationship with the Embassy and with the Department. My relationship with the Embassy, as a consul general I was subsidiary to the consul general in Paris -- he was the Counselor for Consular Affairs, and thus was my boss. Although as a political officer -- by training and by instinct -- I was much more interested in talking to the political section, not that there were any politics to talk about, necessarily -- things were basically quiet, the action was all in Paris, of course -- but they were the people who spoke my language and it was much less consular work. We didn't do visas, we didn't do passports; all I did was notariats and prison visits.



*Q: But you didn't say how many of you there were in Strasbourg. Were you it or did you have more Americans?*

WAGENSEIL: I was it. No, no, I was the only American on the staff. During the summertime there might be an intern, but I was the only American officer there and I mean, we had a staff of nine at the consulate; one consular assistant, one admin assistant, one woman who worked for USIA on cultural affairs, one woman who worked for the commercial service. She didn't really work for me. I mean, she did, we were all in the same building, obviously we worked together. And we had a driver. I guess we had- I said nine; there weren't nine, there were six. And we had a gardener.

*Q: But you must have done political reporting out of there as well.*

WAGENSEIL: I did. Well, I did some political reporting on French issues.

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*Q: In addition to, of course, Council of Europe issues.*

WAGENSEIL: I did a lot of reporting on Council of Europe, but the French issues, I mean it was mostly Strasbourg politics; Catherine Trautmann was the mayor. She was a very outspoken member of the Socialist Party, later became Minister of Culture and Communications under Giscard d'Estaing, and obviously I got to know her moderately well. She's interesting, dynamic. The older generation was mostly conservatives and sort of automatically our friends and so there wasn't much to talk about with the senator and the other deputies and so forth. So there wasn't much going on. It was a time of la cohabitation in France. Chirac called a snap election which he lost and so he was forced to have a socialist as his prime minister, which led to some very interesting issues. But they were mostly played out in Paris; all I had was scraps to add. There were no major problems, there was no major commercial dispute. The USIA had a very easy time of it; they'd bring in a group or a show or an exhibit or something and the crowds would pour in and come hear American jazz or look at the pictures, whatever -- it was pretty easy to do.

*Q: I'm surprised we even had that going on in France, frankly.*

WAGENSEIL: Exactly. Well, it was just kind of momentum. This is in part because -- as I said before -- there was this tremendous outpouring of support to keep the consulate and there had been a letter writing campaign by companies like Ely Lilly and Timken Roller Bearings and General Motors, with two members of Congress saying, "You can't close that consulate." And so basically it was exempted from the budget cuts. And so, because the consulate was there then -- what does it cost to have an FSN (Foreign Service National). What do we call FSNs nowadays?

*Q: There's another name.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, I know. Anyway, local employees.

*Q: National employees but there's another name, another set of initials.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. But -- one person to work as the cultural affairs assistant, one as the commercial assistant.

*Q: And there must have been half a dozen consulates in France at the time?*

WAGENSEIL: There were far fewer. In France -- like in most of the countries around the world -- the consulates had been whittled down. They closed Bordeaux while I was there, and this was interesting because at the time -- this was early in my tenure in Strasbourg -- at the time the mayor of Bordeaux was the Prime Minister of France, Alain Juppé (who's now the Foreign Minister as the wheel continues to turn in French politics 15 years later). But they closed Bordeaux because the Department said we've got to save money and Congress said close those useless consulates. Marseilles stayed open because it's a major port and the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) had a lot of activities in Marseilles and so on so there was inherent support for keeping that post. But basically, it was Marseilles and Strasbourg and Paris.

*Q: I guess I didn't realize it was so few. I kind of pictured you having consular conferences in Paris of all the people from around the country.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, I and my Marseilles counterpart would happily share a glass of wine -- around a very small table in Paris.

As it was, shortly before I left Strasbourg the embassy started up with this idea of sort of "American service posts" -- and this would be a post with, again, French employees, and an American consular officer would visit once a week or once every two weeks for a day -- they set one up in Bordeaux, they set one up in Lyon, they set one up in Lille -- to show the flag. This was in contrast -- and this was the thing that used to irritate the bejesus out of Embassy Paris -- Germany had like five consulates; they had five consulates in Germany. The Embassy in Bonn had somehow developed a very successful technique to defend itself against budget cuts. Part of it was of course the fact that there were so many U.S. military bases at the time, although they were dwindling -- the numbers were dropping dramatically. But there were so many servicemen who had served or been stationed in Germany and they had a constituency at home and so Congress, I think still, keeps the consulates in Germany, but it doesn't in France. French politics, French political reaction to the Iraq War and stuff like that don't help, of course.

*Q: I'm sure.*

WAGENSEIL: And our arguments that showing the flag would help counteract... no, they didn't make a difference.

*Q: By the time you were there there weren't McDonald bombings and anti-American things like that going on?*

WAGENSEIL: There had been a series of bombings. They continued to have sporadic terrorist attacks in Paris when I was there, basically the whole time. And the French had a reaction plan called Vigipirate, which is Vigilance Against the Pirates, Vigipirate -- which is enhanced security and street patrols and the army on patrol in Paris, not just the police. It turned out, I think, it was pretty well established that the attacks were mostly by Algerians or other North Africans. But it just irritated the French because there was not any particular reason. There had been an assassination attempt in Strasbourg of one of my predecessors, Robert Homme, who had been Consul General -- I think -- two cycles before me. As he was backing out of the driveway at the residence, a guy rode up to the car on a motorbike and pumped three bullets into the car, hit Bob in the shoulder, grazed his scalp and another one went, I think, into the seat back. But because the guy was astride a motorcycle, which was perpendicular to the car, Bob was able to back away while the attacker couldn't get off the bike, and then he was able to escape.

*Q: And that was your immediate predecessor?*

WAGENSEIL: No, a couple of times removed.

That was apparently later tied to the Palestinian -- the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) or PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) activity.

*Q: So did you have a lot of security as a result?*

WAGENSEIL: I had an armored car. We had, like I said, this big boat -- which weighed a ton and had the thick bulletproof glass and so on -- for official business.

Going back to Ambassador Harriman, she came down a couple of times for visits to Strasbourg, obviously, and also to the Council of Europe and stayed at the residence when she was there. The residence was this beautiful establishment which had nice, beautiful grounds. We had the best residence of any in the diplomatic corps -- and the French ambassador was furious. He had a place around the corner but his offices were also in the same building. We had a separate residence.

*Q: Well, a French ambassador in France has to have certain expectations.*

WAGENSEIL: Exactly, exactly. Yes, but they were not fulfilled.

But at the front door of the U.S. residence in Strasbourg there's a sign, a document, hanging on the wall, saying that "In this house Winston Churchill resided for several months during the negotiations to create the Council of Europe."

*Q: How interesting.*

WAGENSEIL: So when Pamela Harriman came in the door and I showed her that scroll about her father-in-law, it was an interesting moment. And then that afternoon we were

sitting on the patio outside after the meetings and she got a call from London -- oh, I've lost his name -- her son-in-law, Churchill's grandson, you know, so it was -- the connection was very strong.

But basically, the embassy was happy to let me do the political work and the Council of Europe work and so forth. And my relationship with the embassy and the consul general in Paris was reflected to a great extent in my relationship with the Department, because all of my reporting -- I reported independently, directly to Washington and to anyplace else I wanted to, but the very little reporting I did as consul general went to Paris and then was incorporated in their quarterly report or whatever.

*Q: And sent out from there.*

WAGENSEIL: And sent from there. But the reporting I did about the Council of Europe was not. So, I was reporting directly to EUR and to DRL, and EUR would task me with things about the Council of Europe, with an info copy to the embassy in Paris -- but the embassy had no action to take, it was just for their information, but I was asked to do thus and so. And I would report on the various COE issues.

One year -- I think it was 1997 -- I sent out 400 cables in a calendar year.

*Q: Wow.*

WAGENSEIL: More than one a day. Well there was a summit, the Council of Europe had a summit meeting that year -- DRL A/S John Shattuck led the U.S. delegation to this Summit hosted by Chirac, so it was quite the affair. And everybody was there; Tony Blair, Boris Yeltsin, Franjo Tudman was there, Izetbegovic, etc. You know, all the leaders from around Europe. And I was scrambling, of course, to arrange bilats for Shattuck. I think he had like 27 bilats in the space of a day.

*Q: Sounds like Shattuck, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. You know him well. And I got -- not involved, but well informed -- in a lot of the work of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers in particular, also the Parliamentary Assembly, and I tried desperately and I wish still that the U.S. Congress would pay some attention to the Parliamentary Assembly because the point about the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe -- like the parliamentary assembly of the OSCE, only better -- is that it's elected members of the national legislatures who have a task, it's like a committee assignment. Part of their job as MP (Member of Parliament) in London or Député in Paris is to go to Strasbourg four times a year for meetings of the parliamentary assembly. And the U.S. Congress could be there. The U.S. Congress could have a delegation, an observer delegation. Actually, they'd be called special guests or something, I don't know, but they could be there. Israel does; the Knesset has people there every time. The Japanese Diet has people there. Mexico has people there -- you know -- But Congress never cared. So I would report on what was going on and say, "they're talking about interesting issues; they're talking about political

issues, social issues, they're talking about environmental protection, they're talking about pharmaceutical issues, border, communications and Internet stuff. All these things which help inform European policy, now also EU (European Union) policy and could be of interest here." Plus, of course, as a whole different issue, the European Court of Human Rights.

I'm going to have to leave shortly but I want to mention one nice thing that happened- one other nice thing that happened- while I was there in the summer of, I guess, '97. We had a visit from a delegation from the U.S. Supreme Court.

*Q: Oh, how nice.*

WAGENSEIL: Came to meet with the European Court of Human Rights.

*Q: Ah ha.*

WAGENSEIL: The delegation was led by Justice O'Connor-

*Q: Very nice.*

WAGENSEIL: -Kennedy, Breyer and Ginsburg.

*Q: My goodness. Almost the full Court. Almost a majority, I should say.*

WAGENSEIL: Right. Four of the Supremes plus a bunch of other law professors and whatnot, and they were on a trip and they do this, apparently, with certain frequency. They were visiting supreme or constitutional courts in Europe. They visited the German Supreme Court in Karlsruhe, they visited the EU court in Luxembourg, they visited the French Cour de Cassation, and they came to Strasbourg to meet with the President and other members of the European Court of Human Rights.

One of the members of the U.S. delegation was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Texas and there was a law professor from Brandeis or somewhere and a bunch of other people. It was a very interesting crowd and great, great series of meetings, obviously.

*Q: Which you got to sit in?*

WAGENSEIL: Which I got to sit in. And I helped do a little of the interpreting because some of the European judges don't speak English that well.

At the dinner which was hosted by the president of the European Court of Human Rights, he was sitting in the middle and to his, I guess to his right was Justice O'Connor as the head of the U.S. delegation, to his left was Justice Ginsburg, the head of the Texas Supreme Court, which is an elected position. I was sort of over in a corner at this table; there were like seven tables or something. And the president of the Court of Human Rights' wife was sitting to one side. And I'll never forget, at some point between the

second and third courses, after the aperitif and the Riesling and the champagne to rinse your mouth out and so forth, she leaned across the table to Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and said, "Can I ask you a question?" And Justice O'Connor said of course. And she said, "Why do you keep killing people? We don't kill people in Europe."

Now, the president of the Supreme Court of Texas nearly had a heart attack. Justice O'Connor, cool as a cucumber, obviously she'd had this question before, she said, "Well, I know about your position. I know it well. But our job is to interpret and help enforce the Constitution and the Constitution is silent on that question. That's not an answer. That's my answer." So that was an interesting insight into constitutional law by an expert in the subject.

*Q: And a fun overall experience.*

WAGENSEIL: Very nice, very nice.

*Q: Alright well, I know you've got to go now so we can leave it here and maybe take it up next time with your move back to Washington after that?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes.

*Q: Today is August 10, 2011, and this is Peter Eicher continuing the interview with Steve Wagenseil.*

*Steve, when we left off you were about to move to Washington but let me ask you if there is anything else you want to say about Strasbourg before we move on.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, there are a couple of things that came to mind after we talked last time, following up with questions you asked me, which I never got around to answering.

As I had said, the Russian Federation was applying to be a member of the Council of Europe and the Russian consul general told me in all seriousness that they were quite happy that the U.S. was applying to be an observer because they wanted us to be sort of silent witness, if you will, to their bona fides as a new democratizing country. And I said I fully understood that desire and as it happened we became observers, we were granted the observer status in early '96 and shortly thereafter the Russian application became very much an active issue in the Committee of Ministers, and it got quite active. It was a matter of considerable dispute amongst the European countries because of course they'd been living under the threat of the Red Army for so long and memories of the Soviet Union were still fresh, and quite frankly the human rights situation in Russia was not yet wonderful, although they had done some good things and said some good things in international fora, as we know, for example the UN Human Rights Commission -- where we were both working previously.

But as it came down to the wire, I was increasingly called upon by the diplomatic corps in Strasbourg, the ambassadors of countries north, south, east and west, all of whom

wanted to know “What did the U.S. Government think of Russia’s candidacy to be a member of the Council of Europe?” Because it is a fundamental criteria, or it was at the time or it had been previously, let me put it that way, that in order to become a member of the Council of Europe a state had to be a democracy already and fully respect the rule of law and the human rights and so forth, and of course they have to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights and come under the jurisdiction of the Court. But the Russian Federation, everybody agreed, wasn’t quite there yet, if it was in fact even headed that way -- so all the ambassadors, not just the Danes and the Swedes and the Portuguese but everybody, big and little, wanted to know what Washington felt about this idea. And so, I dutifully reported all my conversations, all the different ambassadors who were asking me those questions, and I asked for guidance -- and got none. I got no response from the Department in writing. It finally came down to the wire -- the vote was going to be taken in the Committee of Ministers like a week later -- and I had sent a number of cables, I had enlisted the embassy; Mark Bellamy, I think, was the political counselor at the time, he had endorsed a cable I had written to Washington, echoing my concern on behalf of the Ambassador -- who of course was the permanent observer, and still silence from Washington.

And finally I called the Department and I talked to somebody in EUR, I can’t remember who it was, and they gave me the number of a woman, whose name I’ve forgotten, who worked in the undersecretary’s officer.

*Q: Undersecretary for political affairs?*

WAGENSEIL: For Political Affairs. Which might have been Marc Grossman at the time, I don’t remember.

In any case, I called her, explained who I was and why I was calling, she said, “Oh yes, I know exactly who you are, we read all your cables with great interest.” -- which I found fascinating. I said, “Look, I hate to go out of channels but it was recommended by somebody in EUR that I call you because I really do need instructions.” And she said, “I understand, I’ll call you back.”

A couple of days later -- which would have been like Friday before the meeting on Monday or Tuesday of the week where it was to be decided -- she called me and she said, “I can give you no instructions. What I am authorized to say to you is this is a matter for the Europeans to decide.” So that’s what I’m supposed to tell the Europeans? “This is a matter for the Europeans to decide...” But they will ask me, I said, “doesn’t Washington have an opinion? This is a matter for the Europeans to decide.” So after she said that about five times I said, “Okay, what I’m hearing you say is that the Department can’t come to agreement on a position, that you can’t make up your mind or you can’t agree or whatever.” And she said, “Read into it what you will, this is a matter for the Europeans to decide.”

*Q: Okay. So, you duly conveyed that to your European colleagues?*

WAGENSEIL: I duly conveyed that to everybody, made a bunch of phone calls, went around to see people and whatnot -- whereupon, of course, each of them asked me, "Well what do you think? What is your feeling?" And I told them in all honesty, "Look, I do not have instructions from Washington, what I am told is 'this is a matter for Europeans to decide.'

However, "in my personal view," I said, "I think it would be -- we've just come out of 60 years of a line having been drawn across the continent. In my personal view, I don't think it would be a good idea to draw another line across the continent, separating some countries from others." And several of them said, "Yes, that's how we feel as well."

*Q: Since that apparently was their ultimate decision.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, what happened was the Russian Federation was admitted without, I think without opposition. It wasn't unanimous but it was "unopposed," as I recall. But there were conditions imposed, a number of conditions, and what happened was the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe -- which is separate but not necessarily less than the Committee of Ministers -- had adopted a resolution saying "If the Russian Federation were to accede, it should promise to do the following things..." And the Committee of Ministers or some members of the Committee of Ministers came up with additional steps that they wanted the Russian Federation to take, and those were duly transmitted to the authorities and President Yeltsin wrote back saying "Yes, we promise. We will be good boys, we will accede to the European Commission of Human Rights, we will ratify the Treaty on Minorities, we will do this, we will do that and we will do the other thing." And having received that letter of response they were members, they were accepted as members.

Now, I would point out that at the same time that this process was going through Croatia was also applying for membership. Croatia, of course, having just come out of -- or still in the process of staggering out of -- the Yugoslav wars, and there were people who didn't think Croatia was ready either, people who didn't like President Tudman for one reason or another, didn't trust him and his -- I don't want to say 'regime' -- his government and so forth. So there was a similar list of steps to be taken, drawn up in the case of Croatia. As I remember the country most vehement in that context was the Netherlands for some reason. I believe, I've lost the thread but I think the Srebrenica massacre had already occurred and maybe the Netherlands were feeling a little vulnerable or on the defensive for having been involved in that massacre in the way they were as providing the troops to the hapless UN force. So anyway, the Russian Federation became a member and Croatia became a member and that opened the doors for some other memberships.

I will point out that when I first arrived in Strasbourg the latest countries to have been made members, if I remember correctly, just before I got there in the middle of 1995, were Ukraine and I believe Macedonia, or as we say, FYROMia, and this was, again, in the time where Ukraine was doing all the right things and saying all the right things and everybody of course wanted poor little Macedonia to be in. But the membership of Serbia



and of Bosnia-Herzegovina were still very much up in the air. Slovenia had been accepted some time previously.

*Q: I seem to remember a debate similar to the Russian one on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia at some point in the future?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, exactly. And I meant to mention that as well. It was a considerable debate within the membership -- and the secretariat -- of the Council of Europe about the applications or the interests of the Southern Caucasus states, and the argument against them was that geographically they're not part of Europe. Europe had always been defined as bounded by the Ural Mountains, the Ural River and the Caucasus Mountains and there's a little bit of Turkey so we'll take all of Turkey but not Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. On the other hand, those three states made the plea that, "Look, we are culturally and historically more tied to Europe because of our having been absorbed by the czarist regime -- the argument was made that those three countries had more affinity to Europe than to anywhere else since they had been part of the czarist empire and then the Soviet Union. And they very much wanted the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval from the Council of Europe as they fought their way to democracy.

The response was, "You're fighting," because there was, of course the very- open warfare between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the dispute between Georgia and Russia had not flared up at that point as it has recently - but there was still a lot of tension with the Russian Federation over Sochi and so on -- so there was hesitation in Strasbourg. But the agreement was sort of reached that, "Okay, we can take Georgia because Georgia is doing alright, Georgia is on its way, Georgia will be qualified for membership, and we will agree to the requests of Armenia and Azerbaijan to become members -- but they're going to have to become members simultaneously, which means they're going to have to figure out something between themselves and reach some kind of truce or ceasefire or something before we're going to let them in the door." Which was good enough to give them some hope and let them proceed with their candidacy for membership.

There were also at the time, especially in the Parliamentary Assembly, a number of states that were special guests. As I had mentioned earlier the U.S. Congress had been repeatedly invited to attend as special guests, but Congress was not interested, which I think is a shame. Other states like Israel, some of the North African states, if I remember correctly, later on Mongolia, Mexico and so forth got the right to come to parliamentary assembly meetings and to speak during debates. They can't vote of course -- but living here in Washington you know the situation of having a delegation who doesn't have a vote.

And the other thing -- one other point that I'll make and then I guess I have to give Strasbourg up, every year the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe sits as the parliamentary oversight body for the OECD, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is headquartered in Paris. When it was set up in the mid '50s it was sort of agreed that it needed some kind of parliamentary oversight connection and

they agreed at that point -- and the U.S. acceded to this -- that the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, the PACE as it's called, would be the oversight body for the OECD, and so every year in September, during the September session of the PACE, there's a day given over to the OECD. And at that session a U.S. delegation -- if one were present -- would have the right to vote, which is why, of course, Congress never goes to the parliamentary assembly ordinarily -- because they would not have the right to vote so why go if they can't vote. Of course, forgetting what they've done to the District of Columbia but I don't want to get started on that one.

Since the OECD is based in Paris of course the staff comes down, the Director General comes down and the U.S. representative to the OECD -- or one of the staff from the office at the embassy in Paris -- comes to Strasbourg for the day. And there's a round of meals and meetings and more meals and more meetings and the other states -- I don't know how it is now but when I was there -- the other states that would come and be represented by members of parliament were Mexico, Japan, Australia, New Zealand. And there I am, the sole U.S. representative, maybe some guy from the embassy in Paris and then there's senators from Mexico and senators from Australia and members of the Diet from Japan and I don't know what all, and they keep saying, "Where's your delegation?" And I have to keep saying, "Congress didn't send one," which was always unfortunate. Not that the debate was ever particularly thrilling -- and the oversight process of the OECD always struck me as kind of pro forma -- but still it was a chance to talk about economic cooperation and development in a venue that was somewhat unusual for the member states.

A word about the parliamentary assembly and then I'll let it go. The parliamentary assembly, as I said earlier, is comprised of members of the national parliaments, and they talk about all kinds of issues. They talk about human rights problems, political affairs -- there's a lot of debate as I said about Russia, about Armenia, about Georgia, Azerbaijan, about Croatia. They talk about the environment and so forth; they adopt resolutions; they go on fact finding missions; they go on election observation missions for states in the region, and I think they serve a very useful purpose. It's a way for a little cross-pollination amongst the member states of the Council of Europe -- and in my opinion it goes beyond or deeper than the European Parliament affords to the members of the European Union. Because these are sitting parliamentarians in their capitals they carry things back to their governments that MEPs (Members of European Parliament) don't necessarily. MEPs are elected directly, okay, but they don't report to their country. In fact, there are those who say they don't report to anybody -- and that's a problem with the European Parliament. Obviously, I have a particular fondness for the PACE and the dedicated professional people who work there -- basically I like the Council of Europe structure very much. The only downside I saw to it is it's kind of insular -- incestuous -- there are people who work there all their lives and never got out and that, I think, led to a certain amount of blinders. They went through the transition from the Cold War to the Post-Cold War pretty well -- and I think they still have a role to play -- but it's not perhaps as important as it was during that transition when they were, as I said, seen as giving the Good Housekeeping Seal to those states, which wanted that approval on their way to Brussels.

*Q: Here in the States it's a little known organization I think-*

WAGENSEIL: Barely.

*Q: -and people don't, yes, don't recognize how important it has been as sort of a leader in developing human rights standards and new human rights standards and pushing the whole human rights agenda forward.*

WAGENSEIL: Absolutely. I agree entirely. I mean, the European Convention on Human Rights was the first international human rights treaty. A Treaty; with a court, and the court passes judgment and the states have to follow that. Now, the U.S. doesn't like that because it's a supra national court and -- for obvious reasons in our philosophy -- the U.S. constitution is supreme and the U.S. Supreme Court is supreme so we couldn't accept international jurisdiction -- except of course when we do, in other treaty contexts but never mind. It's like the whole dispute about the Inter-American Commission and the Inter-American Court, to which we are nominally participants. But yes, the Council of Europe has done some very good work. It's not well known. Those who have encountered it I believe have quickly forgotten it.

*Q: Okay. I'm sure you'll mention it again in other contexts as the history here progresses.*

WAGENSEIL: Right.

*Q: I'm sure you will be running into it again.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, we will.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: So at the end of my assignment in Strasbourg, I had been working in the democracy/human rights environment since '92 in Geneva and the assistant secretary for DRL -- John Shattuck, who had also come to the Council of Europe summit in October of 2007 -- recruited me to come to work in DRL.

*Q: Okay. That's the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor.*

WAGENSEIL: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, where I was offered the position of Director for Multilateral Affairs (DRL/MLA), based on my experience with multilateral organizations like the United Nations and the Council of Europe.

*Q: And that was beginning in when?*

WAGENSEIL: Ninety-eight, summer of '98. So we transferred back. I could have requested a fourth year in Strasbourg; it was not unheard of, others had done it. I honestly

felt I had enjoyed it enough. I didn't want to deprive some other deserving Foreign Service officer of the pleasure of serving in Strasbourg and I wanted to see what kind of work I could do as an office director in the Department. So we left after three years. My wife still complains about that -- but that's neither here nor there.

*Q: And the kids would have maybe been going to high school already at this point?*

WAGENSEIL: Okay. Anthony, our oldest son, had been going to a lycée in Strasbourg for, I think, two years, and Kevin was in middle school in Strasbourg. And we came back and Anthony went into the local high school and Kevin went to the local middle school.

*Q: You'd been away for a long time.*

WAGENSEIL: I'd been out eight years; two years in Lesotho, three years in Geneva, three years in Strasbourg.

*Q: Alright.*

WAGENSEIL: So basically since 1990; came back in '98. That's probably long enough in the cycle of one's career. We know, of course, there are certain officers who have never served in Washington but I felt it was valuable to have a Washington assignment, again -- at a position of some seniority in a bureau. I had developed very good relations with DRL after working in human rights in Geneva and in Strasbourg, although my official reporting channels were through EUR. But, as I have indicated, EUR was not as enthralled with the Council of Europe as I was. EUR had lots of other fish to fry and everything seemed to be perking along quite well in the Council of Europe environment and so they didn't spend much attention on us. I will point out for the Council of Europe summit, which took place in Strasbourg, the head of the delegation was the assistant secretary for DRL and the only person who came from the Bureau of European Affairs -- to a summit of all the leaders of Europe -- the only person who came was my predecessor in Strasbourg, who at the time was the director of EUR/WE, director of Western European affairs. She came primarily to see her friends, whom she had left behind when she left Strasbourg two years previously, and the Bureau of European Affairs seemed to me to neglect the whole idea of this summit meeting of all the leaders of Europe -- they were all there and I thought that was extremely stupid, and I told the Department so -- informally -- and they said, "Eh, we've got other business."

*Q: And did at least the American ambassador come to the meeting?*

WAGENSEIL: I don't believe the ambassador was there at all. At that point, if I remember correctly -- I've lost the thread -- late 1997 Ambassador Harriman had died of a heart attack while swimming at the Ritz and Felix Rohatyn had been appointed ambassador. I don't recall whether he came or not. Perhaps he did but I don't remember him being there. He came down on a couple of other occasions and made quite a splash of course.

*Q: So you had the U.S. seat at the summit.*

WAGENSEIL: Well John Shattuck did.

*Q: John Shattuck, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: I was running around alongside, setting up bi-lats and so forth.

Back to DRL. I came into DRL in late August, early September of 1998, took up responsibility of managing a staff of, I guess five or six people, a couple of secretaries and four officers, as I recall, and aside from the usual annual frenzy of the UN General Assembly, which was coming, and all the issues in Third Committee, which would have moved from Geneva, the Human Rights Commission, to the Third Committee in the GA (General Assembly), which was the normal -- going through ECOSOC, but that was kind of pro forma -- Commission in the spring, ECOSOC in the summer, GA in the fall.

The major event looming on the DRL horizon was the World Conference Against Racism, which was set to take place in August of 2001 -- towards the end of my expected tour in DRL.

*Q: That was in Durban, right?*

WAGENSEIL: In Durban, South Africa, yes. And, like any world conference, of course, this required massive amounts of preparation, both in the UN context but especially in the U.S. Government context. I was quickly drawn into lots and lots of meetings, with lots and lots of people across the country on issues of racism in the United States and how to tell our story in Durban, how to defend ourselves in Durban and so on. And I'll come back to that later. But I also accompanied the assistant secretary to New York for some meetings, I went to Geneva for a number of meetings, I went to the Human Rights Commission a couple of times for like four, five, six weeks at a throw, and was part of the U.S. delegation -- for my sins I was endowed with responsibility for the resolution on Yugoslavia, time and again, and it got to be kind of rote in Geneva terms because the conflict was winding down, there were still lots of lingering issues especially in Serbia but there was no active warfare, there was still some cleaning up to do, there were still some human rights violations to be concerned about, to be accounted for and so on. And so that resolution wasn't particularly hard; it took a lot of time to convince people -- with drafting and so forth -- but a great fun process with the delegation saying one thing, and the other delegations that you want as co-sponsor saying something else and then the lawyers in Washington saying, "Wait a minute, you can't say that!" The issue of genocide or not, ethnic cleansing or not, that sort of thing.

*Q: Were you still trying to do a China resolution at that time as well?*

WAGENSEIL: Always trying to do a China resolution. There was always an effort on the part of the U.S. delegation to get the Commission to adopt a resolution on China. We finally decided -- at higher pay grades -- finally decided that the U.S. shouldn't lead the

resolution, we should try to find somebody else to take it on, somebody else who would be perceived, perhaps, by some of the non-aligned states, for example, as not having an ax to grind in the Washington/Beijing context but as being sort of real genuine human rights advocates. It didn't really fool anybody very long but we did get -- We had the Norwegians, we had the Danes; I can't remember who it was. We had some European friends working on that. We had a couple of Latins; the Japanese were always very skittish for obvious reasons about taking any profile in this, and Iran and Iraq and Cuba, of course Cuba will always be an issue for us, and then of course the perennial Israeli/Palestinian questions. At one point, as I remember, there were like six resolutions about elements of the Israeli-Palestinian question, the question of refugees, the question of settlements, the question of access to water, I don't know what else. There were all sorts of things going on -- all of which we thought were a bad idea and which we would, if obliged, vote against if we weren't able to stop it from being put to a vote and often we would be in glorious isolation or maybe we'd have the Marshall Islands or Palau or Lesotho or somebody on our side, depending on who the membership of the commission was.

*Q: That was in Geneva; did you- did this parallel the issues you were dealing with in Washington?*

WAGENSEIL: The issues in Washington were very different. I mean, there were some of the same things but as always Washington has its own perspective on everything and its own priorities. Those issues -- which those of us in the inner circle, if you will, or the seventh circle, saw as crucially important at the Human Rights Commission or the Third Committee in New York -- are not necessarily as important in the larger bilateral scheme or larger multilateral scheme and so sometimes it was difficult to recruit support from the regional bureaus involved, to get regional bureaus to sign off on a demarche cable where we'd implore the embassy in Paris or Canberra or Argentina, wherever, to please weigh in because their vote is crucially important, -- when of course we've got lots of other things going on with Australia or Argentina or wherever. So, there was that constant struggle. And developing positions for the human rights context in Geneva and in New York was always a full scale press -- and the regional bureaus, as I say, had other issues on their minds and sometimes -- I don't want to say more often than not but all too often -- DRL found itself at odds with the Bureau of International Organizations, which of course sees itself as responsible for the United Nations and sees itself as responsible for issuing instructions to the U.S. delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights, or to the UN General Assembly Third Committee. And DRL, which sees itself as the keeper of the flame on human rights issues sometimes butted heads with IO (Bureau of International Organizations) on larger UN dynamics and so that relationship remained very lively.

Just as an aside, I bumped in Bev Zweiben the other day, I hadn't seen her in years and years, she was the director of the office in IO that we dealt with most often on that.

And so there was a lot of negotiation. I've always said that negotiating with our enemies is nowhere near as complicated as negotiating with ourselves, as we try to develop positions going into a multilateral meeting.

*Q: Was there a particular ambassador in New York who was involved in the human rights issues that sticks in your mind?*

WAGENSEIL: There should be and there was but I can't remember her name. Betty King was involved to a certain extent. The U.S. ambassador was one of the five in New York responsible for ECOSOC issues at the time -- she had the lead on the human rights portfolio because the Human Rights Commission was a subsidiary body of ECOSOC and so everything that happened in Geneva had to go through ECOSOC in New York or wherever before it got to the GA. And so she was the lead person with whom we had to interact.

*Q: Who was the perm rep in New York at the time, do you recall?*

WAGENSEIL: I'm drawing a blank.

*Q: Who was the president of the United States at the time?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, there was a transition.

*Q: Oh, okay.*

WAGENSEIL: You know, there were elections in 2000, you may have heard.

*Q: I do remember that yes, okay.*

WAGENSEIL: President Clinton was in office when I got to DRL and President Bush was in office when I left, and I'll come to that or some elements of that later.

But anyway, there was no major shift in our human rights posture -- because of the transition in the administration -- to my seeing at my low level. There was a shift in the leadership of DRL but actually -- before the election even -- I had been in DRL very few months when Assistant Secretary Shattuck announced he was leaving and Harold Koh -- Harold Hongju Koh -- came in. Actually, the transition was sort of underway before I even got to Washington. Shattuck had recruited me but he left after I got there and Harold came in as assistant secretary, having been professor at Yale Law School. In fact, as I look back, during the visit to Strasbourg of the Supreme Court justices I mentioned that there was a transition underway and it was somebody from Yale and they all said, "Oh, Harold Koh, of course!" Because he had been a clerk for Justice Brennan and was still very much active in the legal community -- so the Justices knew him personally -- as well as knowing of him. So when they smiled and said his name, I felt better about the fact that Shattuck -- who had been sort of my patron -- was not going to be there. And when Harold came in we quickly bonded and I worked very closely, very well with him.

Early in his tenure, which would have been in '99, the Council of Europe had its fiftieth ministerial meeting, fiftieth meeting of the Committee of Ministers, to which the U.S. was invited. It took place in Budapest; Assistant Secretary Koh led the U.S. delegation and I led the assistant secretary around, introducing him to everybody, and he got quite amused by, you know, the way people would run up to me and say, "Oh Steve, hi, who's this with you?" You know: "Who's the guy with what's-his-name?"

Anyhow. But I facilitated a lengthy round of bilateral conversations and so forth at that meeting and the new assistant secretary -- this former law professor who was very familiar with human rights issues in the international context of course -- knew about the European Court of Human Rights, the European Convention and its parent body the Council of Europe, so I didn't have a lot of education to do on that.

Otherwise the electoral transition, the presidential transition was a bit disruptive for me because as I said I had started working early in the preparations for the World Conference on Racism and the Clinton White House recognized that this would be an important moment for U.S. foreign policy, for the U.S. international image and so forth. I have been told that President Clinton felt strongly that the U.S. had a record to be proud of in dealing with race relations and that we should tell the story and show ourselves as a good example of how one can overcome racial conflicts. And so, there was a task force set up under the NSC, an interagency task force bringing together the White House, State, Justice, Treasury, Interior and a whole bunch of other federal agencies for periodic meetings, at least monthly, sometimes more frequently, both internal and then some external meetings to develop policies and postures for the world conference.

*Q: Were you the State representative?*

WAGENSEIL: I was the most frequent State representative or one of two; somebody from IO would come also. Howard Perlow at that point was the director of IO, whatever the office was, IO- I've lost the acronym -- how quickly we forget -- that had the responsibility in the human rights context, and there were meetings in Washington with people from around the country. We had a meeting in Chicago that we went to, there was a meeting in Albuquerque that we went to, and there were a number of issues that were hot for the U.S. delegation as we tried to prepare for this.

The racial issue was far more than just African-American issues. I mean, the African-American community was very engaged and we had some very good relations -- very good conversations, good exchanges of ideas -- with representatives of the African-American community but there were also Latino groups and most potently the Native American communities, the recognized tribes -- and some of the unrecognized tribes and so forth -- because there had been -- I don't want to say "festering" but it sort of felt like festering -- in Geneva for the longest time, the proposal that there be a declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples -- people or peoples -- in the UN. The U.S. had a position that was basically at odds with everybody else in the world because we -- the issue of "people versus peoples" was beyond theology in the eyes of the lawyers in the State Department and the lawyers and activists in the Native American community. And I'll be



honest, I've forgotten which way it flips but with the "s" it means one thing, without the "s" it means another and --

*Q: Peoples have the right to self-determination.*

WAGENSEIL: Peoples, that's right. And it was a question of self-determination and there were those in the U.S. Government -- particularly in the lawyer communities that we had to deal with -- who felt that if we granted Native Americans the right to self-determination they might determine their own futures and perhaps even secede or something, which would be a threat to the Union. Not that any of them wanted to do that -- except for one or two of the most hot-headed -- but the lawyers were not assuaged and so it was a constant struggle back and forth to find a position where we could accept something in Geneva. Finally, they did, it was off my watch, and there's now a declaration which basically nobody pays any attention to but it's been adopted.

*Q: And this was an issue also in the context of the World Conference?*

WAGENSEIL: This was very much an issue in the context of the World Conference because the Native American communities, tribes and their representatives, had over the years in the negotiations in Geneva formed alliances with indigenous representatives from around the world. I mean, the Sami from Lapland and aborigines from Australia and everybody in between -- Brazilian Amazonian indigenous peoples and who knows what. And there was a tremendously complicated inter-group dynamic -- that was constantly weaving together and apart and putting pressures on Western European and other group states, WEOG (Western European and Others Group) states, putting pressures on African states, Eastern European states. The Russians of course had a lot of heartburn over some of the indigenous groups or the ethnic groups inside the Russian Federation who don't necessarily have a political standing but do have a distinct identity and some of them presented themselves as indigenous and having been conquered by those nasty Russians or whatever.

*Q: So you were going to talk about the change between administrations and how this affected the conference.*

WAGENSEIL: Okay. Well the momentum that we had built up with the interagency task force and the dynamic that we had developed -- which was not entirely positive but not entirely negative either -- with the NGO community, the activist community, the Native American communities, that momentum was kind of dissipated during the transition between the time that the election took place, the final results were declared, which was, as we all know some time later -- then the inauguration and the taking of office of the Bush Administration and the getting organized of the Bush Administration there was a lot of lost time and lost momentum. We tried to keep meetings going and obviously DRL and the State Department stayed in business but we didn't really know what the Bush White House would necessarily think about the World Conference -- about what posture we should take and so forth -- so some of the momentum was lost and it took a while to pick up the pieces from that, unfortunately. I don't think any harm was done except I

think we would have perhaps been better positioned. We never really got the chance in Durban to tell the U.S. story.

*Q: When was the actual conference in Durban, do you remember?*

WAGENSEIL: It was at the end of August, 31 August through the 8th of September of 2001. There were a series of preparatory conferences -- for the World Conference -- in Geneva, in Santiago, Chile, in Dakar, Senegal -- and the U.S. delegation of course went to all of those and we were very active in negotiating the documents that came out of those regional meetings.

*Q: Who was heading the delegations to those kinds of meetings?*

WAGENSEIL: Well, during the Clinton Administration it was Secretary Koh by and large; during the Bush Administration Lorne Craner became the assistant secretary but I don't recall he was present for the meetings. I think IO took over part of the lead for that. Mike Southwick, Ambassador Michael Southwick was a key player from IO in this, very much fully engaged in the issues, in the meetings, Geneva, Santiago, and in Durban. He had a key role in Durban. I don't recall exactly who else was on the delegation.

*Q: Was there some threat at some point that the U.S. was not going to attend the conference?*

WAGENSEIL: There was always a sort of a cloud hanging over the issue of attendance because there were so many nasty issues lurking in the bushes waiting to nip our ankles -- the indigenous rights question was one, the question of reparations. There were those in the African-American community who had been discussing the issue of reparations for slavery. First of all, an apology for slavery -- not that it's our fault necessarily but an apology of some kind, And then following from that the issue of reparations, which of course the U.S. Government was not ever going to entertain because "40 acres and a mule" translated into the year 2000 or 2001 was impossible to meet -- so the issue of reparations, there were a couple of activists in the African-American community who were pushing very, very hard. I think of Gay McDougall, who is an extremely articulate, extremely effective advocate for her positions -- which brought her into certain friction with the U.S. delegations from time to time.

*Q: How about Zionism and racism; was that-*

WAGENSEIL: That was -- Zionism versus racism -- Zionism is racism had been an issue, of course, in the human rights context for a long time. It had sort of faded by the time we were on the road to Durban.

*Q: It had been repealed at some point along the way.*

WAGENSEIL: It had been repealed, if repealed is the word; it had been sort of taken off the books at some point, I think while I was in Strasbourg, but the larger

Israeli/Palestinian question was a huge problem. The international debate about Israeli/Palestinian questions -- and especially the debate with the U.S. NGO community about the Israeli/Palestinian complex of questions -- was very difficult for the U.S. delegation and that is finally what scuttled our role in Durban.

To make a long story short, when the World Conference got underway there was a great push by the Islamic Conference states -- led by a very active, effective and totally entrenched Pakistan. I saw Pakistan as very much an opponent in that environment, unfortunately -- because of course in general we like Pakistan, but in this context there was no dialogue at all. The Arab League of course -- and because of the Arab League and the Islamic Conference context -- the Africa group was firmly in their side and the Asia group, China of course, very much supporting the Palestinians; the Europeans were kind of waffling as often happens in this context; Latin Americans of course still had an affiliation, many of them with the Non-Aligned Movement. We were up against a real solid block of opponents, and they wanted things in the Durban Declaration about the settlements, about the borders, about the resolution of conflict, about the status of Jerusalem, about return of refugees -- all the issues from the Israeli/Palestinian debate were on the table and frequently mentioned in the course of the negotiations. Mike Southwick became the lead negotiator in that context and we had as our ally -- taking the lead on our behalf -- was Norway for this. The Norwegians agreed, in light of the Oslo Conference and various other things that had been done -- in parallel diplomacy, second track, third track diplomacy -- the Norwegians very much wanted to defuse the issue and find some kind of way to speak of it in the Durban documents without igniting an explosion -- so that was very much a part of the process. Mike and a couple of people from the delegation spent all their time -- I guess one of the lawyers and Mike -- spent all their time with the Norwegians, with the WEOG, with the Pakistanis and others trying to find some way to navigate through this. I was asked to be the negotiator, the lead U.S. representative in the drafting committee on the declaration itself. It was understood there was a separate little paragraph or a sentence or a line or a chapter or something that would be about Israeli/Palestinian; everything else was on my plate and since I had done this -- in Santiago and in Dakar and part of the time in Geneva -- in the previous meetings I guess they felt pretty confident I could handle it. I had a big thick book of instructions and I knew all the other delegates, of course, on a first name basis and got along famously with all of them -- because they're all nice people except when they're not. But we are diplomats and so we carry on. But it was kind of a high stress several days in the inter-governmental meeting.

Now I have to point out that across the street from the conference hall -- where the intergovernmental meetings were taking place -- there was a separate meeting of the NGO communities and the U.S. NGO world was there -- with bells on -- and people like the American Jewish community and the Anti-Defamation League and other Israeli supporters were out there fighting off Palestinian groups and so forth. The indigenous groups were meeting and rounding up support and there was, as it turned out, there was a sort of a separate NGO declaration. By this time the High Commissioner for Human Rights was Mary Robinson, the former president of Ireland. She'd taken office, I guess, during the time I was in Strasbourg, still in office, and she was trying valiantly to herd all

of these cats in one sort of coherent, positive direction -- but that was quite a challenge because of course there were so many different issues on the table. I mean -- Laplanders and aborigines and Amazonians and Palestinians and reparations and all the other things at once -- and of course she had to deal with all the governments, some of whom liked her and some of whom did not like her -- would not even speak to her, except through an intermediary in a group meeting, stuff like that. So she had a very tough row to hoe and suffered thereafter as a result.

I have to tell one little anecdote. This is the stuff of which dreams are made in the Foreign Service. I was in the negotiations on the text in the drafting committee and I had this big book of guidance and we're going through it sort of line by line and we got to some paragraph or other and I opened my book and I turned to the page about that paragraph and I sought the floor, was given the floor, and I made a comment opposing a couple of words that had been put in the draft paragraph. And I was immediately supported by a delegation -- another delegation who agreed with our position about that language and I was immediately thereafter contradicted by someone from another delegation who pointed out that at a previous meeting I had said exactly the opposite. And I quickly flipped through my book of guidance and discovered that the guidance had changed. Language which we had agreed to -- I guess in Dakar -- which we had agreed to on instructions, had been disagreed to in the process of drafting new instructions, somewhere in L someone had changed his mind. And so then I sought the floor again and said, "Mr. President- Mr. Chairman, thank you very much. I find myself in agreement with both of the previous speakers, and I withdraw my comment."

So we're working our way through and it was about 4:00 in the afternoon of one day in the process -- I've lost the track exactly, when I got -- of course, I had the mic and I was speaking about my subject and my cell phone went off -- as they always do when you have the floor -- and so I finished speaking and then I called back and I was called to leave the meeting and come to a delegation meeting somewhere at 4:30. And so I packed up my stuff, there was nobody else there to take the chair because the whole delegation was going to be at the meeting, and I went up to the chairman of the drafting committee who was, I think, from Congo Brazzaville, something like that, said, "I'm terribly sorry Mr. Chairman, I've been called to a delegation meeting and you know we're committed to this and I'm not walking out but I have to go so please don't take offense if there's no chair- there's nobody in the chair." He said fine, I understand. The Congo Brazzaville had maybe three people in the whole meeting -- we had 30, but anyway. And so I went off to this meeting and it went on for the longest time and we waited and waited and waited and finally Ambassador Southwick came in and told us that negotiations about the language on the Israeli/Palestinian situation had broken down. This was, I think, on Labor Day, the first of September because the conference happened over the weekend. The negotiations had broken down. They'd reached an impasse. He had been on the phone with Secretary Powell and the Secretary of State had instructed Ambassador Southwick and the delegation to leave the conference, forthwith.

So we were instructed to turn in our badges and leave the building, never to return.

*Q: Wow.*

WAGENSEIL: And so we did. The sticking point was language about the Israeli/Palestinian question. It left hanging, of course, all the other things that were going on, and most of the delegation quickly left for Washington. I and Chris Camponovo, who was one of the lawyers from L who'd been working with us, stayed on for a couple of days. I had been invited by the Consul General in Durban -- a guy named Craig Kuehl whom you know-- since we had to move out of the hotel because we were no longer on per diem -- because the delegation was called home. I'd been invited to stay at his residence for the last two days before my plane ticket and I figured I could do that without breaking stride, without offending the government. And Chris stayed on because he had a girlfriend there or something, I can't remember. No, he had other travel plans; he was going to see his girlfriend in Europe or something. And so we were reduced to hanging around outside the building. And it was a joke, I mean, basically, but we would stand on the sidewalk across the street from the conference, outside the perimeter, and when people would come out of meetings we'd say "Beer for news, beer for news!" and - you know -- we'd offer to buy some delegate a beer if they'd tell us what was going on.

*Q: And so the conference ultimately reached its declaration by consensus minus the United States?*

WAGENSEIL: The conference reached its declaration, whatever it was, with some kind of consensus or unopposed or whatever, but the U.S. was not a party to it. There was a bit of a kerfuffle which Craig, I'm sure, has told you about or will tell you about -- in the fact that Craig as the consul general in Durban was still consul general in Durban and so either that evening or the next morning when High Commissioner Mary Robinson was questioned by the media about the U.S. walkout, you know, "Why have the Americans gone?" She said, "Oh well, you know, Mr. Kuehl is still around." And Craig got into a lot of trouble from the Department because he had been instructed to pull out of the meeting and his response was "I am not in the meeting, I am in Durban, I'm supposed to be in Durban, and whatever the High Commissioner said, you know, ask her about it."

I was talking about the NGO meeting. The relationship in the NGO meeting was really poisonous. They came up with a declaration of some kind which was very much not appreciated by the American Jewish NGO groups, and Mary Robinson was forever blamed for that, unjustly in my opinion. The declaration that came out of the intergovernmental conference itself -- which of course was not Mary Robinson's fault -- was basically negotiated by the European Union. I think in the final analysis we probably could have accepted it, but the process was so messy and so forth that we had to pull out.

So we came home to Washington with our tail between our legs, to a certain extent. We had stood on principle, we had followed instructions, we had not given an inch and so forth, and yet still in my view, as the human rights advocate and the guy who thought the World Conference would have been a good chance to show our flag -- to tell our story -- it was not a success, and I was quite distressed about that. And I got home, I guess, in the middle of the week and I had 10 more days in the bureau. I was due to transfer --

September or August is the time when people transfer -- but I had stayed on because of the conference and I was due to leave at the end of the following week.

*Q: Okay, we just finished with the World Conference but I want to get back to some of your other issues in DRL and I've got a couple of questions but maybe you have more to say before I do that and maybe you'll answer them without my asking.*

WAGENSEIL: Well I'll try to anticipate.

One other thing that happened while I was in DRL, which I was part of -- and quite happy to have been and to be affiliated with -- the U.S. and Poland, Secretary of State Albright and Polish Foreign Minister Geremek organized the Community of Democracies Ministerial Meeting in Warsaw in June of 2000 -- and obviously the Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor was involved in that process, the preparations process, and therefore so was the director of multilateral affairs of DRL. And so I became part of the working group, with Harold Koh, under the director of S/P, Mort Halperin -- with people on his team, people from USIA, people from the White House, USAID and so on -- to help pull together the initial meeting of the Community of Democracies. And there were lots of interagency or inter-governmental meetings to talk about that, and then some conversations that took place in the context of the UN General Assembly in New York in late '99 and other conversations with embassies in Washington, delegations in New York and during meetings in Geneva leading up to the Ministerial Conference in June of 2000, which I also attended as a delegate.

And the idea of the Community of Democracies had been around for quite some time but Secretary Albright -- given her Eastern European origins, I guess -- and Foreign Minister Geremek -- as a Pole, very proud of Poland's transition from the Warsaw Pact environment to the modern democratic European environment -- very much in favor of some kind of organization that would bring together the democracies of the world, to work together to support -- not just to support each other but to support the idea of democracy and the practice of democracy -- and to help other countries become democracies. And so, we had a long series of meetings, there was a method -- First of all, trying to figure out whom should be invited, which countries should be invited.

*Q: That's a big question; who counts as a democracy?*

WAGENSEIL: That's certainly a big question. I mean, you can easily tell who are the ones and the 10s -- but what do you about the fours and fives, and who writes the scale? Anyway... And so there was quite a bit of agony over that. In fact, as I recall, for the initial meeting - for some reason -- Poland insisted that Azerbaijan be invited, and because Poland was hosting this thing and basically -- we like the Poles and the Poles were being very helpful and very supportive and we wanted to support them and so forth and so on -- we decided, we the U.S. Government, the State Department, whoever, decided not to pick a fight about it.

There was more trouble with the drafting of what became known as the Warsaw

Declaration because the meeting hadn't occurred yet. It was only supposed to be a couple of days long. The Community of Democracies had not met so there couldn't be a drafting process where everybody sits down in a big room and throws out ideas for paragraph one and paragraph two. So, in typical American fashion we decided to do it ourselves -- and we did. We, the State Department basically, S/P, with some help from DRL and a couple of other players. This didn't sit well with some of the other countries -- like, for example, our friends the British -- and some of the other European countries who didn't like being presented with a *fait accompli*, and they said, "How can you have a Conference and have a Declaration which nobody's ever seen until they have to sign it?" And up until the day of the meeting, the final day of the meeting, there was some of this sort of backstage, backdoor negotiating going on and I think there was one phrase that the Brits -- that we agreed to put in at the request of the Brits. There was a sort of a Convening Group that was tapped to sort of guide this process through its final stages -- it was sort of the Chinese menu: one from column A and one from column B and one from column C -- the U.S. and Poland and I guess Japan would have been involved, India was very much a player and I don't know who all.

But in the final hours the Indian foreign minister said, "There's nothing in here about poverty, there's nothing in here about development." And we said "Yes, that's right," and the Indian representative said, "There must be. You cannot have democracy without development."

And so the leaders of the U.S. delegation went into a huddle in a side room -- off the corridor where the Indian was standing outside as I remember -- and agreed to some kind of language which appears in the final text of the Warsaw Declaration. But the process of preparing that declaration was not democratic. The process of convening the meeting wasn't democratic in the strict sense of the word. I mean, it was a good meeting, everybody said the right things in the intergovernmental context. There was a sort of a tiny little side meeting off someplace else. The ministerial took place at the Sejm -- the Polish parliament -- and there was a side meeting -- in a hotel a mile and a half away or something -- with the NGOs. We sort of said, "Okay, yes, you guys want to have a meeting, that's fine." And the NGOs said, "Wait a minute, this is democracy, aren't we supposed to be involved?" And we said, "This is a governmental meeting, we've got to get started first." The eternal struggle was reflected in that context as well.

*Q: But then the organization continues, doesn't it?*

WAGENSEIL: The organization continues and it's significantly different than it was -- but back then it was very much just the bright idea of a couple of people: "Let's put a show on, okay, we can use the barn!" -- in the great Judy Garland-Mickey Rooney fashion. And it sort of was like that. It was a bit haphazard in the first iteration. Part of the thrust was that the democracies, the countries in the Community of Democracies, would agree to work together, to support democracy and human rights and the rule of law in other venues, such as, for example, "Wouldn't this be a nice idea in the UN Commission on Human Rights or, lo and behold, in the UN General Assembly or something?" That has never exactly worked because countries fall back to national interests, they fall back

to regional group alliances - they fall back to Islamic Conference or Arab League or Latin America Group Partnerships -- and a Community of Democracies doesn't have the traction that those other elements do. There's been some ability to call upon the CD for support for some resolutions -- and there's one thing in process right now, touch wood, that the CD may actually bring a resolution into the General Assembly this fall -- which, as it happens, I wrote. But never mind; we'll come to that later.

*Q: Very nice, very nice.*

WAGENSEIL: Anyhow, that was one of the things we did.

Another thing that we did actually happened while I was in DRL in the same sort of context but it happened at the Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Assistant Secretary Koh advocated that I help him work on a declaration on the right to democracy and that went through a lot of iterations and so forth and so on and eventually was adopted and so we got something into the UN human rights record about Democracy.

*Q: You created a new right; that's great.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, it's not-

*Q: Kind of.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, kind of. It's not quite there yet -- and of course there's no definition for democracy so it's very flimsy -- but at least there's something in the record and there were some subsequent meetings that built on that -- a substantive text that built on that -- and the thing that may come up later this year in the GA or next year, I guess next year, is Education for Democracy, which I can talk about later -- talking about later incarnations.

Anyway, while in DRL those were the main things that I recall. I'm sure there are other things going on.

*Q: What did you think of DRL's role in the Department? Was it regarded as a full partner by the geographic bureaus and others?*

WAGENSEIL: I think under the Clinton Administration, under Secretary Albright when I was there, with Assistant Secretary Shattuck and then Assistant Secretary Koh, DRL was regarded well, was regarded favorably, was taken into account. No regional assistant secretary or deputy assistant secretary would say, "Butt out, this is our business," if a human rights issue came up against a bilateral issue.

There was a bit of a shift under the Bush Administration. I don't say that the Bush Administration walked back from human rights. Secretary Powell certainly believes strongly in them and Lorne Kramer -- who was the new assistant secretary -- is unflagging in his support for the ideas, but he's not a human rights lawyer as Harold was. He came to DRL from IRI, the International Republican Institute, which was an



international NGO working elections and stuff, and not as effective an advocate, I don't think. He has great connections because, if I remember correctly, his father was a POW (prisoner of war) with John McCain and Lorne started his Washington career as a staffer for Senator McCain, something like that. So he's got good connections in the Republican establishment -- and those of course count in any conversation -- but I had the feeling that DRL was a little less important and that's why I think the U.S. delegation to the World Conference on Racism wasn't as powerful as it could have been if Secretary of State Colin Powell, the first black secretary, had come to Durban -- that would have been powerful. The fact that he didn't, I think, made a difference.

Otherwise, we kept plodding along. There was a little more fervor about resolutions about Cuba and about China with a Republican administration.

*Q: Did the Bush democracy initiatives start while you were still there, since you only overlapped for about six months of the- or eight months of the Bush Administration?*

WAGENSEIL: Well I left DRL in early September of 2001 so it was eight months or nine months, yes. No, the democracy initiative per se did not. The Bush Administration didn't seem to care at all about the Community of Democracies, for example. The democracy initiative, if it could be called that, I know they called it that, brings me to my last week in the office of DRL.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: As I say, I got back from Durban, I guess it was towards the end of the first week of September, and the following week was to be my last week at work. I was quite disturbed by what had gone on in Durban -- by how our opportunity had been lost. I don't want to say it was frittered away or anything -- because of course the Palestinian question is a key issue for the U.S. Government -- but I felt I had not been able to achieve all the things I wanted to achieve. I had a few thoughts on my mind that I might have expressed publicly at say, a farewell party or something as I was leaving DRL. Just for the record, I was moving to a brief assignment on detail to NDI, the National Democratic Institute, where I was to be helping them with democracy stuff, mainly in Africa.

But the beginning of my last week, threw everything into a cocked hat -- I mean it threw everything in the whole world into a cocked hat -- because that was September 11. I remember vividly standing in Lorne Craner's office -- he wasn't there at the time; I was acting P/DAS -- Mike Parmly was away and I'd been sitting at his desk and Lorne was out. I'd been in a staff meeting in MLA and then someone had received a phone call and said, "Hey, turn on the television!" We all turned on the television and saw the first of the twin towers in flames and while we were watching we saw the second plane hit the twin towers. Then -- as I'm standing in the DRL Front Office watching this on television -- out of the corner of my eye I saw a ball of flames erupt from the Pentagon. Because from DRL's perch on the seventh floor, the northwest corner of the Department, you could see the across the river to Pentagon and there it was. And I realized that the Pentagon had also been attacked, and as I looked out the window, I realized there was a plane heading

right for the Department. It was a plane that was coming to land at National but was being diverted... For a second it was pointed right at me, and the combination of what had happened in New York and what had just happened across the river, I shouted to everybody, "Okay, lock your safes, get out of the building!" and I ran down seven flights of stairs and out onto D Street and was on the street, for a couple of hours waiting for the all clear to go back in. Obviously everybody was in a panic.

By the time Friday of that week rolled around -- and it was my last day at work -- the mood in DRL, the mood in Washington, the mood in the world was totally different. So all the things that I wanted to say about the lack of success in Durban were -- in my opinion -- irrelevant and so I didn't say anything.

*Q: Certainly the back burner by that time.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I mean, what had or hadn't happened at Durban two weeks previously was very much lost in the dust.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: And nothing you can do about it.

*Q: So did you move immediately from there to NDI?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I mean, the following week I started at NDI.

Now, the problem was that I had been recruited into NDI -- my interlocutor, when negotiating during the summer what I was going to be doing at NDI, the fact that I would come to NDI -- had left. So I showed up and said to Ken Wollack, the president of NDI, "Hi, here I am." and he said "What are you going to do?" And I said, "I was hoping you'd tell me."

*Q: Oh my.*

WAGENSEIL: So, he realized that what's his name -- Tom something-- had dropped the ball, and I found myself sort of loosely affiliated with the Africa team in NDI -- which made sense because I'd served in Africa. I worked with them on some projects they had going on and offered advice and suggestion, met with people, visitors coming to town and whatnot. But I was only really there for about four months because -- once again -- I was being recruited to take a different job in a different city.

*Q: Oh. I remember this.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, by you. And I had reached the point in my career track -- I was an 01, I had opened my window. The Bureau of Personnel, which is now called Natural Resources or something, had miscalculated how long my window should be open. I had gone to battle with them to convince them that in fact it should be open for six reviews,

which is what it says in the regulations, and that counting on one's fingers one got to six in 2002, not 2001. So eventually, I had won that argument -- and in fact I happened across the email that confirmed that yesterday, I was looking through papers -- so I was sort of teetering on the edge of "falling out the window," or I felt I might be falling out the window. It had become painfully clear that since I had worked so long in the Bureau of African Affairs -- but wasn't in AF anymore -- and while I had worked in Europe I was mostly doing IO's work in Geneva or DRL's work in Strasbourg, and DRL is not an inner circle bureau. So I was not on a track to promotion to the Senior Foreign Service, even though I'd served as consul general and presumably gotten good marks for it and been an Office Director in Washington and gotten good marks for that, served as acting PDAS frequently in that role -- sitting in for Leslie Gerson or sitting in for Mike Parmly, I just had the feeling that I was coming to the end of my career track after DRL.

Also, when I was bidding on onward assignments from DRL, nobody came calling me, really -- there was not a crowd of assistant secretaries knocking on my door. I had the feeling I was kind of on my own. And I got this call -- Well, I had seen a job advertised earlier with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), and I thought about it. It was about working in democracy and human rights and stuff -- but I don't think I had even filled out the forms until I got a call from you in Warsaw saying, "Hey, why don't you apply for this job?" I remember vividly because I had been, that day, I had taken time off from NDI to attend a series of meetings -- first of all, outside, and separately, inside the Department -- about Osama bin Laden, and one of the meetings was just down the hall from your wife Stephanie's office and I came out to get a cup of coffee during coffee break and she saw me, she said, "Oh my God, oh my God, there you are, Peter wants to talk to you!"

*Q: Ah, interesting.*

WAGENSEIL: And so I called you, from her office.

*Q: That's right, because there was a gap there when I was still in Warsaw and she was back in Washington.*

WAGENSEIL: Right, right.

And you persuaded me to apply for the position of First Deputy Director for the Office of Democratic Institutions of Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

*Q: And try fitting all that on your business card.*

WAGENSEIL: That's why we use abbreviations.

And I applied for it, I was invited for an interview, flew out to Warsaw, went to an interview with the Director of the Office, Ambassador Stoudmann, which lasted something like two hours and 40 minutes -- during which he did not ask me a single

question -- spent most of the time talking about what it is the office did and his vision of the office and so forth and so on. Then at the end, he said, "Well, I guess you better pack" -- having sort of decided, I guess from the outset, that I was going to be his choice to succeed you, obviously, in the position of First Deputy Director. So I said, "Well, okay, I'm going to want to look at the numbers, I want to look at the arithmetic, see what -- you know -- what are the costs and benefits, and I will respond after I get home, talk to my wife."

Flew back to Washington, got the information about salary and benefits and so on, talked it over with my wife, accepted the job and then called the Bureau of Personnel and said okay, how do I quit? Ah, how do I retire?

*Q: Retire, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: Because I was not resigning. I had enough years of service and I was certainly old enough to take early retirement from the Department. I retired from the Foreign Service on February 2, 2002, 2-2-2002 -- and obviously left NDI at the same time. They were not particularly shattered to see me go because they hadn't really had anything specific for me to do. I had done a couple of things, I had gone off to a conference for them in Dakar, back to my old stomping grounds. I participated in this conference that they had set up about persuading political parties to have more women candidates for local elections. It was very interesting -- I got the chance to interact with some people I had known before. And then I retired from the Foreign Service in February of 2002 and went off to Warsaw to a new job. And if it is customary in these discussions to talk about things beyond the Foreign Service, I will.

*Q: Well I think it is customary. Let me pause it for a moment.*

*Okay. So in early 2002 you packed up again and moved to Warsaw.*

WAGENSEIL: Well, I packed a suitcase, a couple suitcases and moved to Warsaw. I was due to start on about the 17<sup>th</sup> of February, which was, if I remember correctly, two days before you were due to leave.

*Q: Yes. I think I actually left in January but-*

WAGENSEIL: Oh okay.

*Q: -so you had a gap in there and you went initially without your family.*

WAGENSEIL: I went by myself. It was February in Poland. Kevin was in high school in Virginia and we didn't want to rip him out in the middle of a school year. We agreed that it would be okay if he spent the last two years of high school in a different school -- but not halfway through the year; that's too disruptive. So my wife and son stayed behind.

And I got to work in the middle of February 2002. The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights is known by its acronym, ODIHR.

*Q: Unfortunate acronym.*

WAGENSEIL: Well it can be mispronounced.

*Q: Yes.*

WAGENSEIL: ODIHR. But- Or it can be misspelled, which happens all too frequently, including on the occasional armband. But anyway, it is the institution of the OSCE, the Organization for Security and Co-operation and Europe, with a hyphen in “co-operation,” the institution responsible for democracy, human rights, rule of law, elections support, the issues of Roma and Sinti, minorities, tolerance and so forth. And during the three years I was there the responsibilities morphed a little bit, moved around, got more attention to minorities and tolerance issues and so forth, which was a result of international and national pressures inside the OSCE’s European participating states.

*Q: Well let me ask you; you’d been working a long time in multilateral affairs but like me you were landing for the first time in the secretariat of an organization that had, what, 20, 30, 40 different nationalities right there with you-*

WAGENSEIL: Right.

*Q: -in Warsaw. How did you find that?*

WAGENSEIL: I loved it. I mean, when I was there I think the peak was 27 different nationalities out of about 54 staff -- obviously, there are a lot of Poles working in support roles -- but it was fascinating. It was a great experience to interact with people, a lot of whom I still have as friends, real friends and Facebook friends. These folks were all there -- motivated by their interests in democracy, human rights, free and fair elections, the rule of law and that sort of thing -- and so it was a very positive experience to deal with these people from all over the OSCE region, motivated by the same concerns and working for the same goals.

*Q: And so these were issues you’d been dealing with for at least a decade at this point?*

WAGENSEIL: Well some of them, yes. I mean, I’d been working on human rights, obviously, democracy promotion, obviously, and the rule of law as it pertains to the human rights environment, minority issues in a world conference on racism, that sort of thing -- but as elements of U.S. foreign policy, not as elements of the policy of an international organization or of all the countries of that organization. The background is that the OSCE participating states had agreed in the early ‘90s that human rights are an appropriate issue for international concern, not just an internal affair and “You have to stay out of my business.” And so the OSCE had adopted a number of documents whereby the states took on obligations and made promises to each other -- and to their citizens --

and ODIHR is in some respects the enforcer of those obligations or the watchman to make sure those obligations are being respected. The most visible element of that is the election-observation missions which ODIHR puts together every year -- a dozen or more -- in participating states, to observe the elections that those states are holding and to grade them, to comment on them, and to see how well they met the standards, the international standards. ODIHR does lots of other stuff but that's the most visible thing because that's the thing that happens in a lot of the different countries, and voters see ODIHR observers at the polling stations and that's pretty visible.

*Q: Well it also, perhaps the most politically sensitive task, I mean, as well.*

WAGENSEIL: Extremely sensitive in a lot of ways, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The reality that I found was that Ambassador Stoudmann who had been the director for, what, about four or five years, had staked out a position and firmly defended the position that ODIHR was autonomous -- ODIHR had certain responsibilities that had been agreed to in the Copenhagen Document, and other OSCE agreements -- and ODIHR had to get its budget, its regular budget, from the participating states through the OSCE budget process but that was it. There was no real obligation to do what anybody else wanted. ODIHR reports periodically to the Permanent Council in Vienna, ODIHR leadership attends the Ministerial Meetings and various other events, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly when it gets together -- for what that's worth -- but in his vision ODIHR was a stand-alone, sui generis and a quasi-independent agency of the organization.

*Q: That makes it fun, huh?*

WAGENSEIL: That made it fun but it also made it a little risky because some of the participating states didn't like what we did; not just about elections but -- elections are obviously the most visible and sensitive, but some of the other things that ODIHR got involved in, like criticizing states about how they treat their Roma populations, criticizing states about how they treat other minorities -- although the OSCE's High Commissioner for National Minorities has that portfolio -- but the issues of tolerance came over into the ODIHR account, criticizing states about how they treat journalists -- although there's also a representative on Freedom of the Media -- but ODIHR is the organization that convenes the annual meeting on implementation of the OSCE human dimension obligations, the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, HDIM, which meets every year for, what, two weeks in Warsaw?

*Q: Yes.*

WAGENSEIL: And then other human rights seminars and meetings of other kinds on selected topics, either in Warsaw or Vienna or on occasion somewhere else -- once in The Hague, as I recall -- to talk about particular issues. And those meetings are, under ODIHR rules, open, and NGO representatives can speak at those meetings, as can government representatives. Some of the government representatives didn't like that. Hmm, Strange. When the Permanent Council meets in Vienna, of course, it's closed, and the NGOs and others can't see or hear what's going on. The ministerial meetings are a little more open

but it's the ODIHR, the human dimension meetings that are the ones where there's the most direct interaction in the OSCE context -- between NGO activists, opposition leaders, political party reps and whatnot -- with governments, which makes it very interesting, very exciting.

*Q: It makes ODIHR kind of on the cutting edge on some of those things.*

WAGENSEIL: On the cutting edge for quite a bit of that and pushing the envelope and so forth. As I said, the folks that work at ODIHR were very much committed to the issues, experienced many of them, lawyers many of them, multilingual most of them, it was a polyglot crowd and quite prepared to man the barricades on issues large and small, near and far.

One of the responsibilities I had as deputy director was to help put together the agenda, the schedule for the Human Dimension meetings look at "Who we should invite; what topics should be addressed; should there be a side meeting about this or that; who should address that side meeting; oh, you want to have a side meeting on that? Well, we had one on those six months ago, how about something else?" You know, that kind of negotiation -- and then chairing, moderating the plenary sessions, attending the lunchtime meetings, meeting with delegates for breakfast, lunch or dinner, sometimes all three, and so forth and so on. Quite a busy time. The U.S. delegation is always pretty strong, the U.S. is generally well represented there but so are the Russians, so are the Brits, so are the French and the Spanish and most of the other states.

*Q: Reminiscent in some ways of the annual Human Rights Commission meetings.*

WAGENSEIL: There were a lot of familiar faces, actually, from government delegations in some cases, the human rights weenies from foreign ministries. People would come from the delegations in Geneva to represent their country in Warsaw at the HDIM. A lot of the NGO representatives would be the same folks that we'd seen around the circuit in Geneva and even in Strasbourg. So there was quite a bit of interconnectivity there.

*Q: But without the same drama of adopting resolutions at the end.*

WAGENSEIL: Without the same drama of adopting resolutions, but sometimes more pointed interventions.

*Q: Right.*

WAGENSEIL: When an opposition activist speaking under an NGO flag points his finger across the room at the foreign minister of Belarus and says, "You're lying" or words even stronger, "You're murdering your people, how can you do that and claim to be...?" So that was a very moving element in the activities, that I took a lot of pride in. Unfortunately, I've never been able to go back. I'd like very much somehow to wrangle a trip to Warsaw at that time just to sit in the back of the room and listen to the ebb and flow.

The OSCE, of course, uses lots of languages so there's lots of interpreting in earphones and so forth but it makes it a little freer in some ways.

*Q: You were also developing projects to help countries improve their practices?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, there were a lot of projects. The different sections in ODIHR had different activities coming up. There was one I went to Prague, if I remember correctly, working with offices from national Customs Services on customs inspections and training for customs officers, looking at how to standardize inspection routines and standardize paperwork, that sort of thing. Also projects about the rule of law; working with law schools or lawyers, the bar associations; opposition to political parties and governmental political parties and so forth on rule of law issues.

One of the main challenges, of course, is how do you translate "the rule of law?" What does that mean in French? I got a frantic message from the translators when the interpreters would say "how do you say that in French?" or in Spanish. The rule of law in French is "l'état de droit," a state of laws -- as opposed to "the rule of men."

*Q: Interesting.*

WAGENSEIL: That sort of thing.

A lot of projects, a lot of activity on elections, obviously. We're not just observing elections but also trying to help governments prepare new election law.

*Q: Did you actually go out to elections?*

WAGENSEIL: I did. I went to a whole bunch of elections while I was in ODIHR. I went to Ukraine twice; first for parliamentary elections in early 2002, around Easter of 2002, and then again for the elections which led to the Orange Revolution in late 2004, I guess it was.

*Q: It was, indeed.*

WAGENSEIL: I went to elections in Latvia, where the main issue was the fact that the Latvian government didn't let the Russian speaking population -- who are either themselves (or the children of) Russian officials who'd been posted in the Baltic States under the Soviet regime and who didn't go home to Russia -- but they don't have full rights until they become fluent in Latvian and the Latvian authorities were very strict about that. So there was a question about disenfranchisement and so forth.

Elections in Armenia; I went to Armenia twice to check out how our election observation mission was doing because it was led by-

*Q: Our paths crossed again.*



WAGENSEIL: Our paths keep crossing; that's fine, no problem there. One time was led by Bob Berry, actually, who I had known at the State Department, of course.

I went to elections in Georgia a couple of times, including the elections that led to the Rose Revolution in Georgia. Fascinating, you know. And I went out to provide support to the observation mission -- political support and so forth...

*Q: Is this the head of the election observation mission?*

WAGENSEIL: The head of the ODIHR election observation mission, who would have been stationed there for a month or more prior to election day. But if -- come crunch time on voting day or the day before voting day -- if there was a need for some high level support from Warsaw to show the government of Country X that "We are serious about this," that was one of the things I could do.

*Q: Well I can tell you that, for the record here as well, that having you at my very difficult mission in Armenia made a big difference to know that you had the headquarters support right there and that you weren't going to be second guessed and that the headquarters was fully involved in the work of the mission.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. It's clear that that is useful. Armenia, of course, was a tough one because there were lots of problems and a major question and at the last minute they fiddled with the results, so there had to be a runoff. But also when I went to observe the elections in Russia, the State Duma elections in late 2003, December 2003, and the conclusion of the observation mission was that "The elections were free but not fair" -- because it was not a level playing field. We worked closely with the head of the election observation mission and other senior people on the team to draft language in the preliminary statement that was read out to the journalists the next day, language which spoke well of the election commission and the technical aspects of the election -- because there wasn't that much fraud, there weren't really any instances of ballot box stuffing or ballots stolen and that sort of thing, as there have been in other countries. But it was not a level playing field; the Russia First Party had clearly disproportionate access to state resources and to air time and so forth and so on -- and we criticized them for that but not for the technical stuff about ballot papers and counting and so on. But that was a dicey moment. I remember sitting in the back of the room when the head of the observation mission read that statement to the press and wondering if the storm troopers were going to come in and seize all the microphones or something. They didn't. But it was quite interesting.

I observed also in -- well I stuck my head in the observation of elections in the Czech Republic; there was an observation being put together while I was attending a seminar on border inspections.

What else? Ukraine, Ukraine; Armenia, Armenia; Georgia, Georgia.

*Q: Well that's already quite a list. Did you travel in connection also with the democratization projects?*

WAGENSEIL: I went to a number of countries for meetings about democratization, various rule of law initiatives and so forth, primarily in Central Europe; I went to Serbia for a series of meetings with the foreign ministry and the NGO and opposition environment.

*Q: And did you feel that these kinds of meetings were actually helpful in moving democratic processes forward?*

WAGENSEIL: I think they were in Serbia. I also went to Belarus a couple of times and that was much more difficult because -- Well, first of all, there hasn't been any progress yet, seven years later, but also because the environment was just more hostile. Opposition activists were much less active there, much less willing to come to meetings and much less willing to speak out. One always had the feelings that at least one person in the room was a spy for the government and that sort of thing. So that was difficult but it was also fascinating to see Belarus and to meet with people there because it could have been -- and still could be -- a prosperous country, but it was mired in the past under the last dictator in Europe.

Ukraine, went to some meetings in Ukraine that were a positive. I'm trying to think where else I went.

*Q: Did you get to Central Asia at all?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I went on one trip in late 2002 with the head of ODIHR's democratization section to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and met with government officials and NGO activists, opposition people in Almaty, which was at the time the capital of Kazakhstan, and then drove through a blizzard to Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, where I met with -- we met with the president of Kyrgyzstan, President Akayev, and attended the inaugural session of the OSCE Academy in Kyrgyzstan, which got a lot of fanfare -- and basically as far as I can tell sunk out of sight. But I had some meetings with people and people I've seen later in other context but didn't get to any of the other Central Asians. I actually even had a visa for Uzbekistan at one point and they canceled the visit; the government had a crisis or something.

My major interaction with the Central Asian states was the initiation of an OSCE "Moscow Mechanism" initiative about Turkmenistan. There was an incident in Ashgabat, I forget when it was. As I remember there was like an armed attack on the president's car or something -- or a holdup or something -- and as a result he threw half the city in jail. I can't remember the details; I should check my records. But in any case the president, President Türkmenbaşy-

*Q: Niyazov.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes, President Niyazov. No, he's in Uzbekistan.

*Q: Niyazov is Turkmenistan.*

WAGENSEIL: Alright. The president- we can check the record- the president of Turkmenistan misbehaved and some of the states of the OSCE's Permanent Council were outraged enough to invoke the Moscow Mechanism -- which was an agreement agreed to at one of the OSCE meetings in the early '90s, which took place obviously in Moscow, whereby states can initiate a mechanism to investigate something that's happened. What's supposed to -- if it's adopted by the Permanent Council then the chairman in office appoints a Rapporteur to investigate what happened. The government that is being investigated then may appoint a co-rapporteur and together they're supposed to pick a third guy.

I had the dubious distinction of writing to the president of Turkmenistan saying "Mr. President, there are these disturbing reports of human rights violations that are occurring, that your government has been committing in your country and therefore the Permanent Council has voted to initiate the Moscow Mechanism and to appoint a rapporteur. They have decided to appoint Mr. X, who is a French lawyer, and now you now have the opportunity to identify the person you wish to have as the Turkmen rapporteur on this team, which will eventually be composed of three people when your rapporteur and the rapporteur chosen by the chairman in office decide on a third person. So obviously, the rapporteur would like to come and meet with you and your officials to investigate what has alleged to have transpired, find out the truth of the matter and- so please, please let us know who your rapporteur is going to be."

For some strange reason, the president of Turkmenistan did not write back to me. I was at the time the Acting Director of ODIHR, which is why I had written the letter, but I got instead a response from the foreign minister, which said, in effect, "Not only no but hell no, there will be no Turkmen rapporteur, there will be no third rapporteur, there will be no visit, go away." And so the sole rapporteur -- confronted with this situation which had never, of course, happened before -- the sole rapporteur made a number of visits to Vienna, Warsaw, Moscow and some other places. He compiled some information and submitted the report -- which was promptly filed next to the Arc of the Covenant in that dusty warehouse at the end of "Indiana Jones." So obviously I never got the chance to travel to Turkmenistan and that's ... --

*Q: Too bad. Nice carpets.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I had the chance to buy carpets elsewhere.

*Q: Ah, okay, good, good, good.*

*So overall did you find that you had made the right decision in going to Warsaw?*

WAGENSEIL: I enjoyed it very much. I found the work very meaningful, valid, useful, personally rewarding – frustrating too, but I learned a lot about European countries which I did not know. I had the opportunity to interact from ODIHR's vantage with the Council of Europe, with the Commission on Human Rights, with the UN General Assembly, with the Community of Democracies. I went to the second ministerial meeting of the Community of Democracies as the OSCE representative in Seoul in 2002.

*Q: Interesting.*

WAGENSEIL: I learned a lot about elections. I got to observe good elections and bad elections and became interested in the election business and acquired a certain expertise.

Warsaw can be very gray and depressing in the depths of winter but interestingly enough I didn't really work in Warsaw; I worked in a building that was in Warsaw and lived in a house that was in Warsaw but my work was mostly outside of Poland.

*Q: The issues were very much not Poland.*

WAGENSEIL: The issues were not Poland and the -- how should I put it? -- my eyes were tasked beyond the Polish horizon, I guess you could say, even though I'd been ...

*Q: And the office operated in English, of course, like all good international organizations do.*

WAGENSEIL: Like all good international organizations the working language, the only language is English.

*Q: Yes.*

WAGENSEIL: Which of course drives our Russophone friends rather crazy.

*Q: Not to mention our French friends.*

WAGENSEIL: Right, yes.

*Q: Well excellent. And you bid Warsaw farewell then in 2005?*

WAGENSEIL: Okay. If I can backtrack a little bit...?

*Q: Sure.*

WAGENSEIL: Ambassador Gerard Stoudmann -- the Director who hired me -- left about halfway through the first year I was there, and there was an interregnum of about, I guess, six months when I was, if you will, Chargé d'Affaires, acting director, until the new director was appointed. The new director was Christian Strohal, who had been the Austrian ambassador to Luxemburg and previously had been the Austrian deputy chief of

mission in Geneva preparing for the World Conference on Human Rights, which took place in Vienna in 1993. So, the diplomatic wheel turned and there we were together again. He and I did not get along quite as well as Ambassador Stoudmann and I had done, but we worked together for a couple years and my appointment was for three years overall with the possibility of an extension, but it became apparent that I was not going to be offered an extension when my three years came to an end. So I left the job in February, exactly three years after I started, February 2005. We stayed in Warsaw for a couple more months because Kevin was finishing high school at the American School of Warsaw and we wanted to be there. But no hard feelings or anything, no recriminations; I did a couple of odd jobs for the office -- helping edit things and writing things and so forth -- in the time I was still there, and then moved back to the States in the summer of 2005, late summer of 2005.

*Q: And did you know what you were going to do at that point?*

WAGENSEIL: I did not know what I was going to do at that point. I had applied to a number of things. I had applied to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) because the position of Director for Human Rights in UNESCO was coming open. I had been obviously working in the UN environment -- working on human rights, I knew the issues, I knew a lot of the players and so on -- I had been advised by several friends I had inside UNESCO, people that I'd met in Geneva and Warsaw, I'd been advised, "By all means, oh God, you're a perfect candidate, please apply!" And I did, and I waited and I waited and I waited and finally discovered, after we'd moved back to the States, that the position had been withdrawn.

*Q: Oh.*

WAGENSEIL: And I've been led to believe that the position had been withdrawn because the assistant director general of UNESCO, who would have been my immediate boss, did not want an American.

*Q: Well, that happens in the UN system, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: It happens in the UN system. As it happened this individual was someone I knew.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: One of the Senegalese human rights mafia, as I call it.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: And he, for whatever reason, withdrew the job announcement, and the position description was totally rewritten. Arguably, they were rethinking what the job should be and what kind of person they wanted, fine. When it was done I was no longer qualified.

*Q: Yes, okay.*

WAGENSEIL: The other thing that I had, the other iron I had in the fire was a position working at the Carter Center, again something I was encouraged to apply for in late 2005. I went through a long waiting process, eventually was told I was one of three candidates on the short list, was invited down to Atlanta for a series of interviews, which I enjoyed very much -- but apparently they enjoyed it slightly less, and I didn't get that job either. But we know how that goes.

*Q: I know the drill, yes.*

WAGENSEIL: So in early 2006 I was offered a short-term contract by the UN, through the UN Electoral Assistance Division; it turned out to be a job working for the UNDP in the Solomon Islands. They were due to hold their parliamentary elections in April of 2006; there had been some civil strife a couple of years previously in the country. There was an international peacekeeping force composed of Australians and New Zealanders -- because they're the nearest force countries -- but there was concern on the part of the government that the elections might be difficult and the international community wanted to make sure the elections were good. As a result, the UNDP agreed to coordinate international observation. So I went out for two months to the capital, Honiara, which is on Guadalcanal. I learned a lot about World War II while I was there, obviously. There was a Dutch couple who were there with me on the project -- and then three Solomon Islanders as support -- and we coordinated, I think there were 33 observers from Australia, the Australian parliament, the New Zealand parliament, the Commonwealth, the Pacific Island Forum, Japan and the United States. And all we did was arrange logistics, figure out housing, figure out, what needed to be done, where they could go, where they should not bother to go -- that sort of thing. And in the event the elections themselves were pretty good, everybody said so. Unfortunately the delegations were not able to agree that there would be a single preliminary statement, so the Aussies, the Kiwis, the Pacific Islanders, the American, the Japanese had a statement, and then the Commonwealth delegation made its own statement.

*Q: Which I hope coincided substantively.*

WAGENSEIL: They were basically the same, yes, but the Commonwealth secretariat bluntly refused to even entertain the idea of a joint statement, unfortunately. I did my best; I had some good allies in some of the diplomatic representation in Honiara but the Commonwealth HQ in London would not be budged, so there it was.

The only problem was that the most important election in the Solomon Islands is not the citizens voting for their members of parliament. The most important election is what's called "the second election," which takes place behind closed doors when the new MPs (members of parliament) meet for the first time to choose who among them is going to be the prime minister. Party affiliation in the Solomon Islands is extremely weak, subject to lots of bargaining -- meaning the push and pull of family ties and buckets of money -- so

when the MPs met for the first time, like two and a half weeks after the vote, I had just that afternoon left the country. They were behind closed doors for several hours, and when they came out to announce who had been chosen as prime minister, the city erupted in riots.

*Q: Oh my.*

WAGENSEIL: The part of Honiara known as Chinatown went up in flames. The Chinese-owned hotel that I had been staying in was burned. All the UN people had to take refuge at the residence of the UNDP sub-office Director, on a hillside overlooking the city. It was quite ugly for several days because -- as everybody had warned -- the second election is very messy and you can't observe it because, by the rules of parliament, it's behind closed doors. But that was a very interesting experience and fortunately none of my friends were hurt in the troubles.

*Q: Your first experience as a UN hatter.*

WAGENSEIL: My first experience working in the UN, on the UN payroll. I was a consultant for two months. You know -- having been through the State Department for 28 years and the OSCE for three years -- I felt I knew bureaucracies, but when you get into the UN system, it's a whole 'nother universe.

*Q: Indeed, indeed. And you did some subsequent UN assignments as well, as I recall.*

WAGENSEIL: I've done several others, yes. Immediately after I got home from Solomon Islands, the UN Electoral Assistance Division called me and asked me if I wanted to go to East Timor.

*Q: Since you were an island specialist by that time.*

WAGENSEIL: Since I had been out in that part of the world, sort of, at least in a nearby time zone. But I wasn't particularly interested in going back out again and so I turned down the inquiry -- which is good because like three days later riots broke out in Timor. There was a tremendous amount of strife on the island between those from eastern East Timor and those from western East Timor -- I mean, a totally meaningless dispute with no basis in ethnic or religious or cultural or financial disparities -- just the sort of thing that happens.

But later that year -- this was in 2006 -- later that year I was again contacted by New York and accepted a position to go to Timor. I was hired (by the Department of Peace-Keeping Operations, DPKO) to be the Chief Electoral Officer for the UN new peacekeeping mission there, now known as UNMIT, the UN Integrated Mission in Timor. I went out for six months and stayed for 10, during which time they rewrote and adopted a new electoral law, a whole bunch of electoral procedures; they updated the voters registry and they held presidential elections -- first round and second round -- and a parliamentary election.

*Q: And what was your role as the chief electoral officer?*

WAGENSEIL: Well I was the lead person on the UN peacekeeping mission staff for elections. I was a member, if you will, of the “country team” under the Special Representative of the Secretary General. I was the expert -- or perceived as the expert -- on electoral law, electoral issues. I was called upon to interpret a disparity between election law and the constitution -- both of which were in Portuguese, which was great fun -- and their procedures.

*Q: Were you advising the election authorities, the Timorese election authorities or was the UN actually running the election?*

WAGENSEIL: No, the Timorese were running the election but there was great concern -- concern on the part of Timorese. The election is administered by the Government’s “Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration” -- that makes sense -- which is part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Minister of internal affairs is a very militant member of the ruling party, FRETELIN, which had won 88 percent of the seats in parliament -- basically, ran the parliament, ran the government -- and opposition activists and NGO representatives and so forth were very concerned that the minister was prepared to steal the election for her party, and therefore they didn’t trust the electoral secretariat, technical secretary under her authority, to be impartial. What the UN did -- obviously with the approval of the government and through a number of Security Council resolutions which were debated then voted -- the UN mission had staff posted in the Technical Secretariat, technical staff.

*Q: Reporting to you?*

WAGENSEIL: Working for the secretariat, but reporting to me, if you will. We had about 15-20 people -- logistics people; legal advisors; people working on voter education, civic education. We had a total -- I had, under my authority -- about 240 UN volunteers around the country who were basically stationed in the district capitals or in Dili -- and they were sort of the eyes and ears and legs and strong shoulders of the election machinery upcountry -- and of course the UN was relied upon for vehicles to transport ballot boxes and people and so forth.

The other advantage that we had in Timor -- which I think is unique to the Timor situation -- in 2006-2007, under the terms of the Security Council resolutions -- which the Timorese government had agreed to -- the chief of the UN police force, under UNMIT, was the Chief of the Timorese police.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: So the Timorese police force were under his authority and the fellow who had that role was a Filipino -- former chief of police of Manila or something like that -- a guy with a lot of gravitas and professional credibility. He didn’t speak Portuguese, which



was, for some reason, the official language of the country, but he did speak enough Malaysian Bahasa to interact with those who were speaking Bahasa Indonesia, which is sort of the Lingua Franca of Timor, which of course was under Indonesian rule for 24 years. So, he was able to ensure that the police behaved themselves and did not participate in any electoral fraud -- but were, in fact, reliable partners. And there was a special unit of Portuguese police, like riot police, attached to the UN Mission as well, under his authority.

*Q: So a pretty good election then?*

WAGENSEIL: I'm quite proud of the elections that took place in Timor while I was there, because in the first round of presidential elections there were, I think, 14 candidates and the results of the first round were challenged -- but kind of pro forma by some of the candidates who didn't win -- and the results of the second round were accepted by everybody as being representative of the will of the people and there was a change in power. The Fretilin candidate lost and an opposition candidate won.

*Q: Well that's usually a pretty good indication of a fair process.*

WAGENSEIL: Right, I think so. Although of course the opposition candidate who became the new president, José Ramos-Horta, had been a Fretilin member and Fretilin's foreign minister in exile for many years and I had actually met him in Geneva and Strasbourg and New York over the ages. And in fact, in the interim he had won the Nobel Prize for Peace.

But anyway. And then the parliamentary elections, which took place like two months later, there were, I think, 17 parties competing. It was very complicated but it went very well -- everybody accepted the results, there were no challenges. There were complaints about this or that incident but nothing anywhere near serious enough to overturn the results in even one polling station -- much less nationwide -- and by and large the transition was peaceful.

*Q: I'd say it's a great experience for a first, long-term UN experience.*

WAGENSEIL: It felt good, quite rewarding to be involved in that. And, I mean -- obviously there is a lot more to a peacekeeping mission than just supporting elections -- but they were a very important part of the success of the peacekeeping mission, because if that had not been successful then the troops and the cops would have been much busier than they were.

*Q: Well and it's also the exit strategy.*

WAGENSEIL: Well they're still there-

*Q: Oh okay.*

WAGENSEIL: -but it's a vastly different mission now; it's much more into capacity building and rule of law and stuff like that.

*Q: And you went on and did at least one other one as well?*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. I left there in August of 2007 and came home. And New York was quick to try to recruit me in late 2007 to go to Abidjan in Cote d'Ivoire -- knowing that I speak French, knowing perhaps that I had served in Cote d'Ivoire as a Peace Corps volunteer and that I had other experience in Francophone West Africa -- but I was reluctant and so I stayed in the States for most of 2008 working instead on democracies. And I went to work for an NGO here in Washington called the Council for a Community of Democracies (CCD), which works to promote and support the role of the NGO community around the world in the Community of Democracies process, resulting from the Warsaw Ministerial back in 2000. And I'm still affiliated with them kind of as an advisor. And so I spent most of 2008 working in their office on a part-time basis.

*Q: Nice to be back with your family as well.*

WAGENSEIL: It was nice to be back with my family -- my wife was working on getting her degree from George Mason and so I was able to be supportive in that context, which was appreciated.

But then at the end of 2008, I gave in to the importunings of UN the Electoral Assistance Division, saying, "Please come to Abidjan!" But I did not go to their peacekeeping mission, which they had been originally talking to me about. Instead I went to work with UNDP, again, in Abidjan, in the project that UNDP had there to support the election cycle. And this was a \$56 million overall budget, some of it from the government, a large portion from the EU with other donors like Japan and Germany and ECOWAS as a donor, -- interesting. But I was working for the UNDP country team and I was the head of the elections project. This led to continuous friction with the UN peacekeeping mission which had its own election section and had its people stationed around the country, as I had done in my previous incarnation, but since I had done it in my previous incarnation I knew what was going on, and unfortunately I was often in -- well not exactly in conflict, but there was friction with the head of the election section of the ONUCI as it's called, the Office of the Nations- Unies en Cote d'Ivoire or UNOCI, I guess, in English. And he was a former Préfet from Senegal.

*Q: Once again.*

WAGENSEIL: Right. And in fact I may well have met him during my time in Senegal. But in any case, an interesting element is that the country director for UNDP when I was there was also from Senegal, and he basically couldn't stand the guy across the street. So, I had an ally in my boss. But there were all kinds of games being played about sharing information and not sharing information, who gets to meet with whom and stuff like that. I won't go into the details.

The problem was that the government under President Laurent Gbagbo and the electoral commission -- which I was supposed to be there to support -- did not appear really organized or motivated to actually have these elections that they were supposed to have. They had been postponed. There were supposed to have been elections in 2005; they were postponed because of a civil war -- you can understand that -- so then they were rescheduled again and again and again. And when I went out in October of 2008 everybody agreed the elections were supposed to take place within six months, although when I went out in 2008 the elections were -- officially the elections were supposed to take place about two weeks after I got there, but there was no way in God's green earth because they hadn't even started the voter register yet.

So anyway, they went through the process of voter registration and it was the most disorganized thing you ever saw. I was not directly involved in it, the UN mission was, but I went to all the meetings at the Election Commission and heard all about it. And I was able to give advice or not give advice -- depending on circumstances -- and it dragged on and dragged on, and got rescheduled, and the dates got pushed back, and things were fiddled with and so forth and so forth and so on. And finally after I had been there 14 months -- at the end of 2009 -- when my contract was to expire and come up for renewal if I wanted, I told them I didn't want it. I said I'm sorry I've given enough here, I'm...-

*Q: Six months of trying to get things going.*

WAGENSEIL: Yes. And I don't wish to extend my contract. This left some people high and dry but at about the same time the European Union -- the EC delegation -- had, I think, basically agreed that it was time to pull the plug on their participation in the project because they'd been throwing money at this and they hadn't seen much results, and they didn't have a lot of confidence in the Ivorian interlocutors, and so they wanted to restructure their participation as well. So anyway, I left there in December of 2009 and came home.

Since then I've done a couple of things for the UN and I've observed a couple of elections. Oh, I did observe one election in 2006, I guess it was, for ODIHR, went to Macedonia and then again-

Well, last year, 2010, somewhere in the middle of the year I got a frantic call from New York. The Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP wanted me -- quick, quick, quick -- to go out to Kyrgyzstan to help them develop an elections project. There had been a sudden change of government -- the president had fled the country after bloody riots in Bishkek -- and the new government, the interim government was desperately seeking assistance in organizing a constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections and would the UNDP please help...?

*Q: This was in what year again?*

WAGENSEIL: Two thousand ten, last year.

*Q: Last year.*

WAGENSEIL: And the riots had been in early April and I got there, I think, the third week of April and I was there for three weeks and helped put together a project of election support -- basically drawing on the project document that I was working under in Abidjan, a copy of which I carried around all the time -- and to support the new elections commission and work on voter education, work with the NGOs, political parties, the government, UNDP and so forth and so on. And I was there for three weeks and I had a very busy time, meeting lots of folks.

While I was there the new head of the election commission was selected. I was, I think, the third person to meet with him after he took office. I also met with several other members of the commission, with diplomats from China, Russia, Germany and so forth and so on, to talk about how this should work; met with the EU, met with the OSCE office in Bishkek to talk about what kind of support can be expected from donors; met with the international NGO community, NDI, IRI, IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) and so forth -- and put together a project which I left in the hands of the UN country office. That worked out pretty well.

In between, during 2010, I was doing little bits and pieces, consulting with CCD, meeting with their membership, attending some of their meetings, board meetings and so forth. Earlier this year, when was it, in April? I've lost track. I again participated in an ODIHR election observation mission, this time in Kazakhstan. I went out to be a short-term observer, way up-country in Kostanay -- a small city near the Russian border; not quite on the edge of Siberia but close enough that you could hear the winds howling across the steppe. And that was fascinating. I also got the chance to visit Astana -- the new capital of Kazakhstan -- which, if you haven't seen it you wouldn't believe it. It's like a cross between Pyongyang and Disneyland in the middle of the steppes of Asia. It's extraordinary. Some of the most incredible architecture that man has ever conceived.

When I was working with CCD there were two things that I did. First of all, in late 2006 CCD had organized a conference in Budapest which brought together academics and activists from a couple of Central European countries, a couple of African countries and some of the Middle East and North African countries. The purpose was to draw on the lessons of the democratic transitions in Central Eastern Europe and in Sub-Saharan Africa -- the positive, successful, peaceful democratic transitions -- to find some lessons learned and some guidelines, best practices, for the democratic transitions which one hoped would be coming in the Middle East and North Africa. It was a truly fascinating conversation for three days, and I wrote the report on it, which, if you haven't seen it, I recommend it to you.

*Q: Okay, thank you.*

WAGENSEIL: I can point it out to you on the web. And then while I was working at CCD in 2008 they had another conference which took place at the Pocantico Hills estate of the Rockefeller brothers' foundation, north of New York, the third in a series that they had had on the issue of Education for Democracy (which had been highlighted in the Warsaw Declaration). They'd had one in 2003 and one in 2005; this was the third one and this one was aimed at drawing up an Action Plan for Education for Democracy. I was able to recruit and bring to that conference the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Terry Davis -- a former British MP -- who was in New York anyway for the General Assembly --

*Q: Very nice.*

WAGENSEIL: -- and he came up for the day, had lunch with us, addressed the crowd, schmoozed with us for a while and went back to New York, an hour away. And then again, I wrote the report on that. And I mention that because the chairmanship of the Community of Democracies has just transitioned. It was, until a month and a half ago, Lithuania; it is now Mongolia that holds the chair for two years. The Mongolian foreign minister came to Washington earlier this year, to meet the folks because the Convening Group of the Community of Democracies normally meets at ambassador level here in Washington and the NGO that I work with, CCD, sits in as the NGO representative in the Convening Group meetings -- except when they're not invited -- but they represent the international steering committee of the NGOs from around the world.

So the Mongolian delegation came to see us and talked about their goals for this thing and they talked about Education for Democracy and so forth and so on, so I piped up and said, "Hey, take a look at the report that we did on education for democracy. I think you could make some traction with this. Who's going to oppose a resolution on education? Who's going to oppose a resolution on democracy? And -- I said -- in fact there's a draft text already!" (In my pocket...) And so I was told -- about two weeks ago -- that the Mongolian delegation intends to bring up in New York.

*Q: Very nice.*

WAGENSEIL: Perhaps as early as this fall.

So that's what I've been doing for the last little while, working with CCD, and right now I've got a bunch of vacancy announcements that I'm looking at with the UN, UNDP for various things they've got going on.

*Q: Okay.*

WAGENSEIL: And that's where we are on the 10<sup>th</sup> of August, 2011.

*Q: Okay. Well that certainly takes us up to today. It's been a fascinating story, a fascinating life. I know we only got a little piece of it but I think a very interesting piece and let me thank you on behalf of ADST and future historians for sharing that with us.*

WAGENSEIL: Well I hope that somebody in the future finds it at all interesting. If there is someone reading through this and wanting to understand some of the things I was saying about Geneva or Warsaw I recommend that they read your report as well because --

*Q: I think they'll find some overlaps.*

WAGENSEIL: -there are some overlaps and some inter-twinings which perhaps helps understand it.

*Q: Okay, thanks a lot, Steve.*

WAGENSEIL: Sure thing.

*End of interview*