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

EDWARD H. WILKINSON

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Ed, tell me when and where you were born and something about your family.

WILKINSON: I was born in Marion, Indiana on the 5th of June 1936. I'm the eldest of three children. Our mother and father were married when they were at DePauw University, in Greencastle, Indiana.

My father was born in Indianapolis, but grew up in Marion. His name was Hugh Edward Wilkinson. My mother, Sarah Emily Smith, was born in Anderson, which is twenty miles to the south of my birthplace. She moved to Marion after she and my father got married at the height of the Depression in 1933. I didn't come along until 1936.

Q: Let's talk a little about first the background of your father, your family. How did they all get to Indiana and what were they doing after they arrived there?

WILKINSON: I can actually talk about that at length because my paternal grandfather's first cousin, a librarian, spent a great deal of time researching the family history. She wrote a bit about what she found interesting, and I have a copy of her study. According to her, the first person in our line in the U.S. was a certain John Wilkinson, who, though probably British, apparently came to the U.S. from Ireland in the late 1700s. In any event, he arrived in the New World at Cape Cod, and then moved down into North Carolina where he established a home.

Towards the end of his life, the whole family emigrated westward, but he died at about the time they were leaving. So three or four of his children and other relatives moved to Ohio for a year or two, and then on to Indiana, near the town of Peru, which is in north central Indiana. My grandfather was born in Peru in 1886. He, his elder brother and their two sisters lived there during their childhood. The two boys stayed on in Indiana and the women moved to other parts of the Middle West after they got married.

Q: Were they farming, or merchants, or what?

WILKINSON: They were essentially business people. My grandfather worked for a railroad at one point. Upon graduating from DePauw, my grandfather and his brother went west. They spent quite a number of years in North Dakota where they were in the

lumber business.

My grandfather participated in semi-pro baseball, while living in North Dakota. According to family lore, which I think is true, he came back to the Middle West on a baseball tour. There, in Morristown, Indiana, in what is now called the Kopper Kettle Restaurant – then, I think just a rooming house – he met my grandmother who was visiting Morristown with her parents. My grandmother, my father's mother, was born and raised in Columbus, Indiana. They later got married and around 1912 moved to Marion where my grandfather got into the woodworking business. He spent the rest of his life there. He and my father were both associated with a small furniture company in Marion called the Spencer-Cardinal Corporation.

Q: How about on your mother's side?

WILKINSON: Well, I can tell you quite a bit about them, as well. The reason why is that that side of the family tended to live into their 90's, and so I was able to learn a great deal about their backgrounds from them, directly.

My mother's father's family came from central Germany, specifically the area around the town of Kirchhaim in the state of Hesse. My great, great grandparents came to the U.S. in 1842. While I was assigned to Germany between 1995 and 1999, I had the good fortune to visit the area where they were born and raised. In fact, I was able to see my great-great grandmother's birth record in the church where she was baptized in the town of Langenstein, a couple of miles from Kirchhaim.

Q: What was the name of the grandparents?

WILKINSON: That part of the family was named Schmidt, although they later changed it to Smith. My great-great grandmother's maiden name was Altainz. In the town where she was born, Langenstein, I found a number of headstones in the local cemetery with that last name, but from what I can gather they were not close relatives.

Anyway, they came in 1842 by boat to New York. My great-great grandfather, Heinrich Schmidt, led a team of oxen, pulling a boat down the Erie Canal, and they ended up in Butler, Pennsylvania, north of Pittsburgh. Heinrich became a glass blower as did his son, my great grandfather, Conrad.

Q: …Pittsburgh Glass?

WILKINSON: Perhaps a precursor of that company. The reason glass was manufactured there in those days was the abundant natural gas in the ground in that part of Western Pennsylvania. This resource made glass blowing relatively cheap and convenient. But when the natural gas ran out, as it did while my great grandfather Conrad was working there, they then immigrated to Indiana where natural gas was still plentiful. In fact, they originally went to a place called Gas City, Indiana, which was named for exactly that

reason.

My grandfather Walter, Conrad's son, told me the following story: He was a glass blower, too, in those days (during the first few years of the last century) and had found work – perhaps a two or three week stint in a town a few miles north of where he was then living, Anderson, Indiana. After the job was over and he was on his way back to Anderson, he and a friend stopped at Gas City where they went to a local glass company to look for possible future work. There on the company premises they saw machines that essentially were doing the work of glass blowers. My grandfather told me he took one look at the machines and knew his days as a glass blower were numbered. He moved into other areas or employment and ultimate got into management. He retired around 1960 after some years as general manager of the Philadelphia Quartz Company in Jeffersonville, Indiana. They moved back to Anderson where he and my grandmother lived into their 90s. (Actually, my grandmother died just two months short of her hundredth birthday.)

Q: They (your grandparents) were also a presence in your life?

WILKINSON: Oh, absolutely. My father's father, Hugh Boyd Wilkinson, died in 1946, when I was ten, but his wife, my father's mother Anna Hughes Wilkinson, also lived into her 90s, so I knew all three of my grandparents even after I became an adult. I was very fortunate in this regard.

There are a couple of things about my mother's family that are, I think, of interest. My mother's grandfather, my great grandfather, Conrad, was a soldier on the Northern side in the Civil War. He wrote a little book about his experiences in the Civil War, and included in his account was a story about his coming down by train with his unit from Pennsylvania to the Washington, DC area. The troop train stopped in Baltimore, perhaps for the night. They were told that some Southern sympathizers, known as "Copperheads," would try to cause trouble in Baltimore as the troops marched through the streets of Baltimore on their way back to the train station. Although the Northern troops had loaded guns and bayonets, they were told not to fire at the Copperheads if nothing more serious than water or ashes were thrown at them.

While they were being badgered by the Copperheads (mostly Baltimore city firemen), four of the Pennsylvania men (formerly Pennsylvania Railroad workers) went to the train station, found the oil house and set the station on fire. While the Copperheads went to fight the fire, the troops boarded the train and pulled out of town without a shot being fired. They moved down to Washington and spent the night camped in Arlington, Virginia, just across the Potomac River from the capitol.

The next morning, according to my great grandfather, President Lincoln came to the camp and asked the Pennsylvania troops to go under a flag of truce to the Bull Run battlefield to bury the some three thousand bodies that had lain in the sun for six days since the end of the battle. They had three days to do it, and do it they did.

My great-grandfather later fought at Gettysburg, and his name is on the big Pennsylvania memorial there.

Q: Did you grow up in Marion?

WILKINSON: I grew up in Marion and lived there until I went off to college.

Q: Well let's talk about Marion, as a kid. I take it you went to public schools?

WILKINSON: I went to public school, right.

Q: I didn't ask about religion, what about this?

WILKINSON: I was baptized a Presbyterian. Most of my mother's family were Quaker in the early days, but they later left the Quaker church. Here is a story I only recently heard from my aunt, as a matter of fact. It refers to her mother's parents. Apparently, her grandfather, her mother's father, was a Quaker, and he was a physician. As a physician, he took it upon himself to treat unwed mothers, a practice that I understand the Quakers were against. So as a matter of personal decision, he left the Quaker church because he felt that every person had the right to medical treatment.

Q: It's interesting because you would've thought that Quakers would've been tolerant; they were tolerant of so many other things.

WILKINSON: Well, I'm repeating what I was told. I really don't know. I haven't checked into that. It's a good point.

Q: Do you have brothers or sisters?

WILKINSON: Yes, I have a brother and sister. My sister, Alice Jean, is six years younger than I am. She lives in Wichita, Kansas. Our brother, Don, who lives in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is five years younger than Alice.

Q: With a six-year difference, were you at all close?

WILKINSON: Well, in spite of our age differences we were, I think, fairly close.

Q: What about going to school there? What was your elementary school experience?

WILKINSON: I would say that my entire public school experience was typical of a small town in the Middle West. I was able to walk to my schools from our house in ten or fifteen minutes. I was not a great student. I just went to school just like everybody else.

Q: Did you have any favorite teachers? We're talking about the elementary.

WILKINSON: Oh sure. My favorite teachers were all disciplinarians. The more the teacher was a disciplinarian, the better I liked her. I didn't think so at the time, of course, but in thinking back, I realize that was the case. Miss Ballard, my fourth grade teacher and Mrs. Wearly, my sixth grade teacher, were two ladies who were tough. They didn't put up with any kind of foolishness, including not doing homework on time. When I think back about my time in grade school, I can recall intimately experiences in these two classes, particularly, but also in the classes of several other teachers whose names I've long since forgotten. I think remembering Miss Ballard and Mrs. Wearly has to do with my liking them very much, and respecting them as well.

Q: What sort of intellectual interests, I mean that's maybe a little high and mighty to say for a kid, but I mean, what, reading or conversation or… we're still talking about the elementary level?

WILKINSON: Well, I was known among at least some of my classmates as the "reader." They thought I was a little nutty because I would sit down and read books. Now I certainly didn't read past my level, but I read more than most of my contemporaries. I remember not so much what I read or what I learned, but rather simply that people would comment about the fact that I was reading. Another thing that I remember from those years was an intense interest in travel and in learning about the world. Which probably is why I'm sitting here this very moment. I don't know why, but I was absolutely fascinated with thinking about other countries; of visiting and knowing about them.

One of the things that I can recall in Miss Ballard's class was a book containing six chapters that was the basis for one of our classes. Each of these six chapters was about a different part of the world and about somebody who was a typical person of that place.

The one that I remember most was about an African boy – probably about my age then – from, at that time, the Belgian Congo. The story was about his life, how he lived, how his parents lived, how they made their living and so on. I have a picture of that book in mind right now.

Another thing I remember about other countries was from Mrs. Wearly's sixth grade class, which for me would have been about 1948. We were asked to participate in a paper drive. We collected used paper that was then to be sold. The income would be used to purchase books for students in the Philippines, because many of their school supplies had been destroyed during the war. Many years later, I married a Filipino, and she and I like to speculate that she, at some point, might have studied out of one of these donated books.

Q: How about at home? Both your parents were college grads, which for our generation is not all that typical.

WILKINSON: Well, that's true. And my father's parents were college graduates, too, which was really unusual.

Q: Yes, a great majority of people about your age had parents who were not college graduates. It didn't mean that they weren't well educated because they often read a lot more than I think many college graduates do today. Sort of the Harry Truman type thing. How about at home? What was the environment at home?

WILKINSON: Well, I wouldn't say for a minute that my parents were intellectual giants, but they were educated and we did spend a good deal of time in discussions about politics and history or about why this or the other thing was happening. I can recall talking with my sister and brother more than once about how fortunate we were to have had the kind of upbringing we had. Our parents were educated people and the people they tended to be with were also educated. They had people over to the house who had an interest in other parts of life beyond just simply making a living or the conditions in Indiana. This was a very fortunate thing for us.

Q: What was your father doing?

WILKINSON: Dad worked in a white-collar job in a furniture-making factory – the Spencer-Cardinal Corporation – the company that my grandfather had been involved with since the early part of the 20th century. They made tables and chairs, for example, and they fashioned among the first wooden TV cabinets ever made. They made virtually anything out of wood. My father worked in the office and was, at least in later years, in charge of transportation. He died fairly early in life, at the age of 48.

Q: High school; you'd been going to high school about '48 or so?

WILKINSON: I graduated from Marion High School in 1954.

Q: Okay, '54, so you started in '50. What happened after your father died? Was your mother working or…

WILKINSON: My dad died in 1959, some years after I graduated from high school.

Q: Let's talk about high school. In Marion, was there much of a mixture of black, white, ethnic groups?

WILKINSON: Marion High School was pretty well represented with various ethnic groups. One fellow, Otis Archey, a retired FBI agent, was a year behind me in school, but later married one of my classmates. He was fairly recently elected sheriff of Grant County where Marion is located. He thus became the first black sheriff in the state, which, while awfully long in coming, still represents some progress since the days when Indiana was an early home of the Ku Klux Klan.

Q: By the time you got to junior high and high school it was time to sort of find your interests either in clubs or in studies or something. What sort of turned you on?

WILKINSON: Two things. One is singing; I always was in the choir or in choral groups or whatever. I'm an adequate singer. I can carry a tune, more or less. I'm certainly not all that good, but I enjoyed singing. I participated in anything along those lines I could get into. The other thing was dramatics. I didn't act; I was on the stage crew and I thoroughly enjoyed that. Those are the two things that occupied my leisure time. I tried to get into sports, but I was, in a word, terrible.

Q: I imagine, particularly in the Midwest, sports are taken pretty seriously, weren't they?

WILKINSON: Basketball particularly.

Q: And Indiana. You don't mess around with that.

WILKINSON: Well, I can recall winters shoveling the snow off of places so we could play basketball. We played the game wearing gloves and boots and other heavy clothes when it was really cold, but that was standard business for kids where I grew up.

Q: How about, again, moving during this time, what about sort of reading? Were you getting much of a feel for the world outside of maybe some schoolbooks or something like that? I mean, what was going on, because we're talking about the Cold War was in full swing during that time.

WILKINSON: My parents were committed Republicans, as were an awful lot of people in Indiana in those days. I can recall tagging along with them in 1952 when they went to a meeting that resulted in starting a small committee to push General Eisenhower to be elected president.

We discussed the Cold War rather at length around the dinner table. We talked a lot about Senator McCarthy and what was going on with him, what he was saying, why he was saying it, and so on.

The other part of the answer to your question that I might mention is that my parents subscribed to National Geographic magazine. I would take that upstairs and devour it, even to the extent of clipping coupons in the back and sending them off for free information about tourist destinations.

Q: What kind of courses did you take in high school?

WILKINSON: Well, probably my favorite teacher in high school was Miss Julie Ballinger. The reason I say "Julie" is that there were two Ballinger sisters at Marion High. The one I'm talking about was a math teacher. She taught trigonometry and algebra. Her sister was an English teacher. Every morning, it would seem, Miss Ballinger gave us a little lecture before starting class about the merits of going to Purdue to become an engineer. Some 19 of us from our high school graduating class trotted off to Purdue in the fall of 1954 to try to be engineers. I think three from the group finally graduated in

engineering.

I was interested in that area of study largely, I think, because of Ms. Ballinger's morning lectures, but I don't think I was very good in that field. I spent three years in engineering at Purdue. I think that it was very good for me – even though I was studying things I really wasn't all that interested in. One of the things about the study of engineering is trying to solve problems in a way that makes sense, not mechanically, but in a way that is logical. Since my days at Purdue, I've gotten very, very far away from all that, but I still find myself periodically referring back to some of those thoughts of how to solve problems. So I think that probably, in retrospect, the study of engineering was very good in my case.

Q: You had this teacher and everyone pointing towards Purdue. Well there's the University of Indiana. How does Purdue fit with the universities in the state?

WILKINSON: Both are land grant schools about the same size, and of course they were, and are, great rivals in football and basketball. Purdue focuses on engineering. It also has a school of forestry and a school of applied science, whereas Indiana University is more geared toward the history, English, education.

Q: It has quite a language institute…

WILKINSON: Language, absolutely. A lot of our Foreign Service colleagues studied Russian there, for example. Indiana University is famous for the study of the Russian language, among others. So these are the sorts of things on which these schools focus.

Q: I take it was sort of a given that you would go to university.

WILKINSON: I don't recall there even being a discussion on that score. I don't recall thinking about it either. I mean, the only issue was that my parents were a little disappointed that I didn't choose DePauw where they, and my father's father, had gone. I'm not sure why I didn't go to DePauw; I think it was Miss Ballinger's morning lectures.

Q: How did you find Purdue, as sort of the campus life there?

WILKINSON: Well, I liked it. Lafayette, Indiana, where Purdue is located is 70 miles away from where I grew up, so the life there was not all that different. Soon after my arrival there, I joined a fraternity, the same fraternity my father and his father belonged to. That also was a bit of a given, I guess. I moved into the fraternity house as a freshman, something that the university stopped allowing, actually, the next year.

Living in a fraternity house made life quite different than the experience of your average freshman. I can't tell you the number of people who were at Purdue in the fall of 1954 (the figure 20,000 comes to mind), but it was a huge operation for its time. As a consequence, I think that if you lived in a dormitory during your first few weeks or

months there you would tend to feel quite lost. I didn't have that experience because I lived a men's fraternity house.

Q: With engineering, were you getting strictly engineering or did you taste other areas of study?

WILKINSON: You had to take some liberal arts courses, of course, particularly during your first two years. I did not have to study a language or languages, unfortunately, which I later regretted. But even as a freshman or sophomore engineer, you basically focused on math and sciences.

Q: What turned you off on engineering?

WILKINSON: I wasn't very good at it and I didn't like it. I found it far more convenient to go down to someplace and have a few beers rather than study.

Q: What is there on engineering? Looking back on it was there an aptitude, do you think? I mean for some people, that's what gets them. Or what?

WILKINSON: I think you're right it is aptitude. I think I recognized early on that while this was something I could probably have gotten through, I didn't want to do it. After my third year, I was back in summer school studying thermodynamics. If I remember correctly, it was a six-hour course, so that was all I was doing that summer. I remember waking up one morning at some ridiculous hour, like four A.M., and experiencing a sort of epiphany. It came to me in stark terms: "Ed, you are never going to be an engineer." I might get a degree, but being an engineer is a state of mind, not a question of a degree. I just basically turned myself around at four o'clock that morning.

Q: This is your third year, so that would've been what, 1957? Every male more or less faced the draft at that time.

WILKINSON: Right. Although I went to class that day, immediately afterwards I hitchhiked back to Marion. I went straight to the Post Office where the draft board was located. To my amazement, the lady in charge knew my grandmother, my father's mother. They apparently played canasta together. Anyway, I think she wanted to take extra good care of me.

I told her I wanted to go into the Army for two years, so I could have a chance to be sent overseas. However, the six-month military program had just started, and she tried to talk me into doing that.

Q: The six month program being what?

WILKINSON: You could go on active duty in the Army or, I think, the Air Force, for a period of only six months, but then you had a much longer obligation as a reservist. Her

idea was that enlisting in one of the six-month programs would make more sense in my case, because afterwards I could go back to college. But I would have none of it. I wanted to be sent overseas.

Q: So, you went into what, the Army?

WILKINSON: Yes, after volunteering, I was just drafted into the Army.

Q: So this would be '57-'59?

WILKINSON: Correct. Because a friend of mine was getting married and I had been asked to be in the wedding, I asked to put off being drafted for two months. So, I went into the Army in September of 1957.

Q: Where did they place you?

WILKINSON: Here was one of the turning points of my life. I reported at the Post Office on the appointed day in September, and they sent me off to Indianapolis for my physical, and then – that same day – off to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for basic training.

After arrival at Ft. Leonard Wood, I spent about six weeks doing virtually nothing because they had all these newly-arrived six-monthers who were just getting started. The Army brass was trying to get them into training as quickly as possible. They held off those of us who were not in the six-month program from starting basic training because they just didn't have time to deal with us.

I can remember beginning basic training during October of 1957, the same month that the Sputnik went up. We were all standing there watching it (you could see it up in the air at night) thinking, "There is going to be war." Well, of course it didn't happen that way at all, but that was something that I remember from early on. I spent eight weeks in basic training, then I was assigned to clerk-typist school right there at Ft. Leonard Wood. Because Christmas was coming, I spent four weeks in clerk-typist school, followed by two weeks off during the Christmas holiday. Then we all came back for the final four weeks starting in early January 1958.

The rest of the story is what I was getting at a few seconds ago, and it is one of the reasons why I am sitting right here talking to you. It turns out that, of the Fort Leonard Wood clerk-typist school graduates – for as far back as anyone could remember – all had stayed right there at Fort Leonard Wood to be clerks and typists. Our class was the first to be sent to other military posts. Of the people in my class who graduated (if that's the right word) as clerk-typists, the first three in alphabetical order were sent to an Army post in Alaska. And the rest of us went to Europe. If the last three in alphabetical order had been sent to Alaska, that would have been my fate.

We were sent first to Fort Dix, New Jersey. There they had a computer about the size of

this building, which was chugging along and pumping out the names of the military people whose names had been entered, giving the all-important bit of information: where they were to be assigned.

Can you believe this? I ended up being assigned to Headquarters, Seine Area Command, Paris, France!

Q: Well, somebody had to do that. Front line of military duty, huh?

WILKINSON: I was willing to sacrifice. But it gets better. Upon arrival in Paris, I was sent to an Army post called Camp des Loges located about 20 miles outside of Paris. Although I was assigned to work in an office in downtown Paris, not far from the Port Dauphine Metro stop, I was given a bunk out at the base. We were bussed in early in the morning and bussed back to the base in the evening. But one day, after about five or six weeks, my boss, Warrant Officer J.D. Stapp (whom I remember well; a very nice gentleman) came to me and to another fellow and said, "I have terrible news, men."

But, you could tell by the twinkle in his eye that the news was not terrible at all. He continued, "They've just told me that there's just not enough space out at the base. You two are going to have to move downtown."

So I spent a little over a year living in a nice hotel in downtown Paris, just a block from the Arc de Triomphe. This hotel, called the Hotel Royal Magda in the rue Troyon, is still there. I visited it a couple of years ago. So during my time living "off post," I went to work by Metro, just like I'm doing today.

Now, this was during part of the time of the Algerian revolution. The French soldiers had uniforms very much like ours, so we were told to wear civilian clothes to try to avoid being attacked on the street, which, unfortunately, happened to the French from time to time. So not only was I living and working in downtown Paris – which was and is one of the most fabulous cities of the world – I was wearing civilian clothes to work! And I was a 21-year-old private in the Army. I remember that my Army income, including what I was getting to pay the hotel, was about $305 a month. I lived very nicely during the year 1958.

Q: Oh, boy, yes. Were you able to partake of Parisian life?

WILKINSON: Yes, yes, and the reason I'm quick to answer that so positively is that in those days your dollar was rather strong. We could do most everything. We went to the Louvre, we went to other museums, we ate well at good restaurants. I even met some local girls and had dates.

I got to know a fellow from the Bronx, who was of Italian origin, and who picked up French very quickly. I worked at learning the language, and after a time was more or less able to communicate in very basic French. I wasn't and still am not very good at it, but

with him and many others we went out and enjoyed life; including one evening dining at Maxim's Restaurant, which of course cost more money than I could afford. But we did it once and I'm glad to have done that. There was a restaurant in the Ile St. Louis that we favored that specialized in cuisine from the Alsace region of France. To repeat, we lived very nicely. We were given funding to live on the economy and live we did.

Q: You were there from when to when?

WILKINSON: February of '58 to August of '59.

Q: I can't remember, was this when DeGaulle came to power?

WILKINSON: I believe General DeGaulle returned to power in France a few weeks after I left. However, I can recall participating in a pro-DeGaulle parade. I was wetting my whistle at a bar not far from the Champs Elysees, near the Place de la Rond Pointe. Down the Champs-Elysées from the direction of the Concorde came a rather noisy parade, and a number of us went out to see what was going on. They were carrying pro-DeGaulle signs and were chanting and so on, so we joined in and went with them down to the Arc of Triumph. We stayed there for the entire demonstration. There were a lot of speeches and cheering, most of which I didn't understand. But because I participated in that parade, I feel I can take some responsibility for Mr. DeGaulle, President DeGaulle, coming back to power.

Q: On your clerk-typist job, was it just pretty straight clerk typist?

WILKINSON: Yes, it was pretty straightforward. I was put in charge of doing the battalion daily orders. Actually, it wasn't a "battalion." Our outfit was called a "detachment," but it was more or less battalion size. So, every day I put these orders together, a series of official pronouncements on mostly mundane things such as transfers, who was to do what, etc. It was something I was able to do without a great deal of supervision, which was wonderful. I mean, I had to report to people, I had things I had to do, but basically it was just a lot of paperwork that I had to put into official orders. It was fairly simple.

Q: In the first place, did you come into any contact with our embassy?

WILKINSON: One of those summers, and I think it was '59, I went to the Fourth of July celebration at the embassy, which in those days was open to virtually anybody. You didn't have to work at the embassy or be invited in order to go. Any American could attend. I went to the ambassador's front lawn near the Chancery and went inside. There was minimal security concerns in evidence. I did tell them I was with the Department of Defense, which was, of course, technically true. That was the only brush with the embassy I had during my 18 months in Paris.

Q: What was going through Ed Wilkinson's mind as far as what you would do after you

got out in '59?

WILKINSON: I spent a lot of time trying to figure out some way to get overseas again. This was uppermost in my mind. I would've taken any job, anything, anything whatsoever. Any regrets? As Frank Sinatra sang, regrets, I've had a few. But the main one, I suppose, is this: I told my father and mother that I would like to stay in Paris to study for a while after getting out of the Army. (Unfortunately, I didn't qualify for the GI Bill; I'd come into the Army just a little too late.) I had met a couple of people who had stayed on and studied at the Sorbonne or other places, and I wanted to do that. But my father said, "Don't you think you would just play?" Of course I knew he was absolutely right, so I didn't pursue it. I have an idea that if I had pursued it, they would've been supportive. I now wish I had done that.

Anyway, after I got out of the Army I went back to Purdue, and the idea was basically to find the quickest way to a degree. I got a degree fifteen months later in something called industrial economics.

Q: You're not an industrial economist?

WILKINSON: No, I never did anything remotely along those lines. Once again, there are some things I learned while studying industrial economics that I drew upon as a consular officer, the cone in which I worked for much of my career. It's a little hard to provide examples, but I feel like the education was not wasted totally.

Q: You're bringing up something that will come back again. We're both basically professional consular officers and I've often noted that as a consular officer within the Foreign Service, you have so much on your plate in the morning and it has to be gone by the end of the day. How do you do it? How do you do things and what do you do as opposed to what are you thinking about and writing long think pieces for many of our colleagues?

WILKINSON: Well, a consular officer is somebody who deals with two things. One, of course, is visas, and this is a matter of law, at least in large part. On the other hand, consular officers deal with something that is not totally a matter of law, American Citizen Services. This includes everything from Social Security entitlement and military pension payments to arrests, to deaths, to births and... a seemingly endless list. If the American citizen who needs consular services abroad were in the United States, he or she would be able to deal directly with the agency involved. But, at an embassy or consulate, they have to deal with the American Citizen Services office.

So you do these two rather diverse jobs while working as a consular officer. At first, of course, you focus precisely on the job to which you are assigned. You may be focused on one rather narrow job as a visa officer, doing immigrant or non-immigrant visas. Or you might be in American Services where you may have to deal with the people who've just been arrested or perhaps the death of an American citizen. Then later on, as you rise in

rank, you manage dealing with both these issues.

We consular officers do these jobs all day, every day, in many cases. In recent years, though, there are so many Americans traveling and living abroad and so many more people applying for visas that you have many more officers, particularly those at the beginning of his or her career, certainly, focusing on one very small piece of the large issue of consular work. In my own particular case, during the early part of my career I was assigned to rather small offices, so I dealt with the entire gamut all the time.

Q: So, you graduated, when?

WILKINSON: I graduated from Purdue in January of 1961 with a degree in industrial economics.

Q: As a Republican, did you get caught up on the campus? Were they at all interested in the election of 1960, which seemed to be, it wasn't a classy election, but it was one that seemed to engage people that are particularly young people intellectually?

WILKINSON: I mentioned my parents were Republicans, but I didn't say I was. No, I did not get involved in that at all. However, I did have the pleasure of seeing the future President Kennedy give a campaign speech, but my having seen him was sheer happenstance – good luck. It was not because I was desperate to get out there to listen to what he had to say. No, I can't say that I was involved in any way, shape, or form in politics in 1960.

Q: By the time '61 was rolling around, did you have any idea what you wanted to do?

WILKINSON: No, except for my underlying desire to return abroad in some form or other. I did get a job upon graduation. My uncle had worked in management for the Owens Illinois Glass Company, although by then he had moved on to another company. But they were recruiting, so I applied for a job with them. I was offered an opportunity, so I moved over to Toledo, Ohio, in maybe February or March of '61 to start work with Owens-Illinois.

Toledo was the location of the main O-I headquarters. I went there to work there in the main offices, in what they call "inside sales." I spent about six months in that job. The focus of inside sales is to get the product out to the wholesalers as quickly as possible. For example, if a particular sale had been in 'X' place, and the purchaser says, "I need 5,000 of these," or "20,000 of those," it was our inside sales responsibility to ensure that the product got to the right place on time. As an inside sales person, I might have to go out and deal with a production foremen and say, "When are you going to put this particular product back on the line? They need 20,000 of them next Thursday in Tulsa." Or some such. One of the interesting parts of working in a glass factory, as far as I was personally concerned, was that what they were doing there largely by machine was closely related to glass blowing. A number of the O-I people were interested to find that I

had a grandfather who had been a professional glass blower. And I was very proud of that, as well.

Q: Well how come you did this for only about six months?

WILKINSON: I worked in Toledo for only about six months. The idea was that I would work in inside sales as training for becoming a salesman. After this training period, I was transferred to New York City and made a part of the O-I sales force working out of Rockefeller Plaza. After a bit of time reading in there, I was asked to go down to New Jersey to do something special for the office.

I didn't have a company car yet, so I went to Port Authority and took a bus down to Southern New Jersey. On the bus, I fell asleep and woke up well past my stop. While sleeping I had, in a way, been stewing about the fact that my job seemed not to have any possibility of overseas assignments. So, rather than backtrack to the place where I was supposed to have gotten off the bus, I went back to straight back to New York City, went to the office, found the boss and just quit. I can't say it was the result of a huge amount of thought on my part. I just knew that selling glass was simply not what I wanted to do.

So I went back to Indiana. I was about twenty-five years old at this point, but my mother, bless her heart, didn't say a thing to me about coming home with virtually no warning and with no income. I had saved a little, so after a couple of weeks, I went with a friend down to New Orleans and Florida. During this trip, I had a lot of time to think about this idea that I couldn't seem to shake: returning abroad. The idea of going as a student or traveling and doing it on the cheap somehow didn't appeal to me. I guess I was focusing on figuring out a way to do it as a job.

Let me explain what happened next, but to do that I have to backtrack a little. When I was in the eighth or ninth grade, I had another teacher, Mr. Earl Whitecotton, whom I liked and respected very much. For an assignment, he asked us to be a report about what we wanted to do when we grew up. Well, I, in my usual student fashion, didn't prepare anything until the night before. That evening, I found an article in Reader's Digest magazine about being a diplomatic courier, a professional Foreign Service courier. I basically plagiarized the whole article and turned it in to Mr. Whitecotton, who probably gave me a C at best.

Anyway, during that trip to Florida I remembered the article, and when we returned, I went to the library and found it. The first paragraph said that, to be a courier, one needed to be a single male, a college graduate, over twenty-five, have your military out of the way, and be able to type a certain number of words per minute. I said, "Heck, that's me." So I wrote a letter to the State Department to see what needed to be done to apply. This would have been in November of 1961.

Some weeks went by and I received no answer. In early January of 1962, I flew out to Washington. A friend I had met in the Army lived here in Washington, and he was kind

enough to let me sleep on his couch for a couple of weeks.

Immediately after I arrived in Washington, I went to the State Department. There was a personnel office for walk-ins just to the left of the D Street entrance, where, until recently, there was a post office. Because security was not much of an issue in those days, you could just walk in there and say, "Hello, I'd like to get a job with the State Department."

I did just that. I told the personnel officer with whom I spoke that I wanted to be a courier. She responded that because there are so many people waiting in line, I'd have to wait a long time to have an opportunity to be a courier. She did, however, offer me a job in the passport office. There were openings at the time because every spring they brought in students as temporary help. They needed extra people to deal with the additional work caused by people traveling in the summer. So I, college graduate, former sales person with the Owens Illinois Glass Company and former resident of Paris, France, got a job with the State Department as a GS-3, putting pictures on passports.

One evening, at about that same time, while waiting in a movie line, I ran into a fellow whom I knew in high school. He was a student at the George Washington University law school. His roommate had just gotten married, so my high school friend was looking for someone to share the cost of his apartment. I moved in with him at his apartment near the corner of 21st and I St, N.W. And I went to work in passport production near the space occupied until recently by the Credit Union at the bottom of the escalator. Meanwhile, I spent my free time trying to see what might be done about getting a job as a courier. I just thought being a courier would be the most marvelous job in the world.

While putting pictures on passports, I got to know Ted Kroll who had been hired by the State Department to be a communicator. Ted had been a Marine guard in Buenos Aires and later graduated from college. He wanted to be a courier too, but – because of the number of people in line waiting to be considered for this job – he had been dissuaded from expecting to get a courier job any time soon. He had basically been told that he could be a State Department communicator, then, after a tour or two, "perhaps you can apply for the courier job." Ted and I began to hang out together.

But then, without warning one day, he was called by a personnel person who said, "Look, we've got an unexpected opening. If you'd like to be a courier, we could offer that to you right now." Of course, he accepted. This was on a Friday in July 1962. He was asked to go to Personnel the following Monday to take care of whatever paperwork was necessary to change his assignment from communications to courier.

When he got there that Monday, the personnel officer said something like, "Darn, all of a sudden a guy just called and canceled his acceptance of the job we offered him as a courier. And I promised I'd have a replacement courier in place in Frankfurt a week from today," which was the following Monday, seven days later. "Where am I going to find somebody so quickly?"

Ted – bless his heart – said, "What about Ed Wilkinson?" She said, "I remember that name." Ted said, "You talked to him about being a courier, too." "Where is he right now?" she asked. "He's two floors below right where we are." "Well," said the Personnel Officer, "ask him to come and see me." That was on a Monday, and a week later I was in Frankfurt as a courier.

Can you believe that? Again, this was just sheer good luck.

Q: By this time you wouldn't have had any particular clearance or anything else like that, would you?

WILKINSON: I had by then some sort of a clearance for my passport work. Perhaps that was good enough, at least to get started. Also, by then I had taken something called the Federal Service Entrance Exam, and was on my way to becoming a civil servant. I suppose for that reason they had started procedures for a full clearance. Of course, I imagine clearances in those days were not quite so thorough as what is done today.

Q: So you went to Frankfurt?

WILKINSON: I went to Frankfurt as a courier in August of '62. I might say that by that point I had taken – but had not passed – the FSO exam.

Q: So, by this time, you really had your sights set on the Department of State in an overseas capacity?

WILKINSON: Yes, with emphasis on the phrase, "overseas capacity."

Q: It was a good way to get there…

WILKINSON: Yes.

Q: How long were you a courier?

WILKINSON: I was a courier for two tours, a little over four years. The first two years, I was stationed in Frankfurt. Because the Frankfurt courier office was a relatively large operation, and because they had much smaller operations in Panama and in Manila, generally persons assigned to Frankfurt ended up doing two back-to-back tours there. But in my case, for whatever reason, I only did one tour in Germany and then was sent to Manila for my second tour.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the system of couriers in the '60s.

WILKINSON: Because of international agreements, if you are certified by your country as being a professional courier, you are able to take diplomatic pouches through other countries' customs procedures without their being inspected. Of course, there is a

distinction between your suitcase, your personal items, and the pouches, which are sealed. So you go from point A, to point B, to point C, carrying the diplomatic pouch with an official certificate designating you as an official diplomatic courier. These procedures are spelled out in the Vienna Conventions on Diplomatic Relations. So the courier is responsible for moving official diplomatic mail from the U.S. to – and between – diplomatic and consular posts abroad.

As I said, in those days we had a large office in Frankfurt. There were about eighty couriers in total worldwide, and I would say about fifty were in Frankfurt in that time. As I indicated earlier, there was a much smaller office in Manila and a smaller one yet in Panama. Of course, many of the pouches originated in Washington, but most of those were carried by the U.S. military to our offices in Panama, Manila and Frankfurt. We professional State Department couriers rarely did go back to Washington in those days. Out of the Frankfurt office, we serviced all of Eastern and Western Europe, as far east as Moscow. We also traveled over most of Africa and the Middle East, as far east as Tehran, so you can see we covered a lot of territory.

You would be given a certain number of pouches on a trip route, then be met at the train station or at the airport by somebody from the embassy or consulate where you would make your pouch exchange. Let's say you were passing by Brussels and you had two bags for that embassy. The person from the embassy would come to the airport or train station to meet you and would sign for them. And perhaps he had one pouch for London and one for Washington. You would accept them, after signing his receipt. All our routes were interconnected, so the bags would wend their way to the designated destination by the most efficient route.

Q: I would think that, yes, you're overseas, but when you're sitting on these canvas pouches, one, and two, you're hustling around, you're really not getting a chance to see many things.

WILKINSON: Well, true, but you did occasionally get a chance to be a tourist, though. One reason, of course, was that flights were virtually all on propeller planes in those days. You went from A to B much slower than people do today, and there were far fewer connecting flights. You could end up spending a night or two in this town or a night or so in that town, waiting for the next plane out. Therefore, you might have a chance to see things in the places where you were scheduled to stop. I felt very fortunate to have seen many, many things in many, many places that the average American simply had no chance to see.

Q: Were you looking towards anything beyond that?

WILKINSON: At that point, no. The couriers with whom I associated were mostly people very much like me. I found sort of a built-in group of friends, and I'm still in contact with many of them. I'm fond of saying, and I'll repeat here, that when I die and arrive at the Golden Gate and St. Peter asks, "Who are you," I'm going to tell him nothing more,

nothing less than, "I'm a former U.S. diplomatic courier." This experience was a defining part of my life, in a certain sense. And I made a lot of good friends in those days. It was a wonderful life for a single 26-plus-year-old.

Q: What did you do on these trips? Did you read?

WILKINSON: Yes, I had a lot of chance to read. And, of course you have to do a certain amount of paperwork and planning. You really have to spend quite a bit of time paying attention to what you're doing. With large loads of pouches that were often carried in the hold of the plane, you often had to prepare a plan of action to get off the airplane to get down on the ground near the plane's hold to watch them. But, yes, there was plenty of time for reading.

And other things, too. I can remember one night in Vienna going to see the opera, Aida. I got a seat very close to the front of the Staatsoper. This was the sort of thing we also had an opportunity to do, occasionally.

Q: Who was looking after the pouches?

WILKINSON: Oh, the pouches were deposited at the embassy for the night. I might add that courier stopovers in Vienna in those days were very often, the beginning or the end of train trips behind the Iron Curtain.

Q: Did you ever have any real problems? I'm talking about the European thing.

WILKINSON: No. In the big scheme of things, no. I suppose one little problem – from a courier point of view – that sticks out in my mind is that during one trip a fellow courier and I were coming back from Bucharest by train. (We couriers always traveled in pairs behind the Iron Curtain.) The courier schedule had us stop in Budapest just for a couple minutes while the passengers got on and off the train. People from the embassy came to the station and made a pouch exchange. Then we couriers were to continue on with the train to Vienna. Well, coming from Bucharest we arrived at the border between Romania and Hungary, the towns were Curtici in Romania and Orosháza, Hungary. I can remember it like it was yesterday.

The Hungarian immigration official said (in German, the Lingua Franca behind the Curtain), "Your visas are no good." And sure enough a mistake had been made. It was not our fault as it turns out, except that we hadn't looked at the visas closely, which in any case were written in Hungarian. We had no choice but to get off the train. Now in a certain sense, this was a very interesting spot, at least it was in those days. The little train station at the Romanian-Hungarian border looked like something like a scene out of an old western movie. There was a covered, wooden sidewalk and windows in the old buildings with curtains over them. Well, it turns out this was all fake. You could open the one door that worked and go in behind. Behind there was virtually nothing, except the customs and immigration shack and some hovels.

We were stopped on the Hungarian side now, even though we hadn't officially entered their country. I must say, they were really very nice to us. Finally, we were able to communicate by telephone with our embassy in Bucharest and the problem ultimately was straightened out.

We took a later train on to Budapest, which was wonderful because no courier in recent memory had stopped in Budapest. We went to the embassy to deliver and store the pouches, the first couriers to do that in years. There we were treated with an opportunity to see, although we didn't talk to, Cardinal Mindszenty. As you may remember, he spent many years in that embassy as a political refugee. He had sort of a little patio affair inside the embassy next to his quarters. When we arrived, he was walking around out there. We waved "hello" to him, which he acknowledged.

The next day we went on to Vienna. Except for the Mindszenty part and the opportunity to see a little bit of the beautiful city of Budapest, this little contretemps didn't turn out to be much. So I must say, in the four years I was a courier, I really didn't have any problems to report.

I might add that I was in Moscow the night President Kennedy was shot. We took the train from Moscow Station at midnight that night to Helsinki. I still get a little bit choked up thinking about it. First of all, upon leaving the Soviet Union, the Russian border guard tried his best to explain what had happened from his standpoint. Unfortunately, his English was minimal, and as neither of us understood Russian, we didn't glean much about the matter while there. We'd had word of the shooting, of course, but we didn't have a lot of information. We had been able to listen to some sketchy reports on the BBC before leaving Moscow, but we had no way to listen after leaving Moscow.

When we got to the Finnish side, the border guard in charge there was a former Finnair pilot whose English was perfect. He told us everything that had happened that he had seen on television before coming to work. On the way to Helsinki from the border, you could see that many buildings had Finnish flags at half-staff. The Finnish people we saw were clearly sorrowful. I must say, some forty years later it still chokes me up to remember the way these people demonstrated how they felt about the assassination. I spent the night – that is, the night after the President's murder – in Helsinki, then took a plane the next day down to Frankfurt. Because the pouches were in the hold of the plane, I got up to my seat on the Finnair flight to Frankfurt just before the plane's departure. When people realized I was an American (given away, I suppose, by my accent when speaking with the flight hostess), they came out of the woodwork, so to speak, to give me the English-language newspapers to read. Everybody on board was just as solicitous they could possibly have been. The International Herald-Tribune had a black border all around the front page. Once again, I was choked up.

Q: After two years they sent you to the Philippines?

WILKINSON: Yes, I was transferred to the Philippines in November of '64. Out of Manila, we traveled down to Australia and to many parts of Southeast Asia, as far west as Karachi and Peshawar. We didn't go to China, though, a country we didn't recognize at the time. Nor did we go to Japan, Korea or Taiwan, all of which were serviced by the U.S. military courier service.

Manila was, of course, quite different from Frankfurt, a very different place, altogether. I must say I quickly fell in love with Asia.

When I got to that part of the world, I felt like I had, in a certain sense, come home. I don't know why. And let me add here that in March of 1965, I met the wonderful woman who was later to become my wife. We didn't get married for some years, but we hit it off, I would say, right away. Her name is Alicia, but she was known by many people in Manila as Lisa.

Q: What was her background?

WILKINSON: Well, she was born and raised in Bacolod City in the central Philippines, in Negros Occidental. She had graduated from the University of Philippines in Greater Manila, as did her parents before her. Upon graduation, she stayed in Manila to work. She first got a job with the Philippine government, but by the time I met her she was working for Scandinavian Airlines as a ticket agent.

One little interesting point about my wife, I think, is that as I mentioned earlier, my parents subscribed to National Geographic magazine. I used to clip coupons to send for information about other places. Well, Lisa's parents, too, subscribed to National Geographic magazine and she, too, used to clip the coupons and sent them off to get information about far away places. She did this, I think, for the same reason I did: a fascination with travel and with other places. So if there was ever a marriage made in heaven, ours might very well be it.

Also, I might add that for a limited number of years they had, at the University of Philippines, a School of Foreign Service. (I don't know why they eliminated if from the curriculum, but they did.) Anyway, my wife graduated from U. P. with a Bachelor of Science degree in Foreign Service. We dated during my tour in Manila, but at the end of two years, I went off to my next assignment. Fortunately for me, we got back together later.

Q: After four years of courier service it gets pretty long. I mean this is fine at a certain age, but were you thinking of moving on?

WILKINSON: I had taken the FSO exam on two or three occasions and I kept coming close, but I never passed. It was getting a little frustrating. What happened, however, is this. Sometime in the spring of 1966, I think it was, it was decided that we couriers would no longer travel in the first class section of airplanes. Now the idea of traveling first class

was not because we needed the first class treatment, but rather to be able to get on and off airplanes much easier, much more quickly than if you're in economy. This was, of course, very important in that our classified diplomatic pouches were almost always carried in the hold of the airplane. But in the spring of 1966, somebody decided that for budgetary reasons there was to be no more first class for couriers. This was partly the reason why I began to think moving on to another area of the Foreign Service.

Just about the time the "no more first class" word came out, I was fortunate to take a special courier trip all the way out to Frankfurt. While there I met an old courier friend, Dick Luchesa. Dick had been in contact with a former courier who was then a personnel officer in the Latin American Division of the State Department. The personnel man, as it turns out, was recruiting couriers to become consular officers.

The reason, as I understood it, was that there were thought to be too many vacant consular positions, at least in Latin America. Personnel was actively seeking qualified people to fill at least some of these position. Because most couriers were college graduates, this officer felt – as I got the story – that the courier service was a pool of people where they might be able to recruit Foreign Service people who might be able to fill these vacant positions.

As soon as I got back to Manila, I communicated with the officer in Personnel, and, to make a long story short, I applied for and was accepted as what was called in those days a "staff officer." I was to do consular work in a Foreign Service officer position, but not as an FSO.

So in the Spring of 1967, after, I think, some eleven weeks of Spanish language training and a little consular training, I went off to our consulate in Mazatlán, a little town in Mexico, for my first assignment as vice consul. Frankly, I found the work fascinating and I decided I wanted to stay with it. Later I had the opportunity to become a regular Foreign Service Officer.

Q: So you quit the courier business to become a consular officer?

WILKINSON: Yes, although I didn't know what a consular officer was, to be honest. I inquired of some consular officers in Manila what they did, but, frankly, I applied for the job without really knowing what it entailed.

Q: How much training did you get in consular work?

WILKINSON: Two weeks. Mazatlán at that time was a two-officer post. We did nothing, essentially, but American Services and non-immigrant visas. The two weeks of consular training, which was all that was provided new consular officers at the time, consisted of three days in American Services and two days in non-immigrant visas, plus an entire week reviewing immigrant visas, which we didn't do in Mazatlán. So I went off to my first consular posting with five days of useful training.

Q: You were in Mazatlán from when to when?

WILKINSON: I got there in May of '67 and I was there until July, I think it was, of 1969.

Q: What was Mazatlán like? I mean, where is it located?

WILKINSON: Mazatlán is a port city on the west coast of Mexico. It was, and is, a fishing center. Shrimp is the main thing. If you picture a map of Mexico, think of Baja California coming down on the left side. From the bottom tip of the Baja, you just go straight across to the mainland, a little bit north maybe, and there you will find Mazatlán.

It was a town of maybe 100,000 people at that time. It was, and continues to be, a very popular tourist destination for Americans, Canadians and others. Some were retirees, but mostly the American visitors were just plain tourists. It was quite a nice place. Mexicans in general are just friendly, friendly people and I certainly was extremely well treated there. And my boss and his wife were wonderful, too.

Q: Who were they?

WILKINSON: The consul was the late Abraham Vigil. He and his wife treated me royally. I replaced a vice consul there whom I met only briefly, so Mr. Vigil was stuck with teaching me everything. I had nothing but the greatest respect for him.

Q: Why would we have a consular post there? Protection and Welfare?

WILKINSON: Yes, although we handled non-immigrant visas, protection and welfare was what we spent most of our time doing. Partly, don't forget, communications in those days were nothing like what we have today, so you couldn't solve protection problems from a distance as easily as you can today. I might add that the consular office at Mazatlán was closed ten or so years ago, although there is now a consular agency there. The town is still a very popular place for tourists.

Q: Talking about those days, in the late '60s, an American gets into trouble. What kind of trouble and what did you do? How did the system work?

WILKINSON: Well, in those days, and I'm sorry to say it's not all that different today, many of our countrymen's problems were drug related. The difference is we tended to focus on marijuana, whereas today it's on harder drugs. But it's the same old business; too many people think they can just go down to Mexico and, with impunity, do whatever they want. Now, there is a great deal of freedom that exists in that country that we don't have in the States, but it is by no means a free lunch. So you had a regular, steady stream of people who went to jail, mostly for drug-related reasons.

You also had a number of natural deaths to attend to because a large percentage of foreign

tourists who came to the resort town were older people. What you did in those days in a death case is not all that different from what must be done today. Unless there is a close relative on the spot available to attend to details, you arrange to deal with the remains, and you work with the police to get the deceased's belongings and ensure that that they are returned to the family. You try your best to follow the wishes of the next-of-kin, and you do that under State Department rules and regulations, but most of the work is simply common sense.

Q: What about Americans that get arrested? One hears, particularly in those days, about the problem of corruption, the bribes.

WILKINSON: Oh, yes, "la mordita" existed then, and it still exists.

Q: When somebody got into jail, how did you deal with that?

WILKINSON: I don't think there were many arrests of people who understood the system. It wasn't impossible to arrange for an alternative to going to jail, if you had the funds and knew how to play the game. So, the potential was there; I don't deny it. I read an article recently, in, I think, the New York Times on that same issue. It's still going on. I certainly didn't deal in it in any way, shape, or form, but I knew it happened.

Q: This was the time of a lot of young students, many called hippies, going out to explore the world. It was very much the thing to take a year off and the dollar went pretty far and you could hitch hike around and all that.

WILKINSON: You know, we didn't see a lot of the hippy-type people there, simply, I think, because that type of person didn't want go to a place where there were a lot of American senior citizen tourists.

Q: Okay, good point.

WILKINSON: Young, more serious, people went to places like San Miguel de Allende and similar locations where there are schools to study Spanish. But they didn't go Mazatlán to study the language. Of course, we saw students, though. Oh, we just dreaded the spring school break, and for the same reason any Mexican who could put two pesos together got out of town during the pre-Lenten holiday period.

Q: The kids would all come in?

WILKINSON: Well, kids and everybody else. It was kind of a mess. But, of course, the local people, the shop owners, and for that matter the police and the civil authorities – everybody – liked it because it produced a lot of income for the town.

Q: How about getting people in jail? Did you have any problems taking care of them?

WILKINSON: No, no, not at all. Many young kids who came to town got caught buying marijuana. They did a minimum of two years, and very often it was exactly two years. Often the sentence was four years, but normally the Mexican authorities would let the kids out after two. One exception I remember was an American citizen convicted for murder. I think he was in jail for life. He died of natural causes in jail while I was there. Except for him, I don't think there was a soul incarcerated in Mazatlán during my tenure there who was an American who wasn't in jail for some drug-related offense.

Q: How did you find the Mexican community?

WILKINSON: I liked them very much. They were and are very friendly people. There was a restaurant that is still there called El Shrimp Bucket, situated in the Hotel La Siesta. El Shrimp Bucket employed a group of waiters most of whom had been in the States for a time, and their English was pretty good. El Shrimp Bucket was owned by an American by the name of Carlos Anderson. The food was pretty good, and it was an amazing place in the sense of the atmosphere. Carlos would almost inevitably "buy" you one or two Kaluas after dinner. It was a very friendly, happy place and I spent a great deal of time there, as did many, many tourists, and not a few Mexicans. Carlos later opened restaurants in a number of places all over Latin America.

Q: Well, so you were there for two years, from '69 to '71? By the way, what was your status by that time?

WILKINSON: My marital status?

Q: No, your professional status.

WILKINSON: Well, professionally, I spent a lot of years as a vice consul staff officer at a fairly low grade. I think at about that point I was some five years without a promotion.

The reason I jumped on the phrase "marital status" is that during my last weeks in Mazatlán, Lisa – the Filipina I met in Manila, Alicia or Lisa – and I got married. We got married in a civil ceremony in Mexico City, then later, during the last weeks of this tour in Mexico, got married in Mazatlán in a religious ceremony.

My next assignment was in San José, Costa Rica, where both our children were born. I spent two years in Costa Rica doing quite similar things as I did in Mazatlán, although we did have immigrant visas in San José. For essentially the same reasons as in Mazatlán, Costa Rica was also a busy tourist place for American travelers. Nothing like today, perhaps, but under standards of those days it was quite busy.

Q: So who was the ambassador at the time in San José?

WILKINSON: I was there just two years, and probably during fifteen months of that time, our ambassador was Walter C. Plaser. Ambassador Plaser had been an ambassador before

in Paraguay before. When we arrived, Mr. Sandy Pringle was Chargé d'Affaires.

Q: What was the consular work like? Were you the only consular officer there?

WILKINSON: No, I had a boss, Consul Jim Kerr. It was just two of us there in the consular section during the vast majority of my time in San José. After I spent several months as vice consul under Jim Kerr, Mr. Plaser arrived as ambassador. Because he didn't speak Spanish, Ambassador Plaser asked for a full-time interpreter. Well, at small posts like that, the State Department doesn't provide a professional interpreter. So to try to be helpful, Personnel found a vice consul in Monterrey, Mexico, José Fernandez, a Puerto Rican, who's Spanish, of course, was perfectly fluent. The idea was that I would go to back up to Monterrey and take José's place, and José would transfer to San José, replace me and be vice consul as well as be the ambassador's interpreter when needed.

On the very day that I heard about this plan, I found that my wife Lisa was pregnant with our first child. So, as it turns out, somebody else replaced José in Monterrey, and I ended up as the number two general services officer, a position that fortunately for me became vacant about that time. José arrived in San José and replaced me as vice consul, and I spent about six months as assistant GSO. Then when the consul, Jim Kerr, was transferred, I went back to the consular section. So for the last four or five months of my tour in Costa Rica, José and I were the two consular officers there.

Q: What was consular work like in Costa Rica?

WILKINSON: It was a bigger variation of what we did in Mazatlán in the sense that there were a relatively large number of tourists who came there and got themselves into trouble. And we did more non-immigrant visas as well as have an immigrant visas operation. All told, it was the kind of work we were doing in many, many places over the world in those days. But between the two of us and our Costa Rican staff, it was manageable.

We certainly lived a fairly decent life in Costa Rica. I can recall one evening being called by the duty officer who had a problem he wasn't sure how to handle with an American who had been arrested. I went over to a nearby jail to find the arrested American. He was in the "tank" with twenty or thirty other people, mostly drunks. Apart from being drunk and, I assume, disorderly, the American had some sort of a medical problem. The police recognized that he had a problem. They were willing just to let him to go back to his hotel and get out of their hair, but they wanted somebody to come and get him. So I went over there and the rest was easy. I took him to his hotel without further problems. But, what an experience to see the number of drunks in the tank. I suppose it's the sort of thing the police everywhere deal with every Saturday night of the world.

Q: I think it's probably a good time to stop and we'll pick this up next time. When did you leave Costa Rica?

WILKINSON: We left there in January of ’72. Our two children, Thomas and Anna Lisa, were born there. As a “staff” officer, I was not on the diplomatic list so, under Costa Rican law, *jus soli*, both children acquired Costa Rican citizenship, as well as U.S. citizenship.

Q: Well, then where did you go?

WILKINSON: Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Q: Ed, you were in Buenos Aires from ’72 to when?

WILKINSON: From January of ’72 until August of ’75, about three years, nine months.

Q: What was your job?

WILKINSON: Vice consul, and I was promoted to consul during the end of my tour there. I did everything that the consular officers do during my tour there.

Q: How did you see Argentina in the ’72 period when you were assigned there?

WILKINSON: The security situation was not at all good because there were revolutionaries in Argentina at the time. We had many travel restrictions, although usually we were free to move around the city any time we wanted.

Because there were serious anti-Argentine government revolutionaries around, though, bombs went off and people were shot. The American consular agent in the town of Mendoza was kidnaped and murdered during our tour in Argentina. A bomb exploded in front of the British embassy just after the Queen’s birthday celebration. So, it was not a nice situation.

Q: What was the government like at the time?

WILKINSON: It was in those days, as it was all too often all over in Latin America, a dictatorship. In fact, when we arrived, the president of the country, Alejandro Lanusse, was a general who acquired the presidency essentially simply by being a general. But I think, nevertheless, he was a good man in certain ways. Lanusse had announced publicly that he would hold a regular election, one that was going to result in the people deciding who would be the next leader of Argentina. And that happened.

The election took place the following year. A dentist by the name of Héctor Cámpora won, but while running for president he made no bones about the fact that he was really running as a stand in for Juan Perón. Péron, you may remember, was living in exile in Spain at the time. Anyway, Cámpora won the election and became president, but within a few weeks of his election, he simply announced that there would be new elections, which took place. Juan Péron won practically without opposition. Cámpora effectively turned

over the presidency to Péron.

Q: Wow…

WILKINSON: Yes, amazing. So Péron became president and his wife, Isabelita, became vice president. This would have been sometime toward the end of the year 1973.

As far as life in Argentina was concerned, frankly, for those of us who had dollars to spend, we lived quite well. If you've been in Argentina, you know exactly what I'm talking about and, if not, it's a little hard to describe. Argentina is a first class country in many, many ways. It was and is a country with wonderful food, spectacular cultural events of all sorts, libraries, and a beautiful opera house with regular presentations of opera, ballet, concerts and the like.

Because the city of Buenos Aires is in the southern hemisphere, we had European, American and other opera and ballet stars from the North during their off-season, June, July and August. That, of course, is the "on-season" in Argentina. So we saw some fantastic things at the opera house there and because the money situation was not good for the Argentine, we were able to obtain tickets relatively inexpensively. To repeat: we lived very well.

Q: It must've been a major topic of conversation. Why couldn't the Argentines get their act together? They had almost everything going; they didn't have an Indian population to worry about and it is not a poor country in terms of resources.

WILKINSON: All true, all true. That question you probably should put in the present tense, because it appears they still haven't really gotten their act together. It's a little hard to understand why. In our day, I think Argentina produced 40% of the oil the country needed. Of course, the earth in Argentina is extremely rich. I believe I read somewhere that the topsoil is 23 feet deep there because there were no glaciers in the Southern Hemisphere.

The European immigrants, who are the Argentines of today, were educated people. Exactly why they have such basically fiscal, but certainly government-wide, problems, I can't answer. It is surprising. You think each time it's turning around, but, it doesn't. The minister of economics who is there even right now, Domingo Caballo, is a highly educated person. He was economics minister ten years ago, and all things seem to have gone well economically speaking, but they've just had another disaster there financially.

Q: Before we get to the consular work, who was the ambassador while you were there?

WILKINSON: When we arrived, John Davis Lodge was the ambassador. John Davis Lodge was not nearly so well known as his younger brother, Henry Cabot Lodge. Ambassador Lodge was later ambassador to Switzerland. He left and was replaced by Robert C. Hill.

Ambassador Hill was on his fifth assignment as ambassador. He was a man of independent means who had a good handle on what he was doing and why he was doing it. I thought he was just a wonderful ambassador.

Q: Let's talk about consular work there. What was it like?

WILKINSON: It was a pretty standard, almost a textbook operation. With the exception of people who were in the country temporarily with companies, the Americans who lived there tended to be long-term residents. In many cases, they were born there and continued to make Argentina home. Therefore, they did not need lots of consular services. Neither the immigrant visa nor the non-immigrant visa programs were all that large, either. I must say, though, that the non-immigrant visa business was often interesting because of the economic situation. As far as our American staff was concerned, I think we were six consular officers there, including the consul general.

Q: What about the students? Didn't Argentina in those days look towards Europe more than towards the United States?

WILKINSON: Yes, that's true. There was quite a large British population, or people of British origin, in Argentina, and they tended to go to Britain for holidays and for study. The Italians were a little different story. They would go to France and Spain as quickly as to Italy, but Europe was of course "home," if you will. I think the city of Buenos Aires is something like 90% of Italian origin.

Q: How about protection and welfare?

WILKINSON: Well, this was not a big problem either in terms of quantity or in terms of quality. Argentina is a Latin country, but by Latin standards the situation there is far better than in many other places where I've served. That is to say, the authorities were generally pretty honest. So, if you have an authority you can deal with – I'm talking about police, magistrates and judges, etc. – who are by and large decent, law-abiding people, your problems are not significant.

There was one particular situation I dealt with which was interesting. Now this was, don't forget, in the '70s. There was a young woman of Hispanic origin who came to Argentina as a part of a protest. I confess I've forgotten what she was protesting about, but she was out in a provincial town leading marches and making lots of noise in her protests. She was arrested for reasons that we all thought were pretty shaky. A well-known (at least at that time) American lawyer, Leonard Weinglass (of the "Chicago Seven" trial fame), came down to try to see what he could do about getting her out of jail.

Q: So she was from the American left establishment?

WILKINSON: She was certainly leftist, as was Mr. Weinglass. Now, he knew perfectly

well that the Napoleonic Code legal system in Argentina is quite different from the American English Common Law system, and that there was not much he could bring in terms of his own legal experience. However he had been asked to come down to "represent" her and so he did. He and I went to visit her. And this is an example of why I say we really didn't have a lot of trouble with Argentine authorities. Weinglass was not the young lady's lawyer, but the Argentines allowed him to visit her on at least two different occasions. Frankly, I thought they were pretty nice about it. We went to see the judge in charge of the case, and - can you believe this? - he invited us to his home for a very nice lunch.

I thought all Argentines bent over backwards to be decent to us, so I bring that up as an example of that.

Q: Were you able to get her out?

WILKINSON: Yes, she was finally released.

Q: What about the security situation at the time?

WILKINSON: Traveling out of the city of Buenos Aires was difficult because of embassy rules as a result of the very dire security situation. You could travel under certain circumstances, but you had to get permission. The only visit my wife and children and I made out of the city within Argentina was a trip straight south to the resort town of Mar del Plata, where we spent two glorious weeks just being tourists.

I should point out that when we arrived in Buenos Aires our daughter was six weeks old and our son was fifteen months, so getting around for tourist purposes was not all that easy. Having two children in diapers did not make tourism so desirable for us. On the other hand, Buenos Aries is a huge city. I've forgotten now, but it seems there were ten million inhabitants at the time. There were many, many things to do, so we didn't feel that we were deprived, necessarily, because we couldn't conveniently leave the city.

Q: Was the embassy and embassy personnel at all targeted by the terrorists? Were these kidnapings politically motivated or were they money motivated?

WILKINSON: Like altogether too many times in too many places, the American Embassy, and I must say many other embassies, were targeted, particularly if they were high profile. I think this was largely because such attacks would bring publicity that the revolutionaries wanted. I cannot think of a situation where money was an issue. They simply wanted the publicity.

We had one major terrorist incident while we were there. A pickup truck stopped at a stop light right outside the ambassador's residence (a beautiful old home, by the way). Welded into the back of the pickup truck were bazookas. For whatever reason –publicity for their cause, I assume – the people in the open truck were able to fire the bazooka, and they did

so when the light changed green. They fired several shots, then sped away. A number of shells went right into the outside wall of the ambassador's residence. There was some damage, but nobody was hurt, so they got away with that one with relatively little trouble for us.

Another thing I might mention was something I referred to a little while ago. One night my wife and I were in bed reading. The kids were asleep. I suppose it was ten o'clock at night. We heard a huge boom. It turned out to have been an explosion at the British Embassy that was eight or ten blocks away from where we were living. This particular day was the Queen's birthday.

Somebody had pulled a car right up next to the British Embassy earlier in the evening. Apparently something didn't go right with the bomb planted in the car, because by the time of the explosion the celebration was finished, and the guests had left. An embassy guard noticed some strange lights in the car near the dashboard. The car was loaded with explosives, and when the guard tried to determine the cause of the lights, it exploded. With the exception of the unfortunate guard, nobody was hurt.

These were two of the security matters that I remember, but lamentably there was a steady stream of nasty occurrences.

Another little story: One night my wife and I and a couple of friends went to dinner someplace and then went to have a drink after the dinner. We went to a section of town called the Recoleta, which is near the famous cemetery of the same name and near a university. It's a very nice neighborhood of bars, restaurants, and so on. To our amazement, when we pulled up to a main intersection, there were a number of anti-Argentine government revolutionaries with guns there. A couple of them were actually directing traffic; they and had basically taken over the neighborhood. We, however, were so used to this kind of thing that we went through the intersection, found a parking place and had our drinks. By the time we were ready to leave, these guys had been chased out. It was a bit surrealistic.

Q: The consular section often is the place where people come looking for asylum. Did you get hit by any of that?

WILKINSON: A good question. I think the answer is no. I can't remember a situation like that. Needless to say, I was pretty junior; I wasn't necessarily privy to everything that might have happened, but I'm not aware that there was.

Q: Were there demonstrations against the United States?

WILKINSON: No. There were not. But let me tell a little story here, the likes of which most people have never seen.

We talked earlier about the economic situation there, and I'm afraid the word

"mismanagement" leaps to mind. One of the things that the Argentine Central Bank did during our time there was to promulgate a regulation that allowed travelers who were going abroad for tourism to get money – dollars or marks or yen or whatever it was they would need – at a relatively favorable rate. This meant if you're a person living in Argentina who had Argentine Pesos to spend and you wanted to go to the U.S., you could get up to $1,500 at this favorable rate. You could get, I think, 10% of the total in cash in Argentina, and the rest you would have to get from a designated bank in the U.S. after arrival there. In order to qualify for obtaining the rest of the $1,500, the traveler had to remain in the U.S. (or at least, outside Argentina) for at least 30 days.

It's a little odd that the Central Bank would do that because it effectively encouraged tourism, i.e. spending your Argentine money outside of the country. This is not my idea of a good way to manage the economic situation, especially during an economic crisis.

Of course, during the relatively short period of time this rule was in effect, it made a huge difference in our non-immigrant visa operation. As you might expect, a lot of people found it convenient to go to Miami, the closest U.S. city of any size to Argentina, to take advantage of the opportunity to make a little money.

So if a potential traveler could get a visa, the normal procedure would be to obtain the 10 percent of the $1,500 from the Central Bank in Buenos Aires, purchase the ticket (on credit, of course, in Pesos), fly off to Miami, do the paperwork, get the rest of the dollars from the bank in Miami, then quickly fly back. However, the traveler couldn't enter Argentina again through the airport in Buenos Aries, because if he did he would be in trouble with the Central Bank. Remember, theoretically, the traveler was supposed to remain in the U.S. for 30 full days. The traveler would instead return from Miami to Montevideo, Uruguay, then come across the Rio Plata using only his national identification card, a regularly used procedure for travel to surrounding countries. Thirty days later the traveler would go back to Montevideo using the ID card, then return to Argentina "internationally," that is, with a passport.

The traveler would then have $1,500 in U.S. dollars, which could be changed on the black market for about three or four times the locally available rate. Even after paying off the Peso debts for the round trips to Miami and Montevideo, the traveler would still have considerable cash in Pesos.

A lot of people did that, but to do so they required a U.S. non-immigrant visa. When they applied, it was not really reasonable for us to say, "No, you can't have a tourist visa because your idea is to make money off a weird Central Bank rule." I mean, one of the main points of a non-immigrant visa interview is simply to get to the bottom of the section 214(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act question, "Are you coming back?" And I expect in most cases they probably were.

Q: They've got a much better reason to come back than others.

WILKINSON: Exactly. I remember one of the embassy drivers asked me, "Can I get a visa?" and I said, "Well, look, I'm not going to guarantee you anything, but I think you can." First of all, he had a full-time job, and secondly, although he didn't make an awful lot of money, he had a good reason to come home. So, we had people practically breaking down the door to apply for visas. In fact, one particular day the door was, indeed, broken down. It was knocked down because the ancient building the consular section was in at the time didn't have strong doors. The crowd gathered outside the door to the consular section (on the third floor of the office building), and there was such a crush from behind as people got off the elevator that the door literally fell down.

So in Argentina, we experienced a lot of things that normally you don't get involved in.

Q: What about the technical class? I mean the engineers and doctors? Were there good employment opportunities??

WILKINSON: I think the answer to that is no. The Argentine of those days and I'm sure today – and I suspect 150 years ago – was a relatively well-educated person, so you certainly had a technical class. You had professors of everything, from media to literature, and doctors and lawyers and other professionals. However, there weren't a lot of jobs. Most people, though, loved Argentina (just like they do today), so there was not a lot of desire to find one's (financial, at least) destiny abroad. I don't think that happened much then. It certainly happened, but it wasn't a major phenomenon. In fact, I don't think our non-immigrant visa refusal rate was very high.

Q: Now when Perón came back, was there apprehension or people running for cover?

WILKINSON: Quite the contrary. I have a little story about that.

After Cámpora was elected, he removed the prohibition against Perón being able to return to Argentina, so Perón did come back during the winter in Argentina, in June or July of 1973. We had an Argentine maid at the time, a nice, very hard-working lady. She told us something, I think, that a lot of people lose track of when remembering Juan Perón, and that is this: Perón was, in the '30s, a general. Later he was made minister of work. He became very well known during that time, and the changes he made then were his opening later to become president of his country.

Let me explain further. Argentina, in the 30s and before, was anything but an egalitarian society. You had rich people, but there were very few. They were largely landowners and large business people who managed the country. And there were a very large number of poor people. Workers, I'm talking maids and people of low income or all too often no income, were badly, badly treated by the system.

As minister of labor, Perón made a number of changes. For example, he allowed, for the first time the existence of trade unions. He did a number of other things that made life better for the man and the woman on the street. And his first wife, Evita, was seen to be –

and was, I believe – an important part of this. So when he returned, the vast majority of the people who remembered pre-Perón life, and how bad it was, welcomed him. No matter what he may have done regarding fleecing the country in a variety of ways and the other things that were pretty shady, for these reasons, the average Argentine thought very highly of him right up to the end.

Q: Then you left there in '75?

WILKINSON: We left there in August of '75.

Q: By that time you had ceased being a staff officer and became a Foreign Service Officer?

WILKINSON: Correct. The way it worked was this. In the late '60s Ambassador William Macomber was responsible for writing a report called Diplomacy for the '70s, a study that I believe came out in late '69 or early '70. One of the conclusions drawn in the study was that there were a lot of Foreign Service officer positions filled by staff people, not FSOs. As a consequence of some personnel changes recommended in the report and adopted, every one of us staff people who had been three years in an FSO position was given an opportunity to apply to become a regular Foreign Service officer.

I think quite a large number of applicants were taken in as FSOs under the program, although not everybody. I had some friends who, surprisingly, in my opinion, were not accepted. Anyway, sometime in 1974, I became an FSO. The money was essentially the same and the work was exactly the same, but becoming an FSO opened up larger opportunities for the future for me.

Q: So after 1975?

WILKINSON: So in 1975 I had been three straight tours in Latin America. As you know, I am married to an Asian woman, a Filipina. Two things happened that were in our favor in terms of expanding our assignment horizons. Dr. Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State at the time, came up with an idea that allowed a broadening of assignment possibilities. I've forgotten the acronym but…

Q: GLOP. It was basically Global Outlook Program or something.

WILKINSON: Okay, thank you. That's exactly it: GLOP. So, I had, for that reason, a very good opportunity to move on from Latin America. Of course, Asia was my goal.

People who might read this account or hear this tape who know the State Department's personnel structure today will not believe the way it was in the '70s. You essentially got a telegram one day saying, "Your next assignment is thus and so…" and that's where you went and that was the end of that. (Well, okay; things did happen behind the scenes, but, well... it is far more democratic, if you will, today.) Anyway, the GLOP principal gave us

an opening.

Fortunately, at that time I knew my career counselor – my assignment guru – pretty well, so I communicated with her as I was approaching the end of my Buenos Aires tour. I made a plea to go to Asia, mentioning my wife, of course. Rather quickly thereafter, she advised that there would be an opening in Taipei for which I might qualify. Well, fortunately for us, I got the assignment to the embassy there. It was an embassy at the time.

Because of a rapidly increasing workload, they had increased the consular section by two new American positions, rather without warning. So another fellow and I were assigned there more or less at the last moment, unfortunately without any language training.

Q: Who's that?

WILKINSON: His name is Lynn Curtain. Lynn is now retired and living in Manila.

Anyway, we arrived in Taipei in the fall of 1975, just after 10/10, double ten, they call it, the founding date of the Republic of China.

Q: October tenth.

WILKINSON: Right. We couldn't arrive before that date because we wanted to spend a couple of nights in the Grand Hotel, probably Taipei's most famous and most elegant hotel at the time. (I believe mentioned when I met Lisa, she was working for Scandinavian Airlines. She later worked for Civil Air Transport, the Taiwan flag carrier, so she had already been to Taipei and had stayed at the Grand Hotel.) Anyway, because of the quantity of people who were in Taiwan for "Double Ten," we had to wait to arrive on the twelfth in order to get two rooms at the Grand Hotel.

We were delighted to be assigned to a post so close to the Philippines. Although I had been in Manila before, I had never met my wife's family. My boss, Thomas F. Wilson, gave me two weeks off at Christmas, 1975, which was just six weeks after our arrival. I'm so happy he did that. We went over to the Philippines, and I was then able to meet my wife's family. We spent two weeks there, mostly in Bacolod City, Negros Oriental, where Lisa's family lives.

Q: You were in Taiwan from '75 until when?

WILKINSON: The late summer of 1978. We were there three years, a normal assignment.

Q: What was the political and economic situation in Taiwan?

WILKINSON: Well, Taiwan, at that time, was a police state. It probably isn't very

politically correct to say it quite like this, but, in fact, the Chiang Kai-shek party, the Kuomintang, just basically ran it in the way they saw fit. They, themselves, would decide who the next president was to be and then this person would become the president. Period. There was a legislative body called the Legislative Yuan. They were not by any means a democratic organization, either.

Things have changed there, in my opinion, very much for the better. But in a certain sense, even at that time, the political situation was okay. I say this because there was order in the streets.

However, at that time we knew perfectly well that the United States Government was soon going to withdraw recognition from the Republic of China and recognize the mainland. And because the people in Taiwan knew that a withdrawal of recognition was possible (even likely), we diplomats were all very well treated by the populace, presumably to try to stave off the de-recognition. So, as I say, we were treated very nicely by virtually everybody in that country.

Q: You were there when we officially de-recognized the Republic of China?

WILKINSON: No, we left about three months before that happened.

Q: But it was assumed that everybody knew it was going to happen?

WILKINSON: Yes, I think so. But, it was not, in my opinion, well handled. I don't think the ambassador knew precisely when it was going to take place until he was called out of a dinner party – where he happened to be with the president of the country – to be told that the U.S. Government was going to recognize mainland China forthwith. This is according to a story I heard. I cannot confirm it absolutely. As I say, all this took place about three months after we left.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

WILKINSON: Leonard Unger, formerly ambassador to Thailand. A man who makes his home, I believe, here in the Washington area, as we speak. He was and is a wonderful gentleman, and I think very highly of him and his wife.

Q: What was consular work like there?

WILKINSON: Once again, I would have to say that this was pretty standard operation. When I first got there I was put in charge of American Services. Most of our consular work, though, was in immigrant and non-immigrant visas. Now, in those days the Taiwanese couldn't just get a passport and go somewhere because they wanted to. There were certain restrictions on foreign travel. The same sort of thing was going on in Korea, I believe, at the same time.

Q: Yes.

WILKINSON: This, in a certain sense, regulated our non-immigrant visa business. Taiwan officialdom was very understanding and good to us. And as far as American Services was concerned, like in Korea and like, I believe, in Japan, Taiwan had a foreign affairs police, a police force that dealt solely with foreigners. One of the conditions of being a member of this police force, I think, was to speak either English or Japanese, hopefully both, as well as Mandarin and, in many cases, Taiwanese. They were quite easy for us to deal with, so we had no real difficulties in this regard.

Yes, of course, we had people in jail, although don't forget when I was there we had U.S. military still assigned to Taiwan. Americans who broke the law and were incarcerated were almost always jailed side-by-side with the U.S. military detainees. These were all people who had done something not too serious and were serving, perhaps, a two-year sentence. These were not murderers or so on. Let me put it this way, the U.S. military took very good care of their prisoners to the extent even of putting a refrigerator out where their people were. Our people were able to take advantage of these relatively good conditions.

Q: What about visas? We always think of the Chinese anywhere trying to get to the United States, particularly in Hong Kong there's so much visa fraud. How was it running in Taiwan?

WILKINSON: It's possible, of course, that we were badly fooled by the people who applied for visas, but don't think there was a great deal of fraud or other similar problems, visa-wise. There was the usual business of the occasional fake birth certificate and there were fake job letters and like, but in general I don't think there were a lot of these sorts of problems. I did not, by the way, ever sit on the visa line there. Non-immigrant visa interviews were handled almost exclusively by our Chinese-speaking officers, so I'm speaking second-hand. But, I don't think we had a lot of problems.

I believe it is fair to say there are many parallels between Taiwan and Korea at the time. For example, there might have been people who would have liked to leave Taiwan, maybe because they were anti-Kuomintang, for example. But these were not people who could get passports, I would have to say our visa work – both immigrant and non-immigrant – was manageable.

Q: You must have had quite a bit of traffic in students there, didn't you?

WILKINSON: No, not really. There were certainly student visa applicants, and I always felt that this was very good for the U.S., but once again, the student could not simply go and get a passport to study abroad. I don't recall this being a major problem at all.

Q: With the American military was there a lot of marriage with the local ladies?

WILKINSON: Yes I think so, although I don't have a statistic to give you on that. Unfortunately (for me), the word was in the Judge Advocate General office there that a consular officer had to be a witness for the marriage to be valid in the U.S. Of course, that's not true, but the troops would get very excited if there wasn't a consular officer on hand to witness their wedding.

Fortunately, there was only one place in Taiwan where a foreigner could get married, and that was at the Taipei city hall. So, on two particular days a week, we would be there at a designated time. The G.I.'s would bring their documents later to the consulate, and we would do the necessary paperwork to provide them with a "Consular Witness to Marriage." That wasn't necessary for the marriage to be legal, as you very well know, but we did it anyway.

Years later, by the way, probably around 1993 when I was assigned to Bangkok, I visited the home of a newly arrived officer whom I didn't know. After introductions, we were invited to sit down. However, the host looked at me for a few seconds, and then went into his bedroom without comment. He came back a few seconds later with his Consular Witness to Marriage, a certificate I had witnessed it in 1976!

Q: Did you pick up from your local employees at all any sort of tension between the Taiwanese and the mainland Chinese?

WILKINSON: Oh, yes. Well, I don't think we did get that sort of information from our local employees, largely, I think, because they didn't think that would be a good thing for them to comment about, at least not to us. Tension certainly existed, however. I don't think we had any Foreign Service National employees at the office in those days who were "Mainlanders," i.e., people who had come from Mainland China with Chiang Kai-shek, or their offspring. I think they were mostly Taiwanese, if you will. The Mainlanders wouldn't be likely to have taken a job in the embassy. Those people tended to be generals and senior business people and government people, not "administrative"-type people.

I guess I would have to say that the native Taiwanese people were fairly decently treated by the Mainlanders, although there were some exceptions to that in certain cases. I don't really think this was a horrible existence for them, but there were certain limitations on where they could go and what they could do. I mean that in terms of jobs and so on. Yes, there was tension. There's no question about the fact that there was tension.

We, at least those of us who didn't speak Chinese, had to deal with a population of people where, if they spoke English, they had long since decided it would just simply not be convenient to make too much noise about any tension. So we knew it existed, but I can't give you good examples.

Q: In '78, you were there?

WILKINSON: In 1978, to my surprise, I got a communication from my former boss, my

first consul general in Buenos Aries, Robert Bishton. Bob Bishton was looking for somebody to run the consular section in Guayaquil, Ecuador, where he was then consul general.

Q: I replaced Bob in Saigon.

WILKINSON: Well, he sent a message to me about the job, and I leaped at the opportunity to work for him again. My wife made a very clever observation, I thought, at the time. She said, "Well, we've always heard many uncomplimentary things about Guayaquil, but Jane Bishton would never be there if it were that bad. So, therefore, we know it is not bad."

Q: It was usually considered a fever post back in the old days, before they got good anti-malaria medicine. And Thomas Nast, the famous cartoonist, was consul general there.

WILKINSON: Exactly. In fact, he was buried there for a time. Later his remains were taken back to New York.

Regarding Guayaquil, well it is not Paris or Rome, of course, but it's a satisfactory town, and certainly fever was not an issue when we were there. In fact, I don't think there was any sort of an issue there. We had a good time. We had a lot of Ecuadorian friends.

In fact, it was a real sleeper post. When we got there, we were getting 20% hardship differential at a time that Havana was getting 15%! The reason, in my opinion, is that no one ever visited there, probably because of its reputation. During my two and a half years in Guayaquil, we had only one congressman visit, and that was only for an afternoon. Nobody else from the Congress and rarely anyone from the Department found it convenient to visit Guayaquil, at least during my tour. One exception: we were inspected around 1980. I was acting principal officer at the time while we were between consuls general.

Q: You were there from '78 until when?

WILKINSON: January of '79 to July of '81.

Q: What was the political situation in Ecuador at that time?

WILKINSON: Soon after I arrived in Ecuador, there was what I would call a fairly free and fair election. The man who became president, Jaime Roldós, was a young lawyer who was, I think, a man who wanted the very best for his country. Unfortunately, he and his wife were killed a couple years later in an airplane crash. Mrs. Roldós, by the way, was the sister of a more recent president who was not quite so successful, Abdullah Bucarram. The Bucarrams were, in general, a decent political family who happened to be of Lebanese origin.

In any case, the political situation was, in my opinion okay. When we arrived there another legacy of Latin America, the dictator, was going by the wayside. Although Attorney Roldós won the election, if his opponent had won I think the country would still have been okay.

Q: Was there a solid distinction between the people of Guayaquil and those in Quito?

WILKINSON: Funny that you would mention that. Yes, the answer is yes, absolutely.

The reason I suggest the observation is funny is that I certainly would not have thought to ask that, but it is absolutely true.

Q: Well, you have lowlanders, uplanders, flatlanders…

WILKINSON: Yes, and I think in Ecuador it is fair to say the people of the north are rather different from the people of the South. For example, when the northerners think of going abroad, they generally think of going to Spain. People in the south, however, where Guayaquil is located, tend to think of going to the U.S. when they think of going "abroad."

Another thing: in the north the second person singular in Spanish is *tu.* In the south the word of choice is *vos*. Two different words for the same concept... pretty unusual, I would say, for a relatively small country.

Q: The Italians have that.

WILKINSON: Oh, do they really? Okay.

I can remember having been there only a week or maybe two weeks. I was walking down the hall upstairs, not in the consular section. I passed by our telephone operator who said, "Mr. Wilkinson, I wonder if you could talk to this man on the phone." Well, that's kind of odd for the telephone operator to get up from his work place and effectively waylay me out in the hall. The telephone operator said, "It is the Minister of Defense on the phone." I said, "My goodness, are you sure that this is the Minister of Defense, himself, calling to the consulate?" The operator stood a second thinking about it and he said, "Well, he speaks like a *Serrano*, a person from the mountainous north. He speaks like somebody from Quito." To him, that was good enough; this was clearly somebody from the north who was on the phone.

Q: What was consular work like there?

WILKINSON: Quito is a relatively small town, even though it's the seat of the government. Our officers there dealt with a relatively small amount of consular work. The bulk of the consular work was, statistically, in Guayaquil.

To the extent that there were Americans living in Ecuador, the majority lived in or near Guayaquil, or down on the coast. So American Services was a much bigger operation in every way, than it was in Quito. And we had immigrant visas, non-immigrant visas as well as American Services in Guayaquil.

I might add that Guayaquil is where business tends to be in Ecuador; the banking industry is in Guayaquil. Another big issue there is fishing; obviously it's along the coast.

I believe there were two consular officers assigned to Quito, at the time, and we were six or seven in Guayaquil.

Q: Were there any major consular problems there?

WILKINSON: No, not really. However, one weekend an American died up in the town of Cuenca, north and east of Guayaquil. The truck bringing his remains in the casket that Friday afternoon was delayed, so the body missed the plane on which it was scheduled to depart. So the casket spent the weekend on my desk because there were no other planes leaving until Monday and no one could figure out where to keep the body for the weekend. That wasn't really a difficult situation, of course, but it was the best example I could come up with as a "problem."

Q: What was the status of the tuna wars when you were there?

WILKINSON: There were indeed tuna wars, but those issues were handled out of the embassy.

Q: Where was immigration from in Guayaquil? To where were they headed? Do you know?

WILKINSON: No, I don't have a good answer to that. I'm not aware that there are a large number of people of Ecuadorian origin who live in, let us say Miami. Miami always was one of the important places for travel when people in Latin America went to the U.S., but in terms of numbers, again, I don't have an answer to that.

Q: How about the students?

WILKINSON: No, there were not a lot of student applicants.

Q: What was city life like in Guayaquil?

WILKINSON: There was not much was going on there, I have to say. There were a couple of Chinese restaurants that I remember and one or two Italian restaurants, but nothing to report that was particularly interesting.

Perhaps the most noteworthy thing I found was an American citizen who was a barber in

a local hotel. He had lost one of his arms in Korea. I have to say I think a one-armed barber is news. He was a very nice, very personable gentleman. He had immigrated to the States in 1950 and was promptly taken into the U.S. military and sent to Korea where he lost his arm.

Q: Was there any tourism going out to the Galapagos?

WILKINSON: Yes, that, of course, was a big deal. There was an American man resident in Guayaquil who had a good-sized schooner on which you could visit the Galapagos. From Guayaquil, you could spend about six days on this tour. This included, I think, three days or four days in the Galapagos, so you had nice accommodations and a good cook. Travelers were able to experience, to a degree, something like what Charles Darwin and others might have experienced in their travel to the islands. The Galapagos was an important tourist attraction for people, and Ecuador certainly took full advantage.

Q: Were there any earthquakes or disasters or anything like that while you were there?

WILKINSON: There were at least two earthquakes that I remember, although I don't think they caused much damage. One happened during a normal workday. I was having a meeting in my deputy's office when the building began to shake. I really don't remember what happened next, but in an instant all four of us were trying to stand in the doorway to his office. We all began to laugh even before the shaking stopped.

Q: Did the Peruvian-Ecuadorian border dispute pop up while you were there?

WILKINSON: Yes, it did, although I was out of the country at the time, so I personally missed it all. I came up to the States in 1980 to attend the advanced consular course. During this three-week period, the border war, if that's the right phrase, took place. There were some rumors during this period to the effect that the Peruvians were going to bomb Guayaquil. Nothing happened really, but there was a good scare, and of course I was very concerned because my wife and two children were there. It got everybody excited, not the least of whom was I, but in the end there was no real problem.

Q: Well then, in '81 you're off again?

WILKINSON: I finally got caught and had to go to the States.

Q: I was going to say, it's about time!

WILKINSON: I had come to the U.S. in 1980 for the advanced consular course that I mentioned earlier. I'm not sure how it happened, but while here I ended up in the office of Lou Geltz, who was at that time Deputy Assistant Secretary for Overseas Citizen Services. Anyway, he referred me to Carmen DiPlacido, the chief of one portion of what, I believe, was called then Citizens Consular Services. As a consequence of these conversations, in the summer of 1981, I was transferred to Washington to be head of the

European division of Citizens Consular Services, working under Carmen.

Q: So you finally got assigned to the Department.

WILKINSON: Yes. When I got up here to Washington, I sat on the promotion panels for the first few weeks of my tour, then I went to work in the European division of Overseas Citizen Services.

Q: '81 to when?

WILKINSON: Well, less than a year, as it turns out. Anyway, I was in the Overseas Citizens Services office for, I think, no more than forty-eight hours, when President of Egypt Anwar Sadat was assassinated. All sorts of things were happening that weren't going on three days before. This turned out to be quite an opening to learn about the job. The assassination did not really affect me personally in terms of what I was doing, but it was a big problem for the whole office. So I learned quickly.

Lou, as you know, had left Citizens Consular Services by the time I arrived. There was no Deputy Assistant Secretary in the office for several months, but ultimately, Lou was replaced by Bob Lane. Bob had been a vice consul in Guadalajara when I was in Mazatlán, so I knew him. In fact, I was actually the only one around who knew him. He had come from being Deputy Chief of Mission in Asuncion, Paraguay.

This was my first experience in Washington. It was, as I say, in around October of 1981. I enjoyed my stay and I learned a lot. Then in late March of the next year, 1982, the argument, if you will, between Argentina and Britain, the...

Q: Malvinas-Falklands.

WILKINSON: Thank you so much. The Malvinas-Falklands War had started. I was sitting at my desk in Citizens Consular Services when Bob Lane came and asked if I had a minute. Well, of course I did, so he sat down and asked, "We need somebody to go to Buenos Aires, on temporary duty right away. Can you go?"

When he found out I had been stationed there for nearly four years he said, "Well, you're the man then." So, I left for Argentina pretty quickly thereafter. The reasons were two-fold: the Malvinas-Falkland War coupled with the fact that there were a number of personnel problems in the consular section. The fact that I had previously been on assignment in Buenos Aires was an important aspect of all of this. They thought my experience there would be useful, because it looked like neither the boss nor his deputy would likely remain there very much longer.

I got to Buenos Aries on, I think, Monday night and spent ten weeks there, although I was originally sent there for two weeks. You may remember that in the lead-up to the beginning of the conflict, Secretary of State Alexander Haig tried Kissinger-style shuttle

diplomacy to try to patch the situation together. He went back and forth from London to Buenos Aires on a number of occasions, but later it was announced that the U.S. was going to back Britain in the war. There was considerable worry that the Argentines would take their unhappiness with that out on the U.S., and this was one of the things I was supposed to deal with from a consular standpoint.

I arrived a few days after the "we are going to back Britain" announcement came out. Because of the potential for problems, which might include huge numbers of Argentines coming into the embassy and tearing the place apart, the embassy personnel had sent all of the consular (and, I assume, other) files, the important files anyway, over to Montevideo. (Actually they didn't. It turns out there was a lot of citizenship files that got stuck in the basement of the embassy by mistake, but nobody knew they were there during my tenure.)

So there were no visa files, there were ostensibly no citizenship files, and worst of all, there were no American federal benefits, including Social Security, files. The reason why I say "worst of all" is that those files had been destroyed, I assume by mistake. Anyway, we had no Social Security files in the office when I got there, and it was a long time before Social Security and the other federal benefits organizations could provide reproductions of the files they had on the American residents of Argentina on whom we had Federal Benefits business.

The reason I'm telling such a long build up to this story is that during the ten weeks I was there, virtually all the American consular staff transferred to the States or to other posts. Only one person remained of the entire consular section about ten days after I arrived, a young vice consul at the time by the name of Harry O'Hara. Also, I might add, because the Department saw these transfers coming they sent a first tour vice consul, Alec Wilczinski, down from Mexico City to help me out.

However, during the ten weeks I was there, we had almost no work to do; virtually none. Apart from the fact that we had no files, no Argentine nor virtually anybody else wanted to be seen coming into the embassy after our having backed Britain in the war. We had the occasional diplomatic visa, the occasional this, the occasional that. We issued one immigrant visa for the spouse of an officer of, I think, the Bank of Boston, but that was essentially it.

The ten weeks I was in Buenos Aries were a lot of fun, frankly. Amazingly, the second night I was there I went to a restaurant and ran into some friends whom my wife and I had known ten years before. This was an Argentine friend (a man of Basque origin who was born in the Philippines) and his American wife. We knew them pretty well. To run into them within hours of my arrival in a city of approximately ten million people was nothing short of amazing. So I had a good time there, and having friends there helped.

Q: Did you run across any anti-Americanism?

WILKINSON: Absolutely none. One afternoon early in my ten week "tour" in Buenos Aires, I took a taxi somewhere. Now I speak Spanish, but nobody is ever going to confuse me with a native speaker. Anyway, I told the taxi driver where I wanted to go. He looked around at me and said, "You're a foreigner, aren't you?" I admitted that I was an American. He promptly started to talk about the situation in the country, starting with the chief of state, General Leopoldo Galtieri. General Galtieri, he said, according to many people, started this war with Britain to hide the fact that the economic situation was in serious decline once again. The taxi driver went on and on in this vein, then repeated an old joke. He said that all Argentines wish that the government would just build a four lane highway between the president's palace, the Casa Rosada, and the army base in town, so the generals could have their coups and their armies could go back and forth while the rest of the Argentines could go about their business without being bothered by these people. He was a very talkative taxi driver.

Q: You must've been there, over ten weeks, to see the fiasco of when they put the Argentine army into the Malvinas and left them there. That was disastrous.

WILKINSON: It was, indeed, a disaster.

One of the interesting things about being in Buenos Aires during this time is that somebody in the embassy put together a short wave radio so that everybody could listen to the news. The best news we could get was from the British Broadcasting Company out of London. With the exception of a few reporters out on the British ships, virtually everybody on the BBC broadcasts was in fact located a few blocks up the street from the embassy in the Sheraton Hotel. We would sit there every night trying to understand what was happening, listening to these scratchy short wave broadcasts from a quarter way around the world, yet most of the people talking were just a few blocks up the street.

After a couple of weeks, the British army landed at Goose Green on the main island in the Falklands. There was a wonderful story that I heard on BBC. A British officer had a two-shilling piece in his pocket. He found a payphone, put the two shillings into the phone and called a relative or a friend in the still-occupied Malvinas port town of Port Stanley to ask what was happening. The person on the other end said, "Oh, the Argentines ran out of food, there's no money, they are running out of supplies and really don't have anything. They're in terrible shape. Just come on over." I don't know whether this story is true, but from what I could gather, it gives a flavor of the situation at the time. Anyway, the British army stormed into Port Stanley and that was essentially the end of the war.

Rumor had it that the Argentine Head of State General Galtieri would have a drink or two on occasion. One evening, he was supposed to give a major speech on that Casa Rosada balcony where Perón was seen speaking on many occasions. In fact, it is the same balcony pictured in the movie Evita. The Hotel Continental, where I was staying, was about three blocks from this plaza, so I walked down there at the designated time to see the general give his speech. I hung around for a couple of hours, but he never showed. The story was that he'd had a few drinks and just couldn't come out and speak. Anyway, the idea that

General Galtieri started the war for the specific purpose of covering up a bad economic situation rings true to me. I think a lot of Argentines believed that, too.

The other part of this story is that during this ten-week period, I ate more steak than I have ever eaten in my whole life. You probably know that the world's finest beef, bar-none, is in Argentina. Once you're used to Argentine steaks, nothing else is good enough.

As Vice Consul Alec Wilczinski and I were a bit short of work to do, one day we decided to lunch at a rather well-known restaurant near the main railroad station called La Mosca Blanca. Incredibly, as Alec and I were crossing a main thoroughfare heading toward the restaurant, the Pope (!) passed by, virtually without any security people and certainly without much public around.

Now we knew that the Pope was visiting Argentina at about this time, but we hadn't focused on the matter. Apparently, for security reasons, the authorities had changed his travel route without warning. As he passed by, he was standing up in the Pope-mobile waving. Actually, there were only a few other people at the intersection while he was passing by. We waved back, then went on and had two of the largest steaks imaginable.

The rest of the story focuses on the fact that only a few days after the Mosca Blanca lunch, I got a call from Washington with the news that there was an unexpected opening in Manila.

I must say, I thought my boss, Carmen DiPlacido, accepted my precipitous departure from his office, where I had been assigned for about six months, with far too much alacrity. I was a little disappointed at how quickly he said, "Sure, no problem," or words to that effect. But off we went to Manila, some eleven days after my return to Washington.

I arranged to take my departure physical examination in Buenos Aires, not wait until I got back to the States. And – surprise, surprise – my cholesterol level was out of sight. Out of sight.

Q: From the steak?

WILKINSON: Steak and red wine, I think.

Anyway, my old friend, John St. Denis, came down and replaced me. He was with you in...

Q: In Korea.

WILKINSON: Yes, I met him there for the first time, actually, when I met you for the first time during a conference.

So off we went to Manila.

Q: I'm surprised personnel let you get away with going away to Manila, because they have this fifteen-year rule.

WILKINSON: The rule didn't actually apply to me until I became an FSO. I was a staff officer during a good bit of the time I was overseas at the beginning of my career.

Anyway, by the time I returned to the U.S., Lisa had packed us up, so after exactly eleven days back in the U.S., we left for Manila.

Q: Basically we're talking about '81 still?

WILKINSON: No, I got back to the States from Guayaquil in the fall of 1981, went to Argentina in late April of '82 and returned to the States after ten weeks. We then left for Manila.

Q: So '82 to when?

WILKINSON: '85; I was three years in Manila as deputy consul general under Vernon McAninch.

Q: This is an interesting period of time. Could you talk about the situation and talk about McAninch?

WILKINSON: Vernon McAninch, known far and wide as "Mac," was extremely popular and rightly so. I am a great fan of the late Mr. McAninch. He had his faults, as we all do, but I will say from the very beginning that overall I thought the world of him. During my later career in more senior positions, when something came up and I wasn't sure what to do, I would try to stand back a little bit and say to myself, "Now how would Mac have handled this?" And I could very often come up with an answer trying somehow to use Mac's thinking.

Mac was larger than life. He charmed almost everybody. My wife, as I have mentioned, is Filipino. During our tour in the Philippines, my wife said something that may tell you a little something about Mac. One evening, we were at a rather large social gathering. Mac was there, too. After we came home that evening, my wife looked out the window for a few seconds, then with a smile on her face said, "You know, Mac must've been a Filipino in a former life. He knows just how to get along with Filipinos." Mac was very friendly, warm and approachable.

As you know, we had a big consular operation in Manila. One of the things Mac taught me there, which I have religiously followed in the years since, was this. He said, "Look, if you don't go out into the waiting room, once a week at a minimum, and spend a little time to see what is going on, you're not doing your job right."

As I understand the story, soon after he arrived in Manila, Mac went out and spent some time in the visa waiting area. He discovered that there were some guards selling visa applications. They were blanks only, but the guards were making a little money on the side doing that.

Well, I think Mac's dictum was good advice. To any consular officer who might read this I say, take this advice: Get out there and see what's going on.

Mac was a controversial figure. He was, as I said, larger than life, and I learned a lot from him.

If I were consular chief in Manila, I would have a long talk with newly arrived officers, especially those who were new to the Service. I would emphasize the various means many Filipinos use to obtain visas, either for themselves, or for others, for financial or material gain. It is important that everyone understands from the very beginning what goes on.

Q: He was renowned for going into consular sections and really changing everything around for the better. He was considered to be a very good person for putting together an effective organization.

WILKINSON: I think you're right and one of the reasons for that simply is this: people wanted to do the right thing because he was the one who asked you to do it, pure and simple. He had good ideas and good common sense. Let me give you an example of that.

Mac virtually always invited one or two, or more, junior officers to every function he gave, and he gave a lot of functions. Now he didn't expect these junior officers to serve drinks or something. Rather, they were just expected to be there, meet the public, join the evening and see what went on. Mac regularly tried to include junior officers in social gatherings, long before "best practices" was the vogue.

Q: Ed, what about the pressure, which I understand is just about worse than anywhere that one can be, on consular officers for visas?

WILKINSON: This is an important aspect, and I have sort of a unique view on this because of my Filipino wife, Lisa. She was, I think, able to give me good guidance and perhaps an Asian point of view on this subject, a point of view that personally I otherwise wouldn't have had.

The Philippines, certainly in the '60s when I first went there, but even today, is a country where the vast majority of the population knows English pretty well. We Americans have been associated with the Philippines in one way or another for more than a hundred years, so Americans are well known and Filipinos understand Americans very well.

The number of Filipinos who would like very much to come to the U.S. and get a job is

quite high. It just seems like everybody wants to come here, many simply to better their life, economically speaking. We have a huge consular section there, and a lot of our people deal on a daily basis with non-immigrant visa applications because of the large number of people who apply. Of course, we know that there are many Filipinos who ought to have a visa, and we want to give those people visas without delay. But we are obliged to sort through a huge quantity of applicants every day to find those who do qualify. So it's a big, difficult job for our officers there.

All sorts of things are used to try to obtain visas. I'm talking about everything from using illegal documents, to buttering up somebody at a restaurant or wherever it may be when someone encounters a U.S. visa officer or anyone else connected with the embassy.?

It is a major problem and it is something that American officers need to understand from the very beginning. The Filipino will try to see what can be worked out. However, you should say something like, "No, I have moral standards that do not allow me to discuss this now. Please understand I would like to be your friend, but if you want a visa you should get an appointment for an interview and apply." Most Filipinos will understand that and basically that will be that. You can make a case in a way that will turn it off, but if you don't, it will never stop.

It's difficult. Once you've given a favor to a friend (and I'm tempted to put the word "friend" in quotes), that person will not be able to keep what has happened quiet despite assurances otherwise. This is because: (1) that person will want to show off that he or she is "well-connected" to a visa officer, hence he or she has now attained some clout or social status, and/or (2) he or she will want the word to get around so he or she can use this connection or "friendship" for financial or material gain by asking special favors from this embassy "friend."

One incident that is relevant happened at Manila International Airport to my wife. She accompanied her nephew, who was returning to New York's St. John's University, right up to the immigration gate. A young immigration officer called her nephew in and asked him to sit down at his desk. My wife went in with her nephew and sat with him while the immigration officer asked him questions. The conversation went like this, almost verbatim:

Filipino Immigration officer: Why are you going to the States?
Nephew: To study at St. John's University.
Officer: Who gave you your visa and how were you able to get it?
Nephew: Well, I just applied for it.
Officer: Oh, I know So-and-So (he gave the name of our one of our vice consuls) at the embassy. Do you know him?
Nephew: No, I don't know him.
Officer: He's a very good friend of mine. Do you know any consul at the embassy?
Nephew: I know Mr. Wilkinson.
Officer: Well, I know Mr. So-and-So, and he is one of the high-ranking officers there.

(Not exactly true, as the named officer was a first-tour vice consul.)

After a bit more of this, the Immigration officer let the nephew go. All the while, my wife was very quiet and pretended not to understand what was happening. She just said "thank you" when the "interview" was finished. She returned back to the main terminal and her nephew went on into the departure lounge.

So what was the purpose of selecting a 19-year-old student for such an interview? My wife suggests that the whole idea was for the Immigration officer to make as clear as he could to the aunt of the young student that he – the Immigration officer – was available in case the aunt needed a U.S. visa. Or perhaps he was just trying to boost his "social standing" by proclaiming that he was well plugged into the U.S. Embassy.

Whatever it was, it was anything but innocuous.

I have many Filipino friends, and I think the world of the country and the people. But what I've described is a fact of life, and consular officers, certainly visa officers, need to understand that.

Q: I've never served or been to the Philippines. On hearing the stories when I went to Seoul, which was really taking off as a place for immigrant and non-immigrant visas about the time I got there in 1976 or so, one of my major concerns was of consular officers getting caught in two ways. One was sex; usually young ladies were thrown at the officers, and the other...

WILKINSON: Or they threw themselves.

Q: Or the other one was getting favors; special deals on people going out and buying antiques. I remember having a deputy who left shortly after I got there, but had an in with all sorts of firms that all sold things and all this. We never caught anything, but it made me very nervous. Luckily, I was married and I don't like to buy things, but these were the two things and nothing ever turned up. It was a concern. It must've been a real concern for you because everything was multiplied by a certain number.

WILKINSON: As I mentioned before, what you have described is something more difficult to deal with in Manila because of the fact that so many people in the Philippines speak and understand English so well, which means that a lot more people can get to you more easily. I don't mean to imply that the Philippines is the only place where this goes on, however.

Q: Oh, no. It's just that the problem was compounded there. Hong Kong has always been a problem. How did you deal with this? We're talking about young officers coming in, for the most part relatively naive because it's not the sort of thing you got exposed to in the United States.

WILKINSON: Well, that's all true. On the other hand, there were some senior officers who got themselves into some pickles as well. But, you're right. A junior officer is probably the most vulnerable.

Q: The senior officers; that's their problem, but as a supervisor, you're problem is the junior officers.

WILKINSON: The first thing you need to do is to have the kind of conversation that you and I are having. For example, a senior officer should sit down one-on-one or something pretty close to that, describe this situation, then say, "Look, we are watching this closely because this is a serious issue."

Q: Did you find yourself playing the role of elderly psychiatrist, counsel, all that, with your officers?

WILKINSON: I tried to, and I think my best guide in this regard was my wife. She made it very clear from the very beginning to everybody from her sisters and brother to her friends and acquaintances and everybody else, that once you give one person a "favor," you open yourself up to many, many more such requests. She never allowed this to happen in Manila or anywhere else, hence no one bothered her, at least not after a first try.

Q: Did you have any officer problems while you were there?

WILKINSON: In this regard? Yes.

Q: How were those found out and how were they handled?

WILKINSON: I don't believe while I was there that there was anybody who was booted out. The problems were less serious. But sometimes you had to call people on the carpet.

Q: One of the criticisms I heard about McAninch, you heard these things because he was bigger than life, in a way, was at a time when things were getting a little shaky in the administration of President Marcos. You were there when Aquino was killed, weren't you?

WILKINSON: Well, we were assigned to Manila, but in fact my wife and I were in the States when Ninoy Aquino was assassinated. I think it was around September of 1983.

Q: There was the charge, it's not a real charge, but I mean the saying that the embassy, many of the senior officers were too damn close to the Marcos'; they were throwing parties and all this and McAninch name came up in some of this, being the party giver and all of this. Was this a problem or not?

WILKINSON: Yes. I'm sorry to say that it was. Mac was very close to several senior

government people. There was a video that was spread all over the world of Vernon McAninch and Imelda Marcos, the president's wife, dancing at Malacanang Palce. The picture hit the airwaves around the time the Marcoses left the Philippines rather in a hurry. Of course, being close with high government officials is just fine, in a certain sense. One of your jobs as an embassy officer, at least among senior officers, is to get as close as you can to important people. But I think Mac got far too close.

Q: When you came back after the time in the States, was there sort of the word, "Let's draw back a bit from our relationship to the government and power," i.e. the Marcos government?

WILKINSON: Well, I guess I would have to answer that question by saying, we in the consular section were pretty far from other than consular thinking at the time. I can't believe that the answer to that is other than, "Yes, that's exactly what happened," but I can't honestly say that I remember that.

Q: How did you find dealing with police officials and people who issued passports, in other words, government officials with whom you'd be dealing as the consular officer?

WILKINSON: Some were very, very nice and reasonable and helpful and there were others who were largely on the take. At one point, there was a foreign minister whose brother, a disbarred judge, set up shop out in the Foreign Ministry's passport office to organize a little help if you needed it. I would say that was pretty egregious, but over all this sort of thing was not too unusual.

Policemen, like far too many places in Latin America, for example, don't make very much money. So they have to figure out a way that supplements their income. I'm sorry to say that that was standard business there.

Q: Were visa brokers a major problem?

WILKINSON: Yes, of course. One variation on this problem was this: everybody, it would seem, was absolutely convinced that it was impossible to get a U.S. tourist visa without some sort of help. Therefore, many people who didn't need any particular push went to visa brokers. So, for example, visa officers would accept an application for a visa from a man or a woman who made $1000 a week (I am making up some numbers here). But fearing that they would not be able to get a visa, they would go to a visa broker and get "proof" that they made $3000 a week. Now, they've lied to you. Such a lie would not be "material," perhaps, but the whole thing seriously complicated the visa processing. Unfortunately, variations on this theme were the kind of things that were going on all the time.

Q: Ed, you're leaving Manila and what year are you leaving?

WILKINSON: We were in Manila from '82 to '85. We left in the summer of 1985.

Q: You went back to Washington.

WILKINSON: We came to Washington, actually, for my one and only complete tour here. I had been contacted by my personnel officer, Dick McCoy (whom I replaced in Costa Rica years before), who thought, that with the personalities involved, I would fit neatly into the particular job he had in mind. I accepted his view and was assigned to the Bureau of Human Rights where I was to deal with asylum claims. Let me explain a little bit about that the job.

Asylum issues are dealt with strictly and solely by the Attorney General or his designee, according to the pertinent law, the Immigration and Nationality Act. This makes sense because a person may only claim asylum if he or she is within the United States or are at a U.S. port of entry. The Attorney General had devolved the responsibility for dealing with asylum claims on to the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

Until the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, there was nothing in U.S. law that talked about asylum or refugee issues. The Refugee Act of 1980 came about, I would think it's fair to say, largely as a consequence of the revolution that took place in Iran in 1979. Soon thereafter, a large number of Iranians and came to the U.S. wanting to stay here. The law was passed, by the way, about the time of the beginning of the Mariel boatlift. Until the passage of the act, the Attorney General had to deal with what amounted to asylum claims – even though such claims were not mentioned in U.S. immigration law – by a part of the Immigration and Nationality Act that was written for something quite different, section 212(d)(3)(a). This section of the law really allows an immigration officer at a port of entry to let somebody in, if the officer believes that everything else required by the law has been satisfied. For example, if an alien arrives at the port of entry with valid visa in a passport that is expired, or something else that is wrong, but that looks quite innocuous, the immigration officer can invoke section 212(d)(3)(a) and say, "Okay, we'll make an exception in your case. Come on in. You can stay three months (or whatever it might be)."

For example, after the revolution in Hungary in 1956, there were large numbers of people who came to the U.S., doubtless with the intent to stay. The immigration people would invoke section 212(d)(3)(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act to allow these people to stay in the United States. There really was nowhere else for many of them to go, but this was not why that portion of the law was written, i.e., for large numbers of people to enter at one particular time. But the Attorney General used it anyway in such cases because there was no other reasonable way to deal with these people.

So the Refugee Act was passed, and then for the first time U.S. law had a way of dealing with refugees and asylum claims.

The Refugee Act of 1980 was essentially an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. One of the things that was included in the new law was a

definition of a refugee. If you read the definition of a refugee in the Refugee Act, and look at it side by side with the definition the United Nations has of a refugee, you'll see that the two are pretty much the same. Therefore, our law has great similarity with the laws of many, many nations because most nations used either the U.N. definition of a refugee or something very close to it.

Q: In '88 you were there?

WILKINSON: I was extremely fortunate in that in December of 1987 I was promoted into the Senior Foreign Service. I applied for a number of jobs abroad that I thought would be perfect, none of which I got. Then, because of a number of unrelated occurrences, including a retirement or two that were not expected (at least by Personnel), all of a sudden the consul general job in Seoul, Korea, opened up. Out of the blue, I got an inquiry basically from the front office of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. Would I be interested in Seoul? Now the position wasn't actually offered to me at that time. The caller simply said, "Did you notice that the Seoul job is open? It might be something you would like to pursue." I said, "it sounds like a wonderful job," and so I bid on it immediately and was fortunate enough to get it.

Q: Well you were consul general in Seoul from when to when?

WILKINSON: We got there in late fall of 1988, and we stayed until the summer of 1992; we were there four years.

Q: For the reader of this, I had that job from '76 to '79, but I want you to explain things, because you're not explaining to me, but you're explaining to them. How would you describe American-Korean relations when you got there in '88?

WILKINSON: It's important to remember the dates, because the political situation had changed a great deal since you were there. Don't forget that in 1979 President Park Chung Hee was assassinated, causing a great deal of tension. I think by any standard, from the end of the Korean War until sometime in the '85 to '88 timeframe, depending on your definitions here, Korea was a dictatorship. This is a country that was and, of course, still is, our ally. We had excellent reasons to be on their side, but a dictatorship is not really the Americans' idea of a wonderful country, at least in most cases. But as a consequence of the political situation in the country, conditions developed into a military confrontation with unhappy citizens in, I think, the year 1980, when there was an uprising against the Korean dictatorship. Unfortunately, in that case a large number of Koreans were shot down by their own countrymen, the military.

A few years after that incident, the general who was in charge in the field where the shootings took place, Roh Tae Woo, was "named" the next president by the president of Korea at the time, Chun Doo Hwan (himself, of course, a general).

Chun simply announced one day that Roh would be his successor.

As I understand the story, as a consequence of this announcement, virtually within hours the city was filled with demonstrations against this situation. The Korean citizenry had had enough; they wanted a democracy. Apparently, the famous and beautiful, Namdaemoon area was absolutely filled with protesters, as far as the eye could see.

Q: South Gate, it was called.

WILKINSON: Right, South Gate. Huge numbers of people demonstrated rather, I think it's fair to say, unexpectedly, so President Chun quickly backed off from this statement that General Roh would be the next president.

In the event, they actually had a fairly democratic election. Unfortunately, for the people who really wanted to sidetrack the military in the Republic of Korea, two long-time dissidents ran against each other, as well as against Roh Tae Woo. Essentially, the votes for the two dissidents canceled each other out, so General Roh became president anyway. This took place not long before we arrived in Korea.

So after Roh's election, steps were taken to allow a loosening of the bounds that the Korean government had imposed on the people. One of the things that was done was to allow people who wanted to travel abroad to simply apply for a passport. Before that, one could not leave the country without the government's okay. This was not your choice; this was the government's choice. The idea, as I understood it, was that Korea, as a consequence of the Korean War, was so devastated that they could not afford to have the man in the street go abroad and spend money. That money was needed it in Korea, so people were not allowed to travel abroad unless the government said it was okay.

The Government of Korea gradually eliminated this requirement, so when we arrived there in 1988, I think the rule was that people over fifty years old could, if they chose, go and get a passport and travel abroad. The idea was that, little by little, the age would be lowered so that ultimately all Koreans would be able to depart. And this was done.

There were lots of other laws and rules that were being changed in this way. These were President Roh's and his people's initiatives. These changes in Korea made a huge difference to us in our consular operation and our immigration colleagues also felt the same thing. Consular operations increased very, very quickly.

When we got to Korea in 1988, these changes were well in train, but by no means was it finished. It was during our period of time there, the four years we were there, that these travel restrictions were loosened, so that people could leave if they wanted to. Therefore we received huge numbers of non-immigrant visa applications, which, of course, made a big difference in our workload. Our immigration officer friends had a similar experience.

Some numbers: When we arrived in Korea, our immigration visa workload was large. Great numbers of Koreans did want to leave Korea during the period after the Korean

War up until around 1987 or so. They wanted to do so for political and for economic reasons. Simply put, they wanted to go for political reasons – because of the fact that the country was a dictatorship – and for economic reasons, because it was difficult for the average person to live well in Korea. So people left. But because conditions changed rather rapidly, both economically and politically, during this period leading up to when we got there as well as after we arrived. People began to come back to Korea. Koreans who had been living abroad began to come back.

The first year we were there, 1988, we looked at, I believe, something like 27,000 or 28,000 immigrant visa applications and 78,000 or 79,000 non-immigrant visa applications. Four years later, the year I left, the numbers were quite different. We, I think, looked at some 17,000 immigrant visa applications and 256,000 non-immigrant visa applications!

Large numbers of people wanted to go abroad for tourism and study. The government was not concerned about them going abroad because, by and large, they came back. Now there are exceptions to that, needless to say, but it was simply not the same as it was during your experience there, Stu, because many, many Koreans who were living abroad wanted to come home. Korea was where they wanted to live their lives.

During my four years in Korea (or at least during the latter part of my tour), the U.S. Immigration Service accepted back more "green cards" than any other office. In other words, Koreans who had been immigrants in the United States returned home to Korea. They came to the Immigration Service offices at the embassy to say, "Fine, thank you. I enjoyed it but I don't want to live in the U.S. anymore." They had to do that in order to get certain documentation needed to live and work in Korea. It did fall off. It never went away, of course. There's always a certain number of people who, for one reason or another, want to get out, want to go away, and couldn't qualify for a visa. These are essentially poor people, and this of course goes on in virtually every country in the world. But I am sure that statistically speaking the numbers of fraud cases fell off a great deal.

There was a thing that happened, I think in 1982, which is something that I'd like to tell, if I may. It's just – frankly – a short visa fraud story. It was wonderful in its simplicity and I'm just still in awe. I wish that I could say I would have somehow figured out what was going on if I had been there, but I doubt I would have.

Specifically, what was happening is this: if you are a U.S. citizen or a resident alien and you want your close relative to come and join you in the States, there is a procedure for this. One files a form I-130 with the Immigration and Naturalization Service. That form, essentially, puts together your status, resident or citizen, and your relationship to this person whom you wish to sponsor. If, for example, you were married and you wanted to sponsor your spouse, then you'd bring to the Immigration Service office proof of your U.S. citizenship or your permanent residence status information, together with your marriage certificate. Or, if you wish to sponsor a parent or a child, then you'd bring the birth certificate verifying the relationship. So, it's all tied together and this completed I-

130 form, duly approved by the immigration officer and specifically or at least theoretically, signed off on by the District Director of the office where it is filed is sent to the U.S. consular section in the place where the person is living. Based on this approved form, the immigrant visa application will be processed in due course.

The fraud that was being perpetrated on us was this. One or more of our locally engaged staff would go to the supply room and get packets of blank forms I-130s, which we had because people could also file this form in the immigration office in Seoul. Then they would take the blank ones home or somewhere and fill them in with plausible information. They made them look like the real things, including the "official" stamp that ostensibly attested to the "fact" that the application had been properly approved. Then, I am told – I wasn't there at the time – the persons perpetrating this fraud simply tossed the completed forms into the mailroom in a way that made them look like they arrived from the U.S.

Our staff then – probably not people in on the deal – took them mixed up with legitimate ones and filled in the appropriate visa processing forms and the cards then filed them away to await further processing. In some cases, the people who were beneficiaries of these fraudulent papers had to wait for a period of time because there's only a certain number that can be processed in a year's time. But they did that and lots of people got visas under these circumstances.

Now, as I say, the reason I am in sort of awe of all this was the simplicity of it. It didn't require very much – basically some knowledge of the procedures and a typewriter. So there you are.

Q: I'm told this was picked up by a visa officer who noticed that the typing thing always seemed to be on the same typewriter.

WILKINSON: Yes, I heard that, too. It's my understanding that a series of things came together to finally put a stop to the scam. I don't know all the details here. I have heard conflicting stories. But, as you say, one of the things was that somebody began to notice that it didn't matter if the completed form I-130 came from Portland, Oregon, or St. Louis, or Miami, they always looked like they had been completed with the same typewriter. I would not be surprised to find that some of our Korean staff might have been involved with reporting this as well, because virtually all of them were persons who wanted to do the right thing.

Another part of the story was, when they finally picked up on this fraud, somebody decided that it would be a good idea to keep files of all issued immigrant visas. The rules were that we shred old immigrant visa files after – I forget – six months or a year. In any event, it was decided in 1982, after the fraud was discovered, that we would simply keep all immigrant visa files. As far as I could figure, nobody thought about this decision again.

Anyway, we arrived in the fall of 1988. Sometime the next year I found out that as a consequence of this 1982 decision there was an entire warehouse full of paper. There was no filing system whatsoever, so it was hard to find anything. The mountains of forms and documents were essentially useless.

It was a major problem to figure out a legal, acceptable way to get rid of all this paper. Now as you know, for reasons of privacy, pertaining to the U.S. citizens and resident aliens who had filed many of the applications, you can't just put all this paper out for trash pickup. It's got to be destroyed. We spent a great deal of time and effort destroying this six-year build-up of paper. We finally got rid of it, but that was a huge job all by itself.

Q: Speaking of privacy and files, one of the problems that concerned me when I was there, was the possibility of war with North Korea. I mean, North Korea was about thirty-five miles away and in 1950, the North Koreans came and captured our embassy with a lot of papers intact and we had these files about people who were attached to the United States which could go very ill on the assumption that the North Koreans might take over the embassy. We never came up with a real solution for it. Was this sort of beyond the consideration about North Korea?

WILKINSON: There was an awful lot of time and effort spent thinking about North Korea and its impact on the south and various possibilities, but the possible destruction of consular files is not one that I ever heard of.

Q: How about student visas? When I was there, it was almost all graduate students and many male and they'd had to finish military service before they'd get their passport.

WILKINSON: From, I believe, well before you arrived in Korea until around 1988 or even a bit later, the number of student visa applications was relatively small. This is because, as I mentioned earlier, before virtually any Korean male could get a passport, he had to finish his military service. There were other restrictions and limitations. As far as I know, it was virtually impossible to get permission to leave the country to do undergraduate work, and graduate work was not something you could just do because you wanted to. You had to have government okay.

Q: Women could go?

WILKINSON: There were fewer restrictions on women, I think, but restrictions existed. Again, this sort of thing eased off basically in the short period just after our arrival in Seoul.

Q: Also the quality of schools these people were going to was really very high. When I was there they were going to good schools; very solid things, unlike when I was in Saudi Arabia and in some other places where people were going to… not what I would call real educational institutions.

WILKINSON: Well, to repeat, the Korean Government had a say about whether you could go and where you could go. I wouldn't be surprised to find that the Government simply would approve permission to study abroad only for very good schools. The idea was that these students would come back and put what they had learned to very good use. If a student wanted to go to a diploma mill, they probably wanted to use the opportunity to cut and run.

Q: Yes, or the institutions in the United States were claiming they were going to give them a good education when they really weren't.

WILKINSON: I agree with that although, as I said, certainly toward the end of my experience in Korea, people could just simply choose to go and – if we could see that they could afford to do what they proposed to do – we didn't get into the question of whether they wanted to study at the ABC College or Harvard. There were huge changes during that four-year period that were, I would have to say, largely thanks to changes that took place during the term of President Roh Tae Woo.

Q: What about GI marriages and all this? There has always been a problem anywhere we are where we have military because they usually end up going out with women who are prostitutes, or who often do that and have liaisons and there used to be anyway a real network of organizations in the United States, sort of, I think, Korean run, of getting young and not-so-young women to come over as so-called brides and then they would immediately be off on a range. They'd leave their husband and go off and work for massage parlors.

WILKINSON: Well, all of that was going on and, I suspect, still goes on, like in many other countries. Back to Taiwan a moment, my friend, Consul Lynn Curtain, told me of interviewing a lady in Taipei for an immigrant visa. She, when asked, could not remember the name of her husband, the man who ostensibly had filed the I-130 petition on her behalf. That was unfortunately the sort of thing that you dealt with all too often. Of course, there were naïve people, too. It was a mixed bag and the role of our consular officers is, among other things, to decide what is reasonable and what is not. But what you describe certainly existed. It probably still does.

Q: How about American citizens in jail or in trouble? Did you have problems?

WILKINSON: No, we didn't have problems. We had a number of Americans in jail, of course. The Koreans were relatively cooperative with us in trying to make life as acceptable as possible, within limits, for Americans in jail there. I don't think our American Citizens Services officers who dealt with these problems felt that they had serious problems in this regard.

Q: How about the American business community? Did you have much connection with them?

WILKINSON: Well, yes. I might mention something here with regards to that. I worked closely with the Korean-American Chamber of Commerce there on a variety of issues, one of which was providing a special sort of nonimmigrant visa procedure for people in which the Chamber was interested.

It began like this: Soon after I got to Seoul, I went to an American Chamber luncheon. By chance, I sat next to the Boeing representative in Korea who explained he was having trouble getting visas for some people from Korean Airlines who were going to go to Seattle to buy some airplanes. I told him, "Well, it seems to me that if somebody is going to go to the U.S. to buy a billion dollars worth of airplanes, or whatever, we ought to be falling all over ourselves to get their paperwork in order."

So, I worked closely with the AmCham there to try to ensure expeditious processing for appropriate non-immigrant visa applications. Not that we issued visas at their say so, but rather we made it as easy as we possibly could for those people who were of interest to the U.S. of A. to make the visa application processing as convenient as we could. This is because if they were of interest to American members of the Chamber, we felt it was in our collective government interest to be as helpful and cooperative as we could be. We got a lot of pats on the back for this, I'm pleased to say.

In this regard, I worked closely with the Department of Commerce Trade Center representative there at the time, Bill Yarmy. Bill started the Visit U.S.A. group in Korea with people from the travel business, to encourage tourism to the U.S.

But there wasn't a huge amount of business that Koreans had with the U.S. at that time. I think my Boeing example was an exception.

Q: How did you find life in Korea?

WILKINSON: I loved it for a variety of reasons. After the Korean War, Korea was, of course, devastated. The United States Agency for International Development, USAID, came to Korea and, as you know, built some housing for their people on the U.S. Yongsan military base located in Seoul. As I understand it, Yongsan was a property where the Japanese had a base during their occupation of Korea. The Koreans wanted no part of the locale simply because of the bad memories of the Japanese. So this became a major U.S. military base, largely because it was available. Right after the Korean War, it was on the outskirts of Seoul. After USAID ceased working in Korea, we embassy people acquired the housing. As the embassy grew, we built and acquired some other buildings and property.

Lisa and I lived out on the Yongsan base. There were some other properties down closer to the embassy where people lived, too. Again, they were Japanese-occupation related. One was a banking community…

Q: Yes, I lived in Compound Two, which I think was banking.

WILKINSON: Yes, that's right. Compound One was another one.

Q: The Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission and some other senior officers lived there.

WILKINSON: Well, it cost Uncle Sam relatively little money to house embassy officers during the time we were there. Yongsan and the other locations were clean and safe. We had some friends from other embassies and knew other foreigners who lived in Seoul, and they did suffer some robberies and some other problems in living in Seoul proper. We, frankly, didn't have to put up with such problems, so that was very nice.

On my way to Korea in 1988, I stopped in Portland, Oregon, and saw a retired Foreign Service friend, Russ Winge. He introduced me to the head of the Korean community in that city. I think he was the president of the Korean Association there. Anyway, he invited Russ and me to lunch. We had a nice repast at a Korean restaurant and that was my first real experience with Korean food.

We got to Korea soon thereafter, and within days I got a call from for a Korean Foreign Service officer who was, at the time, in charge of the passport office. He was a classmate of the Korean Association man from Portland. The passport officer invited me to lunch at a restaurant about a fifteen-minute walk from the embassy.

We had an all-Korean lunch, seated on the floor and eating from a low table in Korean style. During the lunch, I noticed that there were plates around the passport officer that were not around me. I asked, "What are those things over there?"

He said, "Oh, you wouldn't like this." So I learned fairly quickly, that Koreans, by and large (and I'll just say this without any apology), firmly believe that we foreigners do not, in general, like their food. Naturally, I insisted on having some plates just like he had. Even if I didn't like what was being served, I was going to eat it because I didn't want people to make those assumptions. Well, I have to admit, some of them were a bit of a shock; Koreans like spicy food. But over the four years there, I learned to love Korean food.

Even today, my wife and I, under virtually every circumstance when we think about going out to eat here in the Washington area almost always think first of going to a Korean restaurant.

Q: So you were there until 1992?

WILKINSON: Yes. During the late fall of 1991, I had my eye on what I thought would be the perfect job for me, the Refugee Coordinator in Bangkok, Thailand. By chance, I noticed that my former boss when I was in the Asylum Office, Ambassador Richard

Schifter, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, was going to stop by Korea on his way to China. I sent a message to Ambassador Schifter to ask that he give me a few minutes during his stopover. He was gracious enough to allow me to come and breakfast with him at his hotel. Essentially, I explained a bit about the job I was seeking and asked him to put in a good word for me at the Bureau of Refugee Affairs.

I'm not sure what he did. He may have made a phone call, he may have sent a note, he may have ignored me – I doubt that somehow – but in any event I got the job.

Q: So you went to Bangkok from '92 to when?

WILKINSON: Until 1995. We were there for a three-year assignment.

Q: Let's talk about what you were doing.

WILKINSON: Being Refugee Coordinator was a two-part job. The officer dealt, on the one hand, with what the U.S. Government was doing to help Cambodian, Lao and Vietnamese refugees in the refugee camps in Thailand. There were a number of refugee camps all along the Thai/Lao and the Thai/Cambodia borders. These were places where people who had left Vietnam and Laos during and after the Vietnam War, and later the Cambodian atrocities perpetrated by Pol Pot, were housed. We had, in the Refugee Bureau, funding available for food and for a variety of other services. In addition, our immigration colleagues went to these camps and interviewed people who had applied for refugee status to go to the U.S. Immigration officers did this in a manner roughly parallel to reviewing an asylum claim within the United States. This is because a person abroad applies for refugee status, while a person inside the U.S. or at a port of entry applies for asylum status. My part of this job had to do with providing appropriate funding for food, shelter and so on.

The other part of the job was overseeing the Orderly Departure Program, or ODP. ODP was effectively an immigration processing operation within Vietnam. A few years before my arrival in Bangkok, the Vietnamese finally agreed that we Americans could go to Vietnam and process applications for people who wished to apply for immigration visas or, in some cases, refugee status within Vietnam. Now that, it seems to me, was an amazing thing.

Q: It is. A country, at that time, we did not have diplomatic relations with.

WILKINSON: We had no diplomatic relations with Vietnam at the time, yet there we were, together with our U.S. immigration colleagues, processing visa and refugee applications within the country of Vietnam. Our officers were consular personnel, like any other, looking at immigrant visa applications and immigration officers looking at refugee applications. They traveled to Vietnam in teams. All this had been arranged before I arrived in Bangkok.

The Vietnamese Foreign Ministry dealt with these matters. We, in fact, did our processing in the old Foreign Ministry building in Ho Chi Minh City, which I might say, virtually everybody, except officials in the government in Vietnam, called – and still call – Saigon. This building was the Foreign Ministry up until 1975. It was near the presidential palace, the main cathedral, not at all far from the National Assembly, the Continental Palace Hotel, and so on.

Q: I know it well.

WILKINSON: I had been to Saigon a couple of times during my courier days, and it was very interesting to go back and see it.

The teams would fly into Tan Son Nhut Airport and generally spend two weeks in Saigon. As I indicated, all of this was organized through the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry. There was a team of people within the Foreign Ministry who worked with the non-governmental organization, the NGO, who helped us with the processing. I might add we worked very closely with non-governmental organizations in Bangkok and in Vietnam both in the ODP processing in Vietnam and in providing the refugee services in Thailand.

When I first went to Hanoi in the fall of 1992 in my role as supervisor of the Orderly Departure Program, the only American office that existed there was the POW-MIA operation. They were, of course, coordinating the search for remains of U.S. military personnel lost during the Vietnam War. They were very helpful to us and, in fact, when the State Department first sent three middle-grade officers to essentially be resident in Hanoi prior to recognition, they first set up shop, so to speak, in the building the POW-MIA people occupied.

We had a good working relationship with the Foreign Ministry officials. We also dealt with the Ministry of Interior. The Interior people, like Ministry of Interior people anywhere, were a little tougher to deal with, but by and large, we were well received by all.

Once again, I'll have to admit that one of the reasons why I liked that job was the wonderful opportunity to get to know Vietnamese of all stripes during my time there.

Later during my tour, an office was opened in Hanoi, the precursor to the embassy. When that office opened, our lives became a little bit easier.

Q: Did you, in a sense, employ Foreign Service Nationals under some other guy's name or something, who were working for you?

WILKINSON: Yes we did. Actually, what happened is that we had a contract with a non-governmental organization that employed a number of clerical staff and interpreters.

These people were, as a practical matter, our FSNs, our Foreign Service Nationals.

Q: How about working with the Vietnamese officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs? Was it a fairly relaxed office?

WILKINSON: Yes, it was fairly relaxed – at least the people we dealt with. There was a young man, an interpreter, who I believe was on contract to the Foreign Ministry. He had been in the U.S. as a high school student in an exchange program and his English was very good. Although plenty of people at the Foreign Ministry and elsewhere spoke English and we had our own interpreters, the man from the Foreign Ministry who was in charge of our program did not speak English, so he – and we – depended very much on his interpreter. Of course, our Foreign Service ODP officers were pretty fluent in Vietnamese, as well.

The Vietnamese people with whom we worked – Ministry people, our "FSNs", etc. – would very often invite us to dine at a restaurant or we would invite them to lunch or dinner. I think our easy relationship might have been something that was very helpful in the opening of relations in that country.

Q: Now let's talk about the people you would see in Vietnam to be orderly departed. Who were they and what were their stories?

WILKINSON: Our consular ODP officers interview those individuals who might qualify for an immigrant visa, such as the spouse of an American citizen, the spouse of a resident alien or the mother and father or child of an American citizen in the U.S. If you fit a category of people who could get an immigrant visa, and you could get a passport (generally not a problem), we would issue the visa in the very same way as we did in Bangkok or Tokyo or anywhere else.

We also accepted applications for immigration from "Amerasians," of course. These were offspring of GIs and Vietnamese women during the time of the war. These children were not at all accepted in the close-knit Vietnamese society, so a special law was passed in the U.S. to give these kids special treatment. Of course, by the time I got there, they weren't "kids" anymore.

And, as I indicated before, our U.S. Immigration colleagues interviewed individuals who might qualify for refugee status. Essentially, these were the same people who, if they had gotten out of Vietnam, might have qualified for refugee status in Thailand or in one of the other refugee camps. Or, they were relatives of some of these people. Effectively, the Orderly Departure Program was a combined visa and refugee operation.

There was also a special program for so-called Montagnards, an ethnic group of people akin to the Hmong in Laos. They could fairly easily make a case that they were being discriminated against within Vietnam.

So this processing was parallel to things going on in other parts of the world. However, I think that the incredible difference was that we were doing these programs in a country with which, nearly twenty years before, we'd been at war.

Q: Well, I think in a way we still were.

I think it would be awkward for somebody to come and say, "You know, I'm being discriminated against by this government when you have a government interpreter taking this down. I mean, how does that work?

WILKINSON: Well, technically they weren't government interpreters, although I have no doubt that they had to report. But people did make these claims, and I'm not aware of endemic problems related to this.

I might add here that we also worked very closely with officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Saigon. They and other international organizations put a lot of pressure on the Vietnamese to say, "Come on, let's be reasonable here. These are, in many cases, old folks who aren't going to do you any harm. Let's help everybody out here." And so, there was a great deal of help given to us by the UNHCR in this regard as well.

Q: What about Caucasian Americans; were they coming back to visit at all at that point?

WILKINSON: Yes, they were beginning to come back, some to help the country, some to just be tourists. And I met at least one Vietnamese refugee who came back and established a number of factories to make prosthetic devices rather inexpensively, partly from old rubber tires. In fact, that gentleman lives here in the Washington area and owns a number of restaurants.

Q: This was true in Korea, too.

WILKINSON: Yes, in many parts of Asia.

Q: Throughout Asia. If they were coming back, particularly I'm thinking of American males coming back; Vietnamese are beautiful young ladies and I would imagine there would be a lot of attachments to at least some of them.

WILKINSON: Oh, there were, without question. You had the usual range of this sort of business going on. There were certainly people who had come back there to find a bride. I mean, they were the usual deals that you see all over the world. All you have to do is look in the back of the Washingtonian magazine, for example. "Come over and get your lovely partner for life."

There was established, before I finished my tour in Bangkok in 1995, a bar in Saigon called Apocalypse Now. It was located near the National Assembly. It was very popular

with returnees. Also, there was a Vietnamese-American who opened a first-class restaurant there also near the National Assembly. I'm sorry to say I can't remember the name of it. It was a Vietnamese-style restaurant that was a huge success. As I understand the story, the owner was among the first allowed to come back to Vietnam in the late 1980s. He looked around, saw his possibilities, went back to California, sold some of his assets and came back with cash to open his restaurant. I think he has done very, very well.

Little by little, lots of people came back and the Vietnamese government in that side of their thinking promoted this. They wanted to have it because, like tourism anywhere, it's income for the country.

Q: Did you get the feeling, being in Vietnam when you were there, that the Communist rule was beginning to get quite a bit softer?

WILKINSON: Yes, I think so. You would talk to the faceless bureaucrat about something, and he or she would often give you the company line, "No, we can't do this. Well, I'll have to refer this to a higher authority. Well, I'm not so sure, let's see what we…" But, I got the distinct feeling that the Communists – the people who firmly believed the company line, people who may have even personally known Ho Chi Minh, or people who sat at his feet, as it were – were getting on in years and they therefore were fewer and further between. During my time dealing with the Vietnamese, the younger ones really couldn't do a great deal about the situation, but I think they were just biding their time. I suspect that's going on in China as we speak, as well.

My belief in this regard has nothing to do with anything that anybody said to me. No Vietnamese ever gave me a little elbow in the ribs, but I certainly felt it. I don't mean to imply that Vietnam is going to be an American-style economy tomorrow morning or next Thursday or a year from now. It is likely to be more socialist, I suspect; a little like France perhaps. But, yes, the situation – the thinking of the people – is changing.

Q: Were you seeing signs of foreign newspapers and magazines and that sort of thing?

WILKINSON: These sorts of publication were available in certain areas. I'm not sure what would've happened if a street sweeper from Cholon regularly went and bought the New York Times in one of the hotels. I suspect if he did so, he might have gotten a knock on the door. But sure, I, as a foreigner, could buy virtually anything I wanted. My experience there was really before the Internet, of course.

Q: I was going to say the Internet now probably, this is the computer connection has probably changed everything.

WILKINSON: I would imagine. The Internet existed, of course, but it was not widespread. I personally can't address that issue.

Q: Going back to Bangkok itself, I realize you were not directly involved in making the

judgments of all this, but I've talked to some people who have worked in Thailand at the time and were saying, "You know as we looked at this, the refugees were more and more what we call economic refugees and the NGOs and the others, I mean all of a sudden, if you started denying this or looking too closely, you were essentially breaking their rice bowl." A bureaucracy had built up which was processing refugees and you had to have refugees by hook or by crook in order to keep it going. Did you see any of that?

WILKINSON: Interesting observation. Yes, I would say that I would have to agree with that; it did exist.

I might throw in here something about the situation in Burma that resulted in another refugee crisis. I refer, of course, to the bloody uprising after the national election of 1988. So you had an entire new refugee business along the Burma border. When I got to Bangkok in '92, there were camps run by Thai authorities on the west side of the country. We weren't very involved with those camps, but I did visit a number of them.

Q: This is when they had the election and the army led it and then they basically slaughtered a number of their own countrymen.

WILKINSON: Yes, that was what happened.

I think it's instructive to note, in this conversation, that the Thai Ministry of the Interior – the administrative organization that dealt with all refugee issues – handled the Burma refugee situation very differently than they did on the east, the Vietnam War, side. In 1975, refugees began to arrive in Thailand from Vietnam and Laos, and later from Cambodia. The refugees entered along the Lao-Cambodian border with Thailand. In a certain sense, we – the U.S. Government – sort of ran that refugee situation. Now, that statement is a huge oversimplification, but we spent a lot of money and we did a lot of things to manage the Vietnam War refugee situation in Thailand. In post 1988, on the Burma side, however, the Thais essentially ran it. We certainly had an input, but the Burma refugees were – and still are – managed by the Thais.

While I was there, the young officer who was the Interior Ministry's man in refugee issues and his deputy were transferred to different jobs without much warning, at least to us. I think this was a sign that a significant part of the Thai Government had decided that enough was enough, that the Thais should have much greater input into the management of the refugee programs in their own country.

Which leads back to your question. We had processed these applicants for refugee status in the camps since, essentially, 1979, and although other people did come out from Vietnam, Laos and later Cambodia while the processing was going on, by and large, there were very few people left in the camps who likely qualified for refugee status by the time I got there. I guess it's fair to say that while there were a number of Thais and NGOs who saw refugee processing as a job, I think most people saw the handwriting on the wall and prepared to move on.

During my three year tour in Bangkok, there were some very important valued colleagues from the non-governmental side who found other work elsewhere and were gone. During the time I was there, horrible things were going on in Africa and if your interest in life had to do with being good to people who were refugees, there were plenty of other places to go.

In short, I didn't see the refugee "business" as something that would just continue essentially on its own.

Q: Well, I think this is a good place to stop. We'll pick this up the next time. Where did you go next?

WILKINSON: In 1995 we got the opportunity to go back to Europe. I went to Bonn, Germany, as Minister-Counselor for Consular Affairs. This was sheer good luck, once again.

Q: Ed, what fell apart and what came together to get you to Bonn?

WILKINSON: Oh, it was just a strange series of circumstances, but the person I replaced in Bonn, Michael Marine, went off to another assignment rather unexpectedly, which meant that the MCCA job opened up without much warning. It was rather late in the bidding season and a large number of people at our level had already been assigned during the normal assignment processing. The pool of people who might qualify for that job was rather small. Anyway, I applied for it and got it.

Q: You went to Bonn from '95 to when?

WILKINSON: We were in Bonn for almost four years – I extended for the fourth year as soon as I possibly could. My wife and I had not set foot in Europe in approximately thirty years, and so the opportunity to work and play the tourist on the Continent was just something that we didn't want to pass up.

Q: What did your job consist of?

WILKINSON: The August title of Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs basically describes a person who is in charge of consular operations countrywide. Of course, there are the chiefs of the consular sections in Frankfurt, in Berlin, in Hamburg, Düsseldorf and Munich. The MCCA was responsible for coordinating consular operations all over the country.

The role of the minister counselor under normal circumstances, and to a degree while I was there, was to ensure that there were not different policies in different offices around the country. So that was the real job and, I suspect, the job as it was for years.

However, in Bonn, during my tour, there was a different element to the job because the seat of the German government was moving from Bonn to Berlin. The embassy, of course, was in the process of moving, too.

Actually, quite a bit of embassy Bonn had already moved, or was in the process of moving, to Berlin. So for the vast majority of the time I was there, the American staff of the consular section in Bonn was just a vice consul and I. The office in Bonn basically existed to provide whatever American services work that needed to be done, which was very, very little, because our consular district wasn't very big. It also continued to exist to provide diplomatic visas to foreign embassy staff. So, as one of two people in the consular section, I must say that I learned an awful lot. I did a lot of work that, quite frankly, as a more senior officer, I hadn't had to do for a number of years. One minute I was making what might be called "grand decisions" regarding consular work countrywide, and the next minute I'm out looking at a visa application because the vice consul was elsewhere. I learned a lot and I think that was very useful.

Q: What was the American consular establishment like in Germany at this point?

WILKINSON: Well, there are a number of answers to that question. We had relatively small consular operations in Munich, in Berlin, in Hamburg, to a smaller degree in Düsseldorf, and I'll explain this element in a second. The large operation was in Frankfurt. The consular operation in Stuttgart closed not long after our arrival in Germany.

Don't forget that the large number of American soldiers stationed in Germany, had, I believe, gone down from something in the neighborhood of 300,000 to 100,000 (very, very rough figures) in the years since the fall of the Berlin Wall. So the quantity of citizenship work for the U.S. military establishment dropped off accordingly. Basically, all we did for the soldiers and civilians was to issue passports. There were other operations, but mostly that was the big job. The military, themselves, for example, handled all of the work that had to be done whenever a GI ran afoul of the German law.

Q: Registering births must've been a part of your duties.

WILKINSON: That's true, of course; births and the occasional death. We did different things, of course, with the civilians, i.e., spouses and civilian workers, than we did with the soldier. So there was a great deal of work involved with that.

With regard to American Services, in general, we had a number of cases of U.S. citizen civilians in jail, people who had broken German law. There also were American business people in Germany who needed passport services and, again, births and occasionally a death or other things. But I must say, it was a rather sophisticated operation unlike other places where you have lots of backpackers and so on.

The Germans dealt with what I might term the "non-businessman," i.e., backpackers, etc.,

in a pretty sophisticated and reasonable way, so many of the type of problems we might have to deal with in other countries never even came to our attention in Germany.

And visas were a little different story, as well. For one thing, Germans enjoy the visa waiver, which means that if a German citizen is going to the U.S. for tourism or for business purposes for under 90 days, that person probably doesn't need a visa. Of course, there were eleven or twelve other countries in Europe that qualified for the visa waiver as well, so if you had a Frenchman or an Italian or a Brit living in Germany, these people didn't need such visas either. As a consequence, we didn't do very many non-immigrant visas for Germans or other Europeans.

On the other hand, we had applications for visas from a large number of non-Germans, people from countries that didn't enjoy the visa waiver. Many of these applications were from applicants who had come to Germany for the specific purpose of applying for visas.

Our biggest workload in this category was from Iranians. We had no consular operation in Tehran, and so an Iranian might get up early one day in Tehran, take the morning flight to Frankfurt, and the next day be in trying to get a visa from us. Now that meant that the Frankfurt visa operation was rather complicated. It's one thing to adjudicate a non-immigrant visa for somebody who lives in your neighborhood. If he or she says, "I own a clothing store," you can check on that if you want to or you can check on things by just asking a few questions. Well, that's not true with people from so far away. Language difficulties, too, cause some problems. So the operation was really quite different.

Immigrant visas in Germany were handled solely in Frankfurt. That operation, too, included a large number of applicants from other countries, so that was a complicating factor, as well.

But, as far as my own workload was concerned, I spent a good deal of time just working with the administrative people regarding the move of our American Services operation to Düsseldorf, our non-immigrant visa processing to Frankfurt and the move of the MCCA office to Berlin.

Q: Was there any thought of putting a consular post in what had been East Germany; in Leipzig or Dresden or something like that?

WILKINSON: There is a consulate in Leipzig. Sorry, I think I failed to mention Leipzig when we were speaking about this a few minutes ago. The Leipzig consulate opened fairly quickly after the wall came down. I think it is fair to say that one of the main reasons the consulate was established there was to demonstrate to Germans, and to the world in general, our support for Germany as one country. The idea was to make clear that there is no East Germany or West Germany anymore; there is just the Federal Republic of Germany. The consulate in Leipzig did not do visas, if I remember correctly. They did passports and American Services work, but people went up to Berlin or elsewhere if they needed a visa.

Q: You were saying the Germans dealt with the student; the backpacker type who got into minor problems, and this "sophisticated manner," what does that mean?

WILKINSON: Well, I think it's fair to say that the German authorities would view your American or your Canadian or your British "backpacker" as simply a tourist. Germans certainly are not willing to accept breaking of the rules, but they would be more inclined to give "backpackers" who break the law a slap on the wrist rather than throw the miscreant in jail, which was quite often the case in other less developed countries.

Q: Did you find yourself dealing with the consular side of the German foreign office?

WILKINSON: Yes, I did. The head of consular affairs during the entire four years I was there was a marvelous diplomat, Herr Born. He spoke English, of course, but also Italian and Spanish. I believe his wife was Italian. We dealt with a variety of issues including Hague convention issues.

Q: Is that The Hague, capital of the Netherlands?

WILKINSON: Yes, the capital of the Netherlands where the Hague Convention was signed. The Hague Convention pertains to the question of children who were taken by one parent against the wishes of the other parent from one Hague Convention country to another Hague Convention country. For example, suppose a German woman is married to an American man and they move to the States to live. Then, let's assume for whatever reason later on the woman is unhappy with her home life, so she moves back to Germany. And let's assume they have a child and she takes the child with her, without her husband or a court's permission when she goes back to her family home to live.

As both parents come from countries that are signatories of the Hague Convention, then this convention was brought into play to deal with the situation.

It was a very complicated business and it took forever to get anything done, so we dealt with Hague Convention details to the degree that we could. I must say that the Office of the Legal Advisor here in the State Department dealt with these things much more than we did, but we – and the attorneys in the Bureau of Consular Affairs – did have Hague Convention responsibilities, as well. So I had a number of dealings with Herr Born on Hague Convention details.

Q: There is a case that was being brought up in the <u>Washington Post</u> about a child or one or two who are, I think, the mother took the children back to Germany and then she either abandoned them or was put into an institution or something, and the children were given to foster parents or something like this and the father was completely cut out. So every time our president goes to Germany or something this case comes up. Was that around during your time?

WILKINSON: No, I read about that in the Post as well, but I have no recollection whatever of dealing with that particular situation while I was in Germany. The problem there is that there's never any neat answer to these things. You cannot, in good conscience, say, "Well, because this child is the offspring of an American, the American parent has the right to the child." The procedures, by and large, are dealt with by local law authorities, and, as you might suspect, the Germans tended to take the side of their own nationals. The Americans, of course, took the side of their own nationals. I don't really want to suggest for a minute that these people were doing this unreasonably, but it was a point of view that when the question was sort of even on one side or another, then the Germans sort of won the toss, if you will, if a German court was the one tasked to make the Hague Convention decision.

Q: What was happening at the time you were there? Was Bonn going to remain as a post or was it going to be completely phased out?

WILKINSON: Well, when Lisa and I left Bonn in late summer of 1999, there was to be a portion of the embassy that was to remain under U.S. jurisdiction for use of our military people. Although they were going to stay there for a time, I'd be surprised if they are still there now.

Also, when we closed our Bonn consular operation, our Bonn American Services operation moved to Düsseldorf. Düsseldorf had been "downsized" sometime in the 1980s or early 1990s. It became – essentially – an operation that dealt with solely with U.S. commercial issues, so there were no consular operations there during my stay in Germany. But it was decided, as Bonn was closing, that because of the number of American businesses in and around Düsseldorf, we should again have an American Services operation there.

One problem was that about this time the building where the consulate was located was sold to another owner, so the consulate was going to move to another place. But the Department couldn't seem to get its act together in terms of doing the necessary things to finalize this move. So, just as I was leaving, the small American Services operation that had moved to Düsseldorf moved back to Bonn. Düsseldorf's American Services operation had to work out of our consular premises in Bonn for several weeks or months until the new Düsseldorf office was ready.

The American Services operation finally moved back to the city of Düsseldorf. I don't know whether there is any U.S. military presence in the old embassy now, or not.

Q: Were there any cases or problems that caused you particular concern?

WILKINSON: In fact, no. This, in a consular sense, was a very easy job. As I say, I spent a great deal of time thinking about the move to other places and administrative chores. But traditional consular work? No, no problems leap to mind.

Q: I've talked to people who concern the German-American Institute here and all. The head of it was telling me one time that there was concern, because at one point a lot of Americans were taking German, and not many do now. The number is going down, and as far as tourism goes, people, if they go into Europe, it's going to be Britain, France, Italy and Spain. Germany, although it's sort of the major country in Europe, has the reputation of being rather expensive. American attention isn't there, as far as people visiting and getting to know it, as all of us who were of a certain age, did. Was this a concern?

WILKINSON: Yes, this was a concern. I know a variety of Germans from different stations in life who would mention this one way or another. But, what you described is true. I think it's fair to say that the average American, who looks at his or her bank account and decides that this is the time to take a trip to Europe, does not think about Germany as a destination, at least in the first instance, if at all.

That's another little issue that I might get into, by the way. Most Americans who do know anything about Germany, tend to focus on Bavaria or Baden-Württemberg or other parts of the south of Germany where U.S. military bases tend to be because they or a relative was once stationed in Germany in the U.S. Army or Air Force. I noted that many of these people are, in a certain sense, amazed to find that there exists a huge expanse of the north part of Germany about which they know nothing.

Q: Did you see, in the time you were there, tensions; problems that came to your attention about the melding of East and West Germany?

WILKINSON: Well, there were lots of rather snide comments that "West" Germans themselves would make at, or about, "Eastern" Germans sometimes. To be sure, there were two generations, at a minimum, of people who grew up under different philosophies; they were at a rather different view of life, and there was tension. Now, of course, this is a huge oversimplification, but an Easterner would tend to think, "It's the state's business – obligation – to take care of me." Westerners, too, might look at this in similar terms, but not nearly to the extent of the Easterners. So there is tension. The result of these sorts of difference in thinking was that the country was not becoming one as rapidly as, I think, most Germans thought. It'll take, I would say, another generation or two before this is smoothed over and even then, I don't know.

Q: Did the opening up of the Stasi *files create a certain nightmare for the consular side, because if you've got a file and you want to check it, you've got to check on somebody and it would be almost better not to know?*

WILKINSON: Well, we didn't have reason to get into these files for most people. The reason why I say that is that the people we might have been interested in, i.e. people who might have had some visa problems because of their World War II experience, were either people who had been vetted long before I came to the scene or they had died.

I did have an amazing experience, though, related to this subject. One day, I got a call from Herr Born, the head of the Consular Affairs Division of the Foreign Ministry, about a German former ambassador who was having some visa difficulties. He asked whether I could look into the matter.

Well, I invited the gentleman in question to my office, and he promptly came. Actually, he only lived a few blocks away from the Embassy. He was a very interesting person who had an absolutely fascinating story, which I would like to tell briefly.

In his youth, he wanted to become a German Foreign Service officer. He did the usual studies and then came, I think, to Brown University, here in the States, to study and to polish his English. After some time in the U.S., around 1935 or 1936 he came back to Germany. Then not too long after, he moved to Japan where he studied Japanese. He came back to Germany around 1938 and applied for an appointment in the German Foreign Service.

He was told that yes, he would qualify, but that there were no openings right then. They said they would let him know, so he went to work for a Japanese organization of some sort that was located in Germany. This gave him an opportunity to use Japanese regularly and to polish his facility in that language. It turns out that while he was there Heinrich Himmler and other worthies on the German side came to him to get information about the Japanese people who worked there or otherwise about people they apparently had record of in their files. They – the Germans and the Japanese – were not really allies at that time, and even when they became allies, basically after the war began, there was a certain amount of distrust between them. Anyway, the future ambassador didn't want to, but he had to provide information to German intelligence authorities about certain Japanese.

Just a few months before the war began, i.e. September of 1939, he was taken into the Foreign Service and was assigned to the German Embassy in Cairo where he stayed for several months.

You remember that at that time, Britain was essentially the overseer of Egypt, so when Germany came into the war, which was just a few months after he was assigned to Cairo, the Germans had to close their embassy. He was then assigned to Tokyo. This was after the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact had been signed, and so the Germans and Russians were, at the time, great friends. He took a train all the way to Vladivostok, and then a boat down into Japan. He spent the entire war in Japan at the German Embassy there.

By chance, at about the time the future ambassador and I were talking, I had been reading a book about the famous German spy, Richard Sorge, who was in Japan before and during the Second World War. Sorge was a German, although he was actually a Russian spy. Sorge's mother was from Baku, Russia. He was born there and grew up largely in the Soviet Union. In the '30s, Sorge went to Tokyo and spied on Germany for Russia. So, I asked the ambassador whether he knew this famous person, Richard Sorge?

He responded, “Of course, I know him. Every German in Japan who was there wanted to know him. He was such a personality.” I just found it incredible to actually be gazing upon somebody who had known this person about whom at that time I was reading. And that’s just a little part of the story.

As I said, the future ambassador spent the entire Second World War in Japan in the embassy there. After the war, he stayed on as an officer in their embassy, and was there, I think he said, until 1947 or 1948 when he was finally able to come back to Germany.

Of course, there was some question about what he had been reporting to Ribbentrop in the ‘30s, but the new (post-war) German authorities finally decided that essentially he was a diplomat and nothing more, and so he went back into the Foreign Ministry. He later became the German equivalent to DCM in the U.S. and later ambassador to other countries.

He was an absolutely fascinating individual. I know that a book was written about him and a there was a film made about his life, although I don’t have details on that. But because of the book and film, he needed a visa to travel to the United States to provide details for the making of the film. (I wish I could give you the name of the film, but I can’t come up with it.) In any event, although to get diplomatic visas was no problem, because of this having “reported” to Ribbentrop, there was an unfavorable file on him. We were able to work that out, ultimately, so he was able to obtain a regular non-immigrant visa.

The other thing I wanted to talk about, if I may, is that one of the jobs of the head of the consular operation in Germany is to be the U.S. representative to an organization called the International Tracing Service, which is managed by the International Red Cross. The International Tracing Service is an organization that compiled all the information they could get about people who were prisoners in German concentration camps. So, for example, if you had a close relative who had been in a Nazi concentration camp, you could try, through this organization, to find out what information was available about your relative’s stay in the camp.

There is a huge repository of information in the town of Bad Arelson, which is in the northern part of the German state of Hesse. There they have files from many Nazi concentration camps. After the wall came down, they got additional information from camps situated behind the Iron Curtain.

The way it works here in the U.S., for example, is that if you had a close relative who was in a Nazi concentration camp, you could request all available information about this relative by making application to the Baltimore Chapter of the American Red Cross, which is the International Tracing Service representative in the U.S. Or if you’re in France, you would go to the French representative organization, a veteran’s organization, I think, to request all available information about your relative. You have to make a case that you have reason to have this information: basically you have to be a close relative of

the person involved. My experience with the International Tracing Service was fascinating, largely because of the people I dealt with.

The Berlin Document Center is a repository of this sort of information, as well, and the International Tracing Service also has access to those files. I had a tour of the Center and it was a little frightening. Of course, this was long before computers, so all of this information is hand-written in wonderful old German script. It was a little frightening to think of this army of clerks sitting around writing all sorts of information about you, your uncle, your relative, or whatever it might be, who is Jewish, was Jewish, might have been Jewish, or rumor had it was Jewish. This, unfortunately, was an important activity from German standpoint at that time. Homosexuals and Gypsies were also badly treated under the Nazi system.

There were the representatives from the different member countries. Lisa and I have kept in contact with a number of them. I thought that was one of the highlights of my career in Germany.

Q: In a way, you were helping close things down, weren't you?

WILKINSON: As far as the Bonn embassy was concerned, yes. When you say it that way, you remind me of a point that, perhaps, is relevant here as well. Germany was unusual, in my experience. I've been in a lot of embassies and consulates, but Germany was unusual simply for the following reason: the U.S. was among the countries that were victorious in the Second World War.

In 1945 we came in there and ultimately ended up all over Germany along with our British, French and other colleagues. From '45 to '49, we were occupiers. The Cold War, as it began to gel, gave us good reason, I think, to get on the right side of the Germans and we did. In 1949, the new Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and his associates ultimately put together modern Germany. That, of course, is a huge oversimplification, but that's a sort of an overview.

The U.S. Embassy in Bonn in 1995 was a product, to a very large degree, of our having gone in to Germany in 1945 as occupiers. For example, we had assigned to the embassy a Catholic priest and two Protestant pastors. I believe a rabbi could have been assigned there, but none was. Just before we got to Bonn, a newly assigned Catholic priest arrived there, Father Steve McNally. He was – and is – just a marvelous individual. He's now down in southern Virginia, by the way, with his own parish.

But I mention Father McNally as an example of the sorts of unique things that went on in Germany, as a result of our having been there as an occupying force. In 1949, the new Adenauer government gave us, for example, the location where apartments and houses were built and a large number of American Embassy people lived. It was a corner, if you will, of a park in Bonn, near the Rhine River. The U.S. acquired a large amount of official property in Germany as a consequence of our having been one of the victors of World

War II. So dismantling all this was a part of our job during my tour there. I didn't personally get into this a great deal, but I was involved.

Q: Was there anything else we should cover in Germany?

WILKINSON: Oh, I don't think so.

Q: Well then, in '99, what happened next?

WILKINSON: In 1999 I was sixty-three years old, and you know in the Foreign Service one must retire at the age of sixty-five. Knowing that this was coming – I had less than two years to go before being mandatorily retired – I looked for a Washington assignment. Frankly, my idea was to come here to Washington, look around and see what I wanted to do next. Did I want to retire immediately? Did I want to move to someplace – Las Vegas for example? My wife and I simply had made no decision even though we talked about it many, many times.

So, I came to an agreement with the Bureau of Consular Affairs to come to the Bureau's executive office and work on a special project there for a year.

In June of 1999, this was all set, and it seemed like a good plan to me. Then out of the blue, I received a phone call from Robyn Bishop, Deputy Executive Director of the Executive Office, Bureau of Consular Affairs. She was the number two person in that office and was essentially the chief Foreign Service personnel officer, if you will, for the Consular Affairs Bureau.

She said, "Ed, we have an opening as consul general in Guadalajara, Mexico, and I know that you had expressed interest in that before. Are you still interested?" So, after I picked myself up off the floor, I said I thought I was. She explained that somebody had retired unexpectedly, etc., etc., and there were some other personnel changes, so all of a sudden there was this opening. Now, maybe she was just being nice to me knowing full well that I was about to retire, but she finished the conversation with, "I can't guarantee it, but if you are interested we'll put your name in that hat and let's see what develops."

Well, I went home and spoke to my wife that evening. We agreed that there were any number of reasons for us not to take that assignment. The plans for the future would be far easier to make from here in Washington, rather than abroad. And there's the question of locality pay, which is an issue that one doesn't ignore.

But Lisa and I spent roughly eight seconds discussing the matter, then we said, "Let's try to get it; let's go anyway." So – once again, sheer good luck – I was then assigned to Guadalajara, Mexico, as consul general. We got there in September or October of '99.

Q: And you were there until?

WILKINSON: Until June of 2001, about twenty months or so.

Q: Guadalajara has got the reputation of being sort of the retirement home of a great many Americans.

WILKINSON: Well, that's true. The number is a little elusive. You have to nail down the definition. There are people who live there essentially permanently, and some who just come only for the winter, "snowbirds." Those people generally come on tourist cards, valid for a six-month stay. So, you have a number from 20,000 to 50,000 or more U.S. retirees in the general neighborhood of Guadalajara. My Canadian colleague there believed – and I have every reason to think he was right - that even more Canadians than Americans are retired there. And, of course, there are many other nationalities, as well.

One main reason for all these foreigners is, I think, the huge lake, Lake Chapala, located about a forty-five minute drive from Guadalajara. It's the largest lake in Mexico. Unfortunately, for certain reasons, it's getting smaller and smaller and dirtier and dirtier, I'm sorry to say. But it is a place – when the lake was wide, clean and beautiful – where over the years a lot of Americans and other foreigners have retired.

Mexico makes it very convenient – as do many Central American countries – to get the appropriate visa to go there. As a retiree, you can bring in certain things, such as a car, duty free. You can bring in a refrigerator and other items that are relatively expensive in Mexico. They make this as easy as possible to attract people because it's good for the economy.

As you might suspect, a very significant portion of our work in Guadalajara was attending to these Americans. Because a large number were retirees are older folks, we had a large number of deaths to handle. We also had a complete operation with several employees funded by the Social Security Administration that dealt with federal benefits; all federal benefits, not just Social Security.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Mexican government?

WILKINSON: I found it easy. I would apologize regularly to visiting firemen, Congress people and so on, because I found myself describing Mexico and Mexicans in a way that made me sound like a was a member of the Guadalajara Chamber of Commerce. I really, truly enjoyed working and living in Mexico. Now, I'm not going to suggest that every last Mexican was just wonderful. Corruption is endemic in Latin countries, I am sorry to say. It went on there, although, I would say, with the election of President Fox and the ousting of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, the PRI, that improved a bit. But corruption was not, by and large, a problem that we had to deal with regularly. It didn't cause us great problems. Quite the contrary; I would say Mexican officialdom worked very hard to be as reasonable with us as they could be.

Q: How about drugs?

WILKINSON: Yes, drugs are a major issue in Mexico. They are readily available. I'm not really sure whether they are more or less available than in the U.S., or at least in certain parts of the U.S., but they're certainly available. And cheaper, I would say. The larger concern, though, is drug trafficking - something that concerned us Americans for obvious reasons. Our U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration has many officers stationed at our embassies and consulates around the world. They work with the local authorities in this regard and yes, drugs remain a major concern to us.

Q: Wasn't it out of Guadalajara where there had been a very nasty case of one of our drug agents being kidnaped and killed?

WILKINSON: Yes, there was the case, I can't remember the year – I would say in the middle '80s - when a Drug Enforcement Administration officer, Enrique Camarena, stationed in Guadalajara at the time, was simply kidnaped then brutally murdered. This is, I would suggest, the sort of thing that our Drug Enforcement people have to contend with worldwide. It is a nasty, dangerous business. But their job is to get out amongst the people, find out what's going on regarding trafficking, and that's what they do.

Q: Did you get involved in that at all?

WILKINSON: Security was always an issue, yes, but I personally did not feel in the slightest that I was in danger. The state of Jalisco, where Guadalajara is located, provided the American consul general a full-time bodyguard. Agustine was a marvelous policeman whom I think the world of. He is the kind of policeman – and friend –you'd want anywhere, in anyplace.

Q: What about problems with Americans? I've heard reports that there are parts of Mexico where the people are driving around in their cars and they may be stopped either by policemen or pseudo-policemen or something and robbed and all that.

WILKINSON: Yes, sometimes this happens. There is a tourist police operation that attempts to control that sort of thing. Insofar as I know, these people are pretty clean. The tourist police travel up and down the major highways and if you, as a tourist, break down or have other problems they'll help you.

I might throw in here the observation that, as you may remember I was stationed in Mexico from '67 to '69 and then again from 1999 to 2001. There were huge, huge differences between those two tours as far as life for a foreigner in Mexico is concerned. It is certainly not totally perfect, but it is much, much better than it was.

Q: Did you find yourself, on instructions from the embassy, making representations to the local authorities concerning crime or problems?

WILKINSON: I think the answer to that, in general, is no. I do remember one case that is

still pending in which we worked closely with the embassy and with the State Department. An American newspaper reporter, Philip True, who had spent a number of years in Mexico and was married to a Mexican lady, decided to hike northward from the northern part of the state of Jalisco. He walked into what is essentially an indigenous Indian reservation. He was hiking through there and was later found dead.

He worked for the San Antonio News Express, I think it's called, and the editor and the owner of the newspaper have worked very, very hard, together with Mr. True's wife, to try to get satisfaction. But the case continues to drag on and on. They are very unhappy that two particular indigenous people thought to have perpetrated the crime have not been brought to justice. *[These two were recently – April 2004 – convicted; the case is to be appealed, I think.]*

I think that would be very difficult to do, quite honestly, even though there is some circumstantial evidence. I really don't think that you're going to find the kind of evidence that will be necessary to convict. I don't know nearly enough about it to make any comment other than that this is just a gut feeling.

Q: How about Americans in jail? Did you have a number?

WILKINSON: Yes, a rather small number I think, comparatively speaking. The jails were okay, I guess. If you have a little money to spend, you can make your life satisfactory or even a little better. I wouldn't want to leave anybody with the impression that life is a piece of cake in these jails, but our people who have visited them have not come back with problems, complaints, unhappiness. I think they are okay in the big scheme of things.

Q: Well then you left there this year, 2001?

WILKINSON: We just left there last June. But before we left, Lisa and I drove up to the town where we got married, Mazatlán, Sinaloa, about five hours north of Guadalajara. We went to the chapel where we were married. It hadn't changed much, although the beautiful tree in the front courtyard was gone. We had a chance to look around and see how Mazatlán had changed. We even met some friends that we knew thirty-odd years before.

Anyway, when the time came and we had to leave, we drove northward to the town of Zacatecas and later to Saltillo, then up to San Antonio where we had the good fortune to have a cup of coffee with my predecessor in Guadalajara (who was also with us in Korea) who happened to be in town, O.P. Garza. O.P. is now ambassador to Nicaragua. Then we drove on up to Washington and that's it.

Let me finish with my retirement story. Many people say the Foreign Service doesn't treat its retirees appropriately in terms of a "good-bye." They certainly don't do anything that compares with the treatment of our military colleagues.

Well, when I finished everything that I needed to do in the Department of State regarding my retirement, all the papers signed and doing that, I was told to go over to a particular office and turn in my State Department identification. So, I thought, 'Well, this is it.' I went over the office, went up to the person behind the counter. I said, "I've just retired; here's my ID card." The person took it out of my hand rather abruptly, turned back to the computer screen and said, "I'll take you out of the system."

That, after some 39 years, was my goodbye to the State Department.

End of interview