

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

**AMBASSADOR ARLENE RENDER**

*Interviewed by: Stu Kennedy  
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*Q: Today is February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2006. This is an interview with Arlene Render. This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Stuart Kennedy. And you go by Arlene, is that it?*

RENDER: That is correct.

*Q: Let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?*

RENDER: I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1943.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about your family. What can you tell me about them? Let's start on your father's side.*

RENDER: My father's family migrated from Tennessee to the Cleveland area when he was very young. He is one of five sons and four daughters. A poor working class family, they valued education and considered graduating from high school a major step. All of his brothers and sisters graduated from high school and several served in the military. My father also wanted to serve in the military but was rejected due to a heart murmur. He compensated for his wish by keeping a scrapbook of World War II. One of his great joys was sharing his scrapbook with us.

My mother's family migrated to Cleveland from Georgia. Many previous generations also resided in Georgia.

*Q: What sort of jobs did your father do?*

RENDER: My father was a blue-collar worker. He worked in a steel mill for many years until the steel plant closed. He continued to work at various business and organizations as part of the maintenance staff.

*Q: How about your mother?*

RENDER: My mother worked as a medical assistant for a private physician and later the Kaiser Foundation.

*Q: Brothers and sisters?*

RENDER: My brothers and sisters are all in Cleveland, Ohio. They are all high school graduates. None of them attended university but received some advance training in areas of their choice, for example, medical records training, tailoring, etc. but their children are beginning to go to university. I am the eldest and the first to extend my education beyond high school.

*Q: Let's talk about growing up in Cleveland. What was Cleveland like? As an African American family, was there sort of an African American section, or was it mixed, or how was it?*

RENDER: Looking in the rear view mirror, it was a very segregated town, like most were in America during that time. Although we resided in a predominately black area, we had a lot of contact with individuals of other races through individuals my parents knew. We didn't encounter a great deal of direct racism and prejudice, because our families protected us from it.

*Q: In your family, as the oldest kid, I take it you got stuck with an awful lot of ... the oldest kid always gets stuck with taking care of the younger siblings.*

RENDER: No, we were fortunate. If you asked my parents, they would say we were an extremely poor family, and I would suspect we were. But no, I never got stuck with taking care of my sisters and brothers. We always had a person who took care of them in our house. We even had some live-in help for many years. This was the way it was done. We even had other families residing with us for periods of time. My parents were givers, always assisting other people.

I can recall a period of time when we had two complete families living in our home along with us for quite some time. They remained friends with my parents.

*Q: Although obviously there wasn't a lot of money, you didn't feel you were growing up poor, did you?*

RENDER: No I never felt that I was growing up poor. We traveled mainly throughout our state during my childhood. I recall going to the ballet. I went to a YWCA camp. We played in the neighborhood. We were among the first in our neighborhood to have television. I remember we lived next to a fire station and the firemen were friendly. They were from other races of course, because there were no black firemen.

*Q: It was one of the more segregated elements at one point, the firefighters.*

RENDER: Right.

*Q: What sort of role did the church play? What church was it and what role did it play?*

RENDER: Like in most black lives, church played a central role in our social lives. Even in the north, black families knew where they were welcomed. Given the ethnicity division of neighborhoods, we even learned which neighborhoods not to walk in to avoid being attacked.

*Q: How about politics? Did you family fit into any...?*

RENDER: Politics were never discussed in front of us, the children. They voted when they were able to and I knew they cared about the lack of opportunities for minorities. They always tried to insulate us from the larger issues of the world.

*Q: In your family, were you the bookish kid?*

RENDER: Yes, I was the bookish kid. Today, we would say nerd. Books took me too far away places and helped me to dream large. My family, however, even now, is a family of readers. Both my mother and sister read several books a week.

*Q: In reading, what sort of things or genre attracted you?*

RENDER: As a child, I was attracted to the Little Women series, the Hardy Boys.

*Q: Carolyn Keene and all the detective stories?*

RENDER: Later, I was attracted to mystery novels, histories of other countries,

*Q: Did you have a library?*

RENDER: We went to the public library in our community. It was not too far from our home. I cherished the fact that you received a gold star for every book you read. As a child, I loved getting the gold stars.

*Q: The public library system is great, isn't it?*

RENDER: Yes. It allows those of us that cannot purchase a lot of books to enjoy books as well.

*Q: What about as a kid playing in your neighborhood. What sort of neighborhood would you call it?*

RENDER: I would call it a homogeneous, very friendly neighborhood. The children all played together in the dead-end street. We played jacks, hopscotch, and rode bicycles, skipped rope. The parents spoke to one another. I cannot say that they were all friends but neighborly.

*Q: Was it almost all African American where you were?*

RENDER: Yes. Neighborhoods were segregated. Therefore, the schools followed the same pattern. Our neighborhood bordered some eastern European neighborhoods and in my high school, we had a few children in attendance from those communities.

*Q: Where did you go to elementary school?*

RENDER: I attended Wooldridge Elementary School, which no longer exists. I had a wonderful experience and good teachers. The teachers were not all African American in those days. So we did have contact with people from other races. I remember my favorite teacher at that time was a Mrs. Glukov.

*Q: I can see a Russian background.*

RENDER: She was a very stimulating elderly teacher. She spent a great deal of time exposing us to material beyond the normal text.

*Q: Looking back on it, although your school was predominantly African American, would you say the books, the supplies, the teaching, were on a par with the other schools?*

RENDER: No. I would say in looking back that the larger issues that affected our society also affected our school. Neighborhood schools meant segregated schools. Therefore, we had to cope with used textbooks, old desks, uninterested teachers that demonstrated their biases against blacks daily. Few schools trips and the tendency to try and make us feel relegated to manual labor jobs throughout our lives.

*Q: Were you getting from your family to keep away from white people?*

RENDER: No. My family always taught us that people were basically good. They had friends from other races. People from other races came to our home. I do not recall them ever talking against a specific group. They did tell us not to venture far from home. We knew, for example, that some areas you just didn't go to. As I said, we were insulated. We didn't experience as children in my family, many things that other children experienced perhaps in the south and elsewhere. They didn't put us in situations where we would have to confront racism, or have it affect us.

*Q: Were you feeling the effects of the Great Migration from the south? The African American coming from the south was almost a different breed of cat. Your family though was up in Ohio. I was wondering whether you felt this at all.*

RENDER: No. I would hear stories about life in the south but I also witness a strength in those that came from the south unlike those of us who grew up in our area. The 1960s began to open up a new political realism in our thoughts and lives. There was a sense that things had to change. I do recall being affected by the air of change when I traveled to Savannah, Georgia, with a family friend.

*Q: How old were you?*

RENDER: I think I was about twelve or thirteen, I don't recall my exact age. I do recall going to the grocery store. Coming from Ohio, of course, I wasn't aware of stores for specific people. I went in the store and I was the only black person in the store. I purchased some junk food. The man at the counter said, "You're not from here." I replied "I am from Ohio. It is hot down here." He took the money and bagged my purchases and I went out of the store. Once across the palm trees, I saw a small crowd. A woman said, "You weren't supposed to go to that store. You were supposed to go to this store. I said, "Oh, I didn't know."

*Q: In elementary school, were there any particular subjects you liked or didn't like?*

RENDER: I particularly liked social studies and history. I think we studied world history as well and I was particularly touched by the stories of World War II. That had a profound impact on me, listening to the things that came out in the years following the war.

*Q: Where did you go to high school?*

RENDER: I went to high school in Cleveland at East Technical High School. It was a boys' school originally. Then they integrated the school to make it coeducational. The original school has been demolished. They have rebuilt the school in a different area with the same name.

The technical and science teachers were good. Some were from western Europe. I studied algebra, geometry, and physics. I recall we had a science teacher who was from Germany. He had told us that prior to teaching, he had work for the government on development of the atomic bomb.

*Q: Was this de facto segregation, as opposed to official or legal segregation?*

RENDER: School districts reflected the same geographic boundaries of neighborhoods. It was de facto segregation. Whenever there was an overcrowded school, they just built a new addition or sent you to another school in the area serving your community.

*Q: Was your school absolutely African American?*

RENDER: There were a few recently arrived students from Eastern Europe who had surely immigrated to America and were living in lower income neighborhoods. I do recall in high school we had one or two students from Eastern Europe. There were no racial problems between us. I had a few eastern European friends who took math and science classes with me.

*Q: How about your reading? Did you keep on reading?*

RENDER: Yes, I love reading and continue to read. It was my interest in reading and languages that brought me into contact with the Latin teacher. She invited me to an interview for a scholarship. She did not, however, go into details about the scholarship. As a result, I was reluctant to go to the interview and did not even discuss it with my parents. On the day of the interview, I began to think about a possible miss opportunity and decided to go.

We were late to the interview. Luckily, the Alumni committee waited for me. Now that I am older, I believe that she and other members of the committee had already decided that probably I was a good candidate for a scholarship. I received a complete paid four year scholarship to West Virginia State College now known as West Virginia State University.

*Q: This was when?*

RENDER: That was in 1960.

*Q: Did you get at all engaged in the election of 1960, which many people did?*

RENDER: No. I was not engaged but was excited about it. Remember, African American participation in many areas was not welcomed.

*Q: In your area, was Carl Stokes at all active at that time?*

RENDER: I believe so but not yet a household name within our community.

*Q: So you were at West Virginia State College from 1960 to 1964?*

RENDER: Yes. Then I went to the University of Michigan School of Public Health from 1965 to 1967 and got a Master's in Public Health.

*Q: What was West Virginia State College like?*

RENDER: West Virginia State College was a small predominantly African American institution that sat in the foothills of Appalachia, six miles west of Charleston in Institute, West Virginia. It was a small university, about 3,000 students. It was good for me, having grown up in a protected environment. Students were from every corner of the United States and came from all backgrounds. As part of my scholarship, I worked in the library. It was a good opportunity for I got to know the student body by working at the library. It also made me knowledgeable about the library's collection.

*Q: Where did the other students come from?*

RENDER: They came from all over the United States as well as the world. I recall students from Taiwan, Japan. Interestingly enough, many of the U.S. students were children of parents who had graduated from that institution. It was sort of generational. A lot of them followed in their parents' footsteps to West Virginia State College. Today,

West Virginia State College is no longer a predominantly African American school. It is predominantly an integrated school, and the African American population, I understand, is very small.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the problems of Appalachia?*

RENDER: Absolutely. To collect leaves for biology, you have to go up into the foothills. The families and the children in the foothills knew the school existed and did not shoot you if you were in their area. The scenery is magnificent. But it is very easy to get lost. They knew we were the students from the college, and they would always lead us in the right direction back out of the hills. No one tried to hurt us.

The children used to come to the campus for vaccinations. I do recall researchers coming to the area to study the language of the people in the hills because many of them spoke old English from the Scottish area, etcetera. The level of poverty stood out for me and I was struck by the lack of caring by county and city officials.

I do recall one time when a group of us were in the foothills collecting leaves for biology, we forgot about the time and lost our sense of direction. We ended up far away from where we started. Some of the families alerted the school. When we emerged, a state trooper car was there and he radioed we were ok. It was rattlesnake season and they were hoping we had not encountered or disturb any rattlesnakes.

*Q: It's just gorgeous there.*

*What subjects did you find yourself concentrating on?*

RENDER: At that time, I thought I was going to study medicine, because I always had an interest in medicine and science. Most of my courses dealt with science. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Education. I studied science and education because I really didn't quite know what I wanted to study. Then I went on to get a Master's in Public Health. I thought I like this side of the field. So I did that at Michigan.

*Q: At West Virginia, this was a time when the civil rights movement was moving along. Were you and your fellow students engaged in this?*

RENDER: There wasn't much to be engaged in. Institute is a small town. The college is the bulk of the money in the town. There weren't any issues that needed to be resolved. So we were not deeply involved in the civil rights movement. Yes, there was zealotry and a concern about civil rights. There were many discussions on campus about civil liberties and civil rights. But Institute is a small place.

*Q: Then you went to the University of Michigan. How did you do that? Were you involved in any extra-curricular activities like sororities?*

RENDER: Yes, I belonged to Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. I joined the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. You say, “Well, why did you do that?”

When I think about it, I am not quite sure other than I enjoyed the women who belonged to that organization. They were good mentors and good friends. I also had friends in the other sororities as well. I was not, as I said, a groupie. I had friends everywhere. I had friends in all of the sororities. I chose that one because of their ideas, I think.

*Q: Then you went to the University of Michigan,*

RENDER: Yes, the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, to the School of Public Health.

*Q: And you were there from when to when?*

RENDER: From 1965 to 1967. I graduated with a Master’s in Public Health, an MPH they call it.

*Q: What does that mean?*

RENDER: Masters in Public Health has several fields. I majored in public health education. They have epidemiology, public administration for people who become involved in hospital administration. I was on the educational side of health, how you teach people about their health, how to maintain their health, what the issues are in health, how to educate, how to do things.

While I was at the University of Michigan School of Public Health, I spent one summer working for the Health Department in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I went around and talked to women who had pap smears and received positive results. I encouraged them to go for further follow up. It was enlightening because I learned a lot about people’s fears and concerns, how you can motivate someone to make the right choices, and how a thin line can separate a person from life or death. How do you approach people on such a sensitive subject area?

*Q: Anybody having this or any other manifestation of cancer is scary as hell.*

RENDER: Correct. In those days, it was extremely scary. I was young and most of the people I was talking to were older and had more experience about life. I would go and say I was from the Health Department, that the test was positive, and they wanted you to go for follow up. I would try to answer questions that I would want answered. Some would break down in tears. Some would say they didn’t want to do this or that they should never have taken the test. It was an interesting experience.

*Q: How did you like Michigan?*

RENDER: I loved it. I thought it was superb. Clearly, when you put the resources of Michigan against the resources of West Virginia State, it is a whole different world, and



that showed clearly. I am glad I have an M.P.H. in Public Health. I think it is an area of expertise that is still growing in diplomacy. It has helped in my work overseas.

I recall in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, my first assignment, that the CDC (Center for Disease Control) teams were vaccinating people against smallpox. I used to go out with the teams to observe their work. Since I had this background in public health, they were open to my joining them when they went into a village. I was proud we were focused on a Public Health problem and eradicating it. Smallpox eradication should rightly be seen as a victory

*Q: At Michigan, were there protests?*

RENDER: There were a lot of campus protests about the Vietnam War. When you were walking on the campus, you had to carefully avoid certain areas when there were demonstrations. The problem was worrying if the local authorities would pick you up if you were in the area even if you were not a participant. If you didn't want to be caught in any dragnet, you had to be aware of what was happening on the campus, and try to avoid those areas. As a black person, I already had a fear of police authorities and clearly did not want to be anywhere I could possibly get hurt.

*Q: That was experience of almost all the graduate students who wanted to get on with it.*

*What were you pointed towards? Did you have any particular area you wanted to get into in public health?*

RENDER: I wanted to become involved in international health. It was clear that health and disease would come closer together given increase in world travel and the nature of viruses and bacteria.

So I majored in public health. I thought at the time a Bachelor of Science in Education, and a Master's in Public Health, would keep me current and if I decided to become a physician, I would be able to readily apply. I had spoken to the admission office at Michigan and I felt good about my prospects for entry if I decided to pursue a medical degree. My high school yearbook would have told you I was going to be a pediatrician.

*Q: This brings up a question. In high school, college, and then graduate school, did the outside world intrude? It was a rather turbulent time in American politics, but also the Cold War and all that. Did that engage you much?*

RENDER: Yes it did. I was struck at how the world was divided into spheres. I knew why. I wondered what the future would bring. Given the desire to strive for whatever goals I set, would I have the opportunity to achieve them or would the racial divide keep me from moving forward.

The civil rights movement definitely had a profound impact on me, as did the establishment of the Peace Corps. All of these things had to do with service to others. So

did my religious upbringing, and my family's lifestyle of helping other people. I think this all converged into public health because you help people, provide information, and do things as a service to others.

*Q: Were you hearing much about Africa during this time?*

RENDER: I knew Africa existed. I was very much aware of what was happening in Ghana and those countries that were independent at the time. I knew a little about apartheid. I wondered when it was going to change. I had a profound interest in the continent, mostly because it was underdeveloped. I felt it had great potential with its natural resources. How could one help to turn the circle?

This gave me an interest in the Peace Corps. I did think about joining the Peace Corps early on when it was created. I didn't though. I went on to graduate school.

*Q: When you got out of graduate school in 1967, what did you do?*

RENDER: I went to work in my hometown of Cleveland, Ohio, for the City of Cleveland Health Department. I worked as a public health educator. I was then asked to work for them as their contribution to a newly formed neighborhood healthcare center called Hough-Norwood. Hough was the black area, and Norwood was the ethnically diverse area where you had mostly people from Eastern Europe – Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland.

*Q: They were going to the mills and all that.*

RENDER: That's right. This was called the Hough- Norwood Healthcare Center. In this Center, I worked with different individuals from both neighborhoods to try to develop community health workers who would go out and explain what the health center was about, what its mission was, and how they could participate. It was to provide healthcare. That center still exists. It is bigger and wider. It is sort of like a healthcare plan now.

This was during the time that people were looking at neighborhood health centers and comprehensive healthcare provided in a single building or location.

*Q: What were the issues that you had to deal with there? Was it getting people to come?*

RENDER: The issue wasn't so much the clientele to come. Once they learned of its existence, they came. I found I spent a great deal of my time trying to deal with the different groups of people who worked at the center. They had different backgrounds and you had to merge them into a unified group to carry out their function.

I remember an example of differences in values. A young lady found a great deal of cash on a street, not just in one location but also literally all over the street. I don't remember the amount, but it was more than a few thousand. She brought it to the office and I told her we had to notify the police authorities. The money could have been stolen, who

knows. The staff was of the mindset that they would never see the money again if the police authorities came. However, I won out and I had the police come and take the funds and provide me with a receipt for the money. Fortunately, after several months, the police concluded that it was lost cash and the finders could keep it.

Preventive care was hard to teach. Most individuals felt they would be wasting time and money just getting a yearly check-up.

I learned a great deal about the concerns of the Eastern European residents. They had fears and concerns beyond health issues. I tried to be as helpful as I would on issues ranging from health care to legal assistance to getting their adult children in the suburbs to visit them more often.

*Q: One of the great sad stories about immigration to the United States is the divide that very quickly happens between the children who were born here or came here at a very early age, and their parents who often don't speak English well. They made the sacrifice to come for their kids, but they end up being rather isolated.*

RENDER: That's right. The children forget the old ways and adopt new ones. I became friends with many elderly residents. They needed someone to converse with. I helped filled the void. As a result, I was often treated to meals of great delight and learned about the worlds they left behind. My interest in the world became magnified through my chats with these individuals.

I became even more interested in foreign travel and living as time went by. A retired FBI agent suggested that I pursue an interest in the Foreign Service. My conversation with the FBI agent began my long road towards the Department of State.

*Q: What had you heard initially about the State Department? Did you have any feel for the Foreign Service?*

RENDER: I knew it was predominantly white and there were very few individuals like me. I knew competition was tough and promotions were earned by performance. I liked that idea of promotions earned by performance. Entry would be a long shot but I would try.

*Q: Did you know anybody who had been involved with this at all?*

RENDER: No. I had read books authored by Foreign Service individuals. When I called for information, I learned that an individual I had known at university was working there in the Director General's office. When I called for information, he remembered me. He sent me the information. He kept bugging me to apply. I finally did and one day I got a call that I should travel to Washington. I had been accepted into the Foreign Service Reserve Officer program.

*Q: Did you take an oral exam?*

RENDER: Yes, I did take a very lengthy oral exam in Michigan.

*Q: When was this?*

RENDER: I took the exam approximately six to eight months later. I traveled to Washington in 1970.

*Q: What was the program?*

RENDER: It was the Foreign Service Reserve Officers program. I had undergone the oral examination in Michigan. Based upon the exam and as well as your official performance evaluations for five years which were the same for everyone in the Foreign Service, they would make a determination whether or not you should remain in the Foreign Service.

*Q: Was there a group of you when you first came in for training?*

RENDER: Foreign Service Reserve officers were trained with the other officers.

*Q: Basically, you were accepted and went into the A-100 class.*

RENDER: Yes.

*Q: What was your A-100 class like?*

RENDER: It was a large class. There were only three or four minority officers. There were also two women and I was one of the two in my class. Many of my colleagues are Ambassadors.

*Q: How did you find this?*

RENDER: They were open. Right away, two or three of my classmates who had been children of Foreign Service Officers took me under their wing and shepherded me through the paperwork we had to complete the first day, e.g. insurance. I remain friends with these classmates.

When it came time for assignments in the A-100 class, one had to take the list provided to us and indicate your first or second choice. Since the list of choices was limited, officers began discussing how to obtain one's first or second choice. It worked out for us. Only two of us wanted to go to Africa.. He went to Senegal and I went to Côte d'Ivoire.

*Q: This was still early days, before we were getting such a diverse group of people.*

RENDER: People were always surprised to see me.

*Q: I am not talking just on the race side. But on background, public health was not very high on the list as an obvious one. It was usually history, economics, and etcetera.*

RENDER: No, it wasn't on the list at all. People would just sort of dismiss that part in the Foreign Service. They would ask, "Where did you go to school?"

I would say, "West Virginia State and University of Michigan."

"What did you study?"

I would reply Education and Public Health. They would just remain silent or say Oh.

*Q: Nobody really said, "Hey! That's something different."*

RENDER: Oh no.

*Q: Why did you want to go to Africa?*

RENDER: Several reasons. One was Africa for me was interesting and exciting, a place where a lot of development was taking place. It was a chance to be on the cutting edge of development of democratic institutions that were underway at the time. I also felt a sense of my own ethnic roots. To learn a little bit more about that part of the world. I knew when I selected Africa that it was not the center of the universe in the State Department, and that it wasn't likely to lead to great success in the Foreign Service because it was not Europe. Therefore, it was a conscious decision, but that was okay. I hadn't joined the Foreign Service thinking I would be there for my entire career. I decided to just enjoy the opportunities and do my very best despite the challenges.

*Q: Had you at all gotten caught up in something that was going on in the time you were in college that was African studies? Or African American studies?*

RENDER: No. I studied world history. We live in the world and I knew a great deal about African American history, music and literature. I just wanted an assignment in Africa to see first-hand what the challenges were for the people and it seemed to me that I would get to have a very varied work experience and I found that to be true.

*Q: Then you went to Côte d'Ivoire?*

RENDER: Cote d'Ivoire was my first post.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

RENDER: From 1971 to 1973.

*Q: When you got there, what was it like at that time?*

RENDER: It was the Paris of Africa. It was vibrant. It was rich. You thought you were in a small, miniature France. There were good roads, good restaurants, and French cuisine. There was a large French population, at that time, between eighty and a hundred thousand. I was struck by the lack of Africans in mid-level managerial positions. The French and other nationalities held these positions. Most Africans were treated like second-class citizens within their own country but they did not seem to be bothered by the things I saw. The French, however, recognized instantly that I came from the United States and were careful in how they approached me.

*Q: Had you taken French before you left?*

RENDER: Yes, I studied French at FSI. I spoke correct French and I encouraged French people I came in contact with to correct my language so I could improve my competency. French. This correcting someone goes counter to French culture, they were hesitant but seeing I was serious about it, they began to do so and boy was it helpful. I began to get many invitations to French homes and had a chance to learn even more about how the country was run and who was on first base and who was in trouble. Mrs. Nixon paid an official visit to Côte d'Ivoire during my time as a junior officer. I was asked by the Ambassador to serve as her aide de camp and gift officer for her four days visit. He told me that he was assigning me to role since I spoke French and knew everyone she would be coming in contact with. It was a wonderful political growing experience. She opened up to me and I found her to be a gracious woman. I do recall being asked by a reporter for Time magazine, who was on the official trip, to do a story about me but I declined. I didn't want to be singled out for publicity.

*Q: How did you find the coterie around Mrs. Nixon? Often, they can be really the pain in the neck.*

RENDER: Actually, she was low-key. She didn't have a lot of people around her. She used most of the people from the mission. I wrote the letters that you send back to the White House that are put on official paper. So what I tried to do was at every stop make sure that I wrote the letter, to put in the correct names so I wouldn't forget, and make sure I had a file ready so that when she had "wheels up," the letters could be given to the staff and they could get on the airplane and do what they did with them. Her staff member was surprised that the official letters were ready when it was wheels up time. The real bother was the earplug I had to wear to be in communication with the Secret Service.

*Q: The earplug was from...?*

RENDER: The Secret Service. I didn't like that so well, but I learned to live with it for a few days.

*Q: Who was your ambassador?*

RENDER: John F. Root was the Ambassador during that time. He was very instrumental in exposing me to the political side of the house. Although I was a consular officer on my

first tour, he gave me many issues to work on. One was to prepare him for a meeting at the Foreign Ministry on the “Two Chinas” issue at that time. I remember wading through all the State Department messages, etcetera, to write his briefing cards. Not schooled in Department ways of preparing briefing notes, I placed the key points on small cards but in large print to enable the reader to glance at the notes without appearing to be reading them.

When I went to see the ambassador, he asked, “Where is my paper?”

I thought, “Oh boy.”

I said, “I put the info on three by five cards.” Boy, was he happy, because he had note cards that he could hold in his hands in large print so he could just glance down and see clearly what was written. He seemed impressed. He often gave me assignments afterwards that involved preparing briefing notes for him. I did not mind, for I was gaining invaluable experience and growing politically.

*Q: How did you find your induction to the Foreign Service? Everybody who comes in has no idea. What did you think about it?*

RENDER: Our class had been told prior to arriving in Washington that we would most likely go to Vietnam. This was during the time of the Vietnam War. Once we were in Washington, we were told that none of us would be going to Vietnam, because they had a change in policy.

In terms of the A-100 course, I think it was a pretty good introduction. Clearly, over the years, they have developed the course to make it better. It had many loopholes, because many of the things you do as a junior officer, you had no training for prior to going to post. You had to use your own knowledge and intuition. I don’t think that was so bad either.

I think they did a pretty good job in those days of matching people to jobs, at least some people to jobs, in terms of what you had done before. They sent me to Côte d’Ivoire and I was the only consular officer in the section. There was no one else, so I had to use my own wits. Luckily for me, I also had a very good Foreign Service National employee. That was very helpful. I think often times people overlook their Foreign Service Nationals. I found he was an integral part of the section. I needed him because he knew very well consular laws and regulations.

*Q: Were the Foreign Service Nationals African or French?*

RENDER: In my section, the Foreign Service National was a Togolese who spoke French, German, and English. He had been raised in Togo and was fluent in all three. He was very quiet and very reserved, but had a mountain of information. All you had to do was to let him know he was valued and you saw him as an integral part of the team. He

would bring the FAM books, opened on the right pages of the applicable laws, so you could review all relevant sections before you met with the client.

*Q: What sort of things did you have in the Consular Section?*

RENDER: Our cases were mostly non-immigrant visas to the U.S and U.S. passport/citizenship cases. I issued a number of Certificates of Birth to U.S. citizen children of U.S. citizens. When I was in Côte d'Ivoire you had at that time the effects of the Biafra war in Nigeria.

*Q: Oh yes, the Biafra War.*

RENDER: Very important. And the leader of the Biafra War had fled to and was living in Côte d'Ivoire. I recall a significant visa case whereby he wanted a visa for a son to go to school in America. I spoke to the leader by telephone and explained what documents he needed to include proof of financing. He complied providing me with a copy of his bank account statement from a London bank. He was concerned that the information he provided me would only be used to secure the visa and I explained that was the case. I told him I would not be publishing the info. The info would be included in the envelope with the student visa. I recall informing the political section that I had received a letter from him with the required info for a visa for his son. This piqued their interest, an actual letter from the leader of the Biafra war. I was told I should inform Washington of the visa request. I said ok but pointed out I didn't see any problems with the request. The student had been accepted to one of our most elite universities in New England. However, I sent an appropriate message to Washington to alert them. I learned that although I was right about the visa, the political section just wanted me to ensure the desk in Washington was not blindsided. This was a lesson I remembered throughout my career. Keep Washington informed.

*Q: What were you getting from your colleagues about how did we view Houphouet-Boigny?*

RENDER: During that time, he could do no wrong. He was the man of the hour. He was President of a country that was flourishing. People were coming from all over the world to see it. He built an infrastructure second to none, bridges and roads all over the country. He was developing the agricultural base. It was strong, vibrant. Forty percent of the cocoa comes from Côte d'Ivoire, so there was a great deal of interest in it from the chocolate manufacturers of the world. They were selling their products to Europe.

It was not a poor country. It was a rich country. They had their own resources. We provided no aid. At that time, the poorest people earned about \$1,000-plus per year. In terms of Africa, it was a very high income at the time. Immigrants from all of the countries in West Africa were flocking to the country and work opportunities were abundant on construction projects. While Ivoirians were not resentful of the influx at the time because the foreigners were engaged in manual labor jobs, I could see that immigration could become a future political concern.



*Q: How did you see the position of the United States?*

RENDER: We were well liked by the Ivoirians. I think they were pleased to have relations with the U.S. as an offset to the French, to show that they were not only in the French orbit. As you know, Anglophone and Francophone Africa were divided by their colonial heritage and language. Therefore, the French dominated side was very pleased to have relationships with the U.S. to say, "You see, we have relationships with both. We are not just in the camp of the French." Particularly for Côte d'Ivoire, which had most of its neighbors, both French and English, jealous of its position and economic achievements.

I think we paid too little attention to the impact of autocratic leadership and the problems such leadership brings. Although it may be peaceful and may be working at the time, we weren't looking at the longer-term impact. I personally don't believe that all societies need to operate identically to ours but must have some avenues for freedom of expression in all areas of life. We did not have to upset the apple cart, just have conversations about impact of immigration, citizenship. How to move from just exporting raw materials to developing finished products which would have increased the development of jobs and perhaps lessen some of the immigration issues the west is facing today. If you look at Côte d'Ivoire today, the issues of immigration and citizenship are coming home to roost. In a one party state, it doesn't matter. However, later in time, with the development of political parties and a growing, more diverse citizen body such issues can become polarizing. If you had asked Ivoirians in 1970 if a civil war would take place in 2001-2002, they would have said, "No, never, not in Côte d'Ivoire." A key issue of citizenship raised its head.

*Q: We'll be coming to that obviously.*

*How did you and your colleagues find the French there?*

RENDER: At that time, they were entrenched. Côte d'Ivoire was the jewel in the crown for the French. They were proud of it. They didn't like nor expect competition. They didn't want American competition. But they liked the fact that the U.S. was there diplomatically. In terms of French businesses, etcetera, everything in Côte d'Ivoire was in their hands.

I think the program that bothered them the most was when Côte d'Ivoire decided to start sending young people to America to study. The returnees were confident and exerted more pressure on Houphouët to put them in positions of authority. So there was a delicate balancing act between those who went to America and returned, and the French who were in charge of the ministries. The government was aware of their desire and did place some of them in good positions.

In the 1970s, in Côte d'Ivoire, only a very few people had sufficient funds to study in the United States.

*Q: Did we have any Peace Corps there at the time?*

RENDER: Yes, the Peace Corps program began in 1962. It was a large program by Peace Corps standards at that time. Volunteers were mostly involved in educational and agricultural programs. I became friends with many of them and my residence became a drop off the laundry place for some.

*Q: Were you able to get out into the Interior?*

RENDER: I traveled all over Côte d'Ivoire. I could see that Houphouët's plan was working. Infrastructure was everywhere. People were building things. People had hope. He was concerned about poverty and education. He put a hotel and an airstrip for small planes in every major town. And he put televisions everywhere, so people could go to the village shop and watch the local news.

Some Westerners thought this was folly. I being a junior officer couldn't say whether it was or it wasn't, but I in my own head thought, "Well, if people are given information, it's probably good. The question is how do you go about doing it?"

I could see that the fast-moving pace was drawing people to the cities in massive numbers. That's when they developed a program locally to encourage people to go back to the countryside. They would give them land and implements to begin farming. That's when a lot of people began to return to small-scale farming, planting cocoa and other products. This helped to grow the agricultural base in the country.

*Q: Did you find that you were ever putting on your public health hat?*

RENDER: Oh yes. It was constant. CDC was there during my first tour during the smallpox eradication. I did accompany them on a couple of field visits. Also, I could talk to doctors and nurses easily and developed many contacts in the medical community. I had a real sense, beyond the beautiful pristine facilities what the real issues were in the health field. People had a lot of basic health problems. Health Education was definitely needed but not a mission priority at that time.

The Peace Corps physician and I were pretty close, because he was dealing with health issues among the volunteers. On many weekends, I found him treating locals who were in dire need. For me, he represented what a physician should be. He was a very kind human being and true to his oath.

*Q: How big was the embassy?*

RENDER: The embassy was quite large and served as the regional hub in the seventies. AID had its large regional office there as well as the courier services and other administrative programs such as budgeting. Although located in one building, it was bursting at the seams.

*Q: Was there a group of junior Foreign Service Officers there?*

RENDER: There were one or two additional junior officers at post. , We did spend time together, the three of us. One was a USIS (United States Information Services) or Public Diplomacy Officer. We were all very close to one another. While we discussed our experiences in the country, we did not discuss too much our long-term career plans.

I wanted to learn more about the Defense Attaché office and was able to develop a good relationship with the Colonel and his staff in the embassy. He provided me the opportunity to take trips around the region with him to see West Africa in the Attaché plane. These were usually day trips whereby he would meet with military officials in the various countries and I would meet with embassy colleagues. This was invaluable for it helped me later in my career in my dealings with the Defense Department.

I always felt that the Ambassador was very good to me. He made sure that I was not taken advantage of and ensured that I had working experiences in many sections of the embassy including political affairs even though I was the junior officer responsible for consular affairs. He invited me to many events at the residence and sought my opinion. The political counselor was also extremely good to me and” kept me involved in his section’s activities.

I recall him telling me very early on, “You don’t ask Washington what to do. You tell Washington what you are going to do. And if Washington doesn’t agree, then they will come back and tell you what to do. You have to lead, not be led. The leaders will make it.”

*Q: It’s absolutely true.*

RENDER: So I decided to be a leader and lead, not be led, unless it was helpful.

*Q: Was the Soviet Union at all present or a factor there?*

RENDER: I think the Russians had an embassy but I do not recall ever encountering them. As you are aware, a U.S. security rule of personnel engagement with the eastern bloc was limited. Houphouet was clearly in the Western alliance but had diplomatic relations with many eastern European countries, e.g. former Yugoslavia. When it came to South Africa, he was one of the few African leaders who had a working relationship with apartheid South Africa. The relationship was not advertised but one found goods from South Africa in the markets and their aircraft landed there and took on passengers. I think Houphouet felt he could play a role in bridging the differences between the white leadership and people in South Africa.

*Q: Did you see a career in Africa?*

RENDER: I saw a career in Africa but not necessarily a Foreign Service career. I thought I might consider moving to an international organization to work in the field of Public Health. However, I realized that I could use my health knowledge and skills in the Foreign Service since a number of international health organizations are represented in the countries where we had embassies. I also found that my background in public health was useful in developing contacts in the country at all levels of government and civil society and I was often the first to learn of interesting political and economic issues and problems.

*Q: Did your next assignment come in 1973?*

RENDER: I went to Iran. I was in a country that the U.S. considered friendly towards our country and our interests. There were hundreds of Americans in Iran. You had the U.S. military and a number of private military contract companies such as Bell Helicopter.

*Q: I think this might be a good place to stop.*

The next time we do this, we will pick up your experiences in Iran. You said you found it interesting but we will talk about what you observed, what you were doing there, and all that.

*Q: Today is December 19th, 2006. You were in Iran from when to when?*

RENDER: Iran was my second tour. I believe I was there from 1973 to 1975.

*Q: What was your job?*

RENDER: I was one of many Vice Consuls at the U.S. Embassy, working in the extremely busy Visa Section.

*Q: I realize you were down at the bottom of the totem pole at the embassy, but what were you getting there when you went there about our relations with Iran? From your view, you were brand new to the area, how did you see Iran at that time?*

RENDER: Prior to my assignment to Iran, I had a one on one meeting with the Secretary for Consular Affairs, Ms. Barbara Watson. She wanted me to know that this assignment was an important one and I was being assigned to a part of the world where some felt women should not be assigned. I understood from my preparations that Iran, clearly from a U.S. perspective, was a very important political player in our U.S. strategy. Our Ambassador to Iran at that time also signaled the importance of the country in our strategic vision for he was a well-known and highly regarded individual. He was Richard Helms.

*Q: Who had been the head of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency).*

RENDER: Correct. The senior embassy staff was large. Almost every U.S. agency was represented in the mission. The Department of Defense had a large presence including private contractors. There was a great deal of military exchange and advisors in Iran at that time. What I saw on the ground was a changing Iran that may have been changing too fast, led by a Shah who had created himself and appeared to me to be disconnected from a large segment of the population.

One of the things that happened to me early on in Iran was I met many Iranian families. Getting to know these families led me to have a greater in depth understanding of how they saw themselves and their country. Some, the highly educated, liked the changes that were underway. Those who were more religious, thought things were changing too fast, and not for the better. There was some sentiment, even then, for the Ayatollah Khomeini. This sentiment was always expressed in private, outdoor conversations. Many students also had a rosy picture of Khomeini. Iranians were proud to be Persians. They valued their history and knew they were different from Arabs and others. They saw themselves as friends of all peaceful people and that included people in the West. Students were coming to the United States in droves. This was a positive development and why the consular section was so large.

I tried to learn as much as I could about Iran. It's history, music, art, and literature. While my Persian was not fluent, I used it daily and tried to communicate with Persians in their own language. I received many invitations from Iranians representing all walks of life to various family occasions. I recall a senior American officer at the embassy saying to me, "You were discussed this morning in the staff meeting. The Ambassador used you as an example of what diplomats should be doing. He said everybody should get out and get to know Iran like Arlene. I see her everywhere. She is invited by a wide variety of Iranian society."

Understanding the culture and having insights into the physic helped me in carrying out my duties as a consular officer. I made many important contacts, particularly in the judiciary and business communities that could provide invaluable assistance on problems.

*Q: What were you doing as a Vice Consul?*

RENDER: As Vice Consul, I handled requests for non-immigrant and immigrant visas to the United States as well as the broad range of American Citizen Services. We spent a lot of time on American prisoners incarcerated for drug trafficking. Detained on drug charges traveling from Afghanistan at the border with Iran. I attended trials often in the most northern city of Mashhad. I recall hiring the very first American citizen who lived in Mashhad to visit the prisoners and to keep us posted on who was arrested. We cut down drastically the time between individuals being arrested and our learning of their arrest by having a consular agent in Mashhad. It was important to have that extra link. She was an American married to an Iranian and had been in the country over twenty years. She had traveled to Iran by boat.

*Q: How did you find the Americans in Iranian prisons? What was their lot?*

RENDER: Most of the Americans found in Iranian prisons were young, white and middle class or better. It takes resources to travel outside the U.S. starting with the purchase of a ticket. They all stated they were innocent. They had no idea how kilos of marijuana or hashish got into their vehicles.

*Q: You say they all felt they were innocent?*

RENDER: All Americans arrested on drug charges felt they were innocent, even if the evidence was to the contrary. Although incarcerated, foreign prisoners were kept in separate cells from Iranian prisoner and clearly orders had been given from above to insure no one was physically mistreated. When I met with prisoners, they would tell me they had seen the physician in the infirmary.

Some faked illnesses just to go the infirmary since it was a more relaxed environment. I also know that prison officials would discuss how much time they spent caring for our prisoners. They also explained that they had to censor the magazines that I brought for negative Iran content. I would also take things they longed for such as peanut butter.

*Q: Peanut butter is the consular officer's standby.*

RENDER: Yes. Who doesn't like peanut butter?

I attended many trials. Many judges thought I was a lawyer because on occasion I would ask for clarity on a statement or procedure in Persian. In one case, the arrested individuals explained to the judge the female detainee was a hitchhiker. They just gave her a ride to Iran. Her case was dismissed and she was allowed to leave the country immediately. Presence at these trials also made legal personnel and judges aware that the U.S. was concerned about their citizens.

*Q: Did you have women in jail too?*

RENDER: Unfortunately yes. A few women found themselves arrested. All on drug charges. They were maintained in prisons for women and usually in Tehran. I found the prison not in good shape and I constantly worried about their health. I also contacted many U.S. families for funds to purchase things for their children. Some parents were extremely supportive of their children but many just expected the U.S. to take care of issues and problems regarding their love ones.

*Q: What about doing non-immigrant visa work? Who was applying? What were they after? What were the problems?*

RENDER: The vast majority of our applicants were male students wishing to pursue undergraduate university studies. There was a great deal of interest in pre-med, engineering, science and education. The problems included the sheer numbers of

applicants in the summertime; and how they treated other applicants in the waiting room because they wanted to be seen first.

This is where the Persian culture would intervene. They would have people start to call to ask to help this student or that student. They wouldn't call you specifically, but the section itself. We didn't take those calls. It gave you a sense of how their culture works. Use influence if you can just like in the U.S.

*Q: Were you concerned about their coming back?*

RENDER: Not too much at that time. Iran was very prosperous. Applicants saw a future for themselves within Iran. This does not mean we were not rigorous in our determinations of eligibility. It was only later, towards the end of my tour that I realized many were making preparations to leave and probably would not return.

*Q: What was happening?*

RENDER: That was the beginning of an increase in a negative undercurrent in the society. The Shah was not as stable as many thought. I learned that there were many young Marxist type groups associated with youth in the Soviet Union. Several university students of well to do families had been arrested by the Iranian Secret Police (SAVAK). I was at the home of one when the reported head of SAVAK brought him home. The student explained he was walking by a small protest and got caught up in it when the police arrived. You also had this large U.S. presence that included a large military presence. A consular section local employee was shot and killed one morning while out of the section on official business and two U.S. Defense Department officers a few weeks later. I understand that the consular section employee was killed by members of an extremist group he was a member. The divide between the well-educated, more affluent society and the less affluent more religious was beginning to get even larger. Many felt changes were too fast and moving away from their religious roots. They felt there should be a more fundamentalist adherence to society and regulations. I began to think those two things were going to brush against one another.

*Q: Did you or other members of the embassy have any contact with the mullahs at all?*

RENDER: Remember that I was a Vice Consul.

*Q: I realize that. I was just wondering if you noticed this.*

RENDER: I never heard it mentioned but I cannot say that people in the embassy did or didn't. I doubt it. While I didn't have direct contact with any, I did attend several occasions where Iranian women meet, discuss their woes, hopes, and share food together. Mullahs attended these occasions to bless the food prior to our consuming the meal. I was always the only foreigner at these meals. My "adopted Iranian mother" would take me to such events. Through her, I was exposed to many Iranian events where I gained invaluable knowledge.

*Q: I doubt it too.*

RENDER: I don't think so because I distinctly recall one occasion that the entire embassy staff was told to stay indoors because of a religious holiday where they hit themselves with chains.

*Q: This is to mourn the death of Ali.*

RENDER: On that day, an Iranian family that I was close too called me. They told me that their son was on his way to pick me up. When he arrived at my home, he placed me in a chador and took me to their home. Later, the mother of the family went to the poorest part of Tehran where she handed out food baskets to people.

*Q: Speaking as a Vice Consul back in the 1950s in Tehran. We had some problems there. Students would go to the United States with quite a bit of money. They would have a great time going to the University of Texas for instance. They would come back with an American wife. All of a sudden she would find herself pregnant and with a Middle Eastern family where she was.*

RENDER: Yes, that's what I was seeing in the American Citizens Section. Many American women were marrying Iranians they met while living in the U.S. Many traveled to Iran thinking they knew their spouses who were quite open in the U.S but quickly readapted to Iranian culture once home. Meaning men were dominant in their homes. They also learned that they fell under Iranian laws, which were not positive towards women. Women could not leave the country without the permission of their spouses. This law was enforced. I spent a lot of time on those issues pertaining to the treatment of Americans in Iran, which were very complex. Between you and me, I used to help many leave the country with their children. My efforts backfired on me once, when the American left her diary and her spouse found out I had arranged her departure. He went to the government to complain and the government told the embassy I had violated Iranian law but took no further action. My supervisor cautioned me but was surprised that I was successful in my efforts.

Six months later, she returned. It was her choice. She and her spouse came to see me and he apologized. He said he understood why she left and made adjustments by moving from his family home so they could reside like they did in the U.S.

*Q: How did you help them get out?*

RENDER: I had made many contacts in the Ministry of Justice and at the airport. I would arrange for them to board their flights without difficulty at the departure exit. I would sometimes have to issue new limited travel documents if they did not have their own passports. My supervisor only knew of two cases. I also helped several non-American spouses from other western countries using my contacts. I was extremely careful. I never made promises or gave impression I could help. I merely would say just keep in touch.



*Q: Did you have any problem with your supervisors in the Consular Section?*

RENDER: I never advised them. They only learned that I had helped one individual when the husband complained to the government and the government in turn complained to the embassy.

*Q: This is just one of the things. Anybody who interferes with marital relations, if there is an abusive husband, so you do all sorts of things to get the wife out of the country. Then a few months later, she is back, being abused. You are dealing with a chemistry of which you have no control over, but you do your best.*

RENDER: I did my best. I found that many Americans were in good circumstances. Most of these were married to men of means. They had studied in the U.S. and returned to open businesses and were doing well. An American spouse was a status symbol for some of them. Those married to less educated individuals that they met in the U.S. and who came from traditional families who had not ever traveled outside their country, found themselves having to deal with all sorts of issues most American families are not use to like communal sharing. What's yours is mine. They would find themselves in these small houses, living with all these relatives, and thrust into life with a man who, all of a sudden, took orders from his parents and would shy away from tasks he would do in the U.S. e.g. like taking out the trash, helping to prepare dinner.

*Q: Did you get involved at all with the families and the people who worked as contractors like Bell Helicopter and all?*

RENDER: I knew only a few American families that worked for some contractors. Many Americans stayed in a bubble of socializing with other Americans and foreigners. Lack of language competency was partly responsible.

*Q: You left there in 1975. When you were leaving, did you have any feel for what might happen?*

RENDER: Yes. With the death of the two U.S. military officers, I felt I was leaving an Iran that was going to go through a significant political transformation. And that is what happened in 1979.

*Q: Did you feel it might come from the religious side? Or did you feel it might come from somewhere else?*

RENDER: I thought it would come from the religious side.

*Q: Did you have any problems there or did you get any feel for Iranians dealing with you as an African American official?*

RENDER: I was a complete novelty. They hadn't seen very many people of color. Many people would walk up to me pat my cheeks and say, "Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Ali!" Or they would kiss me.

*Q: The champion boxer at the time.*

RENDER: Yes. They also had a fascination with people with blond hair. One of the secretaries in the embassy also found herself being approached by people who wanted to touch her hair.

One of the things I learned from my Iran experience was that I was great at making contacts with people from various cultures.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the gender story you might call it? How did this play in that society?*

RENDER: Men could not understand why my government would send a single woman to a foreign country to do such work. I found if I just sat quietly, they would bend over backwards to assist me. When I first traveled to Mashhad to attend prisoner trials, the judge in the court would say, "Ah, I see his girlfriend is here." It didn't seem to matter that the prisoner's race was different from mine.

The lawyer would stand up and say, "She is the consular officer, Your Honor. She is not related to the defendant."

After a while, they got use to my presence in Mashhad like everywhere else I traveled in the country. I understood that in their culture woman didn't do certain things. I tried to just do what I had to do without fanfare but deliberate purpose. I never had to get angry. They always delivered. I knew since they did not expect women to be in such positions, they would always be willing to help me do what I had to do. So, instead of being negative, it was always good just to smile, because those same men would help you accomplish your goal.

*Q: Did you get any feel for Iranian women when you met them socially? Did you feel, say in the wealthier classes, that women felt the limitations?*

RENDER: Yes. Under the Shah of Iran, a lot of women worked in professional fields such as medicine and education. In several government offices, I found women working as staff but not many. There was a sentiment, "I wish we could do more."

Women were free to dress as they pleased as long as they wore long sleeves and clothing that did not disrespect their faith. They did not have to cover their heads. Some wore chadors and dressed more religiously. This is one of those underpinnings I felt there was some friction. The fundamentalism was still there. It wasn't to the extreme it is today, but I think it was there in certain groups of people.

They admired the fact that some of us were women working in the embassy as Vice Consuls.

*Q: Was there any problem telling Iranian young men, "You cannot go to the United States." And they would say, "Let me talk to a man."*

RENDER: No. I think because most applicants knew that the person standing before them had the power to issue or refuse your request. They would beg you to change your mind if you refused them and when begging didn't work they would leave and start to lobby through surrogates to have their cases reviewed. Some got angry, particularly, if they were returning students. They just expressed their anger loudly but not violently. A review of cases was extremely limited. The Consul General was the only person who could review a refusal. This was to avoid fraud.

*Q: Who was the Consul General?*

RENDER: It was Mr. Gross. As he became more comfortable with me in the section and my performance, he allowed me more latitude as he allowed the other officers. The Ambassador and the Deputy Chief of Mission were both great to me. They provided me with many learning opportunities. They both often included me in official functions at their residences. When Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was going to make an unannounced, quiet visit to Iran in another city in route to or from one of his secret jaunts, I was sent to that city by the Ambassador to run the control room. He told me I was not to discuss my upcoming weekend with anyone. I would travel to Isfahan along with others from the embassy. I was to manage the control room and handle requests. I felt this was a great honor and that the Ambassador had confidence in my abilities. Managing the control room was my first glimpse at the many tasks one might have to undertake in handling such high level visitors.

*Q: As 1975 withered, where did you go? You were in Genoa from 1976 to 1978.*

RENDER: Right.

*Q: What were you doing in Genoa?*

RENDER: The Consulate is located in the northern port city of Genoa. This port is extremely old and dates back to the days of Christopher Columbus. The Consulate staff consisted of four officers: the Consul General, political officer, administrative officer and consular officer. It also had a telecommunications officer but the post remained vacant for an extended period of time. I found myself not only handling consular affairs but the communications as well. I had to work long hours to do both and of course without any additional financial remuneration.

In addition to handling all aspects of consular affairs, I also assisted the U.S. Navy when their ships docked in Genoa. I often accompanied U.S. naval officers on their courtesy

call visits to their Italian counterparts. I will never forget being saluted by thousands of marines and sailors aboard an aircraft carrier.

The political situation in Genoa at the time was dicey. The Italian Communist Party was emerging as a strong political player, the Red Brigade was a threat and fear for the future was high.

In the consulates in Italy, many of the employees have been there for years. The consular staff was highly trained and older than me. I found, however, that we got along quite well.

*Q: How was the fraud working there?*

RENDER: After a three long year investigation, visa fraud was discovered in the shipping crew list visa area. One major company that had been submitting crew list visas to the consulate for many years did not actually exist even though many of my predecessors obviously thought it did and the staff was positive of its existence. I sent a senior FSN from the American Citizen Services section out to verify if it existed once the issue arose. He confirmed that it did not exist. I immediately had the section make physical checks of all shipping companies and stopped issuing crew visas until we could verify the companies. The FSN that handled the crew list visas took the finding personally and had a physical meltdown. He retired shortly thereafter. He was not being criticized but he felt he should have known and was embarrassed. It was a very sophisticated scheme. The case I remember the most was the one involving a young U.S. Navy serviceman who suffered a serious brain injury while on shore leave in Genoa. I worked closely with the ship's admiral, liaise with the Italian hospital and spent time with his parents. I served as their translator and friend away from home. When the Navy was going to evacuate the sailor by U.S. military aircraft I said good-bye to some new friends.

*Who was the Consul General there?*

RENDER: There were two Consul Generals during my tour. The first was Gori Bruno and the second was John DiSciullo. John DiSciullo came from the Department INR office. He was the Consul General for most of my tour.

*Q: Was there any problem with the Red Brigade?*

RENDER: No. However, we had to be careful. They were known for their changing tactics. There was a great deal of concern about them. The Red Brigade was engaged in bombings, kidnappings, extortion, etc.

*Q: At that time, they weren't particularly targeted against Americans.*

RENDER: No, they were not targeting us. However, we were cautious. We did not bring attention on ourselves. I also stayed away from large places with large numbers of people. Many families of influence and wealth sought information on immigrating to the

U.S. It was clear to me they were thinking about where they might go if they had to leave Italy.

*Q: Did you get any feel for Genoese society?*

RENDER: I was very fortunate in that I got to know a wide range of people. Many old Genovese families invited me. When examining the culture of Italy before it was a republic, many of these families date back to that period. I have been in several beautiful mansions filled with priceless works of art. The families are not allowed to sell these works and have to maintain them. What I found interesting is that a few students, who belong to some of the wealthiest families in Genoa, were pro-Communists.

*Q: The Italian Communist Party.*

RENDER: Yes, the Italian Communist Party.

*Q: You would see them at all the local church occasions. I was Consul General a little later in Naples and I ended up going to mass with the Communists and the Catholics and everyone else.*

RENDER: So you understand what I mean.

*Q: They would all be together at a church occasion.*

RENDER: Correct. It was fashionable. It was popular for them to be associated with the ideas of the Communist Party. I was often asked to address groups on a wide range of topics. I found there was a great deal of interest in Africa and in particular what was happening in South Africa.

*Q: On the visa side, this was not a time of great migration. They would go to the United States and come back.*

RENDER: There were no major migration issues. The migration had occurred much earlier. The bulk of the work on the American Citizens Services side was Social Security recipients. Americans that had returned to the country of their birth or who just wanted to live in Italy. I would see many monthly as they came to pick up their Social Security checks.

*Q: Were there any Social Security problems?*

RENDER: Checks were not mailed at that time but sent to the Consulate for pick-up. This was good for one could keep watch over possible fraud or theft.

*Q: In 1978, you went to INR.*

RENDER: I returned to the Department to worked in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research). This was a great assignment for I learned about the role of intelligence, who gathered it and who had access to it. My actual assignment put me in contact with the Principals in the Department. I learned the structure of the Department, how it functioned and where were the important stops in the policy formulation process. I was one of seven current intelligence officers directly responsible for screening intelligence from all sources. We had to be alert to national and international developments so as to be able to identify what information could be of importance to State Department policy makers. What I found interesting was that the INR side worked independently without direct supervision. If we needed guidance, we could call our Director at home. We also worked in coordination with the Operation Center watch team to prepare the Secretary's Morning briefing paper. This required good negotiation and interpersonal skills. The Summary was limited in pages so sometimes one had to negotiate what information to include. I was on duty when our Ambassador in Afghanistan was killed and Iran was beginning to fall apart.

*Q: When you were in Iran, did you and other junior officers, when chatting about things, notice any disquiet about the very large American military presence there? Also the civilians connected with the military; a lot of Americans were servicing all this equipment.*

RENDER: I rarely had the opportunity to discuss such observations with my colleagues. It was pretty clear that in the scheme of where Iran was on the radar screen in those days that our presence was equal to the attention we were paying to that country. Therefore, it wasn't questioned as to why we were paying the attention, but what else could we do. What more could we do? That tended to be more or less the frame of mind, I felt.

*Q: How long did you have this job in INR?*

RENDER: From February 1978 through May 1979.

*Q: Then what did you do?*

RENDER: I was assigned to the Bureau of African Affairs where I became a desk officer for Rwanda, Burundi and the Central African Republic.

*Q: These were three very active places at the time.*

RENDER: Inter-ethnic conflict was the key focus in Burundi and Rwanda. Unfortunately, these two countries are still embroiled in this question. The Central African Republic had an unstable leader.

*Q: Was it the Central African Empire at that time?*

RENDER: Yes. He crowned himself king and made the country his personal empire. As we all know, he was a buffoon.

*Q: He was dangerous.*

RENDER: He was an erratic individual. He was reactive. The stories of cannibalism around the world left the country in a peculiar position. France was also being criticized for allowing the situation to get worse.

*Q: Let's talk about Bokassa. Did we have an embassy there?*

RENDER: Yes, we had a small embassy there. The Embassy's main function was to show the flag. It had a small aid program carried out by U.S. organizations like CARE. The Ambassador had a small self-help program. We had a number of New York diamond merchants doing business in the CAR. Our interests were minimal.

*Q: In Uganda, Idi Amin had gone from bad to worse. Did you get out there?*

RENDER: I traveled to the CAR and met with government officials at my level. Members of his own government frowned upon Bokassa's behavior but no one dared to speak publicly. His machinations only grew worse. He curried favor with individuals around the globe with the country's diamonds. Given the role of the French in French speaking Africa, France's relationship with countries in its orbit were always of interest to everyone.

*Q: Did this whole French connection to the diamonds, which became a political issue because Bokassa was passing out diamonds.*

RENDER: Bokassa reputedly gave gifts of diamonds to some politicians. During Giscard d'Estaing tenure as President of France, his government overthrew Bokassa's in the fall of 1979. He sent French paratroopers to the CAR while Bokassa was out of the country visiting Libya. Giscard was accused of receiving diamonds from Bokassa. I maintained a low profile on the issue of diamonds and the CAR. I do recall explaining to the French Embassy here that we would not try and comment one way or another on this matter. French internal politics was not our agenda.

*Q: We wanted to stay out of it, I take it.*

RENDER: Absolutely, It was not our concern. The U.S. did not want to be involved in French national politics. We did not know what was true or false.

*Q: In Rwanda, Burundi, and the CAR, did we have real interests there?*

RENDER: We had embassies in these countries consistent with our policy of embassies everywhere. We had no real interest beyond promoting the values we share as a nation, democracy, freedom of the press, human rights, etc.

*Q: Did the Belgians still keep anything?*

RENDER: The Belgians had interests in Burundi and in Rwanda, but the French were dominant. The Belgians had historical ties and maintained close relations with the two countries.

In addition to handling my three countries, I was also asked to covering seven or even all eight countries in the Office of Central African Affairs. For a two-week period, I also acted as Office Director during the absence of both Director and the Deputy.

*Q: You left the desk in about 1981?*

RENDER: I left the desk and I went to Brazzaville in 1981.

*Q: And you were there until 1984.*

RENDER: Correct. I was Chargé d'Affaires for about six months. I assumed my duties as Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) upon the Ambassador's arrival. It is very interesting how it came about. I was summoned to the Assistant Secretary's office. Assistant Secretary Chester Crocker told me he was going to assigned me to Brazzaville as Chargé and DCM. He noted he would be moving Bill Swing but I would have a little time with him before he moved on to his new assignment. He told me to take steps to nail down the assignment. I was stunned but grateful. I could only find the words to say thank you.

Shortly before I left for Brazzaville I learn that the Ambassador would move on to his new assignment sooner but I had no idea he would depart two to three days following my arrival. Although he introduced me to several key players, I found myself alone. So, I started to make the rounds both in the government and the diplomatic community. Bill Swing was the first U.S. Ambassador after a long hiatus of no diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Congo. He laid a very good foundation, if I may say so. They were very pleased with him. The foundation he left in place helped me to deepen our connections for the next ambassador, who was Kenneth L. Brown.

It was called the People's Republic of the Congo. Locally, the people always referred to the country as Congo-Brazzaville. Most of the citizens preferred the name the country was given at its independence, Republic of the Congo. While the government was clearly publicly in the Communist orbit, its people were not. Attendance at Catholic mass grew under their leadership. I used to jokingly ask some key officials if they were pink, rather than red. Many smiled and said yes. Others, of course, staunchly declared they were true Marxists. I would ask them, why they made more trips to Paris than any of the countries in Eastern Europe. They were more French Left Bank Marxists. The reason why I believe it existed at all was because the people in charge were from northern minority groups. The only way to manage the southern half of the country where the majority population resided was to cloak it. That cloak was Marxism. We don't need political parties. We are all one. If the Congo had been a democracy, none of the military leaders that became President would have won.



*Q: What was the genesis of this French entity that is snuggled up against the big Belgian Congo?*

RENDER: Congo-Brazzaville was one of five countries that made up French Equatorial Africa. The others were Gabon, Chad, Cameroon and the CAR. It had always been French on this side of the river; the other side was Belgium. If I recall correctly, after World War I, the French Equatorial Africa Union was established. The Governor - General was based in Brazzaville and he had deputies in the other areas. The French side always prided itself, including the French who lived there, on the fact that Africans could leave the Belgian Congo on the ferry to come across and find a whole new different world. They were treated as real human beings. There was intermarriage. They were not like the Belgians.

*Q: The Belgians were renowned for having this huge country of the Congo and something like three educated Congolese. How about in Congo?*

RENDER: Congolese were able to get a primary education. Many went further and many traveled to France to pursue a higher education. When I was there, Many Congolese wanted to travel to the U.S. but the cost of a ticket was too much and many did not speak English. Visa applications were mostly from government officials and businessmen. We encourage businessmen to purchase U.S. goods and equipment. I felt very strongly we should grow our economic interest even in French Africa. I worked very hard on pushing the government to purchase turbines and other large items from the U.S.

*Q: Did you get anywhere with them?*

RENDER: In the case of the railway, we were not successful. The French used the heavy hammer to put the deal on the sideline. But we did make progress in other areas. U.S. oil companies got deals.

*Q: Was this exploration?*

RENDER: It was exploration.

*Q: Did they find stuff?*

RENDER: Yes. Deals came to fruition after I left the Congo. Two big issues in the larger political context were the issues of Namibia and Angola. I tried to solicit Congolese support for our efforts to resolve the problems of Namibia and Angola. This effort was helped immensely by the visit of Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Frank Wisner. He made an official visit to the Congo to meet with President Sassou to discuss southern Africa and in particular the issues of Namibia and Angola. He sought Congolese support for resolving the issues around Namibia independence and Angola. While they had a meeting scheduled for an hour, they met for several hours covering many in-depth key questions. I felt the meeting was extremely fruitful President Sassou gave his time freely to Ambassador Wisner and I felt a sense of achievement. I was also

glad that the Bureau recognized that President Sassou had good relations with Angola, Namibia and Cuba. He also had strong relationships with his counterparts in central Africa.

Although we did not have diplomatic relations with Angola, I developed and maintain a communications relationship with the Angolan Ambassador in Congo-Brazzaville. This link made it possible for us to handle the myriad of request from congressional delegations to visit Angola to meet with the officials there. Turnaround time for clearances for individuals and planes were processed fast. We would meet and translate the information from English to French and then he would translate from French into Portuguese to send it on to Luanda.

Ambassador Oakley was in Congo/ Kinshasa. I could always call on him if I needed advice on some thorny issue or if I had a question of how to proceed. I will always be grateful to him for his assistance. A lot of the issues on Angola were triangular.

*Q: Here you've got a country that is purportedly a Marxist country, but you were saying was really a Left Bank offshoot of the French intellectuals. Was there any real Marxist overlay? I am thinking of Soviet overlay. Did they have anything going?*

RENDER: All Eastern Bloc countries were represented in Congo Brazzaville. That was part of the Marxist overlay. So you had the East Germans, the Libyans, the Soviets and the Cubans.

*Q: Were the Soviets at all interested there, or were they just a presence?*

RENDER: They were more of a presence. They sought Congolese help on UN issues they supported. Congolese were not lined up to go to Russia to study. Those that had studied in Eastern Europe came home unimpressed.. Many told me they had encountered racism and the conditions they lived in were not so great. Some Congolese married Russians and brought their spouses to Congo to live. One Russian spouse told me her living conditions in Congo greatly exceeded what she had in Russia.

The true Marxists in the country wanted to see more of their economy tied to the eastern bloc but this was not possible. The economy, in particular the oil sector, was in French hands. The oil sector brought in the revenue.

The Congolese liked Americans. They wanted to get to know us. Given their ideology, many were grateful when we could do something that boosted them within their field. We built a small bridge costing around 25,000 dollars with a portion of our self-help funds. The bridge allowed the people to better get their crops to market improving their incomes and their lives. The process included having the Ministry of Construction design, approved and supervise the building of the bridge. I had the Catholic Church in the area supervise the funds to build the bridge. The Minister went all out on the inauguration of the bridge by inviting the media. The Ambassador was pleased to see that such a small

endeavor reaped such great rewards. The Minister was a Marxist but he gladly worked with us.

*Q: Who are the tribes?*

RENDER: The ethnic groups are Bantu derived. Almost half of the population is Bakongo and they speak KiKongo. The second largest ethnic group is the Sangha. Both of these groups are located in the southern half of the country and are Christians. They also believe there is a link between the living, the unborn and the dead. The two other groups are the Teke and the Mbochi. Sassou is Mbochi. They are located in the northern part of the country.

I soon learned understanding how decisions were made in the country helped me to get issues, problems resolved.

*Q: Who was the President?*

RENDER: Sassou Nguesso.

*Q: Was he running things? Or how was it?*

RENDER: He was running things. He was quite powerful. He had good relations with the French and the French President. He is suave, affable, well dressed and had manners.

*Q: What about the Cubans? The Cubans were playing a big role in Angola and also in Ethiopia.*

RENDER: Yes. Cubans were in Angola. Cuban troops were guarding the Angolan oil fields. American oil companies in Angola received security benefits from their presence there. Cuban doctors were both in Angola and the Congo providing direct care to people. The Cuban Ambassador attended diplomatic events but we had no run-ins with other Cubans in the country.

*Q: What about Zaire across the river?*

RENDER: I doubt it since Mobutu had ties to Savimbi. Sassou had a good rapport with Mobutu. Tensions between the two countries always resulted in the closing of the ferry crossing them until they could resolve the issue. Both sides needed the ferry crossing opened so problems had to be resolved.

*Q: How did you get across?*

RENDER: We all took the ferry. The ferry crossing was seen as the ultimate adventure. It was fun to get on the ferry with lots of people, chickens, and baggage. The ferry ran every hour on the hour daily.

*Q: When Ken Brown became your Ambassador, how long did you stay there after that?*

RENDER: I was with him for two years. I was in Congo for almost a total of three years. He was a great Ambassador. Ambassador Brown was loved by everyone.

*Q: What was the embassy like?*

RENDER: It was a small embassy. It was family oriented. There were a lot of bright officers, some of the current Ambassadors served with us in Brazzaville. It is set, as you know, on the Congo River. The embassy actually sat on the edge of the Congo River. It was a beautiful site in an old bank building. Our issues were again the pillars of democracy, deep respect for human rights, economics. We were trying to help U.S. businesses by encouraging the Congolese to buy American. There were humanitarian, healthcare, and education concerns. There were a lot of self-help projects helping women and children.

*Q: When you say self-help projects, what were they? What does that mean?*

RENDER: Self-Help money is funds used to pursue small development projects within countries that do not have large AID programs or missions. Self-Help projects required the participation of the people in the project that the funds were going to. In the case of the bridge project, the people wanted a bridge over a small stream for it would shorten the time to market. The citizens worked on improving the dirt road to the bridge on both sides.

*Q: You left there in 1984.*

RENDER: I went to Jamaica in 1984.

*Q: This might be a good place to stop. We will pick this up in 1984 when you are off to Jamaica.*

*Today is January 9th, 2007. Jamaica. You were there from 1984 to 1986. What were you doing in Jamaica?*

RENDER: I was assigned as Consul General. I was the first FSO-1 to become Consul General. It was designated as a Minister-Counselor position. I went to Jamaica as a result of a decision made by the Director General.

It was an interesting time to be in Jamaica. The climate was tense between the two major political parties. My first Ambassador was William Hewitt. He was wonderful. He understood the local dynamics surrounding the importance of the Consul General position. The Consul General, in the eyes of Jamaicans, is the most important person in the Embassy and for many that includes the Ambassador. The Consulate General was a world leader in the issuance of immigrant and non-immigrant visas, but its visa refusal rate was also high. All consular services are complicated by a high incidence of fraud.

Consular officer are under tremendous pressure from the volume of work and the constant hounding for visas, both on and off the job. They couldn't even go to dinner without someone asking about visas.

I felt that I had to manage the expectations of the host country, the consular officers, and Washington.

The previous Consul General had put into effect a system called, "The Written Reapplication System." I tried to keep it going to see if it could have an impact, because he hadn't had enough time using the system to see if it really worked. I found, after a short period of time, the system had flaws we needed to work out. Mounds of paper began to pile up but paper was better than even longer lines of people.

*Q: What was the system?*

RENDER: The Written Reapplication System was applicable to those people who had already applied and been refused a visa. They had to write a letter explaining why they should be seen again to overcome their visa ineligibility. This was to avoid having hundreds of recently refused visa applicants in line along with others who were applying. So I modified the system by indicating that refused applicants could reapply within three years rather than five, and made allowances for emergencies. I also insisted that the mounds of paper had to be reviewed if officers wanted the system to stay in existence. While some of the officers who had helped to devise the system with the previous Consul General balked, I pushed it through with Washington concurrence. Washington wanted me to squash the system in its entirety.

The second thing I tried to do was to give the consular officers a better working environment. Dramatic physical changes were made to the section. My Deputy and I created a rotational system for officers to work as the newly arrived Ambassador's staff assistant. The new Ambassador wanted a staff assistant and thought he might be able to take a consular officer to serve in that capacity. This opportunity gave all of the consular officers a month away from the section to work in the Embassy. The officers loved this break for it allowed them to see how the Embassy operated. The only problem with the system was once or twice, the Ambassador wanted to keep the officer that was serving for that month indefinitely. I had to get the Ambassador to understand that it was a rotation system and that all the officers looked forward to serving him. I let him keep one officer a little longer given the project he was working on.

To help in the visa determination deliberations, I would periodically take a handful of old, already processed applications for non-immigrant visas, sanitize them and have all of the officers adjudicate the same applications. I would merely ask officers who wanted to comment to do so on the applications. We found that some officers refused applications that had been approved and vice versa. This allowed the officers to discuss what should be some of the denominators in the Jamaica context one should consider important. Many officers told me how helpful these sessions were. It was particularly useful to new officers.

Thirdly, I created a system whereby personalities within the country would come to meet with the consular officers, off the record, to talk about Jamaica, their political party, issues in culture, social services, or what have you. This was a very popular program. It was so popular that officers in other parts of the embassy wanted to participate.

*Q: Why would they come to consular officers' meetings?*

RENDER: I would explain to these VIPs that I wanted to enlighten our officers on Jamaica. Further, The Consul General asked them to come. I started with the head of the prominent opposition political party. He readily agreed to come if I assured him it would be just consular officers and the conversation was off the record. He explained to the officers what were some of the local political dynamics. The officers asked wide-ranging questions and the exchange between them was lively, thoughtful and informative. Following his visit, the political and economic sections heard I was inviting prominent people to the section and wanted to cash in. I explained that these sessions were for consular officers. Consular officers never got an opportunity to meet higher rank officials but clearly could benefit from some interaction. These sessions gave the officers a chance to learn about the government, society, and culture. I explained the terms of these discussions and felt that I should keep them.

To create better relations with the host country, I accepted to speak to various organizations and groups. I also loaned my home to groups involved in charitable causes to host fundraising events. The Governor General of Jamaica attended the first one. Of course, with his presence, the press coverage was enormous. I did that to show the values of the United States.

American Citizen Services was also a very important Section in the Consulate General. There are thousands of Americans living in Jamaica.

*Q: Are these Jamaicans or people of non-African American stock?*

RENDER: Both. Requests for passport services, Certificates of Birth, Social Security benefits and with dealing with drug charges, and arrests were among some of the common types of issues we encountered. We also had a lot of cruise ships making stops along the coast and had to provide consular services to those who needed it. Congressional requests for assistance were also numerous. Fraud in Social Security had to be constantly monitored. I would send officers out to actually verify addresses, names, etc. We uncovered a lot of fraud. I would also press charges against people in the name of the Social Security Administration and have them arrested.

*Q: I was in Personnel back in the 1960s. Jamaica had the reputation of bringing our head of the Consular Section out on a stretcher or a straitjacket. It was a very difficult post.*

RENDER: The pressure and stress is enormous. Embassy officers wanted the Consulate General to make them the good guys and the consular officers the bad ones. I was not known for being supportive in this regard. I felt the officers should not ask the Consulate to make life easy for them by agreeing to continue the use of an introductory referral letter that had not been approved by the Department. I cancelled it. They could only use the approved letters. Further, being African-American, I felt the public thought I should just put the visa machine on the counter.

*Q: This is the problem of what looks like a hometown girl coming back.*

RENDER: Correct. To avoid ever being accused of impropriety, I never let anyone come to my home to discuss visa matters. I further would not accept gifts of any kind. If anyone left something at the Consulate reception desk, I would tell the receptionist to return it. If they were perishables, the receptionist and staff could dispose of them. I never took on cases outside of my jurisdiction without Department prior approval. Therefore, we adjudicated few visas from outside our area of responsibility.

*Q: As Consul General in Jamaica, you were also Consul General to the Cayman Islands.*

RENDER: Yes. The U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom and the Consul General to Jamaica are accredited to the Cayman Islands. Not the U.S. Ambassador to Jamaica. Before I continue, I would like to add one further note on American Consular Services in Jamaica. I hired the first consular agents to help tourists along the coast. These officers could apprise me quickly if someone was arrested on drug charges or needed to be evacuated, etc.

*Q: Yes, because they would contact with the local authorities and could do it immediately.*

RENDER: Correct.

*Q: Often this whole problem could be taken care of.*

RENDER: Without ever having to have us physically travel to the area. They had no involvement in visa issues. They were valuable in providing assistance to Americans in distress. They could go to the police authorities and work it out. If it was a drug arrest, they could say, "Wait a moment and let me call the Consul General." I would then talk to the local authority. I save a lot of time on cases avoiding inquiries from congressional offices. I could also advise the Ambassador if Congressmen or Senators were in the area that had not notified him. I would provide him with names, hotel info and phone numbers so he could contact them. He often did so. He would always ask "why didn't they contact me." I would explain that often their offices were unaware of unplanned weekend travel.

*Q: Who was the Ambassador when you were there? You had two ambassadors.*

RENDER: Yes, the first was William Hewitt and the second was Michael Sotirhos.

*Q: This was William Alexander Hewitt.*

RENDER: No. It was the latter.

*Q: This is Tape 3, Side 1 with Arlene Render.*

*You were saying your first ambassador was Hewitt. How long did you spend with him?*

RENDER: I spent only six to eight months with him. He was wonderful. I spent one year with Ambassador Sotirhos.

*Q: How did you get along with him? I can't remember the man's name right now, but we had one just awful ambassador there in Jamaica.*

RENDER: We got along well. At his airport arrival ceremony, he smiled and said, "You were the only one in Washington no one had anything bad to say about." I thought, what a greeting. I smiled but a small red flag went up.

I felt he wanted to do a good job. He was an active Ambassador. He visited many churches in Jamaica and involved himself in the local scene. He had been in the private sector and his style was different. There was this large, separate office down the road and that office didn't really need his input. U.S. laws and regulations mandated our responsibilities. I sensed his angst. So I tried to make sure he was connected to us. I hired a family member of his in the section. The employee was great and did a good job. The Ambassador did not ask me to do so nor did anyone else. I tried to keep him abreast of official travel to the U.S. by high-ranking government officials. These officials wanted the Consulate to inform Miami so their entry waiting time could be expedited. As a courtesy, Miami would make sure they did not spend hours in lines. Once or twice when he was new, he would ask, "Why do they call the Consulate and not the Embassy?" I explained. I also noted that this was a long-standing process even prior to my arrival. I emphasized they were not calling me but the office. Whoever sits in this chair will get the same calls."

*Q: Also, the title resembles the Governor General too.*

RENDER: Correct. The number of calls from Congressmen and or their Congressional offices directly to the Consulate also surprised him. I explained that often Congressmen traveled to the Island for a weekend private stay. They wanted the Consulate to be aware of their presence on the Island. Therefore, I would take their particulars and pass the information to the Mission Duty Officer and the Embassy front office. The Ambassador would call them and sometimes traveled to the resort where they were to pay a visit. Offices usually called to inquire about constituents concerns. Mostly visa status inquiries. I would just explain to those congressional offices, "This isn't the way it's done. I understand you are under pressure, but we cannot provide the visa nor know when the waiting family members will be able to unite with family in the U.S." In one instance, I



said to the person, “I don’t think the Congressman would want the public to know he was pressuring to bring an entertainer to the States that has a criminal record, which I am not supposed to divulge. I don’t want him to be embarrassed. The person will never be given a visa. Explain it quietly but do not divulge the reason. The Congressional office handled the matter well.

During my tour, I often provided the Ambassador information he requested on none consular matters, e.g. How does one engage the Director General’s office on personnel questions. He knew I had served as Charge in Brazzaville and understood the Department.

*Q: The Jamaicans and the Colombians have the reputation for being pretty nasty characters in the United States, but also in their own countries. We are talking about the criminal element. We are talking about not being very couth. There were a lot of shootings and killings of entire families. How did you find that element?*

RENDER: I worked very closely with the Jamaican Police and the U.S. Marshals Service on drug and expatriation cases. Killings within Jamaica happened but not like in the U.S. It was not an environment of total fear. Armed robberies were more common. All mission homes had guards and the Embassy Security office was careful about areas we could reside. All housing had to be approved by the Security office.

*Q: What about personal safety on the island, for the embassy and for visitors?*

RENDER: At that time, it was reasonably okay. We cautioned all travelers to Jamaica to play it safe. Watch their belongings. Stay on well-lit streets. Use common sense. Don’t throw caution to the wind. Home break-ins were common throughout Jamaica but especially in well-to-do areas. I did not experience any break-ins. A couple of times, I did find the local police authorities in front of my house. They would say the Chief of Police had sent them because there had been some robberies in the general area. I would call the Chief of Police and thank him. I would also make sure the Security Officer was aware. In the instance of robberies, affluent individuals were taken as hostages until their relatives paid ransom. So many families hired bodyguards.

*Q: The tourist trade was mainly in Montego Bay and Ocho Rios. In general, not just related to crime, how did you find that? How did this work?*

RENDER: The tourist areas of Jamaica were pretty self-contained. They didn’t really need Kingston to survive. The tourists landed at the airport and were taken directly to these magnificent accommodations. They spent their time in these resort areas and then departed. The resorts kept their clientele active and safe. Problems were mostly with the individual travelers. The existences of the consular agents were a real help in these instances. People living in these areas that made their living from the tourist trade understood the importance of maintaining a good environment. The Ministry of Tourism also ran island wide ads on the positive impact tourists had on the economic livelihood of families.

*Q: Was there an extradition treaty?*

RENDER: There was an extradition treaty. Many times, the various police agencies both within Jamaica and the U.S. would work out the details. I often had U.S. Marshalls show up to escort people back to the U.S. with host country nod.

*Q: Were you concerned about your visa officers? The vice consuls are usually on their first tour, young. They can get trapped.*

RENDER: Visa officers could only meet individuals at the section. The visa windows were side by side, like tellers in banks. Conversations could be overheard. They were told never to meet anyone at their places of residence. Further, security guards kept a record of visitors at residences for the Security officer. I also explained why I did not meet people privately at my home or take gifts or accept meals from people I did not know. I told them these could become traps.

*Q: There have been cases of bribery and various things. I was in Korea and I was always concerned about that. Did you have any concerns?*

RENDER: Of course. When money can be made in such an environment, someone will try to do so. I got to know my officers. With candor, I never thought any of them would engage in any kind of fraudulent activity. I think the fact that I had the speakers and the rotational programs, frequent vacations, monthly trips to the Cayman Islands to issue visas, helped to relieve the pressures. I further made it clear that I was always available to help. No matter the issue or problem, I would not leave them dangling. I also quietly checked random visa applications daily to look for possible fraud schemes.

*Q: How would you describe the politics and what the political situation was in Jamaica? I always think back to the times of Manley. It was not a very pleasant time.*

RENDER: The political situation was better but terse. The chief protagonists had all serve as Prime Minister or wanted to be Prime Minister. Their philosophies were different but similar. All saw the relationship with the U.S. necessary.

*Q: Right now, I am reading a biography of Colin Powell. His family of course came from Jamaica. It makes the point that during the 1940s and 1950s, Jamaicans who went to the United States basically did not mingle very much with southern African American society. They are really quite distinct.*

*I am familiar with one of our shining lights in the consular business, Barbara Watson. It seems to be almost a completely different casteless society. How did you find this, particularly from your unique perspective?*

RENDER: Jamaicans still see themselves as different, some would say superior, to many even in the Caribbean. One of the first questions I was asked by a journalist was did I

have Jamaican roots. When I smiled and asked why was this question important, she smiled and replied, just wondering since you are successful. I found that they work hard, care about family and getting ahead.

In terms of inviting me to events, I had invitations beyond your wildest imagination, an entrée to every level. I found that while there was a sense of pride that I, a person of color, was Consul General in Jamaica, it didn't change the fact that they wanted me, like my predecessors, to be more forthcoming. I knew what the American dream was all about and why they wanted it so.

*Q: You left Jamaica and went to Ghana. You were in Ghana from when to when?*

RENDER: I went to Ghana in August 1986.

*Q: And you were there until...*

RENDER: For almost three years. The assignment came about in an interesting manner. I traveled to Washington over a weekend to meet the Director General at his request. He explained that he wanted me to go to Ghana to serve as Charge. I should prepare to leave Jamaica within the coming week. He told me that he would inform the Embassy. I should not say anything for he needed time to determine a replacement for me. The circumstances in Ghana were bad and he felt I could get a handle on the issues and turn things around. The deteriorating circumstances were on the heels of a big U.S. espionage case in Ghana. The government was hostile towards the embassy. Relations between the American and foreign national staffs were very bad. The Americans thought the FSNs were not loyal. The FSNs thought the Americans didn't understand the stress and government harassment they were enduring. They also felt the Embassy was indifferent to their continue need for food assistance since some commodities in the country were still scarce and fear was high.

*Q: Could you explain first what was the espionage problem?*

RENDER: The espionage affair occurred over an eighteen-month period. A CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) employee engaged in an espionage love affair with a Ghanaian secret service individual. That affair led to the CIA employee providing sensitive Agency source information to that individual. Eight key sources were arrested by the Ghanaian intelligence service.

*Q: Not wanting to tread on sensitive ground, I want to talk about what happened just before you got there as far as what came out in the press and general knowledge. Was the feeling in Ghana that we had been messing around in their affairs? There is spying and then there is doing something.*

RENDER: I think we were engaged in normal activities of trying to keep abreast of sensitive information within countries. However, press stories discussed possible coup attempts by dissidents. I don't know if this is accurate or not. The Ghanaians set up this

American employee by robbing her home. She began to lean on the young man that was known to many in the Embassy community. He turned out to be an intelligence officer. When she returned stateside, during the routine debriefing, the Agency uncovered that she had given up very sensitive information. She cooperated with the U.S. government and had him meet her somewhere in the U.S. where he was arrested. He returned to Ghana at the end of 1985 as a hero of the revolution. She was sentenced to prison. It was also at a time when the President of Ghana aligned himself more with the eastern Bloc and revolutionary leaders. The head of the government, J.J. Rawlings saw himself as a revolutionary. The intelligence chief, I think, saw himself as a Marxist. Relations between our two countries could not have been at their worst. There were signs posted around town, "Down with the U.S.A.," "Down with the CIA." So you had enough hate and tension to spread around.

*Q: Who had been the ambassador before?*

RENDER: Ambassador Fritz. He departed post in June 1986. The new Ambassador that was to arrive, Stephen Lyne, did not get to post for almost eight months. During my time as Charge, I had my hands full from day one. I had to make progress on many fronts simultaneously. I began by massaging the staff. I knew one area of contention was a food program to help FSNs deal with the food shortages in the country a year or more earlier. Unfortunately, the food package program turned into a big fraudulent scheme.

*Q: They were selling it, I take it.*

RENDER: Food packages were found in the markets. I explained to the FSNs that the program would be terminated and they had themselves to blame. Unfortunately, among them, some took advantage. I noted that the earlier shortages had decreased. I told them that no one wants to give up free stuff. To be fair, I would allow one more shipment, and that would be the last one.

*Q: You had the staff divided between Americans and Ghanaians, and you were taking something away. I can imagine, in the first place, you were taking away a source of income from the local staff, which had come to expect that. I would think that rather than making things better, it would have made a very sullen group of people.*

RENDER: I recall eliminating first the items that were no longer in short supply on the local market: rice, flour, and sugar. The last shipment would only provide the small items like razor blades and deodorants.

At the same time, I told them we would do a wage survey. Hopefully, it would lead to an increase in pay, even if small. In my discussions with some government officials, I asked them to stop interrogating our employees. I underscored we provided hundreds of jobs to Ghanaians and if the harassment didn't stop, I would have to consider terminating their employment to insure their physical and mental wellbeing. I said this would not be the best solution for them and their families but a necessary step. I would not want one of our employees to lose their lives while they were U.S. employees just trying to earn a living.

Within weeks, employees stopped reporting of being hauled in or disturbed by the intelligence service. The ceasing of harassment of the employees seemed to calm the waters on their side.

Several American staff members had been PNG'd. (Persona Non Grata). The Americans felt this came about due to false accusations by some FSN staff. Also, a Ghanaian had been killed in front of the embassy wall entrance by local authorities during a demonstration against the U.S. government. I could understand why the American staff was in a negative frame of mind.

During my discussions with government officials, I also quietly noted that trying to bully or embarrass someone might not win friends or influence people. The signs came down from around town. This eased some fear within the American and western diplomatic communities.

At the same time, I tried to communicate to all that when there is tension among countries, stress increases and tempers flare. The events of the past years were not forgotten and still vivid in the minds of all.

A particular important relationship was between the Political Counselor and me. Prior to my arrival, he had been serving as Charge. Since my assignment as DCM and Charge came quick and post had no forewarning, I felt I should clear the air with him. I told him that since we were colleagues and knew one another, we should work harmoniously as a team. He agreed and we marched forward.

When I arrived in Ghana, I recall that I was taken to the Ambassador's residence. I asked the Administrative Officer why. I would rather go to the DCM residence where I would be residing. He hedged but I insisted on knowing why he had not taken me there. I did not want the new Ambassador to get the wrong impression of me. A deputy arriving at post and immediately start living in his residence.

The Administrative officer then told me that the Political Counselor had moved into the DCM residence with his family given the size of his family following a robbery incident at their former one. Since I was new, I thought long and hard what to do. I decided not to make it an issue. I put pressure on the Administrative officer to get the uninhabitable former old DCM colonial residence near the Ambassador's totally renovated and ready before the new Ambassador arrived. It required extensive structural work. He got it done and I moved into an old small British colonial residence. It was an appropriate size and had character. The bonus was its location. It was within walking distance of the Ambassador's residence.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, J.J. Rawlings was not really anti-American. His newly created persona was that he was a revolutionary like his West African colleague, Sankara. He was unpredictable. He would drive himself around town, wave to you from his vehicle and always wore fatigues. Ghanaians frowned upon his behavior. A culture of

silence was created. Thoughtful, educated, democratic individuals just kept to themselves to avoid trouble.

I met the President of the country within a few weeks of my arrival at a reception. I recalled he walked up to me and started to talk. We spared a little bit but I could see that he was feeling me out. Shortly thereafter, he invited me for an hour and a half long meeting. We covered a universe of subjects. I think he thought that I was a CIA agent, not a State Department employee, and that I had been sent because of the espionage affair. He kept probing for views on specific public individuals on the political fringe. I would turn his questions around and make him answer.

I was informed, as time went on and trust gained, that many thought the CIA had sent one of their senior officers of color hoping they would fall prey. I never said I was or I wasn't. I just laughed and said, "Oh, I see."

Surveillance of U.S. mission personnel was common. This took some time to resolve. Those sympathetic and understood what was happening was wrong assisted me by providing information on those vehicles.

While the fervor of revolution was still in the air, one had to always know what was on the Ghanaian calendar to avoid embarrassment. When my Ambassador informed me of his arrival date and I informed the Ghanaians, I was told this was a good date. Then I learned the Libyans were arriving on that same date on an official visit. I called the Ambassador and explained why he had to change his arrival date. If I had not done so, his arrival would have coincided with that of the Libyans and not have received appropriate attention.

*Q: What was our evaluation of Rawlings, his survivability and effectiveness when you got there?*

RENDER: I think we thought that he was a pot-smoking revolutionary. The Intelligence Chief was the brain. Ghanaians used to tell their children when they misbehaved that they were going to call the Captain. This meant straighten up or trouble would ensue. As long as he had the Intelligence Chief in his corner, he was safe. Many in his administration were young, western-oriented and highly capable. Many had studied in the U.S. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, for example, had completed his education in New York and was married to an American who was working in the States. He told me that without her salary, they could not make ends meet.

The country, however, was getting feedback from the diaspora. The diaspora was not happy with the treatment of the U.S. Practically everyone in the government or country had a relative or two abroad. They were sending messages back saying, "Leave those Americans alone. We don't want to come home. They could throw us out of America, if you keep messing with them."

The poor economic situation had a major impact in moderating spoken views on the U.S. and changes towards us. The moderates began to emerge. Ghana was not getting much help from the east. It was the west that could provide the resources. I recall that I offered to bring the U.S. Interior Service firefighting experts to the country to work with farmers and others on firefighting techniques. Ghana had a lot of forest fires given habits of individuals coupled with drought conditions in some parts of the country. For a very small amount of money a one week program got the U.S. front page positive coverage and a lot of goodwill. We had done something good. This small gesture helped turn the page and create less anti-American venom.

*Q: The British had been there as the colonial power. Did they have much influence?*

RENDER: They had little influence with J.J. Rawlings. They had very strong relations with the Ghanaian military.

*Q: Where were they getting their military supplies and military training at that time?*

RENDER: Most of the upper brass in the Ghanaian military had been trained in London. Some had graduated from Sandhurst. The military was well trained and the British did have some advisors there. The Ghanaian military also was very proud of its peacekeeping record. The Ghanaian military rightly saw its role as supporting the country from outside destruction. The security services were what J.J. Rawlings used to keep his grip on the society.

*Q: In many of the countries where there was a turn to the left, the security services often had the East Germans very much involved.*

RENDER: Yes. The East Germans were there. Rawlings and the Intelligence Chief were building relations with the Libyans and a whole host of unsavory characters. Cuban doctors were also in country. They had a good reputation for they were involved in saving lives.

*Q: Did we have any programs going on there?*

RENDER: There was a U.S. AID mission and Peace Corps program. However, there was no AID Director at the time of my arrival. The post suffered from many vacancies.

*Q: Did you find that you could have a social life with the Ghanaians?*

RENDER: Yes but not immediately. It took many months to move towards a more constructive dialogue. Once the thaw came, I was able to make many friends in the professional sectors. I also made numerous contacts with laborers, market women and housewives. They provided me with insights into issues surrounding daily living.

I have always found that those not serving in high positions may provide better insights into what is really going on in a country. I recall that a market woman that I became

friends with invited me home one day for dinner. When I arrived, I realized that her husband was the mayor of the city. You never know what people know or whom. Following a successful reception at the Residence by the Defense Attaché, I learned from him that in the past, he had had a reception where none of his military contacts showed. He told me that the relationship was moving in the right direction.

*Q: What about the community in the United States from Ghana? Were they an important factor?*

RENDER: As I said, they were an important factor for they kept relating to their relatives their fears of a U.S. backlash against them for the behavior we were receiving in country. Even the Intelligence Chief, told me he had received many messages from Ghanaians in the U.S.

*Q: Also, I assume they were a source of income.*

RENDER: They were a source of income. They were sending remittances to their relatives.

*Q: Was there much in the way of students going to the United States during the time you were there?*

RENDER: Yes. Student visa applications were high. Our overall visa numbers, however, were not too high. Individuals did not have the resources to travel.

*Q: You arrived and had something like eight months as Chargé.*

RENDER: Yes, I served as Charge for eight months. Just under the nine, to be officially recognized in the Department stats. That's life.

*Q: Then a new ambassador arrived. This can be a difficult time, because you've got your contacts. You've done this and you've done that. All of a sudden, somebody else is put on top of you. Who was this and how did you work this out?*

RENDER: The new ambassador was Stephen R. Lyne. As soon as he was nominated, I reached out to him. I kept him abreast of the situation, issues and sought his advice even if I didn't need it, to insure he was a part of the decision making process. Further, it sent the message that I knew he was the Ambassador.

When he arrived at post, I told him that I would be fading into the background. I would accompany him to the Ministries to present him and then I would excuse myself. The sooner the Ministries focused on him, the sooner they would only relate to me on those issues that I would manage. We got off to a good start because he could see that I was not in competition with him. We had spent eight months talking and making joint decisions. He commented on that to me many months later. He told me how much he appreciated my total support and my steadfastness for moving off the stage.



The Ambassador treated me well. I think it is a testament to our being in sync. He gave me superstar ratings, recommended me for a Superior Honor Award and the James Clement Dunn Award. While I was not the recipient of the Award, I was pleased with the recommendation.

*Q: You left there in 1989.*

*That's probably a good place to stop, I think.*

*Where did you go?*

RENDER: When I left Ghana in 1989, I returned to Washington.

*Q: What did you do then?*

RENDER: I think I went to the Senior Seminar.

*Q: I want you to talk briefly about the Senior Seminar.*

RENDER: Let's do it the next time.

*Q: We are talking about 1989. You were in the Senior Seminar from 1989 to 1990.*

RENDER: Correct.

*Q: This, of course, was an exciting year diplomatically speaking.*

RENDER: The Senior Seminar is a year of exploration and examination of issues both domestic and foreign that affect U.S. foreign policy. The participants are made up from the State Department and other federal agencies including the Department of the Treasury, Customs, Agriculture, the Justice Department and the military.

Department of State participants saw their assignment as a signal that you would be assigned to higher positions within the Department.

It was an exciting year. We saw firsthand the effects of the Exxon-Valdez oil spill. We spent time with the officials, the people impacted by the spill and learned about the politics of the spill. Spending time on a dairy farm in Minnesota was also invaluable.

We also spent time overseas. I think the most significant trip was to Germany. Germany was going through its unification transformation. We spent a day in Potsdam with the East German Foreign Affairs students who were hopeful they would become a part of the West German Foreign Service. Then we went to the opposite side and heard how the Germans thought they would proceed but were not sure. Neither side was on the same page which pointed out to me the difficulties of planning for unification at all levels.

Ultimately, we had a chance to explore how you reintegrate half of a nation into a nation. What are the issues that affect this nation? How do you, as outsiders, relate to this? What do you need to do in terms of foreign policy to be supportive? Which side do you take? Is there a side for you to take? We were there at a very dynamic and interesting and time. I think it was worthwhile for many reasons.

*Q: You mention that you spent quite a bit of time on farms. When you were in Germany, did you talk about German farm policy? In a way, they are at odds with the United States with its subsidies and all that.*

RENDER: We did not spend time on German farm policy while in Germany. However, I knew that our policies were not totally in sync. The issues of reintegration, refugees, housing and land were at the forefront of our Germany discussions.

*Q: You were there at a time when essentially one of the great events of that century occurred.*

RENDER: Correct. We were there at the time of one of the greatest events. That is why it was so fascinating. We were able to hear firsthand from those in charge in the West the multitude of issues to be resolved. The complexities of the issues such as land ownership and housing. What you take away is the critical importance of long-term strategic thinking and planning.

*Q: Were you catching any sense of disquiet? Were the people who were talking to you, particularly those dealing with the Cold War and the State Department, all of a sudden the rules have completely changed. Did you sense they were grappling with an unknown quantity?*

RENDER: I had the feeling in our Department of State that people were excited about the prospects of change. In Germany, I felt excitement from those involved in the unification process and tremendous responsibilities they had on their shoulders.

*Q: You spent a considerable amount of your time dealing with Africa. Did you find that Africa was pretty far down the food chain as far as when you got back to Washington and you were doing think tank work and all?*

RENDER: Africa has traditionally been the last item on the totem pole. I don't think anyone who is in the Foreign Service won't agree with that. We are a Eurocentric nation. I was told early on that I should not expect to rise in the Service since Africa was not in the strategic sphere of concern. I decided that I liked the Mavericks. Africa was exciting. I think people who pursued Africa, particularly during the time I was in the Foreign Service, did it for many reasons. One was a true interest in the continent. You could see the prospects for the future. You could see the great promise that it holds. It has all the strategic resources. It has everything. It just needs to be developed and harnessed to move forward. For us, it holds interest, excitement, and you get to do a lot in Africa.

My junior officer colleagues serving in Europe on our first tours did not have the breadth of experiences I had in Africa.

*Q: In 1990, you are finishing up the Senior Seminar. What are they going to do with you?*

RENDER: That's a good question. I was originally told unofficially that I was being considered to become the Director of Central African Affairs. While I was working in a healthcare center in Cleveland, Ohio, I received a telephone call saying, "Have you been notified that you are going off to the Gambia as the U.S. Ambassador?"

I said, "No. No one telephoned me. I am not scheduled to go to Gambia. I am scheduled to become maybe the Director of Central African Affairs. Then I was told, "No, you are going to go to Gambia."

*Q: At some point, you adopted a child. Had this happened yet or not?*

RENDER: No, that happened between the time of leaving the Senior Seminar and before leaving for The Gambia.

*Q: In the first place, how did you end up in Cleveland in a healthcare center?*

RENDER: As part of the Senior Seminar, you had to focus on a project. Frankly, I was not in the mood for a project. I had become lazy. I am a native of Cleveland, Ohio. Prior to joining the Foreign Service, I had worked for a healthcare center. The center was one of those experiments in how you provide multiple services to a wide group of people in one location. It was like the Kaiser system that now exists.

It serviced a particular area made up of two neighborhoods. One was more of an ethnic, diverse neighborhood called Norwood. The other was called Hough. Hough was mainly an inner city neighborhood. These two neighborhoods buttressed one another and it was easy to provide services.

It became so popular that people outside the area wanted to pay to join. It was an experiment before its time. It was a primary preventive health care system.

*Q: Let's talk about before you went out there.*

*Do you call it Gambia or The Gambia?*

RENDER: The official name is The Gambia, but most people say Gambia.

*Q: What were you thinking of before you went? You've got to do your reading up and all that. What was going on that you were hearing back in Washington?*

RENDER: The Gambia was not on front radar screen of the Department of State. It was a former British colony. It is an easygoing, peaceful place. It had a president who was

basically democratic and had done great work on human rights, not only within his country, but also within the sub-region. The current president, President George W. Bush, went to represent his father at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of The Gambia. I think the British monarchy sent Princess Anne. That was prior to my arrival, but clearly that resonated strongly and widely when I arrived there. Everyone remembered our current President fondly.

The Gambia is predominantly a Muslim country but Christianity flourishes as well. Tourists from Scandinavia flock to the pristine beaches in the summer bringing a lot of hard currency to The Gambia. The tourist trade had also created a large number of small businesses serving the tourists.

President Jawara knew his country well and the political scene was laid back. While this was a blessing, it also led to complacency. People were free to speak their minds. Human rights violations rarely occurred. The Gambia had created an independent, non-governmental Human Rights office. U.S. major universities that were in the process of developing courses of study in Human Rights flocked to the Gambia to work with the local Human Rights office. This included professors and students. The Gambia was sending election monitors all around Africa to observe elections. Through our self-help and human rights funding, I was able to provide them with necessary technological equipment, like computers, to help them with their work. If you could get Africans to begin the process of self-examination, it would be better to avoid the backlash from the outside. Peer pressure sometimes works.

The Embassy was a part of the Small Embassy Program. We were fourteen people in the mission, and half of that staff was AID. I found it a unique opportunity to explore how State and AID could work closely together, and I think we created quite a model. I think I was among one of the first Ambassadors that saw the AID Director as my direct partner. I took the AID Director with me to see the President. I told him the purpose of the meeting was for the AID Director to brief him on our programs. I recall he was very interested and asked many questions. I recall the first message we sent back to Washington prompted many positive phone calls.

I also learned the many ways of funding AID program operations. Our AID Director created funding mechanisms often used in the Middle East but not Africa. This allowed the country to use its funds for many other needed priorities. Our money was used in ways that made it easy to track what we were funding and was in keeping with our goals.

We did some things that were very nerve shattering for many of the local officials. We set up the first anti-corruption investigation to try to figure out who didn't pay back loans to the bank. Loans began to be paid off. This was very helpful. It sent all kinds of signals to people that the U.S. in cooperation with the government was interested in stopping corruption. I also uncovered a major international visa fraud ring and had the Minister of Interior arrest all of the perpetrators and file charges.

*Q: Just to go back: did you meet President Bush before you went out?*

RENDER: I did not meet the President before I went out to post. Scheduling was a problem. I did meet him later. He was very gracious with his time. He wanted to meet to discuss how I got Gambia to co-sponsor the US resolution on Zionism.

*Q: This was Zionism equals racism.*

RENDER: Yes. It was a major foreign policy issue at the time. Remember that The Gambia is a predominately Muslim country. The Gambia became a co-sponsor of our resolution against Zionism equals racism. President Bush was pleased with the sponsorship. I had sent a cable. In that cable, I said it was because of the respect they held for him. I did not say exactly what President Jawara had told me. I left acknowledgment of me out of the cable because I didn't think I should toot my own horn. We also discussed Libya.

*Q: I just want to go back. The other day, you were telling us in the office about when you appeared with your very active two-year old son in the Oval Office and how the President responded. Could you tell that story?*

RENDER: President Bush was extremely gracious. I had my two-year old son with me. The President sent for Millie. Jonathan's reaction was one of complete enjoyment. His smile was so wide. The President told me to put him down. I was a little afraid because there were all these wonderful vases around. Here is a little two-year old. The President was telling him to look in a specific drawer in his desk. He found the official M&M candy. The doors were of particular fascination for Jonathan. He left his fingerprints everywhere. Prior to entering the Oval Office, Jonathan, who is autistic, became fascinated by the red strip on the Marine Guard's pants leg and started to rub it. I apologized to the Marine who let me know without movement he understood. When I look at the pictures of Jonathan and Millie today, I just remember with great fondness the humanity of President George Bush. He is one of a kind.

*Q: You were explaining that he got Millie. You might explain who Millie was.*

RENDER: I thought everybody in America knows Millie. Millie is the President's dog.

*Q: What was Libya doing there?*

RENDER: Libya at that time was moving rapidly into others parts of sub-Saharan Africa to create ties. It sought more influence in sub-Saharan Africa. Qadhafi wanted to lead the continent in his vision. In order to pursue his request, he needed more friends in sub-Saharan Africa. With Libya's great wealth, Qadhafi was doling out the cash.

Qadhafi courted President Jawara with little success. They were not of the same mindset. Jawara was President of ECOWAS (the Community of West African States) He wanted to send the message of supporting democratic institutions, respect for human rights and

building African economies. Jawara's vision for Africa was growth and through growth power would emerge.

Jawara did something that had never been done before, which is significant. He tried to get ECOWAS as an institution to create a military peacekeeping group to go into Liberia. You will recall Liberia was in chaos. He said, "We Africans have to help ourselves." "We cannot wait for others to solve our problems." "Since ECOWAS is made up of both francophone and Anglophone countries it was difficult to get a united front. He turned to Nigeria. Nigeria provided the commander and military units to serve as peacekeepers in Liberia. The U.S. supported the ECOWAS effort. I got the U.S. to provide some funds. I personally felt that Africans did need to step up to the plate to help one another and specifically in crises and emergencies. Now the Africa Union has developed the capacity with outside help to send troops into other member countries. Jawara was among the first to move a key African organization in this direction.

*Q: Could you talk a little about The Gambia and its geographic bounds? Did tribalism play a role? What about the Gambians themselves? Different nations have different characteristics, and I was wondering if you could talk a little about that.*

RENDER: Our interest in The Gambia reflects partly from its location. Gambia is engulfed by Senegal. It sits in the southern part of Senegal separating the Casamance region of Senegal from the rest of the country. It was created to form a gunnery position for the British. This former British colony speaks English while French is the dominant language of Senegal. The two countries had experimented with becoming a joint confederation in 1982 and the Senegambia became a reality. It lasted approximately eight years but the union failed. While it was created out of security fears it failed due to lack of enthusiasm among the populations. As the 1981 coup attempt against Jawara by leftist elements faded into the background in The Gambia, the importance of the union began to fade. President Diouf gave up after talks of trade went nowhere.

The lifestyles of the two countries are different. The Gambia is more laid back and Senegal is more formal. In the Gambia, Ministers sometimes answered the telephones directly. It was the same at the Presidency. If you wanted to see someone quickly, you could just call up and ask what time could you see them on that day. They would gladly respond to your request. So refreshing! The President of the country played golf at the British Club. The course was not closed to others because he was playing. I recall the President asking me if I played. I told him no but that the AID Director and her husband both played. I told him I would be afraid to play. If my eyes were roving, I might mistakenly hit him with a golf ball. I told him that I could see the headlines. He laughed. I told him, however, I would ask the AID Director to play with him, if he wished. It happened. They played. It went well and we established the George Washington Golf tournament. Like every good Ambassador, I got to hand out the prizes. While protocol was important in the Gambia, it was not overbearing.

*Q: This is Tape 4, Side 1, with Arlene Render.*

RENDER: So The Gambia, for all practical purposes, was pursuing the kinds of objectives the U.S. was interested in pursuing: the promotion of democratic values, respect for human rights, and economic growth and development, I also added the empowerment of women and growth and development of children.

I even met the author of The Color Purple, Alice Walker, through the U.S. AID Director in Senegal. He accompanied her to the Gambia. She was pursuing research on FGM (Female Genital Mutilation). We both wanted to see the elimination of this practice. It was physically and psychologically damaging to all who experienced it.

I supported many small group discussions on this issue with men to get at the need for its elimination and a change in attitudes from men. We worked a lot with religious leaders, to talk about empowering women to assist in the economic improvement within families. I had Gambian males leading the discussions, not females. The younger generations found this approach appealing. I have always made it a priority with self-help funding, whenever I have been an Ambassador, to support programs aimed at improving the lives of women and children.

In The Gambia, there is a major British Tropical Disease research institution that has been doing tremendous work for many years on malaria, AIDS, and other diseases that affect Africans. Through our AID program, we supported several initiatives. Malaria prevention was one area we participated in. Malaria prevention directly impacts women and children. Purchasing of mosquito nets was a major priority. This institution also had collaborative efforts with CDC (Center for Disease Control).

*Q: How did your African heritage and being a woman, particularly your African heritage, play as an ambassador?*

RENDER: The fact that I was a female ambassador to The Gambia was very interesting for the people. I recall I would go into a village and I would be introduced as the U.S. Ambassador and a man would state "She is the Ambassador's wife." There would be silence and then the response would come "No, she is the Ambassador. Then the men would look up and say, "Oh, you mean she really is the Ambassador?" I never got angry because it was always so amusing. For women in the villages, I was a role model of what is possible for girls if they can get an education. Gambia is a male dominate society. So, in the villages, men were always served first. When I was present, I would always insist that the women be served first along with me. Women would smile and jump for joy. Men would acquiesce out of respect for my official position. I could see they were not happy being served last.

The Gambia plays heavily in Alex Haley's book, Roots. Alex Haley's ancestors came from The Gambia. One of his ancestor's descendants worked as a security guard at our embassy. He was already employed when I arrived. As a result, the connection between the U.S. and the slave trade was well known in the Gambia.

*Q: I would imagine being in a one-crop country, you learned a lot about the peanut market. I don't know; are there great fluctuations? Who buys it? How does it work?*

RENDER: There are great fluctuations. It is usually bought in bulk on the international market. The Lebanese community, which is large in the Gambia, played a key role in the commercial sector. Most of the Lebanese in the Gambia have been there for a long time and are involved in every sector from peanuts to cars to the buying and selling of major food commodities including rice. They saw Jawara as a man who let them live, work with no bother and they in return saw to it that all of the people could afford to purchase the major food staple rice.

Gambia's geographic location left it with little resources. Without the vibrant commercial sector run by the Lebanese, it would have failed a long time ago. The costs of goods led to the purchasing of commodities by all countries in the sub-region. It was not uncommon to see Senegalese military trucks in the Gambia purchasing rice. Of course, the prices were lower than in Senegal.

Jawara knew stability could be maintained if people could afford to eat and purchase some of the necessities. Foreigners, particularly the British, could find food products they craved. There was a local supermarket run by a Lebanese from one of those old Lebanese families that lived in The Gambia that cater to the international community.

He asked me one day, "What kinds of things do you think Americans would likely purchase. I saw an opportunity in that if Americans could purchase some of the items they craved locally, we could eventually close our small non-profitable, costly commissary. I said, "Well, if you are going to ship in things, I have some suggestions." Then I gave him a lead: Giant Food. I actually gave him the telephone number. He purchased many items I recommended, mostly staples. He bought close to a million dollars' worth of food from Giant over time. There was an article in The Washington Post, in the Business Section, after I returned stateside, where some reporter went to Gambia on holiday and noticed the American food products on the shelves. The owner told the journalist that I had hooked them up with Giant Food. I recall receiving kudos at the Department of State the day the story was published as an example of promoting U.S. businesses even at the grocery store level.

My goal in The Gambia was to do what I could with the limited budget we had. Meet our strategic objectives, be creative particularly in the area of helping people improve their lives and maximize our AID resources. It was a harmonious mission and more than half of the staff extended their tours during my tenure.

*Q: What was the role of the British High Commissioner?*

RENDER: The British High Commissioner was the unofficial Dean of the Diplomatic Corps given Gambia's history with the British. On all issues, we tried to coordinate with him. He and I had close ties. There were other large players. The EU (European Union), and missions from the surrounding West Africa region also played large roles. Lebanon also maintained an embassy. Although the number of missions was large for such a small



country, there were only three principal players, the United Kingdom, the U.S. and the EU.

*Q: Did any students go to the United States to study?*

RENDER: Very few.

*Q: Where would they go? Did they go to England?*

RENDER: Most of them went to school in England because they had scholarships, or to Germany. I think it has been a tragic mistake on our part to drastically cut the number of full paid scholarships to foreign students to pursue a U.S. education. We are no longer developing a cadre of friends within many countries that can say the U.S. Government paid for their education.

*Q: Was there any spillover from Liberia and Charles Taylor and diamonds?*

RENDER: Yes. At the time Liberia was in crisis. As Chairman of ECOWAS, Jawara sent troops from Nigeria to Liberia stabilize the situation. Liberia was melting down and he understood that if it melted down, it could have an impact on the whole region. At that time, like most things African, people saw it as just another common occurrence in Africa. There was diamond smuggling but level increased over time.

*Q: What was the situation? Who was the ruler of Senegal when you were there?*

RENDER: It was Diouf. He had a good reputation.

*Q: Senegal wasn't putting big pressure on The Gambia and all that.*

RENDER: Gambia has always been subject to Senegalese bullying on security matters relating to the Casamance. Senegal often blamed Gambia for being a safe haven for Casamance leaders. Gambia did not have the resources to develop a security system that could track every movement of every individual that came from the Casamance. Also, many people from the Casamance moved to the Gambia to get away from the problems of the Casamance.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

RENDER: I was there I believe from 1990 to 1993.

*Q: Were there any fleet visits?*

RENDER: Yes, we had a number of what you call West African training crews visits including visits by Admirals. These were always welcomed. I totally capitalized on these visits to show the flag. These visits did not cost us anything. I even had one come and celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. What a hit it was. Our military is good at many things including

how to throw a 4<sup>th</sup> of July party. I was able to serve a real American 4<sup>th</sup> of July menu with grilled hamburgers and hot dogs. The ice sculptures provided by the military were a big hit with the guests.

*Q: That wasn't permanent.*

RENDER: Fleet visits were not permanent. We were given opportunities to make requests and I found that usually my requests were granted.

*Q: How about the Peace Corps? Were they there?*

RENDER: We had Peace Corps. There were over 100 volunteers working in The Gambia. Most were involved in agricultural, fisheries and education projects. They were popular in the small villages. We tried to help them with their projects through our self-help funding. I enjoyed their visits to the residence for rest and recuperation. I also liked the fact many felt they could come and ask for pizza. My staff loved preparing pizzas for them.

*Q: What were AID's major projects?*

RENDER: The AID projects were targeted to the key goals of the mission. Since they received funding from the IMF and the World Bank, we paid off their loans to the World Bank and to the IMF. This freed up local currency to use for improving roads, schools, etc. Projects also related to anti-corruption, preventative healthcare, human rights training.

Government Ministers saw my AID mission as a place they could go and seek help. This is in keeping with the informality of the Gambian mentality. I saw this as a good thing. Our efforts were seen in Washington as ground breaking. Our AID Director knew the AID budgeting system. I learned so much from her and AID budgeting processes.

*Q: Were women the market women?*

RENDER: There were many small vendors. However, they were not organized like the women of Ghana. They also did not have the power or influence like women in Ghana. This was partly due to their own culture and the influence of the Lebanese traders.

We also had another interesting phenomenon in The Gambia. The white beaches stretched for six miles. Scandinavians flocked to the Gambia in winter on vacation. Tourist dollars were a big addition to the country's economy. One of the big issues facing the country leaders was balancing the culture of the tourists with the country's religious background. Women from Scandinavia were often freer in their dress code than Gambian women. Further, there appeared to be an increase in young men hanging on the beaches. The country began to deploy beach police patrols to keep an eye on unsavory elements and to protect the tourists from being approached. Also, it prevented many Scandinavians from becoming too friendly with the local young men on the beaches. This was frowned

upon in Gambian society. The government wanted and needed the tourist dollars but also had to pay close attention to the religious aspects.

*Q: I think the term is called 'Going South.'*

RENDER: Religious leaders were beginning to complain loudly. Who are these people corrupting our young men. They are not clothed." The government had to institute a dress code for walking around the city. Bathing suits should be covered. As long as you were on the beach, you were okay to wear your swimwear.

The tourist industry began to emerge. Many set up small eateries. Others established water skiing and fishing opportunities. Jobs were being created. So a balance had to be established to protect both sides.

*Q: You were there from 1990 to 1993?*

RENDER: Yes.

*Q: Then where did you go?*

RENDER: After The Gambia, I returned to Washington. I became the Director of Central African Affairs. We'll start there the next time. That has to do with Rwanda, Burundi and the Central African Republic. That's going to be a long interview.

*Q: Good. So we'll start at that point next time.*

*Today is May 16th, 2007. Arlene, you were Director of Central African Affairs from 1993 to when?*

RENDER: I began my assignment in August 1993. I departed in June 1996.

*Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at that time?*

RENDER: George Moose, who had been Ambassador to Senegal, became the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. I had been Ambassador to The Gambia during his tenure in Senegal. Therefore, he asked me to become the Director of Central African Affairs.

I appreciated his confidence in me and accepted his offer. I had early on in my career served as a desk officer for three of the countries in Central Africa: Rwanda, Burundi, and the Central African Republic and had backstop on many of the other countries monitored in the office. Therefore, I had some background on the countries that consistently were always on the radar screen, Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi.

I arrived in Washington in mid-August 1993. Several weeks after the Arusha Accords had been signed in early August of the same year. The Office of Central African Affairs is usually preoccupied with issues surrounding the giant in the region, Zaire now known

as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A country that can hold two United States within its borders endowed with riches including gold and diamonds and rare minerals. Despite its riches, the country is so underdeveloped. The Office over the years also found itself having to deal with ethnic issues involving both Rwanda and Burundi and political insecurity in Central African Republic, Chad, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Sao Tome.

My arrival coincided with interagency discussions already underway on how to support the request for a peacekeeping mission in Rwanda. The mission grew out of the Arusha Accords Agreement between the Government of Rwanda and the protagonists, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF).

*Q: What was the situation when you arrived?*

RENDER: Implementation of the signed agreement was advancing slowly. The agreement called for demobilization of troops, a unity government and a peacekeeping force. The sides did not trust one another and were constantly jockeying for political advantage.

In Washington, peacekeeping missions meant spending money. Congress wanted to reduce the percentage the USG was paying the UN for peacekeeping. It felt we were spending too much. I also knew the NSC was in the process of developing criteria to help determine USG responses to future requests against this backdrop. The first discussion I attended was on the nuts and bolts of the proposed peacekeeping mission. I recall being struck by the fact that there was little discussion of what the mission was supposed to do and could it carry out the mission without the numbers the UN was requesting. The working level was more focus on size and costs. The US paid the largest amount.

*Q: It was more of a massacre, wasn't it?*

RENDER: The Rwandan Patriotic Front attacked Rwanda from Uganda. The cross border attacks began in 1990. A Tutsis exile child, he grew up in Uganda when his family was forced to leave Rwanda at Rwanda's independence. He is now the current President of Rwanda following the genocide that unfolded beginning in April 1994. The genocide lasted for three months where it is estimated 800,000 to one million Rwandans lost their lives in ethnic savagery. Family members forced to kill other family members, neighbors, etc.

*Q: They were up in Uganda.*

RENDER: Yes. A large Tutsis exile population resided in Uganda since late 1959. They left Rwanda when the Hutu majority revolted against colonial rule. The Belgians had always considered the Tutsis superior to the Hutus. This created a large reservoir of hatred for the minority Tutsis population. The Tutsis did not feel at home in Uganda. Their goal was always to return to Rwanda. Their foray into Rwanda was led by the RPF

under the leadership of Paul Kagame. After years of fighting, the Arusha Accords were signed.

Deputy Assistant Secretary Prudence Bushnell and I went to Rwanda several weeks before the entire peace process broke down to push both sides in the name of peace and stability to move ahead on implementing some of the key stumbling blocks. We spoke to all sides.

A meeting held in Tanzania in April, 1994 to also push for resolution of some of the key issues was held and the President of Rwanda's plane was shot down upon return to Rwanda on April 6. The genocide began that night. It was a heartbreaking three months before Kagame stopped the war by seizing the capital, Kigali. Hutu citizens became refugees overnight and trekked into Zaire creating a massive refugee population in the eastern area of that country.

*Q: The Clinton Administration was fairly new then.*

RENDER: Washington has always ignored African issues for the most part except when we are interested in the issues. We do not have a colonial history with the continent and we have traditionally looked to those who have long historical ties to take the lead on issues within their area of influence particularly issues of peace and stability.

A peacekeeping mission for Rwanda was finally approved after months of discussion. It was not easy. It took articles in newspapers, one spearheaded by me, telephone calls to key administrative officials by other governments, read France to get it done. In October 1993, the UN Security Council approved the mission. The peacekeeping mission was a Chapter Six operation and not a Chapter Seven with a mandate to maintain the peace. I note that now all peacekeeping missions have a Chapter Seven mandate.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

RENDER: David Rawson was Ambassador. He had grown up in the region as a young child. He and his staff had reported well on the developments on the ground. No one could predict the shooting down of the President's plane was going to take place or the genocide that followed. However, revenge killings began by Hutu militias the same evening. Moderate Hutus were singled out first. The Unity Government Prime Minister was slaughtered before her family members.

Following the plane crash, the Executive Secretary (S/S) Mark Grossman, called a meeting to assess the situation and explore next steps. There was an interagency discussion and the discussion was focused on tripwires and military preparations for evacuations. As the discussion was underway, I decided in that meeting that my personal tripwires had been met. When the meeting concluded, I went to my office and began to set up a task force to begin the evacuation process. Grossman and Pru gave me the support I needed and I never looked back. I called the Ambassador and told him to start moving. He told me that going to Burundi by road would be the easiest. I asked him how

he saw structuring them, particularly securing them and insuring communication capabilities. I agreed with him and supported his recommendation within the bureaucracy. Against the odds, we won out.

I recall vividly the Secretary asking to see me in his office. I was surprised since I was the Office Director and not a part of the AF Front Office. His secretary told me he wanted to speak with me so I went to his office. He informed me that the military was making preparations to go to Rwanda to evacuate our citizens. I told him that I had spoken to the Ambassador and I agreed with him that leaving by road would be faster and we could move quickly. Burundi was only an hour away by car. I explained to the Secretary that evacuation by military aircraft would take longer. Even if the planes departed from Europe, it would take hours. I would have the military pick them up in neighboring Burundi. The Secretary nodded and said he would speak to the Ambassador and then the Pentagon.

We began the evacuation of Americans the same day. Americans and other diplomats and foreigners that joined our car caravans went by road to Burundi about an hour away. The Ambassador and his staff made good arrangements to protect the car caravans and he kept me posted by radio along the route. There were at least four of them. The Ambassador left in the last convoy. His call was the right one. Road evacuation from Rwanda was the way to go. Americans in the interior, mostly missionaries, were told to cross over into the country closets to them. Many crossed over into Tanzania.

I had the RSO (Regional Security Officer) in Burundi travel to the border. I knew he was a risk taker, and I knew he understood difficult situations and could manage them. I told him to handle any border crossing issues since some individuals were from other countries and would not be in possession of visas for Burundi. I told him to explain that we would be moving all to other destinations when they got to the capital. Car caravans meant people could take their pets and whatever they could not part with in their vehicles.

Evacuations on our end require paperwork. I got many Washington bureaucrats to waive/postpone most of it in the interest of time.

I asked our Embassy in Burundi to inform the government the U.S. military was on the way to pick up our citizens and to request landing permission. In Burundi, it was nighttime when I made the call. The Embassy officer expressed how he thought the Burundians would react to the thought of U.S. military planes arriving amid their own tensions. I told the officer to tell them the U.S. military planes would be landing and I expected them to move quickly on granting landing permission. Within a few minutes, Burundi gave the green light and everything worked out smoothly.

In looking back, if we had waited to develop trip wires and hold more meetings, we could have lost people. We were out before the weekend was over. Washington was very happy. I was told that the Secretary pronounced the handling of the Rwandan evacuation the finest of its genre he had ever seen in his long association with the State Department. The President expressed his gratitude by coming to visit the Task Force in the

Department following the evacuation and shared our grief over the situation in Rwanda. I received many calls from Members of Congress staff. Foreign Governments also expressed their gratitude for our efforts. So, you might say, “Well yes, but you left the Rwandan citizens.” Yes, we did. My heart was broken at the time and remains to be. I wished I could have evacuated all at risk. Of course, it was not possible.

U.S. Military presence in neighboring Burundi to pick up the evacuees had a very calming effect on Burundi. Burundi was also undergoing a meltdown. Killings were occurring nightly. In Burundi, the Tutsis military was constantly accused of killing Hutus while in Rwanda the victims were mostly Tutsis. Hutus have been the victims of massacres in Burundi throughout its history. I suggested to the Government of Burundi that they consider establishing a Committee of some form to send delegations countrywide to urge Burundians not to be provoked into violence by the news of ethnic horrors next door in Rwanda.

While the evacuation was taking place, we continued to focus on the unfolding events in Rwanda. Hate Radio was a key factor in Rwanda. Unfortunately, the Government of Rwanda would lean back on the argument that Rwanda was a democracy and freedom of speech existed. They could not dictate what people could or could not say on the radio. We made it clear the U.S. would hold officials accountable for their actions. While we would have liked to maintain a presence, I knew it would not be possible given the total breakdown in the society.

Stopping the violence and tracking key individuals within Rwanda became priorities. In Washington, Human Rights groups and organizations wanted to know the whereabouts of specific individuals. One individual’s name kept coming up. I had asked the UN mission to rescue the individual. I knew the individual was alive. The UN mission informed me that they had not yet located the whereabouts of the person but would take care of it. Once she was located, I did not tell anyone for fear it would get out. Hutu extremists would have hunted her down and killed her. I chose not to tell anyone because I felt saving the individuals was more important than letting the NGO (non-governmental organization) Human Rights Watch know of the status of the individual. When they learned that the individual was alive and no longer in the country they were elated.

*Q: Just to get a little feel of the inner workings was there a conflict within the State Department about what we should do? Or was this the State Department versus the Pentagon?*

RENDER: There was no interest in getting involved in Rwanda militarily. There was no support for any action militarily in the Executive or Legislative branches of our government. The Pentagon was also adamantly against any involvement in Rwanda.

*Q: Who stayed?*

RENDER: All countries removed their citizens for it was just not safe. We evacuated lots of foreigners along with our citizens. I told their governments if they could get to the

embassy with their vehicles they could come with us. We would not go pick up anyone. It was too unsafe. The peacekeeping mission itself was in jeopardy when the Belgian Government decided to pull its contingent following the deaths of Belgian paratroopers at the airport on April 6. I recall the Secretary telling me the Belgians had made that decision. I was stunned. We ended up with a smaller force on the ground hampered by its Chapter Six mandate.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the attitude of the powers that be and the Clinton White House? Was there sort of a feeling of, Oh God, let's stay out of this?*

RENDER: The Clinton White House wanted no part of this issue. It had reluctantly agreed to fund the peacekeeping mission. That was a major step. Let the UN take care of the problem. Within State there were some working level discussions on creating humanitarian safe zones for people but just discussions. DOD push back was huge.

*Q: Did you get any feel for within the African Bureau and also within the Department of State, the role of Pru Bushnell and others in this thing?*

RENDER: Pru and I worked very closely on Rwanda. She clearly understood the issues. Her heart was in the right place. She and I worked many issues within the government. Pru was the spokesman for Rwanda since it was under her sphere of responsibility. I often felt that we were just spinning our wheels but not going anywhere. I think I can say that we were both frustrated by our government's lack of concern for Rwanda. The U.S. was focused on other world issues and this was not one of them. I personally called the NSC since I had contacts there and pleaded for greater involvement but to no avail.

Within State, a Special Coordinator for Rwanda was established. Although I was not involved in the creation of this position, I personally felt this was created to give the impression that we were doing something. The Europeans were still calling my Office to coordinate our responses. Following the genocide, given the media attention and the pressure that created, President Clinton announced the creation of Operation Support Hope. The U.S. military traveled to Rwanda and provided humanitarian assistance to millions of traumatized refugees. They provided water, temporary shelter, food supplies and other items.

*Q: Did you have a feeling that sometimes almost that a contact in the Political Military Bureau didn't want to talk to you?*

RENDER: I think the Political Military Bureau did not weigh the Rwanda issue beyond providing for the peacekeeping mission. They were worried over whether the mission should remain in light of events on the ground. I recall that during the genocide within Rwanda, I was told by the Legal Department that I could not use the word genocide in a memorandum I was preparing. I was told words have consequences. I said that I knew that but a genocide was unfolding in Rwanda.

*Q: Genocide is genocide, and that's what it was.*



RENDER: Finally, the Secretary of State used the word genocide in speaking to the press. The lesson here is when people look at all the cable traffic and all the things that were written. You have to understand that in the interagency process, to get anything cleared, the final document may not reflect all of the views the drafter/office wanted to state. The original thoughts may be watered down, but it was what you could get cleared to move towards achieving your objective.

*Q: This brings me to a question. I think the whole Rwanda thing became very much on the world scene afterwards. Particularly as a movie called, Hotel Rwanda, which was very well done and very dramatic, talking about the horror there. Was there a look afterwards, maybe it wouldn't be at your level, and say, "We have got to learn from this, what to do, how to stop." In other words, do you feel within the State Department there was a lessons learned thing? Also, particularly a view of the United Nations and its peacekeeping.*

RENDER: I think many lessons have been learned. First of all, all peacekeeping missions now have a Chapter Seven mandate. Peace is often fragile and the mission should be prepared to handle such situations. Secondly, disarmament is a key factor in securing the peace. Disarmament of militias is not easily done and requires quick actions and planning. I think arms have to be located and destroyed before they get delivered to the groups. Hotel Rwanda also makes it clear that we need to establish protection zones and staff them adequately to protect the innocent.

We also at the time developed Watch Lists for possible meltdown countries to better track events on the ground. I think we are more attuned to tracking events in these countries. Countries also have to take steps towards unification of populations. Now Rwanda says it's trying to work towards lessening the differences between the two major ethnic groups. Rwanda for all Rwandans, I believe is the new motto. This is good. Another great and positive step has been to remove ethnicity from the identity cards.

*Q: During this time, was there much contact with IO (International Organizations) Bureau?*

RENDER: Yes. Since the UN peacekeeping mission was on the ground, IO was an integral part of the interagency process. We were videoconferencing daily with all interested agencies and Departments within the USG. Deputy Assistant Secretary Prudence Bushnell led these meetings. Further, the Office of Central African Affairs was churning out continuous daily updates.

*Q: How well do you feel you were served by our intelligence apparatus, as far as what was happening?*

RENDER: The intelligence community had a handle on the historical aspects of the situation, what could transpire but I do not recall anyone predicting a genocide but large

scale fighting was certainly on the table. If the two sides could not move forward, fighting could breakout and multiple thousands of lives could be at risk.

*Q: Why were the French there and not the Belgians? Both of them were Belgian.*

RENDER: Both the French and the Belgians maintained embassies in Rwanda and Burundi. Given the history of Rwanda, the Belgians sent some troops to participate in the peacekeeping force. This is unusual. Countries with histories within countries do not usually become a part of the peacekeeping force. The French heavily supported the establishment of a peacekeeping mission. The French had close ties to the ruling Hutu majority in Rwanda. The French could not have provided troops for they were seen to be too close to the ruling government in power by the RPF. The RPF would not agree to such participation and I do not think the French were seeking to participate in the mission. The French were on the ground in Rwanda and wanted the peacekeeping force and they fought for its approval so they could move out.

*Q: We were then concerned about how do you bring this together. Then what were you doing?*

RENDER: During that same period, we did have the outflow of refugees. Many Tutsis lived in eastern Zaire along the border with Rwanda. Following the seizure of the capital Kigali by the RPF, there were huge Hutu refugee flows into eastern Zaire causing major issues from conservation of the gorilla habitat to feeding and sheltering the refugees. There was fear of the RPF crossing over and of course, the Hutu leaders of genocide within the refugee areas carrying out cross border raids into Rwanda. Further, Zaire's population was uneasy and angry with all of the refugees in their country. Refugees were receiving better treatment than they were by their government.

The UN Commission for Refugees took the lead on settling and eventually repatriating refugees. The international community felt donor fatigue.

*Q: I understand as I recall anyway, that one of our concerns was with these refugees sitting in essentially Zaire that included in them was a very large number of Hutu genocidaire. One of the things was how do we deal with the refugees and not support a bunch of genocidal thugs?*

RENDER: A key issue was who are the refugees. How do we separate the refugees from those that led and participated in the Rwanda genocide. I personally think how we handle refugee issues needs to be rethought. I feel that often our desire to assist without clearly understanding the impact on others makes many refugees scapegoats. It was hard to figure out who was who in the refugee camps unless the bad guys were pointed out. It took programs started by Kagame to start the return of refugees including many perpetrators to return to Rwanda. Ultimately, Paul Kagame did the right thing, I think, in setting up internal tribunals where people could confess and began the process of healing.

*Q: How about the decision to put our mission back into Rwanda?*

RENDER: Once the RPF was in control of the government, we began the process of resuming operations in Rwanda and identifying the right individual to take charge until an Ambassador was named.

*Q: How soon did we do that?*

RENDER: It was in the late summer. President Clinton announced Operation Support Hope to provide humanitarian assistance. Therefore, we needed someone on the ground.

*Q: Who is this?*

RENDER: His name is Robert Whitehead. He went back to open up the mission. His wife was a native of Rwanda. Therefore, he had family connections on the ground that could prove useful. I knew Bob was savvy and had a keen understanding of things going on around him. He is also a terrific writer. He filled the void until the new Ambassador arrived. Robert Gribbin.

*Q: I have interviewed Robert.*

RENDER: Robert Gribbin knew the Great Lakes region. He had served both in Rwanda and Uganda. He personally knew Paul Kagame. So he was a good choice.

*Q: Eventually, President Clinton went to Rwanda and made a public apology.*

RENDER: Yes. I think it was a good step. It helped our relationship with Rwanda.

*Q: Was there a feeling of frustration, depression, among your group about 'We should have done more'?*

RENDER: I always felt we needed to get Rwanda right. We could have done more if the political will existed. To move the needle on our side for support for the peacekeeping mission in Rwanda, I had a long conversation with the former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Hank Cohen. I was expressing my frustration and I asked him if he could help. He wrote an article entitled, "Getting it Right in Rwanda." This lit a fire under the Department and helped to gain support for the peacekeeping mission. First step accomplished. This, of course, preceded the events of April 6 following the plane crash of the President's plane.

Secondly, there were many conversations, even at my level, trying to get people in higher places to do something about Rwanda. There was no desire. The Pentagon was steadfast: they wanted no part of Rwanda. Neither the Executive nor Legislative Branches of government were interested in the "more" scenario. The peacekeeping mission was in place. Following the events in April, some movement on the reconstruction side took place. As I said earlier, President Clinton approved the Operation Support Hope Mission. We also organized the Rwanda Operational support Group, an international meeting to

address a country-specific problem so we could work out a comprehensive strategy and play a complimentary role in the reconstruction process. We also compiled a list of potential Rwandan war criminals and had the list vetted through the interagency process.

*Q: What about during all this, what about Burundi? Was anything happening there?*

RENDER: Burundi was struggling with its own internal upheavals. Tensions were high. We initiated a series of missions to handhold a regime destabilized by assassinations, ethnic massacres and refugees. I often think about my insistence that the Diplomatic Security (DS) provide our high profile Chief of Mission there with a security detail. Diplomatic Security's position was if he needed a detail, we should close the mission and bring everyone home. I felt DS should not be trying to make policy but assist us in achieving our goals. Luckily, the head of DS, Ambassador Quainton, agreed with me and signed off on the detail. Having this detail saved him from injury or worse when assailants ambushed him while on a trip in the interior. When the news broke about the incident, DS was pleased that it had approved my request and that the detail had saved his life..

*Q: As an African expert, could you tell the difference between a Hutu and Tutsi?*

RENDER: Generally speaking, yes. Tutsis are usually taller with keen features. Hutus are more Bantu-type, stocky, shorter. Of course, through intermarriage and genetics like in every other demographic group, most don't fit the general mold. In Rwanda, nationality was stated on their identity card.

*Q. With Rwanda-Burundi, by 1995, have things more or less settled down?*

RENDER: Things began to settle down within the borders of Rwanda after Kagame took power. Rebuilding a society after the traumatization it suffered take years. We were in the period of how do you bring some sense of normalcy out of this chaotic situation in Rwanda? What kinds of services needed to be provided to help victims with their trauma? What do you do about the people who committed genocide?

Early on, a large number of NGOs flocked to Rwanda to help. In their desire to be helpful, they began to take steps that were not consistent with what the new government wanted. There was constant conflict. Many of these NGOs, in the mind of the government, became mini-governments. One day, Kagame in his frustration told them all to go home. The NGOs were stunned and of course wanted to fight back. The NGOs had the resources he needed. He, however, wanted to implement his vision.

Both sides needed one another. I had to spend a lot of time moderating this friction and responding to Hill inquiries. This friction came at a time when in Washington we were seeking millions of dollars from the Congress to help care for the population. The money we were seeking would go to NGOs. The NGOs began to rethink how they approached issues and were more cognizant of how the government perceived their actions.

*Q: We are moving into an era where the non-governmental organizations, the NGOs, are becoming such a vital part of our program. In a way, these can be loose cannons. It can be maybe five people with an idea that they are going to give everybody who needs them eyeglasses, or something like that.*

RENDER: Yes. Absolutely. NGOs are good. They have a desire to work on issues and can provide the staff to carry out their programs. Accountability is easier. However, in a situation like Rwanda, there are so many needs to confront. Groups are working in so many different areas. You need to develop a comprehensive strategy and set priorities. All priorities are not equal.

*Q: Was there any effort made to have an NGO of NGOs. I mean there is a foundation for foundations that gives information out. In other words, it sounds like there should be an organization to train NGOs about how to operate.*

RENDER: NGOs at the national level do have organizations as you are describing. Usually, these relationships translate locally. There was communication among the NGOs on the ground. They met regularly to share and discuss information both with the Government of Rwanda and the embassy.

*Q: Did you find in Rwanda, and perhaps in Burundi too, that because of these massacres, there was a dearth of well-educated people? A society needs this.*

RENDER: Absolutely. Many of the educated Rwandans were killed immediately in early April by Hutu extremists for they believed in moderation. They wanted to see real implementation of the Arusha Accords. Following the genocide, many educated Rwandans began to return to assist in the formation of the new Rwanda.

*Q: Was Mobutu waning in health? Or how was he?*

RENDER: He was still in good health. Mobutu understood Zaire down to the local levels. He ran it like a Chieftaincy. The U.S. liked Mobutu. He was a partner in our cold war endeavors. Zaire was rich. Unfortunately, the riches were not and still not used for the development of the country.

*Q: This is Tape 5, Side 1, with Arlene Render.*

RENDER: So Zaire was a major concern.

*Q: Was this part of your portfolio?*

RENDER: Zaire was the largest country within our office. We tried to steer towards a less corruptible nation state by supporting a reformist Prime Minister program aimed in this direction against entrenched individuals out to maintain the system of rewards for a few in place.

The policy agenda was so focused that it gained wide support at the White House and on Capitol Hill. This was created with the help of a committee made up of former U.S. Ambassadors to Zaire, a few staffers on Capitol Hill and of course, the interagency. Their participation helped to create the appropriate policy.

*Q. During your time, because it has been acknowledged that the CIA had quite an influence there, how sensitive was that?*

RENDER: It was greatly diminished during my time. Clearly, our objective was to insure that Mobutu understood that the Ambassador was his primary contact. He played along but this did not mean that all contacts with other USG agencies were not taking place.

*Q: Looking at it as a practical point of view, we had the mantra of democracy. When you throw democracy into Zaire, you could end up with absolute chaos. With democracy, it means various groups, tribal and cross tribal. Let's just take the tribal thing. If these tribes basically had a proportional vote, you could end up with an absolutely chaotic system.*

RENDER: Unless Mobutu left the scene, the apple cart could not be over turned. We focused on good governance and building up local institutional structures that were closer to the people. Stronger local government operations could have a greater impact on the lives of individuals. There was no way the Chieftaincy of Mobuto was going to disappear. Everybody, including opposition leaders, knew whom they had to be loyal to ensure their economic wellbeing.

*Q: My understanding is that Mobutu and his coterie were not investing in keeping up the mining.*

RENDER: The foundation of good governance did not exist. The façade existed. Efforts by the IMF/World Bank were not helpful in moving the country towards a more transparent society for the population saw their money devalued, no major improvements in their lives or new infrastructure built. The reformist Prime Minister did not gain the popularity he needed to provide him leverage in keeping the reforms on track. He made gains but his gains were not enough.

*Q: Essentially, the riches were being dissipated, rather than being augmented.*

RENDER: That is correct. Their money was not being used to benefit the infrastructure of the country. Massive amounts of money had to be paid to cover the interest on loans made to the country by the IMF/World Bank and little was left to address many other issues. These were the years of structural adjustments. Tightening ones belts.

*Q: Was the money being invested?*

RENDER: I do not think so.

*Q: The Congo was coming out of its socialist stance and coming back in.*

RENDER: Congo–Brazzaville has never truly been socialist. Yes, it portrayed itself as such and surrounded itself with the usual trappings including a flag. As one smiling Minister told me, since socialism has come, more Congolese go to church now than ever before. Strong economic ties with France have never wavered. France has key interests in Congo and a sizable French population mostly in the southern part of Congo, Pointe Noire. The Congolese President always maintained close working relations with the Elysee. If he had economic/financial concerns, he would more likely discuss issues with France than Moscow.

As you are aware, U.S. focus throughout the world was on the development of key democratic institutions, building strong economies and encouraging global trade.

*Q: Were you feeling the almost beneficial effects, maybe not, of the break-up of the Soviet Union at that time? In other words, the Soviets were no longer meddling around.*

RENDER: The Soviets were not major players in central Africa. Most of these countries have a direct connection with France or Belgian. They also have a shared language. While the Soviets would be interested in these countries for economic reasons, it was very hard, if not impossible, to play on French turf. Zaire 's historical relationship with Belgium still existed. Mobuto was known to be pro-western and close to the U.S.

*Q: Moving over to the Central African Republic, formerly the Central African Empire. Was there anything going on when you were there?*

RENDER: Central African Republic experienced a military mutiny in early 1996. In Washington, I established a working group that better fitted our needs rather than a full-blown Task Force. The French maintained troops there and I knew they would take care of us, if required. French forces were managing security issues/problems on the ground. Further, to assist our Ambassador, I asked Paris if they could put a French military person in the CAR who spoke English within our Embassy for a few weeks who could communicate with the both the Ambassador and the Commander on the ground about our needs. The French were puzzled by my request but acceded to it. It was a first, something that had never been done before but it was so helpful. The Embassy fell in love with the military officer for he could explain first-hand what was happening and get our needs met.

*Q: What happened? Did the first plane go in with marines, or what?*

RENDER: The Embassy compound in the CAR is quite large and the Embassy felt uneasy about its security. EUCOM had some Marines on a ship off the coast of Liberia and sent forty plus Marines to the Embassy to secure it.

Mission staff was a little frightened and I wanted to calm the waters so they could focus more on the issues at hand. It was unclear at the beginning if the situation would deteriorate or not.

When it became clearer that we should drawdown our embassy, the Marines helped take the Americans out of country aboard U.S. military aircraft. The U.S. and French militaries worked closely together.

*Q: By 1995, you had solved the problems with Africa.*

RENDER: You are optimistic! No, we had not solved the problems of Central Africa. Rwanda was on the road to recovery. In Burundi, a peace process was underway under the eyes of a UN Special Envoy but the situation remained tense. During my time in the office, we evacuated embassies in many of the countries. Some countries, like Congo-Brazzaville and Burundi twice. Towards the end of 1995, we added the Central African Republic to the list. We also reversed a coup in Sao Tome with a strong public statement that basically said the US would insure the country would not receive any support.

*Q: You left this very exciting job when you were the Evacuation Officer for Central Africa, more or less. Where did you go in 1995?*

RENDER: I guess that I have described myself as the evacuation officer. I did focus on other issues/ concerns. In early 1996, I began preparing for the U.S. Ambassadorship to Zambia.

*Q: I think this is a good place to stop, don't you? We'll pick this up next time.*

*Today is November 9th, 2007. Arlene, we are off to Zambia. It has been some time since we have been able to get together. Is there anything that you think you might want to add?*

RENDER: I was Director at a very turbulent time in the region. No nation could have made available the resources it would have taken to transform unstable countries into stable ones. Their own taxpayers would not have been happy if their resources had not gone to handle their own needs. We had to do what we could with minimal resources. In crises, we focus on the issues but also the security of our personnel and citizens. Mission personnel would prefer not to be uprooted but unfortunately it happens. We are not interested in the messages drawdowns or evacuations might send to host governments like in the past.

If anything, our experiences led to a better recipe for managing crises and evacuations on the ground. I had been asked by the Office of Management to make a video on steps to take but our sheer workload did not provide me the time to do so.

*Q: Did you run across a chicken factor at all? We can tough it out.*



RENDER: Only one or two Ambassadors. I understood and tried to convey to them Washington's perceptions, pet peeves, concerns, etc. As everyone knows, Washington would not tolerate the days when missions had to be evacuated from the rooftops. I also stressed that their chances of making the determinations about staffing, drawdowns, returning to post etc. would be greatly diminished if their judgment proved incorrect.

*Q: Was somebody looking over your shoulder with a pocket calculator and saying, "You know it's going to cost \$17,000 just to do that."*

RENDER: If you move early, you can do it by commercial airline. The costs increase when you require private aircraft or need military evacuation. Early means safety and provides significant cost savings to the government.

*Q: In your jurisdiction, how much Peace Corps did you have? I would think they would make one far more nervous, young people really out there, exposed.*

RENDER: There were Peace Corps volunteers in a majority of the countries. There was a concerted effort to bring them in from the outlying areas into cities. In some cases, like in Burundi, we totally evacuated them because the situation was long-term violence of one group against another in villages. There was a likelihood of them getting caught up in the violence, so we decided to close down the program. Closing programs provides opportunities for volunteers to be reassigned to more stable countries.

*Q: It was a good program for not wasting these kids. They only had two years.*

RENDER: That is correct. You get them out and transfer them to other programs, not have them in limbo while you wait for the country to settle down.

*Q: Then what year did you go to Zambia?*

RENDER: I went to Zambia in 1996. I was there three years.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

RENDER: My tour to Zambia coincided with a cool U.S./Zambian relationship due to the Government of Zambia's determination to manipulate national elections, which in our view, seriously damaged Zambia's new multiparty democracy. Frederic Chiluba, a labor union man, became President. His vision of building a stronger vibrant economy for Zambia coincided with several key U.S. goals of African nations building better economies, strengthening their security and democratic institutions and developing more transparent operations within their governments. Over time, we were at odds over human rights abuses, lack of solid auditing procedures and cracking down on corruption. I came down hard on him and his government in these areas. When his government created a Human Rights Commission and Anti-Corruption Commission, I pledged our support.

Former President Kenneth Kaunda was arrested on Christmas Day. I had traveled to Botswana to spend the holiday. When my Political Officer informed me I was stunned. I immediately left Botswana and returned to Zambia. The White House and Capitol Hill both issued very strong statements against the Government of Zambia for their action.

I instantly understood however that too much of a high profile insult would stifle progress in securing Kaunda's release. So, I opted to lower our public profile on this issue but work in concert with several key Central and Southern African colleagues whose Presidents had influence with Chiluba. I also met with twenty plus donor representatives at my residence to map out a coordinated policy approach since the Consultative Group meeting in Paris was scheduled. This was a workable formula.

I also decided to make an unannounced visit to the prison to see Kaunda. I recall the look on the Prison officer's face but he immediately let me see him. My visit made the front page of all newspapers and was broadcasted on the radio. Actions are indeed worth more than words. The African Presidents were successful in moving on the issue. Kaunda was moved from the prison to house arrest and eventually released. The Zambian Government started to comply with the law regarding former Presidents.

I also worked closely with political parties on strengthening their capabilities to become more effective and participate fully in a multiparty democracy. The political parties only focused on winning Presidential elections. I worked with leaders individually to get them to redirect more attention on the legislative and judicial branches of government. Further, to work at the local levels of government throughout the country. I also encourage interparty talks. I met regularly with political party leaders. They all knew they could meet with me anytime and did so.

In working on policy issues, I have always found it necessary to have a close working relationship with other nation representatives. Zambia, given its role in southern Africa, had a very large Diplomatic Corps. The AID Director and I spent time working with them to create a united policy agenda in the areas of democracy and development. Additionally, I also held separate regular meetings with my African counterparts on OAU/SADC and Zambian issues for the same reasons. I encouraged increased south-south cooperation and dialogue. I supported SADC and other African regional groups represented in Zambia to increase dialogue and development. There was a great deal of trade between the countries within the region. I made clear I supported initiatives to make it easier for inter-country trade, crossing of borders to include custom issues.

Zambia's geographic location made it a part of two civil wars in Congo/Zaire and Angola. President Chiluba headed the OAU/SADC mediation effort in the Congo. The initiative had African ownership and they worked quietly and secretly on the issues with no press and media communiqués on the substance. By liaising with my SADC counterparts and key Zambian officials including the President, I was able to keep close track on the process and ensure that our policy equities were in front of the Africans involved. I had to manage Washington's constant desire for updates on the process with

the pace of the process. I often had to remind Washington that the Africans were not working on their time schedule.

The second regional issue was the civil war in Angola. Kaunda had been a strong supporter of UNITA and the MPLA believed the current government was also aiding UNITA. I traveled to that area and met with local officials, missionaries and others on life at the border. It was a very busy place. The border between Angola and Zambia is like many in Africa, long and unsecured.

In Lusaka, one Sunday, we woke up to a series of bombs going off in the city. Political parties began to spout off their reasons for it. I contacted a key government official and told him that I could have the ATF on the ground within twenty four to forty eight hours and suggested they consider it. He said he was about to enter a meeting chaired by the President and would let me know. When the President spoke to the nation that evening about the bombs, he noted he had requested the ATF to investigate. I was pleased for we could learn first-hand about the bombs. Everyone in town knew that one or two bombs went off in the Angolan Embassy and some staff had been injured.

The announcement that the ATF was coming lowered tension in the city and speculation quieted. Once on the ground, ATF pictures of agents at various sites were splashed across newspapers and carried in television news stories. There was a general feeling that we would get to the bottom of the matter. The ATF prepared a detailed report on the bombings. I had decided that we would provide the government with the report and we would not comment on it publicly. I felt the Zambian government should handle the information. Yes, we learned where to point the finger and the guilty party knew we knew. The Government of Zambia decided to "Let sleeping dogs lie."

*Q: One of the things I have noticed, particularly in Africa but also in other areas, is that so many foreign missions such as the French, the British, the Germans, the Dutch, often play the role of spectator. They really aren't very pro-active. Sometimes Americans are accused of, and quite rightly so, jumping in too soon. The point is that we are willing to get involved right away, and the Europeans don't. Did you note that?*

RENDER: Yes. The ATF arrived in Zambia quickly. I think on Monday. A few days later, the Dutch informed me they were sending a team. Several of my Diplomatic colleagues told me later that they didn't pick up on the need for outside investigators fast enough and the positive impact the arrival of the ATF had on the situation on the ground.

*Q: When you arrived, was Zambia trying to restructure itself after the removal of Kenneth Kaunda from the scene? He had been there for years. Had he left in a fairly benign way?*

RENDER: There had been an election. Jimmy Carter had played a key role in monitoring that election. He also played a key role in getting Kenneth Kaunda to release the reins of power and turn them over to the winner of the election. This meant his whole party was out of power and a new party was in power, that of Chiluba, the labor union leader.

Kaunda finally relinquished power. His government ministers and agency heads lost their positions. New faces took over. There was no love lost between the former and current President.

*Q: There is a dynamic here that I hadn't thought about. In the United States, when a party is out of power, people end up on K Street as lobbyists or they go back to universities, working as lawyers or farmers or whatever. This is true in so many countries. For Africans, there is no place to go. When you lose your government political position, that's it.*

RENDER: That's right. And that's why it is so hard. I have always told African leaders that they cannot treat their countries like their private fiefdoms'. They have not liked my words but I believe we must speak truths. It doesn't always make you best friends but I have found my honesty had not hindered me in working with others.

*Q: This is something that hurts the oils of change of government.*

RENDER: Yes. We worked with two U.S. universities to get a place for Kenneth Kaunda so he could leave and write some books about the liberation movement that he worked so heavily on. He had details that he only knew on the ins and outs of that period. When he was approached on such an offer, he decided he did not want to take it at that time.

*Q: What about Chiluba? When you got there, how tribal were politics?*

RENDER: Politics in Zambia were not very tribal. Kaunda, when he was President, made sure that he included every ethnic group in his government for unity. Even non-Africans were included. There is a small Lithuanian community in Zambia. Many of them supported Zambia's independence movement and were rewarded with ministerial positions. There is also a large Indian population in the Zambia given the British heritage of the country. Kaunda stressed unity among the various populations and that still exists.

Parliament was a functioning body. We spent funding on strengthening the Parliament. Working with the Judiciary was another key area in our programming. The U.S. District Court in Washington worked closely with the Chief Justice. Training of court recorders and modernizing equipment was also included. A system was put into place to also track cases to avoid non-action and cause so much grief to families. We also worked on mediation and arbitration training through our AID program. The British established a commercial court.

*Q: When you arrived there, was parliament more of a rubber stamp?*

RENDER: Parliament was weak. In some areas, it was a rubber stamp. Kaunda had ruled for many years. With Chiluba in power, a number of institutions were trying to transform themselves into becoming more independent. President Chiluba's willingness to open the markets to all helped to improve the economic situation. White South African farmers and businessmen began to live and work in the Zambia. Did you know the construction of

a supermarket chain across the country led to local office ministries making their purchases locally, increasing their buying power and lowering their costs. They stopped using the government system to purchase many items they needed in their offices. Just think of all the middlemen that would no longer make a profit.

*Q: I was going to say, it improved the transportation and delivery system.*

RENDER: Tremendously.

*Q: Let's talk a little bit about the leadership in Zambia.*

*Let's start with when you first met Chiluba. I imagine there was a development over the two and a half years you were there. What was your initial impression of the man?*

RENDER: My initial impression was that he wanted to succeed especially on the economic front. I think he knew if he succeeded in this area, it would help consolidate his party politically. A labor union leader, he knew how to organize people. He should not be taken lightly. He was also very good at manipulating situations to achieve his objectives. He held some information closely unless you hinted that you knew more. He would open up because he also was seeking information. Over time, he would be more candid. For example, he would say, "I can't just call the President in that country regarding this issue Ambassador because I am younger in age, and he is older." I have to travel there and pay deference so it will take longer.

Unlike many political parties, a number of his party leaders were adamant about lengthy terms of office. When Chiluba's term of office was ending and he wanted to amend the constitution, I told some of my colleagues in Washington even though I was no longer Ambassador in Zambia, Chiluba would not be successful. His party would put forth a candidate he could support to have his back. This did not mean the individual would do so.

*Q: How did you find it, reading the body language and all, in Zambia, particularly with Chiluba but also with others, for an African American woman there as ambassador?*

RENDER: The body language was positive. They just treated me like they would treat a male Ambassador. The female cabinet Ministers were elated for they felt a sisterhood relationship. Some shared their frustrations in private with me regarding how things were going in the government. Of course, I was the first African American Ambassador to Zambia. Zambians considered themselves to be a very important country in the region, given the role they played in the independence movements in southern African and in particular both Zimbabwe and South Africa. Younger people in government liked the fact I spoke truths.

*Q: Were you raising subjects like human rights and women's rights?*

RENDER: Many of the concerns I raised were human rights concerns. NGOs and others outside of the United States noted my strong speeches about the importance of human rights. I would also speak out publicly at events and in the media about human rights.

*Q: Was there much of a women's movement? I don't necessarily mean an organized movement. Were women really engaged in the process?*

RENDER: Yes. There is a strong civil society. Women held positions in government including the parliament. They are not afraid to speak out on issues. What most lacked was access to resources. There was even a large march of women from all walks of life to the Presidency to speak out on some issues. They had asked me to march with them. I declined to march with them to avoid them losing the spotlight and criticism that the march was inspired by outside influence. I wanted the focus on them and their issues and not me. They got press coverage and I made the right decision to meet them at the Presidency to show my support. I was standing outside on the street as they arrived like other spectators.

*Q: Were there other women ambassadors?*

RENDER: Yes. There were a few: Sweden and the United States. I almost said China but my Chinese counterpart in Cote d'Ivoire was a woman.

*Q: You mentioned China. I always think of the Tan-Zam Railway. Were the Chinese playing much of a role in Zambia when you were there?*

RENDER: Yes. The Chinese were active in purchasing mines and textile factories. They also did what they do throughout Africa. Build cultural facilities, stadiums, hotels, etc. The Chinese also use loans to gain access to some of the resources they want. Unfortunately, in the building of these infrastructure projects, they transported their citizens to do the work so they were not hiring locals. This was a sore point. I often had discussions with my Chinese counterpart, while in the diplomatic receiving line, on Chinese thinking. I learned the Chinese clearly had a long-term view of their relations with Africa and with Zambia. They wanted to have many friends. Friends translate into support on world issues, when required.

*Q: Are these UN votes?*

RENDER: Yes.

*Q: What about the former colonial rulers, the British?*

RENDER: The United Kingdom had very close relations with Zambia given its history. Zambia is also a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. Everyone in Zambia loves Her Majesty, the Queen.

*Q: At that time and in that country, what appeared to be the most effective non-governmental international organizations?*

RENDER: The United Nations, the World Bank and IMF.

*Q: Were you there during the period of President Clinton having his troubles with Ms. Lewinsky and the Republican Congress?*

RENDER: Clinton was President. But I don't recall the timing on that issue. I think I was in Washington at that time.

*Q: Were there reflections of events in South Africa that resonated up in your area?*

RENDER: There was a great deal of cooperation and collaboration between Zambia and South Africa. They were members of the same Southern Africa commercial union. We encouraged that kind of style of cooperation. For example, they established a driver's license through one of their organizations that could be used throughout Southern Africa. This is a good thing, so that people could drive back and forth freely from one country to another without having to have multiple insurances, etcetera. Those were the kinds of things they were working on and we encouraged. It meant building a stronger Southern Africa union. We worked through our AID Director with our USAID SADC regional office located in Botswana.

*Q: Was corruption or crime a problem?*

RENDER: Crime was not an epidemic. It did occur. Most were break-ins robberies. Only one high profile robbery took place resulting in the death of the individual during my time there. I still believe the Minister of Finance was murdered and his murder was not as a result of a robbery but some financial dealings. Corruption existed. Some of the corruption had been around for a long time like at the port. The government finally responded by establishing an anti-corruption commission. We supported the anti-corruption commission and its work to lessen corruption.

*Q: What was your impression of the school system, including university?*

RENDER: The school system was in place but like most lacked resources at all levels. Education is valued. Many in Zambia sent their children to boarding schools in nearby countries. Zimbabwe, Botswana, South Africa, Namibia. The country recognized the need to put more money into education.

*Q: In some countries, including in Europe, this is where you become a Marxist for four years. You learn to scream and yell. Then you take capitalism seriously. This was not going on in Zambia.*

RENDER: No. It was pretty quiet. Zambians "lived" through apartheid in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. They understood their position in the region. AIDS (Acquired

Immune Deficiency Syndrome) was a problem. We had a big AIDS program in Zambia. One thing I will give Chiluba credit for was that he understood the problem and worked with us on the issue. He received several Congressional delegations on this issue. He was open and expressed support for our efforts. The AIDS epidemic was around us. I recall attending funerals for several mission employees. I also recall discussing this issue in many staff meetings. It was a big problem.

*Q: At least you are talking about a government that didn't go through the stage of denial. South Africa did a little of that. It was almost criminal in that they were saying that this is just a Western...*

RENDER: President Kaunda also came out publicly on this issue. He discussed the death of a son by this disease.

*Q: Looking at one of your neighbors, Zimbabwe, how was Mugabe acting at the time?*

RENDER: Mugabe was clearly still in power and the country was still on the path of destruction. , both economically and politically. Human rights abuses continued to rise. Since Kaunda was no longer president in Zambia, Mugabe remained the long time African elder statesman in the sub-region. Chiluba on more than one occasion said, "I have to wait to see what he says. I'll get back to you Ambassador. I am the younger. This was in regards to the OAU/SADC mediation on Congo.

*Q: One of the problems that is still happening in Zimbabwe is that in order to stay in power, the leader plays an anti-other nationality card. In other words, ousting the Indians or ousting the whites.*

RENDER: You didn't have that in Zambia. A few whites from Zimbabwe and South Africa were moving to Zambia to farm. I recall meeting with some in my office at their request. They had been assured they could farm in Zambia without difficulty.

*Q: It destroys the country. Did you feel that the other nationalities, the Indians or the white South Africans, were playing a constructive role?*

RENDER: Yes. All groups were playing constructive roles. They were seen as Zambians. There were Indian parliamentarians and businessmen. Many had served as Ministers within Kaunda's governments. A few pass government ministers were Lithuanian.

*Q: You keep talking about Lithuanians. Could you explain this?*

RENDER: Before independence, a small number of people from Lithuania settled in Zambia as farmers, etcetera. They worked quietly with the Africans to help them achieve independence. I knew one that had served as Minister of Agriculture under Kaunda. He was now engaged in small scale farming.

*Q: This is Tape 6, Side 1, with Arlene Render.*



RENDER: Thinking about the Peace Corps. I note that our mission was also engaged in transformational diplomacy. I met three young men, for example, who were working with street children. The children would convene under a tree. They would offer them a meager meal and allow them to hang out there reading books and just being kids. They wanted to build a place where children could stay, be protected, and obtain some schooling. Some of the children had parents suffering from AIDS. We were able to give them \$25,000 of self-help money. I gave them the first seed money from the people of the United States. I went to my Japanese colleague and asked if he could contribute some funding. He readily agreed to do so. When I told President Chiluba about them, he provided some land for a building. It became a very big project later on, receiving millions of dollars from different donors including the U.S. I recall with fondness the day I gave them the check for 25,000 dollars.

We worked on a project with the Vice-President's wife. She had obtained a small house and was in the process of renovating it to house orphaned babies and small children. I had gone to see the project with the spouse of my Secretary who asked to go along. The next day, I learned he had gone and worked on the house. The word spread throughout our community and on a weekend we were all there along with many of her church members fixing up the property. We had a good mission.

*Did you leave there in 1997? And then where did you go?*

RENDER: I returned to Washington to become the Director of Southern African Affairs. This was a natural lead-in because I had been in Zambia. I knew all the other countries in the sub-region. I had the opportunity to drive from South Africa to Zambia, going through Zimbabwe and Botswana by road.

*Q: You had Southern African Affairs from when to when?*

RENDER: It had to be 1997 to 2001.

*Q: Are there any stories about you getting the job other than it made sense?*

RENDER: Susan Rice was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. She asked me to come back and take Southern African Affairs. Although I knew I was qualified to hold higher positions and was chided by the DG's office for saying yes, I felt I could help her. The Office of Southern African Affairs was considered the crown jewel in the Bureau of African Affairs.

*Q. Talk about Susan Rice. Where did she come from? What was your impression?*

RENDER: I first met Assistant Secretary Susan Rice when she was at the National Security Council (NSC). She was on the peacekeeping side of the house, and then she moved to the Africa side at the NSC. I found her to be super-bright. She had a clear vision of what she wanted to achieve. She was pro-active. She also admired people who

worked to achieve goals. When we disagreed, we would hash it out. I found that we agreed more often than not. There were times we would approach a problem differently. I am a believer that you can have many roads that can lead to a successful conclusion.

*Q: What was your scope?*

RENDER: My scope was all of the countries in Southern Africa: Zambia, Angola, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland and Malawi. It is rich and diverse. In terms of language, you have English spoken in most of the countries, and Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola. South Africa, Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe received high focus within the office.

I had a terrific staff of younger officers who put their hearts and minds into developing sound policy options and papers always ready for primetime. While I managed the office, I enjoyed seeing my officers thrive and leading in multiple ways. Our office was often called upon operationally by the front office to assist.

Angola required a new policy focus. We shepherded policy papers through the Department and the interagency that answered all of the outstanding issues and questions. This took time but was necessary to obtain the approval needed. Multiple U.S. oil and oil support companies operated in Angola. Yet, historically the U.S. had always been on the side of UNITA that had been fighting the government in power, the MPLA, for years. While U.S. support for UNITA had waned over the years, the government was always suspicious of us. Susan Rice shared my view that we had to forge a closer working relationship with the MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and felt we should put the effort into it. Further, Angola needed peace.

*Q: For anybody who is reading this, if you could explain whom these outfits were, UNITA and MPLA.*

RENDER: Both the MPLA and UNITA were rebel groups fighting for political control of Angola. During the cold war era, sides were drawn. The U.S. supported UNITA conservative Savimbi, and the Soviets supported the Marxist MPLA. The MPLA won. UNITA continued to fight a guerilla war for years within the country. Many peace efforts failed to bring the two sides together. One such effort was the Lusaka Peace Accord. By the time I got to AF/S, UNITA had lost international credibility for it kept stalling on all peace initiatives. In 1992, presidential elections were held and he lost in a free and fair election. He declined to accept the results and returned to the bush. Many of its cadres defected to the MPLA or formed legitimate political parties in Luanda. They were tired of fighting. Some of those that defected were among his best soldiers and they became a part of the MPLA military. They led the MPLA military units that tracked Savimbi in the bush. They knew where he liked to go. His area of operation was in an area he was born in and is situated close to the Zairian and Zambian borders. The MPLA was still confronting the issue of UNITA.

*Q: You wanted to avoid a battle between the two parties.*

RENDER: We held meetings with the MPLA government both in Washington and in Angola. Under Secretary Pickering and Ambassador Holbrooke were involved in these meetings. The purpose of the meetings was to develop a shared strategy for moving our relationship forward. A central part of the discussions was conflict resolution and economic reform and democracy.

*Q: How well were you reading Savimbi?*

RENDER: I think we read Savimbi well. He did not appear to be interested in dialogue. Demobilization and reintegration of UNITA troops voluntarily coming in from the cold became a pull mechanism towards an end to war. Savimbi's force was dwindling.

*Q: Was some of the leftist Cold War stand of the MPLA still a factor or was that dissipating?*

RENDER: I think in the MPLA multiple visions existed. They too recognized the importance of having strong ties with the west.

*Q. I realize that Angola is a big country, but we also gave them a hell of a lot of money. Where was it going?*

RENDER: Angola is an oil rich country. It did not receive a lot of assistance from us. Our mission program was aimed at promoting democratic institutions, good governance, protecting human rights and improving the lives of the citizens of Angola.

*Q: Who got the money in Angola?*

RENDER: When you are fighting a war for more than thirty years, you can imagine that a great deal of funds were spent on military hardware.

*Q: While you were in the Bureau, were the oil companies concerned about our policy there? Or did they seem to go along with it?*

RENDER: When I was in the Bureau, I felt that they felt we were moving in the right direction.

*Q: You would have felt it.*

RENDER: Companies like stability in countries. I only received positive feedback from many major corporations. It is very interesting in Angola, because for years many of these companies had operated despite the fact the U.S. did not have diplomatic relations with Angola. Angola proved to be a reliable partner for them.

*Q: We were supporting the troops who were fighting the government and there were Cuban troops protecting American oil interests.*

RENDER: In the early years.

Another country we focused intently on was Mozambique. Mozambique had a President that was very positive, Chissano. He was moving the country in the right direction. He was making all the right decisions. He was working on democracy and strengthening the economic ties.

Southern Africa was hit by massive ocean storms resulting in unprecedented flood levels. Mozambique was strongly hit. The floods captured worldwide attention. In Washington, AF/S was at the core of the bureau's rapid response team. I coordinated relief efforts with the NSC, the U.S. and allied military forces, regional governments and NGOs. We prepared a daily spreadsheet of donations by countries with amounts and description. This was distributed widely throughout the interagency and abroad. This was a very popular information document. I often think of the officer who took on this task. It meant starting the day updating the previous day's information in less than two hours.

As the floodwaters continued to rise, it became clear that a much larger package of assistance would be required to deal with longer-term reconstruction of infrastructure. I worked closely with the Assistant Secretary to craft a supplemental package and move it through the Department and the Office of Budget and Management. It even got congressional co-sponsors. Lessons I learned regarding AID budgeting processes including pipeline funds from my AID Director when I was Ambassador to the Gambia proved to be invaluable and were applied.

Botswana was clearly a superstar with a strong president. They had a billion dollars in reserves. They didn't waste money. They weren't corrupt. They were a big country with a small population of about two million people. You could see growth everywhere. It gave you hope.

Mugabe was still in charge of Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe of hope had moved to one of despair. There were human rights abuses, a deteriorating economy and no light at the end of the tunnel. We pushed for a stronger democracy, protection of human rights, strengthened of the Zimbabwe judiciary and improving the economy through economic reforms. I argued internally for a stronger policy against Mugabe in Zimbabwe and won. Zimbabwe's deterioration was Mugabe's fault and his alone. I pushed for international observer participation in the parliamentary elections. This gave hope to the opposition and the election process did not go unnoticed.

South Africa was a very important relationship for the U.S. We had established a Bi-national Commission with South Africa led at the highest level of our respective governments. The Vice President's Office tracked closely everything South African. On the economic front, they were doing well. We arranged a state visit for Mbeki with President Clinton. State visits require a lot of planning and coordination over many months. President Mbeki's views on HIV/AIDS were not encouraging for they were out of the mainstream thinking about this disease.

*Q: This was a major issue.*

RENDER: It was a serious concern.

*Q: Could you just encapsulate what his views were?*

RENDER: I think his views linked the disease more towards poverty and lack of nutrition than being cause by a virus that was transmitted between people. Behaviors were behind the spread of the disease and had to be confronted. Not many people in his country shared his views. If I recall correctly during that time, President Mandela spoke out strongly on the need for HIV/ AIDS prevention and intervention, as well as others in his country.

*Q: We talk in some abstract terms of HIV/ AIDS. My understanding is that this is a disease in many places that wipes out almost an intellectual class, among other things. This was not some village thing.*

RENDER: HIV/AIDS affected a wide range of individuals. In many countries, the well-educated were among the first to be affected. Lifestyle choices. The disease affects everyone, both in the cities and in the villages. Villages were not spared.

*Q: It really sounds that way. It's really tough, for a lot of places. China at that time wasn't doing much about it. Other countries in Asia were pretending it wasn't there.*

*Q: You have to take direct action.*

RENDER: Yes. It requires direct action. Education, testing, and changes in your behavior. We promoted forthright African leadership in educating vulnerable populations on HIV /AIDS. Mbeki's unorthodox views worked against us. So we devised a two-prong approach. The U.S./South Africa Health Committee would address the issue on the technical level while high-ranking officials would urge Mbeki to see the effect his views were having on managing the disease and his credibility.

*Q. What about Namibia? What was happening there during your time?*

RENDER: Namibia was pretty quiet with the exception of raids into northern Namibia by UNITA. We worked with Namibia and Angola to improve border control to lessen the raids. A number of Peace Corps volunteers were living in that northern area. I had the Peace Corps move the volunteers out of that area closer to the capital given the raids.

*Q: Was this showing growing desperation on the side of UNITA?*

RENDER: UNITA's fluid funding had dried up. I think his followers were attacking villages for food and what supplies they could gather.

*Q: This is probably a good time to stop. We will talk about 2001.*

RENDER: I am going to cover Côte d'Ivoire. That's very fresh.

*Q: And we want to talk about Côte d'Ivoire, and also the change in administration and the effect you could reflect on policy in the African Bureau.*

*Today is February 7th, 2008. What was your impression of the arrival of the George W. Bush Administration in 2001 as it impacted on the African Bureau? Or was there any particular impact?*

RENDER: There was a greater interest in promoting economic prosperity in Africa that I applauded. This was coupled with the push for Africa to open up its markets more to foreign investments. Walter Kansteiner became the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. He has a deep economic background in Africa. He wanted to move the continent forward economically. He understood its potential.

One area of focus was on good credit ratings so African nations could better shop for resources. He paid a great deal of attention to the creation of the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), to permit African nations access to the American markets with their commodities. AGOA was an act that allowed African nations to bring products into the United States, ranging from cotton to agricultural products, textiles, etcetera. It took some time to get it through Congress. President Bush signed the first one in 2001.

The Bush Administration continued the traditional agenda as well. We continued to push for building democratic institutions, respect for human rights and tacking the scourge of HIV/AIDs. The big difference for the Bureau was in style. He had a laid back style. He expected high quality performances and if you made the grade, he let you soar.

*Q: Africa has never gotten the same political attention as say, Central America has had, except for South Africa. By this time, that was no longer the issue.*

RENDER: While more attention was being paid to individual nations depending on the issues, Africa as a continent has not been in the forefront of our strategic planning. We have no historical ties except for Liberia. Many of our key allies do have such ties and we see these nations in their sphere of influence. Our focus remains on specific areas of concern, e.g. terrorism and radical groups.

*Q: You were the Ambassador to the Ivory Coast from when to when?*

RENDER: I arrived in Côte d'Ivoire and presented my credentials in December 2001. I effectively began work in December 2001 through 2004.

*Q: You had been dealing with Africa. When you went out there, what was the situation in Côte d'Ivoire?*

RENDER: I went to Côte d'Ivoire at a time when we were hopeful that the political wrangling within the country would end as a result of the signing of the agreement reached through its national reconciliation conference that had taken place during the fall of 2001.

They agreed to oppose undemocratic means to obtain power, form a unity government and deal with nationality law issues including eligibility for Presidency. Land reform laws were to be addressed as well and the security forces were to be professionalized and improve their conditions of service.

Côte d'Ivoire is a very unique country in that you have a large immigrant population. There are millions of people from all of the other countries surrounding Côte d'Ivoire. They come from Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Senegal, and Ghana. Many have lived there since the 1970s when the country was going through its economic boom and infrastructure projects were being built throughout the country. Many participated in the actual building of the roads, bridges, hotels, airports, etc. Others became small merchants.

Some of these people have children who were born in Côte d'Ivoire. Under the current laws, because you are born in the country, it doesn't mean you are a citizen of the country, like many places in the world. Citizenship was a key concern for many. In Côte d'Ivoire, the law said you had to be born in the country to be eligible to run for the Presidency. Like in the U.S., you have to be born in the country to be eligible to run for the Presidency.

*Q: I want to ask you about the immigrant groups. In the first place, they are coming from diverse countries. From what you are saying, many of these people are entrepreneurial. As far as the economy goes, were they pretty well integrated into the system? One looks at France, where the immigrant group really has been excluded from all but manual labor, or at least, they have been marginalized. In Côte d'Ivoire, were they really inside the commercial life of the country?*

RENDER: Many of the immigrants still were involved as manual labor workers. Many also worked in the service industry. Cooks, waiters, gardeners, security guards, etc. Others were successful merchants. Inter-marriage was common. Many of the immigrants were not interested in voting within the country because they could vote in the elections of their native country, e.g. the Senegalese. Of course, others could not and saw Côte d'Ivoire as their home.

*Q: Looking at the political map of Côte d'Ivoire, so many of the countries in that area have this north-south orientation, with the north being Muslim and the south being Christian or animist. Also, there is a tribal thing. This is all very simplistic. Was Côte d'Ivoire hit with that sort of thing?*

RENDER: Yes. It has this division. Houphouët-Boigny built the phenomenal cathedral that looks like St. Peter in his hometown of Yamoussoukro located in the center of the country. He also built a mosque there paying tribute to those who practiced Islam. He

was sending a message that I think many failed to see at the time. In the 1970s, the Basilica, as he called it was a tribute to Christianity and the Mosque to Islam. In many families within the country, different members within the larger family may practice both religions.

*Q: What was your embassy like? How did you find it? How did you use it?*

RENDER: Côte d'Ivoire's embassy was considered to be the third largest on the continent at the time. It had a very large embassy and regional staff. In addition to the normal suspects, we also had FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service), Voice of America (VOA), The Treasury Department, and CDC. We had over 120 Peace Corps volunteers in the country.

The mission goals were consistent with the Bureau's goals and objectives. I honed in on the mission's inspection recommendations just prior to my arrival. We also put on the back burner the many little things that various agencies want to engage in and focused on key programs that further the overall U.S. goals and objectives. This provides a united focus.

In this regard, I also created a mission representational plan. Many were surprised. However, I explained that this maximizes our networking and allows us to have more insight into the issues that might arise given the circumstances on the ground. Circular information decreases. Ministers and diplomatic missions are not necessarily the most accurate sources of information on what is really going on.

*Q: He may not even know it, in a normal bureaucracy*

RENDER: Correct. The little guy sitting in the office on the first floor at the desk in the third row may know exactly what they are facing and in which direction they will move. I kept hearing coup rumors but nothing concrete. I would ask my key country team members and others including government security officials and they would reply, Oh Madame Ambassador, there are always coup rumors.

*Q: Let's talk about what actually happened with the crisis. In the first place, you were saying that up to a point, you were getting, "Oh, there is always talk about coups." Who was doing what and how did it unfold as far as what you were doing and what happened?*

The political crisis renewed in 2002 with the alleged mutiny of soldiers at a northern post. The mutiny spread to Abidjan but was put down by loyal military soldiers. I could hear shooting that night. The government described it as just a mutiny and said it would be over soon. Following the events of that evening, we learned that some thought it was a coup backed by the President of Burkina Faso. Others believe former President Robert Guéï was responsible since many of the soldiers that mutinied due to pending demobilization in 2003 had been recruited by Guéï's regime. Guéï and the Minister of Interior were killed and the RDR leader sought refuge in his neighbor's residence, the newly arrived German Ambassador's. He was moved later that morning to the French



Ambassador's residence. An uneasy calm was restored in the southern half of the country but in the north, the rebel forces had taken over other towns and by fall had control over the northern half. Since Burkina Faso is the northern neighbor, this added fuel to the fire that Burkina was behind the coup.

Although we were not targeted, as I indicated to you in previous discussions, Washington looks critically at such situations. I chose to evacuate those citizens and Peace Corps volunteers in the northern half of the country first for they were most vulnerable. Most of the Peace Corps were successfully evacuated by road within that same week. I sent for an ESAT team and they worked successfully with the French to evacuate missionaries and a couple of PCVs in difficult to reach locations. I placed the ESAT team under the able hands of the Defense Attaché. I did not feel I had to second guess her or give the team separate orders other than I had communicated to EUCOM. She, of course, worked closely with mission security officer.

Washington, however, was pushing for a larger evacuation. I explained that Abidjan was under control and calm. Further the French maintained a base in the city. I would keep an eye on the situation and would drawdown non-essential staff. I decided that I would keep all those elements in the mission that related to the type of crisis we were undergoing. I did not opt for equal agency distribution. So some elements were closed and others remained like the entire Defense Attaché office. This was a political military crisis and I wanted all needed and necessary hands on deck.

While Abidjan was calm and I did not expect a deterioration, I did not want to keep others guessing. To enable the work of CDC to continue, I asked CDC to move them from Abidjan. They were working on a very major project that is close to my heart: HIV AIDS research. We were getting ready right before the crisis to begin trials of vaccines. The First Lady was on board. The country was on board. When this crisis came, you cannot conduct these kinds of trials in chaos, so that had to cease. They had to move that part somewhere else, so that was a big setback.

I did not want the PCVs in limbo so we closed the program. I even made a policy that members of the country team could transfer to other posts if they wanted more stability. I told the DCM to let them go if they wanted to do so. I told him I rather have happy people on board and vacant offices rather than the reverse.

Another issue of great importance that I played a critical role in is the establishment of the fast track Liberian Refugee Resettlement Program in the U.S. Embassy Abidjan pushed for this program and we got the Bureau of Population, Migration and Refugee (PRM) Affairs to take it on. I went to the President and told him we would be bringing the refugees from the western border to Abidjan by bus and we would process them for resettlement. This would also lessen instability in that area of Cote d'Ivoire where they were and decrease cross border incursions by Liberian bandits. INS sent officers from Washington to process the cases. Given the political crisis in Abidjan, I was always managing Washington but I should add with success. There was opposition to proceeding with this program but I prevailed. We successfully processed 7,000 plus Liberian

refugees for U.S. resettlement during the crisis. I received an email from an officer in PRM thanking me very much for “pushing to get these refugees resettled somewhere. Without your efforts, it would not have happened.”

We were also in the process of building a new ninety million dollar embassy. Some in Washington wanted to halt this effort. I sensed that they thought they could build a new embassy elsewhere. Working with FBO, I quietly was able to get the Department’s agreement at the Secretary level to continue building the embassy. The Assistant Secretary also gave me support. I squashed all attempts to stop the project. All through the crisis, we kept building. This had a positive impact on the population and investors. The Americans are building the embassy so they must believe that Cote d’Ivoire will not become a total basket case. I knew that we were less safe in our current location and that we would be more secure within a newly built structure in a less dense area of the city. My successor inaugurated the new embassy.

A number of political initiatives took place in 2002 to search for a solution to the crisis. ECOWAS and OAU convened a contact group to push for direct talks between the rebels and the government. A ceasefire was signed by the MPC (rebel group) negotiated by Senegalese Minister of Foreign Affairs Gadio in late fall of 2002. I met with him at my residence and was able to provide him with some input. One issue was legitimizing the rebels. France provided the monitoring of the ceasefire. They stationed troops where it could protect the southern half of the country.

In late January 2003, France held a meeting in Paris with all political groups and parties to start afresh. The agreement was signed in a dramatic meeting with all those that participated in the process and Chiefs of States from the surrounding countries. The U.S., E.U. and others were invited to a presentation meeting in Paris. I traveled to Paris to attend the meeting as part of the official U.S. delegation. The new agreement decreased some of the tension on the ground but the division of the country remained. There were many issues to be resolved and new ones emerging. We worked hard to get the parties to implement the agreement.

*Q: When you arrived there, what was your relationship with the French Embassy?*

RENDER: Within the first week of my arrival in any country, I have two objectives. One is to get to know the embassy staff. The other is to get to know the diplomatic corps. I had a very good relationship with both French Ambassadors. I overlapped with one for a year and then the new one arrived. He had spent a great deal of time in Asia but came to Cote d’Ivoire from the DRC. I also developed close relationships with my other colleagues including the EU, Israel, African representatives, etc. We met often and we could call one another as needed. I even asked him if I could meet with his Generals who were in charge of the French base. He replied in the affirmative and indicated he appreciated my asking him. One should know the individuals that might have to rescue your mission.

The French Ambassador and I met once a week. We started meeting not so much in the office, but at our residences. We would just talk. This was very good because on the day the crisis hit and a key opposition leader was in trouble, I could discuss the matter and confirm the French were sending soldiers to rescue him. The opposition leader is now President of Cote d'Ivoire.

I traveled to the north with the French as part of the UN Monitoring Group established as part of the UN Peacekeeping Mission for Cote d'Ivoire. We met with leaders to encourage movement on resolution of the crisis. I also had contact with the various sides at my residence and on the telephone.

Political jockeying continued. A massacre of civilians in a market area by government helicopter gunships took place. Their indiscriminate shooting was too much. The French Ambassador and I met with the President. I spoke first. I told the President such abuses were intolerable and had to stop immediately and they did. I also spoke up harshly on atrocities committed by the rebel forces. I always tried to be a fair arbitrator. Truths matter and I don't spare leaders of that fact.

*Q: Was this part of Charles Taylor in Liberia which spread?*

RENDER: Yes. There was widespread violence in the western part of Côte d'Ivoire. Rebels were bringing weapons into Côte d'Ivoire. Rapes, murders and other despicable acts were occurring. When we flew over the area, we could see only burned out villages. We had to try to restore some order into the western part of Côte d'Ivoire. Even some of the rebels with whom we met in Yamoussoukro had clearly grown up on the Liberian side of the border. One said to me, "I was born in Liberia, but I am Ivoirian." He did not speak French. I concluded some Liberian rebels had joined forces with the Ivorian rebels in the north.

My French and British colleagues and I met several times on this issues to come up with a plan to clamp down on what was going on there. I suggested that the French take care of the matter for they had troops on the ground. I told him that Washington would not be against it. We were focused on the Middle East and not western Cote d'Ivoire.

*Q: Did that resolve itself there?*

RENDER: Yes. The French clamped down hard and sent strong signals to those that were crossing over. They put soldiers in that area. It's a long border, so you can't control every hamlet, but they quieted the area.

Although relations between Washington and Paris were sour on the question of Iraq, relations on the ground in Cote d'Ivoire were excellent between our two countries. The French evacuated U.S. citizens from Liberia during its meltdown and brought them to Abidjan. They even helicoptered me to the ship to meet our citizens before docking. I recall being asked by a French reporter what I thought about the state of play between our two countries. I told him friends sometime squabble like members in families. France

would always be our friend. France played a key role in our struggle for independence. Lafayette was a revered name in our history.

*Q: This is Tape 7, Side 1 with Arlene Render.*

*At this stage, was the EU Ambassador a player?*

RENDER: Yes, he was very much a player. He was not so much a player with the rebel groups. He worked very hard on the reconciliation process and provided the funds for implementing many signed projects that were agreed upon. He resided across the street from me. Our relationship was harmonious.

*Q: Could you get any of your embassy officers up into the rebel zones to see what was happening there?*

RENDER: At the beginning of the crisis, we could not. My Defense Attaché, had telephone contact with a few of them. Secondly, I had security protection concerns. I did not want our mission on the front page of newspapers in the U.S. for making bad decisions. These rebel groups were not united under one control. It was a risky proposition.

We only travelled to the areas under the security protection of the French who provided security to the UN Monitoring Group on upcoming travel to the rebel held areas. Their forces were heavily armed and I always knew we would be safe. Given the large numbers of UN Monitoring Group representatives that had to travel, I could not take my embassy security officer or Defense Attaché. I wanted to give them the opportunity to travel but space was at a premium. The French always gave me a heavily armed protection detail. I always knew they would never let anything happen to me.

*Q: One of the main things when you went out was to raise the economic wellbeing of the Côte d'Ivoire. What happened?*

RENDER: They became members of AGOA (African Growth and Opportunities Act). We did that hoping to improve and motivate Côte d'Ivoire to resolve some outstanding U.S. business issues as well as to reconcile their political differences. Further, Cote d'Ivoire was the economic hub in the sub-region.

*Q: Did you have American investment in Côte d'Ivoire in the north?*

RENDER: Major agricultural firms were involved in purchasing cocoa, coffee, bananas. Most of these commodities are located around the central zone and in the south.

*Q: Things have been changing rapidly in the State Department, communications and all, with e-mail. How did it work?*

RENDER: It worked superbly. I would speak with the Assistant Secretary prior to his going to the State Department. I wanted to be sure he knew the latest on all issues before he arrived at the Department. I would also follow up with emails and daily situation reports. I wanted to insure that there were no surprises. "Think pieces" and analyses were also prepared. My Deputy Chief of Mission would put all the pieces together. We did one almost every couple of months so Washington would have a sense of how these little pieces fit together.

No one should underestimate the influence of media on crisis. You have to stay ahead of the curve if you want to control the situation.

*Q: Did you get any people from the State Department or from Congress visiting? Did you have many visitors there?*

RENDER: We had a number of Congressional delegations early in 2002. They were involved in and interested in CDCs work on HIV/AIDS.

We did have a Senator come. This senator travels widely in Africa. He is involved in a series of community projects in coordination with some local evangelical leaders. He also held a religious prayer dinner similar to the breakfast held on Capitol Hill. The President and his cabinet attended along with other leaders within the country.

*Q: Did you leave there in 2004?*

RENDER: When I left in June 2004, I felt a sense of complacency by all sides. Individuals were making money and jockeying for political advantage. Progress was at a snail's pace. As I said to my successor, "They are not truly ready yet." It will be several years before elections can take place. The thorny issues are still being worked out.

*Q: By this time, had the north-south line begun to leak, in a benevolent way? Did families get back together?*

RENDER: The leak had begun. Rail service for goods started first. The French still maintained the protection zone for Abidjan. The leak led to others arriving and going to friends or relatives. It was not a huge migration.

During the early days of the crisis, the numbers were much larger. I opposed setting up large refugee camps in Yamoussoukro. Since I opposed it, it did not happen. It was the best decision of all. People moving from north to south went to relatives or friends to stay. Churches provided aid. I told NGOs to give funds to the churches. The Catholic Church in Cote d'Ivoire is very well organized. It knows how to interact with its parishioners. As a result, Cote d'Ivoire does not have to face the issue of camps and how to rid themselves of them.

*Q: So you had a higher standard of living.*

RENDER: Absolutely. It also meant no places for rebels to sneak into.

*Q: They turn into political centers.*

RENDER: I wanted to avoid creating such centers. Further, Yamoussoukro is the home of the Basilica.

*Q: Speaking of the Catholic Church: I am fascinated by this cathedral, St. Paul's, stuck in the middle of Africa. Was it an operating basilica? How was it being used?*

RENDER: Rome provides Priests to serve the Basilica. The agreement was made during Houphouet's time. It is open, it is well maintained and holds mass. It is a phenomenal structure. A great place to sit and think while taking in the breathtaking stained glass windows around you.

*Q: Looking at it as a practical measure, the money didn't go towards homes on the Riviera for Houphouet-Boigny's relatives, or something like that. It is something that gave work in the country and there it is.*

RENDER: The early arguments that it is money wasted may be still valid for some. I can tell you that Ivorians travel to see it and the looks on their faces are priceless. They are so proud of the Basilica.

*Q: After you returned in 2004, then what?*

RENDER: I became a Diplomat in Residence in the State of Georgia. As a Diplomat in Residence, I worked with different universities, military installations, and organizations of all types, to discuss foreign policy issues and explain about the Foreign Service.

It is an opportunity to show the Department of State. I think this is a position that the State Department should enhance. It should have more Diplomats in Residence at the senior levels. This is the best way to gain the public's support for the Department. I used to get calls from as far as Hawaii and Puerto Rico about the Foreign Service. Some of these calls were from parents and teachers.

*Q: What University were you with?*

RENDER: My office was at Spellman College. It gave me an opportunity to interact with students majoring in international affairs. One of the students I met there is now in the Foreign Service and is doing so well.

I have two American children I adopted. My daughter is now twelve so I decided to give her all my time.

*Q: Arlene, I want to thank you very much. This has been fascinating.*

*End of interview*