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DAVID SPRAGUE

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is February 5th. We are talking with David Sprague, one of the leaders in USAID's (U.S. Agency for International Development) education program for decades. But we are going to start at the beginning. So, David, talk a little bit about your growing up, and what happened before you came to AID.

SPRAGUE: I was born in in Spokane, Washington in 1938. We were a large family, six kids, three boys and three girls. I was the fifth child. I attended both grade school and high school in Spokane. It was a Jesuit high school, an important fact since I decided at the end of high school that I would join the Jesuits. In 1956, after high school, I joined the Jesuits and for the next 12 years was in training. The Jesuits, a Catholic religious order, are the only ones that have this long training period before you become a priest. Normally, it's 13 years. I left after 12.

Q: Almost made it!

SPRAGUE: I moved around during that time in the Jesuits, starting with four years in Sheridan, Oregon, where we had what is called the novitiate. It's kind of like a boot camp for two years and then two years of classical studies. Then I was sent to St. Louis, Missouri, to the campus of St. Louis University, where I studied philosophy mainly. Eventually I got a B.A. degree in Classical Studies, a church degree (a Licentiate of Philosophy), and, finally an M.A. degree in speech and drama from St. Louis University.

During the next stage of the training I returned to the Oregon Province and taught high school. I did that for two years at Seattle Prep in Seattle, Washington. For my third year as a teacher, they shifted me to a Jesuit high school in Beaverton, Oregon. It was called Jesuit High, and I was the vice principal of that school as well as an English teacher.

Q: How old were you at that time, roughly?

SPRAGUE: I went into the Jesuits at 18. Then it was four years in Oregon and three in St. Louis, so then I was about 25. I began teaching in high school at 25. After the year in Oregon, I went to what is called the theologate, where I studied Catholic theology. This was in Los Gatos, California. I did that for two years. The period between 1956-1968 was a period of training, which, when I look back on it now, I think it was a great education for me because I wasn't sure exactly what I was going to do. I taught English during those times when I was teaching. But the overall education that I received from the beginning was just an excellent classical education.

Q: Right!

SPRAGUE: Even though I didn't follow through and become a priest, I always look back on that time as very worthwhile. It really did open the world to me as far as looking for different things to do and different places to explore.

Q: Right. So, you were teaching high school at a time when things were getting quite tumultuous in the U.S. because of the Vietnam War and civil rights?

SPRAGUE: Right. Especially the two years in Los Gatos in 1966-68. I participated in a few marches when I was there, just because that was such a tumultuous time with Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy being killed. I think that probably had a lot to do with my deciding I didn't want to go ahead and be ordained. I saw then, and I confirmed

for myself that education and not religion was for me a more effective instrument for helping solve the world's problems, and that's where I wanted to put my life's work.

Q: Was that a difficult decision for you?

SPRAGUE: Yes. It took me a long time. I think that's because I was raised in a very Catholic family. Going into the seminary was a real mark of distinction within the Catholic community. My mother became the president of every Jesuit mothers' club that came along in my training career. I knew when I was teaching high school that I really enjoyed that. That's kind of what I wanted to do. Yet, it took me a few years to make up my mind to leave entirely. It was not an easy decision. But in the very end, it was clear. I knew I didn't want to become a priest and my belief in the teachings of the Catholic Church had lessened significantly. I was in California then, and I went immediately into teaching in a public high school, Cupertino High School. This was before Silicon Valley developed, so it was all fruit trees and spacious parks around Cupertino. It was also an eye-opener for me to see how the public-school system operated.

Q: Was it a good public high school, or was it poorly resourced?

SPRAGUE: I would say it was probably a little above average. It had a lot of kids whose parents worked in the defense industry and some incipient technology firms that were starting out there.

Q: But not an immigrant community?

SPRAGUE: Not at all, no. To be honest, I was surprised at the low standards that were in that system compared to what I had experienced teaching in a Jesuit high school.

Q: Interesting.

SPRAGUE: For example, I taught all seniors, five classes of seniors. I would make them memorize poetry. They had never been asked to memorize anything in their four years. That was to me an indicator of the fact they could be asked to do more. I did enjoy that year. I knew by the end of it, I wanted to continue in education, but I wanted to be able to become an administrator, a superintendent is what I was thinking.

Q: This was 1969?

SPRAGUE: This was in 1969. To do that, I knew I had to go back and get, or at least I thought I had to anyway, a PhD in education, or at least a PhD in something related to education. Just by accident, that summer I was visiting a friend in Washington, DC, who worked in the Department of Education.

Q: Which was what, HEW (Health, Education and Welfare) at the time? Or was it a separate department?

SPRAGUE: It was separate. It was called the Department of Education. He had just come back from a visit to Florida State University and had given them a grant to start a new program.

Q: He was at the Department of Education?

SPRAGUE: He was at the Department of Education. It was late. It was July. He said, "Well, let's see, do you want to get in there?" I said, "Yeah, I'll go there if it's a good program." He said he thought it was. It was being headed by a fellow who had been number two in the Department of Education, and who had decided he would go back to the university. He went back and started this new program at Florida State that pulled in some very good people from around the country. My friend called him up, and he said, "Well, send me your papers, and we'll look at them." Of course, I took that as a "yes."

I flew back to California. I went in and resigned from the school, packed up my Volkswagen Beetle and drove across the country to Florida, much to the surprise of the head of this department. In retrospect, I think it's one of the best decisions I made.

Q: It was a good program?

SPRAGUE: It turned out to be an excellent program for me. And I think, in general, it became a very instrumental program for USAID because FSU became, over the next 10-15 years, a major player in education for USAID.

Q: When you went there, did they have an international focus at all?

SPRAGUE: Very little at the beginning. Bob Morgan was the fellow who headed this program. He got an idea from watching Robert McNamara when McNamara headed the Ford Motor Company and seeing how he applied what he called the "systems approach." Of course, in engineering, it makes sense. You can lay out in sequential paths where it is you want to go. Morgan wanted to take that same concept and apply it to education. Not mechanistically, but practically, considering all the components that go into making an educational system. He brought in a few people from within the education community. Bob Gagne was a leader in educational psychology and learning. There was Les Briggs, who had worked with AT&T in designing training programs, and he was very well known, very well published. Those two were the key anchors of the program the first year, but then Morgan added to that program.

FSU won a project with USAID to work with the Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI) during my first year in the program and that started my exposure to working with developing countries. The education department also received a 211(d) grant from USAID.

Q: You want to just explain 211d?

SPRAGUE: That's just the part of the foreign assistance bill that funded grants to universities to develop the technical talent that AID needed to work in its programs overseas. It was very interesting, because this was early in the assistance program in the late 1960s. There was a real shortage of people who had both the technical expertise and the geographic or historical knowledge of the countries in which they would have to work. I've always thought it was one of the best programs that AID funded. They gave a select number of universities a million dollars each over five years to fund graduate students to work on developing country problems in their field. In this case, it was education.

Q: With no commitment that they join AID after? This was just building the farm team?

SPRAGUE: Exactly. In fact, I think they had in mind that most of those people would stay with the university and become faculty, but then they would be available for short term technical assignments.

The program with KEDI I found fascinating because, again, it was taking this systems approach and looking at the entire educational system in Korea, which had been destroyed during the Korean War and had been slowly starting to build up in the middle 1960s, and then the early 1970s. KEDI was an institute created by the Korean government to guide that development. Florida State worked with them on the whole system development. They had a strong component on educational television, because the Koreans were very interested in that. I didn't go to Korea during that time, but I did work on some of the program that was done on campus. That was really my first exposure to educational problems in developing countries.

Q: You know, David Steinberg, also a USAID alumnus, has written that the change in the education system had more to do with the rapid development in Korea than almost anything else. It changed the whole family dynamics when the girls were going to school, too, and all sorts of other things.

SPRAGUE: Yes. It's interesting. I don't know whether you've seen the World Bank's development report this year—2018. For the first time it is on education and only education. But the head of the World Bank now, of course, is Korean. He wrote both in the foreword and in the body of the report about the development of the education system and acknowledged how the U.S. had helped.

Q: So, he credited the U.S. with helping?

SPRAGUE: He did. Of course, he also credited the World Bank!

Q: Of course!!

SPRAGUE: Towards the end of my Ph.D. program, I worked with Latin American graduate students who were getting a master's degree through USAID funding.

Q: That would be a participant training program of some sort?

SPRAGUE: Of some sort, yes.

Q: Well, in the 1960s, USAID had huge education programs in Latin America.

SPRAGUE: A lot of places in Latin America. It got me interested in Latin America as a place to work. Eventually, in my final year I agreed to go to work for the Organization of American States (OAS) and work on educational television in Colombia. Then, late in my final year at FSU, the fellow who oversaw the USAID 211d grant on educational technology found out I was interested in working overseas and asked me whether I wanted to work at USAID in Washington, D.C. That was Cliff Block.

Q: Oh!

SPRAGUE: I stewed over that decision for quite a while because I didn't know much about USAID.

Q: That wasn't part of your plan?

SPRAGUE: I hadn't thought about that at all and didn't know much about what that would involve. But I did come up to Washington, DC and interview. I liked the idea. I had no idea how USAID was organized, but I found out there was a central technical bureau and that was where I would be located.

Q: That was what, DSB at the time?

SPRAGUE: At that time, it was the Technical Assistance Bureau.

Q: Ah, TAB.

SPRAGUE: TAB, headed by Joel Bernstein, who had been the mission director in Korea. The education office was small, but they did have worldwide responsibility, and I liked that. I thought that was very attractive. Anyway, I switched! And I decided that rather than go to one country, I would take the job in Washington and have much wider exposure. So that's what I did.

Q: That would have been 1973?

SPRAGUE: 1972. I joined AID in 1972.

Q: As a civil servant?

SPRAGUE: As a civil servant in the Office of Education in the Technical Assistance Bureau, and then started learning a lot, knowing nothing about it!

Q: Right. Well, the office—you say it was small, but compared to the size of offices today it probably had quite a few technical officers?

SPRAGUE: We had about eight, I think. They were all direct hire employees either civil service or foreign service officers. It was usually headed by a foreign service officer. When I started it was John Hilliard. He had come from the Ford Foundation but had a long and successful career overseas. The Bureau had, I think, a good reputation as a research and development (R&D) part of the agency. There were, as I found out over time, different perspectives on R&D versus direct field support or being overseas and working in the missions themselves. You had to kind of prove your worth as an R&D office or program to the rest of the agency if you were going to be taken seriously.

Q: So that meant technical assistance?

SPRAGUE: Yes.

Q: Not publishing research papers.

SPRAGUE: Right. You could do pilot programs to demonstrate the effectiveness of introducing innovations.

Q: This might be an unfair question, but as you think back to that time, what were some of the big names in the education field in AID. You mentioned Cliff Block, who had a long, long career. Who else?

SPRAGUE: In Latin America, Stanley Applegate.

Q: Ok

SPRAGUE: He left AID after a while and went down to Florida International University to head the international education program. Hal Freeman in the Asia bureau had a lot of influence. A few years later, Frank Method who was in Policy and Planning Coordination (PPC) had a lot of influence on education policy. Within the office that I joined, Cliff Block certainly stood out as a real innovator. But there was a new program that was just starting called “Non-Formal Education.”

Q: Ah!

SPRAGUE: The world had discovered the fact that a lot of kids were not in school. Bernie Wilder was the head of it. He brought in Jim Hoxing. The two of them were mainly responsible for the non-formal education program. Another fellow was Stan Handelman. He was foreign service, but he joined the office early on. He worked as the education officer in El Salvador in the 1960s and early 1970s.

My first trip overseas with AID was to go to El Salvador because they had started a teacher training program with instructional television that was quite unique. AID had

given a grant to Stanford University, the Institute for Communications Research, headed by Wilbur Schramm, to do the evaluation. That institute at Stanford had also received a 211d grant. They had several graduate students there that wrote their PhD dissertations on El Salvador and its instructional television program. What was unique about it was that, it was driven by one person, a Salvadoran named Walter Béneke, who had been the ambassador to Japan. He was really struck by how much the Japanese used television in their school system. So, when he came back and became the minister of education, he decided he would close all teacher-training institutions in the country except one that used educational television. All teachers had to go through that. The ones that were already teaching had to do the TV course on weekends during the year and learn how to teach with television. It was nationwide.

Q: This was not to reach sort of distant outposts, but they just thought that was a better pedagogical approach?

SPRAGUE: You could have better quality. That's what they were looking for. You can imagine doing this nationwide. They started in the middle schools, grades 6, 7 and 8 over the course of three years, and then moved it down a grade at a time. It was a tremendous effort.

Q: Did they ever test the efficacy?

SPRAGUE: Yes. That was what Stanford University was supposed to do, and they did. They certainly did show, I think, that it had improved the quality of the system, because they put a lot more work into the development of the curriculum and how the teachers were teaching.

Q: So, it might not have been the TV, but everything they did to support it?

SPRAGUE: TV was the catalyst that got everybody excited about improving the educational system. It did go on for five or six years but then, unfortunately, Walter Béneke, who was a very charismatic person, was murdered. As often happens when the innovation is driven by one personality, it started to go down. But those graduate students at Stanford who worked on El Salvador became a core group of technical advisors for USAID in education.

Q: So, some names please?

SPRAGUE: Emile McAnany, John Mayo, Peter Spain, Dennis Foote, Bob Hornung. Dean Jamison, Richard Parker

Q: So, they all came out of that Stanford group?

SPRAGUE: They all came out of that group. That to me, again, was both the effect of the 211d grant and this project that came just at the right time. But three of them, after they

had finished, joined the faculty of Florida State University. Several of them joined NGOs (non-governmental organizations).

Q: Would you say Florida State was the key institution, or were there others that were also focal points for international education?

SPRAGUE: If you look at non-formal education, there was the University of Massachusetts (UMass), which again had a dynamic leader, Dwight Allen. He had been the dean of the school of education at Stanford, and then he went to UMass and headed up this new program called, "Non-Formal Education." He was on the cover of Time magazine.

Q: Oh, my gosh!

SPRAGUE: Because it was the big, bold new thing. They got a 211d grant. I think the other big group in non-formal education was Michigan State University. They had basically started as an information center, collecting information about non-formal education, but had also developed some good graduate students, one of whom I hired.

Q: Ah! Who?

SPRAGUE: Joan Claffey.

Q: Oh, yes

SPRAGUE: The other was Mary Pigozzi, who did come to Washington and worked for an NGO. This is the period in the 1970s, when AID needed more technical resources. They had relied mainly on university people but found that over time that was awkward because the university people usually were teaching and only available in the summers. You could fit them in sometimes between semesters, something like that. Gradually, this is where the beltway bandits began. NGOs started to come up that were much more flexible and could respond much more quickly.

Q: And which were some of those early NGOs that focused on education and had staff available to work for AID?

SPRAGUE: Well, a big one for AID was the Academy for Educational Development (AED). It goes back into the 1960s, late 1960s.

Q: They started as a domestic-focused organization?

SPRAGUE: AED was started by Alvin Eurich, who had earlier also been the dean of education at Stanford University, and who started his organization in New York. I don't know where Sid Tickton came in, but the two of them, Eurich and Tickton were running an organization called the Academy for Educational Development, working mainly in higher education. They were well known. They had on their staff a young guy who really

wanted to do international work and talked Eurich into letting him come down to Washington to see what he could do. They wouldn't let him come by himself, so Tickton also came. That guy was Steve Moseley.

Q: And that was the late 1960s?

SPRAGUE: That was around 1970. When I joined in 1972, we gave, I think, the first grant to AED, and it was to establish an information center on educational technology. AED's international strength in those days was Steve Moseley and a telephone. AED became over the next 40 years the biggest, most active and one of the most effective NGOs working in education and training overseas.

There was also another NGO that was interesting: American Institutes for Research (AIR), a major player in the U.S. educational system. There was a fellow, Paul Spector, working there who wanted to work internationally. He talked AIR into letting him take that effort outside of the organization and establish it independently. He called it, IIR, International Institute for Research. He hired a couple of people. One was Mary Pigozzi from Michigan State, and the other was Vic Cieutat. Those three—Spector, Cieutat and Pigozzi—were the key ones. They became a very solid technical assistance resource for USAID.

Q: Do you remember, what was the total education budget for AID back in the early 1970s?

SPRAGUE: The 105 account was about \$100 million. There seemed to be a ceiling there, and Congress wouldn't go above it. There was general agreement that education and participant training were important. If you sit down and talk to somebody about how development works, they always point to the importance of education. There were, I think, a couple of things that made it difficult to increase the funding. One was, it takes time to see results from education. A Congressman who wants to see what you've done on a quarterly basis, you must be able to get him to be patient and that isn't easy. Also, there wasn't a clear idea of what should be emphasized within the education program.

Q: What was the goal?

SPRAGUE: Yes. It was too much picking pieces out of the systems, and saying "Okay, we'll just do teacher training." Or, "We'll begin a lot of school construction because that's where you can use up money." It's difficult to spend a lot of money in the education system because you don't want to get into paying the teachers' salaries and that is what costs the most. That's the other big item besides school construction. The production of materials is key, but it's not going to use a lot of money. That's always been a problem in funding educational programs.

Q: The cost differentials are not anything that an aid agency wants to engage in?

SPRAGUE: When somebody comes out on a CODEL (Congressional Delegation), you take them out and show them schools. Then they know what you've spent the money on. If it's teacher training, it's difficult. And that has been a problem. Eventually over time, AID's funding for education went up, dramatically.

Q: Yeah, yeah, it did. And it was around specific initiatives. Well, you tell me if you agree or not, but when there was a decision that it was going to be girls' education and that was really going to be a push, something you could count, that was one thing. Then there was the basic education. And then it was the early reading. We're getting way ahead of ourselves, but to the extent AID focused on a specific, measurable goal, then it was easier to communicate that to Congress.

SPRAGUE: Yes, that's true. But it was not always easy to come up with the data to demonstrate the success.

Q: Exactly.

SPRAGUE: One of the major things I worked on first, other than a somewhat tangential relationship with that project in El Salvador, was to help start the interactive radio instruction initiative.

Q: Ah ha!

SPRAGUE: It came out of the division in the Office that Cliff Block headed, which was broadly described as educational communications or educational technology. But it was an effort to see whether you could do with radio what was done with television in El Salvador, which was to have good programs to instruct in the classroom.

Q: And again, it wasn't just for people in remote areas? This was supposed to be throughout a system, cities too?

SPRAGUE: Right. This first project we decided to do in Nicaragua. The contract was with another institute at Stanford University. It wasn't Wilbur Schramm's communications institute, but it was one headed by Patrick Suppes, which was called the Institute for the Mathematical Studies of the Social Sciences. Suppes was in many respects a real genius. He had a PhD in philosophy and a PhD in math. He had started his own computer programming company and had turned out several programs in a few subjects, the first one was math, that were being used in schools in the U.S. The idea was to take the principles of instructional technology and the systematic development of the curriculum and use them with a less expensive technology than television. One of the reasons AID wanted to get into it was because it looked to be a way of getting better instruction in rural areas at an affordable cost.

Q: And more people had radios?

SPRAGUE: And they had radios. I worked a lot on that project, starting with visiting 12 countries that had expressed an interest in wanting to collaborate on a research project testing this out. So, it was very much a research project, and we put it forward as a research project. And it ended up in Nicaragua. That project, which went on from 1974-1978, became the model that was then used for teaching English and for teaching science. Over the course of the next 10, 12, 15 years, it was in Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Bolivia, Honduras, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Dominican Republic and Lesotho. It had a long career. It was started by Stanford, but with subsequent programs, it was EDC, the Educational Development Center, that implemented the program for USAID.

Q: So how did it do? If it's a research project, they clearly were trying to measure outcomes.

SPRAGUE: The instructional power of what Suppes had done on the computer really did make a difference when you did the radio programs. But it wasn't easy, because what he had done with math was to develop strands of skills and essential skills within them. So, you teach until you get to a skill that is essential that students need to have to move on. You evaluate whether the kids have that or not. While you're doing that evaluation, you drop down and do another strand until another essential skill is required to proceed. Then you go back and have your data from how well they did, you either go forward or you re-teach for that skill until they get it. So, it's very powerful, and it makes a lot of sense, but it's very intensive. That was implemented in varying degrees over the course of 15 years or so. It was clear there was a desire on the part of a lot of countries to try to use the radio, not only because it was cheaper, and it was out there, but also because there was a real problem of getting qualified teachers.

Q: Force multipliers?

SPRAGUE: Yes, especially in rural areas, where if you could hire a grade school graduate to teach, you were lucky.

Q: And the reason it was math and science? That was just easier to identify what the skill thresholds were than teaching language?

SPRAGUE: English was an obvious one because then you've got a bona fide English speaker they could model on. That's a good question. Probably the math focus was just as much because that's what Suppes had worked on. That's what they had and could put forward.

Q: Right. But you don't know of any retrospective evaluation of that whole program? So, what was the impact?

SPRAGUE: I think there is an overall evaluation. I have a handbook that goes into what it was. I guess I liked it, because the first thing I saw was they quoted me! They said, "Fourteen years ago, the first interactive radio instruction team began developing a

systematic method for teaching mathematics by radio. Six years later, commenting on the success of that project, David Sprague of the Agency for International Development, Office of Education, wrote, ‘Thus our hope that the project would produce a methodology that was generalizable to other countries and to other subject matters has been realized.’”

Q: Quoting authority!

SPRAGUE: When I look back on my career, certainly that was the first major initiative I got involved in that I think had a lasting impact. It did reach a lot of kids around the world, initially in Latin America, but later in Africa. And it’s still used in some places. Kenya, I know, is still using it for English because it is a way to get an English speaker into the classroom, which is not easy to do.

Q: I think the 1970s were a time when there was a fascination with technology and the application of technology to development issues, and you certainly saw that in health as well. Maybe it never disappeared, but later that became less of a focus, although I think they continued to use TV and radio. And it was only, I guess, maybe in the 2000s, that technology focus then came back again with cellphone technology. It’s a good reminder that in the 1970s, technology looked like it was going to, not be the answer, but it was going to solve a lot of problems.

SPRAGUE: And that’s true. I think we found a lot of those problems crop up when we tried out these things. That was a big program for a while within our office in the research part of AID. We can talk a little bit later about the satellite program, because that became a focus for a while. I moved on from managing projects and became the deputy director of that office in 1976.

Q: Who was the director at the time?

SPRAGUE: Bob Schmeding. He went back into the field. He was a foreign service officer and he went to Indonesia. I joined the office in 1972, became the deputy in 1976, and then actually became the director of the office in 1979 on an acting basis. It wasn’t until 1985 that I got the job officially.

Q: Oh, my god! That’s a long acting stint.

SPRAGUE: It was. It was incredible. It was because the position was a foreign service-designated position, and I was GS (general service) and AID couldn’t find a foreign service person qualified to take it.

Q: And AFSA were insisting that it be a foreign service officer?

SPRAGUE: They wouldn’t allow me to be in it officially.

Q: Did that affect what you could do, or not really?

SPRAGUE: No. No, after a while most people didn't know that I was acting. There was another project that I feel I had a lot of control of during this time. It was called, "Improving the Efficiency of Education Systems." This was using a lot of what I had learned in my graduate program at Florida State. What I really wanted to see was what we could do if we looked at the overall educational system in the country. Not just the education system, but also at education's relationship to the development of the country and where it is, including what other donors are doing. I wanted to take as broad a look as possible, so that we could plan in a systematic way with the host country on how to improve the system. A major priority was to see whether countries could spend their education budget more efficiently, because that was and still is a major problem. Where are you going to get the funds for educational system? That was a big project. I was proud that I got approval to make this a ten-year project. I was insistent that you can't do this in a short period of time; you've got to stay with it. We started in 1984, and it went to 1994. I wasn't with it for the last few years.

Q: Was the effort openly funded by the missions or was it a centrally-funded activity?

SPRAGUE: It was centrally funded but missions could buy in. It was under contract with Florida State University. But we also had in the consortium Howard University, State University of New York (SUNY) Albany, and I think IIR. What I liked about it was, at least in the time I was involved with it, we had a lot of countries that participated and who were willing to share their information. I think we had 14 countries. We would have regional meetings and people would talk about what they had done to try and improve the efficiency of their system.

Q: So, ministries of education were forthcoming about their shortcomings?

SPRAGUE: More than I thought they would be, yes. They still wanted to play the blame game. They wanted to blame the ministry of finance. They wanted to blame the bureaucracy or whatever. We had some people like Doug Windom from SUNY Albany who was excellent. Anyway, Benin, Botswana, El Salvador, Ghana, Guinea, Haiti, Indonesia, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Senegal, Somalia, Togo, Yemen and Zimbabwe, were all within that effort. It was a mixed bag in that we got further with some countries than others.

Q: Which ones do you think sort of made the most of the effort? Where you think maybe there really was qualitative improvement?

SPRAGUE: I think Indonesia was one. Indonesia has done well in getting their kids into school and being concerned about quality.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: I spent a lot of time on Haiti. It's difficult to see the traces probably at this point. I think Botswana again is further along than many others. But they certainly made use of it.

Q: And other donors were receptive, too? You said you had to look at what other donors were doing?

SPRAGUE: As I remember, none of them contributed funds to any of it, but they certainly would come to meetings and talk. Missions could put money into this.

Q: The era of the buy-ins?

SPRAGUE: Exactly. The Office of Education had a budget of about \$5 million dollars. I think one year we got almost \$30 million contributed by the missions in a number of these countries to work on this. That was the only way we could survive in that time in the central bureau—it was to get those buy-ins. I haven't seen an overall evaluation by country of this project. I left it in the middle.

Q: I'm sure that's right. From your engagement with it, did you come away with any conclusions about what the critical nodes were? Whether it's in curriculum or teacher training? Did it point to certain weaknesses that tended to crop up in every or most countries?

SPRAGUE: I certainly came away with the feeling that underfunding is a major problem in education. But it was also the lack of a systematic approach to the educational system. You would have people building schools without ever having done a study about how many are needed. It was the same idea with teachers—where you need them. You run into, very early on, the political problems. I saw that in country after country.

Q: People want a school in their district?

SPRAGUE: Their district. Yes. You would do these elaborate studies of population growth, where the demographic trends will be, and they go right out the window.

Q: People have said ministries of education are generally not strong in the whole government system. But I suppose there must be exceptions where the minister of education was powerful, or powerfully connected, as in the example of, was it, El Salvador? Then it can make a difference.

SPRAGUE: Yes. That's true. Education always seems to be a weak ministry. Looking back over my career, I think the complexity of running an education system is often underestimated.

Q: Right. Everybody thinks, "Oh, I know education. I had one!"

SPRAGUE: I had one! The persistence and consistent determination that must go into making changes in education are often not recognized.

Q: Right. You need a long horizon.

SPRAGUE: Yes. And you've got to look at every part of the system. For example, look at what is happening in DC right now, with the graduation rate, and you see all those good things that Michelle Rhee did to try to improve the quality.

Q: Right, with a systems approach?

SPRAGUE: With a systems approach, and then you can see how it can get off the rails. They couldn't get some kids to do well enough to come to school, and yet when they get to be a senior what do you do with them, so you graduate them. And it destroys all that other work. That's why you've got to look at all the components all the time and be aware of what's happening. That's hard to do. I did a paper once in Pakistan, the second time we were there, and pointed out that one-quarter of the country is involved in the education system, if you count the parents as well.

Q: Parents, students and administrators.

SPRAGUE: Yes, and then all the components of the whole system. There's no other national activity that involves so many people. And yet governments take the approach that everybody knows how to do it. That's been a problem.

There is one other thing I want to mention while I was still a GS in Washington.

Q: Good, and then I want to ask you about Washington at the time.

SPRAGUE: Well, this activity was AID-SAT. It was a one-off event that was done with the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). It was in 1976, the year of the bicentennial. NASA had lent India an ATS-6 satellite, which is a smaller satellite, and used it for educational or social programs. But NASA wanted to bring it back to use in the U.S. In the process of bringing it back, we offered to countries in the path, the opportunity to participate in a two-way communications workshop. It would be very brief, only a few hours. But 26 countries said they would like to do that. So, the value of the ATS-6 satellite was that it could operate with very small ground stations. That's where the major costs were. This was NASA's effort, and this was something Cliff Block worked on a lot to see if we couldn't get a small ground station that would be feasible and affordable. India had demonstrated some of that. What NASA did with AID money was to rent a stretch DC-8 plane and fill it with nine ground stations. They did this in tranches of three countries at a time. You fly in, set up three ground stations, go to the next country and put up three, and then AID and the host country would organize the communications workshops. NASA had people in the country, of course, who would help organize the two-way communications link back to the Goddard Space Flight Center, and

AID would have people who were experts in education, agriculture, and communications talk about the use of communications on the panel.

Q: Right, so this was basically promoting the use of communications, or was it doing it?

SPRAGUE: No, this was just promoting. There were some films that were shown also that showed how it could be done, how it could be used. We tried to create interest in this use of communications for development. I went out to Goddard at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning because you had to do it at a good time for the host countries, but it was a terrible time for us here.

Q: Real time.

SPRAGUE: I must have done 10 or 12 of these events at Goddard.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: I did one tranche out in Togo and a few other West African countries. Often, you would get the president of the country to participate, and certainly the ministers of the various ministries.

Q: But was it clear what you wanted them to do after they got excited?

SPRAGUE: There wasn't any real follow-up. There was a project Cliff Block developed on the use of satellites that was somewhat of a follow-up to that, although it didn't take place in those same countries. It just happened on one path in North Africa. There were about six countries initially that were involved in that education satellite program. It was somewhat of a follow up, but it didn't start until about three years later, so it wasn't a direct one.

I always thought it was the generosity of the U.S. in its bicentennial year showing these countries what could be done. I don't know of any other program in AID that rented an airplane and did something like that.

Q: No! Money must not have been an object.

SPRAGUE: No. There were a lot of NASA technicians, of course, that you had to have in the countries.

Q: It does raise a question. To what extent did the AID education program interact with other parts of the U.S. government? I don't think the Department of Education necessarily had any international wing, but maybe it did. But did the State Department have opinions about what we were doing? I'm wondering to what extent, especially when you were in your management role, you dealt with other parts of the USG?

SPRAGUE: Almost not at all. The Department of Education, I don't know if they had any involvement at all. There is nothing I can remember. The State Department was not involved.

Q: Right. What about Congress? Were there champions, or people who really thought you should just go away?

SPRAGUE: In the 1970 and 1980s, I'm trying to think of somebody on the Hill that was a big backer. Education didn't get very high on the priority list for AID.

Q: Do you remember at the beginning of the 1980s, at the beginning of the Reagan administration, an effort to zero out education? It was all part of the "too many sectors" and something's got to go.

SPRAGUE: You're not thinking of when they created IDCA (International Development Cooperation Agency) at the end of the Carter administration?

Q: No, no, this was a bit later. IDCA, you're right, did propose getting rid of education.

SPRAGUE: I wasn't there for the "have fewer sectors." That was a problem in the Africa Bureau. What they decided was, they could only manage work in two sectors in any country. So, they would say, "Okay, what goes?" And education dropped out every time.

Q: Always,

SPRAGUE: And education never was put in as a new start. As the head of that education office, I never went to the Hill.

Q: They didn't ask?

SPRAGUE: Nobody was asking for education.

Q: Right. Interesting.

SPRAGUE: Yes.

Q: This morning is February 7th. We are resuming our conversation with David Sprague. When we stopped, David was director of the central Office of Education. There may be a few more things that came up in our conversation we want to review, but then David had the experience of switching from GS (General Service) to FS (Foreign Service) and managing a dual career in the Foreign Service. We want to talk about that as well as his many interesting postings overseas. So, David...

SPRAGUE: I think we have pretty well finished the Civil Service career portion, which extended for 16 years. It was from 1972 to 1988.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: In 1987, my wife, Anne Aarnes, who was also in AID and I decided we would like to convert to the Foreign Service and go overseas. At that time, the Foreign Service was quite open to the idea of Civil Service converting, on paper. There was a great deal made of the fact that there was this possibility for Civil Service to do this switch. We had two small children, and we decided this was the time to make the move, if we were ever going to do it. So, we did make known to Personnel that we were interested. At that time, even though it was talked about as a possibility, no one had done it!

Q: Aha!

SPRAGUE: So, we learned it was not going to be easy. One of the problems was we were both at senior grades.

Q: In the Civil Service?

SPRAGUE: In the Civil Service. I was in Senior Executive Service. The issue was, at what level would they allow us to switch over? There was certainly some blowback from AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) about this because they felt we were taking away positions from the Foreign Service. There was also the problem of what backstop you would be placed in. For me, it was a straightforward into the education backstop but for my wife there was an issue because of the specific educational requirements of the health and population backstop.

Q: And this was even before there was a specific country in mind?

SPRAGUE: Oh, yes. We didn't know. But we had a champion, and that champion was Bob Halligan.

Q: Bob Halligan?

SPRAGUE: Bob Halligan was the head of Personnel. We went to him first, and he liked the idea. He never stopped pushing for us.

Q: And it wouldn't have happened without him, I suspect?

I doubt it would have happened. The rest of the system just simply wasn't geared to accepting the switchover.

The second thing is that I had to go through the process of being interviewed by the State Department people. I'm not sure why it was State, except that I was going into the Senior Foreign Service.

Q: You must have been about the highest-ranking Foreign Service education officer, because it's hard to get to the Senior Foreign Service level?

SPRAGUE: No one had ever made that conversion at that level. They just simply never even thought of it. But, again, I think Bob Halligan may have helped on that, too.

Q: Right. Did he know you personally, or was he just really interested in seeing the agency figure this one out?

SPRAGUE: I had never met him. I think he may have known Anne, but not well. We both had good reputations in USAID and that helped.

Q: So, he just wanted this?

SPRAGUE: He just thought it was a good thing. At that time, they were short on people, especially senior people, and they really did need to fill those positions. So, we went with it. The question then was where, and that gets into the question that every tandem couple faces. How to get two jobs in the same place?

SPRAGUE: Pakistan came up as a possible country assignment, and Pakistan had two jobs—one in education, and one in health, so that worked out just fine.

Q: How long from your conversion to your placement?

SPRAGUE: How long did it take? I think about a year from the time we first started talking about it until we were placed and left. The positions turned out to be, probably mainly by luck, excellent positions for the two of us.

Q: Right. That was 1988?

SPRAGUE: That was 1988. August 8, 1988.

Q: 8/88/8, ok!

SPRAGUE: We knew the U.S. ambassador in Pakistan and had known him for several years. We looked forward to being in the same country.

Q: And also, the mission director, no?

SPRAGUE: We had interviewed with Jim Norris when he was the deputy assistant administrator for the Asia Bureau. The Bureau sent somebody out to Pakistan to see whether we were a fit with those jobs. There was a deputy in the Education Office. They came back and said he didn't want to become the head. So, it worked out well.

What was good about the assignments from our point of view was also that the program in Pakistan for the previous 10, 12 years had not done much in the social sectors. The

new mission director, Jim Norris, wanted to get something going in both health and education. For mainly foreign policy reasons, the budget in Pakistan was huge, so there was ample budget

Q: Which must have been quite a change from your Civil Service days when you were sort of grabbing for every penny for your program?

SPRAGUE: Over the course of the next two years, I was in charge of a portfolio of half a billion dollars.

Q: In education?

SPRAGUE: In education. I went from the five million that was in the Education Office in Washington. Nine days after we arrived was the plane crash that killed General Zia (Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq) and the (U.S.) ambassador, Arnie (Arnold) Raphel. I think it took more than three months before Benazir Bhutto became the new prime minister. There was a great deal of enthusiasm and anticipation. Benazir had gone to school in the U.S. and was immediately looked upon as someone favorable to the West and would be open to development arguments and initiatives.

We started to work on a major primary education program immediately when I arrived. There was no precedent for it. There had been a small program in the 1960s, but it hadn't gone anywhere. Basically, what I did was look at what other donors were doing and see where we would fit. The other major donor, the World Bank was heavily involved in the Punjab province.

Q: Doing basic education?

SPRAGUE: It was a huge program, so it covered basic as well as other things. But this was a time when, for AID, basic education was the priority. We decided that AID would concentrate on Balochistan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP), as it was then called. Normally, you start to design a project like this and it would take a couple of years before you could get it on the ground. Serendipitously, the politics of trying to establish a large USAID education sector presence in Pakistan, with a new leader in Benazir, led us to accelerate the project development. It turned out she was going to visit the U.S. soon.

Q: Have a state visit?

SPRAGUE: Have a state visit with (George H.W.) Bush. The White House wanted to have documents to sign. We put through during the next, I think, three months, development of a project in those two provinces to the tune of \$280 million dollars over 10 years.

Q: Wow!

SPRAGUE: And it was signed in the White House during her visit. I have never seen anything that big move so fast, and it was purely because the U.S. wanted to have something in the social sectors signed at the time she was visiting. But it really launched us in those two provinces.

Q: You must have done a lot of travel during those three months, meeting with officials in Balochistan and the North-West?

SPRAGUE: In both provinces, yes. Over the course of the next four years, I must have spent half my time in either Quetta or Peshawar. For all those reasons, we had a blank slate to design the program that we would like to have. The emphasis from the beginning was, how could we get more girls into school? In fact, I made it the only indicator at that point.

Q: Enrollment of girls?

SPRAGUE: Yes, enrollment. When we started in Balochistan, only three percent of school age girls were in school. It was by far the poorest province, and one that was lagging the most. The NWFP was a little bit better but still, as far as girls' enrollment was concerned, it was bleak.

I still remember one of my first meetings in Quetta with the department of education from the province. We came into this big room with all these tables. I looked around, and there were no women.

Q: None at all?

SPRAGUE: None at all. I said, "Where are the women?" In fact, they weren't sure. I said afterwards, "Now, how do we get to where they are?" And they didn't know where their offices were. I said, "Well, from now on, they have to be in our meeting." That was breaking all precedent.

Q: Yes.

SPRAGUE: I also made sure that we always had women on our side, too, when we would go into those meetings. I thought that was very important.

Q: Did you have to recruit women for your program, or were there already women working in the mission in this field?

SPRAGUE: There was one. She was working in the Program Office, but I poached her. She had a Ph.D. in Economics from American University and was very interested in education. She turned out to be a very good member of the team.

Q: Great.

SPRAGUE: I promoted a couple of other women that had been very low-level in the office up to about a GS-09 or 10-level.

Q: FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals)?

SPRAGUE: FSNs, yes. So, I also had a couple of Pakistani women on our side as well. We did what I had been trained to do in graduate school and had employed in Washington, too, with a systems approach to the problem. By far, the major issue was that you had to have female teachers if you were going to try to get more females in school. You had to be able to get the schools close enough to where the girls were living, so the parents felt safe. You had to convince the parents this was worth doing, to have their daughters go to school. I was surprised at how receptive both the people in the province and the girls themselves were to come and be involved.

Q: Where was the resistance? There must have been some.

SPRAGUE: There certainly was in the beginning with the fathers. They kept saying, "It's not safe. It's not safe. They will be attacked." We would have meetings with these groups of men, and they would say those things. I would say, "Who are you talking about? Aren't you talking about yourselves?"

Q: Yeah. Who do you think is going to attack them?

SPRAGUE: Who's going to attack them? But I think that there was an openness there at the time. I guess because the problem was maybe greater in Balochistan, I spent more of my time there. We did the same thing in NWFP. We did work with curriculum. At least, taking their stated goals in curriculum and trying to get them into lessons that would be at the appropriate level.

They had the problem there, as a lot of developing countries do, to want the kids to learn in the early grades way above what they can do. They think that's better, to make it more difficult instead of spreading it out and learning the skills over time. They push it all into those first few years.

Q: So, you get early dropout, huge dropout?

SPRAGUE: They don't have success.

Q: And is that reading, math, across the whole curriculum, or were they particularly pushing...?

SPRAGUE: It was particularly in math. You would see it quite often. But it would be true in reading, too. We spent most of the time on the curriculum side just spreading out the lessons over the course of more years.

Q: You know that's interesting to me, because one of the things I was always told is, USAID can do a lot but needs to stay away from curriculum. It's just too political. But clearly in this case you were able to do it.

SPRAGUE: Yes, that was always the common wisdom that you can't touch the curriculum. I think what often happens is, you say, "Oh, yes. We know you have the curriculum." But then get in and start working with the people who must implement it, and they have no problem trying to make it more effective and pulling it apart, if you aren't trying to teach Western values or whatever. Especially at that level, you are talking about very basic concepts, basic skills.

Q: We talked a lot about radio education. Were you able to introduce that at all, or was this just too rural?

SPRAGUE: We didn't do it. I think perhaps we might have if we had stayed longer. One very critical element in Balochistan was that we found a very dynamic woman, who had been working in rural development in Balochistan and who we helped to start her own NGO. She became our point person for going from village to village, to not only promote primary education, but also to identify females who could become teachers.

Q: Teachers, yeah.

SPRAGUE: The credit that we have, a lot of it goes to her, because she had her own team then. She's still there and still working.

Q: What's her name?

SPRAGUE: Quratulain Bakhteari, a truly wonderful person.

Q: What you're saying, I'm hearing echoes of Three Cups of Tea? He wasn't wrong. I mean he was wrong maybe in the way he used his money, but the idea of gaining community acceptance is critical.

SPRAGUE: Yes. He was doing it on a very small scale and had problems when he tried to get too big. It was the same goal of trying to get more girls into schools.

What I thought was interesting in the North-West Frontier Province, was that the department of education was scattered, some in Peshawar and some in other places. The curriculum was in Abbottabad. And in Abbottabad at that time, the building was not too far from where Osama bin Laden was living in 2011.

Q: Right, right. So, the people in charge of preparing and reviewing the curriculum were not in the province themselves.

SPRAGUE: Yes, Abbottabad was in North-West Frontier Province. It was just two hours away by car. Beautiful town. It's up high in the mountains. I always enjoyed going there.

SPRAGUE: It took quite a while to get organized once we started implementing because you had to work through a totally bifurcated system. The females were not only in separate schools, but they were also in a separate administration. We had to work to get the administrators closer. And oftentimes you will find in rural areas that boys will go to girls' schools.

Q: But the reverse, not?

SPRAGUE: Not the reverse. We did well for the time we had. It was planned to be a 10-year project. There was an impact evaluation done by AID in 1999.

Q: 1999?

SPRAGUE: This is when it was published in CDIE (Center for Development Information and Evaluation-USAID). Chloe O'Gara was on the team. She sent me an e-mail, I remember, saying they had just looked at it. As it says, "It was designed to improve access, equity and quality of primary education, particularly for rural girls. The program resulted in more than 2,100 new girls' schools in two provinces, a 70 percent increase." It ran from 1989 to 1994. The reason it stopped was that the U.S. government was under the strictures of the Pressler Amendment and the U.S. president had to certify every year that the Pakistanis were not building a bomb. The president had certified that every year when Pakistan was assisting us in fighting in Afghanistan against the Soviets. But then after the Soviets left Afghanistan he did not certify, so the aid program was stopped.

Q: Just cold turkey stopped?

SPRAGUE: We were able to continue for about two years to wind up programs. We didn't want to leave white elephants. I was able to negotiate with the World Bank to pick up the project in Balochistan, and the Germans picked up the project in the North-West Frontier Province. But it was disappointing that we had to leave when we did because of the size of that program, and what I think it was doing. It is also very sad to see it all go backwards now.

Q: Oh, yeah. You think about Malala (Yousafzai). It could have happened back under your watch, but it didn't.

SPRAGUE: No. I really believe that if we could have stayed for the 10 years, we could have accomplished something that would have had the chance of becoming permanent.

Q: Do you think the World Bank didn't give it the same attention you would have?

SPRAGUE: From the outside, you might not even have known there had been a change, because they kept the same team. But I think it was only for three years. The World Bank doesn't have people on the ground to follow up on things. I always said I would use any

study the World Bank does with no problem because they do an excellent job, but I would never use them to implement anything because it's not what they do well.

Q: Because they are just not there. They come back for inspection trips every six months or something like that. Was that the largest project you ever implemented?

SPRAGUE: Yes, by far. I've not heard of another education project in AID that has been that large, nor that developed as rapidly as that one did.

Q: Right

SPRAGUE: I think the funding process we used helped the program a lot. We would give dollars to the central Pakistan Ministry of Finance which they could use as they wished. At the same time, they agreed to put an equivalent number of Pakistani rupees into the provincial education budgets for primary education. We would do this in tranches after getting agreement from each province on specific objectives for each tranche of funds. Sometimes we would frontload the funding especially for construction but more often it was after the province had accomplished specific agreed upon objectives.

Q: And did the central government....?

SPRAGUE: The central government got the dollars. They wanted to be able to pay off debt with the dollars.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: So, both sides win, because the province wanted to have the rupees and have them in their budget. It gave us a level of control of what was going to happen. We were flexible on that. I always thought that was a great mechanism. Everybody won.

Q: Sort of performance-based management?

SPRAGUE: Yes. Often USAID funds never leave the capital city in the central budget, but these didn't. The agreement stated, "The central government will give that like amount in rupees in the province budget." And we could track it. We could follow that.

Q: And the government had plenty of rupees?

SPRAGUE: Yes. That was no problem.

Q: Interesting.

SPRAGUE: The funding mechanism is one I wish had been picked up more.

Q: Right. I wonder if it had.

SPRAGUE: I never saw it again. Of course, I only have seen what was in the countries we were living and working.

Q: Right. Did you try it anywhere else?

SPRAGUE: No. I was never again in a place where the USAID mission had that much money and the host government was cooperative.

Q: Well, you have good reason to be proud of that effort. I was just calculating. The young girls you helped would now be in their 30s.

SPRAGUE: Yes, I wonder how many of them got all the way through primary school.

Q: Or even got far enough to be literate and to be able to participate actively in their communities.

SPRAGUE: Yes. In the two provinces, there were 348,000 girls enrolled in Grades 1-5 in 1989. In 1996, that number was 761,000, so it almost doubled the number of girls in school. Boys' enrollment increased from 1.3 million to 1.6 million. As I told the mission director, Jim Norris, "I would do this job even if you didn't pay me. I had the chance to design what I wanted, I had the resources I wanted, and the people to do it."

Q: Sounds like kind of a high point in your career?

SPRAGUE: It was. It really was.

Q: So, you had to leave earlier than you planned? Did you stay until 1994?

SPRAGUE: It was 1993 when we left, but we stayed five years. In general, I think staying five years makes sense in many places. You get to know the country, you get to know what's going on, and you can have a better chance of successful implementation. It increases the chances for the initiative being sustained. What the agency has gone to more recently with the number of conflict countries escalating is one-year assignments and two-year assignments.

Q: Often without family?

SPRAGUE: Often without family. It's very difficult to implement programs.

Q: It would be hard to implement a development program.

SPRAGUE: Yes, it is. There are a lot of countries now where that's the norm, that kind of assignment. Anyway, we left in 1993.

Q: And had to find another place for the two of you?

SPRAGUE: We had to find another place for the two of us. We ended up being assigned to Ukraine. We came back to the U.S. and had four months of Russian language training and then went to Ukraine, where I became the deputy mission director. My wife established and headed the Program Office.

Q: Did you have any qualms about leaving the education sector, or were the needs defined as a tandem couple situation paramount?

SPRAGUE: Finding a job was not easy. If we could have found two jobs at a senior level where I could have stayed in education, I would have done it. In fact, initially, the job was not advertised as a deputy mission director, it was advertised as something like general development officer or something like that. But it was to work with the mission director. Then when I got there, I found out he just hadn't been able to establish the position as a deputy, but that's what he wanted.

Q: And this was early days in the post-Soviet period, right?

SPRAGUE: We got there in January of 1994.

Q: So, they were just building up the program?

SPRAGUE: Yes. In fact, when my wife and I and one other colleague arrived, we doubled the staff!

Q: Okay!

SPRAGUE: So, it was very small. In many ways, it was a real education, for me anyway, to see how the Soviet system worked up close. Ukraine had declared its independence a couple years earlier. It was still very, very much the central system that the Soviets had established. A totally different kind of work, because in so many ways Ukraine was a developed country.

Q: Kids got to school.

SPRAGUE: Kids got to school. They had good teachers. They had standards that were very high. Teachers were revered. We never did have an education program there. It was mainly working on a policy level. In health, we had hospital exchanges and things like that, but it was the economic system that had fallen apart. That was just terrible for so many parts of Ukrainian society. They had no fallback.

Q: Right. Probably like elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, the pensions weren't being paid and people were desperate.

SPRAGUE: A lot of people on the streets selling things just to try and make it.

Q: Right, whatever they had. I remember at the time stories from the AID mission, and the temperature. There was no heat, or there was very little heat, so you were working in maybe 60-degree offices or less. It's hard to imagine.

SPRAGUE: It was really something coming from Pakistan. We arrived in January, and it was at least 20 below zero Fahrenheit. I can still remember taking the trolley down to the office from our first little dacha. The ice was about an inch-and-a-half thick on the inside of the window!

Q: Oh!

SPRAGUE: It was incredible. It was a different experience, but I thought it was fascinating to experience a totally different culture.

Q: So, at that point your kids were in grade school?

SPRAGUE: They were.

Q: And there was an international school?

SPRAGUE: Well, in Ukraine, there was an international school, but it was very, very small. In fact, the U.S. ambassador had four children and that was half the student body in the first year.

It was a new system that two brothers from Idaho had started with an international school in Yemen. The principle behind it was that you let time vary. In other words, you establish what it is the students should learn, and then you give each one as much time as he or she needs to get there. The company was called Quality Schools International.

Q So it's not a graded system?

SPRAGUE: It's not a graded system. It works for some kids, but not others, that's for sure. It ended up that we kept our daughter there because there were enough kids in her grade, but we sent our son to boarding school in Switzerland, which was both good and bad.

Q: Highlights from that mission program?

SPRAGUE: Well, it's hard to say. It was hard to see progress because the centralized system in Ukraine was so entrenched. But we did, I think, a fairly good job of trying to help them take small parcels of land and establish private ownership. It was the same with small companies.

Q: So, this would be the state selling off ownership to individuals?

SPRAGUE: Yes. And usually we did it through auctions because the people were so poor. The big thing was to establish ownership of private property, a totally new concept.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: That was a major program. We did work with the banking system. We had banking advisors. I did one recruiting trip where I hired seven or eight personal service contractors (PSCs) from the U.S. They came, and we had them in almost every area we were working in then. We had senior people who were able to work with the Ukrainians. But it was slow going. We did some work in the hospital exchanges. That was, I think, a good program. Ukraine's hospitals had gone downhill very rapidly without resources. Anybody going into the hospital had to take in their own linens and towels. Often, they had to pay for their own medicine and sometimes go out and get it. It was primitive according to our standards.

Q: Attitudes towards Americans? Was there overhang from Soviet times, or were you generally welcomed?

SPRAGUE: In the AID mission, there was great acceptance. They loved us. You know, the Ukrainians love to party, so there were a lot of parties always. Everybody wanted to go to the U.S.

Q: Training?

SPRAGUE: For whatever reason we could get them there! Even short trips, they just loved it. Working with the government people, it was mixed, because there was still a sensitivity to the idea that we had won, and they had lost. There were a couple of reformers. A fellow named Viktor Pynzenyk had become vice prime minister there at one time. He was from Lviv State University and that was more Western-oriented. The mission supported him very strongly. The mission director wanted to turn the whole program over to him, but we talked him out of that because Pynzenyk was gone after not too many months. There were occasions like that at senior levels where we could have an entrée. There wasn't any stability in the government. There was chaos often and it was difficult to find a leader to work with that could stay in office and govern.

Q: As in Russia, did the communist leaders sort of reappear in new clothing?

SPRAGUE: Not so much when we were there, although certainly at the second level or third level, it was all the same people, because they were there to stay. The real difficulties with Russia were overwhelming at the beginning because they started to withdraw their subsidies on energy almost immediately, and that was crippling the country. The leadership in Kiev at that time was pretty much Ukrainian and oriented toward creating a country separate from the Russians. Some in the eastern part of the country still have not accepted that notion.

Q: Still!

Q: So, the corruption that is talked about so much now, it certainly was there then?

SPRAGUE: Oh, yes. Of course, the overwhelming problem at the beginning was hyperinflation. It got so bad that they quit printing new bills and said, "Look, just assume there are three more zeroes at the end." It was just devastating. It took several years to get that down. The government eventually issued new currency.

Q: What do you think was the biggest success of that early period that the U.S. had or that USAID had?

SPRAGUE: Developmentally?

Q: If it was developmentally.

SPRAGUE: The small-scale privatization program was certainly one effective effort. I think there was a lot of good work done in the health sector. I don't know if it got into the system, but for individual hospitals it was very successful. It was a regional program. We were also working in Belarus and Moldova.

Q: Oh, right! Were the programs similar there? Mainly focused on economic...?

SPRAGUE: They were much smaller, and I would say in Belarus not much happened, because they had elected *Alexander Lukashenko as president, a holdover from Soviet times*. Moldova was again still under the thumb of the Russians to a large extent. Transnistria had the 14th Army Division from Russia camped there.

Q: Stationed there?

SPRAGUE: Stationed right there. I went a few times to Moldova and Belarus, but as a deputy director I didn't go out that much.

Q: Right. What kind of interaction did you have with the State Department? Obviously, you worked closely with the ambassador, but did you have regular visits from Washington from State?

SPRAGUE: Well, this was the time when State initiated the idea of a coordinator for NIS (Newly Independent States).

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: The coordinator for the former Soviet Union was Richard Morningstar. He was a source of great conflict because he very much wanted to be the one to call the shots, down to the level of the projects.

Q: So, it probably also was a conflict with the ambassador, too?

SPRAGUE: We had one incident there. This was when I was the acting director, and the mission was on the 19th floor of a building right downtown. It belonged to the Ministry of Industries. Suddenly, the minister decided he wanted his building back, and he asked us to leave immediately. We were looking for another place. We had found one, but it had to be renovated. It was in an area that was rundown, and the building was rundown. We said, "You've got to give us time." He went to the ambassador, who sided with him.

Q: Oh, yeah, I know who you mean.

SPRAGUE: He said, "Well, I think he has the right to tell you to leave." I said, "We have nowhere to go." He said, "Well, you know, find someplace." I said, "We're looking!" Anyway, that was in the middle of the winter. The minister turned off the heat, and then he turned off the electricity, too, so we didn't have any lights. We could only work during the day when the sun was shining.

Q: Oh, my gosh! Without electricity?

SPRAGUE: Without electricity. The computers wouldn't work. Nothing would work.

Q: How long did that last?

SPRAGUE: It went on for almost four weeks.

Q: But you couldn't invoke the ambassador because he had already sided with the owner?

SPRAGUE: Right. It was also the time the U.S. government was shut down, so there was no help coming from Washington. So, I waited until a delegation came out from State, headed by James *Collins* who had been in Moscow. He was eating breakfast. There was a group of them. I said, "I just want to tell you what's going on, because you won't hear it from the ambassador." I was taking a real chance. He said, "That's going to stop!" He went from that breakfast to the ambassador and said, "You've got to stop this." I didn't know he had done that. I went over for a meeting a little bit later, and the ambassador came racing across the room and said, "Why did you say that?"

Q: Because we're cold!

SPRAGUE: I said, "We've got to do something! We've got to fix this." It still took another week or two until word came from Washington to the ambassador that the situation could not go on. Then, he did go and talk to the minister and got him to relent a little bit. But the minister was following the rules of the old system. They felt that they ran things. They didn't care about these foreigners that were there.

Q: Right. Probably just as happy if they left.

SPRAGUE: Yes. It was a funny time. We had a couple of very clever FSNs on our staff who could go into the wiring and hook our phones back up again. We would go a day or two before the minister's people would find out we were hooked back up. It was quite an adventure.

We were in Ukraine from 1994-1997, and then again had to find two more jobs. We went to Bangladesh. There, my wife and I made the decision that she would continue to go on towards senior management. I said I would be perfectly happy to go back to a technical area. There wasn't any education program in that mission, so I ended up being the head of the Program Office for a year. The following year I took over a technical team. In Bangladesh, what I remember more than anything is, I had four sectors in the program I was heading—agriculture, small business, environment, and energy. I spent most of my time on energy. I found it fascinating because Bangladesh is an extremely poor country. It has very few resources, especially natural resources, unless you count water.

Q: Which they have.

SPRAGUE: But they had discovered gas.

Q: Offshore discoveries or onshore?

SPRAGUE: It was up in the north. Bangladesh's government has traded leadership back and forth between two women for thirty years. They agree on nothing except they would not export that gas to India.

Q: Hmmm.

SPRAGUE: India is still to this day 90 percent coal driven in its energy program. They wanted the gas from Bangladesh. They would have loved to have it. But Bangladesh wouldn't sell it. We got involved in that.

Q: So was it all for domestic use

\SPRAGUE: They didn't even bring it up. They wouldn't get it out of the ground.

Q: Because if they brought it up, India would be the beneficiary?

SPRAGUE: They would do something with it.

Q: Interesting.

SPRAGUE: They had more than enough for themselves for 100 years, but they wouldn't export it. To this day, I don't know whether they ever have.

Q: Bangladesh, maybe not at this time, but certainly over the last 20 years has gone from a net importer of foods to a net exporter, I think. Did the U.S. play any role in agricultural development?

SPRAGUE: We had programs certainly, and Monsanto was there in a big way. We worked on small things in agriculture in Bangladesh. The program was 80 percent family planning because it was a country the size of Wisconsin that has four million people, and Bangladesh had 140 million. The population density was just overwhelming. The AID program had been active for quite some time.

Q: Is that what your wife worked on?

SPRAGUE: She became the deputy mission director when we were there.

Q: Oh, that's right.

SPRAGUE: David Peet and then Margaret Neuse headed the population program and Richard Greene was deputy.

Q: So, you had some of the leaders in the population field?

SPRAGUE: That was a prize post for the population people.

Q: Right, because that's where you had the resources, and the government was receptive.

SPRAGUE: Yes. They had some good programs that I think had real impact.

Q: Absolutely!

SPRAGUE: The other thing that went on, and it made for a very awkward first year, was reengineering.

Q: Yes. Reams of paper.

SPRAGUE: The mission director had tried everything he could think of to get various parts of the mission to communicate better. He latched onto reengineering to solve that problem. Unfortunately, it solved the communication problem but brought with it other management problems. For example, often nobody knew who was responsible for what. The Democracy Office made a big point of having the entire staff involved anytime they were going to have a meeting. Secretaries would be there, whatever level would be there, and they all had equal voice in what should be done. They prided themselves on this egalitarian approach to the work. Unfortunately, the office suffered when a disastrous audit of the mission's reengineering efforts couldn't find data that supported the office's claims of their programs' effectiveness.

Q: I think another term that was used at time was “matrix management,” which basically meant everybody.

SPRAGUE: But there was an ideology to this reengineering.

Q: It was part of the Gore reinventing government effort in the late 1990s, I am pretty sure.

SPRAGUE: The big emphasis was on going out and sitting down with people and listening to what they wanted.

Q: As if you hadn't done that before?

SPRAGUE: Yes. And as if that one person you talked to was going to be the guy.

Q: Represent? So, your job as the program officer was to somehow make sense of all of this.

SPRAGUE: Well, the reengineering kind of made the program office job obsolete. That was the reason I switched out of it and became the technical team leader, which I enjoyed. I had to become an agricultural officer to do it though.

Q: Excellent!

SPRAGUE: I had to come in and be interviewed by the head of the agricultural program in Washington, John Lewis!

Q: Yeah! And you passed muster, did you?

SPRAGUE: He was not happy I was using a position that a real ag person could have but he went along.

But, we're coming up to the end of my AID career, which was in March of 2000.

Q: So, you ended your career with the Bangladesh assignment?

SPRAGUE: Yes. Actually a few months early, because I got an offer from the World Bank before we moved.

Q: Before we move beyond AID, what do you think were the high points for you in Bangladesh in terms of what you were able to accomplish, or anything else?

SPRAGUE: We provided a major relief program, mainly food aid, following one of the worst floods in Bangladesh in a hundred years. That was in the summer and fall of 1998. On a much smaller scale, we did support Muhammad Younus on his micro lending

program in Bangladesh. He would probably say we should have done more. It was a highly successful program.

Q: Well, of course!

SPRAGUE: But we did certainly support the idea of startups of small business or small programs like that.

Q: And that was early days for him, right?

SPRAGUE: Yes, but he was well known in the micro lending field.

Q: But not much beyond Bangladesh at that time.

SPRAGUE: Yes. The only thing, as I said before, that I worked on at the policy level with the minister was the energy program. There was tremendous corruption at that level, too. In fact, the minister disappeared one day. Suddenly, he was gone. It turns out they were accusing him of all sorts of corruption.

Q: And he left the country, or he went to jail, or who knows?

SPRAGUE: I don't know where he went to tell you the truth.

Q: It must have made it difficult for organizations like AID to try and run programs with the kind of oversight that you need to have when the corruption is so built in?

SPRAGUE: That's true. But I was able to hire a long-term personal services contractor to head the mission's energy program who was instrumental in helping to establish a regional energy program for the South Asian countries. It was the South Asia Regional Initiative (SARI) involving India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh. It was still functioning 6 years ago when I was doing some work in India.

Q: We are returning to David Sprague. It is February 7th. He has just left AID, but he has not left development or education, so I have asked him to talk a bit about what he did after AID in the development field.

SPRAGUE: Well, as I said before, I was part of a tandem couple. My wife was assigned to Egypt to be the deputy mission director of the Egypt program. So, I went there. After a few months, I started working as a consultant, first with the World Bank doing supervisory missions every six months or so. I continued to do that over the course of the next three years, at different times.

Q: Looking mainly at their education portfolio, or across the board?

SPRAGUE: All education. They had programs in primary, middle, and secondary schools. I also did an exploratory study for pre-school. I did supervisory missions in all those programs over the course of the next three years.

Q: So, you got to see the way the World Bank works and what's important for them, and it's probably slightly different from AID's priorities?

SPRAGUE: I might say a word about the World Bank, what they did, because I think it's important to see what they got away from after a while. The World Bank, like other aid agencies, needs to move the money. They need to have it disbursed as programs are implemented. Nothing was moving in these education programs, so they created a parallel structure to the ministry of education. It literally took the best people out of the ministry, paid them two or three times as much, and had them working directly for the World Bank. That did make things move better, but it was all outside the system. I saw this so clearly because I did all these supervisory missions. I would be looking at what happened in the ministry, and nothing was happening. These people who were outside were good people, and they were going on and becoming consultants.

Q:] Earning even more money!

SPRAGUE: Earning even more and moving on! But it was a real problem, I think, with the World Bank program.

Q: Right. Well, I think that's been an issue that AID has confronted a lot. MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) also sets up a separate management unit. It's effective in one way, and it really does not build the capacity in another.

SPRAGUE: Exactly.

Q: This is sort of an ongoing issue.

SPRAGUE: Next, I took a longer-term position as a consultant with USAID in Egypt and was in on the beginning of a pilot program in Alexandria. The purpose of that pilot program was to try to help Alexandria improve its primary education system. AID had tried for years to persuade the Minister of Education to improve the education system, so it was a tremendous breakthrough when he finally agreed to allow a new small pilot effort in Alexandria. There wasn't much AID money other than to pay me and one person working for me. There was participant training money that I could use to send people for training. We started towards the end of 2000, and I worked in this program until 2003. Then my wife became the mission director in Jordan, so we moved there, but I came back to Alexandria every other week for the next year. I was with that program for four years.

We did several things. One was, to send a lot of teachers for training to the U.S. and to do training in country. I hired a group of Canadian primary school teachers, who for some reason had landed in Egypt, to do training in Alexandria because they were very hands

on, very practical. The idea was to get the kids to be more active and become active learners.

Q: These would be teacher-trainers or teachers themselves?

SPRAGUE: Some teacher-trainers and some teachers. We had schools in two different directorates I think they called them.

Q: Governorates?

SPRAGUE: Alexandria was the governorate. We had a subset of schools within two directorates. That was always a problem. I said, "If you want to change the system, you also need to take over one governorate entirely and do the whole thing," because we never got to the personnel system. I think what had the most lasting impact was getting the parents and the community more involved in the schools by setting up what we called boards of trustees (BOTs).

Q: Got it! Board of trustees, which was not like a PTA (Parent Teacher Association)?

SPRAGUE: Well, it was the same idea, except you didn't have to be a parent to be on it because we tried to get community leaders as well.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: In that program, we did try to look at how to get the teachers teaching differently. We tried to get the community to be more interested in what was happening in the school.

Q: Not just a black box, but give them some sense that they had some say over what's happening?

SPRAGUE: It was really a struggle, because they didn't collect any data on what was happening in these schools. I got one subset of schools to design and implement a math test. I had to pay everybody extra to do this. Then I used that data to hold workshops for these groups, these BOTs, in the evening to show them the kind of thing you should be looking at and caring about—are the kids learning anything? You can get this data, if you require the schools to collect it.

Q: But you say that's now implemented across Egypt?

SPRAGUE: I worked with an FSN in the mission who was just great, Hala al Serafi. We set up a technical committee at the governorate level with the secretary. Then we had the head of the local university and other distinguished people on this oversight committee. The fellow who had been president of this local university was very interested in this project and came to every meeting. Hala took him to the States on a trip to show him how good schools are run. Luckily, he became the federal minister of education.

Q: Oh my gosh! While you were there?

SPRAGUE: It was towards the end of the time I was there.

Q: Nice to have an advocate.

SPRAGUE: The other advocate was the governor of Alexandria, who was someone I used to brief periodically. He was very interested in trying to improve the schools in Alexandria. He later became the federal minister of rural development. This was under Hosni Mubarak. When we wanted to move what Hala had put together—the whole concept of community involvement in the schools—into Upper Egypt, the USAID mission had the backing of the minister of education and the minister of rural development, which I think is what really made the difference. It is still going.

Q: With AID funding?

SPRAGUE: With AID funding. Yes, AID got into it and did much more when the program started to move to Upper Egypt. I think Creative Associates got the contract. I felt good about getting something going that I think helped the system. We did it on a shoestring as far as money was concerned. It was something like \$1 million over four years.

Q: Wow! But these BOTs took off?

SPRAGUE: They caught on.

Q: Did you find that it was mainly men in the community who showed up at the meetings?

SPRAGUE: No.

Q: Women did, too?

SPRAGUE: Oh, yes. In fact, it was harder to get the men.

Q: Education was a women's thing?

SPRAGUE: Well, it was interesting. You would have some women who would basically want to take over the school. But the more general problem was the lack of interest.

Q: The lack of interest.

SPRAGUE: In the schools in Alexandria, what the planners didn't do early on was set aside land, and that became an incredibly serious problem as time went on. They ended up with no space to build new schools. Often there was no room in between schools. You

would have six of these huge schools with a couple thousand kids in them and no place to go at recess or any other time out.

Q: Because land was so valuable?

SPRAGUE: Because they didn't have any land. They would have to go so far out of the city to get it that kids couldn't go there.

Q: Yes.

SPRAGUE: That's a major problem in a lot of countries. Once when I was talking about this problem, a local official said, "You're talking about eminent domain?" I said, "Absolutely. You have to have it if you are going to be able to have basic social services delivered close enough to where people are living."

Q: Right. Isn't that interesting?

SPRAGUE: Yes, it was.

Q: One other thing I know you worked on, and it may be part of the same program, was engaging the private sector. I don't know whether that was with a vocational focus or whether it was part of the community mobilization, but I remember you talking about business leaders, and I thought it was in the Alexandria program. Am I misremembering? It's possible.

SPRAGUE: Well, when we first started, one of the prime movers was one of the major business leaders in Alexandria. He became a minister—minister of trade, I think. He was one of the people we were reporting to at the beginning. When we would meet with the governor, he would come. So, we had that part of the community interested in what was happening in the schools. We would try to get local business people on those BOTs. We didn't get any resources from them for the schools, although you would get parents to come, like a PTA, and they would paint things and help with the boundary walls, or something like that.

Q: So, they didn't put up resources, but evidencing interest was critical, too?

SPRAGUE: Right, exactly.

Q: So, it's still going. Do you know if there have been evaluations of the program in terms of learning outcomes?

SPRAGUE: There must have been because AID has had two projects follow on to that. I haven't seen them, but they would have to have had positive evaluation of what was going on.

Q: That they continued.

SPRAGUE: That they continued and still are

Q: So, after Egypt...?

SPRAGUE: I went to Jordan because my wife became the mission director in Jordan. The first year, I didn't do anything in Jordan because I went back to Egypt. But then I started working for the USAID mission in Amman. The part I remember the best and liked the most was working with the Jordan Education Initiative. It was started when King Abdullah sat down at the World Economic Forum in Davos with [Bill] Gates and the head of CISCO, and a few others and talked about how they would wire up the country and install computers into the schools. I helped try to bring some rationality to that because there already was a major reform project underway with World Bank funding. I thought it was well developed, and they had done a good job of having separate tasks for the donors, so they weren't duplicating. This technology initiative came in on top of that and didn't consider what was happening. I think AID did try to help by getting an advisor in there to help set up the hardware in Amman, but the real problem was the last mile into the schools and training the teachers, because you could go around several years later and find those computers never used.

Q: Right, locked up?

SPRAGUE: Yes. King Abdullah handed off the Jordan Education Initiative to Queen Rania, and she became the one that was most interested in what was happening through this program. I did several things with her and with that initiative.

Q: Was the International Youth Foundation (IYF) involved in that? Because I know she came on their board, and I know she has worked with IYF. But I don't know if it was on that project.

SPRAGUE: No, it wasn't part of this. She became a strong advocate for education, which was good. She always talked about evaluation, "We want to know what's going on in the program." Jordan couldn't come up with a leader for that initiative, the Jordan Education Initiative. That was something that Queen Rania wanted to keep going, so I took the leadership post for a while. My job was to work myself out of that job.

Q: Right. Find a Jordanian?

SPRAGUE: I finally found a Jordanian. It took a while. I had a professor from Ireland who strung me along for five months or so, who said he would come and be the number two and turned me down at the very end. Eventually, I got two or three people to run the program. It took almost a year.

Q: Is the program still going?

SPRAGUE: Yes. Queen Rania has created a larger unit now and has brought the JEI in as one part of it.

Q: So, the computers are getting deployed and used for education?

SPRAGUE: Yes. The ministry, as far as I know, is continuing to try to integrate the use of the computers into the school. Queen Rania got more interested in teacher training more generally. I worked with her chief of staff.

Q: Rania Atalla?

SPRAGUE: No. At that time, it was Muna Sukhtian. The reason I remember her so well is that we worked on several things. One was setting up a program to reward teachers by having an awards program for them every year. We worked very hard on that. It was a big success. It was nationwide and continues.

Q: That's great.

SPRAGUE: The reason I mention her is because with ANERA (American Near East Refugee Aid), the Sukhtian Foundation now has started preschools in the West Bank working with ANERA.

Q: So that's her family?

SPRAGUE: It's her family. They have a pharmaceutical company. Anyway, I enjoyed working directly with the education sector.

Q: And the rationale for the teacher recognition is hard work, and you were probably getting teacher attrition?

SPRAGUE: There was a problem of getting teachers out into the rural areas. I can't remember now if attrition was a major problem.

Q: Well, it's a good thing to do in any case.

SPRAGUE: It was. It was important to raise morale. The teachers were not paid as well as they should have been, so that program was trying to make up for it. The Queen at that time was very popular because she would do things like that. Get out in front and take that initiative.

Q: I don't know what her current focus is, but it's hard to sustain popularity forever.

SPRAGUE: Yes, that's true. Then my wife and I went back to Pakistan.

Q: You must have the record for the longest string of overseas assignments without a Washington stop?

SPRAGUE: I thought we did, but then I have run into people since who have been overseas a long time. I think Dick and Heather Goldman might have been the longest. They never were in Washington.

Q: Never?

SPRAGUE: Which I think is not good, because you don't know Washington. I really thought it was an advantage knowing how Washington worked.

Q: I agree.

SPRAGUE: I think people who avoid it entirely, even people who sometimes want to come in, they are needed so badly overseas that AID doesn't let them--that's too bad. But my work in Pakistan was of a different nature. That's where I worked as a supervisor in the mailroom under the EFM (Eligible Family Member) program.

Q: Because at that point you couldn't have gone as a dependent spouse?

SPRAGUE: Exactly. They didn't allow dependent spouses who work on the Embassy compound.

Q: This was 2005?

SPRAGUE: 2007. So, I worked as an eligible family member (EFM), which has become an important part of the embassies overseas. In fact, the one thing the current secretary of state has allowed is an increase in the number of EFMs because the posts need them so badly. And they need jobs for spouses. I did that for maybe a year and three months and then I took a job working on education as a PSC in the AID mission. The one thing I worked on there that I thought was important was a five-year strategy for education for Pakistan.

Q: How did it feel coming back 20 years later?

SPRAGUE: Well, it was very hard because I couldn't go out and see what was going on in the provinces. The security situation had gotten so bad that we weren't allowed to do that. The other thing that Pakistan had done—they almost had started when we were there the first time—the central government would always play games with the provinces when it came to allocate the budgets. They would often give the whole allocation of funds to the provinces towards the end of the fiscal year, and the provinces couldn't spend it all in time. And then the central government would say, "Look, we're going to cut you down because you can't spend it." They would do those games. But what the central government did next was go to the other extreme. They just divided up the annual budget and gave it to the provinces at the beginning of the fiscal year, but they didn't give them any help in how to spend it. The poorer provinces didn't know how to handle that much money at that time. That caused a lot of problems. But the security situation was bad,

especially in the provinces—Balochistan and North-West Frontier. School systems existed, but I don't know what the quality was.

Q: Whether the kids were getting into school? Of course, there always have been madrassas, but they must have become much more central to education in the rural areas.

SPRAGUE: Especially in NWFP, they became very big because there were so many Afghan refugees there.

Q: Ah, right.

SPRAGUE: And the madrassas had a lot of financial help from the Saudis.

The reason I mentioned that strategy is because when we came back to the U.S. and my wife started working with an Afghan-Pakistan program, the officer who oversaw education at that time used that strategy paper.

Q: Oh yeah?

SPRAGUE: He said it was his “bible.”

Q: Oh, excellent.

SPRAGUE: So, it had some impact anyway as time went on.

Q: That's great.

SPRAGUE: Then I came back to the U.S. and worked for about 19 months for the Academy for Educational Development (AED) heading the Education Policy and Data Center, the EPDC.

Q: So that's the first time you had worked directly running a program for a non-governmental organization?

SPRAGUE: For an NGO? Yes, it was. I had always been...

Q: On the other side of the table?

SPRAGUE: On the other side, the government side.

Q: How did that feel?

SPRAGUE: It was a strange feeling. It took time to get used to. The first few times when I met with the AID officer who was in charge, who had only been in AID a few months, she was trying to tell us what to do!

Q: Right

SPRAGUE: That was a funny feeling! The overwhelming feeling, I had was that this was a program that had been going for five years and was being neglected by USAID. George Ingram had been in at the beginning of it and had created a capability for USAID to use data to plan. There had been no effort to reach out to the missions to get them to use it. It wasn't being used! They were generating study after study after study.

Q: Academics were using them. I know that.

SPRAGUE: Yes. And all the forward-looking forecasting predictions of what was going to be happening, but none of it was helping missions do something. David Barth had taken over the Office of Education where the program was. That was the first time, I said, "Why aren't you using this?" USAID had spent \$7 million creating this capability and they weren't using it.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: I did manage to get some of the staff out to AID missions a few times, but it was nothing like I thought it would be.

Q: Has that center..., did it collapse when AED collapsed?

SPRAGUE: No, it's still going. It's headed now by the woman I hired, Carina Omoeva.

Q: Oh, I remember that.

SPRAGUE: She now has 12 people working for her.

Q: Excellent! She's at FHI360?

SPRAGUE: Yes.

Q: And are missions using it? Do you know who's using it?

SPRAGUE: They are funded by Wellspring. Have you ever heard of Wellspring?

Q: Yes, it's a private foundation that invests in education.

SPRAGUE: They put in half a million dollars every other year or so, and that's what is keeping it going.

Q: So, AID is not putting money in it?

SPRAGUE: AID is not putting money into it. That all has to do with the narrowing in the focus of the USAID program.

Q: To early grade reading?

SPRAGUE: To early grade reading. This center is made much more for planning at a macro level.

Q: Right, a systems approach.

SPRAGUE: A systems approach. As far as I know, no one is thinking that way in USAID now.

Q: Yeah. They are just measuring reading outcomes.

SPRAGUE: They are really into reading, although now they are talking about math. Maybe they will work their way back up!

Q: Back to a whole curriculum?

SPRAGUE: I did a consultancy for the USAID India mission working half time over a period of 12 months, developing two projects for them.

Q: In education?

SPRAGUE: In education, which are being implemented. I don't know what's happened with them, but they had languished in the mission because the mission didn't have any education people to develop them.

Q: So, they hired you?

SPRAGUE: They hired me. I was half-time in India and half-time here. That was fun. I was glad it got through. Arizona State University was one of the contractors, and I did one trip there to work with them.

Q: And was its focus early grade reading, or was it broader?

SPRAGUE: No, it was broader than that. It was teacher training. Also, for seven weeks, I was director of a USAID project for the University Research Company (URC). AID had created a network for early grade reading. They didn't want to give it to one of the firms that implemented early grade reading, so they gave it to URC, which works in health. This is URC's only education program. They had a problem with the chief of party, so they hired me to fill in and recruit a new one.

Q: The role of URC was basically to try and keep this network functioning?

SPRAGUE: Yes. And they've done a good job. I'm on the mailing list, so I see it's still going, and I think it has become stable. Running that network is hard work, because you had to get all the implementers to share their information and results.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: RTI (Research Triangle Institute) had a lock on early grade reading for so long, they felt they should have had this project. That was the hardest one to corral. But I found it interesting.

Q: Sounds like you were the "go-to" person after you left AID for when there was a problem project or when there was a difficult design? I can't think of too many others who sort of continued to get pulled in, even after they left AID.

SPRAGUE: Oh. The only other thing I've done that is most enjoyable is teaching.

Q: Yes, at SAIS (School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins).

SPRAGUE: One semester at SAIS, and two semesters at Georgetown University.

Q: Right, and you taught....

SPRAGUE: What did we call the course?

Q: I think Education and Development or something creative like that. You had the success of one of your students join AID as an education officer.

SPRAGUE: Yes, Anne Flaker. Annie Alcid is also working in development, somewhere overseas.

Q: And Arjun Upadhyay is still working for Results for Development but working on education.

SPRAGUE: I wonder whether any of the women from Latin America went back and worked in education.

Q: I don't know. Well, you've certainly done your part over the years to try to bring the systems approach to education.

SPRAGUE: I understand why they went to the early grade reading, almost exclusively for a while. The USAID Administrator, Rajiv Shah, was the one who did it, because he would not fund anything that couldn't be measured. But I still maintain we should be able to do that plus. We can help with a broader approach to the systems in education. We must be able to get support for that, get money for that.

Q: Right. I guess Raj Shah thought he needed to have something that was measurable and trackable to sell it on the Hill. But there was a time, and it was before the early grade reading, where basic education really enjoyed a lot of Congressional support.

SPRAGUE: Yes. And people like Representative Nita Lowey....

Q: Were critical to it.

SPRAGUE: Really great. And the budget went up tremendously because of it.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: I don't know. It appears that other donors have followed the lead of USAID on this early grade reading, because at least DFID (UK Department for International Development) is doing that, too. But the Germans are still very much into vocational education. The Scandinavians are very much into the social development part of the education system. I don't know about the World Bank. The World Bank is still at a macro level.

Q: I'll let you go, but any other sort of lessons learned? There are a number I think you pointed to, and one of the interesting ones for me is your sense that it is a mistake for Foreign Service officers not to have stints in Washington. It might be more pleasant, but in fact they are more effective if they have learned how to work the Washington system.

SPRAGUE: Very much so. You know, there is a tradeoff between having people longer in-country and getting the "clientitis" that they worry about. But the downside is, you always must educate people who come in, and it takes time, and the program suffers from a lack of continuity. I just found that the five years in Pakistan were by far the best because I had long enough to see something established.

Q: Right.

SPRAGUE: You gain in having experiences from several countries that you can draw on when you're assigned, but I think you lose something with continuity and stability as far as the program is concerned.

Q: Right. Well, I think the other thing that has come through in your oral history is the importance of recruiting and training younger staff, FSNs, and if you are turning over every two years, you can't do that.

SPRAGUE: That's true.

Q: So, you've been responsible for bringing a lot of people in and along in the education area.

SPRAGUE: Yes. You know, at one point I think we had about a handful of education officers in the whole agency. Suddenly then, AID had an upsurge in education funding, and it didn't have the people.

Q: Right. So, there was a time when you used the Tacs system, the non-direct hire system to bring in education officers?

SPRAGUE: Yes. It hurts especially then, I think, on oversight at the mission level. You just don't have the senior people to do that.

Q: Right. Do you think the agency got better over the years at managing tandem couples and their assignments?

SPRAGUE: They did, I think. Especially the personnel people got more proactive in trying to make allowances, so people can do jobs. They became much more used to the idea of a tandem couple. That just wasn't in AID's history. The whole idea was, the woman would stay home. She wouldn't work. Suddenly, there they were. And AID started to have more women in senior positions and that made a difference. They had to start looking for two jobs on an equal basis and that made a difference. From what I know, AID is much better than State. State still struggles with that, I think.

Q: Well, thank you, David. This was fascinating.

SPRAGUE: My pleasure!

End of interview