

## BOTSWANA

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#### JOHN H. WILLETT Vice Consul Gaborone (1971)

*John H. Williett was born in Massachusetts in 1941 and received his BA from Kenyon College in 1941. His career has included assignments in Gaborone, Tunis, Bordeaux, Paris, Rome, Strasbourg and Rabat. Richard Jackson interviewed Mr. Willett on December 21, 1998.*

*Q: So, John, you're in the Foreign Service. It looks like from your first post in Gaborone in Botswana you're back to Africa. You went through probably a period preparing for the Service in Washington, the usual A-100 course. Did they do a good job? Did you learn anything in it?*

**WILLETT:** The A-100 course I thought was good, although I found one of the consular classes, the one dealing with citizenship law, awfully dull. I regretted very quickly, however, that I hadn't paid more attention in that course, because the issues addressed in it were exactly those I'd be obliged to confront. Later I had to wade through heavy manuals to solve the problems I was dealing with. My life would have been easier had I paid more attention in that A-100 class.

After the A-100 class, I worked briefly for John Stutesman, at his request, in PER. Then they said to me, "Okay, where would you like to go?" Well, everybody in my A-100 class had put down these sexy European places -- Paris, Rome, London, Bonn. But I'd been to all of them, with the exception of Bonn, and I still had the Peace Corps ethic in me, kind of an itch for Africa. I wanted to get back to the bush. I said, "You send me to a place where you can't get anybody else to go." They laughed, but it didn't take them long to find one: Gaborone, Botswana, "for singles only." There were only four embassies in town: the United States, the Chinese, the British, and one other -- the Russians, I think.

*Q: It was independent of South Africa by then.*

WILLETT: Oh, yes. Run by Seretse Khama, an extraordinary person; he would have been a great man in whatever country he lived. He was so... statesmanlike. I can't think of another word.

I took a long flight from Washington to New York to Kinshasa to Pretoria, spent a night in Pretoria, and then was driven north, across the border to Gaborone. The post was run by a man with one of those highfalutin names that only exist in the Foreign Service. Him and me. That was it. As my first job in the Foreign Service, it was a disconcerting experience. I'd been sent there TDY, because that's the way State wanted it. So on the one hand, I found myself making a lot of money. As a bachelor on TDY with embassy housing, I was able to bank my entire salary. There was no place to spend it in Gaborone, I can tell you that. On the other hand, my boss was an odd person, and so was his wife.

*Q: He had the rank of ambassador?*

WILLETT: No.

*Q: Or chargé?*

WILLETT: Yes. If I remember correctly, it was chargé. I believe he was also the rep to Lesotho and Swaziland. Eventually we sent Ambassadors to each of those countries, but at the time, in 1971, we had one man for all three. I didn't get along with him, and I'm afraid that on occasion I let it show. I didn't respect him. I didn't think he had enough energy, enough wisdom. His desk was piled high with unfinished projects. I swore I'd never get myself into that position.

Eventually he was pulled out, replaced by a former Congressman, a Black. That was another disaster, a real disaster. His wife was a racist, towards the Botswana. At the end of another three months -- we're now at Christmas in 1971 -- State said, "Okay, you've been six months on TDY. That's the most anybody can be on TDY, so we'd like to convert you to a regular assignment, and you would do another year and a half there." I refused. I felt it was a horrendous situation. The chief of mission and his wife were far more interested in their housing and their comforts and their privileges and immunities and perquisites than they were in the business of raw diplomacy, of improving relations between the U.S. and Botswana.

There was one important occurrence while I was there: the China vote in the UN, in the fall of 1971. Since there was a Chinese embassy in Gaborone, the Chinese had managed to convince the

government of Botswana to vote in favor of Chinese membership on the Security Council. So these incredible instructions, straight from the Secretary, were zooming in every few days. You know, "Go see the President of the Republic and tell him we're going to have a crisis in bilateral relations if they don't vote with us." If memory serves me right, they didn't, and China got on the Security Council. That was my first big lesson in the limits of power politics. In reality, our leverage over Gaborone was minimal.

Q: *We must have had an aid program.*

WILLETT: We did.

Q: *-putting some money into it, but not enough.*

WILLETT: Yes, but it was still minimal in the sense that the country is sitting on diamonds and other minerals. It's extraordinarily rich in cattle. And the people were fairly well off. In fact, at one point it even became a rather voguish place to go because of the Okavango Swamps, where Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton got married, or something like that, I don't know. I remember that Botswana was in all the papers some years later.

Q: *It's a large country, with beautiful game parks –*

WILLETT: That's right.

Q: *Were you able to get out of the capital?*

WILLETT: Not a great deal. I didn't have a car. I do recall at one point going north into the Kalahari Desert and visiting a place where -- I think I've got this right -- Stanley is buried, the Stanley of "Dr. Livingston, I presume."

Q: *That was the desert of Laurens Van der Post, his writings.*

WILLETT: Yes. It doesn't have the dramatic beauty of the Saharan dunes, but it is a lovely place, and the people who live there, the Bushmen, are gentle and good.

Q: *But life in the capital was dominated by the then reality of South Africa?*

WILLETT: Yes.

Q: *How did you notice that, day to day?*

WILLETT: Oh, by the way the white people swaggered around town as if they owned it.

Q: *Ones who'd come over from South Africa?*

WILLETT: A lot of the time. Mind you, Botswana was never...

Q: *Because of the illegal gambling and that sort of thing?*

WILLETT: No.

Q: *It was not that.*

WILLETT: I was going to say, Botswana never prostituted itself -- is it Lesotho that became the kind of "Las Vegas of southern Africa"?

Q: *Yes, I think that's right.*

WILLETT: Yes, and maybe even Swaziland jumped in there eventually. But to my knowledge, Botswana did not. There was something austere but at the same time noble about Seretse Khama. He was not the sort of man who would sell out to gambling casinos to get a little more money for his country.

Q: *He didn't have to, from what you said.*

WILLETT: You're right. I don't think he had to.

Everything was very informal. I mean, Jackie Khama, the President's daughter, would bang on the door, and we'd go off to a party or something. There was hunting, horseback riding; it was a pretty good life. Had it not been for working conditions in the embassy, I might have stayed on. In my quarter century in the Foreign Service, the only efficiency report I ever protested was my first one. The Office Director at the time for Southern Africa, the one who'd talked me into going to Botswana, took the report and wrote a powerful counter appraisal, completely erasing the rater's negative innuendoes. And I thought, Boy, this is a good outfit I'm in, where that sort of thing can happen.

**SAMUEL S. REA**  
**Resident Officer, USAID**  
**Gaborone (1971-1974)**

*Mr. Rea was born in New York City and raised primarily in Pittsburgh, PA. He was educated in England and at Princeton University and SAIS. At an early age he became interested in Africa, where he subsequently served for many years of his career. After joining USAID in 1966, he was sent first to Tanzania, after which he returned to Washington, where he worked with State/AID matters concerning Nigeria, Botswana, the Sahel Development Program, Madagascar, and policy coordination. He also served in Paris, and from 1995-1997 was a member of the faculty of The Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF). He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.*

REA: On December 5, 1971, two days after I had submitted the approved draft of my dissertation to Columbia University, my wife and I with our 16 month old son, Bayard, and our Brittany spaniel climbed on the plane for Botswana. I was assigned to be AID's first resident officer in the capital, Gaborone. Charles (Carlos) Nelson had recruited me just after he had been named the first U.S. ambassador to the BLS countries (Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland) earlier that year. He and I had first met after he succeeded Sam Butterfield as our Director in Tanzania, during the year I was gathering information for my dissertation. Ambassador Nelson had decided to make the Embassy in Gaborone his resident post, while traveling to Lesotho and Swaziland on a regular basis. Concurrent with that and at his request, our Office of Southern Africa Regional Affairs Coordination (OSARAC) established an Assistant Program Officer position in Gaborone. This is the position I was to hold for almost two and a half years, before we left at the end of March, 1974 to return home for family reasons.

*Q: What was your function? What were you doing?*

REA: The short answer is that I was expected to organize the AID program in Botswana. This meant establishing the resident AID presence there. The Embassy gave us two rooms on the top (third) floor and we employed Dorothy Dambe, who became the vivacious mainstay of the office, as my Assistant. We began to pull together the threads of the regional projects which pertained to Botswana. We created a day-to-day working relationship with the host government (GOB) and donor agencies, and we began to plan future activities. It was a very exciting opportunity for me, but it entailed a certain risk. The risk was that I was working with an Ambassador who was a career AID officer with very determined views, while at the same time working for the Program Officer at OSARAC, located in Mbabane, over 400 miles away! Fortunately, for the most part, we all made a go of it, thanks to Ambassador Nelson's sound professional judgement and to the skills of Roy Stacy (to whom I reported, later George Eaton) and especially of Charley Ward, the Director of OSARAC, who had the Ambassador's full confidence. There was a lot to do.

Botswana had won Independence only five years before. The country, which is almost the size of Texas, had a population then of perhaps 750,000, little infrastructure and very few trained people. By the time I got there, two sizeable AID capital projects were already underway. The first was a \$6.4 million loan for a water pipeline. The pipeline formed part of an intricate multi-donor package in support of the \$300 million Shashe copper-nickle mining development in the Francistown area, in the northeast. Our understanding with the government was that with the increased export earnings from the mine, Botswana would invest in building roads and expanding health and education programs, which were also minimal.

The second capital project which had started by the time I arrived was the construction of a 230 mile gravel surfaced road to the northwest of Francistown, financed with a \$16.6 million loan. The road was designed to link the Francistown spur with the Botswana-Rhodesia border on the Zambezi River in the extreme north.

Later we engaged in planning to construct a small abattoir in the north-central region. The abattoir was under study as part of a strategy to improve cattle management and off-take, so as to improve returns to small producers. Finally on the capital side, we made grants to the Gaborone

campus of the University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland (UBLS), which later broke up into three national institutions.

*Q: But the campus became the University of Botswana.*

REA: Yes, perhaps by 1980. As they had done with the University of East Africa and its three campuses at Dar es Salaam, Makerere, and Nairobi, the British had invested a great deal of effort in establishing a regional institution, with three national branches, for Southern Africa, as well. This approach made a lot of sense but ultimately it could not stand up to nationalist pressures, nor even to regional pressures, as we saw later in the case of Nigeria. Each country wanted its own university. But regardless of how UBLS was configured, our main interest was in helping the institution change the kind of education it provided. We strongly favored a shift away from the classical "Oxbridge" tradition to one consistent with employment demands, along the lines of the U.S. community college model. In the 1969-72 period we provided the Botswana branch of UBLS with a six person team from Cal Poly. We continued to supply faculty under an OPEX arrangement for a time after that. With the teachers we included a small grant program for the construction on the Gaborone campus of offices and housing.

*Q: Were you able to complete those projects? Let's take the road. Why were you building a road?*

REA: In part the road was needed to connect the northern part of the country with the rest. The north was an area which at the time could only be reached by Landrover over cross country trails. This was the primary motivation, and one that had become more urgent as the refugee population increased along the Rhodesia border in the course of the nationalist struggle for independence throughout the 1970's. The line of the road, from Nata to Kazungula, was intended to run parallel to the border and thus could also provide access to that refugee population. Left unspoken was Botswana's security interest in defending against potential incursions by Rhodesian forces at any point along that border.

*Q: Was this the time when they had front-line states?*

REA: Formally, yes, after 1969 when the Lusaka Manifesto was adopted. The movement developed, no doubt, in talks between Presidents Seretse Khama of Botswana, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and Nyerere. When Mugabe came to power in the new country of Zimbabwe in 1980, then the front-line concept took more institutional form in the founding of SADCC, the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference, which we supported very actively.

*Q: But there was a concern over South Africa's incursion and control.*

REA: Yes, from almost every direction. Security was only one aspect of Botswana's general concern about the sorry state of the national infrastructure. The roads were almost all dirt roads, including the roads into Gaborone, the capital. The Kasane area in the far north, as I've said, was entirely cut off from the rest of the country. So as a way of unifying the country, and for the other reasons I have mentioned, the Nata-Kazungula road was a key project. It received a great deal of attention from the REDSO/EA engineers and from the East Africa Loan Office. We enjoyed a stream of visitors from Nairobi.

*Q: Did it get done?*

REA: Yes, it did. By the time I left, construction was well underway, and talks had already begun for a Phase II, to harden the surface.

*Q: Then what about this slaughterhouse, a curious thing for AID to be involved in?*

REA: Although we carried out a feasibility study in 1972, I'm not sure the satellite abattoir ever got built. The abattoir was under review as one way we might assist small cattle producers in the north-central area, between Francistown in the east and Maun on the edge of the Okavango in the west. These small producers were disadvantaged by the fact that Botswana's only abattoir at the time was located in Lobatse in the southeastern corner of the country. Their cattle had to be trekked in to Lobatse over hundreds of miles, and naturally the animals lost much of their weight and value. Experience in our own country had demonstrated that it was more efficient for us to locate an abattoir in proximity to the cattle than it was for us to transport the cattle long distances to a central hub for slaughter.

Because cattle production in central Botswana was the work of small-holders, the idea for this project grew in part out of the equity concern for "the poorest of the poor" which had begun to take hold in the early Seventies. But beef was also one of Botswana's leading exports, and the European market was becoming more accessible. The hooker in all this, and one objection which may have doomed the project after I left, was that cattle raised on the central plain were susceptible to infections spread by wild animals. The disease risk was of special concern to the Europeans, as it continues to be -- witness the "mad cow" episode a few years ago.

But planning for the abattoir was only part of a larger concern we had for agriculture and range management as a whole. We saw a definite shift in the period I was there from capital projects to technical assistance. The TA was designed to address Botswana's severe shortage of trained people. We recognized that here was the heart of the dependency problem -- leaving aside Botswana's situation as a land-locked state. Only political change in South Africa, Rhodesia, and South West Africa could help to remedy that, and this process was to take another 15-20 years.

*Q: How far did we get in our assistance while you were there?*

REA: The technical assistance portion of the program grew quickly. We contracted some individuals individually to fill established positions, under an OPEX arrangement. We were helped in deciding where to place our people by the Ford Foundation representative in Botswana, Frank Glynn. An Englishman, Glynn worked in the President's Office as director of the GOB's manpower plan. This was the very same function Frank had played in Tanzania, where he and I had known each other well just a few years before. Our OPEX program placed experts, as part of our agriculture/range management strategy, in such key positions as the Deputy PermSec (Technical) for Agriculture, in posts in the Planning and Training division of that Ministry, and in a lecturer position at the Botswana Agriculture College, then a secondary level institution. As I was leaving Botswana in 1974, a five person team arrived to plan a project which would provide six additional persons for range and livestock management purposes, along with the

short and long term training of Botswana to replace them. Training was a staple of all our technical assistance projects.

The previous year we had introduced staff in two new areas, as well. One team of four, recruited by our Internal Revenue Service, helped the government to frame and implement the new income tax law, while training replacements. The IRS team was very effective, and was partly responsible for the fact that tax revenues doubled in the time the team was there. The second new area was health. We brought in three public health nurses, a health educator, and an administrator. This team gave a big boost to Botswana's Maternal Child Health (MCH) program. The team was also instrumental in starting an organized approach to family planning in Botswana.

*Q: How did you find working with the Botswana?*

REA: Very productive. Gaborone was a small, comparatively simple place in the early Seventies. Sir Seretse Khama as President set the tone of integrity and clear thinking. His Vice President who later succeeded him, Quett Masire, doubled as Minister of Finance and was similarly direct and informal. I remember his arriving one evening for a reception at our house, driving his own pick-up truck. Masire's Director of Planning, Festus Mogai, who is today President, was my chief contact person in the government. I met with him regularly. These were exceptional men, smart and dedicated, with their feet on the ground.

But because there were relatively few trained Botswana on the job at the time, the government had to place great reliance on expatriates. The fact was that Botswana attracted some of the very best, just as Tanzania had done in the Sixties; in fact, some were the very same people. The PermSec in Finance, with whom we met frequently, was South African born Quill Hermans, a highly intelligent and capable economist. Later, in the 1980s, Quill took leave to work at the World Bank before returning to Botswana where he is a citizen. Pierre (Peter) Landell-Mills and Mike Stevens, both British, both had worked in Tanzania, both served under Mogai in the Planning Office, and both went on to careers at the World Bank.

*Q: Botswana now has a reputation of being very independent minded in terms of foreign assistance. Did you find that characteristic then? They knew what they wanted compared to many other countries.*

REA: Indeed, yes. The Botswana, from Seretse Khama down, had a clear and reasonable plan for exploiting their mineral and other assets, caring for their people, and achieving the greatest measure of independence possible from their neighbors, South Africa and Rhodesia. And the expatriate staff served them very well. Their plan was a plan which AID could buy into and their needs matched some of our comparative strengths. For me it was an outstanding time for learning about development broadly and about how AID could best respond. In addition to this, the general environment there on the edge of the Kalahari prepared me well for what turned out, very inadvertently, to be the next chapter of my AID career.

**CHARLES J. NELSON**  
**Ambassador**



### **Botswana, Swaziland, Lesotho (1971-1974)**

*Ambassador Nelson was born and raised in Michigan, educated at New York University and Boston University and served in the US Army in World War II. Prior to his appointment at Ambassador, Mr. Nelson served in senior positions with the State Department, AID, International Cooperation Administration (ICA), the Mutual Security Agency and the Peace Corps. These appointments took him to the Philippines, Egypt and Iran. In 1971 he was appointed Ambassador to the nations of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, where he served from 1971 to 1974. Ambassador Nelson was interviewed by Celestine Tutt in 1981.*

*Q: In 1971, you were appointed as the first ambassador to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, is that right?*

NELSON: Yes.

*Q: How did this appointment come about?*

NELSON: John Hannah, former head of Michigan University, visited me in Tanzania and I had taken him around the country and showed him some of the things we were doing. I was suppose to go home on home leave and the Assistant Administrator at that particular point in time, who shall be nameless, said, "I don't think you should come home. You are serving under Executive appointment, Nixon is President and I don't know whether I can get you through the White House again to come back." I had been serving in Executive appointments ever since 1966. I didn't particularly like the sound of that. Dr. Hannah raised the subject and said, "Don't worry about anything."

I remember now that Ambassador Ross had asked me what I was going to do after I left Dar es Salaam. I had said that I hoped to come back to Dar es Salaam. Well, he was probing to find out if I knew what the story was, because shortly thereafter I had to go to Ethiopia for a meeting. Maury Williams came out from Washington and at the first coffee break of the meeting he called me and said that I was being proposed as ambassador for these three countries, and that I couldn't turn it down. I said that this sounded like nonsense to me because I had the Assistant Administrator for Africa saying I couldn't come home because as an Executive appointee I couldn't go through the White House again. What is going on here?

Anyhow I went back to Dar es Salaam and then to a chiefs of mission meeting in Madagascar after which I returned to Dar and then went on to Washington. There I went through the confirmation process and during that time people in the State Department, for example, were saying, "Aren't you sort of turned inside out, sort of beyond yourself?" I said, "Not really." So I said to my wife, "Aren't you excited?" She said, "I think AID has dealt with us very well." So there wasn't consternation, and displeasure is too strong a word also, but there was a puzzlement as to why we weren't walking on air. And we weren't walking on air, we continued walking on the ground.

*Q: Was this a problem of AID versus State and the Foreign Service saying...?*

NELSON: No, not really. I think it was the fact that for officers that stay in the State Department with one goal, one ambition...here comes a guy, his wife along, and he has realized that, and they are saying it is not the most wonderful thing since sliced bread. How can they, it is an affront to us.

*Q: I notice that one gets a little bit removed from these things and when you take a look they seem quite different than at the time when you are going after just the title. Now what was the situation in these three countries, and what were American interests at that time?*

NELSON: David Newsom made a deal with Senator Fulbright that because of this ambassadorship there would be only one for the three countries. There would be one USAID guy for the three countries. Except there were three AID people, one in each country. Botswana is the leader in this part of the world. So my Residence was in Gaborone.

Swaziland is a viable country, I think. I had a great fondness for King Sobhuza. But it was a little sleepy. Lesotho was sleepy, too. Botswana is dynamic and alive. It was well led. The president of Botswana was a great man, a great person. There is a country that has tremendous wealth: diamonds, coal, copper, cattle, etc.

What were the U.S. interests? I wish I knew. Botswana was a well-functioning, multi-party democracy.

*Q: That is true of a lot of places. You want to keep a presence there. At that particular time you had all sorts of things going on in the area. I am thinking of Angola, Namibia, and the whole South African problem. These must have been reflected...did you get involved in these things?*

NELSON: I was besieged by reporters every time I came through South Africa. But my answer to them always was, "I am not the ambassador to South Africa and will not comment on South African politics." We had meetings in South Africa - Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and the Portuguese territories. I am not particularly naive, but I almost dropped my teeth when the consul generals from those countries came forward to say they would never be free, always be colonies.

To me, Botswana is a kind of anchor in that area. Botswana is resolute; it has resources; it has a great civil service; it is well led. It has a drought every now and then. But it deals politically relatively astutely with South Africa. Now it has the Caprivi strip up there. I remember when Bush came across to Botswana.

*Q: That was when he was Vice President?*

NELSON: That was when he was ambassador to the UN.

We were standing here and over there was a door with SAP on it, South African Police, because of that little cut in that strange piece of geography.

We fed Zambia which couldn't feed itself in terms of meat. We got hold of a Hercules and flew beef to Zambia.

I even put Botswana ahead of Zimbabwe in some ways. It probably is not as advanced as Zimbabwe, because it hasn't had that overlay of colonialism, etc. But Botswana is a country that has come forward. I think it has the highest foreign exchange holdings of any country in Africa. They are just so damn reasonable.

I used to give parties at my house and there would be a line of pickup trucks in front, although these were ministers. Each one had his cattle post and they went back to the countryside on the weekends.

*Q: They weren't part of the Mercedes clique that developed in so many places like Kenya and Nigeria that really ruined the country.*

NELSON: They all drove Chevrolet pickups.

*Q: How about things like the bête noire of most ambassadors in countries in Africa and non-aligned places, the United Nations votes. You had to go with a shopping list each time the General Assembly met to get votes supporting whatever our position was.*

NELSON: The one issue we had in Botswana was on the China question--one or two Chinas. I went to Seretse, I had a demarche, and we said our pieces. He said, "Now let's have tea." We were good friends. But they didn't vote with us. And to show you how some of the people think, I had worked on the Taiwanese representative and gotten him to try to see Seretse.

We were at a dance and Seretse was there. I had gotten an exchange of cables from Washington, which I did not initiate, saying that Rogers was going to call Seretse.

*Q: Secretary of State, Rogers.*

NELSON: And so I would look at my watch and finally went over to Seretse and said that I thought it was time he got over to the State House because Rogers was going to call him. He said, "What is he going to talk about?" I said, "You know quite well what he is going to talk about." Anyhow, he left, I left. I got home, my telephone rang, and a voice said, "This is Secretary Rogers' office in Washington, is President Seretse Khama there?" I said, "This is my residence. The President is not in my house, he is in his own house. If you are going to call him you have to call State House." This was such a big deal, they were thinking that I had him by the hand and was leading him through his paces. This is an independent country. If he doesn't take our representation as to why he should vote such a way on the China issue, so be it. We did our best. He went the other way. Almost a year later we were back making the same arguments in reverse.

*Q: Were the Soviets doing anything in Botswana that we were concerned about?*

NELSON: They lived right across the street from us actually. No. That came later on as well. Botswana was a little bit loath to take Soviet aid because of South Africa. But then it did.

*Q: Were there any great crises while you were there from your point of view?*

NELSON: Frank Glenn, who had been the Ford Foundation representative in Tanzania, came to Botswana before I did. There were two things that we did. I wrote a recommendation for Seretse to get an honorary degree from Princeton, and I think he got it.

The other thing was, Botswana was in the throes of negotiating copper and certain other things with outside companies--Anglo-American, etc. They would come out with lawyers from the best firms in the United States. My role was to convince the Attorney General that you have government lawyers just like the companies have their lawyers, but they had to go out and get legal expertise to help them negotiate with you. So Frank Glenn and I got together and got a lawyer, well-known, not an American, to come in and work with the government and with the Attorney General who really wasn't up to the task of dealing with these issues. We had to stress that the company lawyers were not adequate to the task of dealing with him either, because they had to hire outside persons also. So there was no tarnish on him or the government, because they did the same thing. It just helped to level somewhat the playing field.

I think because so many countries have resources, they just barter them away. That was to get Botswana in a sense to hang tough. This was favorable to American interests because the Botswana didn't feel they got cheated out of anything. Botswana right now, for example, not only produces diamonds, but it sits on the trust that determines the market value of diamonds worldwide. So not only are they a separate little country producing fodder for someone else to deal with, but they are there all the way up the line including added value and everything else. They are a determinant as to how many diamonds are marketed from this place and that place. So, to me that is a leap, and another feather in their cap.

**SAMUEL B. THOMSEN**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Gaborone (1974-1976)**

*Samuel B. Thomsen was born in Minnesota in 1931. After serving in the US Army from 1952-1954 he received his bachelor's degree at University of California Los Angeles in 1956. During his career he had positions in Vietnam, Laos, Washington D.C., Botswana, Nigeria, and an ambassadorship to the Marshall Islands. Mr. Thomsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996.*

*Q: You were in Botswana '74 to '76? Could you describe Botswana at the time? What sort of place was it, and what were American interests there?*

THOMSEN: Botswana was a tiny country population-wise. I thought Laos was the tiniest country in the world at two and a half million. I think Botswana was under a million. The main features were the Okovango swamp in the north and the Kalahari Desert in the west, there was very little rain. The capital, Gaborone was 50 miles from the South African border. It was

actually a new city. It was built just before independence by the British, a well laid out modern community. I understand its now ten times the size it was when we were there. The kids would bicycle downtown without crossing a major thoroughfare. The Botswanan economy was dependent upon some of the best beef in the world which they sold to the Common Market. Copper, was being exploited in the east near Rhodesia (later Zimbabwe). Our main interest in Botswana was that it was an interracial, what they called a non-racial society. President Khama had married a Britisher. And by example established a very positive non-racial environment which next door to Rhodesia, and South Africa, was a tremendous example of what's possible. Its economy was very stable. It used the Rand, the South African currency, until they established their own currency. When I was there it didn't have an army although it developed one later. It was a very peaceful community made up of about 12 small tribes which were really related, they had a common language.

*Q: So you didn't have one tribe dominating which traditionally sort of sat on top of the other ones?*

THOMSEN: There was one dominant tribe and it was the tribe that produced the president, Seretse Khama. It was a benign relationship with everybody. I think it outvoted all eleven other tribes. But Quett Masire, vice president who succeeded Khama, and is still the president, was from a small tribe. He has been a superb president after the demise of Khama.

*Q: At that time were there any concerns by pressure from South Africa, or Zimbabwe trying to either destabilize or do anything against Botswana?*

THOMSEN: Not significantly. There were incursions from both sides which were functions of the war going on mainly in Rhodesia. There would be so-called revolutionaries popping across the river which divided Botswana from South Africa in certain areas. Botswana was a fascinating country because it was a member of the South African Monetary Union. South Africa collected its import duties, and it was very dependent on South Africa. And it was able to use its landlocked position, and the reality was economic dependence on South Africa to get concessions for the rest of black Africa. The rest of black Africa could have boycotted Botswana for cooperating with the white regime in South Africa. But they got their point across in such a way that that didn't happen. They took full advantage of the industrialized South Africa. A lot of the imports came only from there if they didn't have a cross tariff border. They were really well positioned.

*Q: How about Namibia and Angola during this mid-'70s period? Were there any problems there, and did they get reflected in Botswana or not?*

THOMSEN: Barely. If you look at a topographical map, we're looking at a political map now, but a topographical map would show you that the border between Namibia and Botswana is very heavy dessert, its almost uninhabited on either side. If you go to the nexus of Angola, Namibia and Botswana, there is a major river. But there were some incursions where rebels would move across into Botswana to try to escape South African forces. But it was only temporary. The Botswanan were very careful not to allow themselves to be drawn into a significant cause celebre

of some kind. They ignored a lot of what happened on their borders just to avoid being drawn in. It was a very wise policy, and they did it very low key.

Q: *Who was your ambassador?*

THOMSEN: Dave Bolen.

Q: *And what was his background?*

THOMSEN: Dave was an economic officer. He had been a silver medal winner in, I think, the London Olympics, the '48 Olympics. His previous post had been as economic counselor in Belgrade, and he had gotten a major contract for an American company. I think because he was generally a good officer. His intention was to emphasize the economic and commercial efforts, although we really didn't have an awful lot of luck in getting major investment in Botswana.

Q: *Who was the investor? Was it British, South Africa?*

THOMSEN: British and South Africa. After I left diamonds were found in a couple of locations in Botswana, and the deBeers, Anglo-American, put a lot of money in there and that again added to the economic stability and well-being of Botswana.

Q: *How did you deal with the government? What was sort of a typical day, how could we get information? What would you-all do?*

THOMSEN: The Foreign Ministry was really a part of the presidency, the Office of the President, and staffed by about five or six young, bright Botswana, mainly British or South African educated. I hadn't been there too long before I realized that they had almost no files. So I started providing them with wireless file and other State Department material. Some of these country surveys, and I would bring them in and just chat with them about them, and leave them on their desks. And lo and behold a few months later I discovered they were pulling out a file, and the file would be the material I'd provided. On a personal level, I had a very good relationship with these five or six young men. On a policy level, the Botswana were, I think, were very sympathetic to the United States. They regarded us well. They thought of us a good friends, and they did, I think, as an offset against South Africa.

Q: *How about the president at the time? What was our feeling towards him?*

THOMSEN: Well, Seretse Khama was the son of the king of the largest tribe. Khama's great grandfather, called Khama the Great, had gone to Queen Victoria at the end of the 19th century and asked for British protection from South Africa. So when South Africa established itself, as the Republic of South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho, which had sought and gained British protectorate status, remained independent, although they were among the smallest of the major tribes in South Africa. Seretse Khama was the descendent of that lineage, and felt a very strong responsibility for his people. He was a very decent man, and he and his wife were devoted, as far as we could tell. He had an older son and a daughter (...we got to know the daughter very well, she was married to a Dutchman who was part of their development

organization), and then two young twin sons who were in their teens when we were there. It was a wholesome family, and a wholesome example in Botswana.

*Q: Was there any interplay with Washington? Or were you pretty much on your own in this period?*

THOMSEN: Well, there wasn't an awful lot happening. We did get a visit from Don Easum, who was then an Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. And Kissinger almost got there on his trip through Africa, I think in early '74. We did political reporting, economic reporting, but there wasn't a lot going on that required significance guidance. A lot of multilateral stuff, a lot of international stuff, a lot of UN stuff and going in with demarches on our various policy issues.

*Q: How did that work?*

THOMSEN: Well, they were their own people. They would listen attentively, and if I left a piece of paper I would expect it not to be thrown away. And they were certainly more responsible in this respect in a lot of other governments I've dealt with. But they voted their own interests, and they had a pretty good sense of what that was.

**WILLIAM P. POPE**  
**Political Officer**  
**Gaborone (1975-1977)**

*Mr. Pope was born and raised in Virginia and educated at the University of Virginia. After serving in both the US Army and the US Navy, he joined the Foreign Service in 1974. Mr. Pope served several tours in the State Department in Washington, dealing, notably, with Counterterrorism. His overseas posts include Gaborone, Zagreb, Belgrade, Paris, Pretoria, Rome, and the Hague, serving as Deputy Chief of Mission in the latter two embassies. Mr. Pope was interviewed in 2006 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: So what happened? What was your first assignment?*

POPE: Ah. That was funny. Because I'd been in a couple of years as a civil servant and had all the clearances, because I was working in INR and I had every clearance known to man and everything, it was a lot easier to deal with me than with new people who had come from all over the country and who, most of whom knew nothing about the State Department. I knew the building and people and I was a little farther along than many of them in terms of being settled in. And I remember there was a situation in Botswana, which turned out to be my first post. Botswana, where there was a JO job, junior officer, position that had been vacant for quite a long time. And they really needed somebody quickly and they couldn't wait. And I remember my assignments officer saying something about Botswana. I said, uh, Botswana, yes, give me a minute, let me see if I can figure it out. It sounded like it could be Africa but I wasn't sure. I knew nothing about Botswana, zip. And he said, it's right here, and he pointed it out and I said

all right, we'll do that. We had a ball, we loved Botswana, it was a great post. One of only a couple of true democracies on the whole continent at that point. Sir Seretse Khama was the president, old Bechuanaland. And it was an ideal spot because I always wanted to be a political officer. When we came along you actually had to select what cone you were competing in for the written exam.

*Q: Yes, it changes.*

POPE: I'm pretty sure. And I remember somebody saying, "Don't do that, don't select Political because there are thousands and thousands of people in that, do something else and then change cones." But I just remember that political work was the only thing I ever wanted to do. And so I went ahead and did it and somehow was lucky enough to become assigned as a political officer. And Botswana was a paradise for a political officer because you had the uprising in Soweto and the townships in 1976, you had the war going on in Mozambique, war in Rhodesia, war in Angola, and it was like being in the eye of the hurricane, being in Botswana. And it was peaceful, the school was good.

*Q: You were in Botswana from when to when?*

POPE: From '75 to '77.

*Q: The capital of Botswana is?*

POPE: Gaborone.

*Q: Gaborone.*

POPE: Most people say Gabarone.

*Q: Who was ambassador over there?*

POPE: The first ambassador was a gentleman named David Bolen. And then he left and had Don Norland as the second, whom I still see. Just saw him a few days ago over at AFSA.

*Q: Can you talk about Gaborone and what it was like there?*

POPE: It really was a different world. It was a tiny, dusty desert town with one little shopping mall down the middle, meaning an outdoor kind of a street with shops facing onto it. The Embassy was above an Indian dry goods store in rented space. And the Chinese were there. They were building the Tanzam Railway and we were very concerned about the Chinese. And Sir Seretse was the President and his wife was Ruth, Lady Ruth Khama, a British woman, and they were the embodiment of how racial tolerance could work, those two. And they had children who were well known in this little town. It was a little town, just a few thousand, a few thousand people, and the parliament was wonderful. Being in a small post like that on my first assignment I was actually able to be Chargé a couple of times as a brand new Third Secretary. And it was fun because once the Ambassador, it was probably between ambassadors, and the DCM (deputy



chief of mission) was away and I was able to represent the Embassy at the opening of Parliament. And it was wonderful, a breath of fresh air on a continent full of dictators where people were massacred and disappeared, etc. Botswana had a completely free system, free opposition press, and the things that the opposition said, both in parliament and out of parliament on campaigns about the “government’s inept and corrupt” and this and that. You’d have been shot in most other places at the time. It was wonderful.

*Q: Well looking at this, what was sort of the embassy consensus of why did this happen, this particular place?*

POPE: I don’t remember that we ever came up with a good answer. It was partly, of course, enlightened leadership. A lot of it depends on people. And you didn’t have a Robert Mugabe, who has descended into despotism. And also you didn’t have a kleptocracy, either. You had good leadership and a democratic tradition. It helped that Sir Seretse was also the hereditary leader of the largest tribal grouping as well. He was the chief as well as the political president. It was just enlightened.

*Q: Now, we had, just looking at the area, you say it’s an eye of the hurricane. Were there any resident ANC (African National Congress) or the southern Rhodesian opposition?*

POPE: There were.

*Q: What was happening there?*

POPE: To my recollection, there was nothing happening other than just representation. Sort of like for years the PLO would have representation in different capitals. But I can’t remember anything happening. Up north, along the borders there were some refugee camps that were populated very heavily by young men and I did manage to get into a couple of those. As far as I can recall, I can’t remember anybody carrying guns or any kind of training going on or anything. It was kind of like a parking station, but I’m sure some of those people managed to get out and go back to either Rhodesia or Mozambique, wherever they had come from.

*Q: What about the Chinese? What were they up to?*

POPE: It’s funny, they were there in fairly surprising force. And I don’t remember that they ever actually did anything. Our focus was north with the Tanzam Railway. And I remember they were there in fairly significant numbers but in looking back on it I don’t remember they ever did anything. I don’t think they had any real impact in the place.

*Q: Well this is sort of the story I’ve got from people who served in Africa, the Chinese had considerable representation in the continent, outside of buildings and either railroads or stadiums or something like that, that seemed to be it. I mean, they kind of went there, did their building and then stayed within their compound.*

POPE: That’s about it. I don’t remember they even built anything in Botswana that I can recall. They must have done something but I don’t recall it.

*Q: Did the Soviets have representation there?*

POPE: I do not recall a Soviet embassy there. Chinese for sure.

*Q: South Africans, were they intrusive or?*

POPE: They were the elephant on the edge of the room. They were always, everything was done with them in mind, like Finland to the Soviet Union. So they could have been, they could have been a lot more intrusive. And every now and then, there was some kind of a small raid on an individual but no real big interventions while I was there. Certainly nothing like Namibia, which they occupied for a long time.

*Q: Were you single at the time?*

POPE: No, I was married.

*Q: How did that- I would think it would be, well, it could be fun or not so fun for a young couple.*

POPE: It was paradise. We had two small children, we played tennis, there were lots of pools and people grilled out all the time and had parties. The Brits were fun, the Batswana joined in. There were some Australians there, and a small but fun international community. It was outdoor living and we were out all the time and we had a ball. A small town.

*Q: Did the outside world intrude at all? No menaces from the Libyans or?*

POPE: Nothing. It was idyllic and like my hometown when I was growing up. We were not very aware. It was wonderful. I never felt any threat. The only threat was snakes. Snakes were a real threat. There were some very serious snakes. But in terms of political, nothing.

*Q: Well, I acknowledge Botswana comes through The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency.*

POPE: That's why it's so much fun to read, having served there. It really catches the flavor of it.

*Q: I would think it would, I mean, from what you say.*

*What about, well, did you get any feel that you wanted to be an African hand as opposed to a Soviet hand by this time or not?*

POPE: I think I was kind of ambivalent but not, no, I still wanted to go somewhere else. In fact, I went to Yugoslavia next and I think I still was gravitating more in that direction. But I loved the first post. I felt like I honestly had a better posting than my A-100 classmates. I remember that moment when it's sort of like the high schoolers getting their college acceptances, the moment when everybody in A-100 found out where they were going. And I can remember a couple of people, "Botswana? Botswat? We're going to Paris; we're going to serve on the visa line in Paris." I did so much more and learned so much more in a small post doing almost everything.

But we had a little USAID mission, we had Peace Corps so I learned about those even though I wasn't responsible for them. I ran a small USIS (United States Information Service) library, because we had one that was an adjunct to Pretoria even though there was no USIS officer. I was everything as the most junior guy on the totem pole, and I got to travel around and go to parliament and meet the president, etc. These people who went to the visa line on the first tour ... Paris is always glorious, Paris is Paris, but in terms of the professional development, I don't think anybody got a better first tour than I did.

**DONALD R. NORLAND**  
**Ambassador**  
**Botswana (1976-1979)**

*Ambassador Donald R. Norland was born in Laurens, Iowa in 1924. He joined the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included positions in Morocco, the Ivory Coast, France (NATO), the Netherlands, and Guinea, and ambassadorships to Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Chad. Ambassador Norland was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.*

Q: *You served there as ambassador from '76 to '79.*

NORLAND: Three years.

Q: *What were American interests there?*

NORLAND: That's really the question. American interests at that time were much as they are now; but we were not attuned to what was going on in that part of the world. It is just amazing to think that just fifteen years ago we had no hesitation in sending out one person to three countries, all bordering on South Africa. All reflected, in one degree or another, what was going on in South Africa. And our contacts among South African blacks were not good. Contacts endangered blacks. I've had people tell me that Botswana reflected the most accurate source of black public opinion in Southern Africa. As a result of the Soweto riots of June 1976, we had probably a thousand hard-core black-nationalists in Botswana, which was only two hundred and fifty miles northwest of Johannesburg. The riots in Johannesburg were such that it was very uncomfortable for many blacks to stay on. Schools were closed. So we were able to monitor what was going on there, to test reactions and attitudes of these black nationalists, black-liberation-movement representatives.

Q: *You went out there in '76, which was still Kissinger and all. And then came the Carter administration. Now did you see a major change? Kissinger was renowned for having no real interest in Africa except to see it in an East-West context; you know, Angola or something like that, but only as a reflection of our antipathy towards the Soviet Union.*

NORLAND: It was a position that he maintained until April of 1976. He was on a tour of the area and, from what I've heard from insiders, was getting ready to go to Lusaka, capital of

Zambia, to give another speech reflecting the policy that South Africa's monopoly on modern, organized military force in this part of the world meant it would remain in charge for the foreseeable future. At least to the end of the century. So we had to work with South Africa; together we were going to confront the onslaught of Communism. I hope someday you'll get the people like Win Lord to give the background. I read the...biography very carefully on this, and it's not clear. But Win Lord apparently got to Henry and said, "You can't give this speech any longer. The forces represented by the black nationalist movements are forces we should be sympathetic to. They are taking much of their rhetoric and much of their philosophy from our own experience; that is to say, human rights, civil rights, the right of self-determination, and so forth." So in April of '76, Henry's speech changed a little bit. It was nuance, but he did change; he did say that South Africa was going to have to come to terms with events in the world. As I recall, that was the main thrust. But it wasn't more than a little opening.

At that time it was absolutely forbidden for our officials to have official contact with the ANC (African National Congress), the largest of those groups. And the non-ANC black groups were so small they were mere splinters.

We in Gaborone didn't know the refugees were ANC. We just knew that they were blacks from South Africa, and so we contacted them.

It was depressing to hear what they believed and what they thought were the major forces at work in the world, and specifically in South Africa. There was strong pro-Communist ideology. You'd look at the books these people had in their refugee quarters (and I visited some of them, in so-called refugee houses, on the outskirts of town). They'd have a half dozen books; three or four of them would be Lenin, Marx, Castro, or Guevara. We had a problem.

*Q: But you were under tight reins then, is that right?*

NORLAND: Yes. It was considered provocative to South Africa if we had meetings with the ANC. So people would meet informally, the ANC had a big office in Lusaka, for example. Mutual friends would invite ANC and Americans to the same party, and you'd interact. The CIA got special dispensation. I've never been impressed by their knowledge in this area. But some of our people had made an effort to really get to know the languages and the people, and they would have sustained contacts--but never official.

This was only broken in January of 1987, when Secretary Shultz received Oliver Tambo in the Department of State. That's ten years later. Unbelievable.

*Q: When you went out, did you get any instructions about what you were to do and what you weren't to do?*

NORLAND: [chuckle] That's a fun question. The country director at the time was Frank Wisner. I put in a request, through Frank, to pay the customary call on Secretary Kissinger before going out. Frank came back and said that it was not necessary to make a call, and that the Secretary only had a couple of things he wanted me to keep in mind. The first was, we don't need any new ideas from the field. We have all the information and all the initiatives we need back here.

Secondly, keep a low profile. We do not need any diversion. Maybe Frank extrapolated a bit, but the spirit of the Kissinger era was: There is one focus of public attention, and that is the Secretary. A couple of other things came up along the same line. I wrote them down at the time.

*Q: If you ever find them, we can put it in. In a way, it may be true that you don't want too much initiative, but you don't tell people this too much, because it does things... Sometimes the situation can get dangerous, anywhere, and...*

NORLAND: Well, that gives me a chance to say that, late in January 1977, after Carter took over, someone whom I had met, Dick Moose...no, he didn't take over immediately, somebody else was the Assistant Secretary. Maybe it was Schaufele still; maybe Schaufele continued. But, anyway, Moose was the person who was already starting to eye Africa. He was in M. He had not found a home there, and went into Africa affairs. The point was that within days after Carter's inauguration, I got a telegram in Botswana asking, "Please submit your ideas on what it is that you think the United States should be doing in Southern Africa at this time."

I've often used this in talking with junior Foreign Service officers, to make the point that they should always be prepared. You can have people like Henry Kissinger and other know-it-alls who are there temporarily. The most important thing one can do is to prepare for the day that you get an opportunity to say what you think should be said.

I had been thinking about this, knowing that Henry was not going to be there for long, the election having changed the leadership. So I was able to come in with some suggestions. In fact, I came in with some suggestions before the 20th of January 1977. And that rankled Henry greatly.

I'll tell you what it was. It was an attempt to contain the sudden interest of the government of Botswana, a Third World government, only eight hundred thousand people, in arms. They had a tremendously challenging social agenda; they needed to put people to work. But the pressures were mounting in the country, on the president, Sir Seretse Khama, from the three violent struggles going on on its borders: the struggle in Zimbabwe, between the British regime and the nationalist forces, Nkomo and Mugabe; the struggle in South Africa, which was forcing refugees over the border; and the struggle in Namibia. Poor Seretse Khama, one of the brilliant leaders of the Third World, an Oxford graduate, did not want to put the resources of the country into buying arms and aircraft. Yet he was being pressured by his own son, Ian Khama, then a brigadier general, to acquire this arsenal. Why? Because Botswana people were living on these borders, or close to the border--Gaborone itself is only ten miles from the South African border--and sensed the dangers of South African raids. Same thing in Zimbabwe (it was then Rhodesia), where the white military were raiding. So, to protect his population, Khama was being pressed to acquire arms.

When I got there, it was the first thing he raised in the presentation of credentials. We became good friends. He would take this up with me informally as well as formally. He didn't want to arm; we talked about ways of lessening the pressure. The most important pressure at the time was from Rhodesia.

My recommendation to the Department (the unsolicited one while Henry was still there) was to send a signal through South Africa to the authorities in Rhodesia that their actions in violating the border were forcing Seretse Khama to acquire an arsenal, that the United States might not be willing to provide that arsenal, and therefore where would he turn? To the other side.

I felt I had to say, "Let's prevent this arms race from expanding in this part of the world when there are so many other more important priorities of an economic and social nature that should be met. Let's preserve Seretse Khama's desire to keep Botswana from even having a Ministry of Defense." They had police force, but not a defense establishment.

The first thing I knew, a deputy assistant secretary traveling in the area came up to see me, and said, "Your initiative was not at all appreciated. You shouldn't have gotten involved. What are you trying to do?" Of course, it was perfectly obvious what I was trying to do.

Q: *Sure.*

NORLAND: And then, when the 20th of January '77 struck, the idea was welcomed and got consideration.

Unfortunately, we were slow to react one way or the other. We weren't going to give them the arms. We weren't going to facilitate the acquisition of arms. We tried to talk them out of it. But eventually we had to help out a little bit. The British helped out. And they did turn to the Soviet Union eventually.

Q: *I take it we didn't have any particular commercial or business interests in Botswana.*

NORLAND: We had an indirect interest. American Metals Climax of Connecticut had a partial interest in a copper/nickel operation near Selebi-Pikwe, which is halfway to Zambia. That was one investment. We'd actually helped to build a road, the Botzam Highway (Botswana-Zambia Highway), a gravel job. We had indirect interests even in the diamond business. But, of course, the monopoly on diamond mining was De Beers, which had its relationship with the government of Botswana. We had an interest in exploring possibilities, for example, of coal. Shell, which is not U.S., but British and Dutch, was operating there. Some of our companies came out to take a look at the minerals potential. But, you're right, we didn't have much of an interest.

Q: *Lesotho and Swaziland, I take it, were really too small to...*

NORLAND: In Lesotho, there's almost nothing in the way of resources. Swaziland has got a lot of resources, but the U.S. was not in there; it was South African dominated.

Q: *You had three countries, how did you play this?*

NORLAND: I was under pressure from particularly Lesotho and Swaziland to spend more time there. My predecessor, David Bolen, did not like Lesotho and apparently did not conceal his lack of interest. He was not comfortable in Swaziland. So he spent most of his time in Botswana. When I got out there, it was in my interest--almost a duty--to try to level this relationship. So I established the practice of spending a week every month in Lesotho, one week a month in

Swaziland, and two weeks a month in Gaborone. I'd vary it slightly. But when I was asked where I was resident, I always said, "In this country," because the Department had residences available in all three. While I was not there they served as housing for TDY communicators or others. But I regularly made the tour. I visited Lesotho some thirty-three times in thirty-six months.

*Q: Well, the housekeeping, how did this work? Your main administrative stuff was in Botswana?*

NORLAND: The main political activity was in Botswana. But in each of the countries, we had a resident mission; that is to say, there would be about an O-3 DCM, plus a communicator and an administrative officer. We also had AID missions and a USIS operation in all of the countries. When I first got out there, as a matter of fact, the AID mission was centralized in Swaziland as the most agreeable of the three places in which to live. And there was a kind of a division of labor that had been informally developed there. But each of the three posts had a basic infrastructure of personnel and of resources--vehicles and so forth. When I was not there, a chargé was.

You could call the bluff of these various countries, particularly Lesotho and Swaziland, by saying, "I am here for the week. But even if I'm not here, if you will simply inform the embassy of your interest, I will be glad to come back at any time, for any meeting of importance; don't worry about that. Stay in touch." And, of course, they didn't have much important business with us. Only on one occasion was I asked to go to Swaziland on short notice.

Incidentally, the Department also was kind in authorizing the use of light planes. The embassy in Pretoria had an air attaché aircraft. And they liked to fly over the region to get better acquainted, taking pictures. They eventually got into trouble, as you may remember, and the aircraft, the air attaché and all were thrown out.

The trip was two hours door to door. I would leave one embassy, hop in the plane, and I could be at work in another embassy in two hours. Each was almost exactly four hundred and fifteen miles apart, the three capitals--Gaborone, Mbabane, Maseru--you can see them on your map, almost a triangle crossing South Africa. My wife didn't particularly enjoy flying, and she'd often want to do some shopping, so she would take the car and chauffeur, stop in some South African towns en route before rejoining me. Meanwhile, I'd already done a day's work.

*Q: Did any initiatives come out of the Carter administration, from your perspective?*

NORLAND: Yes, some of them important. One can hardly exaggerate the importance of the Botswana example in human rights and democratization, something the Carter administration pursued vigorously. At one point, Pat Derian, assistant secretary for human rights and humanitarian affairs, had in mind making a major speech in Gaborone to say just what I said; mainly, that Botswana had paved the way.

I'm proud of the fact that from the moment I arrived and tested the theory of Botswana as a democracy, Botswana stood apart. I tested it going to Parliament, talking with members of the opposition, and asking, "Do you have freedom to speak? Do you fear intimidation? Do you have an independent press? If you make a public speech that's contrary to what the president says, do you have any fear whatsoever?"

And the response was, "No."

I became confident that Botswana was a democracy--with freedom of expression, movement, religion, and so forth--and that their elections were meaningful, not perfect, but meaningful. And it was rooted in a traditional system called the Kgotla, which means "village council." Sir Seretse Khama insisted that his ministers campaign between elections, as well as at election time, and explain what the issues were. Even though the people might not always be literate, they had ideas. And there is a tradition in Botswana that says, "A chief is a chief by the will of the people." That's the foundation of democracy.

This tradition helped set Botswana apart. I couldn't say quite the same about Lesotho or Swaziland. The Botswana experience was the one I stressed, saying this is something we ought to build on.

And the Carter administration (you were asking about initiatives). They weren't inspired by just the Botswana example, but they did make something of human rights. I think they were encouraged by Botswana's success.

*Q: What about the other two countries?*

NORLAND: Both are monarchies.

During my time in Lesotho, the country was run by the prime minister, Leabua Jonathan. I often call him a Chicago ward politician. He kept saying, for example, how important it was that I spend more time in Lesotho. And I'd ask, "What for? We are giving you more aid than you can usefully use. What do you want me to do?" He came to power by annulling an election, in 1970, seizing power. He wouldn't let go until he was deposed by a military group in 1980.

In Swaziland, there are two separate governments. The monarchy (in my day, Sobhuza II), with a clique of advisors strongly traditional in their actions and attitudes. They hovered around the king down in the valley. Up in the capital, Mbabane, you had a Western government, people in dark suits, etc. The king wore leopard skins, very often. When I presented credentials, he had a feather in his hair, and was in leopard skin. That's where power resided. When you went to the capital, you had these men in three-piece suits but with little power.

We have some officers who can tell you in great detail about Swaziland, Jim Wachob, for example. Do you know Jim?

*Q: No, I don't.*

NORLAND: I'll ask Jim to come in. No one made a more concerted effort to penetrate Swazi society than Jim Wachob. And yet he will tell you to this day that he had great difficulty.

I went regularly because we had work to do. There were missionaries. We had to reiterate the importance of treating refugees from South Africa correctly, through the UNHCR (United



Nations High Commission for Refugees) or bilaterally. The Swazis had special detention camps in the hills. Of course, it's a beautiful country. The economy is evenly divided between agriculture and industry--South African dominated, of course. They have, I think, one of the largest tree growing operations in the world, a great source of wood pulp. They have some mining: coal, asbestos, which is not very popular.

So I made the rounds as best I could, using a combination of activism and dialogue. I would always be seen calling on people, even if I knew I wasn't going to get much in the way of results. It was part of showing the flag, so they couldn't say, "Well, you're in Gaborone. You're spending all your time in Botswana."

But Botswana had these three wars requiring more attention, more reporting. But I had a good deputy in Botswana, too. Frank Alberti was there for much of the time. Do you know Frank?

Q: *Yes, I know Frank.*

NORLAND: He had this tragedy, during that time, when his wife, on her way back from Johannesburg for medical appointments, had an automobile accident and was killed.

Q: *Oh, I didn't know.*

NORLAND: She's buried there. And one son was seriously injured, but he apparently has returned to health.

Frank would do a great job of filling in for me while I was there, seeing the president if necessary. I didn't feel threatened if chargés were seeing the ranking people. It was all in a good cause.

Q: *What about your relationship with the South African authorities in these various places?*

NORLAND: Well, they were not welcome in these places. There was no official South African mission.

Q: *Really? In none of them?*

NORLAND: None. There were South African businessmen, South African spies, South African domination of the police force, as in Swaziland. They were functionaries behind the scenes. You'd have a sign that said: "Mr. Dlamini" (the most common name in Swaziland; almost everybody is a Dlamini); but behind the scenes was a South African.

Q: *What were your relations with our embassy in Pretoria, Cape Town?*

NORLAND: They were not always as smooth as could have been expected, they were naturally apprehensive that we might be having contact with ANC people. If the South African government found out about such contacts it would protest: "Why are your colleagues in

Gaborone having contacts with these black terrorists?" So we were discreet, trying to minimize the problems for our colleagues.

We had our own interests. And we thought what we were doing was more in harmony with the overall U.S. policy objectives--namely, to encourage democratization, freedom of movement and expression, voting rights, that sort of thing. We didn't think we should be inhibited by always deferring to the South African government. After all, they were on the wrong side of these issues.

We had a lot of sentiment to overcome; for a long time, the American government was in bed with the South African government. We had various ambassadors out there, many of them political appointees, who felt that our future was with South Africa. Until very late, Kissinger felt that our future was with South Africa. He had such bad judgment on these issues. He really thought power was measured principally, if not exclusively, by force of arms, ignoring the ideas that have produced revolution around the world. And he still is a little slow to recognize those virtues.

**HORACE G. DAWSON, JR.**  
**Ambassador**  
**Botswana (1979-1982)**

*Born in Georgia, Ambassador Horace G. Dawson, Jr. entered the foreign service in the early sixties. His assignments included Uganda, Nigeria, Liberia, and the Philippines. Ambassador Dawson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 7, 1991.*

*Q: How did you get the job of going to Botswana? That's a question I ask every ambassador.*

DAWSON: Well, I can't answer. I was lying abed one evening, and I got this call from Nancy Rawls, who was soon to be ambassador herself, and she said that they wanted to send my name to the White House so that I could be ambassador to Botswana, and would I accept if they did so? You know, I don't know until this day whose bright idea it was, or why me.

*Q: Could you give sort of a thumbnail sketch of the situation in Botswana when you arrived there in 1979.*

DAWSON: Well, Botswana at the time, as it had always been, and as it still is, was very, very stable. It's a small country. It was fairly liberal in its politics. It had, and still has, several political parties. Excellent leadership. The founding president, Seretse Khama, was still alive, but he was ill when I arrived.

In fact, this turned out to be a problem for me, because he was not able to accept my credentials as he had done every ambassador prior to my coming, and I was the first one to present his letters to the vice president. As it turned out, that was very fortuitous, because we became very close

friends, and we still are, and we're in touch. In fact, my wife and I only just came back... [tape interruption]

But President Seretse Khama, the founding president, was ill, and the country was in a sort of a drift. In these African countries the office of the president is very important and, even in a moderate situation such as Botswana, so much depends upon the leader.

*Q: I don't know the makeup of the people of Botswana. Were there tribal rivalries?*

DAWSON: Well, not really. Khama belonged to the dominant tribe. That's one of the unfortunate things about Botswana to Tswanas. He was a very popular figure. He belonged to a royal family of this dominant tribe, and he was the founding president of the country. It just turned out that he was the only person in sight.

Now the tribal thing did become a problem when he died. And he died during my presence there. And, in order to do some tribal balancing, they had put Quett Masire in as vice president under Khama, which meant that, according to the constitution, an individual from a minority tribe succeeded the president. And indeed he remains president today.

That gives you some idea of the kind of democratic setup and sense of organization that Botswana has. That's one thing that accounts for their stability as a country.

*Q: Well, what were American interests? When you went out there, what were you told, or analyzed, were American interests in Botswana?*

DAWSON: Well, Botswana, as you know, touches South Africa. It's one of the borders of South Africa, and that was important. It was a kind of alternative, really a light, if you will, of democracy in that whole darkness that is South Africa. So we wanted to encourage the notion of Botswana as a democratic and free society there.

We had a couple of facilities in Botswana, and in time we came to have more.

Botswana is a rich country: it has diamonds and it has cattle. And there was a great interest on the part of the Botswana in encouraging trade relationships and American business to come there. That was one of the things that Botswana always has wanted, to have more and more American investment and business in that country.

So these were the kinds of things that I was trying to stress during my stay there. Mainly, though, the idea of Botswana as a democratic society, a model for the other countries in Africa.

*Q: Were you able to operate relatively freely there?*

DAWSON: Absolutely. Absolutely free hand.

*Q: This was the time, '79 to '82, when the Reagan administration was just beginning to get its feet going and all, and they had a different policy, less confrontational to South Africa, but in the long run it proved...*

DAWSON: "Constructive engagement."

*Q: Constructive engagement. What was your feeling about this?*

DAWSON: Well, I quite frankly think we were promoting a policy that was too conciliatory toward a regime that was obviously brutal and had no intention of changing.

It caused great difficulty in my dealing with the government of Botswana, because clearly the Botswana felt, if anything, more strongly about this than I did. They realized they had to cooperate with South Africa because it had to do with their lifeblood. I mean, it really was critical to them. But they didn't feel that we were doing enough to help them to be relieved of their dependency upon South Africa or to bring about changes there that they saw as necessary.

I thought we put a great deal too much stress on South Africa itself, and too little on building up and recognizing the feelings and the aspirations of the surrounding countries, which by this time were called the frontline states.

*Q: Did the problems with Angola or Namibia spill over into your bailiwick?*

DAWSON: Oh, absolutely. Most of my representation there, I think, had to do with Namibia. We were trying to get South Africa to get out of there and to free Namibia.

In fact, that was much of what Chester Crocker, the assistant secretary of state for Africa, was doing throughout his tenure, dealing with that one problem of Namibia. In the end, it didn't happen on his watch, but I think much of what he did was reflected in the settlement that finally resulted in independence for Namibia.

But it was a very wrenching time for all concerned, because it seemed throughout the time, and I think rightly so, that we were yielding too much to the feelings and the needs and requirements of South Africa.

*Q: Did you or your embassy have any particular problems while you were in Botswana?*

DAWSON: Well, the South Africans came over several times and made incursions into Botswana while we were there. And this, of course, was always something that we had to be aware of.

There was an American who flew over, obviously taking weapons into South Africa. His plane went down in the wilderness of Botswana, and that was obviously a problem for us.

Crocker was visiting--not frequently, but now and again--talking about South Africa in terms that the Botswana just did not want to hear. And so, in a sense, that was a problem.

But Americans operated quite freely in Botswana. I had excellent relations with the president. The embassy didn't have any operational problem that I can speak of.

One of the big things I did while there was to negotiate for two installations. One was for the building of a Voice of America relay station; we'd already agreed on the rental terms. And also we put in a satellite monitoring center during my stay, and I negotiated for that.

*Q: How was your staff in the embassy?*

DAWSON: We had a fairly large Peace Corps; we had three hundred people at one point while I was there.

*Q: Good God!*

DAWSON: AID was a small mission. We didn't have Marines or anything like that during my stay. And the embassy staff itself was fairly small. I would say it was not an outstanding staff. I think that too often the officers who are in upward African assignments--too often now, not always, but too often--have not been as competitive as they might have been in other parts of the world. There's no long line of people saying by all means send me to Africa, you know.

*Q: Three hundred Peace Corps to Botswana sounds almost like overkill. I mean, why three hundred there? It's a friendly place. What's in it for us, in a way, to put that many people?*

DAWSON: Well, the Botswana needed us. Their educational system lagged behind others. You know, Botswana was not a colony, it was a protectorate of Great Britain, and so it was easier for them to move in friendship toward us at independence. And the president of Botswana made a huge pitch for having us improve the educational system, especially the lower educational system in Botswana, and we agreed to do so. That's one aspect of it.

The other aspect of it is, they were very hospitable. They knew how to use resources wisely, and they did so. If there was no job for the ninety-ninth Peace Corps volunteer, they wouldn't ask for them to come to the country. They don't just accept people because they're out there. And, furthermore, they helped to pay for all this.

*Q: It sounds like a felicitous meeting.*

DAWSON: It was indeed.

*Q: Well, I take it you left there feeling quite good about our relations with Botswana.*

DAWSON: Oh, I did indeed. Our relations were very, very good with Botswana. The leadership appreciated American interest in the country. They were very eager to have American technology. As I said, American business was one of their big aims, and investments were something that they wanted. So I felt we had great relations with Botswana.

**NATALE H. BELLOCCHI**  
**Ambassador**  
**Botswana (1985-1988)**

*Ambassador Natale H. Bellocchi was born in Little Falls, New York in 1926. He received a degree in industrial management from Georgia Tech in 1944 and was soon drafted into the U.S. Army to serve in a rifle platoon during the Korean War. His Foreign Service career included positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, India, and an ambassadorship to Botswana. Ambassador Bellocchi was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 21, 1995.*

*Q: Had you known your name was put forward, or not?*

BELLOCCHI: Yes, I think I had known only a short time before, because I think you're offered the opportunity to say no, no, I'll never take it, I won't do it. But I hadn't, and I got the call from Reagan and then I knew, in fact, that he wanted to appoint me. And I went to the library in the State Department to look up Botswana, and the only book in the State Department library was a Ph.D. thesis written by somebody in the UK that described a little group of Afrikaners who had migrated up into Western Botswana, close to the border of Namibia, and had thrived, and were there today as citizens of Botswana. And that was all, the only thing that was in the library about Botswana. Eventually I had to start looking into Bechuanaland because that's what the British name for that area was before, and even so, there was very little on it. So I must say, my wife and I both, left for Botswana after going through that process of becoming an ambassador. Even if it's for a small country, like Botswana, it is really an experience you never, never forget. It's quite an honor. I don't care what country it is.

*Q: In the first place, how does one get ready? You're saying you really didn't know much, but there must have been somebody on the desk who could...*

BELLOCCHI: Oh, sure, they start to give you briefing papers, and all that kind of thing. They prepare you for your hearings. But that had to wait for a little bit until we got the agreement, but that was not a controversial assignment by any means. And then I went up before the Congress, Senator Kassebaum was then the chair of the subcommittee. So we got through without any problems, but there was still the process of getting sworn in. I don't care what country it is, big or small, it's still quite an impressive thing. Then going off to Botswana. My wife and I both were really going there with some concern. I mean, we'd never even thought about Africa before. It was completely out of our area, and we didn't know really what to expect. We were pleasantly surprised. It was a fascinating assignment. It was somewhat important because of the South Africans at that time who were acting up, and raiding across the border into Botswana sometimes. And believe it or not, it was one of the few times that Secretary Shultz ever wrote anything in the margin of anything on where he stood, was that he liked Botswana because Madame Chiepe, the Foreign Minister, had been in to see him and told him a little bit about democratic Botswana, and what they were doing, and how they were being pushed by the South Africans into directions that were counter to the democratic principles that they had adopted, and

he just loved it. He absolutely loved it, and from then on he said, "That's a country I like." In fact when he was supposed to take his first swing through Africa, Botswana was a place he was coming to, to give a talk about democracy in Africa. We had already started to prepare for the visit when Reagan suddenly announced that he was meeting Gorbachev at Reykjavik up in Iceland, and Shultz was pulled off his African trip. So he missed it. We all had recommended it, and he had very gladly accepted the idea. There is not enough hotel space for the entourage of the Secretary there, but he was going to stop in the morning, have a lunch and give a speech, and then that afternoon leave for some other place in Africa. So we were so excited about that.

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

BELLOCCHI: From '85 to '88.

*Q: When you arrived in '85 in Botswana, what was the political-economic situation? Tell me a little about Botswana.*

BELLOCCHI: Well, Botswana is a country that's larger than France in size, but it's only got a million plus people, and a lot of it is desert, huge areas are game parks--two of the largest game parks in Africa are there that are still relatively untouched by the tourists. Chobi, up in the north, and the Okavango swamp area which is very, very fascinating. But then down closer to the South African border, it was a little more developed. Botswana had built a road that went all the way up north close to the Victoria Falls area which is in Zimbabwe. There was some industry, but the country largely depended on the diamonds, the largest producer of gem diamonds in the world, larger than South Africa. But they were very, very lucky. They found the diamonds just about the time they were getting their independence. So they negotiated with the De Beers organization as a country, and wound up with over 50% of the income from the mines. It would belong to Botswana, and then they joined the De Beers distribution system. But because of that they have laws saying that the mines must be exploited in their entirety, not just where the very best diamonds are. That didn't happen in Namibia, and DeBeers was able to mine all the best diamonds on their own, leaving just the secondary to what is left today in Namibia. But in Botswana it was all done very properly. It's a clean government, corruption free. The money they earn from their diamonds actually goes into the treasury, so they're quite rich actually. But as a country, not individuals. The president, as a matter of fact, was always in debt, and had to keep working himself out of debt. So it is a very open society. They have an active opposition party. They have regular elections. The speaker of their Unicameral Assembly was white, as was one other member of the cabinet. There were no racial problems, there were no ethnic problems within the country. That had all been erased by the original president, Seretse Khama, who was the prince of one of the tribes down there. He was educated in England and married a British girl. In those days he was not permitted to go back to Botswana by the British. It took several years but when he got back there, he was elected the first president, and started the whole democratic system. We loved the country. The people were friendly. Foreigners were actually welcomed. And on occasion if you wanted to go down to the big city, you could get in a car and drive, only four hours to Johannesburg. The capital was right on the border, and we could fly down there in an hour as well.

But when you first started, we'd go down there about once a month for shopping in the malls. As time went on you find yourself going down there less and less, and toward the end, why go down there, you can get everything you need here, you look a little harder but...

*Q: This is during the time of...was it constructive engagement with South Africa where we had still the Reagan administration which was considered to be not as confrontational with South Africa.*

BELLOCCHI: They opposed sanctions.

*Q: What was the feeling from Botswana, and your role, and how did you feel about that?*

BELLOCCHI: Well, I think the fact that Botswana was a democracy made it easy to go back with the views of the leaders of Botswana. They were also--what were they called, the Front Line. We got quite a bit on how the Front Line movement was proceeding.

*Q: The Front Line movement being the states surrounding South Africa, which were black states.*

BELLOCCHI: The black states to the north of South Africa, all of whom had to depend on South Africa's economy because they had no other way of running their economy except through South Africa. So they were in the delicate position of depending on South Africa, but opposing South Africa's policies of apartheid. So it was an interesting time to be reporting from there, but clearly they favored sanctions even though it was going to be counterproductive to their own economy. They were a little reluctant to shout too much, but they were certainly supportive of sanctions. During those days we'd get visits from many members of Congress. Two people who are still in the Senate, Senator Simon and Senator Kassebaum, one Republican and one Democrat, went to South Africa, and then stopped in Gaborone. I remember Senator Simon telling the president, "The air is different up here. It's just like coming home." And Kassebaum made exactly the same kind of observation. "It really is in the air, you can sense it. Down there you had that apartheid system, you move into Botswana, such an open place." They really felt comfortable. So we had a lot of people that were supportive of the Front Line states, and once the veto was overridden, and sanctions were applied, it made quite a difference down there.

*Q: This is the American senate who passed sanctions over the veto. Congress passed it.*

BELLOCCHI: What I thought was very satisfying was when the people down there in Botswana, but I think in the other countries in that area as well, commented on our imposing sanctions and saying, "Yes, but your administration is against it. It really doesn't mean anything." Our response that, "On the contrary. It's the law of the land and we will have to observe it", impressed them. And Reagan himself made that point, while he opposed it, it's now the law and it will be implemented. That was very nice. I thought that they were very impressed down there with the fact that we are a country of laws. It was a good lesson for them.

*Q: Was it difficult for you--I mean you were the new boy on the block as far as Africa is concerned, but you were representing the American President, who was more friendly towards*



*the South African regime than many of the policy makers as represented by the vote. Was this an uncomfortable position to be in?*

BELLOCCHI: It wasn't easy to argue but at least in my case, the Botswanans are so nice that they didn't try to embarrass me, but you did have to make the case that constructive engagement was the way to go. In fact, it wasn't completely lost on people like the Botswana because they had to depend on the South African economy. So they didn't want something that would hurt them very badly. They wanted their economy to keep going, but they wanted sufficient pressure on South Africa to change the system. So it was somewhat equivocal, they didn't beat the table and say, "That's nonsense, you've got to be strong and fight them." The further north you got, like Zambia, the stronger they got on these things. Right next to the border, they were a little more careful about the way they proceeded.

*Q: Were you getting any reflections from our embassy in Cape Town and Pretoria about how they felt about the situation at that time?*

BELLOCCHI: I can't remember, he was a political appointee. He left, I remember he was recalled at one point, and then Ed Perkins came down. Ed was there for most of the time that I was up in Botswana and we'd talk to each other on the phone, visited, etc. I can recount a little story, a little anecdote I thought was clever. When Frank Wisner left the front office, that was the time he went to Egypt, I think, as ambassador, Chas Freeman came in to replace him in the front office in the Africa Bureau. And down in Gaborone one day I got a call from the Foreign Ministry close to midnight. Mind you, this is little Botswana, and that was really something. They asked me if I would come over, and there was the Foreign Minister and the Permanent Secretary. They said there were a lot of military movements going on across the border, the border being only six Kms away from where we were sitting at that time.

*Q: Six kilometers.*

BELLOCCHI: And they said there was a lot of military movement going on over there, and they said while there was not much love lost between the South African military and the Botswana military people, there was always a tacit understanding that if they were going to go through exercises close to the border, that they would somehow get the word that that's what it was all about. They had heard nothing at all. All of this movement going on at this time of the night, made them afraid South Africa was planning another raid into Botswana." So this was midnight and I went back to the embassy, but you know, our embassy was small, it really did shut down at night. For me to call the commo fellow to come over would take about two hours to warm up the machine before he could send a cable off. I was in much more of a hurry than that. So I called by open line, even though we were convinced at that time that the South Africans were monitoring these open lines.

*Q: Sometimes it's handy.*

BELLOCCHI: So I called by open line and got Chas.

*Q: We're talking about the acting head of the African Bureau.*

BELLOCCHI: He was the senior deputy at that time. And sure enough he was still at work, it was about 7:00-7:30 in the evening in Washington. I said, "I've got a message here, so I guess the best thing for me to do is for me to speak Mandarin." Chas is a Chinese language officer. So I conveyed the message in Mandarin to Chas in Washington. We talked back and forth, and then he called Ed Perkins by phone back down to Pretoria and saying, "You better get over to the Foreign Office, and say just how unhappy we would be if something like this materialized." Which he did. The Permanent Secretary in the South African Foreign Office didn't know anything about it because the military and the Foreign Office didn't always discuss things with each other. So he had to inquire, but eventually was able to confirm that it was just an exercise. The word came back through that way to Botswana. But the idea that we had to communicate in Mandarin from Botswana was one for the books.

*Q: With the South Africans listening, up the wall.*

BELLOCCHI: They must have wondered if something really funny was up. At any rate it got the job done.

*Q: The South Africans have an ambassador there, didn't they? Or a commissioner?*

BELLOCCHI: No, they didn't even have relations. The two sides would meet on occasion, and it was always between Pik Botha the South African Foreign Minister, and Madame Chiepe, the Botswanan Foreign Minister. Botha was a very rough guy, and Madame Chiepe, on the contrary, is very even handed. She was a school marm, that's what she was and she acted like one. That's why Shultz liked her so much because she really was very calm in the way she handled matters. She sort of gave a little lecture to Botha in a nice school marmish way about why he was wrong in what he was saying. It would drive Botha up the wall, of course. He was a completely different kind of character who wanted to beat the table, while she would go back and counter his arguments each time. But, in fact, later on it became clear when things did settle down that he had a great deal of respect for her. But he was a great actor, and he knew how to be very gruff in the way he talked, but it didn't bother the Botswanans at all. They knew the Afrikaners just as well as anyone else did. So they held their ground very well. There was a great deal of respect between them. I think there was also a great deal of concern because Botswana was a free democracy, and the argument the Afrikaners always used was that Africans were uncivilized. It just didn't apply. In Zimbabwe the same thing applied eventually. Mugabe, when he became president, managed the country reasonably well. So that kind of undercut Afrikaner arguments.

*Q: Did you find the South Africans were meddling in the area at all?*

BELLOCCHI: Oh, always. That goes without saying, of course, because the ANC would also not hesitate to use Botswana. There were ANC people coming in and out of Botswana all the time.

*Q: ANC was the African National Congress.*

BELLOCCHI: Even their military on occasion. They would go into South Africa via Botswana on many occasions. It's a big border, and open. Cows would walk across the border so why couldn't people, and they did.

*Q: Did you have any contact with the ANC?*

BELLOCCHI: Oh, sure. I've even had some, including the present vice president of South Africa, come to a reception I gave in Botswana.

*Q: What was our relationship with ANC in those days?*

BELLOCCHI: I think most of the time it was standoffish because they were supposed to have a connection with the Soviets. In fact, the vice president of the ANC, was a white fellow who was a communist. So you can tell our intelligence certainly focused on the ANC, and much less so on the South African military. That didn't mean that we couldn't meet with ANC on occasion, which we did.

*Q: They weren't in the PLO category?*

BELLOCCHI: No, they were not. Occasionally they would come to Botswana. They came to a reception, I think it was one of the Fourth of July receptions they were there. They didn't view us as friends, but they didn't view us as enemies either.

*Q: Diamonds occupying the major part of the economy, I take it then that our commercial ties, economic ties, weren't very important.*

BELLOCCHI: We had an AID program going on there. The composition of the mission, while the embassy itself was small, there was an AID mission that was largely dealing in PL 480 products. They also had some health programs, and family planning, and some of these other things. So there was a small AID program, and then we had almost 200 Peace Corps people in Botswana.

*Q: That must have been rather pleasant duty. I'm not knocking it, but it sounds like a really nice place.*

BELLOCCHI: I must say I was a little bit wary because they were scattered all over the country, and in order to see all the Peace Corps people, you really had to have a small airplane. You couldn't get in to some of these places, and here were some of our people in very isolated areas all by themselves in some small village in Botswana. But we very seldom had any problems with people stealing, or anything of that nature, very, very few. It was clearly quite a nice atmosphere, people welcomed them, and I think our Peace Corps people felt very satisfied because of that. They were welcomed into the classrooms to teach without any problems. The head of the Peace Corps would visit, and I'd fly around with her to all these little outposts in the country.

*Q: Well, Nat, were there any other developments in Botswana that we might want to cover?*

BELLOCCHI: I think not. They were interesting to us largely because of their democratic system, and the lack of corruption. I think these were the things that really stood out.

*Q: Lack of tribal problems.*

BELLOCCHI: Lack of tribal problems, no racial problems. It was a fantastic assignment. We really enjoyed it very much.

**JOHN HUMMON**  
**Mission Director, USAID**  
**Gabo(1986-1991)**

*John Hummon was born in 1930 in Ohio. He graduated from Albion College in 1953 and later earned an MA and PhD from the University of Michigan. Mr. Hummon began work at the Agency for International Development in 1960 and worked in Tanzania, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia and as the Mission Director in Botswana. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

HUMMON: In 1986. I went to Botswana and was there until 1990 and was Director there. I also shared responsibilities to a certain extent for the regional projects in SADCC. Also, for about a year, we were trying to get a program started in Namibia, so I had that portfolio, too.

*Q: What led you to Botswana?*

HUMMON: I don't know. I was asked to go there as Mission Director.

*Q: How did you find the situation there when you arrived?*

HUMMON: Well, Botswana is a very special place. It was particularly special at that time because it was one of the few truly functioning democracies in Africa. Botswana was a small country and there had never been (they had been under the British as Bechuanaland) a substantial white presence in the country to speak of. So they didn't have a lot of the hang-ups, as I found in some of the countries in Africa where they had experienced a very strong colonial presence. I had been in no other country where the people were so self-confident in dealing with outsiders in a pleasant way. I found that Nigerians were very self-confident in dealing with others, but part of that came from a somewhat different motivation. Botswana had sort of a national characteristic that everybody was an equal, and it didn't matter who you are, or whatever. I liked that setting better than any post that I had ever been. Dealing with the Botswana was a genuine pleasure. It's hard to explain it but it's just that the feeling of equality and openness and candor. If they said that they couldn't do something they wouldn't do it, and if they said they were going to do something, they did it. It was just a unique experience in many regards.

*Q: They were less subject to being pushed around by donors compared with some other countries or dominated by donors. They were more independent minded about what they wanted and did not want. Is that accurate?*

HUMMON: I think that it's true that they had a mind of their own and were self-assured. You're right in that you didn't tell them what to do, because I haven't found any country where you are basically going to tell them what to do, nor should we try to be in that position. But it was just an atmosphere of willing to sit down and discuss equally and thoughtfully what needed to be done. And as a consequence we had, I thought, and a lot of people that were familiar with what took place concurred, we had an important impact in a variety of areas, particularly in opening up the economy. One of the things that I did when I first got there was to bring in a team of world-class experts, who were there for six weeks. And I worked with them and the Ministry of Finance to develop a pattern of what we should be doing with the funds that were available to us to strengthen the private sector within the country. It was designed to help encourage new industries, to liberalize the foreign exchange constraints and various impediments to doing business there such as residents permits, and generating local entrepreneurial know-how. It was across the board strategy and almost all of the main emphases went into the next year's national budget speech of the Vice President. Our effort helped to give much greater importance to the role of the private sector, and USAID continued its support after I had left there. The Botswana, of course, were the leaders in all this, and they had their own time-table, as should be the case. Our participation was more to help identify some of the key constraints to private sector development, to help diversify the economy.

*Q: Who was this group that you had in?*

HUMMON: I can't remember the names. A well-known economist was the head of it, and we had two other high-level specialists in private sector development and training.

*Q: What was the context in terms of how Botswana saw itself in relation to the Southern African complex? What were their fears or hopes in that context?*

HUMMON: During the time when I went out there, South Africa was still under apartheid. Given the situation in South Africa at the time, none of us anticipated the peaceful transfer of power that would take place. I think all of us out there thought there was going to be a blood bath.

We were trying to strengthen Botswana and other countries in that area such as Zambia and Zimbabwe away from their reliance in the past upon the South African economy. In this context, there was much attention, particularly in the regional program, given to developing routes for goods to move in and out of Botswana and Zambia and Zimbabwe and Malawi and other countries without having to go through Durban, the main port in South Africa.

I liked to think, quite frankly, when I was in Botswana that the Botswana program, and our involvement in SADCC regional activities, and the development of the outlines of a program in Namibia were an attack upon the evil of apartheid.

We had only been in Botswana a short time when South African gun ships came in and bombed Gaborone, the capital. The bombing was a mile or so from our house, or maybe more; we were never in any danger. They killed about 12 or 13 people - supposedly at an ANC base of freedom fighters, or "guerrillas" in South African terminology. It was a rather tense situation during the years that we were there. One priority of Botswana was to develop themselves so that they would have greater independence from South Africa. And we were trying to help in several areas.

We wanted, for example, to strengthen tourism, and to help poor people living near game areas to profit from the benefits of tourism and to get involved in game cropping if possible. This was an area of promise, it seemed to us, which we discussed with the Botswana, and after I had left, the Mission jointly developed with them a natural resources management project. There are tremendous game resources in Botswana in Chobe and the Okavango Delta.

*Q: In terms of the wild life?*

HUMMON: Yes. In terms of the wild life. At least at the time that I was there these areas were unspoiled, natural. There were no tarmac roads going through them as in the Nairobi game park and so on. So we were involved in that. We were also involved in curriculum changes in education and this was very important. We had some great contract people out there from Ohio University. Dr. Max Evans was the head of that - a terrific person. To make education more practical, because the educational pattern was very much the Cambridge school system.

*Q: What scale of resources did you have roughly?*

HUMMON: Not a great deal. \$20 million a year was tops and that includes food assistance that we provided until we phased out of that area. DA was \$8 - \$10 million; much of it went for people whom we brought in as experts in different areas.

*Q: Did they have an OPEX program at that time? Operating Executives...*

HUMMON: Yes.

*Q: How did that work?*

HUMMON: Well.

*Q: We were filling positions in the government, is that it?*

HUMMON: Well, yes and no. I mean some of them were positions that were both advisory and operational. We used that in a sense to have more people in a technical assistance type of mode. So we had many Americans. Although our program was small in dollars, it was a program that had a large number of personnel. I feel very good about that. I can't think of much that AID did as an institution that I wished we had done differently.

*Q: Any particular program stand out in your mind as having the most impact?*

HUMMON: There were several. Certainly the focus on the private sector was important. We also had an important impact in education - especially in primary education. That project - and I was heavily involved in that using the "lemon aid stand syndrome," as an illustrative example, to emphasize the importance of a practical education, self-reliance, and the dignity of work - was very successful. We really worked closely with the Botswana to make quality changes in primary education and develop a Department of Primary Education at the University. Both Ministry of Education and University leadership were deeply involved in this project in providing guidance and support, and the Ohio University team was outstanding.

We also had some success with a junior secondary project, although I had to make changes in this project during my stay in Botswana to make it more in keeping with GOB [Government of Botswana] priorities. We were able to provide food assistance to Botswana during a severe drought situation - in the face of opposition from certain quarters in Washington who thought Botswana could buy its own food. We also were able to negotiate a phase down and phase out of food assistance.

The USAID was involved in agricultural extension and research, and we were able to work with the GOB to make this project more results oriented and extension friendly. We began involvement in anti-AIDS actions and health activities, and developed a population planning project. I had actually been asked to be a keynote speaker at the country's national population conference, and we worked with the GOB to develop a population project. In a sense, the population project was both too broad and too specific. It has been drafted mainly in Washington, and needed change. I made liberal judgements on satisfaction of conditions precedent when I was there (and rightly in my mind given the overall situation) in interpreting actions by the GOB to enable our continuation of funding tranches. After I left, the project was restructured. In summary on this, we were successful in helping to focus attention on the importance of population policy, but we were less successful in drawing up a project that met both Washington's perceptions of the speedy action required, and more importantly, the reality of the Botswana situation.

We worked very closely with the Peace Corps in Botswana, which had a large program. I believe we provided some funds, and they were involved in areas or sectors of considerable interest to us. It was a very good relationship, and Lloyd Pierson, the Peace Corps Director during my tenure, deserves much of the credit. I also worked on strengthening cooperation with UNDP, to encourage their leadership in donor cooperation. Finally, I served as Chargé for a few months at this post. May I note that USAID had superb Embassy support from Ambassador Bellocchi and Ambassador Kordek, and DCM Johnnie Carson. My wife, Jean, also served as CLO [community liaison officer] at the Embassy during the four years that we were there.

*Q: What kind of projects were we supporting in the private sector?*

HUMMON: Well, across the board in terms of liberalizing the climate. First, we had this study to pinpoint some of the constraints to development of the private sector. Then we cooperated with UNDP in jointly sponsoring a national private sector conference to identify actions needed. We initiated a donor group on the private sector, and negotiated with local banks a loan guarantee scheme to get resources into the hands of small-scale entrepreneurs. We worked

closely with the Botswana in developing an employer's organization. Training and technical assistance and business conferences were all part of it. Recommendations on residence permits policy and on establishing a commercial attaché office in the embassy in Washington, tax policy, etc.

I must mention that none of these projects or initiatives would have had any measure of success without superb cooperation from the Government of Botswana. There were many, many Botswana who cooperated with us, and were so helpful, but one in particular I must mention - Baledzi Gaolathe, who at that time was Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Finance and National Development. He was the key person on the development side and an outstanding talent. We had lunch frequently, and I would go over the agenda with him and solicit his advice. It was a very collegial situation. He was extremely impressive, and enormously helpful to me during my tenure in Botswana. Obviously much credit for Botswana's record must go to President Masire, and to his successor, President Mogae.

*Q: So you were there for...*

HUMMON: Four years.

*Q: You had a long stint there and made a rather important contribution.*

HUMMON: I think this was probably, in terms of my field of experience, the most important involvement that I had in any country situation. Then I came back and basically worked in AID Washington.

*End of reader*