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HOLLY WISE

*Interviewed by: Carol Peasley
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INTERVIEW

Q: Good morning. This is Carol Peasley, and it is February 7, 2022, and this is session number one with Holly Wise.

Holly, we look forward to talking with you and to having your oral history recorded. First, maybe you could talk a little bit about your background, where and when you were born, and a little bit about your family and some of the things that may have led you to the career that you embarked upon.

Early Background, Childhood, Family, and Education

WISE: Great. Thanks, I'm happy to do that.

So, I was born in Washington, DC, one of the few born there, and then came back to work, headquartered in DC. I was the second child of five in my family. My dad worked in retail with Sears Roebuck, and my mom was initially a stay-at-home mom. We moved every couple of years as my dad got promotions and was advancing his career. Those moves were largely Eastern Seaboard, over to Long Island, to West Virginia, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Then, we landed in Connecticut for a long time. I went to high school and college in Connecticut, Upper Connecticut College, and then came back down to New Haven—I grew up outside of New Haven—and went to Yale, did a public health degree.

Q: Did you go to public schools in all those travels?

WISE: Yes. I was in public school throughout and then went to a private college and then graduate school at a private university. A couple of my siblings went to private schools, but one sister and I always attended public schools.

Q: How was your college experience?

I didn't have much international experience except going on a youth hostel trip bicycling and pony trekking in the British Isles when I was in high school, and then traveling around domestically and then taking a semester off in Taiwan, initially when I was in

college. I sort of by accident became a Chinese and Asian studies major with a minor in dance, and that—you can just write your own ticket when you've got that kind of focus, right?

Q: How did you accidentally end up with a Chinese and Asian studies major?

WISE: When I was in university, like many others, I had a language and distribution requirement. I had already taken some French, so I thought I didn't need to do another romance language, and oh, wow, they have Chinese. And so, knowing nothing about that and having no reason to study Chinese I thought that would be the perfect reason to study Chinese. What I hadn't realized then was that I had already tested out of the language requirement thanks to my high school French, but I ended up diving into Chinese anyway. It was a very intense and immersive program. I had class every day, and the Chinese professors treated us as family, so that was a very wonderful and intense experience.

During my time in college, I took a semester off to live in Taiwan. By chance, I ended up living with a family that was very involved in the medical field—husband a doctor, wife a midwife, and children studying medicine and nursing. That environment reignited an interest I'd had since junior high when I worked as a candy striper in hospitals. I had always felt drawn to helping people, but back then, I was encouraged to consider roles like nursing or teaching. Living with this family in Taiwan, along with teaching English and continuing my Chinese studies made me start thinking that maybe medicine was something I wanted to pursue. But, I came back to my final year of college and finished on the original track of Chinese language, Asian Studies, and Dance.

After graduating, I decided to take some pre-med courses, but partway through, I realized I could have a bigger impact working in public health and policy rather than in hands-on medicine. I applied to Yale's School of Epidemiology and Public Health. I was accepted, and this launched my career in public health. My interest in international health led to an internship at the Department of Health and Human Services, what then was HEW (United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare).

Q: When you said an intern, was this an internship after your degree or an internship while you were studying?

WISE: It started as an internship in the summer between my first and second year of graduate school, and then it converted to a full-time internship during the second year. For my final year at Yale, I stayed in Washington, wrote my thesis on the health sector in Sri Lanka and took some classes at NIH (National Institutes of Health) to finish up the degree requirements.

While at HEW in the Office of International Health, somewhat by luck of being in the right place at the right time, I got tapped to join then-Secretary Califano on one of the early science and technology delegations to the People's Republic of China. I was the most junior person in the office but had a little bit of Chinese language skills and could

support the senior representatives who were going along. I was responsible for note taking, the gifts and the medical supplies we carried on the Air Force jet.

Q: How exciting.

WISE: So, it was a big trip in my life. Among other things, at Andrews Air Force Base in the departure lounge when we were getting ready to get on Air Force Two to head out there, I met Robin Phillips — a Chinese economy and China language expert, who was along as a resource person. Robin and I first met on that trip, ended up getting married, having three children, and being a tandem couple in the USAID (United States Agency for International Development) Foreign Service. We had a great time and were able to do good work in lots of different places.

After returning from China, I applied to USAID's international development internship program and joined in January 1980.

USAID Career Begins -- International Development Intern -- 1980

I entered through the intern program, which was great at the time. They would bring in a diverse class of new hires and put them through some classroom training and then we did rotations around Washington, and then went out to our first overseas posting.

Q: Were you brought in as a health officer?

WISE: I was, yes, and that's an interesting point in terms of the kind of non-linearity of my career. (Laughs) I was brought in as a "backstop fifty" health officer. My first assignment was to the Philippines.

Q: Before we start talking about the Philippines, can we go back to your graduate program? Your degree is in environmental health, is that correct?

WISE: Right.

Q: I assume it's a master's in public health. Were there different specialties within public health?

WISE: Yes.

Q: How did you choose environmental health? I mean, it's interesting because now it would be a very sexy subject.

WISE: Exactly.

Q: But at the time you were breaking new ground even then.

WISE: Yes. Yale's program didn't have a global health track. They didn't have a specialization in international health. They had one course in it, which I couldn't actually take because it conflicted with another course that I had to take. They had strong concentrations in hospital and health systems administration and epidemiology. Given that I didn't want to do administration or bench science/research, environmental health was the most attractive generalist track for me.

It wasn't perfect preparation for the work that I was going to do at USAID. We did not study international development or global health, nor subtopics of women's health, maternal and child health or family planning. Instead, I had knowledge about toilets, food safety, and water-borne diseases.

Q: You did a lot of learning then, early on in your career.

WISE: I would say that's a feature of my story throughout, is that I was—I mean, I don't want to say self-taught, but there was a whole lot of accumulation of new content and skills and kind of reinvention and reorientation as I went through the opportunities or the requirements of new assignments. I switched backstops several times with new opportunities and to align tandem assignments with my spouse. The world was changing, the work was changing, and I scrambled to learn new content and stay current. I want to make a plug for training. While overall USAID does not do enough training compared to other governmental entities, I found what they have offered to be useful. I took a good private enterprise short course before going to Kenya to serve as a private enterprise officer. Later I did a development studies course, senior management training at the Federal Executive Institute and long-term training at the National Defense University.

Q: When you first came in, you said you were in Washington and there was training, and you did rotations. Was some of that with the global health bureau or with health experts?

WISE: Yes.

Q: And was that helpful in terms of getting to at least understand some of the areas in which AID did most of its health work?

WISE: Sure. The health and population bureau was very strong in the agency and there was not only a lot of money and good programs, but there was a tremendous amount of expertise and a lot of real champions in the field who worked there. Rotating in that office introduced me to the people and the programs. They welcomed new blood and there was an openness and a lot of knowledge sharing. USAID is a small agency, the ranks of foreign service officers even smaller, and I learned early on the importance of networking. Before I joined, I was identified by Barbara Sandoval, who was in Honduras, as a candidate to go there. Around the same time, I met Steve Sinding at a party hosted by Sally and Tom Arndt, whom I had connected with during my master's thesis research on the health system in Sri Lanka. Tom had been the mission director in Sri Lanka, and through that connection, I met Steve. At the party, Steve mentioned he was heading to the Philippines as the head of PHN (Population/Health/Nutrition) and

asked if I wanted to join him. I immediately said, "A hundred percent," and Steve was able to put in a bid for me, which led to me being slated for the Philippines. Also, when I was doing another rotation the then-head of the Asia bureau health office was George Curlin, whom Robin's father had supervised when he was a young doc in Dhaka, Bangladesh. So, I had a bond with him and then through him there was a connection with Peggy Curlin. Carol, I can see you smiling and nodding—Peggy Curlin had already started CEDPA (Center for Development and Population Activities), which was an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) that started working with women in Bangladesh and went on to work with women everywhere. I followed CEDPA and Peggy while I was in service and much later served on the CEDPA board and helped arrange a merger with another NGO. It is a small community as I said and making and maintaining these connections benefitted me throughout my career with AID and since then.

Sort of looping back, one of your prompting questions was, "did you have mentors?" I was thinking to myself, that I didn't. The whole idea of mentors wasn't at all like it is now and I didn't feel like I had a mentor—I didn't feel as though I had anyone in that kind of intentional relationship of talking to me, helping me out, giving me advice. And yet, I did. I mean, I had people who had my back—whether it was pulling me forward for a job or giving me access to something that was important or introducing me to others in their network, I did have that. And if anything, I think maybe I wasn't schooled enough to understand how important it is and how I could feed that as opposed to just letting it happen to me.

Q: Yes. It's interesting because I think now people think of mentorship as primarily a one-on-one relationship—

WISE: Right.

Q:—and I do think that the idea of the informal mentoring that comes through networking is probably equally if not even more important.

WISE: Yes, yes. And I think that some of the people, not all but some of the people that were helpful to me and important to me early on were men, and I think that that is in part because there were a whole lot of them in the workplace and particularly in more senior positions. And also, because while I was clear about being a feminist—I was one of the earliest subscribers to *Ms. Magazine* and read it cover to cover, still what I found was it was not always easy with women in the workplace. It's been competitive and sometimes hard to help each other up. This made me sad. Still, my female friends and female role models were really important.

Q: You were in the IDI (International Development Intern) program. And that program at the time consisted of several months of classroom training followed by up to a year of rotations throughout USAID offices in Washington and language training before you IDIs were sent overseas as "junior" foreign service officers at USAID missions. In your IDI cohort of new staff from all the occupational categories from contracting to program to

education officers were there a fair number of women? Was it anywhere close to fifty/fifty at that point in time?

WISE: I think it was. The woman who ran it was a female, and her second, Cecelia Pittas, was also a female. Many of the speakers that would come in were female, but certainly not all of them. But I do remember we had a good speaker who came in from the Women in Development office, and she made the business case for why women in development made sense. It was a great session and made perfect sense to me. And yet the chatter after class suggested it was a token compliance requirement – a check-the-box thing you must do in your project design. And for a long time, it wasn't a requirement as opposed to an opportunity and definitely not kind of mainstreamed in the way people are thinking about it now as your best development dollar can be spent on girls' education before it was you want to build a road and then fill out the annex on women in development so that you could pass the committee. (Laughs)

When I joined, it was the tail end of the Vietnam-era recruitment and the focus was on check writing and capital projects. I came in with a soft sector backstop. It created an interesting dynamic, as project development officers, like you, Carol, were more involved in handling funds and being rewarded for design work. This influenced expectations about the nature of work and where power and opportunities lay.

But let me just mention another—in terms of mentors or interesting things during the IDIship. After the classroom time, we went off-site and did a community project design. I remember not only really bonding with the design team that was a subset of the cohort in the IDI class, but also working through a lot of project design and team dynamics that I saw play out again and again as I was working in the field. We found a community in Virginia that didn't have access to piped water that was living within an hour's drive of DC, and we were able to develop a project to bring piped water to this community. So, it felt like work I went on to do in the Philippines and lots of other places, and yet it was at home. It was a kind of a precursor to this—later I was involved when I was back in DC after a long time overseas in working on lessons without borders and thinking about experiences in the global north or in the U.S. or at home and whether they're like or unlike things overseas, and how do you learn from one to the other and how do you sort of capture that and what's the similarity. Because there's still so much stove piping of—there's either global work or domestic work, and even in education it was interesting that there was—when I was working in global education in Uganda, the thought was—they were struggling with a lot about how do kids learn and what is—how is the brain sort of wired for reading development and language development more generally. And there was amazing work in the States and in Europe and elsewhere around this, and yet, none of that was really brought forward because the people who worked in international education only worked in international education because you could only get a job in international education if you'd already worked in international education. So, anyway, that kind of crossover.

But I digress. I wanted to talk about Fred Fischer. Fred Fischer was, again, sort of a mentor. He was the person who ran the personnel office for the Asia bureau. And he required that everyone that was going—

Q: So, he was the head of the Asia Bureau management office?

WISE: Yes. He had lots of important jobs throughout his career, but at the time, that's where he was sitting. He made everybody who was an IDI going out to an Asia posting, rotate through his office. And they didn't have a separate desk, but they shadowed him everywhere. He made you go over to the personnel office, which was across the street, and you had to follow up on all of the pending assignments and personnel actions that were in his portfolio. Well, why is that interesting? It was interesting because I really had to learn how the agency works – hires people and promotes them, how assignments are made – and the decision-making process overall. Also, I rotated to the Philippine desk, the management bureau, and even the procurement office to get a good sense of the business side of AID. USAID is a bureaucracy, though by comparison to others not large; it's a kind of small, adorable agency. Many characterized it as having wonderful people and terrible management systems, and that probably hasn't changed a whole lot. But right from the very beginning, being required to have that immersion and exposure to the machinery of resourcing development as part of my training really served me well.

Q: Yes, absolutely. That's something that everyone should have an opportunity to do early on, to learn. (Laughs)

WISE: Yeah. But often, unless you're encouraged or forced to do it, you're too busy to either get to the field or do the work that you're uniquely trained for. I'm a health officer; I need to get on with doing health work. I don't need to bother with procurement and personnel and things like that.

USAID/Philippines 1980 --1981

The other thing was that I did language training, and I went to one of the contracted schools, not FSI (Foreign Service Institute), to do Tagalog. By this time, my soon-to-be fiancé/ husband was in China, and I was still in the States, not having started my first tour. We were off-cycle, as it were. So, I was highly incentivized to learn Tagalog fast and pack out for Manila.

Q: Get out to Asia.

WISE: Yeah, exactly. So, I think I went from a zero to a two proficiency level in nine weeks. It may have been eleven weeks. I then tested out and was able to go overseas. So, I came in in January and I went to the field in September.

Q: September of 1980? And, you went into the health office working with Steve Sinding?

WISE: Yes.

Q: And who was the mission director? Was that Tony Schwarzwald?

WISE: Yeah.

Q: And Mary Kilgore was the deputy, right?

WISE: She came in as the deputy toward the end of my time there. It was Dennis Barrett.

Q: Right. Those were the heady days of the big ESF (Economic Support Fund) programs in the Philippines?

WISE: Correct. There was a lot of money going to the Philippines – much of it ESF funding, not Development Assistance money. Working in health, I didn't have a ton of exposure to that as it was quasi-military money/rent for the Navy and Air Force bases there that was programmed for economic support activities. In the field, I was again encouraged to rotate to other offices and have other experiences, so that was a nice chance to get exposure to many things that were going on beyond just the health portfolio. Early on, I was lucky enough to be given a project to manage. I worked on an integrated health/pop/nutrition project in the Bicol Region in the central Philippines. I had the opportunity to travel, had some autonomy and responsibility, and I think I learned a whole lot more than maybe I gave or something. (Laughs) But it was great work.

Q: The family planning program in the Philippines was very controversial, right? There was the famous Cardinal Sin. I've always remembered his name.

Were you involved at all with—or you were observing the policy discussions around the politics of family planning?

WISE: Yeah. I was on the health side, so I didn't play so much on the pop side. And there were people like Billy Goldman and Charlotte Cromer, and then John Dumm.

There were lots of jokes about Wise and Dumm. (Both laugh) John Dumm was the big cheese on the population side. A Filipino doctor and I were working on the health side. We had a couple of people on nutrition—an IDI and a Foreign Service National (FSN). But yes, it was an interesting time in the sense that that population program was well established. It was trying to do somewhat creative things. It worked in the public sector but also started some of the early private sector approaches. I think another important thing about the Philippines program at that time was the exceptional number of FSNs. Many of them became TCNs or Third Country Nationals and served in other places. And so, I mean, for me, if anything—so I was, however old I was, not very old, and was the U.S. counterpart to a Filipino, male, doctor, older, more experienced, incredibly credentialed in his field. It felt a little off-sides or inappropriate.

Q: Yeah. Were you technically his supervisor as well? Did you have to do appraisals of him?

WISE: No, we both reported to Steve.

Q: Okay. That was at least one benefit (laughs), as I think that's one of the most awkward parts when missions are structured so that the interns are supervising senior FSNs who are far more experienced and knowledgeable.

WISE: Yeah. I went on to do plenty of that. (Laughs) But I didn't have it on my first tour. It was kind of a thank heaven since I was still an intern, so I was happy not to be put in that position.

Q: You said you rotated; did you rotate through any of the offices that were heavily involved with the ESF program? I believe that Mrs. Marcos was also involved? Did you have any contact with that at all or was that just over on the other side of the house?

WISE: I didn't.

Q: That was probably good. It would have probably ruined you forever. (Laughs)

WISE: Right, right. Though interestingly, I think it was my first or second week at post. Early on, Dennis Barrett was leaving, and he had been a particular favorite of Imelda Marcos's. And she gave a farewell party at Malacañang for him. She said, "Invite whoever you want," and so he invited the C suite – all the senior management, the office directors, and their spouses, and then he intentionally chose to invite the IDIs. There were several of us at the mission. So, we got to go to the White House equivalent for this party. It was heady and fun, but there were plenty of whispers about why are they here and why do they deserve to go to this thing. There were plenty of other people who had not been invited who either had been longer serving or more senior and so, that was a little bit awkward. But it was one of a number of events where you realized, gee, it's really kind of cool to be the intern, somebody that doesn't really count or matter, isn't even really in the pecking order. It gives you access that you wouldn't otherwise have, access to sit on Fred's couch and listen to a personnel discussion or access to asking a question because you're not a threat because it's not perceived that you have power.

Q: Yes. You can just absorb things and you don't have a responsibility or a function really. You're just like a sponge.

WISE: Yeah. But I did realize that—how important that was to me that Fred was thoughtful and clever and kind of out of the box in that way. I've tried to do that myself going forward and always invested in interns and tried to give them visibility and give them exposure to things and do more active mentoring because I appreciated it myself.

Q: Now, the big question about the Philippines is, of course, were you a good singer? Did you participate in the singing events that I understand are part of life in the Philippines?

WISE: Absolutely. Well, right at that Malacañang party, Imelda and Dennis sang a duet and I think it was “Tie a Yellow Ribbon.” That became the theme song of my whole time in the Philippines. It kept coming up. Then, we would go on field trips and again, Tony, the mission director, made a point of taking interns along when he was doing his field visits. So, I traveled with him more than once, I think, and that was where the singing was really abundant. You’d start at dawn, and you’d be at your second site visit of the morning, being served San Miguel Beer for breakfast with cold spaghetti with marshmallows on top, and then it was 8:30 in the morning, and it was already hot. You were expected to sing for your supper or your breakfast, as it were. (Laughs) And that was—it was before we all found our karaoke feet, our voices, but we kind of tried our best and chipped in, and it was recognized as something—it’s part of the culture and something that you need to do to be polite, and you just better figure out a song that you can sing.

Q: Yes, someone told me that Tony at one point told everyone that they had to learn a song in common as well because there were so many times that the group had to sing, and people needed to agree on some songs that they could all sing together.

WISE: Yes. It was a very “singing” place. I remember I was there for Christmas and the—now I don’t know why I started to raise this because I’m going to start crying talking about it—but the FSNs came around—here I go—came around to the—all of the residences where people were staying, and I was in an apartment building right on Roxas Boulevard, and they, I don’t know, called up or something and you were invited to come down to the lobby and they sang beautifully. And they sang—they sang “I’ll Be Home for Christmas,” and there was not a dry eye in the lobby.

Q: Yes, that’s a wonderful story that really says something about the closeness of the mission and the staff and the importance of the FSN community. Wow.

WISE: Yeah. They were great. They were great. Yeah.

U.S. Embassy in Beijing -- Leave Without Pay from USAID 1981–1982

Then, jumping ahead, I decided to get married and so, halfway through my tour, I took a leave of absence and moved to Beijing. That was a little unusual, and there was no promise that they were going to take me back, so that was difficult. But I decided that I wanted to do that, so I went and lived in Beijing and Robin finished his tour there. I did contract work— wrote the definitive pamphlet on earthquake preparedness for the American community, taught English, taught Chinese to kindergartners in the tiny International School there. Professionally it was weird going from having a top-secret clearance, diplomatic status and a full-time job to being a PIT (Part-Time Intermittent Temporary employee) at the Embassy. I got to understand it’s aptly named, those jobs, because they are the pits. I understood the experiences of others in the diplomatic community and it was weird and hard not to be working. A lot of my identity was already tied to my career.

I spent most of the year trying to figure out how to have some fun or do something else, and then it was over, and I went back to work. So. (Laughs)

Q: So, you were in the Philippines for a year and then a year in Beijing?

WISE: Right.

Q: So, that then takes us to 1982. Regarding your time in China, it must have been valuable to see the diplomatic community from the other side of the street? Was it a full embassy at that point?

WISE: Yes.

Q: Okay, I was trying to remember when it went from being a liaison office to a full embassy.

WISE: Right. It was a full embassy, but it had a DIY (Do It Yourself) infrastructure. Robin was living in the Peking Hotel for, I don't know, six months or so before the apartment was ready. Many people lived their whole tour in hotels and temporary lodging. His offices were in what used to be the garden shed behind the residence and the consular section was down the street.

Q: So, it was still pretty rough. Were you able to travel at all or was travel difficult?

WISE: Yes.

Q: Did you have to get permission?

WISE: All travel was by permit. There were maybe a dozen places that you could go on your own. Anything that was beyond (you **could** go to the Great Wall, but going to Xi'an or Harbin, in the northeast that was Robin's reporting area, for example) would require diplomatic service bureau approval. And you had a required interpreter—interpreter in the loosest sense – accompanying you the whole time that you were traveling. In our case, this was blatantly unnecessary because Robin was a five/five in Chinese, meaning he tested out as a native speaker with complete fluency. We worked within the constraints, he understood a whole lot more of everything that was said and happening than was translated, we had a great experience in the frontier days there.

We also had house help from the diplomatic services bureau, everyone had to, so they spent a lot of time dusting your calendar but not cleaning the toilets. (laughs) The phones were all tapped. I had the only red bicycle in Beijing at the time, and people would report that they knew that I had turned right on Elm Street—the equivalent—at 10:20 a.m. because they had sentries in all of the boxes along the street. There were a couple of government cars and a few taxis, and some diplomats had vehicles and otherwise, it was just all bicycles all the time. I was just talking to someone recently who is from Beijing,

and the ring roads, you know, so they had the equivalent of a beltway, so they were just working on the first beltway when we were there, and they now have, I forget, they're on their, like, sixth or seventh.

Q: Yeah. And this was before they began to experiment with a Chinese brand of capitalism and really began to move forward on the development front in dramatic ways; is that right or were you beginning to see it?

WISE: Yes. Deng Xiaoping was known as the father of science and technology and economic liberalization. Things started to open up as we were there. A few private markets for fruit and veg sprung up under overpasses. Some foreign direct investment was taking place. The Coca-Cola bottling plant opened while we were there. And there were others—some extractive industry folks and an international lawyer (Paul Theroux's brother) who would hang out at the Peking Hotel and share “war stories” of doing business in China.

Q: So, it was beginning.

WISE: There was some openness, but Beijing as the capital was much more buttoned down than some of the other cities. You'd go to Shanghai and with all of the communism and the post-revolution activity, it still had vestiges of a seedy port town. There was more color on the street – a bright barrette in a woman's hair, a colorful scarf or shirt. While in Beijing it was a sea of gray. Everybody was wearing Mao suits and the only color you would see was in the winter when people would wear neon purple, pink and green long johns and you'd see a little bit of it sticking out at their wrists and at their neckline. It always made me giggle. It was a fascinating time to live there.

Q: Yes. I was asking in part to see if you were observing things that came back to you later in your career that the Chinese did.

WISE: Sure. They were the ones that started the methane digesters from the toilets in the communes, and that was something that others have adopted. I was beginning to observe the complexities of state-owned industries, environmental compliance, privatization, and the evolving democratic processes at the municipal level. Decentralization became a growing thing in national strategy in many countries. The Chinese were grappling with it early on. I took lessons also from my time in China on the incentives and disincentives of localization of economic and political activity and the criticality of enforcement/implementation of policy. You need more than a good policy to get you very far. Their environmental regulations were not so dissimilar from those of the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency), and yet their administration and the incentives around them were very different and decentralized. A lot of the big polluters, particularly in the Rust Belt in the northeast, were industries, and the proceeds from them were held at the local level, but so was the pollution. If the central government decided to close them it had an impact both on the prosperity of those communities but also on the air quality and water quality of those communities.

There was a lot that was interesting and generalizable to other developing country contexts. And, having worked in China in the early days and then later in Africa, where there was Chinese investment, laborers on the ground and sourcing of raw materials for export to China, it was helpful to have that bridge of understanding of the Chinese system.

At the time, in China, I did not have the foresight to understand how and if my experience there would serve me. I was told by personnel I was putting my career at risk by going on leave without pay, especially since I was not yet tenured. And I was not able to do development work there. There was no USAID mission in Beijing. It wasn't for another twenty-five years, maybe more, that we even understood China as a development player. USAID went on to have somebody who was posted in Beijing and was working on development cooperation with them. My time there was a pioneer era before any of that was thought through. (Laughs)

Q: Or even dreamed of it. Okay, So, we're into 1982 or so when you're leaving Beijing. Now, were you returning to Manila? Where were you going?

WISE: Unfortunately, they were not able to keep my job vacant in the Philippines so when my leave of absence ended, we returned to Washington. We also decided that it would be good for us as a family if we were both in the same personnel system. My spouse was really interested in development, not so much the State Department side of work as an econ officer. So, he joined AID, and I was already in AID, and we looked around for a tandem assignment. I was pregnant at the time, I don't know if it was widely known. I felt, as did many, that it was a liability to let folks know you were pregnant when you were bidding on assignments. The personnel officer called me and said, "We have an assignment for you, an opportunity for you." The position was in Niger, and I would be expected to go, I don't know, ten or fifteen minutes after I gave birth and then be there by myself with the new baby for a year. And then the other opening for my partner would be a year later. So, I sort of politely said, "Do you know what tandem means? It means that you go together! Let me get back to you on that." What became clear to me then, and I think to a lot of Foreign Service officers and a lot of job seekers—I say this to students now when they're looking for jobs—by the time it is posted, it's either already filled or it's a job that you probably don't want. You really need to be proactive with your career, and especially, in my case, if you're trying to manage a tandem assignment.

So, we got more involved and found a tandem assignment in Barbados, in the Caribbean.

Q: Now, were you in a position in Washington or had you been temporarily assigned to something in Washington?

USAID Washington—Health Officer in Near East Bureau

WISE: Yeah. I was in a backstop fifty job, and I was working for Barbara Turner in the Near East bureau.

Q: And Robin came into USAID? Did he come in through an IDI class or as a mid-career appointment?

WISE: He was a mid-career. He came in as an economist.

The person I replaced when I came into the Near East bureau was Joe Haratani. He had a lot of years credited toward retirement because he got government service credit for when he and his family were interned during the war in a Japanese internment camp. Then he'd been in the Peace Corps, and he became an engineer. I, a non-engineer, took over his portfolio of backstopping, inter alia, the health components of large water and sanitation projects in Egypt and Yemen. Working with engineers, all of whom were male and about 40 years older than I was an adjustment. Joe and I overlapped some before he retired and he gave me some pointers. I admired him. He was quiet and wonderful. He'd done great work over the years, and I just thought, wow, if I could carry on doing the work that Joe's been doing, I'll be—I'll feel good. But what Joe had not had to deal with I did – the dynamics of being a female, little squirt, and trying to deal with these older, male engineers in the bureau who didn't think I knew much about anything, which is not too far off. Working on these massive projects that had been going on forever and were big-dollar sums. We did some interesting work around health add-ons or looking at parallel projects, and I also worked on health projects in Egypt in particular. I had the opportunity to go out to Egypt. So, that was interesting and good.

My father-in-law was a navy doctor, and he did biomedical research; he basically invented oral rehydration (and won the prestigious Lasker award for his work), which was something that AID then decided that they invented, and lots of people have invented it. But he demonstrated clinically that it could work when he was doing work with MATLAB or the ICDDR (International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh) in Bangladesh. So, here I go to Egypt to work on a big ORT (Oral Rehydration Therapy) project that JSI (John Snow International) is running. There's this guy, Bert Hirschhorn, the doctor in charge, and wouldn't you know, he had worked with my father-in-law back in Bangladesh. I guess a lot of AID people, either grow up that way—or through their work they develop these sorts of interesting connections. I didn't have any through my family of origin, but I did have through my family of marriage.

Back to Egypt, I recall arriving at the chaotic Cairo airport, carrying two suitcases full of disposable diapers as a favor for Bert's research project studying fecal output in infants using rice supplement to the ORS. As a childless person, it was an interesting experience to try and explain to customs why I was bringing such a large quantity of diapers into the country.

So, I did health, population, and nutrition program backstopping in the Near East Bureau for almost two years. It was a dynamic office, well-led by Barbara Turner. She was later, much later, to be my boss again.

Q: But then the Barbados assignment finally came to be.

**USAID/Regional Office for the Caribbean -- General Development Officer
1983 --1988**

WISE: Yes, though in the meantime I was pregnant with my first child, not feeling like I could disclose it until the deal was sealed. Try holding in your stomach for six months! Hard to do, but certainly easier than in subsequent pregnancies! I had the kid and then about six weeks later we moved to Barbados, and then I started as a GDO (Global Development Officer). So, I had moved backstaps to a General Development Office position, a backstop 12.

Q: So, you had a mixed portfolio? Was it health plus other things?

WISE: It was health, education, and engineering. There was a big participant training program. It was a regional office and we had responsibility for the Eastern Caribbean countries from Antigua to Grenada, and regional organizations like the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (St. Lucia), the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC) (Trinidad) and CARICOM, the Caribbean Community Secretariat in Guyana.

Q: Who was the mission director when you got there?

WISE: It was Jim Holtaway for most of the time we were there. And Terry Brown was the Deputy.

So, did you have to travel a lot then from island to island?

WISE: I did, especially to Grenada. This was before there was a Grenada mission, they were setting up a separate office just for Grenada during our time in the Eastern Caribbean.

Q: Were you there at the time of the invasion?

WISE: No. And I think it was an "intervention."

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, right. (Laughs)

WISE: We arrived after the intervention.

Q: Okay.

WISE: Robin, when he was in Washington, one of his big pieces of work in preparation for that was to do a cost-benefit analysis on the Grenada airport. And, parenthetically, it was negative, and we went ahead with the project anyway.

Q: And you got to worry about the mental health hospital?

WISE: Yes. The U.S. military bombed the hospital, and so then we had to rebuild it. I was there as they were to christen the hospital and I was literally making beds in the hospital to make everything look okay for the press. We had Project Hope there for a long time, doing their thing and also sponsored lots of overseas training for students from Grenada and other islands to the States. We had Paul White (a magician as a hobby in addition to his “day job”—do you remember Paul White? pushing various participant training programs. We had PTIIC, the Presidential Training Initiative for the Island Caribbean, and so we had folks from all these different islands that were sent up to HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and to other training places and then brought back down. That was the first time I’d gotten involved in participant training and realized how powerful it is and also what a pain it is to do programming, everything from fair selection to the monitoring and placement and then hoping and trying to ensure there’s return upon completion. So, there was that.

It was challenging because it was a regional portfolio, so it required trying to figure out what to do in different places and what you do through regional organizations. One of my favorite initiatives was developing a regional pharmaceuticals management project. It was an early effort to centralize procurement, leveraging economies of scale and rationalizing drug management across various island nations. Individually, these nations lacked economic efficiency, and corruption was a significant issue. We implemented it as a regional program through the OECS.

Q: So, it was an early supply chain management activity.

WISE: Exactly. Exactly.

Q: But doing it on a regional basis?

WISE: Yes. Also, thinking about formularies and how to systematize the right treatments for different disease conditions, and how you popularize that. But you’re right; it’s all supply chain management and demand forecasting and pooled procurement.

Q: But working on important policy issues with a lot of different countries simultaneously.

WISE: Yeah, exactly.

Q: Were you having to negotiate with them all individually and get them to buy into a regional concept?

WISE: The bilateral negotiations were challenging because they had different supplier and sourcing dynamics, and not all of them were onboard with a new way of doing their drug procurement. Montserrat, for instance, was still a protectorate of the UK.

Q: The Caribbean Basin Initiative, this was the Reagan Administration and that was one of their big initiatives as well. Did you have any exposure at all to that from your

position, or was that handled mostly by Washington? Or—I assume there was a big private sector development office in the regional office.

WISE: Yes, it was very Washington-driven, and we had some private-sector programming but not out to the office I ran. Robin worked on some of the macro-economic and structural adjustment arrangements coordinating with the Bank and the Fund. It was interesting how we approached our work, particularly as a regional mission. Throughout the planning period, we grappled with creating country-level strategies, and the challenge was determining how much detail to include and how to shape each strategy to fit into the larger regional framework. Then, what do you do in terms of squishing them into a regional strategy? At the same time, you had separate appropriations for Grenada, and you had a separate mission there eventually, and so they were part of the region, but they were also a little bit—it was like having a supplemental in today's terms. Regional mission planning and programming were interesting. Each of the countries was starting to undergo some structural adjustment negotiations, and we were trying to do five-year plans that were both individual and collective.

Q: If you had technical assistance on the pharmaceutical program, you probably had a technical assistance contract, would be my guess.

WISE: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So, was it one contract that covered all the countries?

WISE: It was.

Q: So, you would try to centralize as much as you could in terms of mechanisms?

WISE: In my portfolio, many of them were regional projects, so for example, the pharmaceuticals one, MSH (Management Sciences for Health), came in and they had a cooperative agreement for the whole region. The Eastern Caribbean countries didn't have separate USAID budgets, so there was no buy-in mechanism. It was more me supplementing all of the activities with buy-ins to AID/Washington instruments to do work in a specific country. That was more the way it looked.

Q: Okay.

WISE: But for anything that we were a direct drive on, like the pharma project, we had long-term advisor(s) regionally deployed, and then short-term technical assistance that was country specific.

Jumping back to the Philippines, it was interesting they had transitioned from loan projects to all grant assistance but within those grant agreements (which had both contracts and grants under them) some of the agreements had fixed amount reimbursement (FAR) components that included conditionality and benchmarks and

pay-for-performance elements that were similar to what is now being called innovative financing. We were doing it back then.

In Barbados, procurements weren't particularly exciting, but there was an opportunity to address issues like teen pregnancies (one in three births) and promote economic diversification beyond sugar cane, rum, and tourism. There was also some infrastructure work happening. I recall infrastructure projects in Saint Kitts Nevis, St. Lucia, and Grenada, including roads and port construction. While not directly involved, I found it fascinating. In Grenada, we focused on tourism development, microenterprise, and investment promotion, working both regionally and in individual countries on export development and investment initiatives.

Q: So, it ended up giving you an opportunity to be exposed to a lot of different kinds of work which fed into the rather varied career you had? (Laughs)

WISE: Exactly.

Q: And how long were you in Barbados in the regional office?

WISE: Almost five years.

Q: Wow. Well, that's one of the things when you get a tandem assignment. Sometimes you can stay in one place longer. I hadn't realized you were there that long. So, until late 1987 or 1988?

WISE: Yes, 1988.

Our second tour was soon ending, and we looked around to see what would be available for a tandem couple. Then we learned that the Mission Director in Somalia, Lois Richards, needed help filling vacancies there and demanded from HR a list of all the tandem couple officers who had yet to serve in a hardship post. This was referred to as the Somalia hit list, and guess what? We were on it. Here's how it happened. During the assignment season, someone in your geographic or technical bureau would be a point of information as to what is coming open and who is likely to fill it. My backstop for health and GDO folks in the LAC Bureau had been on leave right before I called in. I said, "So, what are you hearing? What's going on?" And he said, "Well, just let me check. I haven't been around." And he comes back and says, "Well, are you sitting down?" He said, "Wait. Are you lying down? I need to tell you that you're on the Somalia hit list. And so, it may be that you and Robin will be forced to be placed in Somalia." Which, you know, maybe on the face of it wouldn't have been the worst thing, but of course, I don't want anything that somebody's forcing me to do, so I was like, hell no.

Q: And at this point you had one child, two children?

WISE: We had two children.

Q: Two children, okay.

WISE: Somalia was not a great family post in terms of schools; it was a pretty small portfolio and wasn't necessarily what I wanted to do. So, we extended—we dug in, as the term people would use, which gave us some cover, and Jim was happy to have us. But the idea was that we were supposed to serve this other year. Meanwhile, after the extension was approved, I found out that because I'm mildly asthmatic, I wouldn't have gotten medical clearance to go there anyway. Oh well. This goes back to the accidental nature of my life. (Laugh)

So, then we're still cooling our heels and working in Barbados when someone reaches out to Robin and says, "We have an opening for an economist in the regional office in Kenya. Do you want to go?" Robin said, "I'm a tandem. Would there be something for my spouse?" At the time, Monica Sinding was the Deputy of the REDSO/ESA (Regional Economic Development Support Office for East and Southern Africa) where there was a vacancy for Robin. Steve Sinding, her spouse and my old boss from the Philippines, was the director of the Kenya bilateral mission.

USAID/Kenya -- Private Enterprise Officer 1988 -- 1991

WISE: Steve contacted me saying, "I don't have a health officer position, but I have a private enterprise officer opening. Do you want it?" And I was like, "Sure. What's that? Sure." So, then, that chapter is called *Condoms to Convertible Debentures*. We pulled up stakes, burned bridges with the mission that we were leaving early, and moved across from Barbados to Nairobi with two kids and landed there. I had managed to take a week of private enterprise training offered by a USAID contractor, and, while hardly an expert, I dove into a new challenge. The portfolio I took over had some microfinance, but it also had the development of a capital markets authority, a pretty complex bunch of SME (Small and Medium Enterprise) bank lending programs, and a new venture capital portfolio. I learned so much in Kenya!

Q: And this was 1988 or so?

WISE: Yes; 1988 to 1991.

Q: Okay.

WISE: You were in Malawi at that time, right?

Q: I was in Malawi beginning in 1988, but I was in Africa PD during the 1985 - 1988 period when a lot of those Kenya programs were designed and reviewed. It was very exciting stuff they were doing, yeah.

WISE: Yeah, yeah.

On a personal note, Nairobi was an amazing place to live, with stimulating work and a great community and social life. When I took the job, it was a BS 94 (project development officer). This was my third backstop in my short time with AID. The cool thing about the foreign service, unlike the civil service, is that you carry your personal rank with you, but you can assume the position and backstop of the chair you are sitting in. It allows for lots of mobility and growth if you want it.

Q: At this point, what grade—do you recall what grade you were?

WISE: I was probably an FS-2.

Q: And you were heading up the office?

WISE: No, I was not heading up the office. Doug Kline was the head of the office, though he left pretty soon after I got there. Then Gordon Bertolin was head of the office—I was the lead of the private sector division, which then became a separate office which I led. As I began there were all these PDOs (Project Development Officers) in there, like Carla Barbiero and Jerry Tartar, and then some PSCs (Personal Service Contractors).

Q: Wow. It was a huge office. This was the private sector office. Or was it a combined project development and private sector office?

WISE: Exactly. Exactly.

Q: Okay, got you.

WISE: I assumed the new role after the incumbent left in somewhat awkward circumstances, and it was hard at first since I felt like a fish out of water. As a health officer, you were part of a tight group with a strong esprit de corps and lots of support. And if you left, then you were, like, not one of them anymore.

Q: Yeah, right.

WISE: I felt like I didn't have that community anymore. Overnight I became a BS 94 (project development officer). This was considered a power cone and a closed shop. I felt I wasn't a "real" ninety-four and hadn't served in Africa as many of them had. I remember a conversation with two male supervisors and me shortly after arriving in Nairobi. They said I was not ready for the work since I had not served in Africa, what did I really even know about the way governments worked there, adding I didn't know much about Africa at all, and I didn't know anything about the private sector. Not exactly a warm welcome.

One of the things that I was able to say with surety, was, "Actually because Kenya and lots of other places I've served are former British colonies, I'm very familiar with the British civil service system and its terminology, incentives, and organizational structure. I

feel quite comfortable navigating this system, probably more so than someone coming from a Francophone West African background, which is quite different. As for the private sector, it's not rocket science and I am a quick study and open to guidance.”

Q: Yeah.

WISE: But they didn't want to make it a separate office and they didn't want to make me the office director. I had sort of understood that was going to be the case when I went over there.

Q: Right. But you were responsible for the private sector portfolio?

WISE: Right. And I had two—three FSNs and a couple of PSCs that worked for me, and so I didn't have a U.S. direct hire, but I had a staff and a portfolio. That went on for a little while. We had great projects, a good team, and lots to learn and do. After a while they did create a separate office and made me the director.

Q: For private sector development?

WISE: Yes.

Q: You had mentioned some of the specific projects and things that you were working on, such as venture capital and microcredit. Were you also doing work on the enabling environment as well? Did you have some policy-based programs? Because this was the time when the Development Fund for Africa was in place, did you have any non-project assistance related to that? Or were you primarily supporting policy research, think tanks, and stuff like that.

WISE: I was working with a couple of trade associations like the Kenya Association Management and the Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry. And we were programming PL 480 residuals to support a Capital Markets Authority and the enabling legislation to create it. The agriculture office was promoting horticultural exports through a horticultural crop development authority. I had inherited these SME lending projects with huge pipelines. They weren't moving our grants funds through lending to SME clients. In analyzing it and actually speaking with the lead bankers involved, I learned that the spread was such that the banks weren't making enough money on the lending to make it worth their while. And we were asking them to do a lending-risk assessment that they were not trained to do. We led training programs for bankers to help them transition from collateral-based lending to cash flow and project-based lending. And we got policy reform to enable the interest rate to rise so the banks were incentivized to lend. The stock exchange was still quite basic, with no formal trading floor. We helped create a capital markets authority. We also did capacity building, bringing in a board and a chief executive. We advanced a policy change to allow pension funds and companies like ALICO to invest in the market and purchase bonds. We also worked with non-banks, including the Ismailis, on developing non-bank financial institutions and leasing instruments. And then, what else?

Q: While you're thinking about that, a question, because I know that if one looks at issues that Kenya has confronted over the years obviously there are the political and governance issues, including corruption. Were you thinking about this or doing any related work in your private sector work? Or did it all seem to be operating in a fairly routine way so that wasn't a concern, at least during that period?

WISE: I did work with public-sector entities around financial transparency and limiting the role of the state-owned ag bank. They were crowding private lending and targeting loans politically. We were trying to make space for private banks, to set the terms of engagement, and to create more transparency about interest rates. We did some work with Hernando de Soto and ILD around dead capital or asset loss and informality. We did some research work on the informal sector cost of lending. And we pioneered private sector assessments with J E Austin Associates that included multiparty focus groups and led to a new private sector strategy for USAID engagement in Kenya. The issues that we focused on were not so much about big government corruption, but we worked a lot with bank and fund colleagues on things like price controls and removing price controls. Funnily, at the time, Coca-Cola was price-controlled, so a bottle of Coke cost the same at the far end of the Maasai Mara as it did in downtown Nairobi while the distribution costs were vastly different.

Q: The same cost.

WISE: —seven shillings and it was also the same price at the airport and the same price at a local market. Bread was also price-controlled. We worked to remove that and open the economy and create transparency, bringing in new actors. With my private sector strategy work there was also a focus on building trust because a lot of the private sector players were Asians while most private sector workers were blacks. We engaged the Aga Khan's Industrial Promotion Service (IPS) on venture capital and business development projects. We also started Kenya Equity Management. Unfortunately, one of their first "development project" investments was Gringos, you know, the Tex Mex restaurant that was on the outskirts of Nairobi. The IPS owned major businesses like the Serena Hotels, the Daily Nation newspaper, Diamond Trust (a leasing company), Jubilee Insurance, Leather Industries of Kenya, and more. They had vertical integration and transfer pricing between their holdings to ensure efficiency and maximize profitability. They didn't tend to promote black workers. In the focus groups, the African Kenyans would say that they would rather work for a white any time than an Asian.

Also in our private sector portfolio we explored entrepreneurial training, finance needs and creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem. It was in the early days of the "Doing Business" reports and looking at enabling environments and the role and powerfulness of everything from investment promotion services to EPZs (Export Processing Zones). There was some work around creating EPZs in Kenya that we also got a little bit involved with.

Q: Did the Kenya mission have an economist itself during this period? Or, did you rely upon the co-located regional mission? If so, I'm wondering how you worked across the mission because many of these were big ticket policy issues. I was just curious how that might have worked.

WISE: Yeah. So, we did have Gary Moser—remember that name?—and I think there were some others. We had our own program office, PDOs, and we had, obviously, technical officers in health, agriculture and education. We were well-staffed and did not have the economic analysis services from the regional office. I always had the feeling that there was a little turfiness and that the regional staff went to the missions without their own economists.

Q: Right. I was just wondering if there were ever differences of opinion on policy issues within the Kenya bilateral mission itself when you were dealing with important issues in your portfolio. Did others in the mission have other views?

WISE: For sure. The high-level discussions with the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank and even some bilateral donors were kept at the economist and front-office level. Those of us who were in the trenches were not supposed to be involved in making policy rather we were just implementing projects that—

Q: Right, so you were also dealing with the IMF and the World Bank as well.

WISE: Well, I was working on the operational aspects of our respective programs. I had strong relationships with some of the multilateral staff not because I worked directly with them but also because Robin worked closely with them on regional economic development issues.

Q: Yes, right, sure. And they came to you for information, I'm sure.

WISE: Yeah. There was a lot of that. I'm sure you found that this too—the Bank and Fund have an important role and they have a big pocketbook, but they often don't have a lot of ground truth because they're not there all the time. I found that not only did we have a deep understanding of the issues, but we also had a strong network of key contacts. Even the economist had no particular reason to connect with the PS of Finance or our counterparts, but these were my contacts when working with organizations like the Chamber or Manufacturers Association. At times, I felt there was a bit of jealousy around that. Definitely it was interesting that in trying to understand the private sector and political dynamics it was the people that I knew through the work that I was doing that were really interesting voices. I brought them forward to the director and others for further insights.

They would tell us what they needed in these early days of user-centered design. We would think “what you need to do is this,” and build it from up there and then it would come down and rain on the people. And what they were saying was things like, “we don't really need an export promotion project.” What we need is for you to do something about

customs reform so that we don't have to pay such high bribes or we don't have to get so much of our stuff stolen or diverted or delayed. And to the extent that you could bring forward evidence about how it actually worked and what needed to be fixed to make a difference, that was really, I thought, fascinating, important, and sort of turned the design process on its head.

Q: Yes; that's actually a very important lesson because too often we start with the solution as the export processing zone or something else.

WISE: Right, right, right.

No, you've got to remember that example they always gave about Tanzania and how they actually just mapped what it took to start a business or to invest in Tanzania. They did it in a highly visual way, and they showed that it took, I forget, it was like 380 days and X number of dollars, and there were 144 steps that you had to go through. They were able to present it to the prime minister who freaked out and said, "Okay, that's ridiculous and I want that fixed, I want that brought down," and they could show the rent-seeking opportunity at each level and without pointing fingers, saying, this person is taking a bribe, they could just say, this is a complex maze to go through. That allowed the chief executive to say you're going to bring it down in half within thirty days and here's how you fix it. I don't know how to fix it, but you fix it, and then it was an opportunity for people to go in and work on putting a lot of government folks out of jobs. (Both laugh)

Q: Yeah. No, it actually reminds me of a story I read in an oral history from the late fifties or very early sixties in Korea. Something similar was done there and the prime minister ordered the steps reduced immediately.

WISE: The leadership or the, yeah, the imperative. But part of it is on us. If you can tell that story, if you can describe the complexity and show what an end state could look like, then they can make the decision.

Q: Yes, right. No, absolutely.

One of the other things that was taking place at this time in Kenya was political—some political turmoil, as I recall. And I believe there was probably an election during the period you were there, and there were concerns about democracy. I know that a bit after you left, assistance to Kenya was frozen and/or dramatically reduced at a Consultative Group meeting.

WISE: Right. I think that it was after we left that they had that happen. But we did have Peter Eigen, the World Bank ResRep, who was taken with what he experienced in Kenya and went on to form Transparency International (TI). He was a neighbor and a friend of ours. We talked about how to recognize governmental openness and fair processes which led to his creating the Transparency Index with TI.

The situation in Kenya was puzzling. There was a lot of corruption and low transparency, and the Kenyan government consistently missed their structural adjustment targets, but the donors looked the other way on this cowboy like macro-economic management and the economy continued to grow. They were doing a good job at diversification. They shifted from focusing on coffee, tea, and tourism to flowers, fresh produce, and other horticultural exports. We supported cold storage development and technical assistance. Back then, the flower farms around Naivasha were just starting out, but now they are well-established. We also did significant work in microfinance. We worked extensively with the informal sector, including policy work on the Jua Kali sector and transitions.

Q: That's actually an important thing to make sure it stands out because you were doing the big-ticket venture capital stuff, but you were also working with the informal sector and microfinance. In fact, I think Kenya had some of the most successful microcredit programs in the world.

WISE: For sure. And plenty of them. By contrast, when I moved to Uganda in 1991 there were no microfinance institutions there. I worked on starting up microfinance work in Uganda, it is now prevalent there.

Q: What was the security situation like while you were in Kenya?

WISE: Not great. My house help stole from me, and you'd have purse snatchings on the street, but we didn't have the big carjackings that came a couple of years later. Everybody had guards around the clock on their compounds, safe rooms and security systems more generally. When I first got there, our home phone didn't work, and we had a party line. That was funny. I was on a party line with Pat Fleuret. (Laughs) And do you remember Derek Singer and Ruth? They were also on our party line. I remember they were moving out, and Ruth, his wonderful wife, was standing on the street as their packers were there and the telephone people were coming to rewire our houses for individual lines. Ruth is standing on the street shaking her hands, saying, "Now you're doing this? Now you're doing this?" (Both laugh)

Q: Two more general questions, not at all related to one another. First, do you have any observations on the school in Kenya? Were the kids in school by this time?

WISE: The International School of Kenya is, I hope, still one of the best schools on the planet. My kids would go on a school bus to school. Alex, our eldest, did kindergarten, first and second grade there, and then Ian was in nursery school only before we moved to Uganda.

Q: So, just the very early years?

WISE: Yes—but the highlights of it were things like the little children would do service trips. They would go into the community. They gave them a little bit of language orientation. The bigger kids would go camping with the Maasai. They traveled

internationally for their sports competitions. There was an IB (International Baccalaureate) high school program, a swimming pool that eventually became heated after they figured out how to—the monkeys kept crawling up and tearing off the wires from the solar panels until they finally figured out how to monkey-proof it so that they could have a heated swimming pool. It was a terrific school, and so from a recruitment perspective, anybody with a family was just dying to go there. And there were other family activities aplenty. We could go on the train with our family down to the coast and go scuba diving and beach combing. We did a lot of camping. And we could go climbing Mount Kenya. And two of the top five Indian restaurants in the world at the time were in Nairobi. There was theater from the London stage that was \$5 a ticket and we'd go all the time.

Q: So, an all-around tough assignment?

WISE: Amazing. (Both laugh)

Q: Now, interagency relationships? Were relationships good with the embassy and did you have a lot of contact with the econ section and others in your work? Any observations on that front? Was Hempstone the ambassador?

WISE: Yes, Hempstone was the Ambassador for much of our time there. The Embassy was several blocks away from the AID mission, so you did not run into Embassy folks in the office. And I didn't go to the country team meetings. You knew some people, mostly through shared connections like having kids in the same school or being neighbors, but there wasn't as much interagency interaction. The community was large, with so many donors, NGOs, and U.S. government agencies, so it was hard to meet everyone.

Q: Yeah, right. Okay.

And a question I should have asked earlier when you mentioned the FSNs in your office. I assume they played a very important role there, and many had been there for, I would assume for long periods of time?

WISE: They were very important. They—I don't know that they had been there for super long as the private sector programs were somewhat newer. It wasn't like the health FSN who would have been there for twenty-five years in the Philippines, and you wouldn't dare go to the loo without asking for advice first. The FSNs in the Private Sector Office in Kenya needed mentoring and training on how to work in USAID. It's sort of the nature of private enterprise work, I found, in AID. It's hard to recruit people, U.S. direct hire or contractors or FSNs because—

Q: There's more money in the private sector. (Laughs)

WISE: There you go! The opportunity cost is huge, so as I once inelegantly said, "You get the drunks or the folks that can't make it in the private sector" but that's not at all the case of, like, the people that I worked with. But that is an issue -- if they have private

sector experience, they don't necessarily know what it means to work for a government agency and how we do our business. So, one of the guys, for example, was a banker, and he was a Luo, the tribe that is said in Kenya to be good at banking.

Q: Right.

WISE: One of his most important contributions is that he knew everybody, and he could open doors for a conversation, he could help people understand what we were on about, because they were old boys, you know, from the same school/locale/tribe. He was a genuinely nice guy. He, unfortunately, was up-country visiting family and a tree—they were logging, and a tree fell on his car, and he was in the hospital, but he died right after that. I remember trying to go to the hospital and talking to the doctor and trying to help the family, and it was really traumatic.

Q: What about HIV/AIDS?

It was also early days, —with HIV, the doctor who was attending my work colleague suggested he may have been sick with that in addition to the injury from the falling tree. Our nanny took care of my baby and other child, she died of AIDS after we left there, and I didn't realize she was sick when we were there. I should have. And her husband had died of AIDS, and they were going to do bride inheritance with his brother, and I had to go and try and stand there and stand down all these men from her tribe to leave her alone. She was a second wife and trying to negotiate so that she wouldn't be taken.

And this was still pretty much very early days recognizing AIDS and in USAID's programming.

Q: Right. Let me ask you one other question and we can close for today. You mentioned the Luo dominance in the banking sector. Do you think that we pay enough attention to those potential issues of ethnic background in USAID programming? It would seem particularly important in private sector programming. Do you think that we take enough time to understand those dynamics when we're doing our programming? Or is there more we could do?

WISE: Well, it's such an interesting question, Carol, because now we're doing a lot of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) training and understanding that tribal references, in some sense, can be seen as a neocolonial concept and aren't always considered politically correct. In Kenya when I was there people had a strong sense of tribal identity. That eventually caused a lot of differences and violence. In contrast, Tanzania's leadership has promoted putting the nation first, with a prevailing anti-tribal sentiment that prioritizes national unity over tribal affiliations.

In Kenya, there was a historical rivalry between different ethnic groups. Kenyatta was a freedom fighter, a Kikuyu, and the Kikuyus held much of the wealth and business power, while the Luos often held positions in banking. Then, there was Moi, a Kalenjin (a smaller tribe) who rose to power. Working with Kalenjins in the government raised

questions about transparency, like the head of the capital markets authority, who seemed to have come out of nowhere. A curious situation happened with our Kalenjin gardener, who earned very little, yet was picked up in a white Mercedes limousine when going home for a holiday, leaving me wondering if there was more going on. There was also the issue of whether women could take on leadership roles, a complex dynamic both in the private sector and more broadly. We grappled with how to enable blacks from all tribes to advance in private industry, given that much of it is dominated by state-owned actors or Asians.

When access to finance, beyond microfinance, was based on relationships—like existing business connections or personal background—it wasn't inclusive. It often came down to who you knew rather than the business's needs. We tried to change that by teaching different appraisal techniques, so decisions were made based on the business itself, not on personal ties or whether someone is a woman or not. It's a slow, gradual change, but still important. The focus should always be on ensuring access and inclusion so that no group is left out due to their background, tribal affiliation, or gender.

Q: Yes; these are very complex issues.

Q: Good morning. This is Carol Peasley, and it is February 10, 2022, and this is the second interview with Holly Wise.

And Holly, I think when we finished up our last discussion you were in Kenya and just about to leave. I don't know what the process was of your transfer and how complicated it was for you as part of a tandem couple.

WISE: Well, thanks, Carol.

USAID/Uganda -- General Development Officer 1991 – 1995

So, yes, that was in 1991, and I loved my work and living in Kenya. It was a very stimulating job as a private enterprise officer. I got to work on a lot of new and cutting-edge projects for the agency, including some exciting private-sector collaboration and donor coordination that I found really valuable.

My husband was in a regional position that he also found stimulating. But it was like being a consultant in the sense that you are on the road almost all the time, particularly if you're good because you're in high demand from the various missions that need your services. At the time, we had two youngish boys at home, and they really missed their dad. So, we made a hard decision to think about a place where we could be working together as a family in the same spot. There was an overture from the mission right next door in Uganda. And so, we went for a "wooing" weekend, drove over, and talked a bit to the director and to others in the mission.

Q: Who was that wooing mission director?

WISE: That was Keith Sherper.

A funny thing that happened on that trip. We had the children with us, of course. Both of them were thriving at the International School of Kenya. It was a big school with amazing facilities, a very diverse student body, and lots of amenities. In Kampala we took him to see what would be their new school. It was the Lincoln International School, which at the time was a building with a field. And my cheeky son said, "This is it? No, thank you." (Laughs) Nonetheless, we transferred, and he got over himself and had a good experience, as did his younger brother. I joined the school board in Kenya and was also active on the school board in Uganda. I was the deputy chair, as I recall.

The transition work-wise was a big one for us. I went from a mature program and a solid team in Kenya, and Robin from a regional economist role, and both of us jumped into a bilateral mission that was very different. We were part of filling a critical shortage in the Uganda mission at a time when they were really starting to ramp up programming after twenty years of civil war, being christened as the epicenter for the AIDS pandemic, and with a lot of hopefulness about Museveni as the new leader, having sort of come from the bush and taken the reins of government. The donors, including the U.S. government, were very keen to try and be helpful and to devote a lot of resources to what was going on there.

Q: And what was the position that you went into?

WISE: I went into a general development officer position, I was an office chief, and I had health and education and engineering, and there came to be a private sector portfolio as well, but at the time, there wasn't too much of a private sector portfolio or programming there.

Q: Wow. So, that was most of the technical areas. Was there another technical office? Was there maybe an agriculture office?

WISE: Yes, there was. I also had, strangely enough, engineering. Otherwise, I would say I had the soft sectors or the social sectors, and there was agriculture and environment in another office.

Q: Right. I'd like to talk about a couple of the programs. I know that the education program was very well known throughout the Africa bureau. It was a policy-based program using the authorities for the Development Fund for Africa, and it was, I think, one of the first of those large sector policy-based programs under the DFA (Development Fund for Africa). Was that designed when you were there? Or earlier? Do you have any thoughts about that program?

WISE: I was there from the beginning and I led the design of that project, called SUPER, a new health program called DISH, and a private enterprise development project called PRESTO. We were big on acronyms!

Back to education, there was not much going on when I arrived. The only open activity was local currency support for rebuilding the Tororo Girls School. Back in the sixties, the Russians had built a boys' boarding school in eastern Uganda. In classic cold war tactics, the U.S. response was to build a girls' school nearby. And this school went on and on for some years, but by the time I got there it was falling apart. They had used a design from southern California with cement covered walkways connecting all the buildings on campus. But the local contractor had not used such a great recipe for cement, so that the school was kind of falling down and big chunks were falling off creating a hazard.

I went to Tororo several times to speak with the school leadership about repairs and rebuild needed. The engineer in the office went with me.

I remember, during project field visits, they'd often give a gift out of politeness. And in this area what they had to gift was wild turkeys. I did not know what to make of this the first time and the engineer and driver said it would offend if we did not accept it. So they trussed it up and put it in the car, and we drove back to the capital with this unhappy turkey flailing around. It would end up living in my garden until my next visit when, inevitably, I'd get another turkey. At one point, I had four of them wandering around, making noise, and making a mess. Eventually, turkey harvesting became a thing. We had one for Thanksgiving, another for Christmas, and by Easter, only two were left—nervous turkeys pacing around. One more went, but the last one got pardoned and ended up living out its days with a new owner after we left. (Laughs)

Q: (Laughs) I bet your sons loved these turkeys.

WISE: Well, they did. We also had two giant land tortoises named Bulldozer and Betty. We had brought a bucket of turtle eggs across the border from Kenya to Uganda, and Bulldozer (the female) went on to lay many more eggs in our new garden. She had a habit of laying them with her nose stuck in the hedge and her tail out over the curb of the driveway so unfortunately each one would hit the tarmac, crack and fry. We never got hatchlings from her, though friends who inherited these old tortoises went on to incubate the eggs properly and create new generations of Bulldozers and Bettys.

Anyway, we had quite a menagerie. We had dogs, cats, chickens, turkeys, and even six-foot-long monitor lizards—vicious creatures, but my boys loved them. Plus, we had some guinea pigs and rabbits, though they mysteriously “disappeared” when we were on safari.

Q: So, this all made up for leaving Kenya?

WISE: (Laughs) Yep. We took many of them with us from Kenya and then we acquired more when we got to Uganda. It's just sort of a side note to say what a wonderful, nature-based upbringing many Foreign Service kids can have.

Back to education—we started design work and collaborated closely with the World Bank on a large education loan. Through good donor coordination and creative design, we aligned with the government's needs. The World Bank focused on school construction and textbooks, while we contributed to performance-based Civil Service reform payments that raised teachers' salaries. Initially, many teachers were earning less than minimum wage, but this change helped bring them up to a living wage, making it easier for them to stay in the classroom. And in addition, the facilities were quite inadequate, and textbooks were virtually non-existent.

Q: Do you recall the size of the program? Would it have been around \$30 or \$40 million, something along that range?

WISE: It was called the Support for Uganda Primary Education Reform (SUPER) project, and it was a \$108 million program.

Q: And that would have been a combination of non-project assistance and project assistance?

WISE: Exactly. Eighty in the former and, then twenty and change in the direct technical assistance.

Q: And you linked the disbursements of the non-project portions to the Civil Service reform-related issues?

WISE: The first thing they had to do was get the ghosts out. They didn't have a proper head count of the teachers that were actually in service. There was a lot of work to tighten that up and improve the governance and transparency so that they were only paying for teachers who were actually there. Then the next reform was to classify qualified teachers in the civil service pay scale from where they were as casual workers, like street sweepers, to a higher rank that would provide them with a minimum living wage of about \$70 USD per month.

Q: Was there a technical assistance component that helped them to systematize all of that?

WISE: Yes. We had a team that was in a project implementation unit-type facility in the Ministry of Education that also crossed over with the Ministry of Finance on the disbursement and budget allocation side. Another team focused on teacher training and curriculum development. A key challenge back then—and still somewhat today—was that about half the kids weren't in school, and those who were often lacked basic numeracy and literacy skills. We had to decide between improving access or quality, and we chose to focus on quality first. The goal was to ensure that those who did attend

received a meaningful education, which could then serve as a foundation for expanding access.

Q: That's very interesting, because in most of the countries, including Malawi, where I was, it took a different tack. They focused more on access and then the quality issues rose very quickly. That's interesting.

How did that discussion with the government go? You say you all recommended the early focus on quality and then access. Was that discussed with the government and how did you reach agreement with that approach?

WISE: It wasn't put so starkly as you decide now to leave half the kids behind. The focus was on how to get better returns on investments already being made in the public sector, especially in education. One key way is to invest more in teacher training. While building schools and providing textbooks is great, it's even more critical to invest in the people—teachers—who directly impact students. Kids can learn under a tree if needed, but they need skilled teachers. The challenge in development is that the impact of these efforts, like improving teaching quality, often takes a long time to show results. When I asked for \$108 million for this project, I couldn't promise immediate results—real change might take 8 to 10 years, which is well after the project ends and the money is spent.

Q: But Washington bought onto your approach?

WISE: They did, which was great. I took the draft design to Washington, defended it, and got the green light to proceed with the final design back at the post. But my work was then interrupted. I was pregnant at the time with my third child and as we were working away on "birthing the SUPER project," I got cerebral malaria. I was forced to leave overnight, to be medevacked to Nairobi initially, leaving my spouse and two young children behind. And they told me you may not be coming back. And I remember saying, "But I haven't finished my project paper yet; I have to get everything squared away."

Q: But you did get it squared away, yeah.

WISE: I did get it squared away.

Q: That's something I'm going to follow up on specifically, but before that, I wonder if you talk about coordination with the World Bank's education program. Could you talk a little bit about coordination with other donors working in the education sector, and then a little bit on how you dealt with the ministry of education. You're dealing with them on a policy agenda, and other donors may also have been dealing with the same policy issues.

WISE: The education project in particular was co-designed with the World Bank. We were very intentional about determining our respective roles and in having a unified voice with the government. And I think that the fact that we were acting in unison as opposed to being in the usual donor cacophony was helpful, and signaled to the

government that we were serious, and this was going to be a large and successful sector reform activity. The Bank took on textbook procurement and school construction in a loan to the government, while we took on civil service reform in education, curriculum development, teacher training and student-achievement assessment. It was helpful to us to be able to go into AID/W saying we were part of a much larger program, and our investment was leveraging substantial co-investment from the World Bank. Even though, I think it was Wendy Stickel who said, “Well, I had a little sticker shock when I looked at the budget.” It was a big project at the time in AID terms, but it looked more solid because it stood beside an even bigger activity that the Bank was about.

We worked the projects’ alignment out informally and reviewed each others’ documents to make sure we had all the pieces complete. There was no formal agreement binding USAID to the World Bank, only a parallel agreement between each party and the government of Uganda. Later there were active donor coordination groups in several sectors at the country level, which I found really helpful. For example, we or the World Bank led the education group, while UNICEF chaired the health group, where we sat on it. I also started a private sector coordination group with donors who were getting involved during that time.

During this time we also got a wonderful education officer who then became the deputy GDO, and that was Patrick Fine. He ran the SUPER Project and did a super job of it.

Q: Right. I’ll tell you an anecdote, I believe this was in Patrick’s oral history interview, that when he went back to Uganda years later in his FHI 360 role and went to the ministry of education and they were talking to him about their education program and all the principles were the things that were built into the program that you designed. He said it made him so happy to hear it described as their program. You all deserve tremendous credit for that sensitively done design.

WISE: And, it was their program, exactly.

Q: Just to complete the picture of these non-project assistance/project assistance packages, as dollars were disbursed, I believe that local currency generated went in as budget support to the ministry of education and thus helped support the World Bank program and covered construction costs. Correct?

WISE: Yes. It went into a programming pot.

Q: And thus became a model for sector-based policy programs throughout the continent.

WISE: Yeah. And built real capacity in terms of fiscal planning and budget management on the part of our counterparts, as well.

Q: Yes; to me it’s one of the really fine examples of what they call localization today.

WISE: I agree.

And also there was, with a small number of donors and expats, a closeness and sense of community and connection to the people we served that was rare and rewarding. We were on a first-name basis with the permanent secretary of finance, and we were comfortable interacting directly with a lot of the people in the various line ministries. And speaking of localization, we worked directly in support of a lot of Ugandan institutions that were doing really important work.

One of the interesting things that happened was when a new health officer, Jay, joined our team and looked at the family planning association. He saw the challenges the local family planning association faced—similar to many others worldwide, some stronger, some struggling—especially around sustaining services beyond project-based support. Jay had a smart idea: he suggested helping them buy their building. It wasn't flashy, but it was crucial. As you might recall from CEDPA days, real estate can make or break an NGO. It was about more than just providing funds; it was about investing in infrastructure, building capacity, and enabling them to continue their programming, fundraising, and advocacy.

A lot of my work was also overseeing a very rich health portfolio that had some kind of plain vanilla family planning, maternal and child health, and a lot of HIV-AIDS work.

Q: Right. And this was all pre-PEPFAR (The United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), just for the record. Yes.

WISE: This is pre-PEPFAR. We had an umbrella grant with World Learning (WLI) that was sub-granted to local NGOs for a variety of testing, counseling services, and aid to orphans. WLI also did capacity building, financial management and aggregated results reporting. They also did a good job of creating community between the different local actors and allowing more impact than if they were just being funded on a one-off basis. We had a couple of implementers in the portfolio that were really cutting edge in the world. The testing and counseling work we funded demonstrated that the two together could leverage behavior change, and counseling alone was not enough. Our findings helped to move AID/W in what they would fund/allow in programming to follow. The AIDS Support Organization, another leader whom others globally followed, provided care and psycho-social support to people living with AIDS, their families, and the orphans who were left behind. We worked with religious medical organizations (Islamic Medical Association and the Christian Medical Association) and faith leaders on AIDS prevention and leadership in behavior change within their communities.

Through creative programming, we were able to support organizations that were doing testing and counseling to make the case that people needed knowledge of their serostatus to be able to leverage behavior change and that just advocating abstinence or doing prevention work in the absence of that is not as effective. This was proven by data collected by the local implementing organization and disseminated through scientific papers and presentations at the international AIDS congresses. The Ugandan practitioners were twinned with the TA provider and our CDC staffer to analyze the data and author

the papers. We were supporting service delivery and as well real-time applied research that would determine the approach to the pandemic.

In working with religious medical associations, we engaged imams, for example, to talk about the importance of keeping wives safe for the well-being of their children. By partnering with local organizations and letting them design and implement their solutions with our support, we saw cases begin to plateau. It was also a time when we saw a lot of innovative, integrated programming using various channels, including non-state actors.

Q: Yes, and was most of this done through the grant with World Learning? Is this how you reached this multitude of local organizations?

WISE: A lot of it was done in that way. And there were buy-ins to central projects.

Q: Did you ever do any direct grants with any of these local organizations by the time you left or not?

WISE: There were direct grants with, as I recall, we had a direct grant with Case Western Reserve University, and I think something else with the University of California-San Francisco.

Q: But not with local—

WISE: And I think, as I recall, regarding the umbrella grant, there were several organizations that sort of graduated from that and then were able to take direct assistance.

Q: Right because TASO became quite famous. That became the organization that any VIP visitor to Uganda ended up going to see.

WISE: Exactly. Norene Kaleeba, then head of TASO was globally renowned and went on to other leadership positions in AIDS prevention and treatment outside Uganda. Compared to Kenya next door, Uganda at the time had a better enabling environment and more openness to HIV and AIDS. And then, sadly, it went backward.

Q: Were those changes after you left?

WISE: They put forward an ABC strategy that was homegrown or endorsed in Uganda. But then later, as you probably know, there was—well, there was a lot of concern about men having sex with men and hate crimes, you know, stigmatizing homosexuality, and from Museveni on down there was a much less open environment to programming. At the time also, Janet Museveni, the president's wife, was—she was sort of the patron sponsor of orphans, and so there was a—we had a lot of programming that was for orphan support organizations and had that sort of interesting access because we were seen as being helpful in leading on that. And the approach there was also—and I remember, it was interesting coming back from Uganda and going to the Hill for a conversation about something to do with orphans, and they were—and I can't remember who it was or why

we were having this conversation, but there was the suggestion that AID should start programming and help to build orphanages in the former Soviet Union. And what I was able to say, based on our experience in Uganda was, when I first got there, they had—there was this place called the Luwero Triangle, which had been—where there had been a lot of bush fighting. There were a lot of—the families were basically run out, but supposedly there were children that were left behind and were found just wandering around in the bush, and it wasn't clear who their families were. So, they were not AIDS orphans at that time, but they were war orphans. And they had this clever—instead of creating this institutional structure that would take them to another location, we worked with an organization that refurbished homes and built homes, built a little sort of community, and then brought moms, sometimes with their own kids, to be in a home, and then they would take children into the homes, which was thought also to be more—that was more culturally appropriate at the time, not to take children out of their locale and out of their tribe and out of their—everything that they might have as familiar and put them in institutional settings. Anyway, so we did that. We continued to do that in supporting grandmoms and extended families who had to take on the vast number of AIDS orphans and focused more on kind of livelihood activities and general support for those heads of household who were fostering a lot of orphans as opposed to taking the kids somewhere else.

Q: Yes. Again, you all did some cutting-edge work in Uganda that got picked up in a lot of other countries in Africa.

I know that at various periods of time Museveni and his wife were very close to programs that AID was doing and that there was a surprising amount of contact at different periods of time with both the president and his wife.

WISE: Yes.

Q: Was that during the time you were there, or did you have any exposure directly to them, and if so, what your reactions were, any impressions of them?

WISE: I certainly attended events where the president was, but I had some direct contact with the first lady. And you're right that those were the golden days and there were things like—well, he was very—the president was very interested in things that would—things in agriculture because he was a farmer, and things that had to do with rural livelihoods and the part of the country that he had come from. Our mission director wasn't really a farmer, but he had come a bit more from an agriculture background, and so I think they felt a certain kinship.

Q: This was Keith Sherper?

WISE: This was Keith still, yeah. And there were—before we got there, there had been earlier—you know, they have those long-horned cows that are in Uganda, and apparently, they were—a bunch of them had been imported from Texas back in the day, and so there were these historic connections that were important and interesting. For me, it was—I

was much—having worked on the private sector side in Kenya and working a lot with the Asian community there, particularly the Ismaili, who had done so much in investment promotion and banking and hotels and everything else. And we had a venture capital project with them in Kenya. Then, coming to Uganda, it was an interesting thing just to—there was a little bit of an Asian community there, but—

Q: Most had been driven out during Idi Amin, right?

WISE: Most had been driven out. So, this was like the—it was more like a—the nephew or the son who, something or other, would come back to pick up an asset that had survived.

In Uganda, some of our most interesting work on the private sector side involved partnering with the Uganda Manufacturers Association, and it was linked to a project in Washington that was on policy change, implementing policy change, just for a little bit of technical assistance and walking around money. We helped this local organization run focus groups and convenings with key private sector players, allowing them to identify grassroots needs and things that might seem simple to most of us, but things like they would—getting—they could uniquely get the right people in the room, and they could say things among themselves, and then to government that—you know, it's great if you're going to reduce the import controls, but you really need to do something about looking—you know, customs authority really need to fix that. It was something I'd heard also in Kenya. It was giving voice to the local actors who were able to say, if you were to fix this, or if you were to say this, or if you were to do this, I could do that, or I'd be willing to do that. And I remember the head of the World Bank resident mission coming into one of these sessions and saying to me, "You know, this is so much more powerful than anything we do. And this is so much more interesting than the way in which we program. And this is such a good thing, and we could do this." So, it was kind of, you know.

Q: Was that the beginning of the USAID private sector strategy in Uganda. Presumably there wasn't one or there wasn't much of anything. Maybe you could talk a bit about how you built the program. It would be interesting to hear how you went about carving out a role for USAID in a new area.

WISE: Yeah. It sort of started with this little bit of support to the Manufacturers Association. In doing a kind of initial scan, there was the Chamber of Commerce, which was much more about traders and tended to be a little more protectionist and—and then there was this nascent Manufacturers Association which had all the right people in it but didn't know how to work as a trade association, work in the policy arena and add value to its members. I read a bit and learned that there's a consulting niche focused on trade associations, helping them understand what people need, what they're willing to pay for, and how to balance their services. It's about finding the right mix between lobbying, advocacy, and business development or advisory services. And then, how do you think about special issues, new businesses or women-owned businesses or—anyway, so.

And then, the UN had this program that I had never heard of called TOKTEN (Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals, which was where they—someone who was the—who was in the United States or maybe anywhere outside of their home country who wanted to repatriate, they would pay their salary for six months, I think, or give them a stipend or something for six months in order to be able to go back. And so, there was this guy named William Kalema, who just showed up at the AID mission. This was, of course, when we were in a house, and we didn't have any kind of security or whatever, and I think we sort of sat on the front porch and had a chat. But he grew up in Uganda. His dad was a minister in the government and was the first minister to be murdered by Idi Amin. And they never saw him, never knew what happened; he just disappeared when William was younger. And William went on to the States, and he was a chemical engineer, and he worked at DuPont for a bunch of time and then decided that he wanted to come home. And so he came and went to work in the Manufacturers Association as kind of an advisor to them, and then he became my counterpart.

And so—and we did—and at that time, I mean, I was talking about the generosity of funding. I was trying to be really entrepreneurial in terms of piecing together anything I could get to provide some kind of support, so it was projects from Washington. At one point, I brought in a couple of students from the MBA Enterprise Corps—those talented business school students between their years. We positioned them as part of the Manufacturers Association's offering, where they could work with a member company for a while. We covered their costs and provided housing for them.

Anyway, so we did that kind of thing. We organized policy roundtables and did some work on organizational development for the Manufacturers Association and other groups, including the Chamber. At that time, unlike in Kenya, we didn't have a large private sector portfolio or many key players. There were no microfinance institutions when I first arrived, but we helped bring FINCA in, opening their first branch in Jinja. This kickstarted the arrival of more MFIs, which eventually formed an umbrella organization with support from the bank, Swedish partners, and other bilateral agencies. We also—so then, we designed a project called PRESTO, you know, acronyms are so important in USAID programming.

Q: Absolutely.

WISE: So, PRESTO (Private Enterprise Support, Training, and Organizational Development Project) was a private sector program that focused on entrepreneurial training, provided some loan support, and worked on creating a supportive policy environment. At the time, there was active coordination with the bank on private sector support initiatives, including aligning with government goals, supporting export processing zones, trade liberalization, and addressing tariff and tax issues, along with institutional support for building up the private sector.

Q: Since you were really focused on trying to expand the private sector involvement, were you also looking at potential agribusiness and processing? Were you able to influence how the agriculture office was working?

WISE: Yes.

They focused on agri-business, particularly in horticultural crops, with a big emphasis on high-value products like vanilla, chiles, and some work in fish. And both the input side—yes, as you say, there had been ongoing work with the ag extension, ag research stations international organizations as well as the ministry of agriculture, but this was an attempt to start to work with some of the crop-specific enterprises and see how to grow them up and connect them to markets. This included addressing challenges like cold storage and transport, alongside providing direct support to exporters and growers.

Q: Right, so the agriculture programs also benefited from the kind of policy work that your folks were doing? It was all integrated?

WISE: Yes; a lot of the businesses, you can imagine, were ag-related.

And so, yes, there had to be some coordination, even though I think personality-wise we were tending to be on parallel tracks a little bit. But what was needed was to be much more collaborative in design and implementation than we traditionally would have been.

Q: Very interesting, since too often technical offices become siloed. You had much more cross-pollination.

WISE: A lot of it comes down to the funding source. I remember one of my successes in creative programming when economic growth funds were hard to come by. I had access to funds for orphans, prosthetics, and microenterprise, but each had strict reporting requirements. So, I came up with a creative justification for how one pilot project could use all three sources. I mostly believed in it, but it was definitely a challenge. Sometimes, you just have to play the hand you're dealt.

Q: That's right. And you've got to be creative. No, that's wonderful. I'm sure that was a great project, meeting all those objectives. (Laughs)

WISE: Yep, yep. While we handled some high-level stuff, there were some memorable events—like organizing a huge bonfire to dispose of expired condoms from a warehouse in Uganda, making sure the process was properly documented for AID Washington. Another time, there was excitement about building an oral rehydration salts factory in Uganda to reduce imports. Now, the only problem about shipping things to Uganda is that they go by sea to Mombasa, and then they go by road at that time all the way up from the coast into the other country and then to their place where it's supposed to be. They shipped the machinery, but when it arrived in Mombasa, it got dropped in the harbor and sank. So, we had to get a new one, and it eventually got installed. But despite a clear need, the factory couldn't break even because organizations like UNICEF continued central procurement from abroad, making local sourcing tough. It wasn't until later that better policies came in to support local inputs for relief efforts.

Also, during this time that I was there, the Rwanda genocide happened. And so, that was also interesting from a development perspective to see how we—through the development program we kind of starved them to death with, I don't know, \$20 million a year or something at the program level. And then, when the killers and some of the survivors fled and were in camps in Tanzania and elsewhere, donors were spending almost a million dollars a day to keep them in soap and matches and food and shelter, as compared to the \$20 million a year we spent on prevention or development activities.

Q: You mean the \$20 million that was in Rwanda before the genocide? That was the program size.

WISE: Yes; the DA level there was—my understanding was about that. Then things went south, and then the cost of the cure is so much more than the cost of the prevention, which is the moral of that story.

Q: Right. As I recall, the Rwandans who came in had been based in Uganda. They had been pushed out earlier and they returned. And it was a significant number of people. There must have been changes in that part of Uganda after the Rwandans left. (Laughs)

WISE: Well, there were also ongoing concerns about people that were—there were people in the Ugandan government that were like, well, he's Rwandan, he's really a Rwandan. And as you were saying, the problems may have been fomented in Uganda, and people were harbored there and moved into Rwanda. The relief effort was through Entebbe, and that was interesting also because I had not—I'd been working on the development side of the house and then—

Q: So, you got asked to go down to work on the relief stuff in Entebbe?.

WISE: Well, I mean, no, I went down to the—I mean, the big planes would land in Entebbe, and interestingly, they would—then we had to repave the runway of the airport and do other things that were sort of rent or repayment for letting things come in through there. But I was the disaster response officer at the time, in addition to wearing other hats. So, when the DART team people came in, I went down the first time with them, and it was just interesting, a whole different world in the way of programming and of the lack of resources and the immediacy of everything was going on, but also this recognition that there's so much that could have been done to—you know, they have plastic buckets in the market there.

Q: Right.

WISE: Why not buy them there instead of—but also how it was disrupting everything, that the prices had gone—for housing and for wood and for everything else had just skyrocketed because there was such a scarcity all of a sudden that was created by all this influx of aid workers and relief activities. And this was also before there was really good—I mean, email only came in while I was in Uganda, and we definitely didn't have

the kind of mobile phone penetration and Wi-Fi capacity that would allow—so a lot of the coordination in the relief effort was really challenged because they were working with paper files to try and do the census work or to look at immunizing the children. There was no record of who had been immunized before so they were immunized—they would immunize them again.

One of the interesting things that I—that was a grant that the DART team was able to make—I think it was a seed bank, it was an international seed bank. And so, because what they—the Rwandans are big bean eaters, and they have all these different varieties of beans that they grow. And when they had to flee, and they were either just displaced or they were in a camp, they couldn't go back until—and what they realized, what the donors realized was—or actually just Kate Farnsworth—realized was that they were going to lose the crop and they were going to lose all of the seed stalks and it was going to be gone forever if they didn't do something about preserving it. And so, they gave a quick grant of not very much but to this organization that was able to go and take samples from all of the different crops and hold it in, I think they were in, like, Switzerland or something, that then would be accessible later or maybe one of the international ag research groups holds them. But that was just sort of an interesting, like—

You just assume that they can go back and resume their lives.

Q: Right. And Kate was the regional disaster officer based in Nairobi or Washington; is that correct?

But you were dealing with displaced people who were on the Uganda side, right? Or had you gone into the Congo?

WISE: Yeah. Many went into the Congo, and then they had a cholera outbreak there and they had to do desalination work. They had a lot of them in Tanzania. I don't recall any refugees in Uganda.

Q: So, you went into Rwanda, then?

WISE: We had gone into Rwanda. Then also came back to sleep in the border town. The big refugee populations in Uganda are in the north and I never visited there. Patrick did.

Q: Were you there when Brian Atwood and Dick McCall made an early visit to the refugees?

WISE: Yes, and I didn't interact with them there.

Actually, because I came on home leave right after—right—I mean, this started—I did one site visit with Kate and then basically left on home leave. I remember coming back to the States and it was during the O.J. Simpson trial, and there would be—and I was so consumed with this Rwanda situation. It was just so upsetting and important. Anyway, coming back and being in the States, and they would have, like, thirty seconds on

the—whatever they thought up to a million people that had been butchered in Rwanda, and then they would go to the forty-five minutes on the white glove and whether it fit and replaying the speed chase, and this was two people—every life is important, but it was just so jarring that yep, no one cares at all about—if they even know where Rwanda is—about anything that may have happened there, so.

Q: Yeah. Did you have any contact with one of the Rwandan FSNs, Bonaventure Nymbisi? He and his family were in hiding, and he went over the border into Uganda at some point. Did you have any contact with him?

WISE: I didn't, no.

Q: Or any of the other Rwandan FSNs?

WISE: No. I did have a funny experience of—you know, I teach at Georgetown now and here comes a student and she says, "Oh, you know, I kind of grew up overseas and my parents had been associated with AID work and then more and more." And then he said, yes, Dirk Diikerman came up in conversation and he said, "I was a little kid and they—and Dirk led the convoy of—taking us in our SUVs or whatever and our kitties and our puppies and our whatever's in the night and we drove to Kenya." I think they went to Kenya. He was part of that group and remembered, he grew up, obviously with them, and then came. And I was, "Well, I was not as immersed in it as you were, but I also had some experiences with that at the same time." Yeah.

Q: Speaking of FSNs, did you have a good cadre of FSNs in Uganda that played an important role? Any thoughts you have on the use of FSNs overseas by AID.

WISE: Yeah. I had the best FSNs in Uganda, and they were—and I'm going to sound funny, but in terms of going back and one of the things, so, one of the things—at the time there was—direct hires were going to training classes and going to various whatevers, and so I had decided that I would do some team building work. We did Myers-Briggs with the whole team, the FSN and direct hire team, and it was interesting because there was—outsiders, others had said, Oh, you know, they won't understand it, or it won't be appropriate, it's not the same, the indicators are not culturally transferrable and this and that. Well, it was wildly powerful. It gave them, first of all, sadly, the sense that I cared about them, and I was investing in them a little bit and I wanted to know them as much as I wanted them to understand me and others. But it also gave them a vocabulary to be able to understand each other or talk to each other. And it was very empowering. We also did—we did like a charity walk where we all did—took a day and we walked toward something, and then we got—made a contribution to one of the programs or one of the causes that were associated with our work. And everybody thought that was pretty cool.

I went back a couple of years later, and the FSNs, several of them women, took me to lunch, and they said—they weren't so keen on their director, and their point was just a lack of understanding. They were saying, Well, I don't even think this person knows what our type is or the reason that this person doesn't understand this is because they're like

this. We know they must be this type. And it was—anyway. I still hear from a couple of them, and that’s, yeah, a long time, going on thirty years.

Q: Right. That’s great.

Since you mentioned Myers-Briggs, I assume that this was done because you had taken part in some management training under the USAID contract with the Training Resources Group. That contract gave a whole cross-section of people throughout AID a common language and common understanding of management.

WISE: Exactly.

Q: It was very valuable, I thought.

WISE: I did too, and I did it a lot in different settings with people I worked with. They also had the Keirseley Temperament Sorter, a simpler version focusing on two key indicators, which I found helpful as well. It even helped my spouse and me understand each other better once we realized why we were, well, a little quirky! (Both laugh)

It’s also great for recognizing those who are outliers as valuable assets and figuring out how to bring out their strengths, even if they’re not the loudest voices in the room.

Q: Let me ask one really off the wall question, but you had mentioned at one point that you were pregnant when you went back for meetings in Washington, and I didn’t ask about the previous two children, but were the children born in the United States? Do you have any thoughts about how USAID manages maternity leave and how pregnancy is handled for women officers? Any thoughts about that that could be useful for future policy?

WISE: Oy. (Laughs) Well. Yeah, all three of my kids were born in the States because I didn’t want to stand in the way of them being able to be president, so that was important. They were all born at the same birthing center in Rockville, so I had midwives who attended my births. They were non-hospital births. And in terms of—and all three of them were fine except with the last. I mentioned that I had gotten malaria and had to be evacuated before I had logged out of my project paper design. And then, interestingly, I was instructed to go to Kenya, to the nearest place where there was a U.S. doctor. So, I went, and I was supposed to just by myself, having malaria, take the plane and then go to a hotel and be there. So, luckily, because I had served there before, I had friends there, so I went to Carla Barberos and Victor’s house, and I stayed with them. And then I had to go and get a malaria test. I had to go to see the doctor, who was a cardiologist, but he was Moi’s doctor, and he—Dr. Silverman, I think, was his name, but he was a U.S. doctor who had been there for a while. Great, a cardiologist—just what I need for my malaria. Not an OB, but sure, whatever.”

I went to the hospital and ended up waiting for about an hour and a half. The waiting room was a mix of Kenyan locals, sick Peace Corps volunteers, and other expats. I chatted with someone until they finally called my name. The doctor said I seemed fine but wanted me to get another blood test, so I headed to the lab. They struggled with the blood draw, leaving me with a big bruise. When I went to pay, I realized I'd been pickpocketed—all my money was gone. And so, I just completely lost it and just said, "I don't know what else you have in store for me, lord, but I'm pretty maxed out here. I can't take anymore," And started bawling. The kind receptionist let me go without paying, saying they'd bill me later. It was definitely a low point.

But then, in terms of the whole medical thing, yeah. I mean, I wanted to have a home birth in Uganda, and they told me that I couldn't because there weren't adequate facilities. Never mind that Patrick and Susan Fine went on to have a home birth in Uganda a couple of years later. But at the time, we did have an American pediatrician and U.S. midwives and other people there, but they were going to be out at the international AIDS meeting, so there wasn't going to be—

So, anyway, they said, You can't do it, and you have to go back to the States. And so, I said, you know, sort of reluctantly, I would go back to the States.

Well, then it turned out I got medevacked, and then when I went to Kenya, they said, You can't go back to Uganda. I said, "But I have two kids there." Then our nanny had gone blind and wasn't—and there was no summer school, and there was no power, and there was no way to kind of leave them just on their own while Robin was working, you know, fifteen-hour days every day and traveling, and so I said, "Well, my kids are going to—I had planned to take them to the States for the summer when I was going to have this baby." So, anyway, they wouldn't let me go back and get them, Robin flew over with the boys, and then I traveled on to the States by myself. Oh, and by the way, Alex has malaria while we're traveling, and he's, like, really, really sick.

So, anyway, finally get to the States and then manage to get down to Washington and sort of get sorted out. And I've got somebody that is going to be there with me. And well, this is all probably—but as it turns out that because—I don't know if they still have it, but there was a residence, a dependency form that you would list who were your dependents, and it was based on that that they would be allowed to travel with you on R&R or whatever. And we had, as a tandem couple there was one child on—

Q: Yours and one on Robin's.

WISE: —his and one child on mine. So, then it was determined that there was no approval for them to go to the States, so all the cost of bringing them and keeping them all that was disallowed when I went back to post. I had to appeal it to the controller general of the United States, who ruled in my favor, in order to get reimbursed for all of the costs associated with—

Q: That's amazing. It is truly amazing that common sense wouldn't have prevailed.

WISE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

The other thing is, by the way, there is no such thing as maternity leave.

Q: Right. So, you just use annual leave, and sick leave? Or home leave.

WISE: Well, first you use sick leave, but then, oh, by the way, when you are medically cleared to return to post, then again, the determination is you can't use sick leave after that. So, I come back after a reasonably traumatic time, with a tiny baby to Uganda, and want to take a little more time before I go back to work full-time and am told that I can't use sick leave because I'm not sick because I was medically cleared in order to return to post. So, even though I've got a million and a half hours of sick leave, I can't do that, and I have to use my annual leave. And I can't work part-time because there's no provision for that. And so, that was all that. And then, other things that I hope are so much different now, but at the time it was all so—you know. When I was pregnant in Barbados, I was the only woman on the senior staff who was pregnant or ever, you know, who (indiscernible) relationship. One of the other senior staff people, they talk about an environment they hope is going to change, I remember there was a lot of concern—somebody in the controller's office, it was determined that they were HIV positive and there was a suggestion that it could travel through the air ducts in the mission, and we were therefore all unsafe as a result of that. And that the person had it because it was God's curse because they were a homosexual, I think was the thing. Anyway. So, there's that.

We didn't have a lot of same-sex couples. I found it to be—there was no such thing—and in Uganda, it was fine for me. I could express in my office, because I had an office, and also could have a driver bring the baby to work for a feeding, but none of the FSNs had that. I lobbied to get a lactation room set up and so they weren't having to sit in the bathroom and do it on the toilet. Or more often just not nurse because they couldn't make it work. And those things, I think, have changed some, but I did find it all so challenging when you're trying to travel with a—when I had a regional job and I had to take a seven-week-old baby on a plane to another island and make a snap judgment as to whether the person that I had found to babysit him was an ax murderer or was going to, you know.

Q: Oh, this is beginning to sound like it should be a TV series.

WISE: I know, right?

So, it was—I wouldn't trade it for anything, but I wouldn't—I would say that there were certainly plenty of challenges to trying to be a mom and working overseas.

Q: Yes. And I think many of those challenges, unfortunately, remain. But hopefully the experiences that you've had and the fights that you had also led to some change and improvements for others.

WISE: Yeah, yeah. But you know, that said, I had the most wonderful, qualified, and loving nannies and helpers, and it was a whole lot easier for me than my sisters, literal sisters, who were having kids and working in the States.

Q: In the States, right. Oh, that's true, absolutely, absolutely.

Is there anything else on the Uganda front that is important to mention? We've talked about the private sector work, the education work, the HIV-AIDS work, living conditions. It sounds like it was a great place to live, I mean familywise, in a sense because security was okay while you were there. You guys, you were able to move around okay or—?

WISE: Yeah. There were carjackings and break-ins. And when we first moved there, there were problems with the demilitarization or demobilization, rather, of military people, and so there were kids that were riding around on their bicycles with a Kalashnikov over their shoulders and—

Q: Oh, my goodness. When did Museveni come in? The late 1980's?

WISE: Right. And so there was still a lot of chaos. There were people, colleagues, a woman that worked with me that, you know, a bullet came through their living room when they were sitting there at night. My kids definitely knew how to crawl to the tub and get in if there was—we had a lot of—we were very—we used radios, there were radio checks. My kids still remember what their call sign was. And we didn't have—there were no home phones, and they—for the longest time, maybe—maybe before I left, but—and even the mission was very poor—I think, like, we had one working line that was coming into the mission initially. I had to go down to the mailroom to get a call from the embassy to tell me that I had malaria when I was there.

Anyway, there also—there were, I think, probably—oh, and they hadn't changed the currency yet, so if you went out to supper, there were a couple of restaurants, and if you had supper you had to carry a suitcase full of cash because the bills were such denomination. And they—and on the high street, there was—I don't know that there was a single pane of glass that wasn't broken when we first—

Q: Okay—wow—okay. So, it was very soon after. I hadn't realized that—

WISE: Yeah. They still didn't have the Mulago Hospital at Makerere University where they were doing—in the sixties, they were doing seminal cancer research there. When we moved there, they were trying to get water back so that they could not only do patient care but also do the research and get all this extra support.

So, it changed a whole, whole lot.

Q: One last question then. You had mentioned the embassy. Did you liaise a lot with the embassy or were relations good between the AID mission and the embassy while you were there and did you, yourself, have either much to do with either the political section or the econ section or even the ambassador and DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission)?

WISE: We didn't—we weren't co-located initially. I mean, while I was there. And so, we had good relations; Wayne Southwick was there, he and his wife, they had been in Kenya when I was there. And then Johnny Carson came in. And so, my connection, yes, I had a direct connection with him and had interaction with him, but also his wife was kind of social and nice, and we did some things in a more wives/spouses' way than—

Q: Right. Right, and yeah, and he was obviously very interested in the development agenda, right?

WISE: Yeah. He was. And she as well.

Q: And supportive?

WISE: And so, actually, that said, yes, we would take—he would go on field trips with us, and we would sometimes, you know, go over and do presentations. And as with—well, probably more so even than in Kenya, there was a feeling that the action was in the AID mission, and we knew what was going on and we had the relationships and we had the ground truth and we—and we also had money, whereas one of my kids once said about embassy people, you know, they were friends with everyone from the embassy and various places, and they were telling somebody else, “Well, see the difference between State Department people and AID people or embassy people and AID people, the embassy people talk about things and the AID people do things.” (Laughs) And so, we were sort of proud of that, that we were—

Q: You were the doers.

WISE: Action.

Q: Yeah, the action people. Yeah, good.

WISE: But good relations and part of that was because it was a reasonably small and tight diplomatic community. We all ran the Hash (Hash House Harriers, a British running/drinking club), and we played around a lot. Another nice thing for us personally was we were a tandem couple, and Patrick and Susan Fine were a tandem couple, and so we were kind of a power dyad in terms of doing a lot of work and also really enjoying each other's company.

One of my biggest accomplishments, I was the doula at their second birth, their home birth.

Q: (Laughs) That's good. And I hope that you gave them the advice to make sure that their travel authorizations were done in a way that had the kids covered regardless of which parent they traveled with.

WISE: Right. Exactly. Yeah.

Q: So, those lessons learned are important.

WISE: Indeed.

Q: So, you're four years in Uganda. Now it gets to be 1995 and you guys are looking at what you're going to do next?

WISE: Right. And so, we've been out for thirteen years, so the guidance and also our kind of personal preference, except for Robin's, was probably—it was to come back to Washington for a tour. And so, we looked around a little bit and then each found something that was interesting. Robin went to work for Carlos Pascual, in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau.

USAID/Washington, Global Bureau -- Senior Advisor 1995 -- 1996

So, that for him was a big jump to a very different part of the world, and he embraced it and really did amazing work there. For me, it was Ann Van Dusen who suggested that Sally Shelton, who was the AA for the Global bureau, needed a new senior advisor. I went into that role. Coming back to Washington after a bunch of time overseas was more culture shock than going from one post to another overseas. Also, working in a staff position was just a whole thing to figure out.

Q: Yeah. Different. Different, right.

And the Global bureau at that point had all of the technical offices?

WISE: It was Energy to AIDS, it was environment, education; everything in between. Agriculture was in there too.

Q: Yes; they had pulled everything into that bureau, and so (laughs) so you had to just carve out a role for yourself?

WISE: I was called a senior policy advisor, though I didn't really feel or look the part. Sally, a political appointee, had unique access and perspectives, while I got a bird's-eye view of everything, from the front office to the daily cable traffic. I went from managing large budgets to flagging important info and sitting in endless meetings. It was a quick study in figuring out how to add value, rather than just focusing on what I found fun or interesting.

Q: Yes; that's a difficult role. Can you talk about the variety of work that you did get involved with?

WISE: The first thing that I did that allowed me to have some exposure was going on TDY to Poland and they had these kind of rule of law or democracy grants that they had—they had given one to their congress equivalent, and so it was going back some years later and doing sort of an evaluation or assessment of what happened. So, that was interesting for me. I hadn't worked in the DG space at all and hadn't worked in that part of the world at all, and so it was two weeks or ten days or something like that of joining people that actually knew about this (laughs) and riding along and helping out in terms of knowing something about evaluation and about programs in general, and so that was helpful.

I got an opportunity to help with some of the interagency meetings where AID didn't have a seat at the table. We had, like, a camping stool in the back, but in terms of everything that was being pledged, or everything that was being done mostly through AID programs, and so it's kind of an interesting power dynamic there. And so, that was—and I got to see the inside of OEOB (Old Executive Office Building) a little bit, and so that was curious.

I went to Russia with Sally for one of the meetings, and again, that was—having started off doing one of those trips to China with Califano and then signing an ST protocol as one of the deliverables of that trip, and then going to these bilateral commission meetings, it was sort of reminiscent and also interesting to see how it's symbolically very important and what gets actually done or changed or pledged as new stuff is kind of old wine in new bottles sometimes. It was interesting to see how the vice president had carved out this role for the office, for himself and others, and was able to, with that bilateral focus, really do some more, I think, in terms of raising the visibility, the cooperation and the attention to certain sectoral issues than otherwise would have been.

Q: As I recall, because I was in Washington then, you were also heavily involved in something that was a very tragic event involving Sally Shelton and the loss of her husband.

WISE: Yes. She had gone home for the weekend to her mother in Texas and her husband was at their weekend house in Maryland, and he had gone out canoeing and didn't come back. She was there, and we were dealing with well-wishers and press and lots of others. She was, understandably, terribly upset and there were all these reporters at the perimeter of the property and staked out across the little creek with telephoto lenses aimed at the house. No one was talking to the press. Then there came a picture in the Post of her in her bathrobe on the deck with coffee, "looking worried." It reminded her that if you don't feed the beast, they'll create content you may not want. So, she opened up communication a little more. She would go over to the fire station where the press were camped out in a makeshift press room and tell them what she knew, which was nothing. Meanwhile, there were weird conspiracy theories emerging about her husband's disappearance. Bill Colby was head of the CIA, and later, he collaborated with the head

of the KGB to make a video game called Spycraft. There were several who phoned or came by during the waiting period after his disappearance to share “vital messages” like “the answer to what has happened is on page seven of the latest spy thriller.” I am glad for Sally that I was able to screen these kooks so she was not subjected to them. Divers were brought in; search parties went out, walking all the shoreline woods and turning up nothing. About a week into this, his body floated up to the surface, and the police found it. They came to the door and told me, and I had to go in and tell Sally. She was devastated, of course. And then, she got up, put a brush through her hair, put on lipstick, and went over to where the press was. She gave a press briefing, talked in the most amazing and expansive way about Bill’s legacy, about his contributions, about his role in the post-Cold War era, and then just turned around and marched herself back. And I said, “Okay, here’s the thing. I am never writing another briefer for you. If you can do that cold, then you don’t need any help from me going forward on anything else.” (Laughs) And it got a chuckle out of her, which was good at that time.

Q: I suspect she’d been thinking about it for several days and knew what she wanted to say.

WISE: Maybe so, but it seemed so spontaneous.

Q: I always thought it was quite extraordinary that you, as a staff member, played such an important role supporting her at that difficult time. Not everyone would or could have done it.

WISE: Well, it was my pleasure. Her husband’s children came and there was not very much happiness between them, but I would take the phone calls and try to help a little bit. And someone said, “Well, who are you?” And I said, “I’m the assistant.” And then they started referring to me as The Assistant, and then that became sort of a running joke, that The Assistant says this, and The Assistant says that, and you better listen to The Assistant. Then planning the funeral was a gas. It was like planning a royal wedding. I didn’t do everything around it, but I did some.

Q: Did that take place at the National Cathedral?

WISE: Oh, yeah. Her aunties from out of town came; one of them had a crush on—whether it was Kissinger or Brzezinski, but one of the two of them, they were like, Oh, he’s adorable. Yes, we would like to—could you introduce us? And Sally went, “No.” (Both laugh)

Q: That’s right. We’re probably going further than we should on this. (Laughs)

WISE: Yes, indeed.

Q: So, you were in this position for about a year, is that correct?

National Defense University/Eisenhower School, Student (1997) and Faculty (1997 - 1999)

WISE: I did it for just a year. And then I went to the National Defense University for long-term training. It was a wonderful experience.

Q: That was wonderful. I believe I saw somewhere that you were a distinguished graduate.

WISE: Yes, I was.

Q: And not all USAID people become distinguished graduates, so you distinguished yourself.

WISE: Thank you.

Q: And you were at—I think the names have changed but was it ICAF (Industrial College of the Armed Forces) in those days. Can you talk a bit about what you studied? Did it include issues related to supply chains during times of war or emergency?

WISE: We had classes on logistics, economics, history (called grand strategy), and some leadership courses, along with electives. The core idea of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (now Eisenhower School) was to understand supply management for surges—whether in war, peace, or economic situations—and the importance of collaborating with the private sector to meet demand and offer incentives. It reinforced my understanding of public-private partnerships, even if I didn't realize it then. What struck me most was how different the culture was; I felt like a "tree-hugger" among military folks. It came at a point in my career where I'd been working nonstop, and it was the first time I got to pause, reflect, read, and have deep conversations—truly a gift, and was paid to do it.

Q: Did you have to do a research paper or a long paper or something? Was that a requirement?

WISE: No. We had papers for different classes, and everyone joined an industry study group in the spring. I was in the environment industry study, which aligned with my background in environmental health from grad school. Our work included project-based assignments and a final report. We explored various environmental issues, from waste management and water management in the U.S. to international challenges. We also looked at the role of private players and even the overlap with military regulations, for example, in California a huge amount of the protected land is actually military bases, and how they coordinate with the contiguous communities and also allow them to play their war games and do their readiness work without endangering wildlife and leaving trash around and things like that.

Q: And I assume you had also had a lot of exposure then to the private sector, which you were perhaps able to build on in your subsequent jobs. It's interesting that the private sector, from that early work in Barbados with the pharmaceutical industry, has been woven into your work.

WISE: Yeah. It was—the interesting thing, and really, coming into a little more focus as we talk today, Carol, is I wish I could say it was very intentional. I wish I could say it was all really planned and that it was this good, linear progression. It really wasn't. But there are enough things that kind of come back and reinforce that I guess makes one feel oh, this feels right, or I want to do more of this. One of the interesting revelations when I was at ICAF, was they were talking about the linkage between industry and the military, even in the logistics management sphere. My granddad had been a captain in the Navy, and he was an executive with Sears Roebuck. I never knew about his work, but through my studies, I learned that the Navy depot for warehousing is in Philadelphia, next door to a big Sears depot. When they were surging during World War II the military brought in people from industry intentionally. That is when my granddad came in in a senior rank as a captain. Those people from the industry, my granddad among them, were influencing the ways in which they were thinking about how you stockpile stuff, how do you determine what's strategic material, and they were actually even co-locating logistics depots or these material depots. I learned about my own family and about war history and logistics from graduate school. It made me feel close to my late grandfather.

Q: So, you spent a year studying and then they—you were such a good student that they asked you to stay on to teach for two years? What were you teaching and how did you use that to advance your thinking on all of these issues?

WISE: I served as the USAID chair, where I taught political science, even though I hadn't studied it before my one year at ICAF. My role included teaching courses like China regional studies, an industry study on the environment, and an elective on critical social issues in national security—playfully called "sex, drugs, and rock and roll." I also taught and conducted research on environmental security, focusing on China, and co-authored a paper on the subject. It was my first time teaching at the graduate level, and I found it both challenging and incredibly rewarding.

Q: Were you able to travel? Did you travel to China when you were doing this work?

WISE: Yes, a couple of times, and also Malaysia and Hong Kong. Also we did a trip out to the West Coast each spring to meet with environmental industries there. There was a week of domestic travel and then two weeks of international travel every spring.

Q: Exciting.

Q: Good morning. This is Carol Peasley, and it is February 11, 2022, and this is interview number three with Holly Wise.

And Holly, thank you again. It's great to be talking with you. When we finished up yesterday you were talking about your assignment to the faculty at the National Defense University. Could you please talk a little bit about what it's like for an AID employee when you take an unusual assignment. You get out of the agency's grasp for two years, and yet you were being reviewed by promotion panels and then you were going to be looking for a position after your teaching assignment. Are these kinds of unusual assignments good, bad or indifferent to one's career?

WISE: Thanks, Carol.

USAID would send a couple of people each year as students to the NDU. The assignments were a combination of a reward or something nice that would be given to someone who wanted it, and sometimes, it was used as a parking place for people who weren't able to be placed right away, or there was some issue associated with their service. I hope that I was in the former category! But it was not seen as part of career advancement or a guarantee of upward mobility in terms of promotion. You were out of sight, out of mind, while you were there.

It was life-changing for me. I had really been kind of head down, doing my thing and this was a full and welcome change from everything I had been about thus far in my career. And Carol, you and I were talking about Myers-Briggs as one thing that we had training on and was interesting in terms of understanding ourselves and understanding us in relation to others and as managers as well. For me, the shift from being a health officer in Barbados to working in private enterprise in Kenya was going from “condoms to convertible debentures”—a big shift content-wise. When I went off to ICAF, I took another Myers-Briggs test—probably my seventh time. To my surprise, my results had flipped almost 180 degrees. I used to be an ESTJ, focusing on structure and order, which I thought suited my job in foreign aid. But when I got to ICAF, I came out as an ENFP. It was the first time I felt safe to reflect on what I truly preferred rather than just what I was good at. I realized that while I could excel as an SJ, it drained me because I was working against my natural type. It was a real eye-opener about myself.

I loved being a student again. And, having access to ICAF's research library, where the librarians would greet you and offer support, providing all the tools needed to advance your work, made a big difference.

Then, as I transitioned into a professor role, I gained new insights into the interagency space, negotiation, power dynamics, and foreign affairs—insights I wouldn't have gotten if I'd stayed at USAID. These experiences played a significant role in shaping my thinking, including the development of the GDA concept.

Now, you also asked about how I moved back into the agency. I didn't get promoted while I was away, and it felt like they barely remembered I was still there. There was no mentoring, career planning, or any talk about my next steps. Honestly, this wasn't much different from what I'd experienced before or after. When I returned, I made it clear that they were missing the value of these opportunities. It's crucial to be intentional about

who they send to these programs and what happens when they return. You shouldn't just put them back on the shelf and move on.

USAID/Washington, Global Bureau/Business Development 1999 -- 2001

So, how did I come back? Well, I had left a staff position in the Global Bureau front office that was not something I could or wanted to return to. I went into an office chief job in the Office of Business Development in the Economic Growth division of the Global Bureau. It was a tiny office with an odd portfolio of tech transfer, trade, and technical assistance projects. An International Executive Service Corps grant was in that office. Another coincidence was that my grandfather had been one of the very first IESC volunteers. When he was a Sears executive, he had gone to Iran during the Shah days and advised them on retail operations. And so, I had very happy but unclear memories of IESC, and then I was able to oversee a support grant to them that was already in place in the office.

Q: Yeah. So, you went into one of the key Washington support offices for AID's private sector work overseas?

WISE: Yes. But—and then, after maybe six months, there was the change of administration after the 2000 election.

Q: And those election results, obviously, weren't available for some time, so the transition work must have been somewhat delayed

WISE: It was clear that the transition was going to be taking place, and we knew early on that Colin Powell was going to be coming in as the secretary of state.

Q: But USAID had probably started some transition planning even earlier before the election results were certified, at least as an internal process.

USAID Internal Transition Team 2000 – 2001, Birth of Global Development Alliance

WISE: Yes, it might not always be done this way, but it was clever at the time—there was an internal transition team made up of long-time AID staff. They worked like a task force to address key issues before the official transition team, which typically includes outside folks who guide the agency until political appointees are in place. I was selected for this internal team, which was a great opportunity for me. I was mid-career, had recently completed some advanced training, and was feeling a bit underutilized. Ann Van Dusen was assembling our group, which included a few of us from different areas, like GC and regional bureaus, as well as people from procurement. We tackled a variety of issues around how USAID functions, both internally and externally. It wasn't an official assignment, and there were no incentives—it didn't even show up in my evaluations. But I felt it was rewarding because we were working on important issues and thinking outside the box. Personally, I had a sense of job security, experience, and some renewed

confidence from my recent studies, which gave me the courage to lean into this work. Eventually, as the administration changed, I was seconded from my usual role to this task force, working on a new business model for USAID.

Q: I had always heard that the internal transition team had begun thinking what new initiatives it could propose to the new team and that this is what got people thinking about new ways of working to be recommended to a new administration?

WISE: That is right. We'd gotten a very general cue that there were some things that were broken that we needed to fix. Our job was to find general answers/solutions and to do it fast.

Colin Powell told us, "I've been to the Hill, and there's support for what you do on both sides of the aisle. But they also see your slow processes, unresponsiveness, and lack of attention to external requests. If you can step up and do things differently, I can secure the funding you need." So, we came back thinking, "What does doing business differently mean? How do we reinvent ourselves and fix what's broken while embracing new opportunities?"

My specific charge was around partnerships, and it came from Jesse Helms. The North Carolina Congressman Jesse Helms had described foreign aid as "money down foreign ratholes." He advocated abolishing AID and setting up a foundation instead. This hurt our feelings, but we needed to find out more.

So, I was supposed to figure this out. I knew our regulations and bureaucracy—imposed on us, and all agencies that have federal appropriations meant that we weren't agile and sometimes were seen as unresponsive. And our "PR" was virtually non-existent; many, including my family, had never heard of AID and had no clue what we did or why. Our Legislative and Public Affairs colleagues were hamstrung in what they could do, fearing we would be seen as lobbying, which was not allowed. In contrast, I learned while at a military graduate education facility, the DoD legislative staffers are constantly on the Hill, sharing information and educating Congress on their mission and funding needs. We only got hauled up there to get smacked around for things that we weren't doing, or that went wrong. And it's sort of anti-cultural for us. I learned the importance of storytelling, managing these relationships, and being able to engage key stakeholders in a way that is positive and sort of co-creative.

So, this idea of a foundation was put to us as a possible solution. I looked around and realized there were already two federally appropriated foundations, the Inter-American Foundation and the Africa Development Foundation, and Helms hated both of them because, like any foundation, you can't control everything once they receive their appropriation. So, it was clear that a publicly financed foundation was not going to be fit for purpose in terms of what that issue was. I started thinking maybe it's about having a different sort of partnership, agreement, or way of engaging with others. Our foreign aid model was from the Truman era when the government was big, and there weren't other actors, except maybe the Red Cross. Our way of operating hadn't taken into account any

of the new wealth foundations or even the older, more established foundations, and all of the philanthropy and all of the NGOs that are not exclusively financed by federal dollars. And not only that the money had changed, we had gone from being the sort of majority shareholder in the financial flows pie to being a minority shareholder. And so, how could we shift from what basically were only vendor relationships that we called partnerships to something which had more co-quality, not just in terms of you put in half and I'll put in half, but also in program design and upstream, not just end-of-pipe, engagement. We wanted to leverage others' technology, networks, managerial expertise, local knowledge, and standing –all the non-monetary assets that come from various sectors in this kind of tri-sector landscape.

I pitched the idea to Colin Powell. What a great secretary of state. He walked over to the AID building. He only brought two people with him. He went around the room and shook hands with everybody in the room. I hadn't seen that before or since. And he sat down, and he really listened. I had five minutes on this, and I started by trying to ground this in his experience, in his reality, talking about how he had been in the private sector and had industry experience, he had been in government, and he had also started a non-profit, America's Promise, that did inner-city youth development education work. And then, I quoted something that he had said about the power of the three sectors working together, the importance of that, at which point he said, "How dare you quote me back to me?" And he didn't smile. I almost died. I just giggled a little bit and then went on, and he smiled but I continued to sweat. I said "This is the new opening, this is what we think we can and need to do, and with your permission, we have to figure out how to do more of this and how to do it better," to which he said, "Do it." And so, we did. (Both laugh)

Q: So, the birth of the Global Development Alliance was that day.

WISE: It was!

Q: So, that would have been, then, early in calendar-year 2001, right? But then you have the task of trying to make it real.

Global Development Alliance, Director 2002 – 2005

WISE: Yeah, it was such an exciting, challenging, and fun project. We had to figure out how to staff the team, but AID didn't have extra staff available, so I brought in Development Leadership Initiative (DLI) folks, interns, a PSC (Personal Services Contractor), and even a couple of political appointees. At first, we were based in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau, and after writing a white paper that outlined our plan, the unit was officially established with its own office space and a clear mission. Along the way, we realized we needed funding for technical assistance, office support, a database, training, and also a budget for making deals.

In the early days, my role focused on three key areas: First, I did outreach to new partners, especially private ones, spreading the word that AID was open for business. This involved attending meetings, meeting potential partners, and participating in public

events. Second, I worked on building organizational capacity—things like hiring, training, and improving the promotion and performance evaluation processes. Finally, the third part of my job was closing deals.

And so, we set it up, again as—

Q: Just before going on to that, because I assume there had to have been a lot of work with the general counsel's office to figure out ways in which deals could be structured that met all of those needs, and that had to have been done quite early on. Is that correct?

WISE: Precisely. There was very intentional engagement with the general counsel's office and the office of procurement to figure out if we needed different instruments and to help address this competitive question; the sunshine clause prevents you from speaking to one party without speaking to all parties about something that could be procurement sensitive. We had a private sector advisory council externally and established a GDA point of contact in each critical operating unit internally. These internal and external champions helped solve problems and provided input to our white paper, which would serve as the business plan for the GDA proposal.

Q: And one other early point. Colin Powell had obviously blessed it and meanwhile, an AID administrator, Andrew Natsios, did get nominated. Was he also aware of it in the run-up to his confirmation?

WISE: Oh, absolutely. He not only was aware of it, but he jumped on it as one of his things. And actually, I don't know if you remember, but they actually reorganized the agency then to have four pillars, and we were the fourth pillar, which I wasn't all that in favor of, but that's what they chose to do because the three pillars were functional and talked about health and education and agriculture and the things that we do, and I have always maintained partnerships are not a thing you do, they're a way you do the things you do. And so, having a separate partnership pillar was, I guess, expedient to give it visibility, but it was a bit confusing in terms of setting it up as a separate thing.

One of the reasons that Andrew Natsios was keen on this partnership thing was because it was a staff initiative. In other words, because it was not something—AID, understandably, has always been a little allergic to the people and the enthusiasms that come from outside and are always reinventing us and fixing us and imposing and whatever. And so, the idea that he could say, you know, this bubbled up from within, and this was something that the lifers came up with, in his view, gave it more validity, and he was especially in favor of it because of that. So, that's just—that was another interesting sort of tactical lesson that I learned from somebody who—by the way, Andrew Natsios had a military background as well.

Q: Right. And this was probably one of the reasons why it then got embedded in the front office?

WISE: Yes. It was attached to the front office as a key initiative of the new administration, but it also had to have a sunset clause and seem temporary. I would say that my job was to work myself out of a job once the partnering approach had gone viral spreading across the Agency. For that to happen we needed a central point to focus on partnerships and manage relationships, making sure efforts were coordinated. It wasn't about running everything, but more about guiding the process, like matchmaking and coordinating efforts with major players. The idea was always that specific partnerships—like in health—should be managed by the relevant office or embedded in a mission's portfolio, not by us.

Q: Do you recall the earliest GDA packages that you were trying to incubate and start? Were they centrally done?

WISE: I just want to share what really helped me, even though I hadn't formally studied organizational change—I was figuring things out intuitively. Luckily, I listened to great advice from outside, including friends of the agency who offered helpful insights. They told me that it's crucial to voice ideas to others so they can lend their support if they agree. It's more impactful when allies, like someone from an NGO, speak up on your behalf rather than you defending yourself. And/or there was an accusation that we were watering down our, at the time, MDG (Millennium Development Goals) commitment of ODA (Official Development Assistance) levels by kind of scoring private contributions as though they were ours and that that's just basically letting us, the U.S. government, off the hook for not putting enough money into foreign aid. And so, those are arguments that it's not so interesting if AID is saying, No, no, we didn't do that, we're good, please, please. But to the extent that we were working with other people, and they could stand up and say, Hey, this is a good thing. AID needs to be allowed to do more of this, we want them to do more of this, and we want them to do it better, faster.

Q: I think another very smart thing that you all did was to say that there are some examples of this kind of work that have been successful. And the one that I'm most aware of was with—on cocoa, with Mars.

WISE: Exactly.

Q: And that was very smart, to get people who had done something similar to talk about the potential for the new mechanism.

WISE: Uh-huh. Well, that was—so it was not only getting some multinational folks to stand up and say to both the administrator as well as to people on the Hill and at the State Department, This is a good thing. We welcome this thing. Let them do this thing. That unlocked a lot of permission and funds.

There was another thing that I realized, having grown up in AID, that to your point, Carol, about looking at partnerships that were good examples, what I realized around this allergic to new things and to show that I wasn't some political plant and had come from Mars to impose this and that this was—and also to honor all of the work that had been

done in a partnership-like mode in the past, so we actually did a whole document called “Circling the Globe,” which was a collection of partnership stories that had—that were from AIDS’ history, and that was a way of sort of celebrating the people that had already done them, showing that this doesn’t hurt so much, and also showing that it wasn’t so new. You know, that it was kind of in our DNA and we were just going to turn up the volume a little bit on this and do more of it. So, that was the inside stuff.

Fixing the procurement and personnel systems was a big challenge. I didn't realize I'd be tackling procurement reform, but it was crucial for making progress with new collaborations and partners. We held a lot of focus groups with external folks and NGOs, especially around AID’s New Partnership Initiative. One NGO made a strong point, saying, “Stop calling it a partnership. You hold the money, the rules, and the power. It feels more like a master-slave dynamic. Unless there’s more shared risk, reward, and early engagement, you should use a different term.”

So, that gets to the—also the partnership, why is GDA called GDA and not GDP? Well, first of all, GDP’s already taken as an acronym, but secondly, the word “partnership” was a little bit tainted, particularly in the AID world, and so we tossed around what else we would want to call it. We considered other names and landed on 'alliance,' focusing on public/private alliances. The Global Development Alliance became the platform for this approach. But funding it was tricky—without new appropriations, we had to tax all of the internal requests, which made things challenging.

We initially requested \$140 million to fund early alliances but ended up with about \$70 million, which later dropped to \$25 million annually. When building these alliances, I got advice to find both internal and external champions, celebrate the progress, and make the initiative visible and positive. It was crucial to pick some quick wins because I had a six-month window to show results before interest might fade. Unlike the usual lengthy AID project cycle—strategy, design, approval, procurement, and launch—I had to fast-track the process.

Q: Six months. No problem.

WISE: Yeah, right?

So, the first one, the kind of poster child for GDA, was the Angola Partnership Initiative. And that was a lash up between USAID and Chevron Corporation and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), and then we got some State ESF (Economic Support Fund) money as well. And there were implementing partners that were part of it. There was a consortium that was led by CARE, and it was focusing on ag revitalization. And so, the interesting things about it were that it, for the first time really—it raised the visibility of working with an organization like Chevron. It taught us a whole lot about not only what we could do with them, but what they could do for us. So, for example, the—it was thought that it would be nice to work with these farmer groups and there was an existing project there that was able to just be expanded to go from a feeding program and

relief to actually ag revitalization. And so, it was using—we were pledging that and supplementing it.

But then at one point, the thought was it would be good to maybe build a microfinance bank that would be able to provide a little bit of access to finance particularly in the ag sector. Initially we said, truthfully, we don't have any money. Chevron went to the State Department and said, it would be awfully nice if there were \$2 million worth of ESF money that was allocated to this because then we would also be able to come in with some and this would be a nice thing. And wouldn't you know it, we got that money. We had to deal with things—everything from what is your—what kind of solicitation document and doing—we moved in the procurement sense to—much more to annual program statements where basically we were creating solicited proposals which in the absence of that would have been unsolicited. We were allowing for some collaboration after a concept note was brought in to any part of the agency. We benefited the agency by saying, We'll host the macro one, and also, here's the language that you would use if you want to do a project specific, a mission specific, a region specific one. Knock yourself out. And so that's—a lot of that got going.

We also had to work with OMB (Office of Management and Budget) on—to make sure that there wasn't scoring of—there was concern that if we're bringing in extra money and it hits our books that then they would say, Okay, well, just take that \$20 million off of what we were going to give you because you got it from another source, which defeats the whole purpose of working so hard to leverage these additional resources. So, that was a policy thing that we had to get through.

And then, and then we also, through doing some of this work, another thing was to realize about gift authority and to try and share that with the private players who might be interested in having the tax treatment of resources if they were to give it directly to USAID and then we put it into a joint project that we had. And so, that was used by many of them. So, it was playing around with new partners and new instruments and also trying to demonstrate that there was no sector and no region that you couldn't find some kind of partnership or there weren't—nobody cared about except us. (Laughs) And so I was—so when I was allocating these very scarce, these very precious GDA dollars, it was—I had the incentive to try and create a diversified portfolio and also one that would—that was photogenic and would tell certain stories and exhibit certain kinds of behaviors or reforms in the way in which we were doing business.

Q: It's really quite extraordinary because you were building up a new program, having to develop new instruments and mechanisms, generating deals and also trying to advise the personnel system on how to take account of this new tool and to provide training. That's a lot of things for a very small team to be working on simultaneously over that 2002-2003 period.

WISE: Yeah. It was kind of going around a corner on two wheels for a long time. It was very breathless, it was very stimulating, and there was high energy.

I would say the other thing that was really important that we were doing is we really were having to deal with culture change. And as you probably know, I mean, early on, so to say something like, when I talked about USAID's business model, there were people internally who'd say, We're not a business. We don't have a business model. Others, if you talk about deals or deal flows, again, we're not a private sector entity. It's inappropriate to talk about deals. And then, also, generally, the private sector's priorities seem misaligned with ours, and they don't share our goals. And I have to say, so personally, an interesting thing about working initially so much with the Chevron Corporation was I thought, Oh, my gosh, you know, here I am, a tree hugger, maternal and child health worker person, and I don't have a clue how to talk to them or what to do or even how to organize. And then, interestingly, Chevron or any corporation like that, looks so much like USAID in the sense that they have central bureaus, and they have regional bureaus, and they have missions, which they call business units, and money is located in places—not just at headquarters, money is made and spent at the field level, which is similar to AID. The incentives for designing new projects and not necessarily implementing them or continuing them, the same in both organizations. And so, that was—and the other thing was, in talking to folks realizing that yes, you may work for an energy company, but do you like kids? Do you care about keeping girls in school? Do you think that it would be—and also, does it help your operations if your employees are healthy and if there's a growing middle class in the place where you're operating that can actually buy your goods and services? Or if the government is more transparent so it makes it easier for you to do business there? We share a lot of interests in development and even basic human needs and poverty alleviation. We may just—there may be some different ways in which we talk about it or different drivers for it, but that was really at the heart of this partnership thing, was trying to understand the common cause and then figure out how you co-create a program that delivers value for multiple parties.

Q: At some point, it became a competitive process in which AID missions could submit ideas for GDAs. They went through a competitive process in Washington for the central pool of money. How quickly did you do that?

WISE: It was definitely by the second round of funding, if not part of the first round. And what we realized early on was, well, first of all, if we build it, they won't come. In other words, if we—even with that Angola partnership, which was conceptualized and initiated, yes, at the headquarters level of both organizations, but it was pretty clear that unless we made a connection between the mission director and somebody on the ground in Angola on the Chevron side that it wasn't going to go anywhere. And sure enough, that connection was made and as I recall, the mission director went out fishing with somebody from the operation in Rwanda, and they thought of a lot of cool things that they could be about together, and they built some trust, and then they were able to claim credit for driving this partnership forward. So, it was clear to us that if there was not—first of all, if they didn't—if any USAID implementers, internal folks, didn't have some skin in the game that—if it didn't fit with their strategies, if it was different and actually they perceived that it was a tax on doing other things that they wanted to do that there would not be ongoing support. And they're the ones that had to own that.

So, we did make a competitive process where we—missions would come in—it was both—so proposals could come through a mission or they could come from outside, but they had to have mission endorsement to be able to be considered. And then, we would say, Okay, here's a little for this, a little for that. And we also quickly went to a strong preference for co-financing. So, we would provide matching resources to whatever a mission or a bureau would be willing to put into this.

Q: Yes. The substance of what you were doing was important, but the hows— the change management process -- was also important. There's a lot of important lessons here that helped assure not just early buy-in from missions, but I think enthusiasm on the part of missions. Ultimately, I think that demand was higher than you could meet.

WISE: Oh, for sure. And we also learned that there were different strategies and incentives for different regional bureaus, as well as for the central bureau. So, for example, the health folks, they had done these monster global alliances for AIDS, malaria and vaccines, immunizations, nutrition, and so, they kind of pioneered a lot of this. And they also, historically they have a lot of money and there were a lot of partners that they've already worked with that want to do these things. It was thought at the time, well, the Europe and Eurasia bureau, they've got all this money and they're not—and also because the funding structure, going through State, maybe it's not totally amenable to this. And then—but we sort of quickly realized that no, especially in countries where there's supposed to be a transition that they can't look forward to that same level of funding going forward and there's supposed to be some sort of notion about graduation. That's the perfect time and place to be able to bring in others to kind of burden share going forward. And then, to the—it can work in lots of places. I remember there was one alliance that we very intentionally brought forward which was about accounting in Central Asia, and I thought, Oh, my gosh, this has got to be the most boring thing ever, but it was fascinating, the way that it was—the partners that were involved, the reason for doing it. They leveraged not only talent but bucks, and it absolutely made this huge difference in a place where there were not enough CFAs (Call for Application) to be able to make a poker table, and they—in some of the locales, and they couldn't therefore get audited books. And one of the big issues about foreign investors coming in or anyone being able to participate in your business is having transparency and audited books and this was the ticket, you know, all this here.

Q: Right. They were doing, yeah, a lot on international accounting standards work in the former Soviet Union. I'd forgotten that was done through—with GDA support.

WISE: Yes. Or it was helped by the GDA.

Q: Early on, I suspect that many of the programs were designed, at the mission level, thinking that most of the collaboration with the private sector would be through their corporate social responsibility funds.

WISE: Right, right.

Q: But I think that that transitioned over time to be more in line with company business models. Did you see that happening during the time of the GDA?

WISE: Yeah. And it was as much a kind of coaching that we would do. And I remember we'd say things like, "Go for the engine and not the fumes." And that—in part because if it's philanthropy or if it's the nice thing, you're going to get little money and little involvement, that those offices are—they generally are associated with government affairs and with public relations and then special causes, supporting the symphony of Special Olympics or things that have marketing—return on investment for them. And what you're not getting—and what you're getting is dollars at best. Sometimes maybe you'll get some staff if there's some kind of opportunity for a volunteer or something, but you're not getting them to do the skilled work. So, if you—and by that, I mean if you are Habitat for Humanity and you're getting people from PricewaterhouseCoopers, they're coming to pound nails, which they don't, I hope, have a lot of expertise in, they're not coming to help you with your auditing, they're not doing that sort of thing. And so, to the extent that missions and also their counterparts in these partnerships were able to get to the core business and make the case that this is something that we could do collaboratively using that money as opposed—and people and machinery and all of the assets of the business as opposed to the philanthropic window. It's more—it's also—goes beyond the one-off gift into something which is—can be a repeater event or relationship.

Q: You were the initial stimulus behind all of this, and then the office itself within the front office was established by 2002 and you led that office for three years. By the third year, did you begin to see that missions were doing GDAs on their own and not looking for funding from the center?

WISE: We were definitely seeing—then co-financing became the rule, as opposed to the hope, and we were seeing independent action where they were doing GDA-like programs on their own, using their own money. And things like, if they put out their own APS (Annual Program Statement) and they were—that's how they were then building new relationships, so sometimes they didn't have any—they weren't asking for any money from the GDA pot, which kept being more and more finite. We did continue to do, as you had mentioned, we did a lot of staff training, and that was really—it was super important, and I think really good. People who came out of it felt it was inspiring. We always had some—we had a private sector panel, so we had people that would come and talk about their work or working with the private sector. And we'd often have somebody from Mars, who would bring a lot of chocolate (laughs).

Q: Always appreciated.

WISE: Yeah, yeah. And we had people from—always had somebody from the Office of General Counsel and from the office of procurement. And they could really speak to the kind of wiring diagram questions that very often went in this partnership or collaboration or space. You hear a lot of kinds of stories, or you might see the big check, but what's hard is well, how in the heck did you do it? And was it pooled, was—financing, was it parallel financing? What was the instrument that held it? Did you have an MOU

(Memorandum of Understanding) that stood above it to help govern some of the relationships and can you give me a sample of that? And where have missions gotten in trouble? So, there was a little bit of sort of—we always took a very big FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) approach in trying to understand what—how do you empower people to do this more. And then we had, as I said, like, alliance of the year and GDA champion, and we had the mission directors' conferences. We would—and the state-of-the-art conferences. We would try to bring forward some content and shine a light on those that were doing this and let them say, yeah, it was good, bad or indifferent.

Q: Yes. I remember when the training team came to Moscow. They had a panel with private sector representatives and Steve Schmida from the Eurasia Foundation, who really inspired us with the work that the Eurasia Foundation was doing with private partners in Russia. It was quite extraordinary and had a huge impact on our thinking.

WISE: Steve went on to develop his own firm. And it's all about partnering. Synergy Strategies Group, and then it got renamed Resonance, and they continued to do really good partnerships. And they have a contractual relationship with the GDA legacy organization in AID. But just finding some folks to say who—I mean, it was very much both trying to nest it culturally within our operation to say why it made sense for us to do this, as opposed to having to do it or being forced to do it.

Also, the partnership stuff is much—it's yes, there's some direct control of resources, but it's also an influence strategy, and so how can I be rewarded or promoted because I've leveraged all this money and great partnerships that are getting the job done as opposed to my project, and I myself have directly dispersed millions of dollars.

Q: And part of that is being able to have better metrics to talk about the impact. And if we talked more about impact, it might become the basis under which we should be rewarded.

WISE: Yeah. So, we did do some promotion—you know, we worked on some promotion language with the people in personnel. We also, on the procurement side we had to crack this nut of cost share versus cost leveraging so that in the agreement the leveraged amount is not in the auditable domain, because if it's called cost share then you can—if it doesn't come to be you can get a big bill from the U.S. government. And so, there were some—you know, it seemed like not such big issues, but they would absolutely stop these things in their tracks.

I really tried to walk the talk when we first started. I was eager to get a technical assistance contract in place, so I figured out how to do a quick procurement using an IQC work order. We went through the Bureau of Mines, submitted it on a Friday (or maybe a Sunday), and they issued it by Monday. Our TA team started in under a month, which was pretty fast! I even had our International Development Intern present the achievement to senior staff, giving him some well-deserved visibility. It was a great moment, and it surprised a few folks, much like when Steve Schmida spoke at your training session!

Q: That's a wonderful reminder to people that you can use instruments from other federal agencies. Everyone needs to be more creative in doing that. (Laughs)

WISE: Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Q: Now, I assume you were also consulting with the Hill to reassure them and to make sure they remained onboard. Did the Hill remain interested, and did you have any challenges in dealing with them?

WISE: Well, you know, to name names, so Charlie Flickner was somebody who was an interested party and quite—not onboard with this, particularly the kind of blank check part of it. As I was saying, “We need some money so we can make hay,” or so we can do some deals, and it’s—it, again, runs counter to the control notion of tell me exactly what you’re going to do and when you’re going to do it and what you’ve already got lined up and then we’ll give you some money for it. And oh, and then 9/11 happened right as we were getting started. And so, his response was, “Well, this is OBE now and it’s not going to be relevant and you’re not going to need any money for this because we’ve got to do this other stuff that we’re doing.” And it was a big—it had a big, chilling effect on everybody’s thinking about it. But at the same time, there were no shortage of deals, there was no shortage of opportunity to do this. People were increasingly open to figuring out how I can get this job done in the best way, and if it means working with folks that I haven’t worked with before I’m okay.

Q: So, it sounds like the typical relationship that AID has with the Hill. You don’t often have real champions for what you’re doing, and you just slog along and encounter the issues you encounter and answer questions and keep proceeding.

WISE: Yeah.

Q: It’s interesting because I thought you might have had champions (laughs).

WISE: I mean, there were—well, there were some. For example, when—we wouldn’t say this, but we would say to some of our partners, Well, if you like what’s going on, tell your friends.

And there were some—and increasingly there were things—there were groups like Interaction that were—came around to sort of endorsing, this is a good thing, and they obviously have a good advocacy relationship with various committees on the Hill. And so, it sort of went along. I would say after I left, they imposed a reporting requirement. Henrietta Fore then said, Like we’d had to do with microfinance earlier, and maybe we’re still doing it, I don’t know. But then missions, they were told that they were supposed to spend a third of their money doing this and they had to fill out a form and send it forward that we were going to inform the Hill about this. I mean, I may not have been asked, but I didn’t think that this was the best way to engage with the Hill and share the good news by imposing yet another reporting requirement on the poor, beleaguered folks that were doing the work that they were doing and then their program offices and then their central

offices and then their whatevers. But that was—I don't—that was there for a while, but as I said, it came in after I was gone. It was an idea that, oh, if you want to keep people paying attention to this, you know, what gets measured is what matters, and that you would—that's how to keep their eye on the ball.

Q: Well, it's a remarkable story of an initiative that took off and became very successful. It changed the culture of the agency and continued afterwards, and that's not always the case, as you well know. But 2005 came along and you decided it was time to move on, to do other things?

WISE: Yep, I did. I realized a few things—mainly, that organizations go through different phases and need different types of leaders. In the build phase, you need a charismatic leader with energy and excitement for new challenges. But when things stabilize, you need a leader who can maintain and refine systems. And I came to realize that while I still—I loved my job, I had the best job in the agency, I was 100 percent positive, and I think some other people probably agreed with me. I was super busy and yet I was starting to get a little bored. And I had been in Washington long enough that I needed to go overseas if I was going to—I was in the senior management group, but I still, you know, there's a rotation cycle and that I would need to go overseas. That and coupled with the fact that when I joined the agency, I promised myself I'd retire while I still had time to explore something new. And so, I had a birthday and I said, I'm thinking about this in a year, less than a year. And so, then I moved in that direction. And it was—I'm starting to choke up just talking about it. It was very hard.

But I left it in good hands and in a good place and I feel really proud of what I did.

Q: As you absolutely should. And I know that you then went on to do consulting work with a lot of very interesting companies and in a lot of different kinds of work. Some of it was GDA stuff, so you saw it from the other side of the table. You also set up your own business as well.

I suspect you can't talk about specific things that you've done as a consultant with individual firms, but I do wonder whether there are thoughts about working directly with the private sector companies and some of the things that you've learned after leaving the GDA program? Do you have thoughts on how multinationals are now working in the developing world and the development impact that they have?

Retirement from USAID -- Consulting Business 2005 onwards

WISE: Yeah. There was great learning around that. My transition was when I came out of government, and I really did say, and sort of believed, that I was going to do—that I was going to maybe not work and talked about yoga and pottery and gardening and things like that. And then, quickly, I was getting, like, a C minus in retirement because I had started working immediately after that. When I was considering my next move and as word got out people would talk about these big jobs. But I realized I felt uneasy whenever people mentioned these big jobs. I even told a former USAID colleague, "I'm not sure I want to

be a manager." He insisted, saying I had a responsibility because I was good at it. But I thought, "I'd rather avoid the budget issues, personnel challenges, and office politics. I can manage, but I just want to focus on doing meaningful work." That conversation made me realize I might want to step away from a managerial role and explore opportunities that let me do some exciting work.

And it was a time, again, I have sort of learned over my life to, well, ask people. It's hard to. But we talked earlier about, like, I'm not sure I really felt like I had mentors, but I did have—had people that increasingly I would realize, that's how I learn and that's how I process information, by asking questions or asking others, and if it lands then I know maybe that's something and can help me form a decision. So, anyway, I talked to a bunch of people and got some really good advice – make a list of ten people that you would want to work with and then, intentionally go to those ten people, try and find a way to do some work with all of them or some of them.

And so, I had my ten people list and then somebody else told me how to hang out a shingle and be a consultant, have a little sort of boutique consulting structure. I was very lucky in the sense that I didn't have to market. I had a network, and the phone would ring. And then, it was a question of thinking, well, what value do you add as an AID person going into—I didn't want to go right back to AID, and I didn't want to do that same kind of—either use those same instruments or do that same kind of work, but, so then did I have anything to offer. And it was kind of an epiphanous moment for me to realize the stuff that I assume everybody knows about things like monitoring and evaluation or basic project design or even the roadmap of who's who out there. You know, this one actually isn't—you think that's a non-profit; they're actually a for-profit company. You think these guys will be good for here, but they don't actually have any track record, or they really messed up in that. So, knowing something about some of the actors and organizations in the development space to me that was sort of common sense, and like, I thought every single person must know that. But to some, particularly corporate partners, that was rocket science, whereas what they know about subsurface extraction is common knowledge to them and rocket science to me. So, trying to find that kind of overlap of what I had to offer and bring it forward and then who cared to target a little bit of what I wanted to be about.

So, a lot of the work was with corporations and foundations, some with NGOs, and much of it was in structuring partnership opportunities in education or in health, some other ones as well. It covered everything from finding the right partners and having initial conversations to structuring relationships and defining success metrics. A big part was ensuring clear communication and agreement on how to discuss sensitive issues—like in cocoa partnerships, where companies like Hershey's and Mars coordinated their messaging around child labor. It was a mix of partnership-building and strategic design, like a "Partnership 101."

And I would say for AID people or any people that have been in a highly operational role, it was quite funny, going to be a consultant because it's not what you're used to doing. As a consultant, you do your scoping, you have your three great ideas, you

present them to the client and then there's, initially there's this pause like, are you going to do it? Are you going to do it now? Can I help you do it? And you can't make anything happen. You are just an advisor not the one in charge as I was used to being.

But at the same time, you then say, Okay, well, here's my bill, and you go on to fight another battle. And so, that was—that kind of work—I was not only working with different people than I had earlier in my career, but also it was a different kind of work. I found it very stimulating and interesting.

Q: Was it ever challenging in terms of the time perspective? In AID, we all tend to think quite long-term, and the norm is to say that private sector entities are thinking a little bit shorter term. Was that challenging?

WISE: Well, sure. There's the quarterly earnings call, they need to see results in the near term. Working on big development projects and system-wide change, you don't see indicators of results in the near term. People often want things to move quickly, while government or NGO processes can be slow. And so, you have to manage that expectation.

But then, the other thing is that when we were talking about are you using CSR money or are you using regular corporate money, mainly if you're using CSR money, their contributions budget, it's not only more finite, but it's also—it's a single year spend. Whereas AID projects may have big mortgages and they may need to be fed with incremental funding every year. The idea is that you're identifying an envelope of funding that's multi-year. Well, they can't make commitments, multi-year commitments most times, and so you have to get around how can you—how can they be a reliable partner if they don't know if they can make that same commitment the following year, and they can only give you one year's worth of a gift at a go.

Q: But can the expenditures occur during the next year?

WISE: Yes.

Q: That's helpful. So, other lessons from that period that you think are important?

WISE: Well, it's simply to value the skills that we as USAID folks have and how appropriate and valued they are in other places as well. And also, to think about how you can make a contribution that doesn't have to be just everything that you're directly controlling in terms of projects. Since retirement, I have also sat on and still sit on, seven or eight boards, non-profit boards, and I teach. And so, for me that also is—sort of continues the arc of engaging with others.

Q: Absolutely -- and those contributions are important. On the teaching front, are you involved with global development students, and do you see a difference in the young people that are studying global development to the young people that you knew who joined AID when you joined AID?

WISE: Yes. Well, of course, when I joined AID or in AID, there were U.S. direct hires, FSNs, and some other flavors of people. I teach at Georgetown University in the School of Foreign Service program. It's newish, though we're entering our tenth year in the Global Human Development program, and there we intentionally are not training only U.S. citizens who are going to go and work for USAID. About half of our student body are international students. They have—all of them coming into the program have more experience than most of the IDIs or the interns that were coming into AID when I was first onboarded. Because you have to have two to four years of international development experience in order to even pass the admissions screening. But I think that with the focus on localization, with the emphasis on looking at new business models still and also the continued changing role of the public and private sectors and resources that are out there, as well with the strong emphasis that's around now on diversity, equity and inclusion, and not from a compliance perspective from—I mean, I tell the same story about diversity that they tell in the boardroom, that the evidence shows that diverse boards and diverse C suites make better decisions and are less risky, they attract more capital because they're less risky businesses because they are taking in the right perspectives and the right voices and being more stably managed. And that's the same for USAID or a USAID project is that inclusive design is better design. Inclusive and diverse management is more sustainable. And equity should be at the heart of everything we do. That's supposedly why we do it. And so, what I find is that each year the applicants are even more astonishing than the year before, and it's everything from, I started my own social enterprise when I was in a refugee camp in Tanzania where—oh, by the way, I also got polio and I managed to not only get a high school degree but a college degree while I was a refugee in the refugee camp and now I'd like to come to your university and then I'd like to go and give back and be involved in refugee programming when I graduate, to people that are coming now from I worked at Target and I worked on women's economic empowerment and women in the supply chain and I am wanting to up my game by this graduate school exposure, and then I want to work overseas on those issues. So, it's a more diverse group and it gives me hope that maybe I can retire one of these days and know that others are well-carrying development work forward in bigger and better ways..

Q: That's encouraging, both that it's a diverse group, but also that there are diverse avenues to have an impact on global development.

We should probably think about wrapping up, and I'm just wondering if you have any further thoughts or anything you'd like to mention about your career. I think it's really been quite extraordinary.

WISE: Yes. I appreciate you walking with me through this little stroll down memory lane. It was helpful for me to reflect on what it was all about. I think the theme that came forward for me, and probably for anybody reading this, is that it wasn't linear. There was a certain amount of serendipity, luck, opportunity or something that came into play. The long-term training was important to allow me to step to the side and re-energize. I hope people see in me a good example of leadership without authority or leading from where you are and that you can make a change; you don't have to be the boss to be able to make

things happen. And I was just so grateful that I was given a little opening and took it.
(Laughs)

Q: Yeah. Well, in many ways that's the most important lesson. I think people get too caught up in thinking they can only influence from certain positions and that's clearly not the case at all. So, thank you very much, Holly.

WISE: Thank you very much, Carol.

End of interview