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

CAROL WILSON

Interviewed by: Daniel F. Whitman
Interview date: February 17, 2010
Copyright 2014 ADST

[Note: This interview was not edited by Ms. Wilson]

Q: This is Dan Whitman interviewing Carol Wilson, who at one point worked with the consulate in Pretoria and in Johannesburg as an academic advisor and one reason Carol's story is so interesting is that the various South Africans who benefited from educational exchange all went to Carol, those who got government grants, there were others who went on their own. Before we start into that, tell me about yourself and where your own origins fit into this complex society?

WILSON: Well, I'm South African, born and bred in Cape Town, and I trained as a teacher. You spoke of the '70s, I'm sort of a teenager of that period, and so if I don't remember it, cross reference with whatever you refer to forgive me. I was a teenager when the '76 uprising started, I was part of all that. Things didn't quite work out in terms of my high school. I passed and I became a teacher, and studied and so on, and then I decided it wasn't really what I wanted to do but unfortunately it was the only thing I could do at the time. I couldn't go to university because I didn't meet the entrance requirements, the South African entrance requirements. I was in grade 10 and so after that period, our whole approach to our education changed and we started looking at things differently. I'm not making an excuse but a lot of that affected where I ended up post grade 12. I studied and I loved working with young people and so on, and so I did a bit of journalism, I did a course on journalism, and so I had a lot of being young and idealistic and whatever, I wanted to do a lot of things in the limitations of where I grew up. Our parents were both working class, both uneducated laborers basically, and it was up to me to make sure things happened. One thing led to another and I moved up to Johannesburg. I met my future husband. I moved up to Johannesburg, I was doing journalism for awhile, but the whole move, I decided to go back into teaching, which is where I met Rick Specter's wife, well not really met his wife, but her dad was…

Q: We were about to get to, you mentioned the events of '76 you said you were involved in some way?

WILSON: Well, we were in school, it was grade 10, a religious based school, so it was a very small school, and we were the seniors at the time, grade 10, and we you know, we were told not to get involved, we knew this was happening, and a lot of schools, the townships were meeting on the parade in Cape Town and the teachers, we had priests, young men of the cloth teaching and so on, and they all implored us not to go, but we

knew that it was something, so groups of us got in the train and we listened to the grievances and of course there was very little you could do, because actually I was 15, and was the senior of the school, and you didn't really have the support and we were a very small school, but it made us aware. And every time they had a stay away, I call it a stay away; we would mobilize amongst each other, amongst the school kids.

Q: Sort of boycott so to speak, of school. Sympathy for those in the townships.

WILSON: Exactly, and everything was happening up here in Johannesburg at the time, and that was our way of showing our support.

Q: You were in the parade, isn't that very risky, vis a vis the police?

WILSON: It was, but in the beginning it wasn't the police, it was crude . . .

Q: Not sure what was coming?

WILSON: Correct. It was just in the beginning stages. So at the end of that year, I had to find another school to complete grade 11 and 12. It was a lot different, but we had a pass of support, when we could, by staying away, boycotting products and boycotting companies in this country, like Coca Cola.

Q: When you say "we" was this the majority of your classmates? And your school was in the city of Cape Town?

WILSON: It was in a suburb of Cape Town, it was in a colored suburb.

Q: What suburb was that?

WILSON: Heathfield.

Q: Ah, okay.

WILSON: And then just moving forward a little bit, I moved up here and I started teaching in a high school, and then my husband at the time was an anti-apartheid activist, and he was a political prisoner, and he had spent many years waiting when he came off the island. That was in the '80s.

Q: Robben? I guess I should get his name. It's about you girl, never mind. But you keep talking about him

WILSON: It's all part of the story, I quite cut him up, as much as I like to. His name is Saths Cooper.

Q: Enough about him, now about you.

WILSON: So he came off the island, and he was offered a Fulbright scholarship many times, but he couldn't get his passport because the South African government refused to give him a passport. And then the '80s they had this state of emergency declared in South Africa, and he was detained and let free many times during that period, but he had kept applying for his passport and after one of the state of emergencies, he was released and he got his passport a week later, without any warning, and this was post-August, so the students who had received the Fulbright had already been admitted.

Q: Ah, bad timing.

WILSON: Well, he got it, but he went anyways, so he went a bit later, and then the following year I went over to visit.

Q: Can you guess the year?

WILSON: It was in '87. And so I don't know how too much to say that is acceptable, because a lot of what I did, I don't know what Brooks told you.

Q: He said you were an advisor.

WILSON: (Laughs) Okay, well this has nothing to do with advising. Obviously the way I advise students is very different from the way I studied and how I ended up in University, so I don't know how much you want to hear?

Q: I want to hear everything.

WILSON: Oh, boy.

Q: No, really it's up to you.

WILSON: Okay, it's nothing illegal, well technically it is, but they obviously knew about it, and when I say "they" I'm talking about the U.S. government.

Q: I think with some humor, if you weren't doing something illegal in the '80s, there was something wrong with you, we do understand that.

WILSON: (Laughs) But, well, I went over for a visit, and I was pregnant at the time and not having medical insurance and all of that, we understood how the system worked, but you know, we met some really great people and we met a benefactor who really took a liking -

Q: I'm sorry what campus?

WILSON: Boston. I studied at Simmons.

Q: Oh, Simmons. One of the people interviewed for this series, Tom Hull, who was once the CAO here and PAO now teaches at Simmons.

WILSON: Oh, you're kidding! That's a fantastic story. Well, I got in, well it wasn't then, we got health insurance so I ended up spending time in the U.S., and a year later, after my son was born, I realized the benefit, the value of being in this wonderful place, Boston to me is the best city. I try not to influence my students, but we had more colleges and universities in that one city, than in the whole of South Africa, maybe in all of Africa at the time.

Q: I studied there for 12 years and I have the same feeling.

WILSON: I loved it, I absolutely loved it. And there were so many colleges around, and being a young person and unfulfilled academically and not being able to come back home, I had to wait for a certain age to get an age exemption to get your first degree. So what I did one day, I opened the paper and here was Simmons College advertising, masters in education, special education degree, so it was a new program that they had just written up or whatever, so I went to go see the director of the program. I went to her and said, I want to enroll and she said, unfortunately, it was a grant that was going to be paid by the U.S. government, but for Americans, and graduate studies are quite expensive. So, I said, "What I want to do with this degree?" and so on. And she took my details and sort of humored me.

Q: Was she the foreign student advisor?

WILSON: No, she was the head of the special education program, the dean at that time. So she kept my details and I kept going up on a daily basis, and I went to see how it was going, they needed ten students to get the funding for the program, and she told me they didn't quite have it, they had eight or nine, so

Q: Lucky.

WILSON: Well, I kept going in everyday and of course I couldn't work at the time, so I used to do a little bit of babysitting and stuff like that, and just do time helping, which is what all students do. But anyway, so she contacted me and said to me, I think it was a day before the course started, they couldn't find a tenth student and they were willing to give it to me, but I had to pay a few hundred dollars, but this was fantastic. And within a few hours, I had organized a babysitter, between my husband also studying, he was doing his PhD, and we put our schedules together, so what it entailed was working at different places in the morning, and obviously I was not getting paid. I didn't have the right papers, I didn't have the F-1 visa, I was there as a visitor. I had applied to change my status, which they finally did give me. I was an official student which is what the system does; it allows you to do that. But coming back would have been a problem, which I did, and discovered. We came back to visit in that period. But anyways, the focus of it is they gave me enough funds. We were a support group, a South African support group, and we

contributed, every time a new student came in and needed something, everyone would put their hands in their pocket and…

Q: So, it was for the city? How many South Africans might there have been? Dozens, hundreds?

WILSON: Hundreds. And the building we stayed in, it had a big hall, so sometimes we would rent it out and get together and everyone would bring a dish, so there was a sense of community. One of our friends that we met there was actually a lecturer at Simmons as well, so he helped me out with a few hundred dollars, brought me to someone who could. And my teacher's training, was a physical education teacher, with a lot of schools, and one of the placements, it was a placement at Robert Weiss school, in Boston, and they needed someone to work with girls who had emotional problems. So I had to do physical education with them. They had this fantastic indoor pool and they said, "Can you teach us?" And I said, "I can."

Q: One thing leading to another? (Laughs)

WILSON: It was divine providence. I think I was in the right time and the right place and just finding a place, so I worked for it, but it all sorted it self out. So I spent some time teaching and earning some money and working with these young women and I managed to pay the balance of my fees. So I studied from '88 to '89, I had one semester to do '89, that semester because I crash coursed a lot. I worked over the summer. And my husband at the time had got a post and he was working on his PhD, and I was pregnant with my second son who was born in August.

Q: Wow, busy.

WILSON: It was busy, yes. So I didn't quite complete it, but I went back in 1997 to finish my degree.

Q: To me that seems recent, because I was here at the time. You went back to Simmons.

WILSON: Yes, I went back to Simmons.

Q: Amazing. Now, you've said some positive things about Boston. Can you say a little bit more in detail what was enabling, and freeing? I don't know if I'm on the right track, but there was something positive about it.

WILSON: It's a student city, and I think that's great as a young person. Well I wasn't as young as 18 year olds, but I was in my early 20s, 27 actually, later twenties. But I felt the academic vibe, but to me, it was more my conscience that struck me at the time; I'm spending this time I'm here, if I don't take advantage of this, it may never come again. So I needed to be part of this force, and this academic wealth, I guess, that I felt. And because we were students, we lived in an international building, InterAction was with students, with professors, lecturers, on one level or the other, so it was just a very

academically enabling environment, and I think if you didn't have a brain, you would understand why you didn't want to take part in all of that, you cannot just come here and be a mother and be lucky to give birth and have your son here, but not take advantage of it.

Q: The community of South African students, you said there were hundreds. In South Africa they had certain relations with one another, depending on their origins I think. Outside of that setting, in a foreign country, did this affect in any way, the relations among that cadre of South Africans.

WILSON: There were a lot of South Africans who were students, who fled the country via other countries. So a lot of South Africans who were in exile, and so anybody, anyone who came from South Africa, who had any connection to the past and the history of the whole uprisings and having been in prison on Robben Island, who had any connection to any other prisoner, like Mandela, which my ex-husband did at the time, was like a breath of fresh air. And at the time, I don't recall, very many white students being part of that whole get-together, or support system, because a lot of it, was support for the exiles. So it was like a nourishment for them, providing news from home, understanding the plight that a lot of South Africans were going through, that even the local administrators had no idea, people didn't have a place to stay, or anywhere to eat, and they left because it was a means to get out of the situation.

Q: And you say the white students were less a part of it. With a South African origin coming on this scene, did one have to present ones bona fides to be accepted?

WILSON: No, it was a network, sort of, when we got there, there had already been a network, and I discovered, having lived in an international building, all of the students would find like communities, so you would find Pakistanis, because it presented a support system, so international students and officers, because my ex-husband had spent time on the island, he was known before he even got there. People knew what was happening back home, it wasn't much reported in the U.S.

Q: Well, it may not have been adequately reported, but there was a lot of attention given to it in the U.S. I'm not saying we knew anything much, but there was a lot of sense of something serious was happening.

WILSON: But the actual what was happening on the ground, people knew, because there was a network but it's not that people were excluded in anyway, and it was, I don't recall how many, but they were coloreds, they were Indians, they were Africans, I don't recall many whites. Actually, our very best friend was a white student, but the few who got involved did so because they understood and were sympathetic with what was happening. It was the same situation, people who cared and wanted to be part of it, and people who knew that something was wrong, but maybe they had.

Q: So those who wished to be part were welcome in that.

WILSON: I think anybody was, it was word of mouth, you'd find people pitching up at different times.

Q: What about Americans who were interested? Maybe who didn't have knowledge, but were interested.

WILSON: There were a lot of Americans, absolutely.

Q: Fascinating times. Later, were you considered as one of those exiles and came back, because there were these factions?

WILSON: No, I wasn't in exile, and I think the South African government was hoping that my husband didn't come back, but he wasn't in exile, it was study opportunity.

Q: But there was no statement period when you came back, about this being a period of turmoil?

WILSON: No, it was post that, it was sort of on the brink of the '80s and so on. But the thing is, we, there was never a question of not going back, and a lot of people decided that America had presented a better option, but because we had grown up during the period of turmoil, there was a need to go back, both politically, academically and so on.

Q: Many people interviewed for this project made the same point. There were very few who swathe personal opportunities in the U.S. who at the same time did not have the same desire to go back and use the experience they had to go back and transform their own native country. What is it about South Africa that makes people so loyal to it?

WILSON: Your home is your home. You probably feel, well you are a diplomat in the sense that you've traveled a lot, maybe you don't have such strong bonds, but you were a kid, you grew up in one environment and place, it's your identity, it's your belonging. While America's fantastic, it's great, you're a part of everything, but you don't really belong. That's the underlying reason I think that a lot of people came back. Because you are accepted, but you are not really accepted. The American culture is very different.

Q: So, it was a useful weigh station for the time and to gather expertise, tools and instruments, knowing that you were going to put these to use, or wanting to, back in South Africa. And you did so, here you are.

WILSON: Correct. Well, I didn't get involved immediately, I got back in the '90s, and I had a need to go back, I had a couple more kids, and this wealth of education I didn't actually put to use, because we are light years behind the U.S. when it comes to special education. I mean, just normalizing people for having different pigmentation in their skin was a major thing, let alone a disabled person. So I decided I would continue teaching, I worked in different places, NGOs, teaching projects. I worked at Wits University for awhile, project management, but all related to students so when this opportunity came up,

and the job requirements wanted someone who was educated in the U.S. So, you can't really study for an educational advisor.

Q: What was it that drew you to special education in particular?

WILSON: I'm not really sure, I think as a young person it's a sense of wanting to fix anything, and mend what is broken. When you think of the whole color thing, you aren't accepted for your color, but I always felt strongly for disabled people, and we weren't taught out, it's a lesson, a life's lesson that comes to you in different forms. Not that I had anyone who was disabled in my family, but this was a need to work in another area that a lot of people hadn't thought of. A lot of my degree was practical base, and I worked in different levels of disbursement. What I liked best was job coaching, streamlining and normalizing what was abnormal, and that was my subconscious desires for South Africa, to normalize and maybe that was an outlet for me at the time.

Q: So, you think you understand now with hindsight a little bit more than you did at that time? The reasons that you did things, if I understand, you sort of did things by instinct, by intuition, and now some years later, you look back and you see that this was a very coherent plan and yet at the time you hadn't predicted the whole thing, you just did it.

WILSON: I absolutely, now hindsight, as you say, is a wonderful thing, because a lot of what we do, which I'm trying to solve on a different level, you must plan first, everything fell into place when I was in the States. It was unbelievable, remarkable, how we make a benefactor who took a liking to us and gave us medical aid. It turned out the doctor who delivered my sons was a South African doctor, who was a Jewish South African doctor, who had trained with a very good friend of ours at the time who we had left behind. So the world is so small, and I think things are set up for you, and you can change your destiny, but to me that felt right at the time.

Q: Who was the benefactor? What did the benefactor do for you?

WILSON: Well, he organized medical aid for us.

Q: This was not the doctor?

WILSON: Oh, no, this was someone else, this was an American. You know, so I guess at the time, a lot of things are predetermined, and I'm sure that the tolerance that I had to learn, because I was generally an impatient, impulsive kind of person, and I wouldn't take no for an answer, I guess that's kind of your survival mechanism in a country that we grew up in.

Q: I think I see this quite a bit in South Africans.

WILSON: Someone tells you it can't work, and you make it work. I'm not a very practical person, I'm more practical, and I've developed a lot of patience. And it was always a survival, a struggle to survive. I've worked since the age of 12, 13 to put myself

through high school, let alone university. And that was another reason I couldn't really go, because my parents couldn't really afford university fees, and I couldn't really get a loan, being a person of color, classified as colored at the time. And your parents have to have assets to get a loan, we didn't have a car, we didn't have a house, we lived in a one-bedroom apartment so it was a struggle to survive. And I guess, that's just something that I'm lucky to have.

Q: Irrelevant maybe to this conversation. I have to say this is one of the intoxicating charms to this country. People everywhere I look don't take no for an answer, have a lot of determination, very much in different contexts, for different purposes, but the perseverance and the determination is unique here.

WILSON: You know what I think it is then; I think its human nature. People are in an environment where people are suppressing and oppressing and trying to squash you out, and you see the will to survive. And I really do believe it supersedes everything. And you really see it in this country and if you haven't lived under it, you can't see that cloud of oppression that you live under, and everyone wants to survive, no one wants to give up and die, I guess that's what it is, you learn to fight from a very young age.

Q: You were part of a group categorized at that time as colored. Do you feel that what you said is applicable to all groups or some who had the advantage of being favored by the apartheid system, were they different types of preachers who did not develop this survival instinct because they did not have to?

WILSON: Exactly, I think it's the same thing, we make the mistake now, we are in a more privileged position, financially and so on, and we actually remove that ability, that survival skill, because we give everything, everything is easy, there's no struggle. Now, I'm not saying that they have to go back and live the way we did under those conditions, but everything is given to our kids today. Within my family I have, although I'm colored, my mother's sisters were all reclassified as white, so my mother was the colored sister, and all her sisters were reclassified as white. Within that family they were privileged, they had access to everything and we were left, that divide that you had back then was just as strong within my own family. You know my mother's sister would walk past her in the street because other white people would see her, greeting her, and we would visit, I had an older brother who was fair skinned, he was the only one who was allowed to visit her because she lived in a white area. You know, when you do that to young people they become rebellious.

Q: Your mother and your two aunts, were they the same father, same mother, biologically exactly the same?

WILSON: Yes, everything.

Q: And the system classified them differently?

WILSON: There were four sisters and two brothers and one sister and brother, my mother and one of her brothers, chose not to be reclassified, I think it was the early 1950s or late, just the beginning 1950, it was sort of a cutoff date for them to be reclassified, and they chose not to, because my mother was married to my father, who was not white.

Q: They stayed together, I see. Crazy, absolutely crazy. I'm speechless (laughs).

WILSON: But then, just to come back to your story, I got involved in a part time basis on advising and that was just before e-mail, e-mail just started then.

Q: Late '80s?

WILSON: Yes, and that was very new for us, we were still faxing and so on then. Then this position in 2002, my personal situation changed and I needed to find full-time work and again this was advertised.

Q: This was the position at the U.S. Consulate or Embassy?

WILSON: The Embassy was 1994-95, that was a part time basis and they'd already had a full-time person at the time in Johannesburg. In 2002 I got the position, and I worked for about sic to seven years.

Q: Oh, so recently.

WILSON: Until 2008, 2009.

Q: Like me?

WILSON: Like you.

Q: I stopped what I was doing in late 2009. So you were the academic advisor at the U.S. consulate in Johannesburg from 2002 to 2009.

WILSON: Correct, and I worked on some of the, although they had a Fulbright person and someone who worked on the big missions, I worked on the exchange, I worked on the Fulbright and I set up some of the interviews. I worked on the community colleges' initiative. So we did the Johannesburg, so what I would do is go with my coworkers and go up there and gather applications and so on.

Q: Mark, what was his name? Embarrassing, names escape me, but I knew some of the POs and APOs.

WILSON: The present PO is Tom Haskell.

Q: Yes, I sent him here personally.

WILSON: Anything bad? Oh, dear. No fuss. But anyway, I left in April last year, and I had a very stressful sic, seven years, both emotionally, work-wise, everything. I'd lost my mom, my brother, there was a lot of death, divorce. I don't believe I should be saying all of this but you're going to cut this out?

Q: You will edit this. I'm not going to edit the part about my divorce.

WILSON: Okay (laughs). But I needed another re-growth period, and this April 2009, I'd actually given myself until the end of the year, and I work with students who want to study, and this is the easy part of being an advisor, the best part actually, because now what you do is you find a good fit, and I'm just as enthusiastic about U.S. studying now as I was whatever, 18 years ago.

Q: What is the volume of people who sign up?

WILSON: It's up and down, because South Africa is different, a lot of students would love to go, the cost is prohibitive, not everyone is going to get a scholarship, and today with the recession, it hasn't really made a difference.

Q: Is the Erasmus scholarship a big rival? In Europe? That can be used to go to UK? No, South Africans want to go to the U.S.

WILSON: South Africans want to go to the U.S.

Q: Most however, it is an impediment.

WILSON: It is an impediment, and we've also got a very good education system, despite the rest of the world, despite Africa for that matter. It's a lot easier for people to make the natural progression to undergrad here.

Q: Give me a sense of the numbers. There were Fulbright full grants, Fulbright partial grants, and everyone else who went by some other means. And you also dealt with those people.

WILSON: Well, most of them. They don't all have to come through our office, but most of them.

Q: And they are well-advised to do so.

WILSON: Yes, and of course we have three advising centers, although part time and smaller posts, in Cape Town. I don't think we've ever raised more than to over 2,000 and in the last few years, students, exchange full-time students.

Q: 2,000 in one year? 2,000?

WILSON: Yeah, South Africa's quite small.

Q: Enormous.

WILSON: Well, its small compared to China and India.

Q: Well, China has one billion people! That's not comparable at all. That's an enormous number for a country of that size.

WILSON: Well, ratio-wise . . . we had 1,699, so it's come down, and this year I don't have the stats, because that was a lovely figure we got.

Q: Sadly the Bureau of Cultural Affairs for the year of 2011 is I think for the first time in history, no cost of living increase, no cost of living increase at all, this is a dramatic decrease. Well, at a time of economic hardship in the U.S. relative hardship. It's sad to see this. Now, of the 2,000, how many do you think you dealt with? Half of them?

WILSON: Well, we in Johannesburg, now this was last year's statistics, I think, and I stand corrected, it was about 400 F-1 students.

Q: Now, the F-1 is?

WILSON: The visa for full-time study, of course. When you deal with someone, when you have an exchange, a letter is going on an exchange program, you contact them, you give them advice, but they don't come back so it's difficult to attach. But if you look at the area that I serve, I'd say 400 or 450.

Q: And that's just for one city?

WILSON: That's just for Johannesburg, just for F-1.

Q: What is the M visa? Do you know?

WILSON: What is the M visa?

Q: The M visa is the visa for vocational training; it's a personal thing, what you're interested in. So, you've gone private or independent only in the last 10 months, and you said you needed a period of growth, but that was earlier I guess.

WILSON: This was April last year.

Q: Need for growth, need for change and earlier you described yourself as an impulsive person?

WILSON: Well, this was a decision I thought about long and hard and planned. Obviously I'm a single parent. I have three kids, it wasn't something I did lightly, and I needed to know that I could survive. Also I feel that five years in any one place is as good

a time to turn around and I'd been there five years, and you understand then, there's no, you don't build growth into your posting, for locals.

Q: When you say you, you're referring to the Americans who aid the South Africans.

WILSON: Correct.

Q: Absolutely correct. And I say this with some shame and humiliation, and that's the way the system is.

WILSON: Well that's just the way the system is. When I left, I'm a good worker, I'm not a young student, I'm not there growing, I needed to know though that there were certain things I could do. The position I think was a bit stagnating, and I thought you know what before I become too complacent. Like some of my colleagues who have been here 20 odd years, and were just basically getting a salary, and coming into work every day and clocking in.

Q: Do you think Americans are any different?

WILSON: Well, look after two years, you have more reason to move on, and it can stimulate new vigor.

Q: Can. Not always.

WILSON: For sure. But it would have been nice if we could do that as well, if we chose to. So I needed to do something else I think, and this was good way, as I said. I think I gave myself until the end of the year it's a very alienating job. You work with students, but you are out of the work force, and the contact with the intellectual stimulation, going out networking. There's a limit to what I can do in this position. I was ready to get back into the work force.

Q: So you're in transition right now.

WILSON: Right.

Q: And you've opened up the practice for people who would want the same type of advice that you were giving at the consulate, but you're the one with the expertise, you took the expertise, and you're going to offer it to the public on your own terms.

WILSON: Yes, on my own terms. And you know, I still work with the consulate, I do pro bono for the consulate, because they always defer to me, because I am knowledgeable. I realize that is not the kind of thing that is favorably viewed upon but you know as I said, it was becoming a dead end job, and I was becoming despondent, and there are a lot of other factors, a lot of it has to do with management as well.

Q: Unacceptably, we have a limited time. You've given some rich anecdotal material about how your exposure to things Americans, especially Boston, affected your trajectory, your development. Would it be possible for you to generalize in any way what you've seen, how this affected other South Africans? That's a huge broad stroke, but is that a fair question?

WILSON: I'm not sure I understand.

Q: How did their experiences, their studies in the U.S., you said about 2,000 a year. I'm amazed, I had no idea, what is your sense of the effect that this has on South Africans. They go to the U.S., they study, and they come back. Do you stay in touch with them as an advisor to some degree, do you get a sense of when they come back, have they changed, have they developed?

WILSON: Absolutely, I try to stay in touch as much as possible. Some choose to stay in touch and others choose not to. I think for the large part, again, I'm afraid because I'm a product of the past in terms of color. You know it's a growing phase. This is the one lesson that I will never forget that I experienced in the U.S. It's the kind of growth, I say to students you can't get if you're a South African, you live in Johannesburg and you study in Cape Town. It's farther away and you're more independent, but it's the same culture. We have very few international students, now these days we tend to have more, but on the U.S. campus. That sense of independence and that discovery of self is so overwhelming. You know, when I first went to the U.S., I was 27. I'd never been out of Johannesburg, never moved from Cape Town to Johannesburg, never traveled in any way, I was not a learned, I was not a person of the world, I didn't think the way intellectual people think, not I think so now. But you're thinking patterns change, I couldn't answer the phone, because I didn't understand the accent. I was afraid to venture out on the streets, you know, once you overcome the initial insecurities, that growth it's like getting wings, and you say jeez I can do this. That's the beauty of being in U.S. culture. It takes the most unpolished diamond and at the end of it, you become this polished person, you're self-confident, you've learned how to think, you realize that you cannot move back, you can only go forward in life. I find a lot of kids I work with from the township, that growth in them is something I experienced, and come from poverty and squalor and turn that around. They turn people's lives around. They give hope to people that they work with, that they live with, that's an effect that you can't capture, but it would be fantastic if you do, to actually answer your question. Just see how it does do that. But that one person, it does keep hope alive for the family back home. But that person comes back, with a little bit of an American accent, you know, which is a great thing, but also their skills. Their life skills they come with, is something that is imparted and shared within others was started by my colleague in Zimbabwe: United States Achievement Program. You find students who have a sense of community responsibility, who want to give back to their communities, and unfortunately not all of my students are like that, because you take who comes to you for advice. But the program you work for, who you want to send over is someone you know will come back.

Q: The criteria I think in judging who will get the grant. So the question I guess is would you argue for further or increased funding for this program.

WILSON: Absolutely. She's done a wonderful job, she really has and it doesn't work the same in every country and South Africa students are more privileged compared to the situation in Zimbabwe. So if you want to follow the same concept, you've got to go into the locations, into the rural areas and find that perfect little student. Otherwise you take the student that's partly sophisticated, because South Africa has grown a lot over the years and you fit that student into the program and it's slightly different. I think it's a fantastic program, it really is.

Q: We're getting into the end of your time? Any final thoughts?

WILSON: Well, let's see. I think the program exchange is a great thing and it's something that must continue; again if there is more funding I think it'll be fantastic. But the U.S. government is involved in so many areas of development in this country alone that, I can understand that. I wish there were a way of making the whole exchange a little cheaper, because a lot of parents can send their kids to private schools in this country and a private school fee is more expensive than sending them to local universities, but at the end of the day if you look at a comprehensive cost of going to university locally, it's one and the same. That private school parent would be happy to continue paying for another four years, and it costs about 45,000 or 50,000 grand.

Q: 1/7th of what it costs in the U.S.

WILSON: And when you translate that into dollars, there is no way. And there are wealthy parents here, but even that is stretching it, and I say the demand is there, the interest is there, the curiosity is there, but it doesn't work financially. So that would be great if.

Q: We can solve that.

WILSON: If the U.S. government can just cut down.

Q: If we add one more at a time instead of two it might make some economists.

WILSON: And finally pull out of Iraq that would be great, completely.

Q: I think that would be great. Long overdue.

WILSON: Well, the thing that I was really grateful of when I looked at the concert was being part of a network of advisors, and that's a valuable tool to keep people like myself updated, now because I'm private, and I charge, and I think my fees are modest, and if someone can't pay I'm willing to negotiate my price and that's why it's not working for me.

Q: You always negotiate.

WILSON: Correct. The thing is, I work with a lot of colleges, I don't take retainers from colleges and so I try and provide an unbiased opinion. Although I do have a tendency to lean towards center universities, and there is a move to have private counselors certified, but it costs us a few thousand dollars a year to do that, and I don't have a couple thousand dollars in a month. So that's not effective, but it's to keep people like me, because I still want to be part of that whole thing. I still want to be involved as an advisor. I'm not going to ill-advise someone. I'm still part of a network of colleagues indirectly. So find a way of keeping, because a lot of people leave eventually you know, because as you say, the job is written so that you rise to the occasion over a few years. It may take people longer to go through that growth in the job, but once you reach it there's no way around it, you can't make them managers or in charge of colleagues.

Q: The growth within the sphere of employees at the local embassy, I feel this is true for other countries as well, is limited. There's a ceiling.

WILSON: And people will leave. People love what they do. I think anyone who comes into this job, advising, must do it because they love working with young people and you've got to have a bit of compassion. I'm not saying everyone has to have a sob story like mine to appreciate the value but it helps to understand what it is you want to impart onto your students. It's interesting to see people who fall out of the whole structure, can still be, like you have your alumni associations or whatever, is to open that to people like myself, and I know I'm advocating because I'm in that position now. But I find that just being part of the NAFSA network, I was dropped immediately un-resigned. I find that interaction and discussion invaluable, and though of course I don't have it. So it's up to me to keep researching and so on, but I've got a wealth of experience, besides my job. I was unofficial coordinator for the country, I was country advisor. I advised other countries who started up and who needed, anyone on the listserv needed. I was seen as the athletic scholarship expert, because that's my background training. I'm a sports person by profession, so that was something I followed automatically because I was passionate about it. So I would advise whomever in Africa whomever, it's a lot of wealth to let go like that.

Q: Well, Carol Wilson, thank you, you've worked very hard and very successfully to the benefit of your country and mine and will continue to do so. I thank you for that.

WILSON: Thank you, Dan. It was a pleasure chatting with you today.

Q: It was a pleasure talking to you.

End of interview