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

JOHN "JOCK" WHITTLESEY

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is October 30, 2019 and we're beginning our interview with Jock Whittlesey. Jock, where and when were you born?

WHITTLESEY: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland on November 12, 1956.

Q: Is that where you grew up as well?

WHITTLESEY: Yes, my family lived in the same house from well before I was born until well after I left. I completed high school in Baltimore, went off for college, and never really returned to Baltimore as a full-time resident, but for family visits, etc.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family, parents, siblings, and so on.

WHITTLESEY: I'm the middle of three brothers. We're all about three years apart. My older brother was born in 1953, I was born in 1956, and my younger brother was born in 1959. My father was a physician in family practice and my mom had worked as an elementary school teacher but was a housewife throughout my life, although she did volunteer work for Planned Parenthood.

Q: A lot of people these days do ancestry investigations. Have you looked at your family origins?

WHITTLESEY: It's not a huge source of interest to me. The Whittleseys are originally from England and we are a small family in the United States. We trace our ancestry back to one individual who came over in the 1600s and ran a ferry service in Connecticut. There's other folks who are more interested in the genealogy than I am, [who] have done the full layout of who got married to whom and that sort of thing, so I am aware of our background and this connection to the John Whittlesey, who I think it was in the early 1600s, or perhaps the late 1600s—sometime in there—who was seen as our first American relative. I have a couple of old citizenship papers that came from my Mom's side of the family; again, folks coming over from England, the King family. I have those at home and were in, I think, the late 1700s, officially giving U.S. citizenship to a relative

on my Mom's side. So those are the things that I recall from it. Not a huge source of interest to me.

Q: How did your parents meet?

WHITTLESEY: My father was a medical student and one of his colleagues was my mother's brother. They invited Dad over for a family dinner one night presumably to meet my Mom.

Q: Were they also both from the Baltimore area?

WHITTLESEY: Mom is the Baltimore connection. Dad came from Massachusetts and went to [Johns] Hopkins Medical School.

Q: Baltimore's a relatively big city. Whereabouts in the city, what sort of neighborhood or area did you grow up in?

WHITTLESEY: I grew up in a place called Roland Park. I went to a private school called Gilman which is in Roland Park and geographically is in the north central part of the city, not far from Hopkins University.

Q: Elementary school, are there any recollections? Did you also go to a private elementary school?

WHITTLESEY: Yes, I went to a school called Friends, which was the Society of Friends, a Quaker-linked school for elementary that was K through 7, and I went to Gilman, another Baltimore private school, starting in 8th grade.

Q: Were they very religious, either the Quaker school or Gilman?

WHITTLESEY: Not particularly. We had a Quaker style, I think they called it a meeting, once a week or something like that. Their sort of silent worship, I remember those at Friends, but at least to elementary school kids, it was not a strongly promoted religious value. We might have absorbed a little bit through that, but the Friends are a pretty quiet group of folks and also small, so at that point the school, I suspect, had some modest connections with the society of Friends but not a huge one. Whatever Quaker religious aspects there were, they were very lightly pushed. Same for Gilman, a general Christian background and there would be prayers occasionally in school, maybe an after school religious studies class once in a while, but again very light and general. It was Christian affiliated, sort of multi-denominational. We had Jewish kids attending, we had Christians, probably some Muslims, and it was just not a huge aspect of the educational experience. Both Friends and Gilman are still there and still going strong.

Q: From elementary school do you have any strong recollections about things that you learned or extracurricular activities, Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, or music and so on?

WHITTLESEY: I was not in Cub Scouts or Boy Scouts. Family vacations would be one thing I remember, but I don't recall a particular—I guess I was just a regular kid going to school, and going with the flow, and that was fine. I didn't have any experiences that kind of crystallized anything for me in terms of witnessing something extraordinary or having some kind of particular skill that emerged in either elementary school or high school. [It was] just going along through the program and sports after school. I was not a standout athlete nor was I an intellectually gifted student, as some of my colleagues were. I think it was just a typical, average educational experience.

Q: While you were growing up you mentioned _____. Did your family take long trips or overseas trips? Was travel a major…?

WHITTLESEY: We did a couple of typical family trips to places like the Grand Tetons and Yellowstone. We have relatives in Maine and we went up there a couple of times—I don't recall anything. I went over to Europe with my Mom and Dad but I was in high school at that point, and we went to London and Paris, that kind of thing. It was not a, again from my perspective—Even now sort of looking back to a typical experience that my family had, I didn't consider us to be particularly wealthy, but I didn't look at it carefully. We were certainly comfortable financially, so for my peer group, that seemed to be the typical sort of thing that people would do. They would go off and have a vacation somewhere, a couple of weeks to a family visit or to a national park somewhere.

Q: As you're going through high school, were you encouraged to read for pleasure, other than some people begin to have windows opened by reading certain kinds of fiction or even newspapers?

WHITTLESEY: I was a pretty consistent and happy reader. Reading was something I enjoyed doing and did a lot of. I don't recall any particular intellectual direction that that took, just submarine books. and James Bond books—going through a whole bunch of those at some point—World War II, ship stories, baseball books. My folks were very hands off in terms of their parenting style; something I've come to appreciate as an adult [laughter]. We were not in a pressurized intellectual environment where expectations were laid out as to what I had to do and what I was getting ready to do, and that sort of thing. I really was left to feel my own way, and I think that was a good approach by my parents. [It] led to some decisions that took a long time to develop and no doubt some wasted time, but mom and dad were willing to put up with that. I had a part-time job in high school. I worked for a florist as a delivery-type person, worked at the liquor store maintaining stock, and neighborhood kinds of businesses. So that's how I spent my time.

Q: The other thing, as you are coming to adulthood, as you're going through high school, the counterculture is revving up. Did that affect you or the school in any way?

WHITTLESEY: I think I was a little bit young to really take on a strong impression of that. President Kennedy was assassinated when I was a young boy. I was 7 or 8 [years

old], something like that. We had riots in Baltimore following Martin Luther King's assassination. These are events that I remember. The Vietnam War was coming to a close as I was entering high school. I remember talking to my Dad about the Vietnam War and remembering his comment that this was going to be a war that we were going to lose. I recall that clearly. But most of these things were a few years distant from my personal viewpoint. I graduated from high school in 1974, so this was really the tail end of a lot of the major trends that were taking place in the '60s.

Q: Your high school, I imagine it was a relatively small school because it's a private school, but did it have much in the way of a diverse student body?

WHITTLESEY: You're talking about a private school that essentially catered to well-off people, the professional class. I can't remember when it started, but it was 75 or 100 years old at least. It's located in what amounts to an upper-middle class or upper-class part of town, well off, so there was this whole aura of the upper-middle class of primarily Caucasian with some Jewish components to it. So, you're talking about the doctors and lawyers of town who in those days were—I don't want to overemphasize this as being the ruling class, but these were folks who were in well-respected, well-paying professional jobs, had all been educated and had gone to Princeton, and my Dad went to Bowdoin. My mom went to Vassar, which you know for somebody who was born in 1921, that's not an insignificant achievement. My Dad went through medical school. So these are people who are educated and well off and what would be called "polite society." So, the headmaster of the school, a guy named Redmond Finney, to his credit saw the social trends and took it as a personal mission to expand the African-American footprint at Gilman specifically. He went out and put his personal energy into finding African-American teachers and recruiting African-American students and bringing them into Gilman. The first African-American students at Gilman were a few years earlier than I was, but not by a lot. You can assume that prior to that it was the Caucasian of European descent, Jewish component there, but I don't think there was a single Black person in there. Probably [there were] some Asians, but maybe single-digit percentages. Anyway, he [Finney] went in and that started the development of the African-American presence at Gilman. He was the personal mover on that and made it happen and found ways to support these guys and found good people to mentor them and to be leaders on the campus. That has continued to this day.

Q: In high school you mentioned you didn't get particularly involved with extracurricular activities. Were there any other activities in high school that stand out in your mind?

WHITTLESEY: I worked on stage crew doing theater productions. That was something I did for several years. We all did sports and that was a required part of our education. Those were the things that I recall. I was not the star in the high school play. I was not the star athlete, but I was on the team, part of the stage crew with my friends and this was one of the things we did together.

Q: As both of your parents went to college I imagine as you're approaching graduation from high school they're beginning to talk to you about college. How did that go?

WHITTLESEY: That was an area where I don't recall a single conversation with my parents about, "What kind of place are you going to go to?" They really let me do that all on my own, and consequently it was a very poorly managed process without a lot of thinking or energy on my part. This is all just to show you what kind of person I was, and probably still am. But they were willing to let me manage that and find my own way.

I think it was a given that I would go to college. I have a son now who's gone through the college application process and it's much more intense, much more in depth. What we went through would be kind of shockingly light and quick compared to what students do now, where they're planning these things for years [with] a lot of college visits, pretests, and these kinds of things. We took the SATs and all that.

Gilman certainly had a reputation of being a very high-quality school and if you take a typical school here, even good ones, Gilman would compare quite well. I mean it had multiple people go to top schools, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, Brown, Penn, that kind of thing. Perhaps 15–20 percent of my class would have been in what are now considered the most difficult schools to get into. That was just the way it was. People went off to Princeton. If you went to a high school around here in Washington or a Baltimore city school and you have one person get into an Ivy League…Wow, here's our Ivy League student! At Gilman that was just sort of accepted as the way things were, and you had your parents and the people you interacted with [who] had been to those schools. There was an, I won't say expectation, but that was just simply the natural way that society worked. You're in an educated group, you've got smart kids, they apply to Ivy League schools, they get in, and they attend.

I always tell people now whom I talk to about college that I was just so pathetically under informed about the college experience that it would bring tears to their eyes, if I'd made it all up. I just had no idea who I was as a person, as a human being...

Q: [laughter]

WHITTLESEY: …what the schools were all about, how we would interact. I was just hopelessly naïve and underinformed. I sort of went through this process in a very superficial way. I applied to five or six schools [and] I got into Emory University. I had some friends who went there and probably had heard from them, "Oh this is a good place." That was as far as my thinking went. College counselor says, "Emory's fine," [and] my friends were there. Well okay, go ahead. So that's where I went for my first two years of college.

Q: Were your parents satisfied with that?

WHITTLESEY: Perfectly. I never heard of a single word about, "You should have done this." "Why didn't you do that?" "How come you're not going to…? My Dad went to Bowdoin, which even then was a very tough school to get into. I think I applied to Bowdoin and didn't get in. That should have been a clue about my intellectual capability, but I never got any kind of pressure or criticism from my folks. They were very, very hands off and accepting. "This is what you're doing, and we're okay with that," just didn't come up. It just was a nonissue as far as I was concerned. It would have surprised me if my Mom had taken me aside one day and said, "Why didn't you …? How come you're not going to Princeton, or something like that." Several of her relatives had gone to Princeton, but I never got any of that. So good for them.

Q: Going from Gilman, a relatively small high school, you get to Emory, a big university. What was that like?

WHITTLESEY: That was a real shock to me in multiple ways, and I think my first step in leaving the home bubble of Baltimore and Gilman, which was a very familiar environment, very comfortable. I'll just mention a few things that I recall even now.

One is that my high school's athletic facilities were head and shoulders above Emory's collegiate athletic facilities. I got down there and I thought, "Wow!" That was really a surprise. Their gym was small and their fields were modest. It would have been different, of course, if I had gone to some power athletic school, but at Emory it was just not a big deal. So, my high school facilities were much better than Emory's.

One of the things I recall going to Gilman [was] being raised in this—I don't want to call it a hothouse atmosphere, but certainly a limited circle where your father is in a highly respected job, and money is not an issue. You live in a nice part of town, all of these things. You're going to what is represented as a top-quality private school; essentially the best education money can buy. I don't want to blow it completely out of proportion, but there was certainly that sense that Gilman was a top-quality school, much, much better than the Baltimore city public schools. I have no doubt that's absolutely true.

But when I got to Emory there were a lot of students there—Emory at the time and probably still is, a very medicine-oriented school [with] pre-medical studies at Emory—chemistry, bio, all those sort of hard sciences—drew a lot of kids. We had a big contingent from the Long Island area of New York, and these were some really well-prepared and intelligent and just much, much better students than I was. I struggled the first year. My grades were not good. I was taking courses that I really didn't belong in; I didn't have the background, but I was too stupid to recognize it and found out the hard way. "Hey, you really can't handle yourself in this class. These other kids have had calculus in high school." I was like, "I went to Gilman," and then, all of a sudden, that doesn't help you anymore. You're in there with some kids who have really gone through—They probably went to excellent public schools, Great Neck, New York, and places like that where they have a very high level of achievement and education.

So, all of a sudden I was floundering around in my first couple of semesters to figure out what I wanted to do. I hadn't thought, I didn't have a clue about what I wanted to do, what kind of person I was, what I was psychologically and intellectually adept or suited for. So when I started being not a deep thinker on it, "Well, I'll do what my father did. I'll try out to do pre-med, since I know a little bit about it. I can see my Dad loves it, and it's a great career." I didn't even bother to think about, "Well, he's a different person than I am." So I started this pre-med track in Emory and I just went absolutely nowhere. The hard sciences were not—I didn't have the background, and it became clear that that was not what I was good at nor was going to succeed at.

So I found my way into economics, which I liked. I probably just took an econ course or two out of either a requirement to have a general range of courses that Emory would require, or that somebody had said "Well, this is good, you should take this," or it's not impossible that my Dad thought that this would be something good to know. In any case I took that and started thinking, "Maybe I should lean more towards economics and the business side of things. So I thought, "Okay, now we're getting somewhere."

So, in my sophomore year I decided to transfer because Emory was a real center for the hard sciences but not as well-known in business and economics. So I applied to and my Dad, to his credit and I'm sure my Mom and he were in cahoots on this, suggested Georgetown Foreign Service School. This is something you might be good at. So I applied there. I might even have applied to Princeton out of some thought—But I applied to and got into the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia because they were, and still are, known for the Wharton School and their business and economic side of things. So off I went to Penn, starting in my junior year. I did [my] freshman and sophomore year at Emory, then junior and senior at Penn. I graduated from Penn in 1978.

Q: During your college years, did you join a fraternity?

WHITTLESEY: No. That was something that they had a lot of at Emory and I'm not quite sure why, but it's just something I stayed away from. I don't know what my thinking process was, whether I thought it's rushing things. Literally they called it Rush when you start your freshman year. You have no idea what's going on, and all of a sudden you're committing a big chunk of your life to this group and you don't know them. I just stayed out of it, and I'm happy with that decision.

Q: As you transferred to Philadelphia and UP, were you prepared for city life? Emory isn't really a big city.

WHITTLESEY: Yes, sort of a suburban campus. To my knowledge, I don't think I even visited Penn before I went there. I was totally flying blind with minor thoughts rolling through my mind, but no serious effort to check the place out and ask difficult questions about what it was all about. I guess I'm just that kind of person. You can just show up and away you go. It didn't bother me that Penn was in an urban [setting]; that was the way it was. It seemed actually pretty. You've heard a lot about the urban campus of

Penn, but I remember thinking, "Oh, it's actually a little bit better than I thought." It's not like being in Manhattan; there are some trees! It was not just walking down a city street, it had a campus feel to it, to me.

One thing I remember, I don't know at what point I did this, probably in high school, but my parents had heard about—I think they would call it now like a personality inventory or something like that. I'm trying to remember the name, Johnson O'Connor, I think it was. They [my parents] said, "You should do this." It took a weekend or something like that, and the idea was that they'd give you an assessment. One of my cousins had done it, and these things kind of float through your social circle. My Dad had gotten onto this as something that was [worth] doing. So I think it was something my younger brother and I both did. The idea was to get somebody who does this for a living and really take a hard look at, "Here's something that you're good at, and here's something that you're not good at."

I remember the person at the end where they sit you down and say, "Okay, here's what we've found." They give you all kinds of different tests trying to draw out what kind of skills you have. Can you think three dimensionally? Do you have a mathematical or logical predilection? Are you good with languages, and things like that? What's your learning style? Where are your basic capabilities? I remember I was average in a lot of things, and I said to the lady, "Well, it looks like I'm not good at anything!" [laughter]

To her credit, and it was such a brilliant thought, she said, "Don't look at it that way. You actually have a lot of capabilities in different areas. Yes, you're not an outstanding mathematician or you're not super in this thing, but you have a wide range of skills at a decent level, so here's some of the things you should think about as possible careers." Politics and government were on that list.

That, I think, started things off and I worked as a summer intern for a U.S. senator—probably between my freshman and sophomore years, or sophomore and junior years, for Senator Mac Mathias from Maryland. He had some distant family connection with my family. My grandmother knew him, or my parents had met him, that kind of thing. So, there was this sort of old school connection there. I did that one summer and I think it was right in the middle of my college years.

So, Johnson O'Connor, I think, led directly to the internship with Senator Mathias. It started me on a road that didn't reach fruition for a few years, but that was the first step. If I had been paying more attention, I would maybe have focused on that a little bit more at the beginning of a career, but when I ended up graduating from Penn, I majored in political science and economics.

[Next] I ended up going out to California where my brother worked and lived and started working for a computer company.

Q: One second. Before we go to the computer company, while you were in University of Pennsylvania you had an internship, were there any other extracurricular college jobs that stand out in your mind?

WHITTLESEY: Not particularly. I played soccer for a year at Emory but I didn't do that at Penn. I was not heavily engaged in the extracurricular activities at Penn. I think a combination of concern out of focusing on academics and not wanting to spread myself too thin, but also coming in as a junior where you don't know anybody, the social groups are all set, that kind of thing.

If we could take a break…

While we were having our break, I was thinking about my years growing up and education and college and the sorts of things I remembered. I'll start in the middle and go backwards. When I went to Penn I was looking at the course list that you could take. I had done a paper in high school on China and the United States because that was one thing that did happen when I was relatively aware of what was going on, and that was Nixon's opening of China. That was something that was in the news. My family would get *Life* magazine and *Time* magazine, so there were discussions about these things. I had thought about taking Chinese language when I was at Penn. I thought maybe there's a possibility—But in one of those little quirks, the course I read in the syllabus [said] you have to take two semesters of it. I think the idea was that you wanted to have a longer exposure, and I was really worried about starting it and not finding it to be something that I could do, and either wasting time or getting an F, these sorts of things. It kind of put me in an uncomfortable mood to think, "What if I'm locked in to taking this or something," so I ended up not taking it. That was a huge, very thoughtless act on my part that a little more research would have, I'm sure, resolved in a better way.

It made me think about this China thread that has run through my life essentially from high school on. I think it began with my father, a physician as I mentioned. He had a professional colleague who was from China. I don't know whether from mainland China or Taiwan. At that point I was too uninformed to think about these things. Dr. Chu lived in Baltimore. His kids went to school at our schools, and I'd heard their names a couple of times. My dad was a big admirer, shall we say, of Dr. Chu and I sort of remember a couple of times him [dad] mentioning this is somebody who's really has a lot of admirable qualities, his daughter is smart, and all these things that we respect about immigrants, and particularly about Asians.

I don't know whether that was related, but my best friend in high school was half Chinese. His father was from mainland China, his mother's an American. He was somebody I was spending a lot of time with and got to know his father a little bit. I did a paper about China in high school because of the Nixon thing. So that was sort of the beginning of some interest in China. I'd been reading about China and Nixon's opening up of China, and my friend was half Chinese, so I ended up taking an international relations course at Penn, something like that. I didn't take the Chinese [language] course,

which was just a huge mistake on my part, although it took me a long time to figure that out.

When I finally graduated with economics and political science [majors], I thought I'd become a business person. I went out to California where my brother lived, in part because he lived in Orange County, California where they have wonderful weather. After two years going through West Philadelphia winters, I was more than ready. I had applied to the University of Chicago at that point for an MBA. That was kind of my game plan, and I thought, "I really don't want to spend two more years right away in a cold northern urban city busting my ass at school. So, I'll take a year off and then I'll do my MBA." So I went out to California with a plan to spend a year out there working or doing whatever.

My brother worked for a small entrepreneurial computer company and somehow managed to arrange a modest job there [for me] in their purchasing and procurement. You're talking about a company that had maybe 15 or 20 people. It was kind of unstructured, and I just loved being out in California. There was this whole sense of the computer industry taking off. This was when the original IBM-PC and Microsoft started. I can't remember whatever the name was of the first go-round of Bill Gates's operating system, MS DOS or something like that. Anyway there was the sense computers were really starting to grow at a rapid pace and beginning to play a major role. I got into programming just by accident because of working at this company. The heavy hitters, the people who were really at the center of the action and the fun at that company were the programmers. They were the cool kids, so I started to do that and learnt how to program. So I found my way into the world of computers, but without the slightest bit of background, academic training and things like that. That's what I started to do.

I got laid off from that company and found another job doing computer programming, and this was really the one event that really changed my life, you know, a knife-edge happening, and that was the company I was working for out in California got a contract to support a company in Hong Kong with software.

Q: In what year?

WHITTLESEY: That would have been probably 1979. I worked for the original company, probably a year, from summer of 1978 to somewhere in 1979 or something like that, and then got laid off. I got a job at the second company, starting in the middle of 1979, and worked for them for a few months. Then towards the end of the year this opportunity came up to work with a company called [Hong Kong] Cable and Wireless, which at that time was a big telecommunications company. They ran the telephone system of Hong Kong. They had purchased one of these systems that I was familiar with and the people that I worked for said, "Do you want to come over and work in Hong Kong?" So I was like, "Yes! I do want to come over!"

I think that the international bug had been sitting in there [in me] for a long time and this was really the moment where it came out, and things were just never the same after that. The business person I worked for was—He was more of an operator than a serious businessman. He was always in some kind of shady [dealings] near the foul lines of behavior, money, and things like that. Not exactly a blue-ribbon personality. But it gave me what I was looking for, which was a job. I was in my early 20s. I didn't really care about things like health care and, if I got a check occasionally, that would be nice. The opportunity to go to Hong Kong was absolutely irresistible.

From a business standpoint, it was a complete failure, but from the social standpoint, it was a real success. Typical of me, I got off the plane in Hong Kong just having absolutely no idea what Hong Kong was like. It was pathetic how little I knew about it, how incurious I was, and sort of willing to follow the first thought that came into my mind. Because I knew Hong Kong was a British colony, I thought it was going to be sort of like Bermuda. I had this vision of grassy lawns and stuff like that. So I got to Hong Kong and it's totally urban, [but I] just had the best time of my life there. I was by myself, I had no commitments anywhere, I didn't have any debts, so I was really on my own. You've probably been there, but if you haven't, Hong Kong is a wonderful spot. I would just get out and walk around and soak in this wonderful atmosphere of Hong Kong. I met my wife-to-be there one night, so life was good.

I was there for most of 1980. The job kind of came to an end. The quality of the business arrangements was just not working, and things were starting to fall apart. My then girlfriend, wife to be, had already applied to go to school in the United States, so she was on her way in the fall of 1980 to go to University of Wisconsin at Eau Claire. I came back ostensibly to continue the work of this company that I'd worked for in Hong Kong. That sort of fell apart in a couple of months, but I continued to do computer programming. I moved back to California where my brother was. My wife transferred the next year to go to the University of California Irvine, so we were together. She probably came over [to California from Wisconsin] in the summer of 1981, that would make sense. So I was doing computer programming. After a year at the University of Wisconsin, she was at the University of California. Then she applied to and got into Georgetown [graduate school]. So the plot is starting to thicken a little bit here.

I was still doing computer programming, just business things, inventory and customer lists, and invoices, that kind of thing. But she [wife] was going to get her Masters and eventually her Ph.D. from Georgetown in linguistics, so we came back to Washington. I had family back here in Washington, so it was kind of a comfortable environment for me. So that kind of set us up.

I decided to start working on computer mapping. I was interested in maps. That's another thing that has been with me a long time. It's not like I took a course. It was something around that I enjoyed, so I thought maybe I would enjoy doing computer mapping applications. So I studied, applied to, and got into the Master's program in geography at the University of Maryland. I worked on computer maps with the thought

that I can do something, which although at a vastly lower level, would be similar to Google Maps where you can use the data management capabilities of a computer to do route finding and things like that. This was at a—completely honest—kindergarten level compared to what's on your phone now. But that was the general point. I was interested in geography as a field of study, and then focused on computer maps because I was interested in maps and I had the computer background. I thought maybe that would work as a product. I was looking for something that I could make some money at, and that ended up not particularly working out, but I did work on computer maps on my own for several years while doing regular business consulting programming to make a living.

So now we're in the mid to late '80s. I graduated from Maryland [University of Maryland College Park]. I just went part time. Part-time student, part-time working. I graduated, I think, in 1989. I took it very slow for a few years to do my Masters. Then at some point in there, my wife and I started traveling. I'm trying to think, we did a lot of travel, for sure, in the United States, but we did some international travel. That sort of started us with this global viewpoint that has led to the State Department.

Q: This period from roughly 1981 to 1989, you met your future wife, you've come back to the United States. You're taking a slow pace toward a Master's degree. Was your wife working at that time, or what was she doing?

WHITTLESEY: She was a full-time student, no kind of serious outside job. I think she worked at the library at Georgetown. She had a job while we were in California at a cookware store to make a little money, but these were just financial for some income, nothing professional about it.

Q: Did she end up getting a Ph.D.?

WHITTLESEY: She did. She got a Masters and a Ph.D. consecutively, straight through, at Georgetown, and she graduated at roughly the same time [as me]. She might have gotten her degree in 1989–90, I've forgotten the exact year.

Q: Was it in a particular language or was it more general?

WHITTLESEY: No, she was interested in the structure of languages, the way languages work as a system, or the grammar of things and the way those systems interact. It's more of a technical side than the actual practitioner side of knowing a foreign language. It's more the science of language.

Q: When did you guys get married?

WHITTLESEY: We didn't get married until 1990. We were living together for a long time, but I finally persuaded her that this would be a good idea, so we got married. We were together almost ten years before we got married.

Q: In the course of these 10 years you're continuing to program, and I imagine ever more sophisticated, because computers were becoming more sophisticated. But you're also now beginning to travel with your future wife. How did it coalesce that you became interested in international work or service?

WHITTLESEY: One of the things was that when we were still living in California, I had contacts in the computer programming industry. I guess we must have been back in Washington and wanting to travel. I can't remember how the idea came up. We were still in California at that time—I'll have to ask my wife what the exact timing was—but the idea was you can go work in Australia, because somebody had some contacts [in Australia] in the same computer system industry. Somebody knew somebody who worked there, and so this was sort of the happy marriage of "you can get work in Australia and that will let you stay there longer so that you have time to enjoy it." We did a Pacific Rim trip that was focused on doing some computer programming work in the Sydney area. This was a raging success just from a social standpoint. The work side of it didn't generate any huge changes, but we had some money coming in and we stayed in Sydney for three months, and saw a lot of Australia. Then [we] did a special airfare, one of those keep-going airfares where you stop [at a series of places] and [then] come back. So that was the connection between the programming and the international work and gave me the opportunity to travel and see places. Of course having been in Hong Kong, that opens up your interest in continuing that and wanting to see other places. That all worked out nicely. But I must say I've lost the exact timing there [probably 1982]. I remember being in California and wanting to get a phone call or being on the phone with this guy in Sydney about the work there so that must have been fairly early.

Monique got into Georgetown, [so] we moved back here [to Washington DC], but [I kept a] sort of interest in international work. That seed got firmly implanted through the Hong Kong and the Australian travel experience that was in the early '80s for me.

Q: In the early '90s you're married but you're back in the Washington area. How did you end up being interested in the Foreign Service?

WHITTLESEY: This is actually easy to explain. My dad had probably mentioned this a few times in a very non-pressurized way like, "You should think about the Georgetown School of Foreign Service or something." I had applied to the Walsh School [in 1976] as a transfer student and didn't get in, but it was something that came up and maybe the Johnson O'Connor people said, "This is the field you would be good at." It wasn't something where it's, "Ah, that's what I'm going to do." I think at a minimum I kind of put that on the table as an option, something that I heard about and done at least a little bit of thinking about, but had not pursued strongly.

There was the combination of travel with my wife, which we both enjoyed a lot, and the nature of my work as a computer programmer, which I found increasingly kind of unfulfilling, I guess, would be a good word for that. The computer industry changes. You have to have a way to stay informed, and with my style of work, which was essentially a

self-employed person, I didn't see that working. I also found the work itself less interesting. You're dealing with customer lists, and managing data for businesses and things like that. I was, "Okay, I've done that and I'll do it again and again." It just didn't kind of excite me. And there was also this sense that the industry is going to move on past your skill set, and where are you going to be in five or 10 years? There was a clear thought in my mind that this is something that's not going to end overnight, but it's going to taper off here and you need to be thinking about what you're going to do [next].

It was my wife who actually came up with the idea of applying for the Foreign Service. I don't know where she got it from—We had a Foreign Service Officer in our apartment building—but she [my wife] was the one who put that right in front of me and said, "This is something you should think about."

I remember talking to the Foreign Service Officer who had a Christmas party or something and we were talking about his work. He was probably retired at that point, but I do remember him describing the Foreign Service, and my thinking that that sounds absolutely fantastic! [Laughter] So, that was really the beginning of it.

It had come up in conversations through my childhood with my dad, exposure to things Chinese through school, the travel experience going to Hong Kong, then really being an international person from that point on. My wife is not just an ethnic Chinese, but somebody who was from a foreign country. That's something that I live with every day, even now. This started my interest in geography and travel, so that kind of broke the dam, I guess. I applied for the Foreign Service Officer exam, took it, and I guess I did okay on the written part. [Then] I did the interview and lo and behold, I got selected! Then [I was] trying to get off the waiting list and get into an A-100 (entry training) class and those types of things. I started at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) back in the bad old days in Rosslyn where there really was an A-100 office!

Q: Which were the years you began taking the test until you were actually hired?

WHITTLESEY: My A-100 started in March 1992. I was in the 62nd A-100 class. I must say I don't remember when I took the written test but it probably would have been in 1990 or 1991. I remember a couple of things about that. One, which probably hasn't changed at all, is the State Department was so opaque and mysterious about what the classes were, and when, and how many, and how you should approach this. What it was all about. It was just very difficult to grasp that. I hope that they're better at marketing, in a good way, "This is what it's all about."

In those days the U.S. Information Agency existed and that was put forth to me as an option that you can join the USIA as an information officer. I talked to somebody and I think he ended up being a friend of mine who later joined the State Department [when USIA merged into State].. I talked to him about what USIA was all about and it didn't quite sound like what I wanted to do. Finally the gears turned at State and I got pulled into the 62nd A-100 class and that was really the right thing for me.

Q: Were you hired into a cone or was that the time when they were hiring people without a cone and you subsequently determined?

WHITTLESEY: Second option there. You were brought in without the cone and you did an initial tour, the entry-level officer tours, and at some point we put in a preference list. That all happened during my first tour, which was in Greece from 1993 to 1995. A friend of mine who was in the same general category as me and I put in our requests for "coning." Would you want to be a consular officer? Would you want to be a political officer? Those sorts of things. It was all a little bit mysterious and the State Department was not particularly good at giving you a sense of what it was all about.

I also remember when we did the interview portion of the [Foreign Service Officer entry] test, which was here [in Washington DC]. Fortunately I lived in Washington so it was nice and easy for me. I had some contact later with the senior officer supervising or testing the oral part of the test. We had various written things [exercises]. We had an interview. They were asking me about...here's a scenario: what would you do? I remember one of the questions was, "Let's say you're running a library, what kind of magazines would you want?" We did what these days would be the equivalent of a tabletop exercise to see how you interacted with the other three or four people who had been brought in and faced some kind of hypothetical problem that required you to try to reach a consensus to get something done, or you're facing a problem and some role-playing types of things.

We did the "inbox exercise" and I still remember that distinctly because I had been managing a small business, a lot of this was fairly familiar to me. I was used to getting stuff in and maybe writing a reply or making a decision about something, so I started working on it, and like, "Okay, I can do this." There was always something buried in your inbox like "This is an emergency, take care of this right away!" I didn't grasp that, so I just sort of methodically started working from the top down in conventional thinking style. I remember thinking this is routine office management-type things to me. I didn't have any kind of brilliant approach to quickly scan to see [an overview]. The idea was that you had just shown up at Post and this is Day 1 and you're faced with this inbox. I don't remember thinking, "Oh I am just crushing this! I'm clearly fantastic at this, and I got this all figured out, it's great." It seemed very routine to me.

Then I remember we worked with the supervisors at the very end of the day. They bring you in to say, "Yes, we're going to offer you a job." Or, "Thanks, but we're going to look elsewhere." So I got the offer and I remember walking out and some of the other guys said—I was probably a bit older than the typical other folks that were there—"Did you get in?" "Yeah, they made me an offer!" They [the other candidates] were nice. They said something like, "Well, you clearly looked to us like you knew what was going on, and we're not surprised to hear that." That was nice.

So A-100 and Rosslyn in March of 1992. I'd been making not great, but pretty solid money as a computer programmer. That went down significantly when I started at the State Department. We also didn't get per diem because I was already a Washington resident! "Grrr, I could really use this because I'm going to be here for a year."

Q: Oh, because they were going to give you Greek language training?

WHITTLESEY: Right, I had six months of everything else: A-100 and ConGen Rosslyn and tradecraft, and then Greek language training, so I was essentially heading out to post a year after I arrived. I had the financial resources to hang in there with my modest salary. I came in as probably an [FS-0]5 or an 04, I've forgotten exactly which, so [I had] a little income. It seemed everybody else was getting per diem and they're in great shape, their housing is paid for and everything.

Q: When you did the A-100 course, obviously you're given a list of places to bid on but you're also given the type of job. How did you set up your first bid list?

WHITTLESEY: I think it was mostly the quality and the nature of the place rather than the specific job. I did not have the perspective that I'm a political officer and I will go anywhere where they'll give me a political job. I think we were all a little bit unenthusiastic about going to what we would call a "visa mill" where you would work as a consular officer in someplace on the Mexican border, the Dominican Republic, or those types of places. Amazingly enough, we weren't fighting any wars at that point, so that was not an issue, but I also wanted a reasonable quality of life. Lagos, Nigeria was on the list and I was like, "That doesn't attract me." I ended up putting Greece as my preferred place and I got it, so everything worked out well in that regard. I didn't have a professional goal at that point other than just to get on board and work my way through my first junior officer tours. I think I was probably heading for the economic cone, but that option was just not in the cards as an entry level officer at that point.

Q: So was the assignment in Greece a consular tour?

WHITTLESEY: It was a rotational job, so I got a little bit of econ, I did some time in the political section, and I did essentially a year of visa work. That was also fine with me. It gave me a little bit of exposure to the different kinds of work.

Q: Before you go to [talk about] Greece, you were talking about being in A-100 and getting all the training. What were your impressions of it, because now you're going from the private sector to the public sector, and you've never done it before? How did you react?

WHITTLESEY: I was in the 62nd A-100 class and we had a mixed group of folks, typical, I guess, of an A-100. The one thing we were well known for, both to ourselves and around the school, was that it was the first A-100 that was more than 50 percent female. It was right on the knife edge and then one of the men dropped out, so the ladies would

always make a joke, "Thank you, Spiro!" He was one of the guys who decided not to proceed with the Foreign Service, because that made the 51 or 52 or 53 percent or whatever it was. But it was a mixed group. We had folks who had been probably teachers, finance folks, banker-insurance types, some other folks I can't remember. Maybe a journalist or two in there. There was a retired military guy who was a little bit older, a couple of other ex-military, and some from other U.S. government agencies.

I don't recall any strong impressions of everybody being this way or everybody was that way. It was obviously a pretty high-performing group. People had been in reasonably challenging careers and had done stuff with their lives. Some of the folks had traveled; other folks not so much. We were very mixed gender, mixed age, mixed backgrounds. We had a few African Americans, a Japanese American; I can't remember all the groups. I'd have to sit down and look at the list again to remind myself. A majority Caucasian, but definitely a mixture of other folks in there, and that was just accepted as the natural course of events. That's who made it, and away we went.

Q: Was the training you received adequate for your first tour? Did it prepare you well?

WHITTLESEY: I would say no. We did at one point—They probably still do this—an offsite where we went off to someplace in West Virginia, within striking distance of Washington, but off in a hotel somewhere to do what amounted to a long-term role play at an embassy. They had some retired Foreign Service people, or people who had worked at FSI come along with us, essentially to advise. I remember thinking that we really didn't know enough about how the Foreign Service operated to really make that a valuable experience. It just got thrown in there. One of the things that I think struck me from the beginning of our time in A-100 is the need to interact with folks, this sort of sociability, and not in a friendliness way, but your ability to get along with and work with other people that was emphasized. That part they did get right. That was a message that not only was accurate but kind of sank in with me.

Q: Interpersonal skills.

WHITTLESEY: Right. And not only that you had them. I had never really looked at myself as being talented in that way. One thing that was clear was this is a place where you have to push yourself a little bit to be outgoing, raise your hand, participate; you don't want to be a wallflower. This is what it's all about; it's engaging with other people, and that really connected with me in a big way when we started A-100.

They asked folks to be what amounted to be officers for the class, or a committee to take care of class business. I was one of the folks who volunteered for that. I was whatever they called it, the chairman, or the—I think president would be a bit pompous—but the head of the little group who managed the class. So if we needed to get people to sign up for stuff, or we wanted to do a social activity, our little committee would take care of that. I was involved in that and I think probably on the strength of that was when we had our offsite and we were doing the embassy simulation, I was the DCM. I remember just

having no idea what that was all about. Therefore I think the simulation and role play itself was not as helpful as it could have been.

They went over a lot of the nuts and bolts of federal work. There was getting lined up for your bank account, and direct deposit; the mechanics of it. I'm sure we spent some time talking about representation. I think that was another theme that came up a lot. They made it sound like we had to do a lot of entertaining, and I ended up doing very little of that throughout my career. I think that was something that was not particularly accurate, but the idea that you were engaging with other people in a social setting for professional aims was a message that came over very clearly. So those were the things that stood out for me.

Q: You had applied for the position in Greece. Was your position the economic and consular position at a 3/3 [language level], or were you not expected to speak Greek?

WHITTLESEY: 2/2 because it's an entry level [position]. We had folks who did six months versus nine months [of language training], or something like that. These were some of the folks who became longtime friends of ours who had gone through either the six-month course and were going out as entry level officers, or some more senior people who were taking the nine-month course and were going as heads of sections, etc. That was good exposure to make some real friends and to begin to hear about how these things worked in reality. I think I still probably didn't have enough of a conceptual framework to take on board all of that information. But you're starting a learning process and it's a little messy, always.

Q: My last question for today. As all this is going on with you, what's going on with your wife? Is she thinking about a job when you move to Greece? What's her situation?

WHITTLESEY: One of the things that I will always admire her for is that she did the entire A-100 [orientation course], like every single day, as a spouse. I think almost nobody else did that. They might come for individual things, but that was typical of her commitment to this. She wanted to know what it was all about and she and I were just keen to go to A-100 every day. That was the way it was for the entire length of the training. She took the Greek language course, so she bought in 100 percent. That's just her kind of viewpoint. Other spouses would kind of drift in and some of [my colleagues] were probably single, but she really took it on herself to learn about the State Department and the Foreign Service and what this new life was going to be about. So bless her for that.

I am not sure she had a distinct plan in terms of work. I'm sure in A-100 they talked about spousal employment and work agreements, so she knew what the outlines of that were, but if she was going to do something, I think [our plan] was going to be that she would figure it out when we got there. She was fantastic at that, and in future discussions we can talk a lot about that, because it's one of the qualities that you really need as a Foreign Service spouse.

We have never as an institution solved that problem. It's probably more difficult now but she was a good example of somebody who had real credentials. I don't want to demean folks who focus on their families, but she had a solid professional-level education and was interested in applying that, and then did that in these very special circumstances. It's to her great credit that she was flexible enough and tough enough to make it work in all of these different tours that we had. She also participated, as we'll talk about I'm sure in the future, in a lot of the social activities. She was really a true partner in this whole process, and made a lot of difference to me because she knew a lot about what was going on, and wasn't just, "Well, how was work today, honey?" She knew who the people were. She was on a first-name basis with my colleagues. She spoke the language; she knew the society. She knew the State Department, and she could not only work through that for her own benefit, but obviously for mine, and to understand where I was coming from and what my situation was.

Q: Great. Let's end here for today, and then we'll pick up as you go to Greece and how that first tour was and so on.

WHITTLESEY: Sure. That would be great.

Q: We're resuming our interview with Jock Whittlesey as he begins his first tour in the Foreign Service in Greece, and that year was…

WHITTLESEY: 1993.

Q: Did you have to do any special preparations before you left? How did that go?

WHITTLESEY: Greece was my first Foreign Service tour so I had some background training [at] what we'd [call] ConGen Rosslyn, because I was going to work as a consular officer for part of my tour. I think I did a couple of general tradecraft courses on Foreign Service writing, and things like that. I took the short Greek language course, six months' worth of Greek language. So, starting probably in September 1992 [and] going into the beginning of 1993. I finished that off and then went off to Greece.

Q: How did you find Greek language training? Greek is a little more difficult than a basic, let's say, Romance language?

WHITTLESEY: I was not particularly adept at it, but I thought it was super interesting because of its linkages to English, which made the class absolutely fun to take. There was a lot of excitement about being a Foreign Service Officer going off to Greece. I had a lot of positive energy in this, and I was doing essentially nothing during that [period] except being a full-time student. My wife did it with me, so we really enjoyed it. It was also a good opportunity to interact with some of the more experienced Foreign Service Officers who were also taking Greek language training and would be our colleagues in Greece. I really enjoyed it and, as I said, the linkages to English were really fascinating.

Q: You arrived there [in Greece] in 1993 and you're going there as a vice consul. Take a moment to describe what the embassy community was like back then in the mid-90s.

WHITTLESEY: We had just had a political-appointee ambassador leave Greece, and I think the DCM also had just left. When I got there the new DCM, a Foreign Service professional named Williams was, I suppose, acting as a charge d'affaires. We didn't get an appointed, confirmed ambassador for several months. That would eventually be Tom Niles, who had been ambassador to NATO [and] I think ambassador to Canada, among other things, so two professionals running the show. That seemed a bit distant to me in my daily work of trying to figure out how to run a Visa Section, and just learning the soft culture of the Foreign Service when you're operating overseas—what it's like, wanting to do a good job and understand what's going on. All the positive things that you put into a brand-new career and figuring out how all that works was where all my energy went.

Q: Were you able to get housing and get yourself settled easily?

WHITTLESEY: It went okay. I'm trying to remember how long we stayed in our first house. We eventually ran into a problem with the landlord and moved to another house, but that also went pretty smoothly as far as the embassy was concerned. I didn't feel particularly stressed by that and it all seemed to go along okay. The GSO, the administration folks in the embassy, there was a sufficient number of them and they had enough money to do things, so I felt like I was reasonably well-supported by them. That part of it went okay, and our housing was fine.

Q: When you arrived, did you find that the amount of Greek that you got was [sufficient] for your day-to-day activities?

WHITTLESEY: One of the things we did literally on the way to Greece was to spend a day at Kennedy Airport in New York and to see how it worked. We talked to immigration folks and then we went out to the airport for a morning or for an afternoon to see how that worked. I remember it was timed so there would be a plane coming in from Greece. I was standing there behind the interviewing officer who would be taking people as they came through the immigration line. The Greek folk started coming in. There was somebody who didn't speak very good English, so the person in front of them said, "You know the lady behind me doesn't speak very good English. Would you like me to stick around and do some translating?" So here I am, "Mr. Foreign Service", and I replied, "No problem, I'll take care of that." I'd just had Greek language training, this would be a good chance for me to try things out. The first and simplest question that the interviewing officer wanted to ask was that he wanted to see the person's airplane ticket. I just totally blanked on the word for ticket. I got it mixed up with another word in Greek that sounds similar—*eisitirio* and *estiatorio*—and I just totally locked up. This is a woman, and I'm miming a man taking a ticket out of my jacket pocket. It was a quick lesson in humility! [Laughter] I'm talking about real humility, like you are not as good as you thought five minutes ago!

I think my experience in Greece bore out my feeling that some more language [training] would have been useful. I had a bare minimum, very basic, [and I am] sure I made lots of mistakes. It was, I guess, enough for the task, but more would have been helpful.

Q: When you arrived at the Consular Section in the embassy, how was it divided up? What were all the different responsibilities?

WHITTLESEY: I guess it was three sections, maybe four, depending on how you count them. For the State Department people we had a Nonimmigrant Visa Section where I started out, an Immigrant Visa Section, and American Citizen Services.

Q: So there was no independent Fraud Section, for example, or…

WHITTLESEY: I don't remember a fraud officer. We did have an actual person, they must have been from Immigration and Naturalization (Service), where they lived bureaucratically before the Department of Homeland Security, that was in the Justice [department], or maybe they were just a standalone agency. Anyway, we had people who were real immigration professionals. They might have a fraud officer, but it was not a heavy fraud post, as I found out. I think my training might have painted a little more dire picture of fraud and visa misrepresentation in Greece than turned out to be the reality. We had a few people who didn't qualify, but in general, it was pretty easy. Over time, my feeling developed that it was a pretty straightforward place to work, and not the heavy place with a lot of fraud or real dangers the way some other posts would have been.

Q: What were the unique aspects of the nonimmigrant visa activities you did? For example, were there many third-country nationals or were there security risks, etc.?

WHITTLESEY: At the time the terrorism problem had not risen to the level that it's at now. I was certainly aware of it. I think the biggest third-country issue had to do with Albanians coming to Greece. At that point Albania was, and probably still is, an extremely poor country, not exactly similar, but analogous to Haitians and the Caribbean countries, with desperate economic problems and a lot of people trying to scrape a living nearby. So we had a fair number of Albanians come through, but in general Athens was not, I think, a particularly challenging place. Greece being a maritime place, we had a fair number of seamen visas. There were some peculiarities of Greece, but in general, it was not too bad, and I do remember feeling very, very relieved that the senior FSN [Foreign Service National] in the Nonimmigrant Visa Section had lived in Chicago for several years, if not many, and was really a fluent English speaker. My tension level went down, right on the spot, listening to him as we met and listening to him talk. I thought, I can really communicate with this person, his English is excellent.

I don't know whether you want to explore this in a little more depth, but we did have two separate corruption scandals in our section while I was there. In one, an FSN had been taking money from applicants-to-be and saying, "If you pay this amount of money, I will

make sure that you get [the visa]." There was concern on the Greek side [about visas] that made this a winning proposal for a lot of people. Somehow that [scam] came to light and they brought the FSN to the United States on some pretext and arrested him as he got off the plane. That was a real shocker to me.

The other person had—I'm trying to remember the relative timing of these two things, whether it happened at the same time. It all came out in the analysis, discussions, and interviews that happened with respect to the blatant bribery part of the scandal. I think the senior FSN had accepted free hotel rooms or something like that, which was an absolute no-no, as far as ethical practice; he knew better. I wasn't completely surprised at the time; this is something that's part of their Greek culture. "I'll treat you; you're my friend," since we're talking a lot about *quid pro quo* [laughter]. He also got fired and I remember the Marines literally walking him out of the embassy and having the security people go through his desk after he had left, all that sort of thing. That was pretty serious, but it was also confined to those individuals.

I worked for a very pleasant and experienced guy, Consul General Danny Root. A couple of different, senior FSOs, were heads of the Visa Section. It was certainly a strong learning curve for me trying to come up with how the Visa Section actually operated on a day-to-day basis. It was not that I roared through it without a mistake or without any questions, but it was manageable.

Q: Do you recall any particular nonimmigrant visa cases that really drew a lot of your attention or required a lot of effort?

WHITTLESEY: One that comes to my mind immediately was some poor child who had fallen off a boat or something like that and suffered a horrendous injury. They were trying to get him on an airplane as quickly as possible [to fly to the United States] to have medical treatment. Our part in that was pretty mechanical. I think the kid was 10 or 12, something like that. It was a horrendous situation, but at least we were playing a positive role.

Other individual cases don't come to mind, other than the regular procession of Albanians who were almost an automatic [visa] rejection, and we would make stupid jokes about that. But in general, there's a fairly good-sized Greek community in the United States [and] there's a lot of back and forth. Greece is not a place that has huge security problems with respect to people wishing to do us ill. I think the worst thing that would probably happen if somebody decided to stay would be that they would open a pizza parlor, had work in their uncle's shop, or something pretty harmless in the larger scheme of things. From that standpoint it was a nice place to break into the business a little bit.

Q: Did they rotate you through the section?

WHITTLESEY: Yes. Most of my consular time was in nonimmigrant visas. I did maybe six or seven months at least in nonimmigrant visas, tourist visas. I did a couple of months in immigrant visas and a pretty short period of time in American Citizen Services, passports and things like that. That might have been a few weeks or a month, something like that. Most of it was in the Nonimmigrant Visa Section. My assignment there [in Athens] was two years long. I did roughly six months in the Economic Section and six months in the Political Section.

Q: When you moved into the Economic and Political Sections were any of your experiences or contacts from the Consular Section useful for you?

WHITTLESEY: I think it ran the other way. I remember somebody had helped me out with—I was interested in becoming an economic officer; I was what we call an "unconed person." I wanted to show my ability to work on economic issues so I connected with a person from Delta Airlines, a Greek-American who was Delta's general manager in Athens, and we had a conversation. I wrote up a short cable about that while I was in the Visa Section, which was probably not a good idea for me. I think that was really more than I should have been doing and it took time. It wasn't a huge amount of time, but I think I should have just stuck to what I was supposed to be doing there. I don't recall it working the other way around where somebody I had met through the Visa Section turned out to be helpful in the Political or Econ Section. I don't recall any of those experiences.

Q: When you were in the Political and the Economic Sections, what areas did you cover? What were your responsibilities?

WHITTLESEY: I remember we had an aviation issue related to servicing Delta's planes. I've forgotten most of the details but Greece had certain restrictions. When a foreign airline comes in, they basically negotiate an agreement with the host government that spells out what they're able to do and what they're not able to do, and there was a little squabble over that. Delta wanted to adopt some practice that the Greeks said was not allowed under that agreement. Delta claimed it was, so we had a little bit of a push and shove on that. I would say again this was nothing huge, but important enough that Delta wanted to [press the issue]. I guess [Delta] had a cost-saving measure that they wanted to apply that the Greeks felt was prohibited under their agreement. At some point we had diplomatic notes going back and forth, and the Greeks eventually said something along the lines of, that their concerns over this issue were suspended or something like that. It wasn't quite like, "We're giving up," but it's like, "We're not going to actively dispute this anymore."

Then somebody said, "When [the Greeks] said 'suspend,' do you think they were [agreeing with us]? Maybe their English isn't good enough, and what they really mean is they renounce their view?" Somebody else said, "No, I think they know exactly what word they're using. And suspend is exactly what they want." I remember somebody's comment to that effect and thinking that was one of those times in the Foreign Service

where you have to truly respect the people with whom you work on the other side of the table from. Thinking they don't know their stuff, or their English is poor, or other things that in effect denigrate them a little bit, that can be very easy to do. I think in most cases, it's not fair to our professional colleagues. You have to watch out to not underestimate people. It's a stupid as well as an impolite thing to do. That was one of those cases where it was clear these guys know exactly what they're talking about. They can read that just as well as you can, and they're coming at it from their standpoint, and you have to take that as it comes from a peer, not from somebody who is still learning the ropes and things like that.

Q: What about in the Political Section? Do you recall any particular things you reported on that at the time were important? You know, you think back and you go, "Well you know I really learned something there."

WHITTLESEY: I remember going to a meeting with the Greek intelligence services, and that was quite eye-opening. I was somewhere between naïve and undereducated about the whole intelligence apparatus. I had some sense of what went on, but it was very interesting to hear that conversation. I remember that distinctly. I'll leave it at that.

Q: And while you were there, were there major bilateral issues or bilateral irritants that had an effect on you either personally or professionally?

WHITTLESEY: I don't recall any kind of huge issues, no. A couple of things happened during that time. I think Andreas Papandreou died. I knew (Maria Amalia) "Melina" Mercouri, who was a very famous Greek actress, died. So those were the major events. We were a little bit concerned about terrorism aimed at us. The CIA head of station had been killed in a bomb attack several years prior to my arriving, but those are things that people pay attention to, and don't forget easily. We were fairly cautious with our security arrangements. We had a lot of armored vehicles and things like that. The DCM at the Turkish embassy was killed while we were there, so that's serious stuff. Those were some of the events that occurred during my time that I recall.

Q: Did your job require you to travel in Greece at all?

WHITTLESEY: I did one or two things professionally, but not particularly related to politics or the economy. That kind of work kept me pretty much in Athens. My wife and I did a lot of personal traveling and I remember getting an embassy vehicle and driving to a place called Missalonghi in northern Greece to represent the embassy at a cultural festival. We also went to a Greek play in an ancient Greek theater [Epidaurus]. That was just super cool. Essentially the invitation had come to the ambassador and he couldn't go, so I got these tickets handed to me. To sit in the VIP seats, right in the middle of this and you're watching a play that's several thousand years old in the original place. It was just super fantastic.

I went once to a parade of some type, something along the lines of Mardi Gras. I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was very outrageous and over the top and a fun day. I represented the embassy, and I did that a couple of times with my wife. Those things go a long way to giving you some opportunities that are fun and make the embassy experience more than just a job.

Q: Speaking of your wife, did she work while you were there?

WHITTLESEY: She did a couple of small things at the embassy. There were some American schools there—She has a Ph.D. degree so she's well plugged into the educational world and has real credentials there—so she worked on a couple of projects at colleges that were in Athens and that had American connections. That was good.

Q: While you were there were you able to improve your knowledge and use of Greek?

WHITTLESEY: I tried to use it as much as possible. I assume you're familiar with the language ranking. I came in with a 2/2 and I tested when I left at a 3/3, so a little better.

Q: That's certainly…

WHITTLESEY: A little bit better. Because it was our first tour [and] it was a country with very deep historical and cultural roots, a very rich past, and a lot of great places to visit and travel opportunities, so we did a lot of that. We'd go out to some of the Greek islands, to ancient ruins, Olympia, Sparta, and on and on. Greece is full of those types of places. So we did a lot of traveling and saw a lot of the country. It's not a big place, so we were able to see a fair amount of it in our two years there.

Q: Proceeding through the two years, after one year there, were you beginning to think about where you're going to go next? How did that go? What were you thinking about and what sorts of criteria were you using?

WHITTLESEY: This may also have been somewhat naïve on my part, but the word that we got from Washington was that the [Washington-based] assignments officers will have much more of a say in where you go for your second tour than they will later in your career. The other component of that decision was that, having gotten Greek language training, there was also informally, either through word of mouth or that sort of thing, people would say, "They won't give you back-to-back language training. If you have another language you can use that." That kind of left me a little bit high and dry, because Greek is a "boutique language;" you're only going to use it there, or maybe in Cyprus. Otherwise I would be going to an English language post, and that's precisely what happened. I ended up going to Jamaica for my second tour.

Q: That would begin in 1996.

WHITTLESEY: 1995.

Q: 1995. Okay.

WHITTLESEY: Because there was no language training or no kind of long-term training, I had only home leave. I might have done a couple of short courses or something. [We] left Greece—I've forgotten at exactly what time, but it would have been maybe April or May 1995, and I was probably down in Jamaica within a couple of months of that.

Q: You'd already had a year as a consular officer, how did they determine, or did they explain to you how they were assigning you within the embassy, what position?

WHITTLESEY: Well, it was probably more of a concern to me than it was to the State Department. They had and still have a huge need for visa officers at these relatively early stages of your career. You have this long list of visa jobs that they're looking for people to fill and relatively few of what we would call a pure political or a pure economic job. Those were few and far between, and did not pan out for me at all. So I got the classic "visa-mill" job for my second tour.

Q: A quick aside. My very first tour was in Jamaica as a visa officer from 1984-86, so just about ten years prior to yours, and I'm acquainted with the term "visa mill!" When you arrived in Jamaica, since you've already had a year as a consular officer, were you in any way in a supervisory position?

WHITTLESEY: Maybe a little bit, because you had first-tour officers there who literally had not worked a minute on a visa line; they had just started. [Embassy Kingston] had a pretty good-sized Visa Section. I'm trying to remember how many American officers we had there but it was at least five or six. It seemed like quite a busy place to me, both on the nonimmigrant and on the immigrant visa sides. So nothing formal, but probably a little bit of, "Can you show them how to do that?" [I was] the equivalent of an immediate supervisor, somebody who could help out and lend a little bit of advice on a very short term. We had much more senior folks who would handle the difficult cases and do the real management, but in terms of, "I haven't seen one of these cases before. What should I do?" You're sitting next to the person, that kind of thing.

Q: When you arrived in Jamaica in the mid-90s, there was a major hurricane that seriously affected the infrastructure. What did they tell you in general about personal security?

WHITTLESEY: That was more of a concern than hurricane damage. I don't remember when that [hurricane] would have been prior to my arrival, but it was certainly a couple of years, if not longer. There was no sense of, like now, going to the Bahamas where you would have immediate damage to houses and trees blown down. There was no kind of visible evidence of something. It may have had an impact a few years before, but things had had time to regrow and rebuild a little bit, so it was not a problem. The security was certainly an issue—crime, street crime. At some point we had visiting teams from

Diplomatic Security come down and give us training about how you protect yourself. So the Department was pretty careful. It did what it could do with respect to giving us some tools to work with in terms of managing our security. We had armed guards at all the embassy residences and things like that, so it was clear that that was a major concern.

Q: How would you compare the activity of these officers in Greece to Jamaica? Roughly how many visa applicants did you see a day and that kind of thing?

WHITTLESEY: Jamaica was much more of the "visa mill;" a much busier place, or at least it certainly seemed to me. It had a bigger Visa Section and I don't know what the statistics are, but there were just a handful of us in Athens and it was a much bigger operation in Jamaica. [There was] a different level of economic development in the two countries so you came at these visas from different starting points. The issuance rate in Greece was much higher than it was in Jamaica. You had lots of folks who were quite poor in Jamaica and who really could go to Miami, south Florida and get a job pushing a lawn mower, digging with a shovel, working agriculture, or something like that. A very low-end basic job and it still would have been better than what they had in Jamaica. Whereas in Greece, most folks were pretty comfortable and not really driven out of the country by the economy the way many people were in Jamaica where no doubt about it, it's a poor country. Lots of people had a very minimal standard of living, so to have the bright lights of the big city of Miami, a plane flight away, was a very strong inducement for them to go up and stay.

Q: As you were working on visitor visas, what were the major problems you encountered? In other words, was it fraud, was it counterfeiting of visas, or…?

WHITTLESEY: We wouldn't see the counterfeiting part of that. That might get picked up by other people in the process, screened at the airport. I guess our primary focus would have been to make sure the person was telling us roughly what was going on. There were strong inducements for them to spin a yarn. That can be difficult to really tell when somebody's out-and-out lying to you when they're strongly motivated to do so. You had to be very skeptical of what was going on because there were real reasons for them to want to leave Jamaica; real reasons for them not to be telling you the truth.

Q: As a result of working in this section, did you end up having a lot of contacts with Jamaican police or other law enforcement agencies?

WHITTLESEY: I don't recall that. I probably had a little bit more when I worked a brief amount of time in the American Citizen Services. There were some fun stories that came out of that experience, but there were two things I remember doing on nonimmigrant visas. One related to Bob Marley, the very famous Jamaican musician. He had died [in 1981] but his band and his Island Records were still a real powerhouse in Jamaica. The band came in one day for visas for a U.S. tour and that was fun to sort of see those guys. Their passports were an inch thick with visas from every country in the world—Japan,

Europe, and Russia. These were professional musicians who had been around. So that was fun.

I also remember a group of Air Jamaica—I think they were all females—flight attendants coming in for their visas. That was also a great day because they were all young and pretty and excited. They had just been hired and they were getting U.S. visas, so everyone was in a good mood, and it was just a very pleasant [laughter] half an hour there where we might have been a dozen of them, something like that, and we moved them through the process. They were going on aircrew visas, so slightly different than typical tourist visas. I just remembered that being an enjoyable thing.

Visa sections, as I'm sure you know, are full of unpleasant stories as well. I remember a lady who had had acid thrown on her going for medical treatment. A really young girl, who was maybe 13 or 14, had been impregnated, given birth, and her child had a heart problem and was getting a visa to go for gratis medical treatment at a hospital in Ft. Lauderdale or Miami. So there's some ugly and unpleasant things as well that come through. You see a lot of different things.

Q: You didn't by chance get to have to give visas to a famous Jamaican bobsled team?

WHITTLESEY: I did! The quick answer is, "No," but I did work with the Jamaican Olympic team for, I think, the Summer Olympics, probably at Atlanta.

[Note: The 1998 Winter Games were held in Nagano, Japan. I think you adjudicated for the 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympic Games.]

Anyway, that was a part of my consular duties, the sort of thing as somebody who'd had a couple of years [of experience before] coming into Jamaica that you would do as a second tour officer that somebody right out of Washington would not do. That gave me some contact with real Jamaicans, the people who ran the Jamaican Olympic committee, and that was very fun to also see that level of society. These were the lawyers and the higher end of their economic structure. [They were] working in this very poor country, but I really enjoyed working with them. Everything sort of came out in the end. We didn't have any big problems. It was a fun process and something that I enjoyed working on.

Q: Now turning to the immigrant visa side, I imagine that was pretty active, too.

WHITTLESEY: Yeah, those were much more routine than nonimmigrant visas, because at that point—I don't even know how the system works these days, but for the immigrant visas, Immigration and Naturalization Service would approve them, so it's much more of an automatic issuance than the NIVs were, which really comes down to the officer on the spot trying to decide whether the person is telling you the truth and qualifies for the [nonimmigrant] visa. So [immigrant visas are] a little bit different, a little slower paced,

a little bit more paper oriented. Do they have this? Do they have that document? That type of thing.

Q: You were there in the mid-90s. The HIV epidemic had gotten much bigger and much worse. Did you find you had to turn down Jamaicans who had been exposed to HIV?

WHITTLESEY: I don't recall that. I'm trying to think. Between Greece and Jamaica the number of times that I dealt with something that had a medical aspect to it was quite low; a handful of cases between those two assignments. It certainly wasn't a day-to-day issue.

Q: Often in relatively small countries like Jamaica, visa officers become generally widely known and sometimes even accosted. Did you experience that in Jamaica?

WHITTLESEY: You're absolutely right. You're on the street, you stand out anyway as a Caucasian, you're instantly identifiable, and it's not difficult for people to remember. You see 100 people a day, they see you one time and they remember you pretty well! One time I remember distinctly, a guy came up to me outside a restaurant and he said, "Hey you work at the U.S. embassy," something like that. To go to the end of the story, he was [very] polite, nothing happened. He literally said, "Yeah, you turned me down," but he wasn't shouting at me, he wasn't threatening. It did make me think that next time that could be somebody who's really upset and wants to act out something there on the street with me. Nothing happened in that case, but it was a reminder that you know, you are visible and there are lots of folks out there who have good reasons to be unhappy with you and wouldn't mind mixing it up a little bit if they get the opportunity. Fortunately none of that happened.

My wife would drive around Jamaica. She got a job at the University of the West Indies, a Fulbright, so she was well connected with a group of her peers there. We'd take our car over to the university campus. You're talking about a place where there's a lot of tension, I think in part because of the economic situation, but just the nature of the society there. Small things can explode in a second. A relatively minor fender-bender car accident can all of a sudden just turn into a real confrontation where somebody wants to hurt you. These things happen. Fortunately, none of it did [to us], but it was always a concern, and always on the back of our minds when you're going around. Keeping an eye open just like [the Security Section] wants you to do; being careful to stay out of trouble.

Q: Besides consular work, did you work in the economic or political sections?

WHITTLESEY: Very briefly, which led to one of my favorite lines of the Foreign Service. When I got promoted at some point in my tour there, or maybe it was just my third-tour assignment that came through, the guy I was working for in the political section said, "Congratulations! You've reached the bottom of the ladder!" [Laughter] I thought it was an absolutely perfect way to describe finally coming up out of the junior-officer tours and the "visa-mill" assignments and then doing something that really was what I came to do in the Foreign Service.

I had brief contact with the political and the economic sections. I remember going with the ambassador to meet somebody high up in the Jamaican government. I don't know whether it was the prime minister or some ambassador-level, top-level person. I don't recall the substance of it, but I do remember the ambassador afterwards saying, "You should get a haircut and shine your shoes." He was an ex-Marine. He believed deeply in making a good impression, and I did not kind of come up to his standards with respect to my hair or my shoes. That remark stayed with me all these years. He certainly meant it in the best way that he wanted folks to look good and he wanted people to have a professional appearance. He believed in that as a tool of diplomacy, so it wasn't meant in a demeaning way, but it still hurt a little bit when he laid that on me. I was thinking he was going to say something nice like, "Thank you for helping out today." Instead I get this comment about my hair, which couldn't have been that bad, but that was his take.

Q: While you're a junior officer, typically the DCM serves as a mentor or sounding board for general career issues. Was that the case in Jamaica? Was it helpful?

WHITTLESEY: We had much more of that in Athens, where Tom Miller, who went on to be an ambassador a couple of times, came in as the DCM. That was something he personally took on as a DCM. He knew that was his role, and he would get together with the JOs and he would talk and he was honest. We'd meet in the secure conference room and he'd say, "I will tell you what I really think, but it's got to stop at the doorway." So that was great to hear as a [junior officer]. You're feeling like you've got a little sense of what's going on at the top of the embassy.

Our problem in Jamaica was that the ambassador's office and the political and econ sections were a block down the street. The Consular Section was off on its own. Not far away, but we certainly didn't have daily contact with folks. We were somewhat isolated over there, which did not promote engagement between the consular section and the embassy. There were probably a couple of things we did. We tried to arrange events to talk to folks. I remember having conversations with some of the other agency folks, or the military folks, a small group of the JOs would get together with them. The DCM, John Vessey, might have done a little bit of that but I don't remember a huge amount. Most of it was stuff that we did on our own.

Q: Did you have any major VIP visits? Was that part of your junior officer life?

WHITTLESEY: Yeah. He was an ex-president by then, but Jimmy Carter came down for a couple of days. That was certainly the biggest [VIP visit] that we had, and I'm sure I had some minor role in that. Jamaica is just not a place that draws a lot of high-level attention, so I don't think we would have gotten the secretary of state. We might have gotten an assistant secretary or something like that. That would have been perhaps once, and then Jimmy Carter would have been the one VIP visit that we got.

Q: Did you travel around the island much? Did you get to see life outside of Kingston?

WHITTLESEY: Yeah, Jamaica's a small place. We had a vehicle and I think we did pretty well. My wife and I throughout our tours made a real personal commitment to try and get out and see what's in the place. Some of that was just going up to resort hotels in Negril or on the North Shore and enjoying a quiet weekend, but we visited a bunch of places including a cultural event in the middle of Jamaica where a Jamaican folk hero [Cudjoe] had come from. They had a celebration, so that was interesting to see. I'm talking about just average folks in an out of the way place, and they put this event on once a year or something like that. It's not a professional gig at all. These are just farmers living their daily lives and then this event happens once a year, so it has this pleasantly informal air to it. You know, the sound system doesn't work quite right, and the schedule is just a mess, but nobody really cares too much. It's just a fun thing to do. We did that. I certainly remember that one time in the middle of Jamaica and I'm sure we did other things as well that got us out. So we've seen [Jamaica] end to end.

Q: Any difficulty adapting to driving on the "wrong" side of the street?

WHITTLESEY: I don't remember any particular problem with that. We never had any accidents, which was good. I do remember driving at night coming back from the North Shore. The roads in Jamaica are pretty modest; they don't have highways. These are just two-lane country roads, up and around hills. I know it sounds horribly racist, but a Negro at night in dark clothing on a narrow, unlit road is a real problem. So, I was really very nervous driving sometimes, because these are little villages, people are walking on the side of the road and they are really hard to see. If you come around a corner and your headlights might not be on them and all of a sudden, "Oh my God, there's a person there!" Nothing happened but it was certainly something that I was nervous about at the time. You have to be really careful driving because folks were out walking across the streets to visit their friend or something at 9 o'clock at night and they can be hard to see.

Q: As you look back on your two junior-officer tours, what were the major talents, abilities, or lessons that you took with you as you moved up?

WHITTLESEY: I think it was mostly just getting familiar with the enterprise and who did what. You're trying to learn how the U.S. government operates, trying to follow economic issues or immigration issues. I'm trying to remember any sort of lightning bolt type of revelations, but [nothing] other than individual stories, which I want to mention because they're fun and I assume you're up for hearing some of these things.

Q: Absolutely!

WHITTLESEY: One thing I remember in Jamaica, a moment where you think, "Now I understand this culture a little better." I got a group of people together to go have a conversation with the head of the Jamaican central bank. I remember thinking this is something that would never happen in a million years in Washington D.C. It would be the equivalent of going to see Jerome Powell or Alan Greenspan, etc. It would just never

happen. But Jamaica, because of its smaller size, more informal, it doesn't have all the pressures and scale of Washington D.C. You can call up, you get to the person's secretary, and say, "Hey, could Governor Smith spend half an hour with us to talk about what's going on at the Bank of Jamaica? And they'll say, "Yes!" Here it would be very unlikely just because you have huge numbers of people and people are very busy. Even if they would in theory like to sit with a bunch of novices and tell them about their job, they just don't have the time. But in Jamaica you could do that, and that was very nice.

I also remember the person, a lawyer, who was the head of the Jamaican Olympic Committee. This is a guy who could, if he wanted to, be in Ft. Lauderdale or Miami, but he chose to stay in Jamaica. That made me think carefully and deeply about somebody's ties to their home country and what they get out of life. Here he was in this poor, underequipped, struggling country that he could bail on any time he wanted, and yet he chose to stick it out with all the negatives because there were obviously positive things there as well.

I remember traveling to Negril. They had an absolutely fantastic hotel that we enjoyed up there, so that was nice.

I was alluding to some stories and incidents. The good stories, as you know, always happen when you're in American Citizens Services. One was visiting prisoners. A lot of the American folks in Jamaican jails were there for smuggling drugs. We took them Thanksgiving dinner. I remember one of the prisoners had put on a tie, and I was getting ready to say something like, "You really didn't have to do that," but I pulled that back a little bit, figuring this is a special occasion [for him and] dressing up a little bit and celebrating takes him just half a step away from this miserable environment he's in. So that was nice.

We visited a place called the Remand Center that was literally like a Dantean nightmare of prison cells on both sides. [There were] hot, sweaty, mostly African American faces or Negro faces, hands up on the bars as we walked through. It was quite a chilling sight to walk through this thing because it was so dark and [there were] dozens and dozens of people. [It was] not a huge place, but had a lot of folks in there and it was really a weird experience. Even the ACS chief said he thought it was scary. We weren't physically scared, but it was just unnerving. It was so different from your day-to-day experience. There were several of those things.

You had crazy people showing up in ACS who had run out of money [and were] trying to get home. That was also one of those little life lessons. It's not a big deal in a larger context of the Foreign Service, but you see people who are intentionally abandoned by their families. You think, well, these people have just had it with an adult son who might be in his early- to mid-20s or 30s and he's just one of these folks who does something wacky if he doesn't have his meds. An older guy who was certainly in his 30s or 40s was the same sort of thing. They don't take their medicine and they go off on some psychotic break. You track down the parents and they're like, "This is the 14th time this has

happened, you know, he can deal with it himself." That was quite interesting and sad to see, but a little piece of reality.

Q: Your wife, you said, was there at least part of the time as a Fulbrighter. Did that introduce you to another side of Jamaican life? How did that affect things?

WHITTLESEY: She certainly had more contacts with academic folk than I did. I had a little bit of that, but for her that was mostly in daylight hours when I would be at work, she would be at UWI (University of West Indies.) I'm sure I've been over there and met folks, and sat in the corner while she had a meeting or did a class or something like that. So it was interesting to see that side of it. All of a sudden you're seeing the parallels; this is the university system here. These are the young people who are trying to get educated who will be the leaders in a few years. These are the smart young Jamaicans. It gives you a more rounded picture of the society.

One of the things I recall during the break that I wanted to mention in terms of lessons that really did carry forward to the rest of my career was when I was working in the Immigrant Visa Section. I'm not positive, but it may have just been somebody who was trying to get a work visa or something like that. Anyway, there was a lot of back and forth and the person who was trying to get the visa had professional representation; they had a lawyer who was helping them try to get the visa. At the end I can't remember how it worked out, probably the lady got the visa, but the lawyer wrote a nice thank you letter and said that one of the things that he appreciated was that I was accessible. That was really an eye-opening moment, because that's something that's so easy to do, really. I mean, if somebody calls, you answer the phone. You get an email, you write back. [For] somebody who's on the outside trying to work their way through this giant bureaucracy and all this process, to have someone who will answer the phone and talk to them really makes a difference. That's something I continued to try to carry forward in my experience at State.

Q: Before we leave Jamaica, one last general question. Often embassies will begin exposing junior officers to public speaking opportunities. Did you do any of that in Greece or Jamaica?

WHITTLESEY: I don't remember. I probably did it a couple of times but it would have been something small, no big events. It's something I've always enjoyed and wanted to do more of and felt that the State Department did not do enough to bring people into that world and give you the opportunities. So, that was something I almost always said "yes" to. Certainly if somebody came and asked me to do something, I would start with a, "Sure I'll do it." Then if there was some reason why you couldn't, you would decline. But most of the time, and not that it happened a lot, but on those occasions where somebody asked, I would try hard to make it happen.

Going to receptions and things like that, part of this accessibility thing is to be out there and talking to folks. That is something I took pretty seriously and wanted to participate

in. Of course if the DCM or the ambassador has a party, they can just tell you to show up. But there may have been times where, "Well do you want to go?" Or "You can go or not go," I would go. I would try to make that a positive thing so I would be at the event and at the reception, those sorts of things. I think that's a big part of our job, just being out there, being who you are. That's part of being a diplomat.

Q: We're approaching the end of four years in the Foreign Service, and generally you're looking toward receiving tenure and maybe being promoted to the next grade. Did that occur in these first four years?

WHITTLESEY: I have forgotten the exact time. I certainly got tenured in there, which was nice. I also got assigned to the econ cone, which was what I wanted, so that was also very nice. I have lost track of the specific date when that happened, but in those first few years, both of those things happened.

Q: Then the next thing closest to the Foreign Service Officer's heart is where they're going to go next! How did that occur?

WHITTLESEY: I don't remember a lot of the process here. I certainly talked to my wife and we would then be looking at bid lists and had opportunities, or at least theoretical opportunities, to go places. I wanted to do language training, something that I could use multiple times. I think I put in for an assignment in Japan somewhere, maybe Tokyo with Japanese language training. That did not workout but the Guangzhou assignment came up and because my wife is Chinese from Hong Kong, not from the mainland but culturally Chinese, that seemed like a good fit for us. So off to language training we went. That was really the start in putting the junior-officer training, the "visa mill" stuff—I was just absolutely delighted to put that behind me. I guess some folks enjoy that. I did not care for it. It was too…. I always compare it to working in a bank, too retail. Next person, next person, next person, this relentless pressure to move people through, make decisions, get the line shorter, finish the day's applications, etc. It's just not what I enjoy as a person and not what I got into the Foreign Service to do.

Q: Any children come along yet?

WHITTLESEY: Yes. Because of the assignment to Guangzhou, I had two years of language training. The first was here at FSI [in Washington DC] and my son was born at the end of that year. He was born in May 1998, at the end of the first year [of language training]. That actually worked out perfectly because we were here for the entire pregnancy and had first-world medical care. My parents were in Baltimore and got a chance to see the whole thing when my son was just a newborn and all of that. So that all worked out beautifully.

Then we went to Taiwan for the second year of language training. I can't remember whether it was one or two people, maybe not even that, going to the mainland for language training. Taiwan was still the center for language training for the Chinese

section at that point. Most of us went to Taiwan and did the language course there, which was ideal for my particular situation with a young baby. You have very regular hours; you're finished at 3 or 3:30 every afternoon. You have time to relieve your wife if she needs to do something. We lived in a pleasant part of Taipei up on a mountain near a university that was quiet and peaceful and had grass around it. We weren't in the typical hustle-bustle apartment, not that that was an impossible issue, but it was nice to have a house that was peaceful with a green lawn outside. It was very, very nice.

Q: What was it like taking Chinese? How well did you take to it? How good was the teaching?

WHITTLESEY: I think my language-learning gifts are modest. I wanted to learn it. I did my best. I was right in the middle of the pack there and I did the two-year course. I got a 3/3. There were a couple of guys in the class who really put some serious [effort] into it and were hand-writing characters and things like that. That is a major commitment and took a lot of time. I can say that because I had a kid probably I just didn't want to go that far with it. Chinese in particular, and probably some of the other very difficult languages, you can put into them as much as you have in the tank. It's all good. But I just got on the [language training] train, I rode it for two years. and I got off where I was supposed to be. I never felt that I was particularly gifted or adept at it. Adequate. I could make myself understood. Certainly had lots of gaps in my knowledge and a lot would depend—I think one of the things that I take away and what I tell people about learning languages that I got from my experience from Chinese is it's all about your language management skills, your conversation management more than anything else. A lot depends on the context that you're in. Somebody can sit there and listen to a person give a speech or something like that and follow along. That is very impressive, or even worse, listening to two native speakers converse—very, very tough. But if you are in there talking to somebody, you can say "Huh?" Or "Is this what you said?" That's kind of the ballpark I was in. I was not going to blow anybody away with my Chinese, but I could get through and you find out that most folks are willing to meet you halfway and work with you to make things understood. They're not looking down their noses and saying, "Wow, your Chinese really sucks," trying to embarrass you. Most of the time they're working with you.

Q: When you were taking Chinese were you also studying for the job you were to have?

WHITTLESEY: We would get cultural classes as part of our language classes. Not so much on the specifics of the job, but history, cultural things, music, current events, etc. It gives you a broader context of what's happening in the country, holidays, and those types of things. Here at FSI, if it's the New Year they'll have a New Year's party to demonstrate what Chinese New Year is all about. Those sorts of things matter a lot when you're going to a country. You understand the cultural dynamic that's going on there.

Of course I had a huge advantage having married a Chinese person. This was her culture, so it was just a gigantic crutch to me that I had somebody [for whom] this was her native culture. No question about it, it's not even like an American-born Chinese whose mother

or grandmother had immigrated. This was somebody who was brought up in that culture and knew everything about it, totally familiar. So I got a big help from that and we can talk about it when we move on to talk [about my assignment after] Guangzhou and Beijing. When I left the Chinese world, those crutches got kicked out from underneath me and it was a real psychological adjustment to go to Jordan where I did not have a spouse who was from that country. I did not have language skills, and I did not have any experience living in that country so it all kind of came down on my neck the first day I got off the plane in Jordan. But going into Chinese culture was the exact opposite. All the things were pulling in my direction. My wife was Chinese, I had lived in Hong Kong before, and I had hung out with Chinese people for years and years. [I was] completely comfortable in the culture and learning the language. I knew some of the history and those types of things, so all of that created a very positive atmosphere for me to go work in China.

Q: Maybe this is a good place to pause. We're right on the edge of your arriving in Guangzhou and in your economic cone as well. Maybe we'll pick that up at the next session and follow you through that tour.

WHITTLESEY: All right.

Q: We're resuming our interview with Jock Whittlesey as he begins Chinese language training in 1977?

WHITTLESEY: 1997. So, my job to-be was going to be an economic officer. My tour, which was going to be in Guangzhou, China, was my first, I will say, "real" State Department tour in my chosen field of economics and reporting. I was just as pleased as punch because I had a long-standing [interest] in China, had been to Hong Kong, my wife is from Hong Kong, so I had a lot of natural interest in learning about the culture. The two-year language course was just great as far as I was concerned.

Q: A quick question about the language. You're learning Mandarin. Your wife is from Hong Kong where I imagine Cantonese was spoken.

WHITTLESEY: Correct.

Q: And Guangzhou is far enough south so it's more Cantonese than Mandarin?

WHITTLESEY: Yes, that's where Cantonese comes from. Guangzhou was Canton in the old days in the English-style of nomenclature. As it turned out, I wasn't quite sure about how that was going to play out. Under the People's Republic, what we call Mandarin—the standard Chinese, the northern dialect—is the lingua franca of government, the press, education, so almost everybody speaks Mandarin proficiently, such as the folks you're going to deal with as a consular official. I think in two years working in Guangzhou, I met one person who was not capable of carrying on a

conversation in Mandarin. My job at this point was to learn Mandarin as well as I could, and I worked on that. I also took advantage of the time to study the history and culture of the Chinese. Our son was born at the end of my first year of language training, so we had prenatal duties during language training. I had other things as well, but it was very interesting to study Chinese and I really enjoyed it. I wish I had been better at it, but some things you can't control and your native ability to learn a difficult language is one of them. I took my best shot at it and did okay, but I'm far from a beautiful speaker of Mandarin.

The first year was at Washington here at FSI and that wrapped up sometime in May 1998. Then my wife and I, accompanied by our son who was born at the end of May, went off to Taiwan in July, I think, and went to the Chinese language school, which is a State Department dedicated language school for us, which was also lovely, up in the hills outside of Taipei. What we referred to as "CLASS" probably something like Chinese language and studies [Chinese Language and Area Studies School]. I can't remember all the details of it. We lived within walking distance of this little school, which was in an old set of buildings that at some point had been [used] by the U.S. military. They had left decades before and the State Department grabbed this little compound. It was just a great place to study and be close to my wife and infant son, so that was great. So that all moved forward as it should have.

Q: Did the fact that you were essentially in a Chinese immersive environment help?

WHITTLESEY: I think so. The problem was that in Taiwan they speak their native language, a slightly different version of Chinese yet again, a dialect, because most of them came from the southeast coast. They speak a dialect that has a slightly different pronunciation; certainly enough to mess you up when you're a language student! It was not like you went effortlessly into this native speaker environment where you could hear the stuff that you got in class and go out and turn on the TV, or walk down the street and have, but it was helpful. I'm sure everybody has their own set of language learning issues. I remember going to the barber and quickly realizing that.

[break]

WHITTLESEY: So I was talking about the difference between learning standard mandarin and what they speak in Taiwan, but regardless of what language we're talking about, when I went in to get my hair cut, all of a sudden I realized "a little off the side" and "tapered in the back" requires some special vocabulary! So, just one of many instances where you realize, Hey this is [tough]. So to get to your basic point, yes, it was nice to be in a Chinese environment, if for nothing else than you start to familiarize yourself a little bit with the culture and what people are like on the street level, regardless of how well you speak their language. So it was great. I had a very enjoyable and interesting time there and the language experience was good.

Right at the end of our training period, the U.S. bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. And I remember kind of walking into the school, the small language school that we went to, and seeing this headline and thinking, "This is going to be a problem for the next 10, 20 years between the U.S. and China." So that was a tough way to get off onto a career working in China. But these are the things that happen when you're a diplomat. You don't ask for anything along those lines, but it happens.

So my son at that point was just about a year old, and we went off to Guangzhou, which is in southern China, just over the border, I mean just 30 or 40 miles, with Hong Kong. And the U.S. consulate there is on what might be thought of a sort of run-down but pleasantly quiet, old part of the city which had been sort of the western [European] district in the old days, Shamian Island, so it was really quite a nice place. I haven't been back since so I don't know what it's like now but it certainly had the capability of being a lovely area. It was relatively open and quiet, which in a big Chinese city is hard to come by. We were right next to a 5-star hotel, the White Swan Hotel, which gave us access to restaurants, they had a swimming pool, things like that, so everything was just fine as far as I was concerned. We were in a small group of folks who were working [there] on these things, and so away I went as a young, or shall I say maybe not young, but a novice economic officer.

Q: How big was the consulate when you arrived in the late 90s?

WHITTLESEY: Well the only part of it that I remember clearly was our reporting section which was small. There were just 3 of us. We had one pol econ chief, one political officer and me as the econ officer, and we had maybe 3 Foreign Service National employees who worked with us and would do research and follow the press, and come with us on trips, and that type of thing. The administrative section was also small, maybe 1 or 2 or 3 officers. In terms of numbers, by far the biggest part of the consulate was the consular section. A lot of visas. They did all, ALL, of the immigrant visas for China because going back in the old days, I think that's still the case too, that because Guangzhou or Canton was the outlet, the point of interchange for China with the outside world. Everything went through there, and plus most of the people who were emigrating from China were from that area, so it made a lot of sense [to do immigrant visas there]. The folks who came over and worked on the California railroads and the gold rush, sort of the first spurt of Chinese migration to the U.S, virtually all [of them] came from this part of the world. This is why, when you go to an old, long-standing chinatown in the U.S., Cantonese is usually the language. Now that's been overtaken by the growth and opening of the People's Republic, so now you hear a lot more mandarin.

So [there was a] big consular operation and I was just absolutely thrilled not to have anything to do with it! [Laughter] I was just very pleased to be working on economic issues, but that was broad enough. I didn't have any particular interest in environmental things, but it sort of came up in the regular course of work. Most of my time was spent on banking and investment and trade and macroeconomics. I was an econ major in my

undergrad so I sort of felt comfortable in that world. So that's what I spent most of my time working on.

Q: So quick question since you've mentioned environment. Was the environment you were living in relatively clean or were you dealing with issues like polluted air, polluted water, other things like that?

WHITTLESEY: I think the answer is yes but there was also nowhere near as much attention paid to [pollution] as would be the case later. At the time I got to Beijing, which followed my Guangzhou tour, my first Beijing tour ,I think people were not really focused on [pollution]. There were always complaints about the air quality and things like that, but it never really kind of crystallized, certainly not as a political issue.

Q: And you and your family didn't suffer any ill effects from pollution?

WHITTLESEY: We didn't notice anything because we were right on the Pearl River. The consulate was in a building that was owned by a former company like Shell Oil or one of the big international oil companies, right on the river. It was hard to distinguish pollution from haze. They have kind of a murky atmosphere anyway, so [it was a] very humid ecosystem. The atmosphere is kind of heavy anyway, and then you lay on top of that coal smoke and coal from ships, a lot of river traffic, so you could smell the air from time to time, things like that. But I never sort of, I never felt I was getting sick from it or that it affected my health in any way, or that it represented some kind of an opportunity for us to deal with. It was just kind of accepted on its face and didn't become much of an issue. I think people were much more focused on the, as typical, the economy and trade and things like that.

So I spent two years there.

Q: Oh wait, one last sort of general atmosphere question. You were in the reporting section. Was there also a separate commercial section?

WHITTLESEY: Yes. And they were located in a different physical building. We had a commercial section, we had an agriculture section. These were both pretty small. And the public affairs section was in yet another building in Guangzhou, so our physical facilities were scattered. We would get together. I remember Ned Quisdorf was the commercial officer, Sam Wong was the Ag person, and the three of us, with maybe my boss and one or two other folks, would get together for lunch periodically just to kind of talk over what's coming up, those types of things.

Our ambassador visited at some point. I've forgotten the details of it. I was there from 1999 to 2001, so [there were] a couple events of note. We went through the Y2K issue there, and I think the State Department sort of prepared as well as it could for something like that where you're thinking, if this for some reason goes really bad, we're in trouble. You know you're in a place that's not sophisticated. This is another world with respect to

what would be typical for the internet and things like that, if their computers stopped working and the electronic infrastructure, even back then it would have been very problematic. So I think they took everything very seriously and we were given flashlights and they stocked up on water and probably MREs, Meals Ready to Eat, and had a big pile of cash so they could buy their way out with airline tickets and things like that. But that turned out to be kind of a non-event as everybody knows.

Q: I have a vague recollection of the issue of Y2K in china with an article somewhere, maybe it was the Economist or somewhere else, where average Chinese were saying, "Oh we don't have a problem! We still use the abacus!" Is that true?

WHITTLESEY: Only for, they might use that at a street stall or something like that where a couple of quick, well you got 6 of those at this price per pound and you could rattle those sorts of things off but any kind of sophisticated business operation would have been electronic at that point, so I think that's a little bit of - I don't know quite the word, but aggrandizing their traditional culture. The one thing that happened relative to that was somebody had a party to celebrate the change of the millennium and we were watching the television where it would have scenes from around the world and like two minutes after midnight the screen went blank for two seconds, and our general services officer was in there, and it was just long enough to catch your attention, and she said, "That was not funny!" I just remember her, thinking, oh my God, this is it! We're losing touch with the outside world. But as you know, everything went fine, but there was just that split second where everyone thought, maybe this IS a problem!

The ambassador when I first got to Guangzhou, I think, was Ambassador Sasser up in Beijing because I remember seeing pictures of him. There were pretty fierce anti-American demonstrations at all of our consulates, and parts of the embassy in Beijing took a beating from people throwing rocks and ink bottles and those types of things. I remember seeing a picture of Ambassador Sasser, and it was pretty cosmetic but still very unpleasant, things had gotten through the windows and things like that. He left sometime in there. It was not critical. I wasn't too connected with the embassy so I wasn't following that closely. Our consul general at that point was Ed McKeon, M-c-K-e-o-n, and at some point during my tour, Ambassador Sasser left, and he was replaced by a guy named Joe Prueher **(Joseph Wilson Prueher),** who was a career navy person, and ended up... I think his final assignment was as the commander of PACOM, the Pacific Command, so this was like way up at the top of the military hierarchy. And he came in to be our ambassador and a good thing it was too because at the end, first of all, he was very well thought of, he had the credibility to deal with military issues. So, for example, on the military bombing of the Belgrade embassy, he could speak authoritatively on that in a way that a State Department person couldn't. I doubt that persuaded a lot of people on the Chinese side, but at least he was somebody who could say, I've been in the military my whole life. This is the way things happened, and this is why this would not have been a pre-planned thing, something like that.

The other thing that happened towards the end, right at the end of my time there, I think, also when Ambassador Prueher was still there. There was the collision between a U.S. spy plane and an EP3 which is a sort of a low-and-slow propeller plane and some kind of Chinese fighter jet that they had scrambled to look at the EP3 as it trundled along out in international waters. They bumped into each other and the Chinese jet crashed into the ocean. The pilot was lost, never found the wreckage, and the U.S. plane had to make an emergency landing on Hainan Island which was part of our consular district. So this was absolutely blockbuster, front-page, global news. My role was completely insignificant, but folks from our consulate were very heavily involved in that and that was quite the issue for at least, I think, 10 days or maybe a bit longer than that, while the U.S. crew was held by the Chinese and having some negotiations about that. The Chinese wanted a letter of apology and this sort of thing. So Ambassador Prueher was right in the middle of those discussions, and I think that was fairly early in the George W. Bush administration. I think it was important in the sense of establishing [Bush's] bona fides as a commander in chief, and establishing the nature of the U.S.-China relationship, those kinds of things. So that was interesting.

I am ready to move on from Guangzhou.

Q: Wait, I have one or two more questions. So while you were in Guangzhou, what were your reporting responsibilities? What areas were you expected to cover?

WHITTLESEY: The entire economic frontier. U.S. investment in China. The Chinese banking industry was always of interest to the U.S. Issues of Federal Express getting established there [in Guangzhou] and how were they doing? How were they being treated by the Chinese? The whole manufacturing sector in South China, which is really right there in our district, the Pearl River delta. The Pearl River goes right through Guangzhou, but that whole Pearl River delta river area is one gigantic factory complex. This was one of the huge trends in the development of the Chinese economy, this development of essentially a real industrial age, not too modern, but modern enough to become a global manufacturing center. [Industry was] using in those days the vast labor resources of China. So you're pulling in people. You have internal migrations from all over China, because [the Pearl River delta] was where the jobs were, and so people came down to Guangdong, the name of the province, to Guangdong province and found a job in manufacturing somewhere.

I visited factories from time to time and that was always interesting. A couple [visits] I remember for no particular reason. One was made play-doh. So a play-doh factory. A toy factory. A place that made coffee pots and domestic equipment, those types of things. I went to a place that did some kind of aluminum smelting or extruding of aluminum parts. A place that made gas heaters. Garment places, on and on. Those were always interesting, to see how things are really made there. [They were] quite a window into Chinese culture and the state of the economy at that point. When I went to the place that was one of the toy factories, it was just an extraordinary scene. The place is the size of an airplane hangar, and [there were] 1,500 young Chinese women, and they were, I

assume 99.9% were women, all there at these long benches painting things or assembling these toys, and me just sort of in the midst of all this humanity. It was quite interesting.

Q: Were you ever allowed to take a photo of that? For historical purposes it would be fascinating to see those old photos.

WHITTLESEY: I would have to go back to…. I must say I don't [have any]. I must say this is pre cellphone days. I think most people would have…. The Chinese are kind of reluctant in those circumstances. They're not usually like, "Oh sure, go ahead and take a picture!" They would be [saying], I'm answering on a theoretical basis, "no." I think they would be reluctant in those circumstances to have people taking pictures, you know, always concerned about how this looks to the outside world. Usually our view going in would be, well, they're at least letting us in to see. Let's not overextend our welcome and put them in an awkward spot. This type of thing.

Q: As a reporting officer, were there any particular issues that you had to approach the Chinese and say we have some problem with this?

WHITTLESEY: Intellectual property is always an issue. Treatment of American companies, investment standards. But intellectual property would probably be the issue where we had the biggest concerns.

One of the companies in Guangzhou that I was most familiar with was, and this was a typical business arrangement of the time, a joint venture between a Chinese company and a U.S. company, to do maintenance of commercial aircraft. So Boeing 777's, we didn't have 777's at that point, but whatever was flying, the big Boeings and Air Buses, these guys would fix them. And so that was a U.S.-Chinese joint venture. So we talked to them about how's it going, and what kind of roles are you seeing?

You get into things such as whether there were restrictions on moving money around, can [the companies] get visas for people to travel either in or out, access to parts, customs.

Down in Shenzhen, which is literally right across the river, pretty close to Guangzhou, but right across the river, at least the Hong Kong line, not the downtown city, [Shenzhen] was getting established as a technology center. So what was then called Lucent, which was sort of the R&D arm of AT&T, maybe spun off. We visited their facilities, talked to them. Somebody else was making some quite high-technology items, and we talked to them about customs, their relationship with Chinese customs for getting stuff out of the country, or getting the parts they needed into the country, those types of things. It was a really enjoyable portfolio. I always said there's not an issue that you can touch that doesn't matter in south China in particular. I mean, this was just a giant economy on the move, critically important to the U.S. so whatever you wanted to talk about was interesting and there were plenty of folks back in Washington who wanted to hear all about it, so you had that nice sense of people caring about your work, those types of things. So that was quite interesting.

Q: A last question about your reporting. Were you called on to, or did you write a crystal ball cable like, Hey Washington you ought to be looking at this trend?

WHITTLESEY: I don't remember anything in particular. I think it's tough enough figuring out what's happening now. As they say, predictions are tough, especially as they relate to the future! So I don't remember such a clear view that I could point to something that was an emerging trend. It was just hanging on to what was going on, and this was still moving pretty fast and it took all my attention. I was the sole person. I mean this is an area that's got maybe 200 million people, certainly a GDP in the hundreds of billions of dollars and [was] important to China as part of their national economy and important to the U.S. with a global role, so there was lots and lots to think about and to see and to understand there, and it was great.

Q: Speaking of which, just as a snapshot, as you traveled as a consular office in your district, was there anything that stuck out to you as you think back on it?

WHITTLESEY: I'm trying to think if I ever was really shocked by something. I don't remember anything that kind of rises to the level of what you're talking about. You are always trying to, I mean this was just completely [new]. I mean, I'd never been in China before. So [I was] not exactly starting from ground zero, but from a low base of understanding. So [I was just trying] to understand how things worked there and what life was like. There was a part of their society that was still, at that point, a lot of manual labor and kind of old-style buildings. It was not the gleaming modern metropolis. I mean, people go to Shanghai or Beijing or Guangzhou and see parts of it,, but there was lots of it that was still kind of old style…. People living in cramped, grungy old apartments. [Most] people didn't have cars back then. You had a lot of hand labor, I mean literally people pushing carts and things like that. I mean, it wasn't quite like horses in the street but it was not by any means as thoroughly as modern as you would have found in the West at that point.

Q: Did your wife work while she was there?

WHITTLESEY: No, not that I recall. Our son was still an infant, 1-2 years old, so that really took her full time.

Q: Okay. Now as you're approaching the end of this tour, you've invested two years of your life in learning Chinese and you're looking ahead to where you're going next. What were your considerations for where you wanted to go next?

WHITTLESEY: Well my thought was to see if I could stay in China because having put this effort into learning Chinese, being familiar with at least part of the China and [having] some exposure to greater China, other parts of the country, that seemed like a good proposition to me, as opposed to going off somewhere [else] and coming back in 5 years and having my language just completely disappear at that point. So it made sense

to try to line up an onward job and stay in China. I'm trying to remember how that all worked out. I'm sure it was quite mysterious to me, because in China, the Chinese positions are advertised in the State Department very far ahead of time because if the person doesn't have language, they need two years to get the language training. So you kind of have to start that [job-application] process, even if you have the language, that job is going to be advertised and filled essentially 3 years before you get there, and that was probably not clear to me when I got there. I don't recall the details, but knowing my own lack of familiarity with the assignment process and all that, but somebody fortunately was able to give me a sense of the way the process worked, and I was able to connect with a job in the Environment Section in [Embassy] Beijing that lined up timewise with when I would be leaving Guangzhou. That assignment was confirmed. So I was actually fairly [lucky]. That would have happened pretty early in my Guangzhou assignment, because otherwise that position would have been filled with somebody else and gone before I ever thought to look there. So that meant, which is unusual for the Foreign Service, I had multiple years ahead of me where I knew exactly what I was going to be doing. It was actually a fairly comfortable situation for me, as opposed to [thinking], well, I'm leaving next summer and I have absolutely no idea where I'm going to be. That decision had been made a couple of years [before going to Beijing], probably when I just started in Guangzhou, to commit to the Beijing job. So I had basically five years ahead of me in China and I knew that. That was a nice relaxing, at least for me, situation to be in.

I did not get a particularly helpful description of the job. I had contacted both the person who was the head of the section, and the guy I was going to replace. The head of the section was Kurt Tong, who has gone on to heights of glory as our ambassador to APEC. He was the consul general in Hong Kong, DCM in Tokyo, so a very high-quality foreign service officer, somebody who did well for good reasons in his career. And the person I replaced was a guy named David Cowhig. His description of the job and what I ended up doing seemed quite different, as I recall, but it was not problematic for me. Just that it was a little off the mark, I think. But [the job description was] interesting enough to have me say yes. But as I'm sure you know, a lot of State Department jobs vary according to who's in the position. They bring [their own] interests, or some event crystallizes something, or for some reason or other they get pushed to look in one direction. The next person comes in and maybe that issue has passed and something else is coming up, or the new person knows something, and is familiar with an area that the first person was not. So there's a lot of variability, especially in something like environment and science and health where these can be very situationally dependent. It's not like you're the human rights officer and the agenda is pretty clear as you start your job. So it was a wide open field. We left Guangzhou in the summer of 2001 and moved up to Beijing and started our tour there.

Q: So a quick question about the nature of the work. Were you filling a spot in the economic section or was your destination the environment science technology health [ESTH] office?

WHITTLESEY: We [ESTH] were a separate section, which was not always the way it was. Around the world, the State Department in its infinite wisdom has a lot of variability in the way [embassies are organized]. Places that might have one or two environment officers, they might be part of the economic section and report to the econ counselor. In Beijing [ESTH] was felt to be an important enough role that what we abbreviate as ESTH, environment, science, technology, and health, was a stand-alone section. The head of our section, Kurt, when I first got there, sat on the country team and reported directly to the DCM. We were not part of the econ section. And we also had our own little office, which was lovely. This predated the new embassy in Beijing, which opened in 2008.

We were in the original embassy compound, which was a series of outdated buildings which we had patched up and added to, and so on and so forth over the years, to cope with our expanding footprint. Guang Hua Lu (Road) was in sort of the diplomatic part of town. And our building was a new building. It was built by [the embassy] on a part of the main chancery grounds but as a separate building. It had been the commercial services office and they outgrew it completely and just pulled up stakes and went into a big commercial building well away from the main complex but [their departure] left this nice relatively new and modern building for [ESTH], so that was lovely. It was also not controlled, it was not classified space, and so we could come and go much more easily. In those days, there was an embassy swimming pool right behind our office so a couple times I went swimming during lunch, things like that. So it was also very nice in that I had a window, could look outside. We had our FSNs work right there with us, the Foreign Service National local employees. There was a nice physical setting.

One of the things that Ambassador Prueher had done, I believe was primarily his initiative, was to upgrade the housing for us in Beijing. His timing was excellent. The embassy had gotten leases or purchased, I don't know the details of the arrangements, what amounts, what here would be considered, kind of a planned community, a gated community. It was out near the airport, so [it was] not physically close to the embassy but well above in quality and size this sort of even the diplomatic housing apartments that the Chinese government had been offering in years past which were completely adequate by Chinese standards, but were not super attractive to somebody who had been living in a house or a townhouse in the Washington DC area. So these [new houses] were individual houses, they had macroscopic lawns, but there was…. You could park your car, you had a garage, air conditioning, all sorts of things built in and not the sort of typical cement and tile Chinese apartment buildings that characterized a lot of Beijing. And the international school was quite close by. Our complex was called River Gardens, it's still there, and still has a lot of embassy folks. Maybe not so many now. Because the housing options in the city have improved a little bit. But anyway [River Gardens] was a very nice place. Because it's in an enclosed gated community you could walk down the streets without breathing a lot of smoke, and without getting hit by a car rushing by. Our son learned to bicycle there. They had a swimming pool with an indoor and an outdoor pool, there was a little store, and so it was quite a reasonable standard of living as far as we were concerned. So that was all good. And again, because my wife is Chinese, and is a

native speaker of Cantonese but can speak mandarin at a near native level, [I had] absolutely no problem. I mean, she could go out on her own. I didn't have any concerns about getting a phone call like, "I have no idea where I am," or the car won't start. She was much better at dealing with those things than I was. So I was very relaxed about that.

Our son went to a preschool right inside that [River Garden] complex. They had made over a large house into a little Montessori school so he went there for a couple of years. So our home life was good.

So my portfolio…. If I could go on and talk about that in Beijing, I was there from 2001 to 2004 and there were probably four or five officers in the environment section, which made it a pretty good-sized [ESTH] section by U.S. embassy global terms. I always told people this is the biggest [ESTH section] in the world. I think that is still true.

Q: I believe it is.

WHITTLESEY: So we had four or five, maybe six officers, depending on who was coming and going, we had an office manager, and three or four foreign service nationals there with us, so by the time everybody got there, it would have been 8-10,11 people in our staff meetings, so that's a pretty good size.

I got to the embassy in the fall of 2001. I don't recall other than residual flutter over the EP3 collision. That would have been less than a year before that. But in general we were in a fairly positive and forward-looking phase in our relationship with China. George W. Bush was the president at that point. A guy named Sandy R-A-N-D-T was the ambassador. He had been a trade lawyer in Hong Kong. Michael Marine was the deputy chief of mission, a Foreign Service pro with a lot of years [of experience] and knew his job perfectly, and was good at managing. [He was] a very down-to-earth, no-nonsense guy. Kurt Tong was the head of the [ESTH] section. I enjoyed working with him. So I focused on, I think essentially through my years there, 2001 to 2004, on a lot of natural resource issues, such as water, forests, desertification, and grasslands. I was in charge of pandas, so that was fun. And I've got a couple of little stories about that you might find interesting.

Probably fisheries would have been another aspect of my work. The air pollution problem had not particularly taken root yet. That was still something in the future. Climate change was also [in its] early days. The Rio Earth Summit had taken place and we had the framework convention and so on and so forth, but as a political issue, [climate change] had not really taken root, so [my work] tended to be much more focused on individual topics. Fresh water, forestry and things like that. It was a very enjoyable set of issues to work on. Generally pretty positive.

The Chinese, despite this sort of umbrella high level concerns about working with the U.S., the people in the ministries and agencies that we dealt with who handled those

issues, like forestry on a day to day basis, had a lot of respect for the U.S. agencies. They knew they had a lot to learn. They were humble in a good way that 'Hey we're facing the same issues you are. How do you deal with this?" And so that's a very enjoyable and pleasant work atmosphere and, yes, the president of China or the chairman of the party would be criticizing us for whatever, trying to "ruin" China, "keep China down," this sort of overall political context, but then a couple of levels from that there was a lot of business being done in a very respectful way.

Also [true for] the folks who came over, including, and I think they're still working on it, trying to set up a national parks system in China. So we had [many] high-level visitors. This was a bit of a double-edged sword. Everybody in the U.S. government wanted to come to China and visit. It was cool, it was very interesting, and so we would get very high-level folks. That gave us a lot of work, but at the same time you had the sense that you were really working on something important. These are two giant countries with a lot of global interests, working on some issues that I thought were important. That was a nice setting to be in, where you had access to this very active and forward-looking set of issues that made a difference. I took some great trips with people out to the western part of the country looking at desert issues, water issues at various places.

A great trip I took was getting to the pandas. When we, the United States, got our pandas from China in the Nixon era, there was an arrangement made [that] wasn't just like putting a couple of animals in a box and sending them over. There was an agreement established that required mutual visits and scientific exchanges to promote the wild population of pandas, to keep them alive as a species and hopefully to have them thrive. So there was some scientific and conservation agenda behind this. One of the most fun trips I did was to take the U.S. panda delegation one year. We visited the panda centers in Cheng Du, we went on a field trip from [Cheng Du] to the areas where [the pandas] lived. We walked up hillsides looking for them and had professional level discussions with the folk whom we visited. I literally got to sit next to a panda on a park bench. That picture I still have!

Q: That's wonderful.

WHITTLESEY: [In the picture] I'm kind of looking at the panda. Of course everybody wants to get their picture taken [with a panda]. This was not exactly caveman thinking, but certainly another era in terms of human contact with the bears. But they had one [panda] that was people-friendly and would sit there and they gave it an apple to eat and you could get your picture taken with it. So I was touching it. It was like 50-60 pounds. I mean, it was not a little handful. This was a cub. And I was touching its fur just to feel what it's like and it's surprisingly rough. You know you think, oh, it's a panda that's going to have this silky beautiful fur. No. This is a wild animal that lives outdoors year round in some fairly challenging conditions, and it's not a stuffed toy. And I went out another time with my family and we got our picture taken [with a panda] and my son. I remember the panda was eating the apple and my son was picking up the bits of apple. The [panda] was sitting there so the apple bits were falling on the panda's stomach, and

my son said, you've got to clean them up! Taking the little bits of apple off the panda. But it was great to see the real deal. And even with pandas…. That was, I think, a little bit of a shock to me, that you have this incredible natural resource, the panda, globally unique, tightly tied to Chinese culture and their view of themselves and their position in the world, and [China] still had villagers living and working in that area where the [pandas] were. And I thought, that is really shocking that [China] can't even, their political system can't even deal with 4,000 villagers here in this place. [The area was] just completely unique and critical for these animals. So that [lack of action] surprised me a little bit.

Their physical facilities for the pandas were pretty stark. I think if you went maybe a little bit behind the scenes, the [Smithsonian] national zoo has the resources to put into making nice enclosures that are a little bit more pleasant. I mean this was much more of a jail cell kind of thing. Just bars, and tiles, and things like that. It had kind of a rough edge to it that surprised me a little bit, given the importance of the animal. I mean we're not talking about something that nobody's ever heard of, some kind of ferret or something. I mean this is this unique, precious symbol, and it's a big animal too. So the infrastructure was a little harsh.

But I was there with the U.S. delegation, real experts. A guy who was the panda person in the Atlanta zoo, the head of the U.S. national zoo, the international head from [U.S.] Fish & Wildlife, and a biologist type from Fish and Wildlife who was more at the endangered species working level but somebody who knew a lot about animals and wildlife. Those are the folks I remember. [There was] another working-level person who was more of the biologist type. We drove around for a week out in Szechuan and in that area near Cheng Du, visiting different panda facilities and talking to folks and going out to where pandas might be found. We never did see one out in the wild. But it was very interesting to talk to these folks and learn about pandas.

Q: At that time in the early 2000s what was the general understanding about how close to extinction the pandas were and what the trend line was?

WHITTLESEY: I think it's not a lot different than what it is now, that [the panda population] was at a low but stable level. First of all, it's hard for people to figure out how many [pandas] there are. These are somewhat reclusive animals and they live in very difficult terrain. They're in the mountains, so it's not like you can fly over with a satellite or even a drone, which didn't exist at that point, or a helicopter or an airplane and say "there's a herd of them over there!" So just getting numbers on [pandas] was tough. I think [China's] focus was the captive breeding program, literally just trying to produce the biological reserve to have the animals alive and even if they were in a zoo environment. There's a lot to learn about what they eat, and the structure of... not exactly their lifestyle [laughter], but I'm trying to think of the right word for their daily habits and things like that.

So one of the things that was going on throughout my time there was that the Memphis Zoo was very interested in getting pandas. And to go to the end of the story, they were able to strike an agreement with the Chinese and have a couple of pandas sent over to their zoo. I don't recall the specifics but because Federal Express is [headquartered in Memphis] …

Q: Would they really send them with Federal Express?

WHITTLESEY: Yes!

Q: Holy cow!

WHITTLESEY: They still do that. When they repatriated the baby [panda from Washington DC], that was a dedicated FedEx plane. It's hard to imagine that [the Memphis Zoo was] able to pull this off. Obviously a group of folks, somebody at the Memphis Zoo said, and it could only have been somebody up at the high echelons, probably the top one or two people, said, "We should try to get some pandas." And I'm just speculating here, but trying to understand how this might have worked, they would have formed a committee, with a chairman and a donor group to sort of make this work in the larger context. Because Memphis is not a huge city, but they got FedEx there and I guess they've got a decent zoo and someone said let's make this happen, because this is a multiyear effort. You don't just fill out an application and fax it in and hope that you get it. You have to do [some] wining and dining, sort of relationship-building, people fly back and forth, and so Memphis was willing to get in there and do that. They had consultants and the whole [package], I mean it was a serious effort, and I don't know exactly when they started, but at the end of this, by golly, they got the Chinese to agree. They structured one of these agreements to send a couple of pandas over to the Memphis zoo. So that was one of the highlights of my tour.

FedEx and the other folks who literally put [the pandas] on a plane said, "Let's get the ambassador to come out and get his picture taken." I mean this was the photo opportunity of a lifetime. So we were able to get, and I don't remember if I had this idea or if it was somebody else, but [we said] let's get a couple embassy kids to come out, and so [the Chinese] said, fine, it's okay. You can have two spots. And I remember this was one of the few times in my entire State Department career where I saw the ambassador give a direct order: "My daughter is going to get one of those spots! Any difficulty understanding that?" "No, Mr. Ambassador." And I was glad he did that. I mean that poor child [the ambassador's daughter]; 13 years old. Her father is out every night and living in this high-pressure, high-work environment. That poor child certainly deserved to have a little something nice happen because of that. [A second embassy child] got the other spot. We had a drawing or something for the other spot. Somebody else got to go out there, got their picture taken. So the pandas are in big cages, and FedEx [loaded them], and off they go. So that was a lot of fun.

But as I said, I got to travel around a lot. Because our son was still fairly small at that point, it was easy to travel. As I also mentioned previously, my wife was completely comfortable and capable of traveling in China on her own. She didn't [need my help]. She was much more likely to help me than vice versa. We both enjoyed traveling and getting out so we saw a lot of China in our tours there, including going out to, I think we were in Guangzhou at that time, to go to Tibet.

Q: Wow, how long were you able to spend in Tibet?

WHITTLESEY: It was maybe 3 days, 4 days, something like that. It was not a long period of time. But Phil was still amazingly young and I think now he was probably too young to [travel there], because the physical demands of going out there are intense. You're at over 10,000 feet of elevation. He was still a little baby. But we pressed on, did that. We went out to Xinjiang, the western [province] which is essentially now a large jail cell for the Uighur people. I did other trips out there without my family on business because they had floods or maybe had an earthquake or something out there and we provided [relief]. Part of my job was to do disaster relief, so the Red Cross took us out there and we were taken around to places that had been flooded [or had earthquakes]. I went to several floods. These were on different occasions, but [visited] several areas that had been flooded or had an earthquake and things like that. [This was] the equivalent of handing over the big check and getting our picture taken and doing a little photo op type of thing. Showing that the American people were supporting these folks in their time of need.

So we got to [travel], both myself on my own on business, and also with my wife. We got to see some of the more remote and less visible parts of China, which is one of the great things about being a diplomat. You have the time and the travel skills to make that happen. I doubt that anybody could just get on a plane now and go out to Xinjiang, but at that time it was still relatively open. And that was just something that we could do that almost nobody else could, because the folks who were coming to China, they wanted to see Beijing and Shanghai and go to see the terracotta warriors in Xian. And that's going to be about it. And getting out to Kashgar was just not going to happen for most folks, so it was a great opportunity to see all over China.

We went to the northeast in the winter for the ice festival, you know, all of those [travel] things. When you're there for multiple years, you have the time to set those things up and pick those off, which you couldn't do if you were just coming in for even a couple weeks or a month. We went throughout the southwest and to the far west and multiple times to see the terracotta warriors, all those types of things. And I think there's a lot of value for a diplomat to do those types of things. [There is value in] seeing the daily life that the people maintain, what they're concerned about. I got to visit the Yellow River with some real water experts from the U.S. I mean, this is one of the real joys of the diplomatic world. You're not an expert, but they are, and you get to spend time with them, and [ask] what's going on here? What do I need to know? And they are all too

happy to talk about these things. You really get quite an education in some of these [trips].

Q: Absolutely. A similar experience happened with me as a public affairs officer where I got to hang out with the Fulbrighters. Every one of them is a genius in something. And maybe you're not that interested in carbon fiber or whatever, but somebody, one of those Fulbrighters is going to be a genius about something you're interested in and you're going to get a lifetime of experience with a year [by] periodically talking to these people

WHITTLESEY: Yup. I think it was when I was in Guangzhou, if I could rewind just a little bit. You reminded me of one of those things that I knew I would forget while we were talking about Guangzhou. But one of the things I did down there was because the U.S…. I think a lot of people don't appreciate, even now, how knitted together the U.S. is with China. We have a wide range of agreements and understandings and relationships between our various departments, and it kind of goes across all [of the] government, including the military and folks you would think would not necessarily have a tight relationship.

But one of the things I did when I was in Guangzhou, essentially because there was nobody else to do it, was to go with somebody from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to visit a nuclear power plant in China, called Daya Bay, near Shenzhen. It had this unique relationship where [the power plant is] in China, but it supplied electricity to Hong Kong. But anyway they had a relationship, and this is typical of many issues where the folks who are dealing with day to day issues in China, I mean they have serious, real responsibilities. You're running a nuclear plant, you know, you don't want to screw up. So you are, I won't say desperate, but let's just say you're very interested in getting people to help you out. And so [you ask the Chinese], "Do you want to have a U.S. nuclear expert come and watch [your operation]?" [They would answer,] "You bet I do! I want to know exactly what he thinks about this."

So this was one of those [visits]. I didn't know anything about nuclear plants, but they talked, and you talk to your own folks to ask what are we looking for here? What are the issues? And they give you the real inside scoop and it was just absolutely thrilling to hear what's going on in this society. [China is] this giant country with a huge amount of global influence and you are right there with somebody who's got a pretty significant role, given the nature of things. I mean, China's got a huge population but the number of folks who can run a nuclear plant is not big! So you're talking about somebody who is at the top of the top, who has the background and the experience and the knowledge. These are sophisticated people, even in a country where you still have a lot of plain old dirt farmers and stuff like that. When you get up to somebody who's deputy minister, minister, head of an agency, running a big facility, these are not hicks. These are folks that have been around, know the issues, have traveled and are sophisticated folks. It's very enjoyable and fun and challenging to interact with them.

So going through the nuclear plant was fun. One of the things I remember the most: this particular plant had been built by a French company. The French have a big nuclear company, I can't remember whether it was Electricite de France, or another big French energy company. I guess the building and the operation of the plant was somewhat of a joint venture. I've forgotten the details. But we got to the plant the night before and we were going to have our tour and meetings and stuff the next day. I remember we went out to dinner. [Later] I went out [to a convenience store] to get something, and I was walking back to my room and somebody kind of came out of the darkness. I was a little sort of, just caught my attention, I guess. I realized that this person, who turned out to be a French person, not a Chinese person, had just had way too much to drink and was literally staggering. And once I sort of figured out the situation, that he was not going to [attack me], [and that] he could make his way home, I remember thinking this guy's going to be in a nuclear plant control room tomorrow. Do I really want somebody who is near the edge of incapacity hungover in a nuclear plant in the morning? Obviously nothing untoward happened, but it was just one of those funny little scenarios.

Anyway, the general point is that because of my particular issues, and I mean me as one person in the Embassy, I got to travel a lot and to a lot of very interesting places, and that had really kind of grabbed my attention in a way. Even other people in the embassy would comment, "You get around," "Your trips sound like fun. When we go, it's just to meet the people from the Foreign Affairs Bureau in the capital city and it sucks but you're out in the forests, or at the lake, or at the dam, or this sort of thing" So that was fun.

Q: As you think back, were there particular U.S. policies that you followed that you were very concerned about?

WHITTLESEY: No, nothing that I recall, certainly at this stage, that concerned me or that I really felt was misguided. In general, I thought we were pretty, we were in a very positive role, helping out in all of these different things. We had a very active relationship, and there was nothing that I was looking at that I was thinking "Oh God, I mean, we're not doing ourselves any favors with that. This is blind." No, I thought we were doing good work as diplomats there to engage with this giant country on very specific issues that did have global impact. One of our missions as diplomats is to find areas that affect the U.S. And yes, it does matter if the Chinese are safely managing their nuclear power. And it does matter if they are conserving forests. And it does matter if they're protecting endangered species. And [that] their fishing industry follows certain rules and that they have adequate water resources and things like that. So our interests were not difficult at all to follow, and if I could mention this scenario that happened toward the end of my tour there…

I think it was maybe the year 2002 or 2003 as a good example of that. And that was a health outbreak called SARS. Let me think if I can recall what SARS means. Something Acute Respiratory Syndrome. What would "s" be? But S-A-R-S. Something acute

respiratory syndrome. And this was China which because of its high population and because of the climate in certain places…

Q: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

WHITTLESEY: Okay. Because you have people living in proximity with animals, literally, the family pigs are in the front courtyard and the chickens are running around. This kind of human-animal interchange is considered by scientists to be a real threat for viruses and other diseases. At some point it became clear that this respiratory problem that got labeled SARS had started to break out a little bit. This was a situation where the Chinese were a little bit caught because it's one of those situations where they can't hide behind their political rhetoric any more. They've got a problem and they need help. So somebody has to say, hey, we've got an emergency here. Can you help? What the hell do we do here? They don't have the kind of broad-based scientific enterprise that we would have in the U.S. with legions of well trained, experienced people. [China has] got a thin layer of folks on the top who know exactly what's going on and a lot of folks [underneath them] who are under-trained and under-experienced. But of course at the same time, they don't want to admit all this in public. There's a little bit of a delicate discussion that has to take place so that they don't seem like idiots to the outside world who can't manage their own affairs.

Fortunately the World Health Organization has an office in Beijing which was lovely for us, and for the Chinese, because it gave a kind of a neutral broker who could in effect represent global interests in a serious way without China saying, "Well we can't handle this. We have to bring in the U.S." I mean that was maybe a political step too far for them to take. But dealing with the World Health Organization on an international basis, that was much more palatable.

So there was real concern that this was going to be a major epidemic.

Q: And once it gets into one person, if you're not able to track it, airlines, and people just catching it in the airline cabin!

WHITTLESEY: Exactly. So this is why, for that reason alone, this is why the U.S.-China relationship is so critical because yes, what happens in this little village in Guangxi province that nobody ever heard of that has 500 people in it, that can shut down New York City in ten days if you're not careful.

So this process started to unfold before our eyes in Beijing. There were of course a lot of rumors and this lifted the veil on a lot of the bad Chinese practices of failing to report information accurately and fully, and giving you the happy talk of "We got this under control," and, "Don't worry about it. Everything's going to be fine." The Chinese hosts themselves [this time] are like "No, we've [never faced] this before." A lot of them, and you're talking about at that point at least 15 million people in the Beijing metro area, a lot of folks are like, "I'm out of here." And they literally got on trains and went home [to

other cities and villages.] So you had, for a few days there, you had just absolute pandemonium with - probably got to the level of people hanging off of trains to get out of town, but certainly every train was packed. And the city [Beijing] literally started to shut down a little bit, because it would be the equivalent of – and I hope I can do this while being fair to our neighbors from central America who populate the U.S. If they suddenly all decided to go home, things where you have a large Latin population [such as] taking care of restaurants and even things like lawn care and manual trades, construction industry…. Imagine what would happen to the construction industry if everybody who had a passport from a central American country left town, things would just shut down, and restaurants wouldn't be able to function and things like that. So this is what started to happen in Beijing.

So it was very, very interesting, and a little bit scary. We had town hall meetings at the embassy. We were given the opportunity to fly out if we wanted to, if you really feel you can't, you're not comfortable staying here, you can be repatriated. Several people took that option. Maybe somebody who had an underlying health issue, or a young baby, or something like that. "I want to be back in Seattle; I don't want to be in Beijing" when some epidemic is raging.

And I remember some people from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) came over and we took them around because we were the health section. We had some folks [stationed] there from CDC, representatives, but they were only a couple of folks and they needed some manpower. So we helped out to take some of their visitors around. I remember somebody asking the guy, "Is this something we need to be worried about? What are we facing here?" I just remember the upshot of his answer was [that] a little panic is not completely out of the question here! This theoretically could [go badly], and this is the thing about health, you never …

Q: Just look at the Ebola issue. And ultimately it was dealt with, as one might say, as quickly and efficiently as possible, given the conditions, but it could have been much worse.

WHITTLESEY: Yeah. SARS was certainly in that category and when it's happening right in front of you, you don't know which way the dial is going to move, and sure, the last 100 times this has happened, it died out and everybody kind of goes back to the way things were, but there's probabilities instead of being one in ten million, now we're like one in 100,000. It's like, "Okay, we're starting to get to the point where, yes, you do have to be concerned about this." And as I said, the potential risks are huge. We were facing some very interesting [issues], and having some very interesting discussions.

This is also not abstract, all of a sudden, because, well, if this is really going bad in Beijing where *we* are, maybe Japan is not going to be too happy about a planeload of people [showing up.] "Sorry about your American passport, but didn't you just come from where this outbreak is?" "Yeah." "See you later! Yeah, head on back because you cannot land here."

All of those things for us as American diplomats [that] would have been the typical [departure] maneuvers in case of civil strife or something: [you would] go to Singapore, get on a plane, get the military to fly you out. Well, the Chinese would never in 100 years let a U.S. military plane land in Beijing to remove American citizens! Singapore may just say, "No, sorry, you guys are stuck there. We have our citizens to protect. You're our good friends, but we cannot risk bringing a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease into our population."

So all of a sudden, all these things that we kind of lean on as diplomats around the world, those are getting knocked out from under you. So it was very interesting [for] maybe a few weeks, while all this played out. The Chinese were, we'll say, and I'll end on this, they were up to their old tricks of not sharing information to the point that WHO people would go to inspect a hospital and the Chinese were reportedly moving patients around so that [the patients] wouldn't be [discovered] by the inspectors.

The short term effects turned out to be negligible. SARS kind of died down. People came back and went to work and everything sort of resumed its normal course. But to their credit, a group, and I don't know who they are, but a group of folks in the Chinese government and particularly in their health ministry and academic enterprise, said, "We [China] cannot do this again. This is not good for us as Chinese people to have a potential for a raging epidemic to take root in our society." The old rules just won't work. The typical "hide it," "Don't let people know," "Sorry [but we] don't manage health emergencies like that."

When I went back in 2014 to 2017, the medical world was the one part of the Chinese, and to a certain extent the environmental people also, was the one part of the Chinese government that had really moved forward and seriously engaged the international community and pulled themselves up as best they could in a good-faith effort to conform to national standards. And not just by saying it, and rhetorically committing to doing the right thing. I mean, they said, here's what you have got to do. You've got to have information, you've got to have resources, you've got to sit on the committees, you've got to have experts in place, and they took that on in a serious, mature, and wise way.

I think they moved their thinking forward so when we had Ebola, they were the folks who were saying, "Yes, we agree with you. We've got to work with you. China needs to be in the game, this is going to affect us." And all of a sudden you find, "Well gosh, there's 200,000 African people living in Guangzhou! If somebody gets off a plane from one of these [infected] places, you're going to be in big trouble!" The Chinese didn't have any trouble understanding that. And so that means that you have [Chinese] folks internally advocating. I'm just making this up for purposes of illustrating the thought process, but for example, the health minister goes to the president and says, "We've got to get on this issue and be engaged." They're a voice for – I'm sure they do it in a polite and deferential Chinese way, but also with an unmistakable view that this matters to us [the Chinese].

That kind of internal advocacy is what you're seeking all along as a diplomat, to get somebody to understand, here's why the United States has a transparent information system and why it has regular reporting for health issues, and here's why we invest in this sort of thing. And here's why you should be sending your people to do this epidemiology training and participate at WHO because next time, it's going to be you. This was a case where it really was, and while avoiding an immediate disaster, it [SARS] was scary enough and real enough for them that they got the message and made a big change.

Q: Wow. Fantastic.

WHITTLESEY: So it was very fun and interesting and exciting to be there while that was happening. Like reality: you don't know how it's going to work out.

Q: One last question is before we break, you were there over the period of 9/11. Did that have any impact on your work in Beijing?

WHITTLESEY: I don't think so.

Q: I understand it's certainly very far away and the Chinese have pretty tightly controlled borders, but rather an extensive secret system of observing and surveilling things.

WHITTLESEY: Yeah, I remember turning on the TV and seeing what turned out to be the world trade center in flames, and I thought, oh, some crappy hotel in Bangkok has gone up in flames, and then I'm like, this is in New York! And calling up Kurt (Tong) and saying, hey man, you better turn on the TV. This is going to be important for us.

Q: You know, it's funny. I saw it on TV in the last place you'd expect. I had finished canoeing in western North Carolina, and there was a general store and I just went in there to get a coke or something, and it was on the TV in the little general store, and the sales person behind the desk said, you might want to watch this. So I looked and I saw the plane go into the first tower, and my first thought was, there had been some breakdown in the air traffic control that this was some crazy awful disaster that happens once in 100 years, and it just didn't even dawn on me that it could have been a terrorist attack until 15-20 minutes later when you saw – no, this can't be. Lightning doesn't strike twice that way.

WHITTLESEY: I must say that the Chinese were not involved in (post 9/11 policymaking). It wasn't their people who carried out these attacks. It didn't happen on their turf, it was not a Chinese plane. They just didn't have a clear interest. I'm trying to state this in a neutral way. I mean it just wasn't part of their... it didn't affect them, it didn't involve them, shall we say, directly. I'm sure they were watching and began the sort of thinking about terrorism that has now pervaded the global political class. But in terms of our daily work, I don't recall any particularly strong influences there.

Q: Okay.

WHITTLESEY: I'm sure we got expressions of condolence and things like that.

Q: All right, so let's pause here and maybe what we can do is reach the end of your Beijing assignment and move on from there.

WHITTLESEY: Sure, that would be fine.

Q: We're resuming our interview with Jock Whittlesey as he completes his tour in Beijing as the natural resources officer.

WHITTLESEY: One thing that I wanted to mention is a general component of being a Foreign Service Officer, and particularly true for those of us who work on environmental issues, is the opportunity to meet people who are experts in their field and to visit interesting facilities and sometimes have conversations with real experts on very esoteric topics. Our then assistant secretary of oceans, environment, and science (John Turner) visited China. I had an opportunity to go with him out to a place in western China, a province called Qinghai. We went to a special atmospheric science research station, and this place was specifically picked to be as isolated as possible so that you're not downwind from a bus stop or a factory. They're very high up in altitude. I don't recall exactly how high it was. This was one of a handful of research stations around the world that was intended to get pure atmospheric readings, untouched by local conditions. So it's isolated and high [up], and the samples that they take become the baseline of the gasses actually in the general atmosphere of the earth. In my mind, this was one of the first times where we really started talking about CO_2 and climate change in a serious way as part of my work with the State Department. I know that others had been working on it for a while, but this was the time when I started to get more involved in that.

Q: Once again, this is 2004?

WHITTLESEY: Right. So those conversations had been underway; we had had meetings on climate change. I remember going to some bilateral meetings with the Chinese on climate change, but this was a time when (climate change) came into sharp focus. It was quite an interesting trip, in addition to being of scientific importance.

When I was leaving China, my next assignment was to be what we call the Regional Environmental Hub Officer—hub in the sense of being at the center of a wheel with multiple spokes—based in Amman, Jordan but covering all of the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau, essentially the Middle East, the Persian Gulf countries and North Africa.

So, I went off to Amman with my family in late summer, early fall of 2004 and we set up shop there. My son was going into first grade. I believe. I had never set foot anywhere [in the Middle East]. We might have been to Israel before, but certainly never to Jordan and never around the Middle East. I'm putting my thinking cap on about when we first

went to Israel; we probably had been to Israel once before. Anyway, I had zero regional experience. I did not speak Arabic and I was really thin in terms of background knowledge, cultural knowledge, etc. It certainly had its aspects as a positive challenge, but it was also a bit overwhelming at times.

I think it exposes one of the weaknesses in the U.S. Foreign Service that somebody like me, who's essentially a complete novice in the area, gets dropped in there with a very modest amount of training and expected to function at a professional level. I think that doesn't do justice to our country, that you have somebody who's so inexperienced in the local issues. I was spending a lot of time just coming up to speed with basic cultural norms, history of the region, as well as my professional portfolio. So I note that as what I feel is a bit of a weakness in our personnel system. In a perfect world I would have had a way to break in and get trained, spend time, get up to speed, but that's not the way it happens in the Foreign Service sometimes. I was in China and two months later, I'm in Jordan.

We were in the Iraq War at that point, with Jordan playing an important role. You have the constant background of Arabic-Israeli issues, so the nature of my work changed instantly. I thought I was going to be heavily engaged in Iraq issues, but that turned out not to be the case, which was a real surprise to me. I thought that the State Department in Washington or at Embassy Baghdad, the foreign policy community, was going to say, "We've got this person in Jordan; he can be very helpful to us for multiple reasons." It never gelled the way I expected it to. I went to a couple of meetings related to Iraq, but in terms of playing an important and detailed role with respect to our engagement in Iraq, that didn't happen. It was surprising at the time and it's still a bit surprising even now.

But what I did spend some time on, which was part of the plan, was work in the U.S. role as an intermediary between the Arabs, the Palestinians, and the Israelis, particularly on water issues because water is an absolutely critical natural resource in that area. It's a very water-short place, so water was watched and managed extremely carefully, and of course it has political connotations as well.

To continue my theme of being ignorant, the United States had a long-standing trilateral—by long-standing I mean eight years, give or take a few. We had a term for this particular group, but it was essentially a U.S.–Palestinian–Israeli working group on water issues that was run on the U.S. side by a guy named Chuck Lawson. He was and still is a good friend of mine, a very astute, knowledgeable person, highly professional, knew the area well. [He was] everything that I wasn't! So he ran this program and my job was to assist with that.

Q: A quick context question: The Oslo Accords were signed a few years earlier. Part of the accords was an understanding that the United States would provide assistance to Israel and the Palestinians in development issues like water. Was USAID a player in this trilateral group?

WHITTLESEY: No. My memories are certainly partial at best, but I remember this as essentially being a political discussion. There were modest amounts of funding to pay for meetings, plane flights, etcetera, but in terms of getting fully engaged with USAID on projects, I think that would have been done through the bilateral AID missions in Amman and Tel Aviv, at that point covering the West Bank and Gaza, but I do not recall. We may have had folks sit in, things like that, but big projects, that was not the situation. This was a time for the Palestinians and Israelis to get together to talk about "meat and potatoes" issues; about water supply for certain parts of the West Bank or sewage treatment plants, etc. It was a talk shop for discussion rather than project management.

There were folks from the respective governments and of course I got to know some of the folks from the Palestinians and from the Israelis. I remember talking with one of my Israeli counterparts about Jerusalem and the settlements, and how that related to the Israeli footprint and areas of control, which I'm sure as you're aware can be very complex and detailed. I can't remember what question it was, but it had to do with the settlements and West Jerusalem, but some hopelessly naïve question that I asked that I'm sure completely shocked him, that anybody could be so abysmally uninformed about these issues! I remember to this day his clear shock that I knew so little about the Palestinian issue and [him] needing a moment to recalibrate his comments. All of a sudden, he realized he was talking to somebody who's in kindergarten and he couldn't use the typical language and have the sorts of discussions that he would with other people in his orbit. People talk about humbling moments; that was a humbling moment.

We would convene meetings on fairly technical topics in neutral locations. We went to Vienna once and we went to Istanbul a couple of times. We had to find places that everybody was comfortable [with] and it wasn't going to be an Arab country where the Israelis might not feel comfortable. For example, we had one of our meetings in Istanbul. We got somebody there to talk about gas stations and their effect on groundwater, because the underground storage tanks can leak. How do you prevent this, or how do you manage surface runoff from a gas station where people overfill their gas tank on the car? That can get into the water supply, so how do you manage that? These were fairly technical things. One time we went to Australia, which was a bit of a long hike, but we had somebody there who was an expert on a particular topic. I can't remember what the topic of the day was, but Australia has a lot of water management folks who are extremely knowledgeable. It was worth the long flight to get over there. These trips gave people a little more opportunity to interact more informally, out of their typical context. They're supposed to be fairly pleasant. We went out to dinner and things like that, so it's a way to build some human-to-human interaction outside of the professional context. Those were fun and useful.

One of the clear moments in my Foreign Service career that I remember after 26 years, there was a bit of a confrontation between a Palestinian and an Israeli during one of these meetings. There were just the three of us in the room and I had to figure out on the spot how are you going to handle this. Something had triggered a bit of a hostile remark from somebody, the other person had reacted to that, and we had to settle that and move on in a

professional context. That was something that burst into flames right in front of me. I may be exaggerating in my own mind the extent of the hostility, but there was clearly an edge in the atmosphere, and that was real applied diplomacy. You have a second to decide what you're going to do with these two guys. They spoke their piece and we moved on, so that was fine. But Chuck Lawson, who managed this larger context of the meetings, was a master at letting people speak. That's an important part of diplomacy, just letting somebody say whatever they want to say. You can go ahead and [let them] say it, knowing that when they've gotten enough of that, it's time to conclude that comment and move on to other things. So it was very interesting.

This little group of us met in London one time. There were several different meetings at various places, and that was nice. It was a challenging portfolio for that reason. You felt you were really working on an important issue and obviously a critical part of U.S. foreign policy. But [it was] much different from my experience in China, where local management and institutions and natural resource management within a country was the topic of concern. Here, it was water in a political context and [that] made it much more complex and of course relevant to U.S. foreign policy interests. So, that was quite fun. We visited various sewage treatment plants [in Jordan] and a place that desalinated groundwater using some kind of osmosis filter that I think AID was involved in. There were several things that I got to do as part of that. We talked a lot about the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee, which has another name, I'm trying to remember.

Q: Kinneret?

WHITTLESEY: Lake Kinneret, a huge freshwater resource in the area. I met a lot with the water folks in Jordan who participated in this; I believe they participated sometimes—Now I'm getting a little bit—Whether it was just the Palestinians and the Israelis or whether—I think the Jordanians were part of that as well because they were seen as supporting the Palestinians and could provide some institutional expertise. And of course the resources themselves were intermixed between Jordan, Israeli and the West Bank. So, I got to know the folks who worked in the [Jordanian] water ministry. Not AID, but the U.S. Geological Survey had a water person there who also participated in these things from time to time. It was very interesting and challenging work to deal with these issues.

I did a bit of travel to other parts of the region; some just on personal time and other trips were for professional reasons. The general theme is typical for the environmental policy people at the State Department, [which] was using scientific issues as a tool for political engagement and for local economic development. You want to encourage people to support their scientific infrastructure and their scientists.

One of the projects we worked on was called SESAME, and that was a shared scientific research project similar to CERN or other big-science projects. [It was] too big for any individual country to manage, but everybody, the theory was, could share that, and that was a scientific machine called a synchrotron. As I recall it now, it's a machine that

generates electromagnetic particles and you can do research based on that. It can also be used as a very high-end x-ray machine, to put it in simple terms. I couldn't go beyond that now at this point. The Germans had an old one that they didn't need any more, but it was still functional and our job, with multiple countries, was to try to establish a physical location and together get it up and running, and establish the governance structure, etc. I believe Iran was a member of that. So [it was] one of the few places where Israel and Iran met on an equal footing.

Q: What was the thinking in terms of where to base it?

WHITTLESEY: It would be in Jordan. That was why we had the meetings in Jordan. I'm not sure it would be possible to reconstruct where the other meetings took place, but the plan was that it was going to be in Jordan. I believe they've made some progress and it may even be up and running at this point. So this was a large scientific project, a perfect target for diplomacy in an area that needs reasons to interact, needs reasons to develop its scientists, and contribute to the world's scientific knowledge.

I remember this Jordanian I had some interactions with. I think he [Khaled Toukan] may have been the minister of science—I may not have his title exactly right. This was one of those situations where he crystallized for me the situation that people face in developing countries. Folks you often meet, it's so easy to believe that their folks are just not as well trained as… He was a big guy, 6'4" or 6'5," so a towering physical person. He went to school in the United States and got a Ph.D. from MIT in something like nuclear physics. So that's all you need to say. This person really had an extraordinary mind and by anybody's standards was an extremely intelligent and well-trained person. I remember him being a very gentle person. I was at an event where the king of Jordan was there and I remember this minister—I cannot remember his name, but I could probably dig it out if necessary—bowing very humbly to the king. I remember being enormously impressed with this individual as an extraordinarily gifted intellectual but also with the skill set to manage a bureaucracy; to operate in a political environment as well as a scientific one. A very impressive person. I remember him well.

The minister of environment, a guy named Khaled Irani, was another person who was extremely pleasant to work with. [He] spoke excellent English, and at the point where I met him, I think he was the head of a Jordanian environmental NGO [Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature]. I can't remember the name of it now, but it is a conservation organization. He had gotten plugged into USAID and they had funded various projects that his organization had worked on related to conservation in Jordan. They had renovated a building to be their headquarters that was very cool and up-to-date and a hip kind of place. He was the head of that organization for a while and eventually became the minister of environment for a few years when I was still there. I was in Jordan from 2004 to 2007.

These were some of the principal things we worked on: conservation within Jordan, water issues with the Palestinians, and scientific development through SESAME

regionally. Some of the trips I made…. We went with some Washington colleagues to North Africa to Tunisia, Morocco—not Libya—and Algeria with the idea of trying to establish peer-to-peer connections with U.S. organizations and individuals who were interested in science as a global thing. There are always resource constraints so it's good when you can get people who are working on something similar to say, "Hey, we're both working on this, you do this and I'll do that." That's where you have a project. Could I see your data? Could we talk about the results? That's very clearly a win-win.

Q: In this kind of advocacy where you are trying to create connections, were you also trying to create commercial connections in the environmental industries that might have been developing in the United States at that time?

WHITTLESEY: I think on that particular trip it was much more government-to-government. I don't recall any specific situations where we were out to promote U.S. businesses, but that would have been a general part of our remit at any point. If somebody had asked, we certainly would have tried to make connections. I don't recall any specific situations where there was a project or a company that was involved. But that would have been a routine part of our business to keep our ears open, to make offers like, "By the way, if you guys are looking for some help, here's the person in the Commercial Section and they can connect you with U.S. companies."

I remember part of that trip in Morocco. We went to visit the small but interesting space agency that they have and a similar type of situation to Jordan. They had two young guys who had gotten a first-class education either in Europe or in the United States, good English speakers. They were probably not more than 45, I'm guessing more likely in their 30's, so pretty young guys. What impressed me about that situation was—Morocco is not a country that's drowning in wealth—somebody had found these guys, and I'm sure others early in their academic careers, maybe at university. These people had been nurtured and supported as they grew through their careers and been given opportunities. You're talking about somebody paying for you to go get a Ph.D. somewhere overseas. Somebody has to say, "This is something we want to have happen, and you're the guy." I remember being very impressed by that long-term vision, like, "These are the kinds of people we need and we've got to have folks who are sophisticated and knowledgeable about not only their technical sphere but can make things happen organizationally, familiar with the world scene, real high-quality folks in various areas." They had a couple of them, for sure, in their space agency.

We were also talking to people about their national laboratories. We had somebody from some of our labs with them so they could have a little shop talk about how they do things. So, it was very rewarding and interesting for me to have the opportunity to play a part in that, and to facilitate these conversations between peers, to see these countries and what kinds of folks are there.

Another individual I remember. We were in Algeria on that same trip, so this all took place in the northern Africa countries within a week or ten days, something like that.

While we were in Algeria for just a couple of days, we went to meet their environment minister or conservation department to talk about their park system or something, which is one of the things people are often interested in about the United States, as I think I've mentioned in previous contexts. Our environmental agencies and natural resource management agencies are highly respected around the world. Folks are always very... "How do you do this? Here's a problem that we have. What would you do in this situation?" I remember, he wasn't the minister or the lead person, but one of the folks we met in Algeria who was somebody was down a layer or two, so still a very senior person in their parks and conservation. He just had the look of somebody who was completely at home in the outdoors, and I was thinking, "If I was going through the desert, this is exactly the person I would want with me." Dark tan, tough looking, and it was just an amusing moment to think, this is someone who's familiar with this really challenging environment. It was great to be able to meet folks like that and see what they look like, how they acted with each other, as well.

Q: A general question, were health issues part of your portfolio?

WHITTLESEY: Yes. We had an outbreak of avian flu. I believe that was a global issue, and that certainly was part of my portfolio in the Environment, Science, Technology, and Health Section. That was our full name. We did the policy things relating to health, as is very typical of the State Department. You get things where you really don't have a lot of expertise, but nobody else does either, so you're in charge. You have to be able to deal with the Department of Health and Human Services and get somebody from the Centers for Disease Control on the phone and be a conduit for information, these kinds of things. So, there was an outbreak of bird flu, for want of a better term. We would talk to our colleagues in the health services in Jordan about how to deal with this. What's the United States doing? What would you do in Jordan if you had what we would call a tabletop exercise, or a blackboard "in theory." How would you respond if the following circumstances emerged?

Like a lot of health issues, that was something that ended up not really catching fire the way the Spanish Flu did in 1918, where you're talking about bodies in the street. But these things always have a potential of spinning out of control, so we did some information exchange. [We] thought, "How are we going to deal with our mission if this thing becomes highly contagious and you have a global outbreak of a deadly flu. What are we going to do with the Americans who are working in Jordan?" [You've] got some big problems if all of a sudden you can't just get on an airplane and fly to Washington, DC in a few hours. You might have to hunker down. Food, water, all these sorts of things. What are you going to do with them? You have kids, school, all the aspects of daily life, which are challenging enough already in a regular context, but if you have a global health emergency, then it becomes extremely difficult. I would like to mention that when I arrived, David Hale was the deputy chief of mission, [and later] became the ambassador. He is now the political under secretary, the No. 3 guy in the entire department, so he has done very well. But he came up through Jordan and the Middle East as his area of expertise.

Q: One other question about health. Did you get involved with PEPFAR in any way? Was that an issue for your region?

WHITTLESEY: No, PEPFAR is the president's program for AIDS. We may have talked about it a bit, but it was not a big issue there. In the same way, climate change was not a major concern for Jordan. It was just starting to come up in China when I left there, where China really was a global player, and mattered a lot. Knowledge of the issues at that point was relatively low but it was clear that they [the Chinese] were a big component of any solution on climate change. In Jordan, water was clearly something they really cared about. AIDS was just not enough of an issue, [but] climate change, they're a tiny country and they're already extremely water-short. They don't have any global muscle to deal with [AIDS], so it was just not something that came up.

Q: Related to environmental carrying capacity. When you're talking about the North African countries especially, desertification and what has now become environment refugees, people who can't live on their land anymore and are desperate to find somewhere else to go. Was that becoming an issue when you were there?

WHITTLESEY: I don't remember that being thought of in that way there. They were always water-short so [they had] their desert cultures in the Middle East, Egypt and Jordan. Syria was a nearby neighbor and I remember the water minister in Jordan saying he always got along better with his Israeli water counterparts than with the Syrians! Very amusing. Maybe [this gives] a little sense of how these things shake out when they're on the ground and they need to interact to solve a problem or figure out what's going on. He found the Israelis much more open and willing to work with him than the Syrians.

I don't recall any use of the term environmental refugees or any issues being framed around that topic. But they're on the edge there with respect to water in particular. They were pumping groundwater to keep their water supplied. It was always on their minds about how they were going to deal with water.

Talking about working and living in Jordan and the Middle East and talking about environmental issues, I hosted a U.S.-only meeting, essentially an inhouse environmental meeting of folks from around the region. We had that in Petra, which is a beautiful and amazing historical site. One of the benefits of living in Jordan is having an opportunity to visit places like Petra or go to Wadi Rum. We went down to Aqaba several times. I would go down with my family and go swimming, snorkeling. and see the corals there. We went to the Dead Sea a lot, which was also a great place to visit. There was a very nice Marriott Hotel down there. That was a typical weekend getaway. It was only an hour or two away from Amman and we could drive down there. Down, down, down because Amman is quite high and the Dead Sea is obviously the lowest point on earth. We would go down there, enjoy the swimming pool, go in the Dead Sea, have a nice meal, etc.

Talking about what the issues are in the Middle East, water just dominated the conversation. Water touches quality of life for almost everybody, but it gets into agriculture and the economy. There's still lots of folks there who raise animals and for whom their animals are a source of their daily survival with milk and meat. So overgrazing would be a concern, but as I recall, water was really something that caught everybody's attention and had a real, direct impact on the quality of life. It was something that people cared about a lot and were willing to talk about, which is precisely why we worked with the Israelis and the Palestinians on water. This is something they honestly cared about and weren't being forced to talk about. They really needed to work together.

I went to Egypt several times, primarily as a place where people could meet to talk. It was great to have the opportunity to see Cairo, the traditional center—along with Damascus—of the Arab world. I visited more [countries] for exploratory meetings to get a sense of what was going on in their country, including several places in the Arabian Gulf. I went to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and to Lebanon. All of a sudden I'm the science expert, the environmental guy for that area, and the [U.S.] embassies didn't have anybody who was a specialist, except for in Israel, where they did have somebody. So if I visited, it gave the embassy an opportunity to meet the environmental minister and say, "Here's our visiting person from Jordan who focuses on these issues." It gave them a chance to touch on all the different issues that I was working on.

I also went to Bahrain. I'm trying to recall if we had any particular larger meeting there. I think in general those [meetings] tended to be just visiting the folks in country to talk to their environmental ministry or their science person. Qatar was very interesting. This was actually more on the science side, because they were setting up an educational center that drew on U.S. universities. Their vision, which I fully supported and respected, was to establish world-class educational facilities in Qatar by partnering with Georgetown University and Cornell and some other very well-respected, primarily U.S. [universities], I think. There might have been a U.K. or a European university mixed in there, but I remember them being essentially U.S. universities and establishing what amounted to an offshore campus. I have not followed up on that to see how they're doing, but I thought it was an audacious and a worthy goal to try to bring great education to a country like Qatar. [It] would draw people from around the region who might not want to have their 17-year-old daughter go off to live in upstate New York, but would be okay with them going to Doha to get their degree where the cultural gap is not quite so big. Some fabulous facilities there. They built custom-made buildings for these places and they were just getting that whole project started. It had been years in the making. By the time I got there, I would say they had a lot but not all of the physical infrastructure complete and were just starting up with classes and trying to get this thing going. It was interesting to watch.

Q: Was any of your work related to either air pollution or carbon capture?

WHITTLESEY: I don't recall that being an issue there. I believe that at this point it's pretty clear that some of the places in the Middle East have horrendous air pollution. But it was not on the top of anybody's list. I was in Jordan from 2004 to 2007 so I was leaving just when we established our air quality monitor in Beijing, where we had a clear problem. The situation worked perfectly there [in Beijing] for us to start up this experimental program, but it was not a big issue in the Middle East. They had much more pressing…

Q: Were most of the countries at the time you were there using unleaded fuel? Had they at least gotten out of leaded?

WHITTLESEY: I think they had. I think one of our meetings had to do with unleaded fuel because I remember having a conversation with somebody. That meeting didn't take place in Saudi Arabia, I think it was in Egypt. Somebody who was a real oil guy from Saudi Arabia came who knew just everything there was to know about refining and drilling. He was a very interesting guy to work with and to hear him talk about the science and the industrial side of petrochemicals.

I think they may have still been in transition. What happens in some places is they have a refinery that's built to make leaded gas and it becomes a national asset. Trying to rebuild that or stop using that and build up a refinery that makes unleaded gas upsets the apple cart in a way that makes it very difficult. They [refineries] take big investments, and for many folks it's just easier to say, "Too bad, but we're going to keep making leaded gas because we've got a leaded gas refinery. We're going to stick with that rather than try to scrape together $100 million to build a new one." You have a very complex global market. I guess some countries don't want to get involved in that, and they're happy with the status quo. There were some discussions about that but I don't recall it being a top-tier issue.

Q: Given the desert environment there, I wouldn't imagine biodiversity was a big issue.

WHITTLESEY: No. [Biodiversity was not a big issue.] There were a few conservation types. We had a bit more problem with the reverse, having Arabs who would want to hunt using falcons or who would go on safaris into Africa to shoot certain antelopes. There's a bit of a hunting culture there that has some unfortunate effects on conservation. This was one of many issues that we would bring up as part of our conversations. Obviously the more you get into something that's part of the culture, the harder it is to try to find a solution.

Q: While we're on this subject, were you the CITES person, the international guy to prevent trade in endangered species?

WHITTLESEY: Yes, I would have been. I would have been the person, for example, if we had been preparing for a CITES conference of the parties and Washington had information, I would be the one to trot over to the environment ministry and hand them

the paper and say, “Here’s what we’re trying to do with the upcoming conference and we would really appreciate your vote.” That would have been on me. As is typical for diplomacy, I mean, within my portfolio. The same with health issues. If something needed to be passed in official channels, that also would have been my job.

Talking about local issues, during my visit to Saudi Arabia one of their problems had to do with waste water management. I’m pretty sure that was in Jeddah or Riyadh, maybe Jeddah. They had been just pumping their waste water into some place in the desert not too far away. Two things I remember about that. A very pleasant, urbane Saudi was the director general of the environment department and he brought in three or four of his senior people to sit in on our meeting. I’m still not quite sure why he did that. I think it could have been just a simple, “Here’s a native English speaker to give you a chance to interact with an American in a business setting.” It could have been perhaps he wanted to show them that he can hang in there and that he speaks excellent English, or maybe he wanted them to listen to the substance of the discussion. I have no idea, but I remember being a little—I was right in the middle between startled and pleased that all these people—It makes you feel good, for whatever reason, that you’re important enough that he’s getting his folks in there to talk to you, or at least to listen. He called it the Perfume Lake! [Laughter]

“So, who deals with these issues in your country? Is there somebody we can talk to?” It tends to be the way these conversations go. “Here’s a problem we’re having. How do you deal with it? What are the tools or the instrumentalities that you would use to manage waste water, etcetera?” A lot of times I wouldn’t have the detailed knowledge in my own head, but [could say] “Let me put you in touch with somebody from this organization or this part of the bureaucracy who does deal with wastewater every day, or who does deal with solid waste, who can help you.” Trying to build these connections to fight common problems. Some environmental issues have a clearly global—something like climate change, a better example. You release CO_2 in one place and it affects everybody around the world right away. You’re talking about conserving ecosystems and biodiversity. Yes, it makes a difference that this endangered antelope in the Arabian Peninsula is thriving and is not wiped out. These are the kinds of things we’re trying to accomplish and make a contribution to. For me, that’s what felt good about working on environmental issues. Even though these are global assets and sometimes they require global solutions, people working together can really make a difference. So, that’s what got me out of bed in the morning.

Q: How did your family adapt to life in Jordan?

WHITTLESEY: I think they did fine. My son was quite young. He was in first, second and third grade there. My wife is a trooper and very tough mentally and so I think she did perfectly well. We were lucky in that Jordan, in the context of other countries in the Middle East, is a pretty easy place to get around. She can drive, a fair number of people speak English, it’s not super dangerous, there’s not a lot of religious restrictions, etc.. A much more open society. So I think they all did fine. There’s enough of an American

population there that they had the Amman Little League, so my son learned to play T-ball and Little League in Jordan. When I look back on my time at the State Department, that to me is one of the real gifts that I could give to my son: the opportunity to….He would have been nine, 10 at the most, when we left Jordan, so I doubt he has specific memories, but the experience of growing up in a truly different culture, Muslim culture in this case, Arabic speaking, different food, different habits, different dress, different climate, everything. Just the experience of growing up there, even in an American household, is, I think, extremely valuable. It certainly was to me, and I think it was for him as well. So I was glad that he had the chance to do that.

We certainly had our security issues there. I can't remember the gentleman's name [Laurence Foley] from AID who was shot to death maybe two years before I got there, not far from where we lived. We were very careful with security, but we were still living in a regular Jordanian apartment building. We'd have an embassy security patrol stop by once in a while, but if somebody really wanted to get to you, it was not going to be a problem. I remember having conversations, because the embassy there had been built--You're probably familiar with it—with Inman standards. I'm trying to remember what bombing led to that evaluation, but there was a major push within the State Department to upgrade our physical security following some horrible attack on one of our facilities at some point. [It was] led by a former navy admiral, Bobby Inman. Embassy Amman was definitely a post-Inman embassy, built from the ground up to be highly resistant to whatever kind of attack folks could think of. I remember people would complain, "Sure is tough to get into the U.S. embassy!" We had to go through this and it looks like a fort and all of that. I remember telling them, "Listen, if you worked in there, you would be very, very happy that it looked like that and you wouldn't care." It just depends on what side you're on. It really did make a difference to me that the place where we were most likely to have a problem had been very carefully thought out to protect the folks who were working in there. So that was good.

I think it was before we went to Jordan that I went to the—I can't imagine doing it any other time—the "crash and bang" course out in West Virginia where they take you on a closed automobile track and you learn to do high-speed maneuvers, safety training with a vehicle, and all kinds of other safety training. That was a lot of fun also. You get in a car and [they say], "You see that car over there? Push it out of the way!" Bam! Oh that was great! That was fun.

We never had anything affect us personally but there was a hotel bombing that took place when we were in Jordan where somebody walked in with a suicide vest and set themselves off in the middle of a wedding reception. [Then] there was a U.S. amphibious ship that carried helicopters and a couple thousand marines or so that came in and docked in Aqaba and they [terrorists] launched a couple of missiles at it from some place in Aqaba. I think it actually ended up killing somebody in Israel by mistake because Eilat is right across the strait there. The idiots didn't know about missiles and they just fired it off and hoped it would hit something and it went over and took out a taxi in Eilat. It didn't bother this amphibious carrier too much. They picked us up by helicopter in Aqaba and

flew us out and we landed on the carrier as it was approaching Aqaba to dock. That was enjoyable.

The job is just so wonderful that I could just go on and on with the interesting folks that you have a chance to meet and talk about. He [Alex Azar] may be the actual head of Health and Human Services now, but he was the deputy back then. The ambassador or maybe it was the DCM [Daniel Rubinstein]—I think David Hale was the ambassador at that point—had a reception for him [Azar] so he could meet his colleagues. I was doing some research on the Department of Health and Human Services, which I didn't know a lot about, and their budget was multiple times the entire economy of Jordan! It was just mind blowing. Here's this one U.S. department that was 10 times the GDP of Jordan. Just extraordinary.

One of the things that we worked on that came onto my turf in Jordan—because of Jordan's unique role as both a U.S. ally but also as an Arab country, and a relatively safe and proximate to Iraq—was a program of the science and technology advisor to the secretary of state, which is essentially an outside scientific person who's appointed to keep an overview on science issues in foreign policy. I think his name is George Atkinson. He had the idea of trying to keep Iraqi scientists engaged in the scientific world, to give them something positive in a world that was otherwise just topsy-turvy for them. So they had meetings in Jordan because it was relatively easy for the Iraqis to get there, and our folks could come in easily. They'd stay in nice hotels, so it all worked nicely as a place to have these things. This Iraqi science engagement project, they called it a virtual science. That may have been a component of it, but it was, "What can we do for the science community of Iraq? We're spending all these uncounted billions of dollars on munitions and soldiers, let's spend a little money to try to work with their scientific folks and get something good out of all this." I believe there were a couple of times when we had those types of Iraqi engagement meetings in Jordan. I remember looking at the picture of Vice President Biden. A lot of U.S. politicians would come through Jordan on their way to Iraq because they could fly commercial or fly U.S. standard military jets into Jordan and then get onto an Air Force C-130 to fly them the rest of the way into Iraq. Mike Pence, who was then a congressman from Indiana, was one of the folks who came through with a delegation. He was one of five or six congressmen. They were just doing a fact finding, "Let's go to Iraq, see what's going on, and get the briefing and talk to some folks." I was their control officer. I think they didn't have any specific scientific goals for their trip, but this is just something that we all had to share as staff of Embassy Amman to take care of visitors. We had a ton of them going through.

So I remember having dinner with then Congressman Pence and a couple of other folks from his group at their hotel in Amman and talking to them about Jordan. I remember a couple of things he said. One made a lot of sense and one I found amusing. I think it must have been at the end of their trip or maybe it was just the end of their Jordan day. They were relaxing and in a jovial mood at the hotel and having a nice dinner, and one of his congressional colleagues asked, "I'd really like to have a cigar. Would you mind if I

lit up?" Pence said, "I insist on it." It was a sort of, "If you want it, I want you to have it." It was a very pleasant and kind remark for him to make. The other thing he said was more on the political side. He said, "No matter what you think about the Iraq war, I think we can all agree that the more we know about what's going on there, the better it is." I mean, you can't argue with that. That's a very sensible thing. We're not going to sort out the pros and cons of it, but coming here, seeing what's going on, trying to learn about it, is a good thing. As a diplomat, that's certainly something that I believe very deeply. I remember his comment and thought, "That's a perfectly reasonable thing to say."

When we put them on the military planes, they got body armor and helmets and the whole deal. They took it very seriously at that point. It was a small but non-zero chance of having something go wrong there. I mean, people do get killed. This was 2005 or 2006. I remember when they came out. They got off of one plane [from Iraq] and got onto another jet and were going to go somewhere in Europe, very safe. One of the congressmen borrowed my phone to call his wife but he didn't get through. So [after] the plane took off—I think one of the rare times I did this—I called back later and just said [to the wife], "Listen, your husband is okay. He's on a plane to Brussels." It just made me feel good.

Q: Absolutely, absolutely. Wow.

WHITTLESEY: Let me think if there's other things that we spent our time on in Jordan and visiting around the Middle East. My family and I visited Oman, but that was just our own personal vacation. I'm pretty sure one meeting was in Kuwait. We had some meeting there and I cannot for the life of me remember what the connection was. I think you get the sense that regardless of the specific topic, our general approach was to try to promote engagement between the U.S. scientific community and the various scientific and environmental communities around the region. I am lost as to what the specifics were for that specific meeting, but I do remember somebody coming from NASA. They had a woman scientist and she's an astronaut. I could figure out her name if need be, but as I'm sure you're aware, the astronaut corps is a very impressive group of folks. I remember it definitely had to do with women in science, so she's a female astronaut. Somebody said, "How did you deal with all this and being a woman? She said, "Well, in three years I got my PhD, I got into NASA, and I got pregnant! [Laughter] I mean this is somebody who's really super-organized and has it all thought out, and bam! Here she is! She's got her family, she's an astronaut. All good.

I remember an emotional scene there with somebody standing up wearing a full burka, one of these ones where you could just see the eyes. She was from Yemen, which was not exactly at the front end of women's rights, and saying, "I'm from Yemen and we're not as sophisticated as you guys are, but we're trying." It was just very touching to have someone stand up there and face the specific shortcomings of her society, having seen what to her must have literally seemed like somebody from outer space. A woman, whose daily dress is a burka, and she's talking to an American woman who's wearing a blue NASA jumpsuit. The cultural gap was just extraordinary, but this was precisely

what we were looking for, to reach out to those folks. We care about you. Yes, science has got this, and there are other people like you. You're trying to create a community. This was what all this work was for.

I remember a meeting in Kuwait with women scientists. It took place in this absolutely gorgeous building that some Arab bank built. Not a private bank but the equivalent of the Inter-American Development Bank or the Asian Development Bank, which was a pan-Arab financial institution. They had poured some serious money into their headquarters building and it was just gorgeous, with beautiful Arab furniture and design features. Very Arab, but just impeccable quality and taste. To meet in there was just fantastic. So I really enjoyed that. [It was] one of those little things that you get a chance to do; even a wealthy tourist would never go. You can go to Kuwait any time you want, but unless you know about this bank or you know somebody there, you're never going to get in there. But because we're working and you have local connections, somebody from the embassy knew these folks and this was our professional community, it literally opens the doors to you and in some cases you get to see these fantastic buildings. In other cases you're going through the Ministry of Health, which is a dumpy, forgotten, dusty place in some anonymous corner of town. It's not always great, but to have a chance to see folks in their real working environment is a very positive one, and a huge plus for me just as a person to get a chance to see all these things. All these little dots of experiences and meetings are the lifetime of memories you carry away from being in the Foreign Service.

Q: This is a good moment. What were you beginning to think about as a next tour?

WHITTLESEY: I went to Guangzhou because I thought I'll get some language training, work in a big country, and be an econ officer. My Beijing tour was less about the environment than it was about, "I want to stay in China." I had been in Guangzhou and I want to do another China tour and there was a job in the Environment Section.

Clearly by the time I went to Amman, I was saying, "This environment stuff is a lot of fun, I like this, I see that there's this job in Amman that sounds great." I will be essentially a solo player. Let's touch on that before we move on from Amman. I'm sure that when I was bidding on tours after Amman, I looked around for environmental stuff. I was very interested in that because my top pick was to be the Environment, Science and Health Counselor in London. We can talk about that process in a minute, but at that point I had thought, "This is good stuff. Look, there's an environment job in London!" The State Department is not either so big or so organized that I could count on getting an environment job, so I had other things in mind, but I think at that point it was clear that I wanted, if at all possible, to stick with that.

Now let me think of what I was recalling…

Q: Being your own boss!

WHITTLESEY: Yes, thank you! Good memory! See? Thirty seconds and it's gone! When I was in Jordan, I had this unique regional job and nobody except me actually knew what I was supposed to be doing. There were people who knew parts of it, but nobody day-to-day was responsible for every minute of my time. If I said, "I want to do this," or "I'm going to go here," my boss who had enough work for three people to do, he was not going to say, "Do you really need to take that trip?" Nah, he's like "Go away, I've got a delegation coming next week. I can't be deciding your work for you." So I had this lovely sense of independence and I had a fulltime FSN—In fact I just got an email from her this morning—Rana Safadi, and so that was a great working situation. I had some travel budget that I alone was responsible for and I made several very enjoyable as well as meaningful trips, and [even] went to Venice one time. We had all of these meetings with the water group, the quadrilateral or the trilateral group, in London or Istanbul, which I had never been to before, so all kinds of good things came with that working arrangement. I really enjoyed that.

When I was bidding to leave Amman and bidding for my next tour, we still wanted to stay overseas. Again this was sort of what's possible and what's not. Being the environment counselor in London…. I was an [FS-]02 officer then, and that would have been what we call a stretch, a temporary promotion or assignment to a job that's ranked at a higher level. I think that was an [FS-]01 job. I can't remember the other jobs that I worked on except for one. I pursued the London job diligently and at some point they said, "We've got somebody else for that. You're out." These things happen. Sometimes this person may have been in Iraq and somebody said, "Hey this guy or this lady had been dodging bullets." I don't have a problem with that. So this is part of life as a diplomat. You don't always understand how these things work out.

I then picked a job to work on counterterrorism issues back in Washington. Nothing to do with environment, but there it was. I knew somebody in that office, so I said "Okay I'd like to put my hat into the ring for that job." They said, "Okay you've got it." We were still in the bidding cycle, and I can't remember the precise timing, but after I had said I would do the counterterrorism job in Washington, I got this call or an email saying, "Are you still available for the London job? The person we selected has dropped out." No explanation given, but "they're not available. "Would you be interested in this?"

I probably said, "Give me 24 hours, but definitely I'll give you a solid answer tomorrow," something like that. If he had said I need to know right now I probably would have said, "Okay." But I asked around and said, "I've already committed"—no sort of. I had said, "I would do this [counterterrorism] job but I'd really like to take the London job. What's going to happen to me [if I back out of the counterterrorism job]? Is this okay?" I asked my colleagues and the general tenor of their replies was, "You should do the London job. Yes, you'll get a minor ding on your reputation for backing out of a commitment, but I think most folks would understand that something else came up." So I agreed, and I talked to the deputy of the mission who's not quite the senior professional, but the No. 2 professional in the mission at that time. He said, "Listen, I can never counsel you to break a commitment, but this would be the kind of commitment that would be the least

damaging to break." So, I took all these different opinions that I got from folks, and some of the folks were like "What are you, nuts? Of course you got to take London. What are you even talking about?" So there were some funny moments in there.

Anyway, I accepted the job and I called up my friend in the counterterrorism office and I said, "Listen, I'm sorry but I'm going to have to break that [commitment]." She was not pleased, but I think life went on, and I never heard another thing about it. I wasn't blacklisted or had some horrible thing happen like being drummed out of the Foreign Service. These things happen. There are always balls in the air. I still remember we were down in the Dead Sea at the nice Marriott having dinner and I got a phone call from Washington saying, "You're our guy [for London]!" I remember my words, "I'm the happiest FSO in the world right now." This was something that I had dreamed about and was so overjoyed to get it. So, I hung up the phone and said, "We've got to get dessert tonight!"

Q: Something to commemorate this!

WHITTLESEY: I was just thrilled beyond words to have this golden panorama of working in London on environmental issues. It was just perfect.

Shall we end there, and then we can just start next time with "Off to London?"

Q: We're resuming our interview with Jock Whittlesey. Jock, you had one more point you wanted to make from our last session before we move on to your tour in London.

WHITTLESEY: Yes, I was recalling a couple of things that I think were particularly relevant in Amman with its heightened issues related to terrorism. This never approached what other people in the diplomatic corps and the military were facing [in other countries], but from my limited experience, two things were interesting.

One was we had a regular stream of U.S. government visitors over on official business. Keeping track of them and helping them out fell to me. At one point, we had an attack during a time when some of our visitors were there. I think it may have been a knife killing downtown where it was Westerners who were targeted. Pretty unlikely to find an official U.S. government visitor down there, but nonetheless, somebody was killed in a deadly attack. My response was straightforward to get the folks back to their hotels. Just a simple, "Go to your hotel room and stay there!" And that took care of it. The Jordanian police presence was probably raised for a while, but the sense was that, "We're going to send an embassy vehicle to pick you up and here's what you should do to protect yourself."

I remember hearing later from someone whose wife was in Jordan [with that group]. He was really appreciative, saying, "We felt like somebody was looking out for her. When you're traveling in those circumstances, that's when you need somebody who knows

what's going on in the area to tell you what's going on." That was a nice "thank you" from that person, clearly heartfelt.

The other terrorist-related thing was we had some suicide-vest-style bombings in Amman. I think the timing was such that the bombing took place a couple of weeks before we had a pretty good-sized meeting with a lot of U.S. government folks coming to Jordan to participate. The DCM, at that point the chargé, was, I thought, quite sensible about it. He said one of our tasks was, "What are we going to do? Are we going to end official travel for a while? He had a very sensible plan, which was to just tell people, "Listen, usually when these things happen they're not followed immediately by another attack. That's no guarantee; it could happen tomorrow or it could happen never. We're going to let you make your own decision about whether you want to come." So, I passed that on to the folks who were coming.

For example, we had 10 or 15 people coming for this meeting and almost all of them said, "Fine, we'll come. I understand what the situation is; I can accept that as something that's uncontrollable. I'm willing to take the risk." But there were one or two folks who said, "Sorry, I'm out. I have a four-year-old daughter. I am not coming home in a box. [I don't want] to open myself up to the risk of getting killed to talk about air pollution in Jordan," or whatever the issue was. That was just something that was on an individual basis. Almost everybody was okay with it, but there were a few who were not, and you had to respect their individual decisions. It was an interesting situational study in personal evaluations of these things. There's not a right or a wrong answer. Some folks were perfectly fine with it, and for other folks, it was more than they wanted to deal with.

So those were just a couple of things to wrap up thinking about Jordan in general. We felt pretty safe in Jordan—certainly compared to other parts [of the Middle East]—and well taken care of. There was no sense that the government was after us or anything like that. I had my wife and family there so we knew that there was a possibility of attacks and other things happening, but that was something we were comfortable with and accepted as part of working there. It's just one of those things that you live with as a diplomat overseas, whatever your particular situation is, and we were comfortable with that.

I hope I'm not repeating myself, but I remember one time we had some congressional visitors or some fairly senior folks visiting. They were important enough that they had a dedicated security team following them; three or four congressmen or some senior people from the administration. I heard that when they pulled out of the embassy's driveway their security team pulled in behind them to trail behind them. They poked their guns out of the car windows as a sort of visible, "You don't want to tangle with us." It made the guests a little nervous like, "Does everybody here drive with guns poking out the window?" "No, they're with us, and it's okay." It made them a little unsettled.

We had an excellent tour in Jordan. [It was] great to have the opportunity to live in the Middle East in a Muslim country to work on Arab-Israeli issues, but I was absolutely

delighted to get the assignment to London. That was both a professional step up because it was a higher-ranked position for me, what we call a "stretch" assignment in the Foreign Service. I was an [FS-] 02 officer and that was an [FS-]01 position for a more senior person than myself. Of course the opportunity to live and work in London was absolutely a delightful prospect to me.

Q: You arrived in 2007.

WHITTLESEY: Yes, it would have been the summertime probably. I would guess August, but I'm not positive.

Q: Did you have to go through any additional training before you went to London?

WHITTLESEY: Not that I recall. Maybe a week or two weeks of European tradecraft or something like that; obviously no language training. Possibly somewhere in there I did a tradecraft course on energy issues. It's possible that was that summer, I've lost track of where that came. The climate change issue was becoming of great importance in our foreign policy. The energy course is where they talk just about the factual aspects of large-scale energy generation grids, coal mining, the whole panoply of issues that relate to energy production and consumption. I probably did it that summer so that would have been maybe a week or something like that. It was more of your typical Foreign Service schedule of leaving post in May or June, have a little vacation, pick up some training in Washington, and then show up at your new post in time for your family to get settled and kids to go into school in late August or September.

For the only time in my Foreign Service career, [we had] a little problem getting our son into the school we wanted in London. And I'm not quite sure what the problem was. We were trying to get him into the fourth grade at the American School in London and they just didn't have room. By the time we had gotten the [State Department] assignment, we were a bit late in the school cycle. Fine for the State Department, but a little bit late in the academic cycle. They just said, "We just don't have the room for your kid." So we found another school that turned out to be fine. He went there for a year and then transferred to the American School in London, which we can talk about in more depth, but which was excellent. So that was a little bit of a hiccup, and one of those aspects of living overseas and moving constantly that you don't think of as being related to diplomacy or the State Department, but as just your family life. It's not guaranteed to go the way you want every single time, and I'm sure it is much more challenging for folks that have special-needs kids, or there's some aspects that require special handling, or there's something different that needs a lot of attention. That can be very tough on folks to manage all that in addition to dealing with the move and things like that.

A final issue was that we sold our car in Jordan because the UK drives on the left and the wheel on the car is on the right. We made the decision to get a car there [in the UK]. Nothing there that's an unsolvable problem, but it just adds to the complexity. You don't have a car for a while. You have to buy one. You have to deal with getting a car in a

foreign country, getting it licensed, and all of these things. so the overhead of moving is a bit of a pain.

Q: Did you take driving lessons to learn how to drive on the wrong side of the street?

WHITTLESEY: No, as you mentioned that, I was just thinking of the lady [Anne Sacoolas] who killed a person [while driving] over in the UK. This is one of those things that most people do fine. I'm sure everybody has momentary lapses and forgets that they're driving on the wrong side and corrects them, but in that case, there were serious and fatal implications. It sounds like a joke, but it's certainly not to that family.

To answer your question, we did not have any special [driving] training. I don't think I was going there for my assignment, but [years earlier] we were just going there for vacation. I remember we flew into Heathrow and rented a car. To get a rental car and go out into Heathrow traffic after a long flight without any orientation was very, very stressful. Fortunately it was no problem, but you could have easily gone 100 yards and had an accident. We made it through our entire U.K. tour without having any car accidents! [It's] solvable, but you do have to pay attention.

As is clear from my description, we just had a wonderful time both professionally and personally in the UK. One of the nice things about it was the location of our housing. We were given an apartment in a very pleasant—I guess you would call it an internal suburb—residential neighborhood in London called St. John's Wood. It was close enough to the embassy that I could walk there in half an hour, but it was also right on the subway line, the Silver Line, the Jubilee Line, so that was close by. By coincidence, it was 200 yards from the Abbey Road crosswalk and the Abbey Road Studio, which is still there. I always tell people that throughout our tour, in rain, sunshine, winter, summer, late, early, there were always people out there getting their picture taken in the Abbey Road crosswalk. It was just part of life in London, and very enjoyable.

My son's school, the American School, was also 200, maybe 300 yards from our apartment. I could walk him to school and then either walk to work or get on the subway for a quick ride down to the embassy, which was in a lovely part of London, Grosvenor Square. The embassy itself was a little run down, but nobody's complaining about it when you're in London! You're in one of the most fun and interesting cities in the world with restaurants, all the historic buildings. It's beautiful, it's safe, and it was just great.

Q: Take a moment to describe what your Environmental Section was like in the embassy.

WHITTLESEY: I think I had what they called counselor rank or title. I was the environment counselor, which was a nice title to have. We had a total of four people in my little section: myself, a full-time office manager or secretary, a full-time entry-level officer who would do a year in my section, and then a year probably in consular or something like that, but assigned to me for a full year, and then a part-time eligible family member, who I think might have been on a 20-hour-a-week schedule; as opposed to

Jordan where I supervised [only] one FSN who was wonderful and got a lot out of her professionally. [There were] a few more hands to do the work at Embassy London, and that added a little bit of a challenge, nothing too dramatic, but a step up a bit in terms of management, supervision, work allocation, but small enough so that I could handle it.

The other part of the job was the potential range of issues, which is so broad you had a choice of an unlimited number of things you could look at; unlike the Political Section or the Economic Section where somebody for sure was going to be looking at the financial services sector. You just don't have an econ section in London without assigning somebody to that. That person comes in, "Here's your job," end of discussion. In my section, our range of issues was so broad you had to assess what's going on at the moment, what the U.S. government priorities are, where those intersect most strongly with what's going on in the UK, and finding some value to the taxpayer for your time and effort. That to me made it particularly enjoyable and interesting.

There was one part of my job that was set and that was to be the permanent representative to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), which is the UN body that deals with the commercial shipping industry. Their headquarters is in London, and the permanent representative is a very nice title without a lot of substantive work. Essentially you are the official go-between with the IMO and the U.S. government, and do things related to certifying delegations, passing documents, or receiving information.

Q: Were we a member of the organization?

WHITTLESEY: Still are. In practice what that meant was the eligible family member [in the ESTH Section] I worked with did a lot of the day-to-day to work on the IMO, responding to requests for information, passing along delegation lists, and making sure the flow of information between the IMO and the embassy and the various bodies in the U.S. government that we worked with was flowing. I would go to meetings to try to learn about the substance of issues as part of my job, but it was a very intermittent thing where they'd have a meeting for a week or perhaps two weeks to talk about a subject. We would get an expert delegation from the United States that would come over to participate in that. I might go to a few meetings, or get together with the head of the delegation to talk about what was going on so I got a little bit of a background.

Q: While you were there, were there any major issues we had related to the IMO?

WHITTLESEY: I think there were a couple of things that were going on. I would say major in IMO terms, maybe not front page of the *New York Times* level, but things that were important to the shipping industry. One was the IMO's management of the climate change issue and having discussions on how the commercial shipping industry was going to respond or deal with climate change. That was something that got a lot of attention. I think the measure was not passed while I was there, but we spent some time talking about what's called an "emissions control area" for the United States. IMO rules allow countries to establish a zone in their waters where all incoming commercial ships,

regulated by size, have restrictions on what kind of pollution they're allowed to emit from their exhaust stacks.

Q: Did that also include noise pollution? The noise of their engines?

WHITTLESEY: No, purely parts per million of various exhaust pollutants.

Q: I ask because in recent years the issue of noise from large liners interrupting the signaling between whales or between dolphins has become an issue. Every now and then you read an article about whales that have been beached and the reason apparently is because they got lost or their ability to navigate using sound and communication was interrupted because of this very loud liner passing by.

WHITTLESEY: That was not an issue we talked about in my tenure there that I recall. I think that is more likely to come into play when you're talking about ships using sonar, particularly military vessels. The other thing that gets people concerned about the whales and dolphins is using acoustics to explore for oil.

Q: Ah, okay.

WHITTLESEY: …Because those are quite loud. That's been ongoing. The science is unclear, but some of the whale species are quite threatened, and nobody wants to see them get pushed over the edge by either military sonars or oil exploration noises. The two issues I recall being the most important in the IMO were climate change in general and this emissions control area in the United States, which is certainly related to it.

As I mentioned, my role was as a mailman and a figurehead but it did give me the opportunity to interact with folks and it was quite interesting to talk to people around the U.S. delegations and in the IMO about these issues and educate myself a little bit. I've mentioned several times that one of the attractive parts of being a Foreign Service Officer is talking to people who really understand these issues and have devoted sometimes decades of their lives to a deep understanding and working with a very focused topic. That's an opportunity that doesn't come along in a lot of situations, but we get it a lot in the Foreign Service. I've always enjoyed that part of the work.

So there I was, me and the Queen! [laughter] We had three years in front of us. We had this very nice range of issues that I could work on, with climate change being the most topical. When I came [to London] in 2007—I hope I mentioned this before, but I'll repeat it just in case I didn't—that was the end of the Bush administration and the policy of the Bush administration with respect to climate change was not particularly popular in the UK and in Europe. We were getting hammered in the press for ignoring this issue.

Somewhat counterintuitively, that turned out to be a real blessing for me because people would find out that you were an environment officer and they're like, "I didn't even know you guys had environment officers." Their expectations were low that anybody

was even thinking about these issues at the U.S. embassy. I remember one time I wrote something innocuous, a tweet, blog entry, or interview, and this columnist had noticed it and wrote in a UK newspaper somewhere, "It's nice that they have an environment officer, and this is something we support!" I just remember the sense that, "Wow, just showing up was good!" The Brits were so critical of us that any kind of engagement actually turned out to be quite positive. President Obama got elected, and of course that just turned the whole climate issue 180 degrees. There was a surge of positive emotion and energy towards solving the climate change issue now that we finally had a president who really wanted to take action. I think that's not completely fair to President Bush but that was certainly the popular view.

When I got there, the ambassador was a guy named Bob Tuttle, who unsurprisingly, was a political appointee. He's a Californian and had worked on President Bush's campaign as a finance person, money gatherer, so way outside the professional diplomatic corps, but two things about Ambassador Tuttle I think are worth remarking on.

One is that personally he's a very pleasant guy. I have a little story I'd like to tell about that. The other thing was that there is an advantage sometimes to have somebody [as ambassador] who is financially and emotionally independent of the State Department and they also know the president. I think in Ambassador Tuttle's case, [he was] on a personal basis with President Bush, and that is a very empowering thing. It has its risks as well, but I saw the power of that. When people would be critical of President Bush for one thing or another, Ambassador Tuttle could respond, "Listen, I know this person. I've spent time with him. I can tell you, he's not that kind of person." That has a lot of power and is very persuasive. So that's the plus side of having a political appointee. Of course he had his own business, something to do with car dealers or multiple dealerships, a very wealthy guy. He wasn't waiting for that State Department paycheck to cover his rent and things like that, so it gave him a certain freedom of movement that other people wouldn't have. Even a State Department person who knows the professional side of it, is much more constrained with their patterns of thought and action than a real outsider would be. It puts some demands on the person, too. [They have to] act in a way that's responsible and doesn't upset the apple cart just for the sake of upsetting the apple cart, but here are times when unconventional approaches are actually helpful.

I wanted to mention that Ambassador Tuttle and his wife were great hosts, not only in a professional sense, but to the embassy community. We had a pretty good-sized embassy there, not gigantic, but probably at least 100 or 150 embassy staff plus their families. The ambassador's residence, the house that he lives in in London, is just an absolutely fantastic piece of property that backs up, I think, on Regent Park. He's got this big house and a huge piece of property. It's just something out of the 1920s. It was someone like Barbara Hutton, a wealthy heiress, who built this in the old days when London was a third the size it is now. She built this beautiful house on this enormous piece of property and bequeathed it as the ambassador's residence, and it's been there since. It's called Winfield House and is not too far from the embassy.

He would have a Christmas party for the embassy staff. This is not a diplomatic gig where you're entertaining other ambassadors and the U.S. diplomats were there working; this was a fun day for us and our families. He, and I'm sure his wife, was really the prime mover here; they put some real effort into organizing this party. I don't know where they got all this stuff, but it looked like something out of Willy Wonka. It was just piles of candy, food, and giant lollipops. It was a spectacular-looking event. Of course the kids are just in heaven! Anywhere they put their hand, there was something good to eat. Cakes and food all over the place; candy and chocolates and just mounds of it. It was a perfect way to celebrate the holidays, and it was typical of this very generous guy.

Another reason why it's sometimes nice to have a little extra money floating around: he was financially capable of underwriting an event like this. People outside the government don't know; they assume this is all government money that people spend. Uh-huh [no]. This is coming out of his pocket. Nobody said he had to do this. He was a kind person who wanted to do something nice. He not only had the inclination, but really put some effort and expense into it. I always remember that about him.

I'm trying to think of a thematic way to talk about my time in the UK. I guess the climate change issue would have to be the one thread that works through my entire time there. Going back to the tail end of the Bush administration, a guy named Jim Connaughton (James L. Connaughton), who was the head of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, was President Bush's lead guy on climate change. He came over to meet some folks in the UK government and they had established a meeting on climate change that I think they initially called the Major Emitters' Meeting, or forum, something like that. That was his idea. President Bush set this up—I'm sure under the advice from the State Department and Jim Connaughton—and the idea was that you really need to get the major players off to one side, outside of the formal UN process, to talk about things. So this was a way to do that, and Jim Connaughton was our representative. I give President Bush credit for getting that process started. President Obama, when he came into office, was smart enough to realize, "That's actually a good idea. Let's not be stupid. I don't agree with President Bush's climate change policy down the line, but he did something that's helpful here; let's keep it going." They renamed it modestly, but it essentially stayed untouched and that mechanism carried forward.

Q: Do you recall who the principal members were?

WHITTLESEY: It would be China, the European Union, Brazil, Indonesia, India, probably Australia, and Mexico, I think, was in there. Let me think who else—Japan. So it amounts to taking the top 12 to 18 economies in the world who would be the ones who are emitting the most carbon dioxide or who otherwise have a major role in climate change; Brazil because of the Amazon and things like that.

One of the great things about London was, when we had meetings they were often in absolutely gorgeous rooms and buildings around London. That just made it so much more enjoyable. One of the major economy meetings was in a lovely place—Lancaster

House or something like that right near Buckingham Palace. It was a government meeting room. It would probably have been some royal residence at some point—I've forgotten the history of it—but it is a lovely building and we had our meetings there.

Q: Was there a set agenda? Were there goals; some kind of long-term deliverable?

WHITTLESEY: I'm sure there were. I'd like to talk about that a little bit in a more general context. In terms of a specific meeting, there was probably something they wanted to focus on. They wouldn't just walk in and say, "What are we going to talk about today?" People were gathering from all over the world to talk, so they had to be prepared. They come in to move something forward, but the general purpose of this meeting group was to have a place where people could have informal discussions that didn't essentially get into the press and were not covered in a formal way. They gave people the chance to talk about ideas and begin to move policy suggestions forward and to ask people, "If we ask for this, what do you think about that?" They were very informal and flexible, and that was the power of it, especially getting out of the very stuffy UN format where you've got 160 countries there. That process is stifling. It has its reasons for being, but it's not as effective for moving forward and establishing consensus. The idea was, if you've got these guys to say "yes" to something, everybody else could say, "Fine."

As I was thinking about our conversation today, one of the things I wanted to mention was that, particularly because of the style of the UN negotiations on climate change, the duration and the complexity of the issues, the international nature of them, these were really extremely arduous processes to be engaged in. I knew several of the folks in the climate negotiator's office, which was led by Todd Stern, and he came in essentially on Day 1 with the Obama administration with the express portfolio of managing the international climate change process. He carried that role all the way through the Paris Agreement, so virtually to the end of the Obama administration. I don't know how many miles he logged with his team, but just the physical and emotional demands of the schedule of folks like him is just extraordinary. I don't think people realize how incredibly exhausting it must be. This is somebody who would fly to China, fly from China to India, go back to Europe, be at home for a couple weeks, then be in Indonesia or go back to Europe. Flying all over the place, not just a couple times a year, but multiple times a month, long haul. Then at each place he'd have intense meetings on very esoteric and technical subjects that would go from dawn to midnight. Just the physical demands on keeping up with this in the context of jet lag; it's an extraordinary burden that I remember Todd in particular exemplifying. The secretary of state was always on a plane somewhere, never getting away from the pressure. You never get away from the issues. There's always something that you've got to look at, things coming at you all the time. It's just an amazingly heavy burden for somebody to bear, especially for years and years, and I deeply respect Todd for his work and I hope he's rested up by now and still feeling good about the Paris Agreement. That was really an extraordinary achievement, and simply wouldn't have happened without his personal contribution. Of course he had folks working with him, but it was not a big group of folks, maybe eight, 10, or 12 people

in his office. He would draw on other U.S. government agencies, the Energy Department, EPA, and so on, but a small group.

Q: This is the presidential-level federal engagement, but individual states or groups of states also began engaging amongst themselves in various attempts to reduce carbon emissions or do other things. Did they come through to meet with their counterparts?

WHITTLESEY: Yeah, as a federal mission we would sometimes hear about them, but it was more of a courtesy. We would not be directly involved. Todd would have been somebody who was well informed on the state and local issues and trying to weave that into his overall approach in trying to assemble a policy that made sense and was effective. The states would have been a big part of that. So yes, the narrow answer to your question was, "We were not involved because those were state level folks, but those conversations were going on." When I was in Beijing or London, those folk were showing up and having conversations.

One of the topics we spent a lot of time talking about was emissions trading, where you are monetizing carbon emissions; putting a price on those and putting a cap on them so they can be gradually pushed down. It's a mechanism for companies that gives them a financial incentive to reduce their carbon emissions. London, of course, as a financial center was a big-time location for that.

One of the highlights of not just my London tour but my entire time at the State Department was getting to meet Prince Charles. He is a committed environmentalist, and also, because of his unique role as British royalty, can pick up the phone and call whomever he wants and get top-level people to at least listen to his comments and to ask questions and have thoughts. He has the financial resources that he personally brought in that were not insignificant, but were a small part of his overall contribution. But what he really brought to the table was his ability to convene and to network with folks. He had a small staff of folks who would work on these things, and one of the groups he put together reached out to what are called the re-insurers, which is a little known but important part of the insurance world where re-insurers insure insurance companies. They are massive players. It's a group of folks who are people who really care about things that happen with a 50-year or 100-year timeframe. They deal with long timeframe infrastructure. If part of London or Shanghai goes under water because of climate change, these are the folks ultimately who are going to have to pay for that.

I thought that was a clever idea of Prince Charles to gather these folks. He convened a meeting and a group of us had dinner at—I think they call it—Clarence House, which is his residence. It was 30 or 40 of us; it wasn't just me sitting at the table with Prince Charles, but I did shake his hand and have a brief conversation with him about the issues of the day. It was a memorable evening and something I won't soon forget.

One of the things you're doing as a diplomat is trying to find interesting folks who are at the center of issues. You're in a new country, so how do you find those folks? Some of it

is institutional, your predecessor can give you a few names, but you're always looking at the newspapers and talking to folks. "Who's doing this? What's going on? Who should I be talking to?" So I found his staff people who were engaged specifically in his environmental work. It was named the Prince's Trust or something like that. They were his group of staff who worked on his ideas for improving and protecting the environment. One of the folks I eventually came in contact with literally had been working for Greenpeace as a staffer and got hired by, or decided to go work for, the Prince's Trust. Talk about going from the left wing to the right wing; going from an environmental NGO to a royal staff member in one step! It made perfect sense as an environmental person, and he was a very nice guy.

I spent a lot of time talking to financial people in London about ways that the financial industry was dealing with climate change. One of those folks [Paul Bodnar] ended up back in the United States. I knew him when I returned to the United States and he ended up working at the State Department and at the White House on environmental issues, I'm sure in large part because of his knowledge of the capital markets and the financial industry. I spent a lot of time going to various finance companies, big banks, smaller operators, who were related to emissions trading. That was something I ended up spending a lot of time on when I was in the UK.

Q: Did any agreement or organization result from any of the talks while you were there?

WHITTLESEY: The closest we came would have been the UN Conference of the Parties (COP) for the climate change convention in Copenhagen. I think that was in 2009 and it was COP 15. Those meetings take place every couple of years and the one in Copenhagen was seen as the first real opportunity to lock down some serious international agreement on climate change. It didn't happen, at least the best-case scenario did not develop, but it was really a very interesting thing to be a part of.

I had a minor role as a control officer; essentially being the escort for a couple of different folks. One was the head of the Council on Environmental Quality for the Obama White House, Nancy [Helen] Sutley. The other was Lisa Jackson, who was the head of the EPA. And that was really extraordinary! It was a couple weeks' worth of meetings, and it was one of these things where Arnold Schwarzenegger showed, probably Michael Bloomberg was there somewhere, and the movie stars were around a bit as well as the grubby government people who were doing the actual negotiations. There were a lot of receptions. Nancy Pelosi came over, a lot of senators, and it was a little bit crazy. Senator James [Mountain] Inhofe from Oklahoma had a press conference and said, "There's absolutely no way we're going to pass climate change legislation." Senator [John] Kerry, who was a strong fan, got up two hours later and said, "We are definitely passing climate change legislation in the U.S. Congress." Anyway, it gave everybody a chance to come and talk about climate change.

There were very interesting dynamics in terms of the meeting itself. The way it works is, the first week is, in general terms, preparatory. The working-level folks set up the

discussions and organize things and the general plan is that the second week the more high-level people come in and try to work out something. Then the top-level comes in on the last day for the photo op and some announcement. I would be remiss if I did not mention again the physical demands of these negotiations. People are up sometimes literally around the clock. They will work through the night and go straight into negotiations the next day. They go to bed at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, get a couple hours sleep, then get up at 6 to get ready for the next day. Just extraordinary, and they do this for weeks in a row! It's just exhausting. I was exhausted and I didn't have anywhere near the demands on my time that they did, plus the intellectual rigors of trying to negotiate all these things.

A real question [at COP15] was, "How is this going to turn out?" Sometimes I guess the end is pretty straightforward and other times nobody really knows, and this was a "nobody really knows" situation. You're talking about thousands of people there; these aren't small. You have NGO people plus the official delegations. I can't imagine what the size of the official U.S. delegation was. It must have been 20 or 30 people and could have easily been double that, so it's thousands of people in these cavernous meeting rooms, plus all the hangers-on like me who are there in a support role. I remember a couple of times wondering, "How is this going to turn out?" And having and listening to speeches. The president of China was there, and gets up to make a speech, which I'm watching on TV, not in the conference room. Because I knew China reasonably well, having worked there, I just remember being very disappointed that this was a real opportunity for China to break out of its inward-looking, traditional foot-dragging approach. It was just more of the same [old] from President Hu (Jintao). I remember thinking, "This isn't good. This isn't what we need here. What we need is somebody to explode and say, "We are going to deal with this, China's in, and we're going to work on it in a serious way." Instead, it was just a business-as-usual approach. That was disappointing.

A lot of this was going on outside of my personal area of contact, but I heard later apparently President Obama literally walked into a room with some of the other leaders and just sat down and said, "Hey, guys, how about let's wheel and deal here. Let's get something done." I certainly give him credit for giving it a try and being personally willing to roll up his shirt sleeves and listen to what other people have to say and try to do something. You have this tremendous opportunity. We have all the top-level people who don't need anybody's permission; they don't have to go back to their capital to get an answer. They're it. So let's make a deal. It didn't quite come off, but it was I think a valiant effort and at a minimum saved the Copenhagen meeting from being like, "Nothing happened." It was an imperfect and partial step forward, but at least it was a step forward. I think President Obama should get a lot of credit for that.

The nice thing about these end of the meeting events is Obama can say, "I'm leaving at 4 o'clock tomorrow afternoon, and we're either going to do it now or it's not going to get done." So they had, at a minimum, a serious attempt at engagement and real negotiations with the top people. That was very positive. Thinking back on Todd Stern and looking

back over the arc of climate change leading into the Paris Agreement where it all came together; this [COP15] was trying to start the car and it conked out after a couple of revolutions. I'm sure it was disappointing to the folks who were there, but if you look back, and you think, "Well, we got to Paris and made the agreement eventually." Copenhagen didn't happen that way, but it certainly moved the ball forward and helped to establish the momentum and the mechanisms for ultimately reaching an agreement, so it was positive.

I had a chance to meet Hillary Clinton. She was secretary of state at that point. She came: just a typical "thank you for your work," a photo, and a handshake, maybe. I got to be in that picture of a very tired-looking group of people with big bags under their eyes, including her. We met President Obama, at that point still very early in his administration and was—I don't want to be flip about this—the new kid in town and the hot ticket. Everybody was excited to meet him. He had all of this youthful and new star power which had been brought to bear here. The excitement and the energy of having somebody—this is with a group of folks whose professional lives are focused on this issue--to have a young intellectual president who was behind you 100 percent was just thrilling to a lot of folks. It was a lot of fun.

As I mentioned, the scale of this meeting was really gigantic. Any one of these individual things would have been a major lift for a fairly small embassy like Embassy Copenhagen, and to have this all dropped on their heads—secretary of state, president, giant international meeting, senators, congressmen, multiple department heads—it was just absolutely crazy. Nothing is going to be perfect under those circumstances. One of the little things that happened, I remember, was when I was going to a breakfast that the ambassador was holding. I can't even remember what the purpose was, but there's a lot of these side things going on to spark conversations between important people relative to this issue. I guess it was either at her house or at the embassy at 7:30 in the morning. There were 20 or 30 people there, and these things are very tightly scheduled as you can imagine. Breakfast starts at 7:30. People have got to be out of there at 8:30 to go to the meeting that was going to start at 9. So there's not a lot of flexibility. They have one thing after another, and their day will be packed like that, and it goes on and on.

So we were there at 7:30 to have breakfast and apparently the cook hadn't gotten the word exactly right and thought it was at 8:30. We ended up having hard rolls or something like that with butter and jam. It was just one of those things. I'm sure the ambassador was very embarrassed by that, but at the end of the day who cares? It's going to happen; these little things happen and nobody really gets hurt, but it was certainly not the way she wanted it to come off. I was just glad it wasn't me who had to take the blame.

It shows you the difference between folks. I did not know that particular ambassador, [and] I didn't hear anything further about that incident, but some folks are really very attentive to those things and when they go wrong, they get angry. That can be very tough on the staff who are also under tremendous pressure, and maybe got misinformed by

somebody else, but they're the one who's standing there getting chewed out. Other people are, "Oh well, let's hope that doesn't happen again." So you get different reactions to these things, depending on the individuals.

Q: Yeah and unfortunately in Copenhagen you can't go out to Dunkin Donuts or Einstein Brothers bagels and bring back 50 plates of something in 20 minutes.

WHITTLESEY: No, the circumstances didn't allow for any kind of graceful recovery, so it was just a shame.

Here are the last couple of things I remember that I wanted to mention about the Copenhagen meeting. One thing was that my watch is a solar energy watch, and Copenhagen in the winter is a pretty dark place. I was inside virtually all the time, and by the end of the meeting, the battery started to really run down on my watch, which it almost never does. It's always on high energy, but two weeks in dark, wintery Copenhagen, inside all the time, wearing long sleeves and a suit cut off the light to my watch.

The last night of the COP, there was a proposition that came up before the group. They can schedule breaks, like, "Okay let's meet again at 10 o'clock tonight." It might have been 8 [o'clock] or something, but, "Let's break for dinner at 7, we'll reconvene at 9 and take this on." The U.S. delegation would head down to our little meeting room, which is plastic tables in what amounts to a tent city in their conference center. Not a lot of teak and mahogany in there; it was all temporary stuff. I remember watching one of the delegation members, just so exhausted, trying to pull in the energy to deal with this one more complex fraught issue after just three hours' sleep for a week and just rubbing her face and her feet, trying to pull herself together. It was a very extraordinary scene.

Q: Nobody told you to pack a Red Bull into your purse for moments like this!

WHITTLESEY: The guys who do it a lot do that, but those things are also awful. People are eating terrible food, they're up around the clock, and you can get through a day with power bars and diet cokes. But if you're doing that essentially full time for years, you can't do it. This was somebody who was at the very end of her physical and mental reserves, but hung in there to try to come up with a practical solution and move the ball forward. It was a very impressive performance by a lot of folks.

The COPs have a very distinct formal ending time and I'd stayed until 8 or 9 o'clock on Friday night. Then I went out to pick up my family at the airport and took them to our hotel. On Saturday I thought, "I'll show you [my family] the place where the meeting was held." We went over there and by the time we had looked around it might have been noon or 1 o'clock in the afternoon. The meeting was just breaking up. It had run all night and I saw two of my friends getting on the little subway car to go down the street to their hotel. They had been there 36–40 hours, something like that. I mean just crazy.

You think, "How are they even standing under these circumstances?!" Just amazing. So the physical toughness of these jobs is something that makes a difference.

Let me mention some of the other things that I did and that I worked on. One of the events that stuck in my mind [that] was unrelated to climate change was a basic science facility that the UK had built on its own. It was what they call a "light source." That sounds pretty simple but this was a very fancy high-physics machine that shot electrons in a loop that were condensed by magnets and used for physics experiments, and also for some very high-end uses of pure particles that they could use for testing things. It was way beyond my capabilities of understanding but I'm sure they made a valiant effort to explain everything to us. This was something, I think it was called the—I think it was something having to do with "diamond" was in the name of this place [Diamond Light Source]. It was a brand-new facility, big science, so I went out for the opening and the Queen came! Certainly one of the reasons I wanted to go was to see the Queen.

As we're hearing now with Prince Harry and his wife, a lot of the royal events are these openings where they go and, "Thank you all for coming out." They make some pleasant remarks about whatever event or facility they happen to be at and support the good works of UK society, whether it be academic, professional, nongovernmental, etc. This was a science facility and the Queen was out there. It all opened up in due course and we were given, I'm sure, a talk about what it was all about and a tour of the place. It was very interesting to see.

I remember watching the Queen. Of course she's done this 50,000 times, no surprises there for her. She's meeting people, and saying, "Thank you," this sort of thing. There was somebody trailing along behind her who was very elegantly dressed and I thought, "That's not Camilla." Here I am like we're in *People* magazine all of a sudden and in a whispered voice I ask myself, "Is that Camilla, Prince Charles' wife? Who is that?" I eventually turned to somebody next to me and I asked, "Who is the lady in the light blue dress? I don't recognize her." She's clearly not staff in the sense of she's not a 28-year-old with a cell phone and a clipboard. Who is she? And the person next to me said, "That's the Queen's lady-in-waiting." "Aaah." It was just the funniest thing because it was as if the history books had opened up right in front of me. This is a phrase out of the 1300s—a lady-in-waiting! I didn't even know that these things were still around! I'm certainly familiar with the term but it had never occurred to me that they still have them, but there she was, the lady-in-waiting. I guess she just hangs around and if the queen gets handed something, she can give it off to this person; not security, just there to be helpful. So it was very amusing.

I guess we're all a little bit influenced by the star power of the royalty. I saw Prince Charles at something like the Royal Geographic Society give a talk one night. I've forgotten what precisely he was talking about, but it was an environmental theme, I'm sure, dealing with conservation or climate change. I just remember what a super public speaker he was. I mean he either really….Maybe multiple factors, but he either had somebody who really understood him and could work with him in a way that he was

comfortable with, but he was absolutely fantastic at speaking in a natural but informed way, and just really interesting to watch. Of course being Prince Charles didn't hurt at all! But his familiarity, his comfort on the stage was palpable. He really did a good job of reaching out and engaging the audience. His ability to do that was very impressive. I think he's sometimes seen as a bit of a stuffy old guy and just a wooden figure. I mean he's not cracking jokes or anything, but very natural and engaging, and it was great to see that.

Another general event that I remember. The International Maritime Organization would have its assembly. I don't think they have them every year; it may have been every other year. I'd have to think about that. I just remember one time when the commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard came over for an IMO meeting. This was their big meeting and he is essentially the big cheese in the U.S. government when it comes to IMO issues, commercial shipping, safety at sea, environmental standards. This is all Coast Guard stuff and he is the senior person so he was the head of [the U.S.] delegation for the IMO meeting. Being the Coast Guard commandant, he had certain resources at his disposal, so he got flown over in a nice Coast Guard jet. He landed, not at Heathrow, but at some other airfield nearby, and he had, relatively speaking, a small but dedicated group of his staff come over to lay the groundwork, do the security checkouts, and all those types of things that come with a senior person's visit. That was Admiral Thad [William] Allen. I don't know if he was the commandant then, I think maybe not, but he was the U.S. lead person on both the response to Hurricane Katrina with the New Orleans response, and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Q: Oh, British Petroleum, yeah.

WHITTLESEY: This is a very effective guy who knows how to get things done at the highest level, so a super interesting person to talk to, also very pleasant and down to earth. So were the folks he worked for. I don't recall anytime anybody really acted like a stuffed shirt and was full of themselves. I don't remember really taking away a negative impression throughout my Foreign Service career of somebody who really rubbed me the wrong way and made a bad impression with them being too arrogant and demanding. Many times it would be the other way, people were accommodating, pleasant, practical, understanding of what's going on, and things we can and can't do. But I certainly remember the Coast Guard folks being very practical and down to earth. This was a very senior guy who's a global official in a sense, and a world leader in these issues in addition to being one of the very top people in our own government, so you want to be respectful and give him the respect that he has earned and deserves.

I remember he was flying in on the Sunday before the meeting, which was going to start on Monday. I was going to go off and spend the weekend with my family somewhere, and I talked this over with his, what we call an advance team, which is his staff who was out there a few days before the meeting starts to make arrangements. They must have either had instructions or reached back to the admiral's staff and asked, "Do we need the embassy guy?" They basically said, "No don't worry about it," which I thought was very

nice. You know if they had said, "No, you really should be there." You count on your colleagues to tell you, "Does this person care? Do I need to be there?" We're diplomats; we care about these things. That's why the president or the secretary goes out and meets people at Andrews Air Force Base. It counts in our business. But in this case the guy said, "Don't worry about it. We know that you love the Coast Guard. It's all going to be okay, so we'll see you on Monday morning." That was very kind.

Q: You've talked about principally environmental issues, but your portfolio also includes health and technology. Were there activities involved in that while you were in London?

WHITTLESEY: That answer is certainly "yes." This is the U.S.–UK relationship. All of these issues across the board are very tight and very high level. The UK is an extremely advanced society with a lot of good thinking and good work going on in many issues. We simply depend on them for a lot, just as they depend on us, so you name an issue in my portfolio, it mattered. Again, one of the nice things about working in the UK is people really did care about these things. We had several meetings on the topic of space interaction between the US and the UK. The head of NASA came over. This is the way it is when you're a diplomat in London. You're dealing with heads of agencies, department secretaries, head of the Coast Guard. These are very, very knowledgeable, experienced, intelligent people who are absolutely at the peak of their professional lives, and it's just a lot of fun to be involved in those conversations and to follow those issues around.

So the head of NASA, a guy named Mike Griffin, came over for conversations with the Brits about space and what's going on, looking for ways we can work together.

The Diamond Light Source that I mentioned was more a technology and science thing than anything else.

I don't recall any global health outbreaks that we had to deal with during my time in London, but one of the more interesting health things that did come across my plate was—literally in this case—the fallout from the polonium poisoning of the former Russian spy Litvinenko; I'm probably mispronouncing his name. He was poisoned in London in a hotel by another Russian spy and it killed him after several days. There was a global search for evidence, first of all trying to figure out what happened to this poor guy, and then managing the issues and finding the polonium in various places around London and on airplanes. It was a true international incident. We had some meetings [in the UK] with health folks from the United States asking, "How did you manage this? What was the thinking here? What was the protocol? What were you trying to do?" This was very typical of the learning process that I think that people maybe don't fully appreciate from the outside that this is going on all the time, not only within the government, but between governments. Polonium poisoning was one case.

The other thing that I still remember very clearly was this. As I mentioned, this was during the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the British have their own set of oil wells out

in the North Sea. I remember going up to Aberdeen, which is the oil capital of the UK. It's up near the North Sea oil fields. I can't remember whether we had a visitor or just had a phone meeting with some folks from the United States who were doing the offshore oil rig management, but I do remember that the folks from the UK were very tense. All of a sudden they realized the enormity of what they were doing, and it was like, "There but for the grace of God go I." They were a very chastened group of folks and very anxious to hear about what we were doing and the reactions. How were we planning to adjust our policies and our technology to prevent this from happening [again]? This was something they cared deeply about and there was no mistaking the gravity of the issue. That was the sense in the room that we [the UK] have really got to pay attention here and make sure this doesn't happen to us. It's different in many ways in the North Sea but the fundamental issue of controlling an offshore oil rig was something that's shared between our two countries. My role in that case was to help have the conversation about, "What do you guys do here? How do you manage?" We were doing a lot of those after-action reports. "What do other people do? How do we stop this? How come this hasn't happened in other places?" "Did we do something wrong in having feedback from other people?" "You mean you don't do annual inspections?" "You don't take this for this [certain problem]?" "You don't have this piece of technology?" It's this information sharing. That was a time where the atmosphere in the room was very focused because of the deadly serious context of the offshore spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Q: Another technology issue that's growing when you're in London but may not have quite matured is cybercrime and all of the issues around that. Was that something you dealt with?

WHITTLESEY: No, not at all. It's much more likely to be something under the FBI. I didn't have anything approaching the [necessary] technical skills. The State Department probably has some interest in those things, but I think the primary cooperation there would have been with law enforcement agencies.

A few more thoughts crossed my mind about work that I had done in the UK. One was going up to a marine research lab in Scotland. A lot of times I tried to mix in an official visit with a family trip. We wanted to go to Scotland and I realized that there was a place, so I would take a day and go over there and talk to those folks. I just remember having a conversation along the lines of, "You're the U.S. diplomat working on science." You get to see the head of the institution. Wow, that's pretty good! Very fun. We were talking about one of the issues of the day: biofuels from algae. There's algae or certain forms of them that apparently contain some natural oil and this can be used as a substitute for gasoline or diesel oil. It's seen as a climate friendly and environmentally friendly. You don't have to drill it; you just have to have a pond full of these things. I'm not doing justice to the complexity of it, but it's seen as a possible energy solution. I remember the head of this institute saying that. This is essentially a sleepy academic center, people dissecting jelly fish and abalone, and doing other kinds of very academic research. The algae people had been there with their little containers of algae and happily studying them and doing science on them for years and years and then all of a sudden, biofuels from

algae pops up! Now these guys are getting recruited by Exxon Mobil and BP. How would you like to come and work in our fancy algae energy lab and make three times the salary that you make as an underpaid Scottish government scientist working in this place? The sense of the spotlight coming on them was palpable there. All of a sudden their little area of expertise was something these giant corporations cared about deeply and they had the money to go out and hire who they wanted. They would disappear and head off to who knows where to continue their work for Exxon and other folks.

I guess we have an analogous position; we have a chief scientific officer. It was John Holdren for President Obama. I'll figure out his official title, but he's the head of the science office [Office of Science and Technology Policy] and the president's chief scientific advisor. The British have a similar position and I got to know two of them pretty well: Sir David King and eventually knighted Sir John [Rex] Beddington. They were both very pleasant folks to work with and I had a lot of contact with them on scientific issues. There was a guy who was not the chief scientific advisor but a scientific advisor, I think, in the Foreign Ministry, [named] Bob Watson, who's also very well known in the international scientific world, and particularly in climate change. Part of your job as a diplomat is to do outreach and tell folks about science or the environment in the United States or U.S. foreign policy on these issues. There were several times I remember talking briefly to meetings about U.S. science and environmental policy and a couple of funny and embarrassing things came up.

I remember one time somebody like Sir John Beddington or Bob Watson was talking to a crowd about the United States and the biblical view that some people in the United States hold related to the history of planet earth and things like evolution. He's saying, "You know there's a museum dedicated to the creationist school of thought and they think that the earth is 6,000 years old." I just remember this audible gasp from the audience! So part of my job is to put that in context for people and to neither ignore it nor explain it away, but to put that in context. "Yes, there's definitely a group of our citizens, this is what they believe," and leave it at that.

I remember another person asking me a question in some form or other about the same issue of having a very conservative, religious group of people within the United States who took a very biblically based view of evolution and science. They asked me, "Is that focused in particular areas of the United States?" I think the clear implication was what we would call the "Bible Belt." I had to think for a second before I answered that question because I guess the quick answer would have been "Yes, the southern United States is undeniably more conservative and has a more biblical viewpoint of these issues than other parts of the United States." But I remember reading even in San Francisco you've got some folks who hold those beliefs. Places like Alabama, which in general would be a conservative place, have a liberal group of folks. So I didn't want to paint anybody with a brush, so I just brushed [the question] off and said…. This was one of the few real diplomatic answers in my entire career. I really tried to split the difference, not answer the question, but without lying about it, I said, "I'm not aware of any formal studies," and that was true. You have to provide information that's reliable for something

like that. You don't want to make a casual judgment that could be an inaccurate assessment of something that really matters to a lot of folks. So better to just plead ignorance, which was true. I remember walking off the stage and Bob Watson saying, "You had to dodge that question," because he knew all about the situation, and he was there listening to the question and heard my answer. He was supportive in an amusing way saying, "You had to dodge that question!"

One of the things I wanted to mention was Energy Secretary Chu talking about batteries. We can go into this in more detail when we talk next time. And being connected with what's called The Royal Society and the person who's the head of that. I'll actually go look up his name. I think it is Martin Rees. He had a great title like the Astronomer Royal!

The final thing that I want to make sure I mention was when the Apollo astronauts came through. If we can kick things off with a discussion there, then we'll certainly get through London and my return to the United States on the next go-round.

Q: We're resuming our interview with Jock Whittlesey as he's concluding his tour in London. Remind us, what year again is this that you're concluding?

WHITTLESEY: I was in London from 2007 to 2010, essentially summer to summer, so some of these events may be a little bit earlier, some a little later in that timeframe. There were a couple of additional items that were high points of my time there that I wanted to mention. I thought they were of particular interest to me personally or of larger interest to the folks who might be interested in my experience there.

The first of these stories was the Environmental Cleaners. Because England has this wonderful, long-lived social structure that has evolved essentially over millennia—certainly over hundreds and hundreds of years—they have a lot of historical events that take place in London in particular. One of them that caught my attention was a parade of the various guilds, which are working societies. This would be the leather workers, butchers, shoemakers, and all of these things, which in England's past were controlled by what amounted to professional associations. I went down with my family and it was absolutely wonderful. Typical British event, which I didn't really understand before I got to England. I think one of the real joys of my tour there was seeing how the British not only have this tremendous history, but are able to bring it into a modern era in a way that is fun and interesting, and hip in many cases. So this parade of the guilds was one of these events.

We were down there watching these people parade. Bookbinders and all of this. They each have what amounts to a uniform, or a formal dress that identifies them as members of that guild, the way you would have Ph.D. professors in their gowns with specific colors and badges. Each guild had its own particular style of dress.

One of the guilds I saw go by, which was probably holding up a sign or somehow identified, was, and I quote, "The worshipful company of environmental cleaners." I thought, "You're talking about my business! Let's have a little conversation about this." So through the course of a few phone calls I found them and was in correspondence with some of their members. They essentially were a trade association. They would have had an elected president or something akin to that and a board of directors, and it probably rotates. But this amounts to people who own companies, who work in the environmental business in one fashion or another. So I went down, and I talked to them about their work. I got a little sense of what was going on. I had an opportunity to tell them about my work as an environmental diplomat at Embassy London, so that was useful.

They kindly invited me to their annual dinner meeting, which my wife was able to join me at their kind invitation. To give you a little bit of a sense of British style, this was a white-tie event. I think it's probably the only time in my life I've worn white tie! I've forgotten the exact address but it was beautiful and historic. Might have been the Lord Mayor's house or something in the city of London—beautiful and historic home or building. It would have been not just a home, because it was pretty large scale. So this was a dress-up night and a fun night. Because London is a very difficult place to drive your own car, my wife and I took a taxi there and then went to dinner. There was a reception beforehand. They had people from what I assume are the English equivalent of Civil War reenactors. These were going back a few hundred years in English history. They were like Pikemen, wearing helmets and body armor from the 1400s or the 1200s, way back in English history. They were holding pikes and swords, etc. We had our picture taken with a few of them and it was just a very enjoyable evening. We had dinner and folks chatted about their work. I talked briefly about my work and learned about the folks who were in this profession. It was a great night and a good example of how the British have modernized their ancient ways and styles of doing business without losing the contact with tradition. I think it's one of the real strengths of their society.

At the close of the evening, my wife in her practical way said, "It's so expensive to take the taxi down here. Let's just take the tube (subway) to go home." I was okay with that. London is very safe and the tube goes right near our apartment. I remember the two of us, me in my white tie and my wife in her long dress riding the London subway and getting home that way instead of something more regal! Anyway, a great night and a real tribute to the very kind and lovely people who invited me to this thing. You know they pay a lot of money for their dues, and were kind enough to allow me to get a little peek of what their work was like and about their society.

Q: Did your return ride get any curious onlookers?

WHITTLESEY: Nothing that I recall. Nobody came up to us or said anything. I think because of the importance of the subway in London, people are a little bit more used to all kinds of folks riding the subway and riding buses. I remember going to concerts at the Royal Albert Hall and there would be a big group of people at the bus stop, which you would practically never see here in Washington, DC, where by far the greatest number of

people would just get in their cars and drive home. It probably merited a sidelong glance, but it was certainly nothing that had never been seen before. Kind of like Tokyo, you see somebody in a kimono or something along those lines, so it was maybe a little bit out of the ordinary but nothing that caused a real ruckus in the tube.

Another—I won't say ancient, but certainly historical—British institution that I had a chance to work with closely in a professional context was essentially the scientific society of the United Kingdom, which is called the Royal Society. They are the nongovernmental organization that serves as a representative of all sciences. They do a lot of work to establish policy and standards and bring people together to discuss not simply the individual scientific issues of the day, but establishing policies and ways of doing business that are positive for the scientific world. They would represent science in larger social debates.

I went down to their office building, which is in downtown London, many times to meet people or to attend meetings. I got to know the president at that time of the Royal Society, Martin Rees, who has two of the best titles I've ever heard. His academic title is cosmologist, so he studies the cosmos. As it was explained to me by someone else, not by Professor Rees, the universe exploded billions of years ago in about half a second. It's been expanding outward, but he's trying to figure out what happened in that first half second. After that first moment they have got the science under control; it's that first little bit. His second title, which I love, is Astronomer Royal, which has a very stately ring to it. I have nothing but respect for Dr. Rees and I don't mean to make light of his very heavy work or his intellect, but to an American, Astronomer Royal was such a beautiful title, just fantastic!

He was also a very down-to-earth guy. I'll talk about this specific meeting in a second, but I remember he was managing a discussion on a particular topic one day, and I was joking with him afterwards. I said, "Listen, if your job as the head of the Royal Society doesn't work out, you could always be a professional meeting manager." He was kind enough to see the humor in that. The president of the Royal Society is an extremely high-level, delicate job that only a few super-qualified persons would be able to handle. He did it with aplomb, but he kindly took my joke about doing something a little bit more down to earth as a meeting manager! A very nice guy.

One of the things that astonished me throughout my time in London and the UK was this ability to see yourself reaching back in history. The Royal Society is one place that I could do that because Sir Isaac Newton, who is a revered figure in the history of science, was one of the original presidents of the Royal Society and obviously a leading figure of the day. [At the Royal Society] You have this direct line with somebody who's sitting across the desk from me, this institution's going back hundreds of years with incredibly distinguished names from science, which even today, hundreds of years after their death, are still well known in the scientific world. Hook, Faraday, and all these names out of history, there they were at the Royal Society. This institution is still alive and vibrant and

contributing to UK society in a very real way. It was a powerful symbol of how British society has evolved over centuries to produce the kind of society and civilization we have now.

The specific meeting that I remember where Professor Rees was acting as the moderator was one that included our Energy Secretary Steven Chu. One of the good things about the Royal Society, they were able to find the right people to have interesting discussions on topics where science and policy and business overlapped. You could hardly do better as a representative of U.S. society than Secretary Chu, who I think was a Nobel Prize winner. I'm not sure, but in any case he's an extremely distinguished and extremely smart guy with a Ph.D. in physics and lasers and ran the physics department, perhaps at the University of California. You just don't get much higher up in the academic world than Secretary Chu. He was the secretary of energy, so he was running this big bureaucracy, which is a challenge to any person. I remember asking him in his past what job he liked the most. He said he liked being the chair of the physics department because it was at a level where he could see changes and make things happen without a lot of difficulty, something which I think is a little tougher when you're head of DOE [Department of Energy]. It was a wonderful morning.

I was there as what we call a control officer to manage his schedule, take care of his transportation, get him to the right place, and provide him with whatever background papers and things he needed. We were in this discussion at the Royal Society. I'm pretty sure it was about renewable energy and these types of things. It was a real treat for me to see a top-level cabinet official able to engage in serious scientific debate with real professionals from heavy scientific fields. This wasn't talking-point-level discussion with people who spend their time behind a desk. This meeting was serious, practical scientists with real-world experience in their craft talking about these issues. It was great to see.

Another thing, and I think we'll bring our discussion of my UK experience to a close on this note, and this was actually an American-related experience. We had a situation where—It may have been two Apollo 11 astronauts, but it was certainly not three. For sure, Neil Armstrong from Apollo 11 had been doing a tour. I think it was a morale-boosting type of event for the U.S. military because he was a naval officer, and he had been visiting U.S. bases in Europe or around the world and he was coming back through London and kindly agreed to—I don't want to seem like I'm not appreciating the importance of the topic, but a prepared presentation about Apollo 11. This would be in the form of an interview between Armstrong and David Hartman, a TV journalist, who was in effect the emcee. I don't remember whether Buzz Aldrin was there or not, but for sure Neil Armstrong was there. I think it was through the Royal Society, but I'm not positive, perhaps it was with another scientific group. We found a place for them to do this presentation and they provided tickets for a certain number of people to attend. I was able to go, and what a thrill to hear Neal Armstrong say, "The Eagle has landed." I mean, it was chilling. That expression is overused, but that's one of the few times in my life when it has been absolutely riveting. They had this conversation going on about what it

was like going down in the Eagle and getting to the moon. You knew what was coming up, and this was one of the situations you rarely encounter where literally everybody in the room was absolutely riveted. [I recall the expression, "You could hear a pin drop." It was just dead silence, with maybe 100 to 150 people listening to Neal Armstrong saying, "The Eagle has landed." It was an unbelievable privilege because he's gone now. This is the first person who walked outside the earth, a real privilege. One of those moments in a diplomat's life where you're dealing with an historic figure and it was wonderful. So alas! [Laughter]

Q: All good things must come to an end. Yes!

WHITTLESEY: So alas, my UK experience came to an end. Tours in London lasted three years and most other places if you wanted to stay an extra year you could. In London that was not an option. It was three and goodbye. That was the sixth consecutive tour that I'd done outside the United States. I'd not worked a real domestic assignment for the Foreign Service in my career, other than going back [to Washington] for language training, which is a little bit different than working there. Also I did not have a clear picture of where I wanted to go after London. A friend of mine, my predecessor as the environment counselor in London, had gone from London to Rome. I can't remember whether he went from Rome to London or London to Rome, but his comment was, "After you go from London to Rome, there's no place to go but down!" So he decided, and we decided in the fullness of time for us, that this was a good time to go back to the United States, get a domestic assignment in, and re-tool and get ready for another overseas assignment. So we went back to Washington.

My job, which was a one-year assignment based on the type of work it turned out to be, was what the State Department calls a special assistant to the assistant secretary of state for oceans and international environmental and scientific affairs, which we abbreviate as OES (Oceans, Environment, and Science). That job took me from the summer of 2010 into the summer of 2011, a one-year job. Special assistant jobs vary from bureau to bureau. I was the only special assistant in OES. Typically bureaus will have two or three. I think the secretary's office has five, maybe more by now because for somebody who works on an around-the-clock schedule like the secretary, you need all of those people and maybe more. They [special assistant positions] are known as fairly grueling hours, long hours, and a lot of pressure because there's this constant stream of the papers and things like that.

I didn't find it particularly onerous in OES. Some of that was due to rookie inexperience. I think I did not understand the job well when I started it. I had not had the benefit of working a previous tour in Washington so I really didn't have a good picture of what my job was all about and it took a little while for me to figure it out. I'm sure I made many mistakes in the course of that. Fortunately that didn't seem to create any long-term problems, but I'm sure other people were rolling their eyes at my rookie mistakes. It was very interesting, as I described to people later, the job is 100 percent logistics and zero percent substance. I had been thinking that my background with OES, working as an

environmental officer would have been a benefit; that somehow knowing a little about the substance would have been helpful, but I think that's not true at all. It certainly made me comfortable working there. I knew some of the people, which was helpful, but in terms of your ability to do the job, it really was about managing time and paper flow and getting people lined up to do things and making sure they came through on time, and doing small things like escorting people to meetings, that sort of thing.

The substance of the work of the bureau was done by the Assistant Secretary Kerry Ann Jones, who had worked in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. She was a Washington hand with a lot of experience in this area, very professional. Our principal deputy assistant secretary was Dan Clune and we had three deputy assistant secretaries. Dan Reifschneider. I think the science person was Jonathan Margolis. [He] was the one I worked with the most, and Dave Balton, the long-time deputy assistant secretary for oceans. The three of them plus the PDAS and Assistant Secretary Jones were the substantive core of the bureau. I was there just to assist her with logistical things and make sure what she needed got done.

One of the events that took place during that time was, I believe, the Deepwater Horizon or some other oil spill or some major catastrophe where there's a response for that. The climate change issue continued to develop and it was interesting to see that from the inside. The thing I appreciated the most [and] that I benefited from the most in that job was the perspective of what it's like to be in a policy-making job in Washington; particularly from working with Assistant Secretary Jones who really had a very clear idea about what being an assistant secretary was all about and what was done and what wasn't done. That was very helpful to me to see somebody operate in that world, who she dealt with, and how she dealt with them. It was very educational, and as I said, I bumped along learning things the hard way. I'm sure I was inflicting some of that on the staff I worked with, but that was a very interesting, different kind of job.

As soon as you start the special assistant job, you're looking for your next assignment because it's only a one-year job. And I found another [assignment.] I did not want to go directly back overseas; that was too short of a turnaround in Washington. I think my son was in the 7th grade when we came back. Yes, we were back for four years, so he started in 7th, so 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th grades. We wanted to time it so he would not go to a new place for his senior year. That would not have been a good idea in terms of managing that whole process of applying for colleges and things like that. So, we decided to stay in Washington a little longer. I got an assignment for two years to work on the Mexico Desk in the Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau (WHA) working as the environment officer on the Mexico Desk. The Mexico Desk is pretty good-sized, as State Department desks go. On any good-sized desk, you always have a political person, an economic person, we had a consular specialist, and we had people working on border issues in particular. We had me as the environment person. There was an assistance program called MERIDA that provided money for training. I think that was essentially a drug-war effort. I think we ended up with a deputy director, and a director and all these folks. I think we were at least eight or 10, maybe a dozen folks. It probably varied a little bit.

The job in the front office as special assistant of OES was an [FS-]01-ranked job. This [new assignment] was back to being an [FS-]02-ranked job, so a little less demanding in terms of responsibilities heaped on me. Any logical person would have done the [FS-]02 job first, and done the [FS-]01 job second. It would have given me an opportunity to get a little more experience with the tradecraft issues of working in Washington. Be that as it may, I did the special assistant job first and then the desk officer job second.

The biggest individual component of my time on the Mexico Desk was as the working-level person from the State Department with somebody from EPA and with somebody from Treasury in an institution called the North American Development Bank. We called it the NAD Bank. This was somewhat analogous to the Asian Development Bank, or European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, but this was a U.S.-Mexico institution that was formed as part of NAFTA. I think it was an endowment, I'm not positive about that, it may have just been regular funding. I've lost track of the origins of that. The two countries formed this institution and its specific focus was development along the border with an environmental focus, because one of the concerns on the U.S. side with NAFTA was an erosion of environmental standards in the United States due to economic pressures from Mexico. This was an attempt to say, "Look, what we're going to do is raise the level in Mexico."

The NAD Bank, which is headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, was a small but professional lending institution, and their mission was to support, with their lending, environmental projects on either side of the U.S.-Mexico border. There had to be some kind of environmental nexus, some demonstrable benefit to the environment. It didn't have to be 100 percent environmental, but there had to be something there. The types of things we would do would be wastewater treatment. In some cases, we would build roads if somebody could say, "Having an asphalt road there will reduce dust." Some of these places just had dirt roads, and you drive vehicles over those things all day and they raise a lot of dust that creates a type of air pollution that can affect folks. So having an asphalt road reduces that pollution, and you get a net environmental benefit. Maybe putting in a renewable energy project in a place that doesn't have any electricity, etc. One of them, I think, was a wind farm—a renewable energy facility in California, and there were other ones where the NAD Bank would put in some money as part of a project to renovate or construct a wastewater treatment plant, or put in a sewer system in a place that didn't have them. These were actually pretty valuable to the people who lived there. I think a lot of folks don't realize that a lot of these areas, even on the U.S. side of the border, are marginal economic entities and poverty is very real down there with water problems, low incomes, etc. They're small populations, so to build a sewage system or renovate their wastewater treatment plant is a huge issue for a small town in rural Arizona or across the border in one of the Mexican states.

We would evaluate these projects and I would work with my counterparts at the EPA and at U.S. Treasury. These were the three prongs of the U.S. group. We had our Mexican counterparts and we would have board meetings which we would support. In my case, a

deputy assistant secretary from WHA was the working-level head of delegation, and we would meet the Mexican counterparts. They would approve proposals and things like that. So that was quite interesting.

I got to see a fair amount of the border at various times. I went to Matamoros once for a board meeting. I went to San Antonio at least a couple of times, and went to Ciudad Juarez, Mexico when they were right in the center of their really horrible violent era with people getting killed on a regular basis, including lots of policemen. I stayed across the border; I think it's El Paso. Part of the structure of the North American Development Bank was a separate environmental evaluation group called the Border Environmental Conservation Commission (BECC). They were headquartered in Juarez. My friends, a couple of American staffers who literally lived in El Paso, would drive over to Juarez to go to work and go home in the evening. This was something they were used to. Most of the staff was Mexican and lived in Juarez, or in the area.

We went down there to look at some projects in the Juarez area. One of the memorable visits we made was to the Juarez landfill. It's what amounts to the city dump, but that doesn't do justice to what I saw, which was a professionally managed waste operation there. We all think of ourselves as being open-minded and progressive on international relations. You work for the State Department; you hope you have respect for other cultures, but I think what really surprised me was the level of professionalism that I saw there. You think, "Juarez, all those John Wayne movies with all the negative images of Mexicans." I remember the simplest thing, looking at pictures of it. It's stuck with me to this day, and this is getting on to 10 years later. I remember (in the photo) the folks in the Juarez waste management sanitation department were very professionally turned out with uniforms and modern equipment and all of this. They had a picture of them somewhere doing a piece of work. It was just very impressive to me.

The landfill was quite an operation. Juarez is a big city, and we had a tour of their landfill. One of the projects the NAD Bank had undertaken was to help support the development of renewable energy from the landfill by capturing methane gas. There's a certain technology and waste has to be managed in a certain way. It's not what people think where you just back a truck up to a hole and throw the stuff off and the seagulls have at it. It's very carefully handled. They put a piping system in and they capture the methane that comes off the garbage as it rots. That gets fed into big generators and runs electricity generation! So we saw this whole thing going on.

I think it was also in Juarez where they showed us their recycling operation where people would sort out cans and bottles that had been picked up for recycling. They had a place where they got old tires. Those get ripped apart. The metal that comes out of our steel-belted radials gets recycled as metal and the rubber either gets put in playing fields or burnt. So, they had this very comprehensive system for waste management. I won't say "very enjoyable", but it was an interesting several hours going through this thing.

I'm trying to mention things that I think we in the diplomatic corps get to do from time to time that would be tough for other folks to do, especially because you're not just looking at it as a tourist; you're sitting there with the manager of this operation who's a 20-year professional and he's telling you about how this all works. This is serious stuff here; these are big issues. You're seeing top-notch professionals and getting it explained to you, with the ability to ask questions. This is a form of education that I found great, interesting, exciting, and worthwhile. It was something that was very important to me throughout my career and was a big part of being a State Department officer.

Q: This responsibility was principally for the border area between the United States and Mexico. There are areas along the border where it tends to be sunnier; there's a desert. Were there solar collectors that you saw?

WHITTLESEY: Wind generation was the one that we specifically visited. That was in Brownsville, Texas. I remember seeing a presentation about another wind farm. The reason I'm laughing is that of course they go through a lot of work to find out where the windiest places are so they can build these things. Somebody had found a hilltop in Mexico where it was just super windy all the time, a perfect location. He had a picture of this dog that lived up there with its master. I don't know whether it's part of the wind farm or not, but the dog had this look of a very windblown animal, as if it had spent its whole life peering into the wind with squinty eyes and its fur blown back from its face! (Laughter) It was just hysterical!

I do not recall specifically going to a solar energy site, but I have no doubt you're 100 percent right that it's a great area for solar energy. You have the technical resources, and you also get into some very interesting diplomacy related to producing something in, not just a state, but producing it in one country and using it in another country. So that's why the State Department plays an integral role here, because there's a special legal entity that has to approve these types of transborder connections, whether it's a water pipe or an electricity connection. They get looked at very carefully. This is something that is not just a rubber stamp operation, but there's a very careful examination of what's going on and the way it's handled in both places. "Do we really need to have this?"

This reminded me that I also specifically wanted to mention one of the utilities—if you will—that works between the two countries is a telephone system. There was some facility that was right at the border to manage this cross-border communication. The very impressive deputy of the Mexican embassy, Mabel Gomez, was in a meeting. It was 4:55 on a Friday afternoon where everybody else was getting out of town, going home and getting ready to enjoy the weekend. She was in a meeting with somebody at the State Department. I remember walking past because the conference room was in glass so I could see what was going on without participating in the substance. I just remember being so impressed with her: focused, engaged in the conversation, representing her country on a very dull and esoteric subject, which she probably could not have been less interested in, but very professional. I'm sure she's gone on to great things from there.

There were some other good folks on the Mexican side who I worked with. The Ambassador Arturo Sarukhan (Casamitjana), who had the reputation of being a prickly guy, a tough customer, was always perfectly polite and pleasant with me. I enjoyed his company and respected him. One time I was able to attend an event with the president of Mexico. I'll be darned if I can't remember his name…

Q: Vicente Fox (Quesada)?

WHITTLESEY: No, after Fox and before Peña Nieto. He was the one who managed Mexico's involvement in the climate change issue, so a real environmentalist. Bless him. The fact that I can't remember his name should not affect the esteem in which I hold this person. It will come back to me at some point or I'll be able to look it up.

He was in Washington for an event that had to do with the monarch butterflies because they (monarch butterflies) live down in Mexico. As an environmentalist, and to this day, I have no doubt that he is a sincerely committed environmentalist, in part because of the climate change issue where Mexico played a really important role.

Q: Felipe Calderon.

WHITTLESEY: That doesn't sound right, I've got to say. But it has so far escaped my memory that—Do you have a list of them there?

Q: Vicente Fox, Pena Nieto, and then Obrador.

WHITTLESEY: Yeah. No, between Fox and Pena Nieto. Maybe it was—Anyway we'll track it down at some point.

One of the things that was going on in Mexico was the horrendous drug violence, and this was a guy who was the head of a government that lost lots and lots of people—civilians, military, and police—in drug violence. This is someone who's used to real tough decision-making. People having to die because of decisions that he made. It really impressed me that he was willing to get up on the stage and talk about butterflies! Here's somebody who would go out of that meeting and be faced with a major crisis with real violence in his society, or something that would face a presidential level-person, and yet he thought it was important enough to get up and talk about the forests in Michoacán and the monarch butterfly. That was very impressive to me as somebody who really had his priorities set right!

Those were the things that I remember from my time on the Mexico Desk, visiting the border region, working on these projects.

Q: So, the two presidents. You have Calderon from 2006 to 2012 and Pena Nieto from 2012 to 2018.

WHITTLESEY: Okay, it must have been Calderon. The name didn't ring a bell with me, but that must have been him. I was waiting for the light to go on, but, even when you told me, it didn't ring a bell, but that was him, because I was on the Mexico Desk from 2011 to 2013 so that all sounds right.

Working on the North American Development Bank projects; getting down to the border area, I remember I was talking about going from El Paso into Juarez. As a diplomat we get used to having a lot of security people around us, armored vehicles, and this type of thing where you are really very well protected when you go into a dangerous area. There was no doubt Juarez was very dangerous; certainly the equivalent of Beirut or Baghdad on a bad day. They had almost open warfare with people getting killed in high numbers, and gunfire in the streets. It was very dangerous, but when I went down there, my American friend from the Border Environmental Commission picked me up in his Honda minivan, and I was like, "This is it?" We spent the morning driving around Juarez, visiting the local wastewater treatment plant, the place where the roads had been upgraded, and going to the municipal landfill. I still remember—my Spanish has left, a lot of it has disappeared by now—they call it a *relleno sanitario*. Like a chili relleno, it's exactly the same word, it means "stuffed." So this was a sanitary stuffing and it was funny to see the word in that context, where all I'd ever heard before then was *chili rellenos*, and here it was as a landfill!

Driving around in Juarez with this guy's minivan, just the two of us. Thank goodness nothing happened. He was obviously comfortable; this was an environment he knew well enough that we weren't going to get into trouble. We were going to innocuous places, but the violence at that point was so bad that you could easily stumble into something. If you'd just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, you could easily get into trouble. Obviously nothing happened and it was a perfectly lovely day, but I remember that initial feeling, "Where's the armored car?" Anyway, we had a great time.

I didn't know a lot about Mexico and this gave me an opportunity to visit several times. I went to Mexico City to meet foreign affairs agencies and other folks related to the North American Development Bank. We had NAD Bank board meetings and went to other professional meetings in Hermosillo. I'd never been to El Paso before. I don't remember if there was a BECC connection or if this was just the U.S.-Mexico joint initiative, but my role was tiny, but still involved in it in a small way. We were engaged with all groups, the border patrol because there's a park down in Texas called Big Bend, literally from a big bend of the Rio Bravo. What do we call it in English? The river that flows along…

Q: Not the Rio Grande?

WHITTLESEY: The Rio Grande! Mexicans call it the Rio Bravo. We created a project between our two governments to allow people to go back and forth there at the park and visit. It was a cross-border park. This allowed people to go across legally and visit the other side. It's very, very isolated, which is why this worked. I'd be curious to go back

and see if it's still in operation, but it allowed people to go to an ATM (automated teller) and do it autonomously. It wasn't like somebody from the border patrol or the immigration was there. They had a little machine where you could slide in your passport or something like that and get approved to go across the border. That was nice, so I had a chance to visit Big Bend National Park. They have a village-size place on the Mexican side that survives by giving rides to people on the river, selling souvenirs, selling lunch and cold drinks, etc. I'm guessing there might be a few dozen people, but there they were and this creation of the cross-border park really meant a lot to them in terms of livelihood. To go down there and visit the park—We had a little ceremony to kick this thing off. Some big dude from the border patrol was there to make a short speech. It was quite interesting. So that was my two years on the Mexico desk.

Q: Just a last quick question. All of these issues related to environment, were any of them also related to the other parts, the science or the oceans?

WHITTLESEY: There was one ocean-related issue that I will talk about in a second. I'm glad you asked because I wanted to mention it; probably a couple of ocean-related topics. I don't think I got super-involved in it, but we have a fairly robust relationship with Mexico on health issues. I think there's a dedicated part of the U.S. federal health bureaucracy that is down there and deals with border issues. In some places, you have these two societies, in large numbers, living right on top of each other. You really have to be in good contact with each other, and this is one of the things that the government can do. We're (in 2020) dealing with this outbreak in Wuhan. Picture it if El Paso was 100 yards away from Wuhan. That's the situation you get along the border. You have these multiple paired cities: Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, Brownsville and Matamoros, and San Diego and Tijuana. I visited Tijuana for a meeting one time. Had a lovely visit there.

Popping those myths of Mexico. I don't really want to describe what those myths are, but they are not positive. They're sort of an old-time image of Mexico in the American mind. To go to a place like Tijuana where they had super restaurants, good infrastructure; a really enjoyable place to spend some time, meet folks who live there, well educated, professional, friendly, all you could ask for in a professional colleague. That did a lot for me personally, and I'm ashamed of my ignorance. This was an opportunity to get a real picture of what the place was like. There's just no substitute for it.

So, on the health thing, I certainly remember some meetings about that but I don't recall any particular flare-ups that happened there. I think there were some issues related to transfer of samples. I don't remember whether this was in China or in Mexico. I'll describe the issue in general and probably applies in both places, but…

Certainly with China, but I suspect also in Mexico, one of the things that the scientists are always very interested in is getting samples of things. At the same time, no country wants live infectious diseases floating through its mail system! So, these things are very, very carefully examined and controlled. Sometimes all of those elaborate controls present a problem. There are people of good faith on both sides who are trying to say

"Let's see if we can make this work a little more easily, a little faster." If we ever really get an emergency, this is something that has to happen with FedEx speed where overnight is probably as much time as you want to spend. The idea of something taking three weeks to clear through customs is just unacceptable when you've got a fast-moving health emergency.
I'm sure we worked a lot on that, and definitely in China where they were just getting used to the fact that they're not just an isolated country anymore, they're part of a global system. If you want to benefit from the work that other people are doing with controlling global health outbreaks, you've got to play this game too, and that means you have to be willing to send us samples. You can't just say, "Oh we're sorry, we can't do that," or "We haven't done this before; we don't know how." This is a problem that has to be solved. That's something that goes on I suspect all the time in the health world, and is a good example of where diplomacy and health overlap.

There are times when you use diplomacy, or where you're using science or environment as a way to engage with people, like the Arab-Israeli issue: "Let's talk about water." Everyone cares about that and it will benefit everybody. Or animal conservation, things like that. Everybody wins; there's no down side to having a clean environment. There's no down side to having biodiversity, etc. So you're using that as a field of engagement and hoping that leads to broader diplomatic understanding between your two countries. While we talk about environment now, we can actually work together. What a surprise!

And while we're there, why don't we talk about something else. It's the idea that this kind of spreads out. It certainly has worked for us around the world in many places. You could not get a better example than our relationships with Canada and Mexico where, I think, unless you have been in the business or somehow connected with the technical issues there, you don't realize how carefully and deeply these countries are engaged with each other. It's very deeply worked out in a lot of very specific issues that people don't think about. It's not just stamping passports at the border. There are times when you're using environment and health to establish an arena for engagement, but there are other times when you're using diplomacy to actually build for the sake of health, or for the sake of the environment, not for the larger diplomatic mission of engagement with another country. So, the health issues there were certainly one of those, where you needed country-to-country engagement for some very specific outcomes in the health sector.

I'm trying to remember if we had any kind of pure science issues. I must say I do not recall those but like a lot of things, they probably go on unnoticed if you're not related to that particular topic, or if there's not a problem there. The State Department wouldn't get involved. A lot of that would take place under academic auspices, and you would have university-to-university exchanges, etc. These are examples of how our two societies engaged. I certainly toured universities in Mexico City and other parts of Mexico and there was a lot of exchange and engagement with U.S. universities.

Q: You were going to talk about the oceans.

WHITTLESEY: Yeah. The ocean and particularly the Gulf of California, the Sea of Cortez, and the poor vaquita. It's one of the examples where we worked with the Mexicans to try to preserve the vaquita, which is the smallest member of the porpoise family. It's a sea mammal, so it is air-breathing. I hate to say it, I suspect that they're going to go extinct within just a few years. Their numbers are tiny, in the dozens maybe, which is really too small to sustain any kind of population. So I'm afraid that there's no happy ending here. There were typical animal conservation issues of loss of habitat, human encroachment in their areas, and in particular fishing not for the vaquita itself, but for a fish called the totoaba, which lives in that same area. The vaquita ONLY live in the Gulf of California, so they have a very limited range, and this is the sad story when you're in a very specific range, if something happens there, that's it. There's no backup plan. There's no other population that will carry on the way it might be with a blue ocean whale. These little porpoises were killed, essentially, by accident. They get caught in fishing nets and they drown. People illegally fish for the totoaba, which is itself a protected species, not as threatened as the vaquita. The totoaba's swim bladder is sold as a food delicacy in China.

Q: Of course! [Laughter]

WHITTLESEY: It was another instance where the cultural tastes of a group of people thousands of miles away are effectively wiping out this poor animal. This got a lot of attention from the U.S. government and from parts of the Mexican government. It's a very difficult problem to solve. You have legitimate fishermen, you have folks who illegally fish and want to continue to fish illegally, and you have this demand. Again these are poor people. Their options are limited; they're living in a very isolated part of Mexico. This is really one of the few ways they have to make money, so I think you've got the parameters of the situation.

We would have meetings about the vaquita. "What can we do? Can we educate people in China? Can we work with Chinese customs? Can we strengthen law enforcement in the area?" All of these things were not just discussed, but real people on the ground were trying to make things happen to save this animal, I think, with little success. The issues were just too intractable and intertwined and the population was just too delicate and small to be able to take the pressures that were being applied to it with the illegal fishing. I suspect they're not long for the world.

But I do remember having a conference call with somebody—this typical faceless bureaucrat—somebody in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) fisheries [unit] who was deeply involved with the vaquita. I'm sure this is going to be emotional for me as well, but I remember on these conference calls this person talking about the situation and describing what the vaquita's situation was, and becoming so emotional and having to pause and gather her composure to continue to talk about it. It was clear these lovely animals were going to go extinct, and this was someone who really cared about them and devoted a large part of their working life to

trying to protect them. The feeling that this was for naught, that it was going to all be in vain in the end. This was very tough for this lady to take. For those folks who think that this is just a day job for people, that is in many cases not the case. The folks within, and not just on this issue, but in many different situations, the federal employees are personally and emotionally invested in doing their jobs well and trying their best to reach a good outcome. In this case it was not going to happen, but there are other cases where people have really put a lot of personal effort above and beyond the simple, "Come in and do your job and go home," kind of thing. It really matters to them and they've worked hard to achieve a good outcome, and 99.99 percent of the time the average citizen in the street is not going to know about that. But those folks are out there. It's good to have them working on it.

Q: Is it the most endangered marine mammal?

WHITTLESEY: Yeah. Another issue that came up a little bit—more of a law enforcement issue—was Mexican fishermen who would come into U.S. waters to fish for standard food fish. It was illegal because as Mexicans they're not supposed to be in our waters without a fishing permit. It's not like the vaquita where you had a protected species of the totoaba. We had some conversations about that as well, and some of the places in Texas that are in the gulf region along the border, the Mexican fishermen would be in fairly small boats, but they rush in and try to get their nets down and get a haul of fish and rush back before the local law enforcement chases them away. I'm sure that's still an issue.

There were other things I'm sure that happened in my time there, but those were the things that I remember from Mexico.

Q: The only other question was, unlikely you would deal with it, but phytosanitary laws?

WHITTLESEY: No, I did not, but you remind me of another thing, somewhat related to that. The phytosanitary you're referring to would be standards that are established for shipments of grain or food. These things are very carefully done by people who are specialists in the area. Highly technical and has to do with a certain percentage of this bacteria or this spore and if it's okay to bring this into our country or not. I think USDA, the Department of Agriculture, has the lead on that. I was familiar with that in theoretical terms, but no practical work.

Your question reminded me of a project I worked on. Let me see if I can get the name right. It was a similar type of issue, and it had to do with a parasite that got on cattle. There is a significant amount of cattle that move across the U.S.-Mexico border. I think in many cases from Mexico into the United States. The reason I was snickering was because it has something to do with the name. It's a screw worm or something like that.

Q: Oh. Sounds bad enough.

WHITTLESEY: Yeah, and if you're a cow, they're pretty ugly. I don't think it's going to kill anything. I don't remember what they do, but it's considered a parasite, something that the agriculture authorities want to control. They also want to allow the trade of cattle between the United States and Mexico, so as I recall, it had something to do with an inspection facility that was right on the border, and this was the same situation. You get into what sounds like very nit-picky legal issues, but people care about this. Who's going to go inspect those cows when they're still in Mexico? Are you talking about a U.S. agriculture official exercising U.S. sovereign law in Mexico? Let's think about that a little bit. Can a Mexican official come into Texas and make a determination about something that affects economic issues? So these things cut both ways. I think it had to do with what amounts to a limited permission, a license to have inspectors come across the border and inspect the cattle and say, "They are free of the screw worm."

It always got a laugh when we would bring this up in staff meetings and things like that because of the "screw" word in there. It's one of those things that's funny if you're not involved in it, [but] if it's your cattle that have it, then it's a multi-thousand-dollar investment. It becomes a lot more serious. We did a little bit to facilitate and allow the inspections to take place and to work out the ground rules under which those could take place. Those have to be very carefully vetted by legal officials on both sides. It's something [for] which the benefits are pretty clear to both sides, yet still gets a very careful look. You're exercising your sovereignty to protect the rights of your citizens. This is people's jobs, and just applies in these very special circumstances.

I remember we also had a conversation along a very similar kind of line about importing Mexican tomatoes. It's another massive industry. Is it a fruit? Is it a vegetable? Whatever they are, tomatoes are ubiquitous in the United States. They're a year-round commodity and Mexico supplies a lot of those. You can't just grow any old tomato wherever you feel like it in Mexico and ship it up. I couldn't begin to describe, certainly at this point years later, the myriad rules about how many and when and under what circumstances, etc. [It was] very carefully controlled. I think part of this was the Mexicans wanted a more open market and there were tomato growers in Florida who were just adamantly opposed to this. So we were in one of those awkward situations where something that is beneficial to many Americans, getting good inexpensive tomatoes from Mexico in February, that's a good thing. But talk to somebody whose company raises tomatoes in Florida, and they have a different viewpoint. So we had some internal issues that had to be sorted out before we even began to deal with the Mexicans. My role in this was small. My knowledge of them is limited, but it was a good example of how these things are complicated. You have lots of people involved, even for something that seems as simple as getting a tomato into the supermarket! There's a lot behind that.

I'm still groping for any scientific things that we might have worked on. There was one energy-related issue. I just remembered this at this moment, but there was a nuclear plant in Mexico that was using what's called highly enriched uranium.

Q: We've heard of highly enriched uranium; more in Iran than Mexico. Please continue.

WHITTLESEY: This was all perfectly above board with Mexico. The technology was built there to produce, I think, commercial nuclear energy. I think it was more than just a research reactor. I think it was big enough to be a commercial reactor, but using highly enriched uranium, which according to the standards of the day, was perfectly acceptable. It was still carefully managed by the United States, but Mexico's a close ally. We're not worrying about them making bombs. But policy and the global situation evolved over decades and it became clear that highly enriched uranium is such a dangerous item that even in the hands of reliable and trustworthy folks like the Mexicans, it represents a danger to everybody to have that in a nuclear plant where you might have a few security guards and a fence, but a determined attack would certainly overwhelm it. It could lead to the theft of this and using a dirty bomb or some other horrible outcome for us with the risk being too high.

Over the course of years and years, the United States and Mexico worked together to figure out what to do with the highly enriched uranium, what to do with the nuclear plant. I think the outcome was that it had to be converted through some scientific, technical process to use low enriched uranium, which is considered far less dangerous in a nuclear proliferation context. But the highly enriched uranium still had to be retrieved from Mexico and brought back to the United States where it would be put under lock and key in a very secure place. The idea is you're taking this stuff out of the larger more general context and putting it under a high-security environment where you don't have to worry about terrorists coming in. Put it on an army base somewhere where nobody is going to fight their way in to steal it.

So we worked on the arrangements, the exact same process. Everybody wants it to happen, but you're talking about something that's extremely dangerous, even when being handled by folks who really know what they're doing. You're transporting it over long distances. How? Under what circumstances? When? A lot of details. You can't have anything go wrong in the process. You have to think it out very carefully in advance.

The one thing that I remember about this was the woman on MSN, Rachel Maddow, went down to do a story about this very situation. I guess if you got on Google or went to her website you could find Rachel Maddow going to the nuclear plant in Mexico. There was a brief clip of her talking to my friend from Embassy Mexico City and then driving around and talking about nuclear fuel. It was one of those situations where we bump up against the celebrity world, and we still find that amusing in diplomatic circles. "There's Bill with Rachel Maddow and he's on TV!" Sort of high-school level sense of excitement there. "You're famous!" Of course Bill was a serious guy doing serious work and we were just teasing him. It's still a reminder that this is somehow magnetic for everybody. Getting on TV is always a context where you get special attention.

That reminds me—going back to Amman—on this very point. Just one brief story there. My successor as the environment officer in Amman got to spend something like three

hours alone with Angelina Jolie [Laughter] at Amman airport because Angelina Jolie was flying into Iraq on some U.N. kids' mission or something like that. She was transferring planes in Jordan and had to wait for the plane. So there's my friend! He's in the VIP lounge, just him and Angelina Jolie chatting. I'm like, "What happened?" He said, "It was very down home. We talked about our kids and school and stuff like that." She's this international movie star. I never had anything quite that glamorous happen to me. I did meet Prince Charles in the UK. That was good. But these things sort of happen by accident from time to time throughout a career and every once in a while you're brushing up against somebody who's really high profile. I always teased him about getting all this time with Angelina Jolie.

So, Bill was on the Rachel Maddow show talking about nuclear power and the highly enriched uranium. I think that all got worked out. Again one of those things. Nobody's ever going to hear about it except the folks who watched Rachel Maddow and her show, but it just has to go right. But if somebody messes up, or if they don't think these things out in advance, it can be catastrophic for a lot of people.

Q: Oh yeah.

WHITTLESEY: One of the things I do when I'm thinking about your questions, is literally thinking about the map of Mexico. Visualizing in my mind where I've been, under what circumstances, and what happened there; what the issues are in that particular place, but I think we've covered Mexico pretty well.

Towards the end of my time on the Mexico Desk I was beginning to look at next assignments. As I think I've mentioned a couple of times, you look at these from a professional standpoint. What's going to be good for me professionally? Also what would be fun, what's interesting, what would you like to do? Also what's your family going to do?

Q: Absolutely.

WHITTLESEY: I think by the time I was in the bidding process at the end of my Mexico assignment, the State Department's real heavy demand for people to go to Afghanistan and Iraq had dropped off, but that was certainly something that my wife and I talked about, just as a couple. I'm sure a lot of other Foreign Service families had the same kind of conversation. They may not have come to the same conclusions that we did, which was that I had no particular interest in going there. I certainly didn't want to be apart from my family. I was worried about the psychological impacts on my son in particular because at the point where the demand for people in Iraq and Afghanistan was at the highest, he might have been 7, 8, or 9 years old. That's very problematic as far as I'm concerned because you're not there. The child knows enough to know that you're in a dangerous spot, but they don't know enough to be able to deal with the reality that it's highly unlikely anything would happen. With all our American diplomats in Iraq and Afghanistan in very tough circumstances, I think we might have lost under ten people.

God bless them for giving their lives. But the vast majority of folks came and went home without getting hurt, but that doesn't work for a 9-year-old. The kind of stress from. "Oh what's on the front page? What's on the TV today? Well, another bomb went off." They're going to be thinking, "Did Daddy get blown to bits this afternoon and I haven't heard about it yet? That was not something I was willing to undertake. Other people, different circumstances. I respect their decision that they wanted to serve there, but I did not.

When we were getting ready to move on after the Mexico Desk, one of the options that came up was to go back to China as the deputy in the Environment Section there. This actually looked like a great opportunity, and in retrospect, it was. My wife's not from China but she's Chinese; she speaks Chinese, [She was] 100 percent comfortable there. We had done two tours there before so we knew a lot of the folks. We knew the ground; we knew the issues. They had super schools there, so my son would be finishing up high school there. That was something else we wanted, where there was enough time that he would have a solid experience and not just get yanked out of school after his junior year and thrown in for his senior year, or something else where he would have to leave overseas and come back. It was great timing with respect to going over there.

Maybe I'll talk about that a little bit and we can bring our conversation to a close with respect to the discussion about what motivated me to go back to China. As a human being, but also because of my experience of being a diplomat in the State Department, I guess I'm a real believer in international engagement: being on the ground and face-to-face engagements and the actual experience with other cultures and other places. That's something I think is very deep. I almost can't imagine you can do a lot of work in the State Department if you didn't believe that that was something really worth your time and effort. I think that's a fundamental driver for a lot of us who end up working in (diplomacy). We're attracted to the international sphere maybe because it's a bright shiny object and has lots of fun, new things in it, but also because of the sense that this is something that's worth doing. There's a lot of exciting and interesting challenges about international life. I hate to put this in such stark terms, but having your child live in that environment, I think, not only gives them certain innate characteristics, it also develops personality characteristics in them. Here's the bare-knuckle version of this. When they're applying to school, it gives them something to distinguish them from every other kid. Graduating from high school in Beijing is an instant eye-catcher on a college application. The same kid with one less year of experience in China but graduating from George Mason in Falls Church, (Virginia) would just slide by. "Oh, so you've lived overseas a little bit!" But graduated from high school in Beijing? That's a landmark milestone in a person's life that will stay with him forever.

My son was down (visiting us) for Christmas. He was in an interview process at his college—this is several years later—for something he wanted to do. He's in the Coast Guard Academy so he was interviewed by a group of Coast Guard officers, senior folks, commander, captain, that level. These aren't just lieutenants who have been in a few

years. They were very taken with his international background and wanted to talk about it. So this is something that we could do for him.

In addition to being a very high-quality education, this is—I wouldn't call it a dirty secret, but certainly a secret of the State Department—when we're overseas, the international schools are often really top quality, or at least in many places. I won't say everywhere. If you go to any big city in Europe, Paris, London, Rome, Berlin, Norway, these are all going to have top-quality, American-curriculum schools, and the State Department pays for that. My son got to go to the American Community School in Amman, which I wouldn't say is world class, but it's certainly the equivalent of a good public school here in the United States. But the American School in London, and the International School of Beijing are top-notch international institutions that provide an education that I think is just—especially because of the international aspects of it—simply unavailable in the United States. The equivalent would be Phillips Andover, Choate, extremely demanding and expensive private schools in the United States or maybe something like the magnet schools like Thomas Jefferson, very top level.

The great thing about having your children in the international schools is they're living and working and studying and having fun with kids from Korea and Norway and Germany. This is just the way it is! You go down the corridor of my son's school at the International School of Beijing and they have the flags up from all of the different countries that are there. This is a real melting pot, but it's very natural for them. So that was a huge plus that we could really approach the Beijing assignment with. This was such a solid positive outcome that I would have done almost anything to get him back into it. This was such a good arrangement for him, and also I loved the fact of going back to the Environment Section at Embassy Beijing. I knew what was going on there, I knew a lot of the people. So that was all very positive and I was delighted when I got the job.

Next time we can talk about the lead into that assignment and heading over there. So, we're in 2013 at this point and my Mexico Desk assignment wraps up and I start the entry process for Embassy Beijing.

Q: Excellent! Okay.

Q: We're resuming our interview with Jock Whittlesey as you're ending your time in Taiwan and going on to China, is that right?

WHITTLESEY: I think we had been talking about my Mexico Desk experience. We're in the time period where I'm starting to think about my onward assignment during the middle of my Mexico Desk experience. The issue of my follow-on assignment came up and that brought to mind one of the things that I did during my time on the Mexico Desk, and that was to take what the State Department calls early-morning Spanish, because my thought was, "Well, I'm working on the Mexico Desk, I'm working in the Western Hemisphere Affairs Bureau. It would be a good idea, not only for the current assignment

to learn some Spanish, but also in case there was an upcoming assignment, that would give me some options where I had some language training." Even if my Spanish wasn't perfect, it would be a step in the right direction and a sign that I was interested in and willing to put in some effort on my own.

I can't remember the length of time I studied Spanish, but what I do remember, at last the way I did it, the timing was horrible. I'm not a morning person to start with, and the early morning Spanish class at the State Department, I think, was basically every day. We might have had at a minimum three days a week, but certainly three or more days a week and it started at 7:30. And given my other schedule commitments with the family at home and things like that, I quickly found that it was just impossible for me to study at night when I got home. That just did not work. I would fall asleep just instantly. So what I ended up doing, also because I was riding my bike to work from home, I would get up around 4:30 a.m., have breakfast at home and ride my bike in. Maybe I would leave a little bit after 5:00 a.m., 5:15, get into the building maybe 6:15 a.m. or thereabouts, take a shower. and go upstairs and study for an hour from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. at my desk with all the computer facilities available to me there, and then go to class.

So in terms of time management, that was very productive, but it was also very tiring. But I was happy to do it, and one of the other things I remember was at the end of the class you take a placement test. And I remember you take a break in the middle between the time where you're doing conversation and when you start doing reading. I went outside and I just happened to bump into one of my Chinese teachers at FSI, because this was over at FSI. I was so intent on the Spanish I had to tell the person, "Please, don't speak to me in Chinese. Don't say a word. I'm right in the middle of a test. I cannot mess up my Spanish with whatever language skills I've got up there for Chinese." So I remember that distinctly. And I also remember trying desperately to get my Spanish to a reasonable level. The instructor used a lovely phrase to describe my Spanish. She called it, "Speaking English in Spanish," which was a clever way of saying that I was basically using English grammar and syntax and word order and things like that, so a native speaker could clearly tell that this was very elementary Spanish being spoken!

I tried for a couple of jobs in WHA, including one in Peru that I didn't get, so my Spanish sort of went back on the shelf when I got the job in China, and I had to kind of reactivate my Chinese. We'll talk about that in a minute, but there were a couple of other things that happened while I was on the Mexico Desk that I thought were interesting and worthy of discussion in our conversation.

As I've mentioned a few times, as a Foreign Service officer you get the chance to meet some very interesting people. Two different individuals that I met came to my mind in terms of remembering this assignment. One is a lady named Ninfa Salinas. She is the daughter of an extremely wealthy Mexican man who's an industrialist type. I forgot where he made his money, but well into the billions, so very, very wealthy. She was an environmentalist, and became a senator in their congress and was visiting the State

Department, so I met her a couple of times. She was a very pleasant lady and I enjoyed listening to her talk. She gave a talk over at Georgetown. Something was going on over there. It just made me think of what it's like to be a billionaire's daughter; all the good things, all the bad things about that. Very interesting. But she was a very pleasant and well-educated person and, I think, truly committed to environmentalism. So that was one of those situations where you definitely want people to share your interests and your views. You want to work with them, and so we had a chance to work together a little bit with her.

Another time that I was really impressed with—I've forgotten the young guy's name—I met a Georgetown student from Mexico who was the head of the Georgetown University Mexican Student Association. Essentially the Mexican kids would get together to relax and meet each other and I guess speak Spanish and talk about home and things like that. We at the Mexico Desk, I arranged for an invitation. They came over for a reception in their honor, just to meet some of the folks from the Mexico Desk. So we had a chance to talk to them about our work and to meet them and hear what kind of people they were. Very interesting. One of the things that really just totally amazed me, especially compared to what I think of myself in college or other college kids, the guy who I had originally contacted who was the president of this association had brought a gift to us to say thank you for this reception. It was a handmade china plate in a Mexican style and said something like, "Thank you to the State Department from the Georgetown University Mexican Student Association." It just totally amazed me that a college kid had not only the class to think of giving this, but the foresight to make it happen. I mean this isn't something that you can run out and get the evening before. This would have been done weeks in advance by I assume calling back to Mexico and asking somebody to do it, somehow dealing with the payment, which wouldn't have been extraordinary but still has to be taken care of, shipping it to Georgetown university, showing up on the day, and handing it over. It was this beautiful plate, and I was so impressed with a college student being able to pull this off. That was really very impressive. I'm sure this guy is crackerjack. Whatever he's doing now, he's doing it well and at a high level. So they were a very impressive group of kids, but especially the guy who was the president.

These incidents weren't related to my work on the Mexico Desk but they happened while I was on the Mexico Desk, both of them State Department tragedies. One of them was the death of Foreign Service Officer Ann Smedinghoff, a woman who was killed in Afghanistan, of all things delivering books to Afghan children!

Q: I've actually interviewed a number of people who knew her and one who worked with her in Afghanistan. It's a very sad story.

WHITTLESEY: So they had an official, I guess a memorial would be the right word, for her one day, and I was able to attend. I remember being in the Atchison Auditorium, and it was, of course, a completely full crowd. There's sort of this murmuring in the audience, but as soon as Secretary John Kerry walked in the door with the Smedinghoff family, there was complete silence and the only sound you heard was the spring-loaded

chairs flipping up as everybody stood up; just this instantaneous thumping sound and dead silence as they walked in. A very touching and tragic story.. She had done an overseas tour in Venezuela. She was in a certain A-100 class and those people had grouped during this memorial. They would stand as Secretary Kerry would say, "Here are the people who worked with her in A-100." It was very impressive and moving.

The other tragic event that I participated in in a small way was when the four bodies of the American diplomats were flown back from Benghazi. I went, along with a couple of busloads of people from the State Department, to Andrews Air Force Base for the ceremony where they literally were taking the caskets off the plane and putting them into hearses and driving off. (Victims were) Four people, the ambassador, a couple of security guards, and a communicator, I believe. I remember President Obama was there, Secretary Clinton was there, and probably other high-ranking folks. I can't remember whether the secretary of defense was there or not. There was again a very hushed, emotional crowd, in probably what amounts to an airplane hangar out at Andrews Air Force Base. It was a very tragic scene with the flag-draped coffins being carried off by soldiers, and *Nearer My God to Thee* being played by the band. That was very moving.

A couple more positive things that I remember from my Mexico Desk experience. Every once in a while somebody will say something that just goes directly into your brain in a very special way and you always remember it, and it explains something in a very sharp and crisp way that is memorable. One of the times this happened to me was when I was talking to a friend of mine from the Mexican embassy. It must have been fairly early on during my time on the desk. Of course they have super people working at their embassy. The best folks in their foreign service would be working at the Washington embassy, top-notch people. Excellent English, of course, and knowledgeable on both Mexico and the United States and our bilateral relationship. Technically proficient, perfect manners, everything you would want in a diplomat. I can't remember what the nature of our conversation was, but somehow I had mentioned Mexico in the context of being a Central American country, and my friend from the Mexican embassy said, "We think of ourselves as North Americans." This was just a light bulb to me, and I couldn't thank him enough for putting it with that kind of clarity. That really reset my view of Mexico, the United States, and Canada in an instant. It was just a fantastic statement. That was one of those moments of clarity, and the fact that I needed it doesn't speak well for me, but thank goodness he kindly gave it to me in a way that made sense to me.

There were a couple of times I remember meeting people who were not only intellectually and personally attractive, but had this sort of magnetic effect on you. One of them was a lady from the Mexican embassy that I worked with. She was of course very intelligent, well educated, well spoken, physically pretty. Well, I'd say a beautiful woman, but she was a solid six feet tall and it gave her this magnetic presence as a big, strong, pretty woman. It was just one of those things that you couldn't help but notice when you were dealing with her, or when you walk into a room and there she is, not some little will-o'-the-wisp type, but solidly built, 6-footer, dead gorgeous, beautiful, attractive,

and smart. It was a great combination and somebody who was a lot of fun to have the chance to work with.

Reminds me of a couple other times. Once in the UK, I met a guy who was of African descent, so Black racial group. He was, I think, a member of their parliament, but also an entrepreneur who had made—I don't know if he was a billionaire, but he had made plenty of money at something. He had started a company or worked for some company where he had made a lot of money, so he sort of had it all going for him. He was good looking and he was wealthy and of course he was in parliament. But beyond that, he was perfectly dressed, he had perfect manners, and a good-looking guy. He was fairly young, probably in his 40s at the most, or late 30s. I just remember being in a meeting once where he walked in, very politely, and just crept into a back seat, trying not to make a scene or anything. But as soon as he walked in, it just absolutely stopped the room, because everybody took a second to look at this person. He just had this magnetic effect on people, and I remember that particular instance, because it just brought the conversation to a close for a moment.

Finally, when you're living overseas, particularly in a non-European country, you get used to—This isn't related to the Mexican Desk, but more to my time in China but I thought I'd mention it now. We're talking about your relationship with the culture, the society you're in. In a lot of countries, you are clearly a foreigner, and that was certainly the situation in China, where you're visibly different and stand out. I remember one meeting—She probably would have been pretty no matter where—but there was a young woman who worked at the Danish consulate in Guangzhou who was just absolutely the classic Nordic beauty, and I think more so when you are in a room of Chinese people. Here is this blond-haired, blue-eyed, fair-skin person, it just lit up the room. So that was a reminder of just sort of the physical reaction that you have in some cases to people in a certain context.

I remember many times, like when I worked in Jamaica where the primary ethnic group there is Black; China for many years with obviously an Asian racial group; Jordan with Arabic-speaking and Arab people around you. When you're overseas, not only in a foreign country but where there's foreign language being spoken, a different ethnic group, you resign yourself to understanding at most about half of what's going on around you. Unless you are extremely gifted or have a long history in that place, are a super linguist, and are gifted with those kinds of skills, you're just not going to know a lot. You don't have the comfort; you don't understand the language very well, and of course you are not going to catch all the cultural references and these types of things. So when you come home (to the United States), you have this literally, like at the airport getting off the plane, all of a sudden you're like, "Wow, I can understand the advertisement that's on the wall over there! And that conversation that three people are having over in the corner of the bus! I can hear that. I can understand that. I know what's going on!" You also get the sense that everybody here kind of looks like me a little bit! It's like, "Did I go to high school with that person?" They all look vaguely familiar somehow because now you're back in your environment. For us here in the States, primarily a Caucasian group, you

really have this funny sense of things all looking very familiar to you when you come back (from overseas). It's a reminder that when you're overseas you are struggling against this all the time. You don't know the culture. You don't know the language. You look different; you're a visible foreigner. That's just the way it is and you get used to it. But when that gets lifted all of a sudden, you do get this sense of relief.

Another person I met while I was on the Mexico Desk—This occurred when we had a fairly high-level U.S.-Mexico meeting on the 8th floor of the State Department.

Q: What's on the 8th floor again?

WHITTLESEY: The place where this high-level meeting…

Q: No, I mean, but…

WHITTLESEY: It's the ceremonial rooms of the State Department and they have a room up there that has a giant table where you can seat 40 people. There's a kitchen up there. Hillary was the secretary of state at that time and she was meeting—I assume either it could probably only have been the Mexican foreign minister or somebody like that. This was a pretty high-level event. The 8th floor has the Benjamin Franklin Room, which is a large ornate ceremonial hall where they might do larger banquets or an event where somebody's giving a speech to a larger audience. The secretary would be one of the few people who would use that on a regular basis for high-level stuff. This is where they have all the old colonial furniture and glassware that George Washington had owned and antiques that have been passed to the State Department by folks who wanted them to have a good home, so to speak.

So, we were essentially waiting to have lunch and I think Hillary was a little bit late or something. She got tied up, so a bunch of us were up there waiting for this thing to start, and I must have been a control officer for somebody. I certainly wouldn't have been—This was way above my level, but I would have been up there just to make sure everything went well for the person that I was taking care of. It might have been the ambassador or something like that, that he was where he needed to be, he had met whoever he needed to meet, and that he was taken care of. The plan was that I was with this person, I was going to hang around until the lunch started, and then all the staff would disappear and the senior folks would have their lunch and discussion. So while we were waiting, I struck up a conversation with a person in a navy uniform, and he turned out to be the deputy (chairman) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. His name is Sandy Winnefeld (Admiral James A. Winnefeld, Jr.). This is somebody who is right up at the top of the military bureaucracy. We were basically killing time, I guess you would say, because nobody exactly knew when Hillary was going to show up. In the meantime there wasn't much we could do, so we were just conversing. I just remember it as being a great conversation with Admiral Winnefeld. He was a very pleasant person and we talked a little bit about the navy and a little bit about naval history and things, so just a casual conversation, but it was very—You hear about people use the word humbling, well it was

very humbling for me to meet somebody who had gotten up to the top of a very highly competitive and highly skilled group of folks. This was one of the top players in the world in terms of demonstrated ability to manage complex and important issues, and he's one of them. So that was great. It might have been 10 or 15 minutes that we chatted, but it stuck in my mind as a really enjoyable few minutes, and a very pleasant guy.

Unfortunately (Winnefeld had) a bit of family tragedy, as I found out later. His son—I think he's got maybe two children—it turns out he's almost exactly my age. I remember we were talking about the navy and Vietnam and he asked me if I had served or something like that. I said, "Well no, because when I was at the age to be joining the military, we were at the end of the Vietnam war, and the military was in a drawdown situation." He said in a factual tone of voice that he was exactly the same age as I was! I don't think he meant it as criticism, but it certainly was a little bit stinging. I had not gone into the military and he had. We were essentially identical in age. Be that as it may, just one of those little situations that you get in where two people are just on different roads. He had certainly ridden the military road to an extraordinary level.

I found out later, after he had retired and left the Pentagon, which I think he did shortly after our meeting because when you're the deputy of the joint chiefs, you've got nowhere to go but out. You're not going to take another job after that. That's the end of the road. I found out that one of his children had died from a drug overdose on the third day he was in college. It was just gut ripping to hear that, to know this person in a small way and to have some sense of the tragedy that he's going to have to live with for the rest of his life. I'm sure that the lifestyle of a top military officer is a demanding one. It's tough on the families and I have no doubt that he would feel that he is in a certain way responsible for the death of his son, that his career had brought pressures and certain influences in the family life that the child had not been able to cope with. Some random events, I'm sure, mixed in there, ended in this very tragic situation. So again, (it was) a situation where somebody you know—You always wonder about people who have this charmed life, the Hollywood stars. People think, "Oh, everything is perfect for them." Here was a guy who would seem to be at the top of the world in terms of his professional career. He's got a family and a very demanding and important job, but right under the surface there is this tragedy that he will never be able to escape. It was a reminder that even the most admirable people sometimes have problems in their lives that are insoluble. So I've always felt a special bond to him. I'm sure he's forgotten me long ago, but he's somebody whose situation I remember and think about from time to time.

One last thing, a little bit later, on this topic, still on the Mexico Desk, and then we can talk about preparation for Taiwan and China. When you're on the desk you get invited to events that the host embassy gives. So the Mexican embassy has an event and they'll ask folks from the desk to attend out of courtesy. I was at an event once where the Mexican embassy was giving some kind of award to Mexican-Americans for their contribution to the U.S.-Mexico relationship, something along those lines. It mattered to them. This was something they had put a lot of effort into and probably something they did every year to recognize prominent Mexican-Americans. One of the people who got an award was

Edward James Olmos, who's the actor who portrayed—For me he was always memorable as Lieutenant Castillo in *Miami Vice*, but he's been in some very big movies. He played a teacher in one. He was, as a younger guy, in some dance and song movies, a very talented actor, and somebody who also has, I think, put in a lot of work as a Mexican-American. He's from L.A. and there's obviously a huge Mexican-American community out there. He had done a lot of good work, so he richly deserved all of this. I was super excited because I loved him as Lieutenant Castillo in *Miami Vice*. So I thought, "Oh, this is my big chance." I was a little star struck, and I said, "Well, I'll get a chance to go say hi to Edward James Olmos."

I remember he gave a little talk after he received his award. I'm not quite sure how to put it. He really has the artistic temperament and mindset, obviously a very creative guy, and his acceptance speech for this award was so genuinely bizarre to me that it kind of rattled me a little bit. So I ended up not saying hi to him. He had people around him, of course, who were talking to him, but it was clear that he was just on another plane from the rest of us, and having some idiot (me) come up and say, "Hey, I'm a fan of yours when you played Lieutenant Castillo," was just not appropriate for the situation. I just remember this feeling, "Wow, this guy is just off in another world, and it just doesn't connect very well with mine."

So those are some of the things I remember from my time on the Mexico Desk.

If anybody is listening to this who is not familiar with the State Department's assignment procedures, while you're in one job, you begin and end the process of looking for your onward (next) assignment. At some point in there, I got a list of possible jobs that would open up at the time I was leaving the Mexico Desk. The job that I ended up being interested in and getting assigned to was to be the deputy of the Environment Section of the U.S. embassy in Beijing. That was perfect for me because I had China experience, I had Chinese language, I knew a lot of the people there, the timing worked out, [and] it was at the right level. So everything was good; I got the job.

I started kind of rebuilding a little bit to prepare for going to Beijing. One of the interesting things—I've talked about taking early morning Spanish—this particular job in Beijing required speaking and reading at a 3/3 level, which is moderate fluency according to the standards of the State Department. My Chinese had fallen off a bit since I had left, so I took a placement test and probably got a 2/2 or 2/1+; clearly not at the level that I needed to be at for this particular job. The standard option would have been for me to (study in Beijing). This was when I took the placement test. We talked to the people in the Chinese [language] department (who said), "Here's your skill level. You're below where you need to be, but we would recommend, and we'll put it through the bureaucracy of the State Department, for you to go over to Beijing, do a year of Chinese language training there, and then start your assignment in the summer of 2014." It would have meant leaving (Washington) in the fall of 2013, going to Beijing as a language student, spending a year, and then going directly into the job from there.

But, this was not what my wife and I wanted to do in terms of our family's approach to this assignment. At the end of the Mexico Desk (assignment), we would have been back for three years and my son would have been in 7th, 8th, and 9th grade. This would have then put him in Beijing for (grades) 10, 11, and 12—three years. I think because of some of the things he was doing in school, we felt it was better for him to stay another year here in the United States. He was involved in the Boy Scouts and the Sea Scouts and that extra year, we thought, here in the States was something that we wanted to do rather than going to China.

What that meant was I needed to get my Chinese up to a higher level. The arrangement that we came to was that I could study on my own and then take a six-month course, which was offered in Washington. They did not have a one-year program in DC for Chinese at the level I was at. So for one year, you had to go to Beijing, but the idea was "Well, if you can get close enough that the six months will put you over the top, then we'll do that. That meant that I was studying on my own and had to pay a tutor. I had tutoring sessions at least once or twice a week, and this was also a bit of a drag on my schedule, and my personal life, but this was the way that we could arrange to stay that extra year.

The plan was I was going to work on the Taiwan Desk as a fill-in. They needed somebody there, so I would work six months. That would have been the fall of 2013 after I left the Mexico Desk. (I would) work on the Taiwan Desk for a few months, and then do the six-month language training starting in January 2014. Do that until the summer of 2014, then head off to Beijing, theoretically with my language at the right level for that assignment.

Q: Just a very quick question. This is an example of when the Department accommodates family needs. Was it very difficult to arrange?

WHITTLESEY: Yeah, it was not the good news that (it seems). I knew the person who was the head of the Chinese department at FSI, and I think that made all the difference. This is a razor's edge. He could have easily said, "Sorry, this (Washington training) just isn't going to work. Get on a plane and go to Beijing. Sorry." They are completely within their power to do so. And may even have been the right decision over the long term, at least from a professional standpoint, to have a solid year of language training. But I knew this guy personally. I went to him and I said, "Listen, I will study. I will work hard. Here's what I want. I want to spend the next year here in Washington. I'll work on the Taiwan Desk. I will do tutoring on the side. I will take the six-month course and we'll make this work so that I can get out there to Beijing with what I need. I think he was in a very jovial mood, because he was close to retirement! He was okay with that and signed whatever needed to be signed for me so that I could do the six-month course. This was going to be okay from the perspective of the Chinese language department. I would get to where I needed to be.

This was a knife-edge decision. It could have easily gone the other way, and it was by no means a sure thing. I had to work hard on my own time to make this happen, and in a perfect world the State Department would have a one-year Chinese course in Washington to accommodate people like me, but that just didn't fit in with their style of doing business, and I understand that. They're pushing x number of people through this large global training course and certain things are available in some places and not in other places. I just didn't quite fit in with that. But he was in a good mood; it all worked out.

I did my five or six months on the Taiwan Desk and then did the language training here at FSI in Arlington before going to Beijing in the summer of 2014. Working on the Taiwan Desk, that really is shorthand, because by the official protocol of the State Department, Taiwan is not a country desk the way you would call a typical country because it's an uncertain legal relationship with the People's Republic. Let me think, it was something like the Office of Taiwan Affairs; something that isn't quite calling it a country desk.

Part of the introduction to working on the Taiwan Desk is developing this vocabulary of all the special language terms and the legal cutouts and all of these things that make Taiwan just a little bit different from being a regular country the way almost every other place is. I remember when we did the original Chinese language training back in 1997 to 1999, the first year was in Washington, which was fine. Then the second year was in Taiwan. This goes back years where Taiwan was seen as, and was, and remains our great ally and a much more stable place and the mainland was kind of *terra incognita*. (The People's Republic of China) was something a little unknown, very low level of development, very unstable politically, etc. So all of the infrastructure assets the State Department and the U.S. government built up were in Taiwan, or most of them at that point. This included our language school. But because of Taiwan's special unique legal relationship with China and the United States, when I did my second year of language, we all had to legally resign from the State Department and get hired by the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT), which remains our "unofficial representation." We don't have an embassy in Taiwan; we have the American Institute, and so on and so forth. I literally had to resign from the State Department to create this fig leaf of separation from the U.S. government. We were not over there under government auspices, and we didn't have diplomatic passports. We did not have diplomatic [privileges], we had pseudo diplomatic privileges. Everything was like "almost, but not quite."

When I was working in the Taiwan office with Chris Beede as the head of that office, a very experienced and knowledgeable China hand, part of my work was to come up to speed with the terminology, what we could do and what we couldn't do. That was a good experience to have as background knowledge going over for a mainland tour. It's the kind of experience the State Department, if it did more training, would have. We probably had some of that when we were in (A-100) training the first time around, but perhaps not in the depth that I had when I was working in the Taiwan office. So it was very helpful to have it.

There were some benefits to this. Taiwan, like Mexico, would send absolutely their best diplomatic folks to be here. They called it TECRO (Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office). So some double talk that made it in formal terms a standalone entity, but it amounts to a de facto embassy. That's still the same; that hasn't changed. It functions as an embassy and is staffed by their already very high-quality diplomats.

I remember when we were over in Taiwan studying language, we met some of our (Taiwan) counterparts there, and they were a very impressive group of folks. They all had Masters degrees from Yale or Michigan and spoke perfect English and were just super representatives of Taiwan. The folks they had working at TECRO when I was in the Taiwan office were more of the same. These were really excellent folks, friendly, knowledgeable, intelligent, everything you could ask for from a diplomat.

And, which is extraordinary for us, they also had money, because Taiwan is a relatively well-off place, and they were not going to skimp. If there was a way to spend some money in Washington, DC to advocate, that improves their status here for some reason, that was money well spent for what they were here to do. Unlike the State Department, which is cheap and never has enough (money) to do anything right, well, these guys had the money to do things right. They gave the best what we call a National Day party that I have ever been to, period! The national day would be…. For us it's the 4th of July where it's our annual celebration of our country's founding, or some major event, and every country has one. Taiwan's is in October, the 10th of October, if I remember correctly. They had just a super reception. I think it was at the Four Seasons in Georgetown, one of Washington's best hotels. I mean this is top of the line. If it wasn't the Four Seasons it was the Ritz Carlton or something at that level; just the best that you could do.

One of the benefits of being in the Taiwan Office is we were some of the few people in the U.S. government who legally could interact with these (Taiwan) folks. You couldn't just show up as a State Department diplomat the way you could for any other event, so we had this kind of insider status. (Taiwan) had just a super reception for their national day or anniversary or how they termed it. Because they're not a country, it's not a nation, they would have called it something a little bit different. They had great food, a lot of it, and I remember thinking that these guys are so classy.

If I could speak a little bit out of school [laughter], I've also been to many national day celebrations at the Chinese embassy, and they tend to be a lot stiffer there with the ambassador doing his official duty to speak on the state of U.S.-China relations, world affairs and China's rise, and all of these types of things. It tends to be a little bit dry and monotonous. After you've heard it a few times, you know what's coming and everybody's just kind of there. They have to say it, you have to listen, we understand. A lot of diplomacy is like that.

But the Taiwan folks were so classy they didn't even bother to give a speech. They knew that nobody really cared, so the head of their office, the de facto ambassador, never even made remarks! He just circulated around, "Have a good time! Have more to eat!" He

was being a host but without delivering these more formal remarks, which would have been a complete buzzkill of whatever mood was in the place. But the Taiwan guys, in a very serious way, I thought that represented their ability to capture a moment, a way, a style of doing business that would work to their benefit. And the people walked out of there happy. This is what you want from a National Day. You want the guests to have a good time, to remember, "Hey, we were at the Taiwan party last night, and it was great, and I met somebody and they're good folks," and all those good things. The Taiwan representative was able to pull this off in this very subtle, and I thought, deep-thinking, approach. We certainly (do not do) the same thing on our national day. You know the (U.S.) ambassador will always give a speech, and they tend to be fairly pro forma, and it's not going to be anything that's really going to get people excited or surprise them. This (Taiwan) guy was smart enough to say, "Let's just skip that and have a good time."

I was only (in the Taiwan Office) a few months. The big thing that I was working on was a trip being planned by the then administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, McCarthy (Gina McCarthy). I cannot come up with her first name, the lady who's from Boston. I've lost her first name. Sue or Janet or something like that. Because it's a long way to go to Asia and she's a very busy person, the idea was that she was going to go to China, the mainland, have some meetings there, which she wanted very much to do, and then with some kind of a little sleight of hand, end up in Taiwan on the same trip. To go directly to the outcome, that did not fly at all. The idea was that she was going to go from the mainland, probably Beijing, fly to Hong Kong, which is under the one-country, two-systems governance in theory, has separate foreign relations, and (then fly to Taiwan).

So she would not be flying directly to Taiwan from the mainland, but go down to Hong Kong, have a meeting there, and then go from Hong Kong to Taiwan. When the Chinese found out about it, that just blasted their redlines. They did not accept that at all. I was not in the room for those discussions. She was literally in China, the EPA administrator was literally in China when they had this discussion of, "Oh by the way, we're (leaving) from Hong Kong." Because her itinerary would just say Beijing to Hong Kong, and that was what they gave to the Chinese. But at some point they told the Chinese, "Well, from Hong Kong she's going to go over to Taiwan," and (the Chinese) found out. They probably knew a long time beforehand through their intelligence system, but never mind. They were adamantly opposed to that, and I'm sure they spelled out their opposition in very stark terms to her. "If you do this, it's not going to go well for you here, and it's going to affect our relationship," and sort of like, "You don't want to do this." She got the message [and] the Taiwan trip ended up being canceled, which I thought was a shame, but that's the way these things go, where politics sometimes overwhelms good sense and a missed opportunity there for everybody, I think, but when you're dealing with the US-China-Taiwan relationship, that's the way things go.

So those are the few things I remember from my time in the Taiwan Office and then I went into language training in January (2014). That tends to be pretty grueling.

Q: The language study that you went into was at FSI?

WHITTLESEY: Yes. I had done some studying on my own, but in January 2014 I began the formal course. Since I had been through the Chinese language training before, I knew some, not all, of the staff in the Chinese (course), because they have a lot of them. The Chinese program is big, very professionally run, and it's absolutely unique. It's not like they use Rosetta Stone or Babbel or anything like that. This is the FSI program and they develop all their own materials. It's custom-designed for Foreign Service Officers.

I knew a lot of the folks there. I had been studying so that meant that I was not a beginner, obviously, at that point. I had worked and lived in China for years and had some language skills. What they do is gather several people in my same situation, people who had had some Chinese language training before but needed more for some reason or other. They would call it a top-off or a lift to get to the next level. Somebody maybe who had studied outside and had not gone through the FSI course and wasn't quite up to State Department standards, or all kinds of different folks would be in there.

For some reason they called it the Cats and Dogs group! I'm not sure I ever really heard the full story of where that expression came from, but I think it originated with somebody who was their initials, or maybe somebody was named "Katz." This went back a few years. So it was Katz and somebody else, some bright spark came up with calling this the Cats and Dogs group because it was the odds and ends, the mixture of people who didn't fit into other places. So there was a little group of us who studied together and were trying to lift our Chinese up. It was actually very handy because I got to meet some of my colleagues who were going over to China. That socialization, completely separate from the language training itself, was very handy. You know who's going to Guangzhou. You know who's going to be in Shanghai, and you've met the person who's going to Shenyang, and that's extremely helpful.

So let's take a short break and we'll go to the next step here.

So we're resuming our conversation about the Chinese language training and getting ready for going over to Beijing.

Most of that (training) was just routine, but as I said (it was) grueling and fairly intense language study. It's one of those things where you can put as much time and effort into it as you wanted. I've never known anybody who I thought slacked off during language training. It's something that we take seriously, and with Chinese you can't just slide through. You really have to put the effort into it. You're in small classes. There's no place to hide if you screw up!

One time, not in this set of language classes but in my original Chinese language [class], I had not studied the night before and got just totally caught out by one of my teachers. It was obvious that I had not prepared adequately for class that particular day and as the class broke up we bumped into each other in the hallway. There was a third person

standing nearby who was an FSI administrator in the Chinese program, a guy named Chris Crocoll, who I think may still be associated with FSI, I don't know. He had worked in the Chinese program a long time and continued to do that. He was just by accident standing next to us, and I went up to my teacher and began to say, "Listen, I'm sorry I did not prepare adequately for class and it won't happen again." Chris was standing there and couldn't help but overhear. His reaction was absolutely priceless. Being an Asia guy, he knew when not to be around! Two people having—It wasn't an argument—a personal discussion of some embarrassment. By Asian standards you're not supposed to be there. Chris was carrying some papers and he just held them up in front of his face like, "I'm not here, never mind, there's nobody over here listening to this conversation! You can just forget about me!" It was very funny.

I knew several of the teachers and we were working hard. The advent of computer software for language learning was just an absolute revolution to learning Chinese. I so wish we had had it when I did it the first time around. The things that the computer can do are just wonderful and were a huge help.

Q: What sticks out in your mind as a particularly valuable improvement?

WHITTLESEY: The computer being able to say things, because (pronunciation is) really hard. You're looking at symbols on a written tablet, on a piece of paper, or you're looking at characters or there's a tone mark and you want to know, "How does that really come out of the person's mouth?" To be able to literally hear the way it sounds is a gigantic help. And you also can look at the characters in much larger format so that it takes up an entire screen on the computer as opposed to a little bitty thing that's printed out. You can look at those in detail. The computer can walk you through stroke-by-stroke of how you make those characters, and it's excellent. You have wonderful searching and cross-referencing ability. You can go back and forth. You can look for it and you can find words that include that character, and it is just great. So that was a huge step forward.

While I'm thinking about it, the other thing that absolutely revolutionized, not Chinese language learning but living in China, was picture menus at restaurants! Because Chinese food is a world unto itself, it is expansive, it is deep, it is complex, and it is also somewhat opaque. It's not like grilled salmon or something like that. There's a lot of special terminology in there. I'm telling you, if you want to find out whether somebody really speaks good Chinese, ask them if they can order in a restaurant. That is a true test of language mastery, and even a lot of good Chinese speakers have trouble with that. What a lot of people do is, they'll know a few dishes and they can get through it, or they go to the same place a couple of times and they know what's on the menu and they'll just kind of memorize that. But in terms of being able to scan a menu and pick something out, that is very tough. So having pictures was great. That raised the level of cuisine markedly for those of us who have to struggle with ordering overseas.

I was in touch with the folks over in Beijing because I was replacing somebody there and I wanted to have a sense of what was going on. I met people who were back in Washington for some reason. We had chats and things like that so that was very good. One of the events that was being planned was the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialog (S&ED). This was an annual meeting that the United States and China had. I think it was canceled under the Trump administration, but this was the umbrella high-level discussion between the two countries. It was going to be in Beijing right at the time I was supposed to show up, and of course right at the time when my predecessor was going to be leaving. So, it was terrible timing for everybody concerned, especially because the environment, science, technology, and health issues were a big part of this meeting. We had a lot of the substance of the S&ED focused on environment and science, health, and technology issues.

So the Environment Section at Embassy Beijing started asking me, "Would you be willing to come over a little early? Could you leave your Chinese class early and show up in Beijing and help us with the S&ED? It will really help us out and it will be good for your transition," and so on. There were some very reasonable arguments to be made for this. I was like, "Yeah I understand that and I'm willing to do it if that's what you would like." For me it was, I would say, somewhat less than what I really wanted to do. I would have been perfectly happy just to stay at FSI and finish up the Chinese course and show up in the fullness of time without the sense of, "We really need to get you out to Beijing a little early and step right into this big event." The embassy wanted it to happen. I understood where they were coming from; it was a completely reasonable thing for them to ask for. So we tried to accommodate their desires, but that changed the tenor of my training because now that the endpoint had been moved up maybe a month or more, and trying to finish early and get the required amount of Chinese and get out of Washington, which anytime you're moving, it's always awful because of all the arrangements that have to be made.

So this schedule made things more difficult and took a fair amount of my time and energy to try to make that happen. I ended up falling a little bit short. I think I was fine on the speaking part of the Chinese language test, but I fell a little short on the reading part of it. I ended up with something like a 3/2+. I think in the larger scheme of things, that's not a world-ending problem, but that in turn created a bunch of administrative hoops that had to be surmounted in terms of getting a language waiver or something that where the State Department would say, "Well you're supposed to have a 3/3, you only got a 3/2+ but we'll let you go anyway." All of this was a bit of a burden at the end of my time at FSI.

So the way it worked, they tested us on a regular basis at FSI anyway, and I might have gotten like, I can't remember, a 2+/2+ or a 3/2+. Then I went in to take it again, and I was hoping… probably (I had gotten) a 3/2+ and I think I went in to retake it in hopes that I could get my 3/3 and that would end it. I don't know [but] I suspect that their evaluation is pretty accurate, but I had just an awful test from the reading part of it, and actually fell back a little bit. I went back to like a 3/2 or something like that.

I still remember this one particular article that I was supposed to read. (The reading test) has three components, and one of them is your quick reading of something for what they call a "gist". Just what's this about in general? Is this an ad for a house? Is it somebody telling a crime story? What's the general story? Then you have something a little bit more in depth that you have to read through. They give you some options, a couple of choices, and you can look through them for a minute just to scan them quickly and presumably try to identify something that you're most comfortable with. It's very fair. This is the standard test procedure that everybody goes through.

I picked a bad article! You just have that sense of dread, of horror, that, "Oh my God, this isn't coming together for me." Usually what you do is you try to look at it quickly and say, "Oh okay, I recognize some characters in here. I can work through this," because once you've picked the article, you have (a longer time) to go through it. But after I had picked (the article), it just never came together in my mind. I found out later what the problem was. It was a character which in regular usage has one meaning but in this article that I read, it was somebody's name. I kept thinking, "What? This doesn't make any sense! What are they talking about here?" Clearly stumbling and not doing a good job. I had missed the point of the article. It was not exactly a catastrophe, but certainly a step backwards. So I ended up getting a 3/2+. I got the language waiver after a lot of back and forth with various parts of the State Department who have to sign off on these things.

I had worked out with my family and with the embassy that I would go over to Beijing for the S&ED and once that was over, I would come back to finish moving out and get my family, put my car in a truck, and send everything off. Then we would return together as a family, but later in the summer.

Q: I'm sorry, S&ED?

WHITTLESEY: The Strategic and Economic Dialog. This big meeting that I was going to. That was the impetus behind getting me there early. So from that standpoint it was actually okay. It was just me traveling and I'm trying to remember. I think I got there right at the end of June; I mean it was like June 30 or the last day of June. These things actually matter in the State Department, because the difference—It was still June when you got there vs July and it affects when you can leave.

But it was just me traveling, just a couple of suitcases. I went and stayed in the Hilton Hotel, which is around the corner from the embassy. I could walk, so that was actually very handy. I did get to participate in the Strategic and Economic Dialog. I did get to meet folks (U.S. government contacts) who were there and who left immediately after the meeting. So that was good. All of that was very, very positive. There are worse things in the world than spending two weeks at the Hilton in Beijing. It was a very nice hotel and right next to the embassy, so it was super convenient. I got a chance to visit our house where we were going to go. It was not quite ready yet, but I got a look at it so I could tell my wife about it. So a lot of good things came out of the visit.

I started the process of getting familiar with the people that I was going to be working with, both within the embassy and in the Chinese government, people that I would be working with. So all of that was very positive.

I met the deputy chief of mission, a guy named Dan Kritenbrink, who had, I think, been the head of the China Desk, [then] went to be the DCM in Beijing. He was the DCM when I was there—Deputy Chief of Mission. He was just a super guy, one of the really outstanding people in the State Department. He went to work for the National Security Council for a while. I don't know whether he's still an ambassador but later he was ambassador to… I think it was Vietnam or Cambodia, one of those Southeast Asian countries—Probably Vietnam. I've lost track of where he went. But a very talented guy.

For folks who are not familiar with the State Department, when you are the deputy chief of mission in a big embassy like China, I mean there are not many jobs in the world that are more challenging than that. It is a nonstop ordeal of difficult decisions and judgments under very pressurized circumstances with results that really make a difference. This is an important bilateral relationship. Mistakes are costly. You have to be patient, strategic, and smart. They're extremely demanding jobs, and Dan was fully on top of that. Anybody who gets up to that level is a high flier. I mean that in a very positive way. They're extremely skilled and talented folks with a lot to offer the United States in terms of their ability to promote our foreign policy goals.

Of course I met him multiple times when I was in Beijing as an officer, but I remember he took the time to say hello to me when I first got there. He's one of these guys who's probably got an inbox that's ten feet deep with emails, everything is urgent, has to be done by the end of the day, but he's somebody who took that 15 minutes, "Hey, good to see you! Great to have you here!" It was like he didn't have a care in the world, nothing going on. Let's talk, let's catch up. That was very positive. A great guy to work for. You never saw him get angry, always unruffled, on top of things, knew exactly what was going on, experienced, had been there, helpful, everything you could hope for in a supervising officer.

So I met Dan, went through the Strategic and Economic Dialog, which did have a lot of environmental aspects to it, and we had a lot of very senior people from the U.S. government over there, assistant secretaries. I can only assume it was John Kerry at that point who was the U.S. lead. The Treasury secretary was over as well, head of the Office of Science and Technology policy, so it was an all-star team on both sides. So a very intense and productive meeting, and it's all over in a couple of days—but the preparations last for a long time, and the logistics are very intense, because people are moving around. You've got a lot of people, they're all high-level, they need support, and hotel rooms and all of that. So it's a very demanding thing to organize and pull off.

It goes back and forth. One year in Beijing, the next year in the United States, and then back to Beijing. That was the Beijing year and pretty much as soon as that was over, I

came back to Washington. It was the usual flutter over who was going to pay for my plane ticket. This is the State Department at its worst. A $1,200 plane ticket and you generate another $800 worth of costs and people talking about it, and trying to get somebody else to pay for it. It's very frustrating.

So I came back to Washington. I don't remember a lot of our move-out details, but we shipped our personal vehicle over to China. I remember the folks coming to pick that up and people packing up our household goods. Things get broken. If they're doing something other than what you think is going to happen in terms of the procedure, my wife would get a little tense. That had to get taken care of. One of the reasons why the Foreign Service has the high levels of stress it does is the moving process.

Meanwhile my son had just finished 10th grade. He had some summer things that had to be done, and so everything was very tightly timed. We had to get real estate people to deal with our house once we moved out and on and on and on. It all came together. My son had his last Sea Scout event and people knew we were leaving. I remember at the Sea Scout event, which is the sailing part of the Boy Scouts, somebody said, "I heard you're going to China, when are you leaving?" I was like, "Tomorrow!" That kind of brings it home to folks, like this is right at the edge here, we're going to do this, and then we're gone.

I remember you always end up with stuff after you pack out that you've either kept too much to carry in your suitcases or you've found something that you should have put in the boxes and didn't. It got left behind, or it was in the car, or it was at your brother's house, and now you need it. You always have too much stuff and then you've got to figure out what you're going to do with it. So we decided, let's box this stuff up and we'll just mail it to ourselves over in China. It will show up in a couple of weeks and everything is fine. We literally had things in the boxes and then my wife decided that "No, if we get a slightly larger suitcase it will all fit in." So we did this repacking exercise. The boxes were unpacked and the cardboard thrown out and we packed things into our suitcases and we just got in under the wire with respect to weight limits, because if you go over those, the cost is significant and YOU have to pay that. That's not something the State Department will cover.

We were in business class, too. I think because of our own upgrading with miles or something like that. I don't think it was the State Department who paid for it, but I can't remember. I do remember we were in business class, and I remember moving things around at the airport to make each of our suitcases come in underneath the weight limit. So when we finally got on the plane, I was like, "Ah, thank goodness that's over with!" So off we went to Beijing.

There was one more thing that my son had to do. I've forgotten about that till this moment, remembering back on that. He had a Boy Scout event that he was going to in Japan, of all places. A global Boy Scout event, and this was part of what we had hoped for in terms of staying that extra year in the United States that had allowed him to get into

a leadership position in the Boy Scouts. He was going to be a troop leader or something at this jamboree in Japan. It impinged on the start of the school year at the International School of Beijing by a day or two, something like that. I think he missed some of the very initial orientation-type things. But we were able to make it all work at the end and the school was not particularly worked up about it. We did have to make a lot of excuses and explain things to people about our schedule. I think part of that is our own desire to get as many of these things done as possible. We may have been a little ambitious and a more prudent person might have said, "Why don't we just skip that? You're trying to do too much." But that's the way life is in the Foreign Service, and we were able to move, and to get in all my son's events. We went to those. I think there's certainly some benefit to him from those.

Then we were in Beijing in August or September of 2014. We're back! We had been there before; we were literally living in the same housing area that we had lived in before, which was out near the airport, away from the embassy itself, but close to the school, which was excellent. I was set in my job as the deputy in the Environment Section, meeting my new boss, Chris Allison, who had been in the Economic Section. If I recall why this worked out this particular way, there must have been something with the timing of the replacement for the head of the section, who had been Erica Thomas. Chris filled in for a year and then a guy named Chris Kavanagh was coming in 2015. He was going to start a regular three-year assignment as the head of our section. There was something about Erica's departure that left a one-year gap and I've lost track of what the triggering event was of why she left. Because he had been there a long time and she may have just run out of time. The State Department may have said, "No, you've been here too long now. You have to leave." So she moved on and Chris Allison was filling in for this one year.

I was replacing a guy named Eugene Bae, a Korean-American. I think he was going off to Seoul to work as the environment officer there. So after a fairly chaotic summer, and a lot of stress in there with all the moving and setting things up, and flying back and forth, we were where we wanted to be, and everything was then set for our three-year assignment as deputy in Beijing.

Shall we just stop here? Are you okay with that?

Q: Yeah, that makes sense.

WHITTLESEY: Next time we can begin with literally starting the work in that section.

Q: Today is Valentine's Day 2020, February 14th. We're resuming our interview with Jock Whittlesey in his role from 2014 to 2016 as the deputy of the Environment and Science Section in U.S. Embassy Beijing, China. You arrived there in summer of 2014?

WHITTLESEY: Exactly. As I was talking about previously, we had a huge annual meeting with the Chinese that I think was in the middle of July. I made a major effort to get there a little bit before that and participate in these bilateral meetings because it was a great chance to capture the overview of our relationship with China. This was the set of meetings called the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialog (S&ED). I was somewhat of a passenger, rather than substantive. My role was more logistical, making sure people got to meetings and that there was notetaking and such. Not official meetings, but what you would call a Track 2 or 1.5, where you have academics and supporting organizations that came out. These big bilateral meetings where you had a lot of high-level people tended to attract a lot of people from not just around the U.S. government but also from nongovernmental organizations. They knew that folks were going to be there, there are going to be receptions, and this was a good opportunity for them to meet. So we took full advantage of that, but it does impose a big burden on the staff to organize everything. So it was a very busy time but a great way to get an introduction, which I certainly needed, to the current state of the relationship, and to meet some of the folks who were involved in that.

So that started with a bang in the summer and typical for the Foreign Service, a lot of what we would call 'churn', people departing from their original assignments, new people coming in. I think in our particular section it was just myself and the head of section. We were the "new guys" and most of the regular staff had been there previously, which was very helpful to us.

The person who was the head of the Environment Section was Erica Thomas, who left that summer, I think right after the S&ED, like the day after. She had obviously been asked to stay around to provide some continuity for the incoming folks like me. I think our new head of section, Chris Allison, was probably on home leave or training in the summer and didn't arrive until the end of August. So I had a little bit of time with Erica when I first got there. She's a well-known figure in the China environment world and has stayed working with energy issues, but she was one of the real powerhouses behind what turned out to be one of our major, not just environmental issues, with China, but our political and diplomatic issues, and that being the air pollution in China and in Beijing. She was really the guiding spirit on that. She did an amazing job of getting the nuts and bolts of the program up and running and keeping that going and dealing with all the political issues that accompanied this, in addition to the straight technical issues. She really made a gigantic contribution to U.S.-China diplomacy and to international environmentalism and is a major person. (She is) not particularly well-known outside of the U.S. government, but (is) somebody who should be. She left right after the S&ED and went to Brussels or someplace like that.

I remembered why we had a shift. I was going to be the deputy and a guy by the name of Jonathan Fritz was supposed to be the new head of the Environment Section. The two of us were supposed to be the replacements. My predecessor, a guy named Eugene Bae, his assignment ended routinely. He left a little bit before the S&ED, hence the need for me to get there early. He went to Seoul, I believe, and worked there on environmental things

for his next tour. So Erica and Eugene were leaving and Jonathan Fritz and I were supposed to be the new kids, he as the head of section and me as the deputy.

This is difficult in the Foreign Service [because] we're such a small group that a change in one place can really affect a whole series of dominoes, and that's what happened with Jonathan's assignment. I'm not sure I can pull all of the pieces together, but it might have been Susan Thornton who was going to be the consul general in Shanghai. She got pulled to be a deputy assistant secretary so now we needed somebody to fill the consul general Shanghai job, and that was the economic counselor-to-be. I've lost his name, so he was in a sense pulled out of Beijing and put into Shanghai, and that left the economic counselor job open in Beijing. Jonathan Fritz, who was supposed to be the head of my section, got tagged to be the new econ counselor, and that left the ESTH job open. Because the human resources machinery takes a long time to fill all these positions, we had in effect a job that needed to be filled right away. What they did was to ask Chris Allison, who was a reasonably senior and very competent member of the Economic Section to act as the environment counselor for a year until the [human] resources at the Department of State could advertise this job and find a full-time replacement.

So you have this clear trail of dominoes with people moving around to try to fill these jobs because it's difficult; you have to have language skills, and it's not something where you can ask somebody, "Could you?" It's not just like moving to the office across the corner." These might require people to move their families and [that] takes time, or they don't have the necessary training and that takes time. So we often have these stop-gap series of personnel moves to cover all the positions because of our small size, which I think a lot of people don't fully appreciate outside the State Department. The whole China group within the State Department, if you add up all the people who have skills, is probably only a few dozen people; certainly not more than 100. You're talking about a pretty small list who can work in a political or an economic job there right away. So, Chris Allison came in to be the head of section and I was the deputy and away we went!

I was delighted to be in Beijing. Everything had finally fallen into place with respect to my family situation, and we were where we wanted to be, when we wanted to be there, all of the various hurdles with respect to training had been either overcome or gone around in some way! So I was feeling good, and very pleased to be in Beijing. There was a real sense that, as there almost always is in China, that this was a very challenging and interesting time with a lot of opportunities ahead of it. Nobody quite knew how that was all going to work out, but China was getting more powerful by the day, and for a lot of us that was not a threat so much as an opportunity to really turn this relationship into something very positive and bring China into a global relationship that was going to be stable and positive and really make a contribution and move away from their more authoritarian past and become in the phrase, "a member of the global community."

We also felt, particularly in the Environment and Science Section, that this was seen as a real area of opportunity for us. China had big problems in those areas, they wanted our help in those areas, and we had established through the science and technology agreement

between the two countries, a long track record of working together. So everything was very exciting.

We also were in the Obama administration, so this was the first of our big issues that we were working on over the course of years, and started to really come to a head, and that was climate change. We can talk about that in a little bit more detail. As I mentioned earlier, Erica's work on air pollution reporting was just an absolute pivotal part of not just the environment relationship, but our entire political relationship. Air pollution reporting was a huge breakthrough, in my opinion, a key piece of the whole relationship. So the air pollution reporting was important.

Q: When you say "air pollution reporting," is this an embassy report that's required by Congress, or required by some agreement, or what's the nature of it?

WHITTLESEY: Sure, well we'll talk about that in detail, and then if you could remind me to get back to the last thing and that is Ebola. I think those were the three major issues—climate, air pollution, and Ebola. Let's talk about the air pollution issue in some depth because this was really—I'm groping for the right word—the centerpiece issue for the Environment Section. It started in a very modest way. I think sometimes folks don't realize how incremental diplomacy is, but this was a classic piece of incremental diplomacy. I can guarantee you that the people who started out with the first steps of that (air pollution reporting project) had absolutely no idea the way it was going to end up. They just had a short-term, small question in their minds that they wanted to solve, and that led to one thing, and that in turn led to other things, and over the course of years it mushroomed out.

The air pollution issue was started with a very basic question that ran smack up against the Chinese political culture, and that is, keeping information away from people. Everybody knew that Beijing had horrendous air pollution. There was a lady—I wish I could remember the name. I'll have to dig it out to give this person the credit that they are due for starting this process off. There was somebody who I think was a science fellow who was working in Beijing on a short-term basis. Not a career diplomat, but somebody who came over there who had some scientific training and a scientific approach to issues and worked in our Science Section, who came up with the question, "Well, what is the air quality here?" Nobody really knew.

Q: Now wait. Didn't the State Department periodically send somebody to take measurements at least for the purposes of determining the differential for health?

WHITTLESEY: Not that I'm aware of. It's not impossible that it was done, but I've never heard that. It's completely possible that it had gone without my attention and it was happening, that somebody would show up, but usually these things are pretty well-known. You're going back now into the 1990s and we didn't have handheld monitors and things like that. The air pollution issue, in terms of its role in diplomacy and foreign affairs, had not really taken hold. The United States had been dealing with

air pollution domestically for decades but the thought that this was an opportunity for diplomacy I don't think took off until the Beijing air quality monitor really took root.

So it's not impossible that the Overseas Buildings Operations had dispatched somebody, but I doubt it because those are fairly sophisticated machines. It's not something they could carry in their handbag. It would require a lot of setup. It doesn't sound like the kind of thing we would do. It's also unlike water where you can get somebody to send you a jar of it and run it through a lab in Bethesda just as if you were in Beijing. Air has its own peculiar set of conditions that require careful analysis. I don't think those conditions really existed until we got the air quality monitor going there.

To resolve your comment, I'll end by saying, "I'm not sure." I had never heard that, but it's possible. Even if it was done it was not done on a long-term, steady basis that was good for anything more than feeding back to our human resources system for determining hardship. Somebody probably just said, "On a scale of 1 to 5, how's the air pollution?" It may have gotten to that point.

This scientist working in our Embassy Beijing said, "What is the air quality exactly?" The Chinese, even they may not have had a very good idea, because in Chinese political culture this would be something like lifting the tent flap to poke your nose underneath and see what's going on. That is not a recipe for a successful bureaucratic career in China. The idea that somebody was going to stand up and say, "Hey, why don't we just check what the air pollution is like in Beijing?" doesn't sound like the kind of thing they did. So everybody would have been in favor of studiously ignoring the air quality from the Chinese side. Even if they had data, which to me seems maybe possible but not likely, that was being closely held and no doubt massaged very carefully to provide a rosy picture of what was actually a very grim situation.

So this lady said, "Let's get an air quality monitor." I think it was Erica, but it may have been somebody else. I want to try to recognize the folks who did the good work up front and had the idea that this is how we do it. We found a small pot of money that the State Department offered that had to do with public diplomacy. This is one of these grab bags of funding. If it was a few hundred thousand dollars I would be astonished. The State Department is not a wealthy and well-funded organization with respect to these sorts of things, but they had a bit of money and somebody said, "Let's get some of that and buy an air quality monitor and start monitoring the air quality." I think that was as far as the person had thought it through. It wasn't like, "This is going to open the door and we're going to be able to have the following diplomatic engagements that we take the next step and publicize. I think it was just the germ of a question, "What is the air quality?"

[We] got a monitor; it was $10-15,000, something like that. They set it up at Embassy Beijing and started checking the air quality. Once they had this information coming in—I don't know at what point they decided to start publicizing this, but let's give folks the benefit of the doubt and say, yes, they had thought that once they had the air quality information, they would publicize it. Because it was on the grounds that we have an

obligation to inform our citizens living in Beijing of this health issue. So that was the first step; getting the air quality monitor and publicizing the data as a way to inform our citizens. This was the diplomatic foundation stone of the whole process. It was not done as a way to embarrass the Chinese by blowing the whistle on how terrible their air is. I don't think that was really the genus behind this idea. It was, "Let's find out what it was and tell you." So pretty straightforward.

In diplomatic terms I think that's an absolutely defensible position. We have an obligation to protect U.S. citizens. Everybody can understand that. We started, I think, with a very basic approach to this and putting information out by email or by Twitter at the beginning, and this caught on a little bit. All of a sudden this was—I think it's worth noting that the political atmosphere in China, while it may have been authoritarian, hadn't started really pulling in the social media toolkit that they have now where they have this gigantic security operation to monitor and squash anything they don't like. These two developments grew up together, the air quality monitoring and putting it on social media. Nobody really had a sense of how this was going to play out, but the basic fact that we reported air quality on a regular basis took hold, and it was certainly done by Twitter. There started to be people within the Chinese community who said, "Hold on a second! Why is the United States—?" They were positive about it, "Why do we have to depend on the U.S. embassy to hear about air quality data in our Chinese city?" So it was the government people who were unhappy. The average citizens were like, "Hey this is very useful! Why didn't we know this before?" The Chinese government is nothing if not attuned to its areas of deficiencies and when people start complaining about it, they pay a lot of attention.

The (Chinese) government is now in high dudgeon about this and saying, "It's not the role of a diplomatic mission to put this information out there." They were clearly unhappy and asked us on multiple occasions to stop. I'm getting this as lore, second- and third-hand information, but I think it makes sense that this is the way things developed. We're putting this information out and we are getting a bit of a following in the Chinese social media, which was just budding then. Probably Twitter was still possible to do back then. It became clear that this was an issue that had some traction with the Chinese public, and for very good reasons, for the same reasons that it has traction with us.

This went along for a while and frequently the Chinese complained about the air quality monitor. They asked us to stop. This went right to the top of the State Department and secretaries of state were involved with this, and stuck with us, and said, "No we're going to keep doing this. We are not going to stop, even if you ask us." That took some backbone and it was appreciated. I think it was a major step in our relationship and I'm glad we didn't fold under pressure because the Chinese government was clearly unhappy about it.

One of the major incidents of the whole process happened in a typically accidental way. This whole air quality monitoring and hooking it up to social media and tweeting the results every hour was very much an ad hoc process. It just hadn't been done before. It's

also something the State Department as an organization is not particularly good at, even on a good day! Maintaining technical equipment is just not something that we do! It was all done in a, relatively speaking, very casual and ad hoc way by people who were figuring it out as they went along. It was a one-of-a-kind situation. I'm sure we were pressing people into service who were pretty new at what they were being asked to do, but they did their best. So you had this patchwork thing that developed over time.

I'm going to have to delve a little bit into the peculiarities of air quality information. EPA within the United States has the clear government lead on that information. (It is) something they do well and have done a lot of thinking on. They have the technical expertise. They came up with this set of gradations for public management of air-quality information. It was a green, orange, yellow, [and] red scenario, so people could quickly get a sense of, "What's the air quality today?" EPA had a difficult problem because of the multiple pollutants in smog. They have to come up with a way to compare. What if the nitrous oxide level is in this part of the scale and soot is in another part of the scale? Or particulate matter is where? And sulfur dioxide? So they came up with what amounts to a zero to 500 scale and they set off areas where they thought there was good air quality. Or this could be a problem for people who are sensitive to air pollution. Slightly higher—getting into an unhealthy range. Very unhealthy.

In a somewhat naïve way, they set an upper limit on just how bad air quality could be, which is essentially an artificial number because you're comparing all these different scales where you're taking a physical measurement and turning it into a scale number that just comes out with these healthy, unhealthy, very unhealthy ranges. So 500 was the top of the scale, and the idea was, "It's never going to be any worse than that." So that gives you an upper limit and lets you coordinate all your information. But they did call this like "beyond scale" or something along those lines. This was over the limit and it would just never occur.

Somebody—I don't think I've ever heard the name, but I could probably track him or her down if necessary—when they did the Twitter, they would figure out what the 0 to 500 value was and then print out the associated healthy, unhealthy, or unhealthy for sensitive groups, or very unhealthy. "Beyond index" was the term. The person had written the computer program that says, "If the 0 to 500 value is 150, print out 'unhealthy for sensitive groups.'" That's the message. Here's what it means for your health.

Apparently as a little joke to themselves, they said that if it goes over 500 it's "crazy bad!" This was just an innocent joke. You can see the computer programmer laughing to himself, putting it in as, "Nope, this is never going to happen." It's a comment, or it's not really working code. Of course, sometime later the next programmer came along and saw, "This was a comment?" So they made it live code and then one night the air quality index got above 500 and the Tweet goes out saying, "What's the air quality? It's 'crazy bad!'" This was completely unintentional and also flies in the face of everything EPA stands for, because they are nothing if not careful and meticulous and consistent and very staid. I mean this is their bread-and-butter reporting and they're very careful in how they

manage it. The idea that this little joke would pop out on a U.S. government Twitter feed was shocking, not only to the Chinese, but also to the EPA.

So this thing got out there and the uproar from the Chinese was immediate. It entered into legend as "crazy bad" air. So we fixed the problem, "Sorry about that; it won't happen again. We'll just say 'Beyond Index'". But it did. In one of those social media moments, it just circled the globe within 20 minutes of being tweeted out. That was a major incident, but the air was in fact that bad. It was perhaps not the most professional way we could have made those observations, but it happened, and "crazy bad" was born.

I think the very beginnings of the air-quality monitor system were in 2007–2008, between my tours (in Beijing). When I left in 2004 there was none of this. When I came back in 2014, it was up and running. It started, I think, in 2007-2008 and gradually developed over time. We had established protocols for managing the system, having it repaired, and recording the information. Over time we had raised our game a little bit and gotten more organized about it, but it was still essentially a one-of-a-kind system. And I think, too, as sometimes happens with these issues, there is a part of the Chinese government that found this completely outrageous and they were furious and wanted it to stop. But there was also the part of the Chinese government where they said, "These guys have got something here. This is something we should be doing." The Chinese Environmental Ministry, which was not even a ministry when we began this process, but more the equivalent of a bureau, they started to build their own network, so this was a positive outcome. I think leading by example, we did it. It was just facts; here's what the air quality is.

Q: Once we began to measure it and measure it over time, did that data get back to the Department for purposes of determining the health quality for American diplomats?

WHITTLESEY: Ultimately, the answer is "Yes." I want to be frank and also fair to people. This was just completely new and because the air pollution in Beijing was so intense, it really was something qualitatively different from the air pollution in the United States. We would say that just for purposes of giving people an understanding of what it was like in Beijing, if you take the worst air quality in the United States, the average air quality in Beijing was multiple times as bad as it was in the worst place in the United States. People just weren't used to thinking about air quality like this. This is a classic example of why this international discussion on these issues is so important, because conditions outside the United States are often radically different than they are internally. These are conditions that you simply won't find in the United States but are easily found in other places. All of a sudden the medical people, who hadn't really been thinking about this, they were only there for a couple of years, and nobody told them to worry about it, I can't speak in any detail, but they finally grasped that this is something that is affecting the health of our people. Not just the U.S. citizens who lived there, who are a much more diffuse group and we don't have any immediate medical responsibility for, but when you're talking about diplomatic people, now all of a sudden it's "Hold on a second!" You're taking somebody who maybe has asthma, or bronchial problems…

Q: Or small children.

WHITTLESEY: …or lung problems, or COPD and you're putting them in an area with intense pollution. Let's just talk about this for a little bit. There were folks within the medical (staff), the inward-looking part of State MED who did start looking at this and got involved with the air pollution and took it on in a serious and institutional way. I'm sure we look at that with much more care and detail than even 20 years ago, where that would have been like, "What are you talking about? Danger comes from bullets, not from little bits of stuff floating around in the air."

Q: Given that it did go on for a while, was it an object of interest for other posts to try?

WHITTLESEY: Certainly, yes. I think there's a lot of human psychology in all of this; it won't surprise you. The Chinese certainly deserve all the scorn that they get for their horrible management of air pollution. It was just too tempting a target journalistically for people to ignore. You had this unpopular regime who took a lot of trouble to hassle journalists and make their lives difficult and be mean to them. And you have this problem with air pollution that affects everybody and that the Chinese were doing their best to cover up, ignore, and keep people from finding out about. Of course [for] the journalists, this was the goose that laid the golden egg right in front of them! This was the story they could go to over and over. It was just absolutely fascinating to read, and the Chinese certainly had dirty hands on this and deserved everything they got.

It became a media sensation because of the fact that you had all of these elements for a great story where you had a bad guy, you had a legitimate problem, and all the journalists. Because Beijing is a world capital, everybody was there. You had the *New York Times* and you had the *Washington Post*, plus every other journalist. I remember talking to—I don't remember where she was from, maybe one of the Nordic countries. This was years later. They started looking at air pollution as it affected their missions. I remember telling this person—She came in to talk to me and wanted to hear the history, what we did, and things like that. I said, in the context of diplomatic engagement on air pollution, you had in effect a perfect set of circumstances in Beijing because the U.S. embassy there gets a lot of attention. It's big, it's well funded, we had a lot of good reasons, both health-wise and for political purposes, for really taking on the air pollution issue. So in terms of how the embassy, and of course with our U.S. legal system, you can't put your employees, just from a human resources management perspective, into what amounts to an unsafe workplace. So they had some serious issues to work on.

All of that meant the U.S. embassy was capable of mounting a real response to the air pollution issue. It took a while to get there, and one of the key events here happened—I got there in 2014. I think it was in 2012 or 2013 and they had bad air pollution, which in Beijing tends to take place in the winter when you have people burning coal. Parts of China even now are still quite poor and use coal, or they have poor-quality fuel. They don't operate their air-filtration equipment on their scrubbers, their big smoke stacks, and

so on and so forth. So the air pollution in the winter is when it's really bad. They had incidents, I think it was probably in January or February 2012. It could have been in 2013 where they had a very, very bad, not just a few hours, but several days' worth of just horrible air quality. You get the "beyond index" where it's so bad that EPA hadn't even come up with the terminology or the rules for reporting on it.

This was a bonafide crisis where it brought people, not only the Chinese, but the folks at the U.S. embassy into very clear awareness that they were at risk in some very serious ways for health damage. There was a lot of angst, a lot of concern, within the embassy community. I was not present for that but I have been told about the management of the embassy, the ambassador, and the Deputy Chief of Mission Dan Kritenbrink at that point, having a townhall meeting. It wasn't quite like a mob with pitchforks, but it was a very concerned and upset group of employees. This had nothing to do with the political situation; this had everything to do with, "We work in this place, and you're the boss. We have a problem. What are you doing about it?"

To the credit of the State Department and to Dan, they dealt with it in a serious way. We had, I think, quite a good air filtration system in the embassy. Fortunately the embassy was newly built there, built in time for the 2008 Olympics. People knew that the air quality in Beijing was bad so we had a good filtration system at the embassy, but now the question was, "What about our apartments?" and things like that. So the embassy started purchasing and distributing air filters for free so that people could run them at home to keep the air quality within their residences at an acceptable level. This was a serious investment. These were top-quality machines, plus all the procurement and maintenance that goes along with giving people a piece of equipment and something where filters need to be changed every so often.

We're now starting to look at the totality of somebody's life in Beijing, and "Okay, you're an employee. You're at the embassy for 9–5, five days a week, probably more than that, and the air quality is good within the building. We know that because we have a good filtration system, and now you have these good filters at home. If you run those (air filters), we have proven that they will (clean the air)." The embassy came up with a process for checking that and all the logistical ways that the State Department checks on things, and has to conform to this standard, and here's the way we test, and here's the machine that you use. People sometimes are unkind to bureaucracy, but this was one time where it worked for us.

Now you've got clean air at the chancery, the work building. You've got clean air at home. Most of the (international) schools in Beijing had high-quality air-filtration systems because they were not dumb and saw what was going on, and had the money. They invested in industrial-scale air-filtration systems.

One of the events that took place, which was an absolute sensation, again captured the moment, was when the International School of Beijing built a soft dome over its athletic field. When the air quality had reached a certain level the kids were banned from going

outside. All of this worked off our air quality monitor. So when you get to 200 on the U.S. embassy air quality monitor, that's it (the end of the day) for outdoor athletics. These bubble-top athletic fields were a sensation and again captured that this is the world we live in these days. Things are so bad there that we're having to, in effect, breathe filtered air when kids go outside to play.

Q: Wow.

Q: Yes, go right ahead.

WHITTLESEY: So the upshot of all of these individual events and the continuous reporting from the embassy was that this really broke open the air pollution issue in China with its specific connections with personal health. It also raised a lot of very troubling political questions for the Chinese about the relationship between their government and the people. "Wait a minute, guys, how come we're not hearing about this from you, and what are you doing about the pollution?"

Let's be completely clear here that the health ramifications of this are really horrendous, especially for somebody who lives and grows up in Beijing. Bad enough for us who were there for a couple of years, but if you're a child who is born up and just constantly battered by the Beijing air pollution, they have long-term, serious chronic impacts from the air pollution, which are non-trivial. Their lungs are smaller, they have higher rates of respiratory disease and heart attack, and cancer across the board. It has a number of serious health impacts, so this really cracked things open a bit, starting with our little air quality monitor and tweeting these things out like, "Crazy Bad." They had a cute name for our air pollution emergency in 2012. It might have been "Airmageddon," or something along those lines, which lent itself beautifully to social media and newspaper headlines and helped to bring it to everybody's attention. It just goes to show you the power of the media in all these things.

Q: A very quick question, the actual beginning of the use of this piece of equipment started before you arrived.

WHITTLESEY: Yes.

Q: By the time you arrived, how long had it been in operation, more or less?

WHITTLESEY: On a steady basis, I would say five or six years, so it was well established. This actually brings to mind one of the issues that I think I alluded to earlier about other places wanting these, and I have told you about Beijing being the laboratory for all this. But one of the issues that we faced, other folks started to say, "Wait a minute! We have air pollution here too!"

Q: India's famous, and there are times even in Brazil when they're…

WHITTLESEY: This is something I have not checked in on the current state of these things, but the State Department, to its credit, tried and I think successfully expanded the use of air quality monitors. We began with the other parts of Mission China, the consulates, so Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang, and Chengdu, and eventually Wuhan. So, yes, there was an effort to expand the air quality monitor program. We were working with EPA on this because they really are the air quality professionals. We're just diplomats. We'll do what we're supposed to do here, just tell us how to handle this.

But the idea was that this would go beyond that and become a global thing. So another program now that's embedded within the State Department is the air quality monitoring systems. There were some interesting discussions about where we need air quality monitoring. These things are not trivial to manage. They're not super expensive, but there are some costs. They require maintenance, and people have to manage the information, etc.

A place where there's very good air quality doesn't really need it. Nor a place where you have a responsible, open government. Nobody is going to be questioning the air pollution in Oslo, or places that have well-funded and open governments. So you're looking for places that a) have a problem, and b) don't have the government's willingness. Sometimes it's not their willingness, but their technical ability. Again, they're not simple matters to manage, and there's some expertise that's needed. Some places want to do it; they just don't know how. That's just not available or they don't have the money.

There's a bunch of criteria that came up. I think if you go to the EPA air monitoring website you can find the international sites and our U.S. embassies at this point. As far as I'm aware, those are the official ones that the pollution information is displayed on the EPA's website.

Of course this was a tremendous point of pride for us, and this goes back to the work that Erica Thomas had done to develop all of the, not the technical standards, but just the management that these things need, the reporting on how it's done, and to make sure that it can hold up under the political pressure that we were seeing in China. When I came in, it was just at the front end of expanding the air quality monitoring system, so people were starting to ask, "Well, how do you guys do that?" We took another hard look at the way we managed the system, with the idea of coming up with a global standard that other embassies or consulates could apply if they needed to run an air quality monitoring system. So that was, of course, a real point of pride.

Embassy Beijing and Erica had really broken ground on this, and it was a completely new way—It was a huge diplomatic win for us, in addition to being a real help for people who were concerned about their health. We're talking about the embassy's reaction to having the terrible week or two of really bad air quality. This began to raise questions like, "What about wearing face masks? Is this something we should do?" This is just simply something people hadn't thought about before in terms of providing guidance. "Well,

what do we do? Does the embassy provide face masks? Should you bother? At what time? Who should wear them?" It gets quite complicated.

I remember talking to one of the embassy doctors, and this really flabbergasted me, because he had been involved in the discussions about air quality with respect to employees. We had two classes (of staff). You had ones who were permanent, or there for an assignment, so there for three years. You also had people coming in who were maybe for a meeting, for a couple of weeks, a few days. What do you tell them? Are there people who shouldn't be coming?

He did not break any medical confidences, but he did say there are people here who really shouldn't be in this high pollution. They've got a breathing problem or some other kind of medical issue that interacts with the high air pollution in a way that's potentially very bad. I said "Are they nuts? What are they doing here?" He said, "Beijing is seen as a place where you can get a promotion coming out of this. It's a career enhancing assignment, because it's in the center of all the action, busy and big. You get to know people, and your name gets around. So you have people who really want to come here." So they're actively trying to subvert the medical people who are telling them, "This pulmonary disease. You really should not be going to this high-pollution place." And they're, "Well, I'll get an exemption," or I'll do this, I'll do that, and they find a way to come. MED has its own set of problems. That really caught me by surprise.

I thought people should be begging for this information and saying, "Well, golly, if the air pollution is that bad in Beijing, I'll just find another assignment." We should set up guardrails on our assignment system, and if you have the following medical conditions, you're out. But we hadn't gotten to that point yet, and I guess MED doesn't have quite the bare-knuckle power to tell somebody, "You cannot go to this place. We are not going to let you do that." But I do think that people may be more responsible if their kids have asthma or something like that. They will decline an assignment there, not seek it voluntarily in order to protect the health of their children. You think they'd be that smart for themselves, but when it comes to their own health, people are a little less careful.

I remember a couple of things related to the air pollution issue. I tried to set a strict rule for our family that if the air pollution got to a certain level, we would wear face masks outside. Period.

Q: The masks themselves are not just the ones you might wear for a cold. They were much more serious to keep out the really polluting particulates, I imagine.

WHITTLESEY: Yes, it's called an N95 style mask. It's the wealthy relative of your basic paper surgical mask. They are made a little bit more solid and made to capture the small particles that otherwise can literally get into your bloodstream. They're so small that they can cross the barrier in your lungs and get into your blood.

Q: N?

WHITTLESEY: N95. I think it has to do with the percentage of a certain size particle that will get trapped. They're a standard item. You go to drugstores here and you ask for N95 masks, and you get 10 of them. They're not super expensive, a couple dollars apiece, something like that.

I remember riding the bus in (to the embassy) one day and one of my friends was taking their children into the embassy for a medical thing. They were both wearing masks, and I was thinking, "How odd it is to have this mask over your face!" I realized that as an adult you compensate automatically, but for a child, now they're unable to see the person's lips, the voice is somewhat muffled, the face is hidden behind this white mask, and so it's really an odd condition. You're a parent interacting with a child and they're both (distorted talking) covered behind their mask and you get this muffled sound. A bit weird.

So a lot of strange things start happening. You would check the air pollution the way you would check the weather. [You] look at it in the morning with the embassy's hourly distribution of the air quality information. This got modernized and put onto air quality apps that you could get on your phone. You'd just pull it up and see what it was like. You would check, "Oh, the air quality is 225 this morning. Let's put on masks when we go out."

It's just one of those new conditions, like the weather, whether it's raining or not. Now you're dealing with the air pollution. We would tell folks who were coming to be prepared for air quality issues. Because you live there, you get used to it a little bit, but somebody who's coming, it's a real shock to their system. They might be feeling dizzy or something like that. I don't recall any specific incidents where people got off the plane really and felt terrible, but different people have different reactions. You could hear people even around the embassy, "Well, the air has a particular smell today." Or they taste something in the back of their mouth, these types of things, so it was clearly evident.

The Chinese government, to their credit, the different camps within the Chinese government—There was certainly the environmental camp who said, "Hey we've got to start dealing with this in a responsible, mature way." They started building up their system of air quality monitors. I think this encapsulates the U.S.-China relationship. The working-level folks were very interested in talking to the EPA. "How do you do this? How do the systems work? What do you do with the data? What do you store? What do you throw away?"

Of course at the top level they were unwilling to show any kind of enthusiasm for working with us. Frustrating. I think that the pendulum has now swung in the direction of disengagement, which is a shame, but at the time there was, at a minimum, "Hey, we need to work with these guys because they know what they're doing. They've been doing this for 40 years. They've got a lot of it figured out. We've got to do in three years what took them 40. Let's get on with it. Let's bring the folks over and let's have a

discussion." I've been in the meetings where those kinds of conversations took place, and this would never make it into the newspapers, but with high-level Chinese officials from the environmental part of the government saying, "We need your help. We can't do all the things that you know how to do. Help us. This is important to us."

As is our style, we did work with them. So that was very positive. So we had this engagement with one part and then the other part of the Chinese government, which is the reactionary, "Don't do anything to make yourself look bad." We would see pictures of (Chinese) people putting fire hoses, spraying water down on the air quality monitors so that their readings would be minimized, or they would unplug them, and go offline. Or they would just go into good old-fashioned data manipulation, and fix things.

Erica Thomas had done—I think it was a little bit earlier in the process, and as you develop this scientific infrastructure for reporting air quality, it becomes more and more difficult to fake it. But in the old days it was relatively easy. They could just manipulate the numbers. Somebody sat down and counted up the days for what the Chinese report of their air quality was like over the course of a year, and there was this extraordinary number that fell just short of the real warning level of bad air quality. The actual value that would trigger the air quality, on their scale it would have been at 100. You have an air quality alert or something, or an air quality emergency, a huge number of days were at a level of 99 and literally none had the 100. Then a few out in the higher levels where it became difficult to fake and cover it up, but clearly trying in a dishonest way to manipulate their data and make themselves look better.

Q: They were doing that back then. Now, in this day and age, given the greater sophistication with internet tools, I imagine it might be even easier to create false data or cast doubt on the data that have been for many, many years trustworthy.

WHITTLESEY: I would say no.

Q: Ah. Okay.

WHITTLESEY: I think there's a couple of factors that make it more and more difficult for them to really lie about the air quality. One is the advent of individual air quality monitors. People can buy things on the internet. It's the size of a small clock. They can put it on their bedside table. It tells them what the air quality is right there at that moment. They're not as sophisticated or quite as accurate as the big air quality monitors that we would use for professional purposes, but they're pretty darn good and would come close. So if the government monitor says, "It's a lovely day and the air quality is beautiful!" And your personal one, which you just got from Switzerland two weeks ago says, "Boy, the air quality is really awful today," that's not going to fly. So that's one reason why. In the old days there was just one air quality monitor for the whole city and everybody just looked at that number. Yes, that's relatively easy to fudge, but the more stuff you got going on, the tougher it is.

The other factor—and this goes directly into Chinese politics—is the national environmental ministry set up its own network of monitors, specifically to avoid or to try to short circuit the process of local people lying about their air quality. So when we were doing a report about their national air quality monitoring system, we were going to visit one of their air quality monitors, and the national environment ministry literally put somebody on an airplane from Beijing with the keys to the little cubicle where the air quality equipment was. They were the sole proprietors of that monitor, and not about to let the local government folks get in there and have access to it.

Q: Oh, wow.

WHITTLESEY: This is one of those unfortunate aspects of Chinese political culture, that nobody wants to look bad, nobody wants to show that their air quality is poor. In their political culture, that's the local government in effect perceiving themselves as having complete ownership of that problem. Their solution is simply to cover up the problem, which is awful. But this is the way the Chinese government works. The local officials don't want to be seen as owning any portion of a problem. It's a longstanding tradition to bury bad news. This goes back millennia, not just air pollution, it's just the latest version of how this is done.

But now that you've got the national government running its own network, they have a tool with which they can call out the local government. "Your monitor, which is a mile and a half from ours, shows an air pollution level that's 50 percent less. You want to explain that to me? Let's talk about that." The national government is certainly capable of bringing down the hammer when they want to. This is a way to keep everybody honest. We had real friends inside the environmental community, not just the environment ministry, but the whole environmental community, who wanted to deal with this problem in their own way. They wanted to figure out what they had, real reporting, and they wanted to manage their air pollution in a serious way. So there was this, not a little battle. I guess this was a real battle, because you've got major economic stakes here, like, "Are you going to shut down this misbehaving cement plant that's going to put 5,000 people out of work if you have an air pollution emergency?" "Are you going to have an honest-to-god low-pollution vehicle, and air pollution monitoring in a legal system where you can't drive unless your vehicle is outfitted with the correct anti-pollution equipment?"

As the expression goes, a lot of people's "oxen get gored" in those situations. You have some very powerful interests, which are saying, "We don't want to have to put on the scrubbers in our cement factory smokestack. It cost us too much money. You, as the local party chairman, better tell the (Chinese) EPA to shut up and leave us alone so that we can just go our merry way." So you start to have all those issues, but clearly the issues are much more out in the open. The Chinese government's various mechanisms are coping with that. We had a similar air pollution emergency when I was there, and one of the things they did fairly early on was to implement an even-odd license plate system to try to manage air pollution of cars. The Chinese solution: Buy two cars! So you

always have one that had a license plate that would work for that day, stuff like that. China's a funny place in that they're a very serious group of folks, and when they try to deal with a problem, they're very comprehensive about it. They know what's going on. They work these things carefully and in detail and they look at the way other folks have done it. Their laws and standards are often quite good, but their problem is on the implementation side. It's not that they don't know what to do, or they don't know how to do it; it's that they won't do it.

You hear these stories of other pollution issues, where the environment ministry in most countries is usually pretty small and weak. We would hear stories of environmental officials showing up to inspect a factory or a manufacturing plant, and just getting roughed up by a gang of bullies from the place and getting tossed out on their ear! Or locked up in an office until their boss got onto somebody's boss and got on to the (Chinese) EPA people and said, "Pull those people out of there. We don't want them around!" So, really dramatic law-breaking. There's nothing fake about it. Although they were certainly capable of doing fake stuff as well. They knew that the environment people were coming to inspect, so they'd turn on the air scrubbers. They (officials) come, they measure. Oh everything's great. They leave. Air scrubbers go off. So the compliance network was one thing that the Chinese had real problems with. The U.S. EPA has been much more successful at getting American companies not just to do the right thing, but to do that voluntarily without having to have EPA put in a lot of costly inspections and things like that. They have this voluntary compliance.

There's no doubt there's some coercion behind that. The local factories in the United States know that if we get caught then it's really going to cost us. So it's not even worth the trouble; compliance is going to be easier. This is really where the U.S. model shines. Our combination of technical expertise and engagement with industry would come up [with] what would amount to reasonable ways to reduce pollution, but at the end of the day the companies know that if they don't comply, they can really get in deep trouble.

But the Chinese political and economic model is, "We just won't comply and we'll fix it politically without even trying to have a pretense of technical compliance. We will just call the local party secretary who's my brother in law. He'll take care of our problems."

I did want to mention one more thing about the air pollution, then I think we'll bring our conversation to a close for this week, if that's okay with you. Different air quality monitors work in different ways. The one we had in Beijing—I suppose there are bigger and more expensive ones—was a professional-quality machine. They're not huge. The whole package is about the size of a refrigerator. The actual working monitor is much smaller than that, a bread box size. This also may be something that by the time people are hearing this, these words will be completely outdated and (pollution monitoring) will be done through a different technology, but the one that we used literally pulled the air through a piece of white paper tape. You would get the actual physical smog being deposited on this white paper tape. The way it was measured, it would pull a very carefully calibrated amount of air through this tape for a very precise amount of time.

Then it would pull it through what looked like a little circle about the size of a dime, it would pull that over half an inch, and see how dark it was; how much light would pass through.

The technical aspects of these go well beyond my capabilities, but this is basically how it works. It literally collects the smog on this dime sized circle, and then it figures out every hour how dark that (circle) is. Our monitor, which sat up on the roof of one of the embassy buildings, had this long roll of paper tape that would be fed through. Every once in a while, we would have the repair man go out, who worked for a Chinese company, and replace the paper tape; put in a new one and bring the old one out. But the reporting was all done electronically. As soon as the monitor pulled that thing out, 10 minutes past the hour, and read it, that (reading) got reported through electronic means, so instantaneously. The paper tape at that point was really unnecessary, it was superfluous. It only needed to be there for the hour that (the monitor) was pulling the pollution through and for the few seconds that it takes to determine the amount of pollution.

When we had briefings for visitors, I would hand people pieces of the paper tape. You have this long piece of tape; it's like a miniature roll of toilet paper. It's only about an inch wide and you can see these series of dots along it. I said, "This is actual Beijing air pollution." You could see it. If somebody had a roll where you pulled it out and you would be looking at 20 or 30 of these little circles, you could see the variation of the dark spot over here, "Hey, that's not too bad. It's a very light gray, not a bad day at all, or not a bad hour." I hoped that it was a fun thing for people, that I would just say, "This is your souvenir from Beijing. This is the real stuff. This isn't a printout. This is the smog that is coming into your lungs." People's psychology for you. Everybody knew about the air pollution in Beijing, and if we had clear air they'd be disappointed. It's like, "Oh, here's the Beijing smog!" "We can't throw this away! It's a beautiful clear day!" [Laughter] So that was funny.

We had been talking about the comparisons of Beijing and other cities, and you had mentioned India. This is one of the interesting things about Beijing in particular, and without going into a lot of details about it, sometimes the air pollution was horrible in Beijing, and sometimes it wasn't bad at all. People, of course, never heard about that! They expected it to be awful all the time, but it was just awful some of the time. It depended a lot on the weather, the seasons, things like that. Based on my limited knowledge, someplace like India has much more steady air pollution. Maybe the bad spots are not as bad as the worst in Beijing, but it also doesn't have the beautiful clear days that Beijing has once in a while.

And one of the things that I would always tell folks when we were talking about air pollution is that I think the psychological effects are just as strong as the physical effects. You would go through a time when it was gray and smoggy for maybe a week, ten days, wearing an air mask. Then one day, a front comes through, or the weather warms up for some reason, or the wind direction changes, and you have a beautiful clear day. You just

feel elated and buoyant. if it comes back you're depressed and moping about. So you've got this real psychological effect, but it does go up and down. To have a few days off from it is great, and you don't have to wear a mask. But the places where you're hitting it all the time, I think, are much more difficult to deal with psychologically. That was part of the process of dealing with air pollution.

I think there was something else at the back of my mind about the air pollution in Beijing and living with it… Anyway, I think we handed people the little circles that showed what it was like. I remember one time because the air quality monitor was on the top of a gate house. It was near a little side street where a lot of embassy vehicles parked. One night one of those vehicles caught on fire and you could see the air pollution from the monitor, which was 100 yards away, just skyrocket to unbelievable levels instantly in the course of an hour. It was an absolute spike going straight up because it was downwind of this vehicle fire that was close by. These things do happen, but in general having steady readings.

You asked about the history of this, because this is really what (mattered). One of the keys to the whole project was having consistent, comparable, reliable data over a long period of time, and that was really one of our key contributions. That was something we took very, very seriously. As I said, at the beginning when we started this project, I think without really supporting it in a serious, institutional way, just sort of ad hoc that I described, it was fine. But as we went along, it became clear that we really had to do a much better job of providing regular institutional support and to protect the (monitor) from potential hacks and other tricks that the Chinese might be willing to take. This was something that I spent some time on. Some of the other folks in my office spent serious time thinking about it, because with our IT infrastructure at the embassy, we were very careful about allowing access to our computers. So all of the information reporting for the air quality monitor had to be kept separate from our regular IT infrastructure, the regular computer and communications things, and it was just a lot of trouble to manage. We had to rethink that and not only in the sense of having reliable IT but also we had to make it defensible in that we had to be able to maintain this under what would amount to an information attack from the Chinese government if they wanted to take us offline. I mean if there was a terrible incident and they wanted to stop our reporting for their own purposes, we wanted to prevent that. We wanted that consistent reporting that was reliable, and that was key to us. It took a lot of energy to figure out how to do that. Then State Department regulations were managing computer hardware and communications software and the whole mess is not something we're good at. But we're working on it.

So I think if we could end our discussion here that would be great.

Q: We're resuming with Jock Whittlesey as he's departing Beijing. It's 2017 that you're departing Beijing.

WHITTLESEY: Yes. I guess that my pursuit for an assignment began probably in the fall of 2016 in the typical Foreign Service way. It was pretty clear to me at that point that I

would, as we say "tick out" of the Foreign Service in 2018 so I basically had a year from the middle of 2017 to the middle of 2018 where I could be useful and employed.

Q: *Now one second. You reached what grade at this point?*

WHITTLESEY: I was an [FS-]02.

Q: So, you were an 02 and you were in the 02 grade for as long the Department says is permissible and you hadn't yet been promoted to 01. I just wanted to be sure that I…

WHITTLESEY: In our typical fashion, I theoretically could have been promoted to [FS-]01 the day after I got back to Washington from my Beijing assignment. The promotion panel that met in the summer of 2017 was essentially deciding my fate in a formal way, but I think the die had been cast well before that. I didn't expect to be promoted and I thought it would not be appreciated by my colleagues if I bid on an overseas assignment and the first thing that happened when I showed up was, "Guess what, I did not get promoted. I've got to leave next summer." I didn't want to do that, so I was looking for something in Washington in the OES Bureau because I wanted to continue to have contacts in the environmental world because that was where I was heading once my State Department career ended.

So I asked around and found a friend of mine who worked in the office that deals with conservation issues and water. They were kind enough to help arrange, I think we call it a Y tour, just the letter Y. What that means is that it's in effect a handmade one-year assignment for some special purpose. It's not unknown to have those. I'm sure there's lots of them every year, but it fit my purposes just fine to come in where I could have a year in Washington. That also was very helpful to me because I wanted a year to start to get ready to be outside of the State Department, so that was extremely helpful to be in the Washington environment for my last year at State. All of that worked out.

At that point, my son had already been in college for a year so I didn't have any transition issues with him. He was fine, going into his second year of college, so my wife and I departed Beijing.

I guess this is actually a good time to release a little secret. This is like a mini scandal, or it could be perceived that way, but let me tell you the story anyway, because it's directly relevant to my work both in Beijing and on environmental issues.

When I was a lad, my first big overseas trip was to Hong Kong in 1980. During that trip I got myself a little ivory figurine that I had been carrying around the world and loved dearly. It was there with me in Beijing as I was working in the Environment Section, promoting U.S. policy to end ivory trading! To cut a long story short, I decided to throw it out because I simply could not take the risk (of being caught with it). You know the Chinese government would have loved nothing more than to find a U.S. (environmental) diplomat who had a nice ivory carving in his house. That was something I just could not

entertain as a possibility. So not quite in the dead of night, I snuck it into a common trash can out at our housing and it's gone! So that was a sad part of our pack-out. I miss that poor little sleeping man greatly, but that was just something that had to be done so that I didn't put the State Department at any risk of myself and the embassy of looking foolish and hypocritical. Although I had had it for nearly 40 years, those sorts of explanations wouldn't have been too convincing to anybody, I think.

So we packed up. We already had a house in Washington, so that was also easy, and very helpful. That's a big part of it, and I'm sure it's much worse now where everything is interlinked with your cell phone, your emails, you have to talk to each other, you get confirmation codes and things like that. I didn't have a personal cell phone, but at that point I think it was not too difficult. At least I had the address. My wife and I knew where we were going and could make all the arrangements with our household goods and things. So that was very handy.

So, we packed up, sent our car back, and I started work in September 2017 in the OES Bureau. I knew a few of the folks in that particular office and around the building who had worked on environmental issues, so I was on comfortable turf. Pretty much as soon as I got there, I got this very official letter from Human Resources saying, "Sorry about that, but you've got a year to clear out (retire)."

I ended up working on what they called the Wildlife Team in that office, and our mandate was to gather information and generate policy related to wildlife trafficking, which is the illegal trade in living and dead animals around the world, animal parts such as ivory and things like that. We assembled a report about that, working with colleagues around the U.S. government and in the NGO sector. That was one part of it, but also anything we could do to understand the situation that wild animals were in around the world and to find ways to encourage their protection, so we had a vibrant natural sector that benefits not only the animals, but people as well. So that was my work for that year. I enjoyed that very much and was working with pretty good-sized NGOs on the international environment; NGOs like WWF and Nature Conservancy, and then some more specialized ones that deal with particular species, such as Panthera, which deals with the big cats. You get into working with these odd animals like pangolins, which not a lot of people have heard of, but are very heavily trafficked animals. There's a pangolin organization, it won't surprise you to know.

Q: I'm sorry, what is a pangolin? I've never heard of it.

WHITTLESEY: P-A-N-G-O-L-I-N. It's not unlike an armadillo. It's a small ground animal, and its claim to fame is it's covered with fairly hard scales and that's its defense. Unfortunately for the pangolin, Chinese folks have developed a hankering for the scales and some form of Chinese medicine that's supposed to be something good for you somehow. They are killed and their scales and their meat are trafficked in just enormous quantities, certainly more than the population can bear. They're becoming more and more threatened. It's a difficult scenario where they live in Africa and they are captured

and killed there, and their scales are sent up to China in vast quantities; tons, sometimes. For something about the size of a small dog, a ton of scales represents a lot of animals.

So there's a very sad side of working with wildlife, but the opportunity to try to do something positive for the animal kingdom is a great one. We worked on a wide variety of species, trying to develop policies that would lead to their protection. Another animal we worked with a lot was the snow leopard, a very beautiful and rare big cat that lives in—There's a bunch in the Asiatic mountains, so Mongolia, western China, some of the "Stans" have populations of snow leopards. We had an event to promote snow leopards and brought policy people, NGOs, and other interested parties together to talk about it. So this was the sort of thing I was working on. As I said, I really enjoyed the opportunity to work on wildlife issues and meeting folks around town who shared that interest, both professionally and personally.

You never quite know who you're going to run into, but the Humane Society turned out to be a big player in this. There's a group called IFAW, the International Fund for Animal Welfare. The Association of Zoos and Aquariums brings in folks like the San Diego Zoo, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, the New England Aquarium, and all of the big zoos and aquaria around the United States who play a big role in protecting and preserving wildlife. They had a very fun event that I attended at Capitol Hill, which they do every year where they bring live animals to let people look at all kinds of different things that are suitable—we always say—for that kind of a setting. They're not bringing tigers or anything in there, but somebody had a little crocodile and some birds. I've forgotten all of the individual animals that were there, but they really are extraordinary looking and just the opportunity to work in that setting was a lot of fun.

One other thing that I wanted to mention that I enjoyed a lot about that assignment. I was in a sense on my way out of the Department, so the good news was that I was not required to participate in management-type things which, had I been a regular working officer at that level, I would have been a deputy or a section head or something like that, where you're [processing] leave requests, putting people in for training, ordering supplies, all of that stuff. So my job was almost 100 percent focused on substance, which was great! We had interns and entry-level officers and it was fun to spend some time with them, to show them how the State Department works on these issues, and to acquaint them with the federal government from the inside. So that was good.

Of course we're working with other agencies, the Department of the Interior and the Fish and Wildlife Service. One of the issues that came up at that point had to do with wildlife trophies being imported to the United States and the role of big-game hunting. I think most folks would say that if something does not help the local people,. you're in trouble because they might for financial reasons be forced to support poaching or kill animals directly to support themselves. It's a very tough problem to resolve. You have folks who are living in these areas who are trying to survive as best they can. You don't want to see animals get killed, but sometimes the best solution might be to lose a few animals to hunters who bring in a significant amount of money from the hunters who pay big fees to

go out and shoot these animals. Most of our time was spent on trying to support ways to reduce the trafficking of animals. That might be training for police forces, computer systems that allow folks to exchange information, or just bringing people together to talk about the problem, both the supply and the demand ends, so they have each other's cell phones and they can say, "Hey we're seeing this shipment coming to your country. Maybe you ought to take a look." You also have technical things. There are people who train dogs, like drug-sniffing dogs, to sniff out wildlife. They can be trained to identify ivory or other wildlife products by smell.

Q: That's interesting.

WHITTLESEY: There's all kinds of things going on. There are technology issues related to using drones, special cameras to detect poachers, and to support professionalizing the local park rangers. One of the most interesting groups I had the opportunity to hear from is a group called African Parks. They're basically a British-organized NGO that is there to help protect wild animals and wild places. They do it by coming in and running national parks in areas where the local government simply does not have the money or the technical capacity to operate these parks. They're still out there doing their thing, and they essentially offer, "If you let us come in, we'll take care of this problem for you. We will train the rangers and we'll bring them good equipment." In some of these places, it's literally getting the people paid and fed. Your guy's got some kind of muzzle-loading gun from a long time ago and the poachers have AK-47s. So some of those places are quite dangerous and more than a few rangers have been killed in confrontations with poachers. It's nice to have some training, some weapons that will work, and ammunition and radios. All of these things make a big difference.

So that's a little bit about the substance of my time there. My colleagues worked on the official report related to wildlife trafficking, which I will say has remained one of the few issues on Capitol Hill that really has true bipartisan support. It's hard to find somebody who's going to argue against protecting wild cats and beautiful animals in the wild. So this has also made it relatively enjoyable to work on because you don't have things that are poisoned in a partisan way.

I didn't testify myself, but went to listen to my colleagues testify to folks on Capitol Hill, which basically amounted to an information exchange with Capitol Hill staffers, or senators or congressmen, and describe what we do and (provide) information about the wildlife trafficking situation. They are seeking ways to help. So all of that was very good.

Q: Did you take part in any of the bilateral or multilateral meetings of some of these conventions, like CITES?

WHITTLESEY: No. My boss, Christine Dawson, did some of that. CITES was handled by a colleague, Kristin Koyama. She was working with (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife. She was our official point of contact for CITES and would work on the documents, reading

reports, gathering information, and sharing that. I did not do that, but Kristin was a very able and effective person who filled that role beautifully.

As I said, when we started talking about this assignment the time table was clear. I had to be out of the Department, gone, badge turned in by the end of September 2018. The State Department has what they call a retirement course for the Foreign Service that runs two months. I knew that was going to be August and September 2018, and at the end of that, I was going to be out the door. It was very nice to have a clear time table with some transition period built into that. So I left the OES Bureau at the end of July and began the retirement course at the beginning of August. The August portion of that (course) was classroom-type information, literally at FSI where somebody would come in and talk about Medicare or all kinds of grim topics like managed care, what to do with your Thrift Savings Plan, or ideas for people about what am I going to do now? Or, here's what you need if you want to be a teacher, or if you want to open a restaurant, a little bit about running a small business, all these different options. It was quite an effective and useful course, I think, and really packed with a lot of information. Different people were going to take different things away from that, because some folks really have a pretty clear picture of what they want (to do in retirement). They may even already have a job or be close to it. The (instructors) make some effort to connect you with potential people who are interested in hiring Foreign Service Officers, and they let you work on your resume and other good life skills and teach you about LinkedIn. So that was useful.

Then September, essentially you're still getting paid for that last month, but you're not in class and you're free to go out and do job interviews and scout around for whatever you want to do when the time comes for you to leave the Department at the end of the month. So I did that and my wife joined me for large portions of the classroom stuff because it was very helpful for her to hear some of this, e.g. how you manage your finances, and health-related issues. Guess what! You're in your 60s now. It's not like being 28. Here's some things to keep an eye out for to keep your physical and psychological health. All of these types of things.

So that was it! In due course, the end of September rolled around. I don't remember what day, whether it was at the end of July when I got my retirement badge or at the end of September. It may have been at the end of September. That's one of the things that this retirement course does for you. I had filled out a form and so I had this knife edge experience where I was in the main HST building in Foggy Bottom with my regular State Department badge, which gives me essentially full access to the entire building without any trouble. It was a few days before my official retirement date. I went to the badging office to get my retiree badge. They take your picture, they give you a new badge, and take your old one (laughter). All of a sudden, once I went out the door, I had to go through security to come back inside. I was no longer welcome above the 2nd floor. All of these little problems emerged and it was just this instantaneous and somewhat shocking transition from being part of the team to being something less than a full member of the State Department, simply because of the badge and what that gave me access to.

So that's my story, and so Phase II, maybe Phase III of my life started October 1, 2018 and chugging along. I've come back now. One of the…

I took the course in August and September of 2018 and I think it was maybe December 2018 or January 2019 that the lady who ran the retirement course sent around an all-hands email to the people who had recently graduated saying, "This office in the State Department is looking for people like you to be editors of the human rights report." I said, "That sounds like fun!" I had not had any luck getting a job with an NGO or a firm that dealt with environmental issues, so this sounded like a reasonable alternative, and I pursued that. So I ended up coming back as what the Department at one point called the WAE, While Actually Employed. There's another acronym, something like a Reemployed Annuitant, and REA, but it's basically a half-time program for State Department retirees. You're brought back at the same pay grade for a maximum of half a year's worth of hours. You can spend that any way you want, whether you work full time for six months or half time for the full year, but they have a clear idea of how many hours per year you can work.

I started doing that in September 2019, working on human rights reports (for 2019), primarily for the Western Hemisphere Affairs group within the Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Bureau, and have enjoyed that. So I'm kind of on summer vacation. They get all their information together and cleaned up in January and February, so I think it was in February the work ended and I walked away from that. But with an expectation that it will begin this coming September and start all over again for the 2020 HRR.

So that's been part of my post-retirement world. I'm still connected with the State Department in a slightly different policy area, but have enjoyed working on the human rights aspect and have gotten into that in a little more depth these past couple of months during the pandemic when I have lots of time at home. I've been reading up on the aspects of that to try to expand my knowledge of the field. So that's what I've been doing. That's the Jock Whittlesey story in more detail than you probably wanted or needed, but there you go. I'm happy to field any questions or develop this in any ways that you would like.

Q: Looking back on your career, have you seen changes in the way the Department handles families, since you did have a family and you were traveling with them during your career? Has the Department changed for the better or for the worse? How would you say it deals with the family aspects of life?

WHITTLESEY: I don't think that it has changed remarkably, I've got to say. I joined in 1992, 1993. You've got my resume there that will have the correct date. I'm lost as to when I went overseas, but anyway, '92 or '93. We did not have any children at that point. My wife was given access to a lot of the training that I had, which I thought was great, much appreciated. She had the chance to work, either with assistance from the Family Liaison Office when we were overseas, or to work in the local economy, or in the case of

our last Beijing assignment, to be an embassy employee, which was also very helpful for her. I think those options were there all along, and I must say I don't recall any huge shifts with respect to either the types of support that were available or financial issues, anything like that. I'm sure there were people working hard to make that as beneficial a relationship as possible, and I don't want to minimize their efforts, but I don't recall any earth shattering change where we came in one day and the situation had changed dramatically from the status quo into something more helpful for families. I'll ask my wife about it, and if there was something that got her attention, I can reconnect with you to spell that out, but resources were there from the beginning. It has remained somewhat of a thorny issue for the State Department, I think, and it is far from being a completely solved issue.

Q: The next question, was your training adequate for the requirements of your jobs, or how would you address the question of training in the Department?

WHITTLESEY: I think this is something the State Department can do better. I've thought about it a fair amount and have seen a lot of discussion of training issues in the Foreign Service Journal and other learned publications. The one thing I think the State Department does pretty well is language training. That is something they have carved out the space and time to make happen. That is a good aspect of State Department training.

My suggestions would be to spend more time on the equivalent of area studies and learning more about the countries you're going to, history and current events and who the political and social leaders are. A lot of that takes place organically at this point when you show up at a place, but with the demands of your job coming right away, I think you end up taking something of a haphazard approach to understanding what's going on in your particular country.

I think more knowledge about our own government would be helpful, because all of a sudden you're dealing with a set of issues and you have to figure out how does this work in the U.S. interagency. Part of our job is to explain that to our foreign counterparts, and if we ourselves are trying to figure that out, that does not make us effective representatives of our own system. I was working on wildlife issues, for example, so that meant I had to figure out what the department of … how they were organized, who worked on those issues? I had to find them, all those types of things, and insert myself into the process. This is something that goes on, and you're going to do it for maybe two or three years, and then another person's going to come in and pick that up, and they have to go through the same thing, so there's a lot of inefficiency in that process. While you're trying to figure something out, not quite from scratch each time but pretty close to it. I think it would make us more effective as an organization if we had a little bit of training to raise the floor a little bit on what our knowledge is, stepping off the plane.

Another area that I think we don't know a lot about is the international system. We're all dealing with the UN, and right this moment the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization. I think people just get dropped into these situations and have to

learn on the job about how they operate and what their history is. I think that is very inefficient and makes us certainly look bad for those situations where you may be talking to somebody who's spent their professional life working on UN issues and they know everything about it, or a lot about it, and you know nothing. That is not a good way to represent U.S. foreign policy.

Two things about the State Department that continue to amaze me, from the beginning or through to the end, is our institutional phobia about interaction with Congress and our institutional phobia about interacting with the press. It reminds me of that great Mark Twain expression, "A cat who goes onto a hot stove, he won't hop onto any more hot stoves, but he won't walk on a cold one, either." I think there's just so much that's lost by having those interactions so tightly controlled. I know the press can be ugly sometimes and requires some management, but I also think there's a lot that we give up by not having a better chance to interact and be more proactive. I don't want to say offensive in the sense of being overly aggressive, it's just that we have a good story to tell. We certainly have policy issues that we're trying to deal with, and let's make some friends out there in Congress and then the press so that we're not just talking to people in the foreign ministry. I think this is related to the public outreach aspects of our work—I wish that we had better support for that. A couple times I signed up for various—I'm trying to remember what they call it here—the home town diplomat course, or program that we had. Just zero support to you in terms of connecting you with folks. It's like sure, okay, fine, you go out and you find all of the people to talk to.

Q: Just one quick thing. I think I'm getting a little bit of static or background noise on your side. Is there anything that's brushing against the…?

WHITTLESEY: I'll bring this up a little bit closer to my mouth. There's nothing major going on. I think I hear a washing machine in the background, but it's very faint.

Q: No, it just sounded like something was brushing against it.

WHITTLESEY: It could be the microphone is just rubbing up against my shirt. That's the only thing I can think of. I'll sit up and try to hold it a little bit closer to my mouth and avoid generating any external sounds.

Q: Okay.

WHITTLESEY: The hometown diplomat program, which I did a couple of times, I was very much disappointed in the level of support that we got from the Department. You're coming back for home leave and looking for somebody in the press to talk to, and it seemed to me a good place for a couple of energetic people to be very helpful, who did this all the time, and knew who to reach out to, and could connect you to. Same thing overseas, I was always ready to go out and talk to a school or talk to the ladies' lunch circle, or the chamber of commerce or whatever, and just got zero support for that kind of thing. If you wanted to do it, fine, you can go ahead and do it. But in terms of saying,

"Hey I'd be happy to do this," and have somebody come back in a week and say, "We got a request here. Could you go? Nothing. Zero. So I found that disappointing.

Q: Now over time how have you seen the Department change? Obviously you lived through the changes of the internet and the ability to communicate 24/7 instantaneously, but aside from that, were there other changes you noticed in the way the Department did business, either for good or for ill?

WHITTLESEY: Let me think about that for a minute. Certainly the development of the internet and cell phones and quick social media, all of that made a difference. I guess you'd have to say that that certainly changed, if not revolutionized, the way we do business. I think the State Department culture is, for better or worse, a much more conservative, slow-moving way of interacting with people. I'm not going to say we were dragged kicking and screaming into the 21st Century, but compared to some of the options that I think are now open to us for really dramatically changing the way we do business, I would say that has not happened. Our traditional role of being the official voice of the United States and interacting with foreign counterparts in professional diplomatic matters, which is writing cables and things like that, has stayed the meat and potatoes part of our work. I don't think that has changed dramatically. Yes, you can now put photographs in cables and things like that, and probably there's a little more interaction with a wider range of stakeholders, but not quite to the extent that I think could have taken place.

There are good reasons for us to be a relatively conservative organization. We have a huge mission and that is something that has developed over time. I respect the fact that for decades, and if you look way back, for centuries, this has been an evolving process. An electronic toy isn't going to change the fact that we still have to meet people to hammer out agreements and things like that. That's the nature of our work. Since that hasn't changed, the way we do business hasn't changed dramatically, I think. Anyway, that's my take on that.

Q: My last question is, if you were going to advise someone who wants to join the Foreign Service, what skills and abilities would you tell them to try to acquire to be competitive and to be successful in the Foreign Service today?

WHITTLESEY: I do meet people all the time in various ways who are at least potential candidates to join the Foreign Service. I talk to them about my experience and this is where some of the traditional aspects of diplomatic service remain completely current. Whether you're talking about 1950 or 2020, it is not as different as you might think. I guess in the old days you would get on a ship and disappear for three years, and have limited interaction with Washington. That part of it has changed a lot. But the first thing that I think is really more of a personality issue is that you've got to really want to do this, and enjoy international life. My advice to somebody who is young is not to ask their friend from college who graduated three years ago about what it's like to work in a law office, a business, Wall Street, or something like that. Ask somebody who's in their 40s

and has been there for 15 or 20 years and really understands what it's all about. Then make some decisions about it. I've worked a full career in the State Department and when you walk away from a career after 20 or 30 years, and you can say, "Hey, I just loved every part of it," that is a good career for you. So you have to focus on why is that so good. What is it that you like about that? That's the part that's going to make it work over time.

Let's pick on the lawyers, okay? Since they're a nice, easy target. People go to law school and they have this vision of what it's like to be a lawyer, or maybe a financial person. I've known some folks in the Foreign Service who started out in the financial world, and they worked there for four or five–eight years, and then they started looking at themselves and saying, "Is this really what it's all about? Is this what I want to do for the rest of my life?" The answer is, "No," for some of them. So they come to the Foreign Service because we have this very mobile lifestyle that pushes a lot of change and adaptation onto you; gives you an opportunity to live and work overseas. That's just not something that you see a lot. It's completely different from taking your annual vacation in Mexico or going to Italy or something. When you live and work in a foreign country and have your family there, it's just much different than even an extended vacation. That's something that has to really appeal on a very basic personality level. It doesn't happen a lot, but I think one of the traps is that people think they are going to enjoy international life, and the reality is that is not always the case. It's stressful to live overseas, to be in a place where you don't speak the language, you don't know what's going on, where everything is going to be a little tougher than it is at home.

When I have these conversations with prospective diplomats, I say, "My own two brothers couldn't be more unlike me in that respect. I'm the one who always wants to get on a plane and go somewhere, and they are perfectly content to be home boys, staying in the same place. They like that, that's what they want. It's not whether I'm a better person, or they're a better person, but that's chemically what they want. If you put them into my job, it would drive them crazy, they couldn't do it, they would drop out." Probably the reverse is true, that if I had to take the lifestyle of my brothers, I would not be happy in that. So you've got to really match up at a very basic personality level to the demands of moving all the time, and living overseas in a foreign culture, and to understand as best you can what really that means in terms of its demands on your psychological energy, your native abilities, and your personality. Is this something that you can tolerate for extended periods of time? The answer for some people is no. Don't get into it if it doesn't seem right to you or you're not sure you're comfortable with that. Of course there's going to be anxieties and concerns with every move, but if at a basic level that doesn't seem an attractive prospect, I think folks really need to think carefully about whether they want to be in the State Department.

That's something that I think has not changed much. Yes, you have the internet now. It helps a huge amount to have email, phone calls, things like that to know what's going on. But the fundamental issues related to living overseas and interacting with people from

other cultures and countries have not changed, I think, at all or very little, for us in the State Department. So that's the overall take.

I criticize our lack of education and training, but I think the State Department does more of that than a lot of companies where they're much more likely to just hire somebody who's qualified. It's the idea of developing in-house talents. I don't think it's unheard of in the private sector, but certainly the State Department should be (doing more training). I think in the military there's an expectation that everybody who's a military officer is going to do at least a master's, take a year off, do a sabbatical. We (State Department) don't do any of that. We're just constantly going to the next assignment. You've got maybe a couple of weeks in Washington to catch up, and that's just not enough.

I'd like to see more education, but I think we do more of it than a lot of careers offer. I personally like all the changes and the new settings coming around all the time. When I first joined the State Department, I had been working as a self-employed consultant for a while and the sort of retirement issues and benefits and all of those things (at the State Department) were not a big issue. I remember one of the happiest days in my life was when I heard that the State Department actually provides your housing overseas! I was thinking, "Gosh, how am I going to cover an apartment in Rome on an FS-04 salary? That's going to be a big bite there." So that was a great moment when I realized that was something I didn't have to worry about. As I've stayed in, of course the financial aspects, this kind of continuity of it, the solidity of it, having good benefits, (has mattered more).

But one of the things that I appreciated more and more as I stayed in the State Department, and it's not the financial and economic aspects of the civil service, but first of all the basic cultural ethos of service to the country. It's a great thing to get out of bed and feel that that's your role in life. Also the civil service protection, which take a lot of flak for being red tape and bureaucratic, and there's no doubt there's some downsides to it, but on the other hand, I've always felt that I could take a—What's the word I want for a rational decision to, the equivalent of being a whistleblower or to express dissent in a mature way and have the civil service protections around me so that if I said something critical of the boss I couldn't just get fired the next day because he or she didn't like me; that it had to be a little bit more than that.

I know there are folks who coast along in civil service and it is tough to move them, to get rid of them if they're underperforming. On the other hand, I really felt that—Let's say something like sexual harassment, that I think is an issue that the State Department has taken increasingly seriously over the years that I've been in; issues related to gay and lesbian employees; racial prejudice, all of those things. You have some serious protection and some structure on your side that will protect you if you speak up against a supervisor who has crossed the line and those are bad lines to cross. People should get in trouble for making passes at their subordinate employees, or for making stupid jokes about racial or religious issues, these types of things. Those are people who deserve to be fired. I'm glad those protections exist and it's not just, "Oh well, that's the boss, so I don't want to get fired so I'll shut up." That is not a good work situation, in my opinion, and I think the

federal employee regulations related to harassment and EEO issues have a very positive side, and that was something where I was always glad that I worked in that setting.

Q: All right. I've reached the end of the interview, unless you have any parting thoughts.

WHITTLESEY: I do not. I think I've said what I wanted to say. It's been very interesting to me to dredge up some of these memories and it's interesting the extent to which it's happened on the spot. If you had asked me—Unless you have somebody like you there patiently listening, and asking questions and going through things in a fairly close and detailed way, you don't think about these things. But, "Oh yes, I remember all of a sudden!" But your memories get triggered and it brings it all back in a way that reminds you of a particular situation, good or bad, and that's been fun for me.

Q: Curious that you mentioned that. We've learned over time that the conversational approach to helping people remember is more valuable than just about any other, in particular when it's a peer-to peer-interview by somebody who has worked in the same kind of work that you've done and knows in advance what to ask to help trigger memories and help bring back some of the details and the wonderful anecdotes; what it's like to know the ground truth living in a country working for the U.S. government.

All right. So I'll conclude by thanking you on behalf of ADST for all the time you've put into this. We'll end the formal interview here, so I'm going to pause the recording.

End of interview.