

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

DAVID BUSS

Interviewed by Mark Tauber
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Q: David, we always begin with just where were you born and where did you grow up?

BUSS: OK. I was born in a suburb of Chicago called Homewood, about 30 miles southwest of the city in late March, 1952. My father worked for the Illinois Central Railroad and my mother was a homemaker who also provided child-care for neighboring families. I was the third of three children. I think I was probably unplanned: My brother was nine years older and my sister 11 years.

Q: Your father's work kept him local or did he actually ride the train?

BUSS: He was fairly local. He was a foreman in a shop called the "maintenance of way" – responsible for the rails in the Chicago metropolitan area, both the suburban lines and the long distance trains, which are now part of Amtrak – just keeping the lines clear.

Q: The town itself, were there minorities, what was the demographics?

BUSS: Interesting. Homewood grew from former corn fields and originated as a golf club community for people escaping from Chicago. There must have been six golf courses within, I would say, five miles from where I grew up. They created first basically the train siding for people to come out from the city to play golf on weekends mostly. And, eventually it grew into a village. I would say that the population, when I was young, at about 15,000, almost exclusively white.

Q: So, you went to high school there as well.

BUSS: Exactly. Homewood-Flossmoor High school served several neighboring communities, many particularly affluent ones. Interestingly, I had a high school graduating class in 1970 of over 800 people. By that time, there was a single black student in the graduating class. Around 1968, a phenomenon called "white flight" occurred from the near south-side of Chicago, the South Shore neighborhood particularly. In the course of just a year or two many dozens of mostly Jewish families moved into the area. By the time I was a junior in high school I guess my environment was a lot more diversified than it had been before then.

Q: So, while you were in high school did it give you opportunity to do extra-curricular things that involved you with people from other backgrounds?

BUSS: Not so much. Not surprisingly I was the chairman of the prom decorations committee. I had a lot of particularly artistic friends, I guess. I was active in the chorus in both scheduled classes and, as you say, extra-curricular activities that were of an artistic and musical bent.

Q: I imagine, as a member of the chorus, your school competed.

BUSS: We did indeed, yes, with other choirs in the area – the Chicagoland area. We were, I guess, well-known as a reasonably good choir.

Q: Did it let you travel any further than sort of your immediate area?

BUSS: Into the city particularly, but I do remember one excursion to Peoria, Illinois. It was a competition of some sort; I think we stayed overnight with members of the local chorus.

Q: You're in high school. How would you describe the high school experience that you had? Did you like it, what did you like, what didn't you like?

BUSS: I did enjoy it. For one, moving from my little neighborhood public schools to the larger campus of the high school which involved students from a much larger community. As I said, I was born in, lived in Homewood, immediately next door were much more affluent towns of Flossmoor and Olympia Fields. The students from all of these communities went to the same high school. Furthermore, there was no parochial high school in close proximity, so a number of kids who had gone to Catholic schools for their early primary grades all gathered in this community in the high school. So, my acquaintances grew quite enormously and I ended up becoming friends with quite a broad range of people, at least considering where I had been earlier in primary schools. We stay in touch even until today. I would say I've got a close friendship still with maybe 30 kids I went to high school with.

Q: That's wonderful. Overall, it sounds like a good experience.

BUSS: It was; it was very positive. I guess I graduated in the top 20 to 30 percent of the class.

Q: So you were a good student; you took it seriously.

BUSS: I did, yes.

Q: Did other civic activities, Boy Scouts, church, other things come into your life or was it mostly organized around the school?

BUSS: Mostly around the school. I did participate for a short while in an organization called Young Life. It was a Christian fellowship, you know, with a lot of guitar playing

and singing, things like that. I guess it was more, for the musical element than anything else. I did remain somewhat active in the Presbyterian Church that I was brought up in. I gradually grew away from that, as I matured and began questioning a little bit more about religion, organized religion.

Q: As you move towards becoming a senior in high school are you thinking of college?

BUSS: Yes, I was, but I have to admit that I questioned what a degree could do for me to reach my goal of getting away, preferably overseas, moving away from the small town environment of Homewood, Illinois. I thought about applying to colleges and eventually what I ended up doing was applying to an airline technical training school. I took a correspondence course over the course of about six months beginning immediately after I graduated. I remained in Homewood. I had a summer job which turned into a longer period working for the Illinois Central Railroad, working on a maintenance crew that did painting, renovations of the little commuter railroad stations, and, at the same time, taking this correspondence course. I completed the coursework in January of 1971 and went to the actual physical training school itself in Kansas City in February of that year. I think it was about six weeks or so of practical exercises in various operations involved in the airline industry.

Q: This school was a private school, you paid tuition, but did it have any connection to any of the airlines?

BUSS: No, not directly, although there were recruiters for both the airlines and the Federal Government that showed up at the school in the course of this training. Unfortunately, you may recall, there was a huge setback to the airline industry because of the oil crisis in 1971. Airlines had practically stopped hiring. I think out of this graduating class of 50 or 60 people we knew of one girl who was bilingual – Swedish and English speaking – who got a solid offer of a job with SAS (Scandinavian Airlines). No one else got a job I'm aware of, at least at that immediate time with an airline. But, interestingly, the FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and, I guess, the civil service as well has its own recruiting branch and they all came to interview and give examinations to a number of us who were interested in a Federal job. I guess I did take both a civil service exam and examination for the CIA.

Q: Let me step back one second. You had set for yourself a goal of doing something international already in high school, maybe not exactly decided on what, but you thought getting into an airline industry would be at least a first step?

BUSS: Exactly.

Q: Was there something in high school that ignited that desire?

BUSS: I thought about that a lot, Mark. I think I had been infatuated with *National Geographic*, the television programs on different parts of the world and just thought Homewood, Illinois was just too small for me. I returned to Homewood in March '71

with my certificate of having completed this airline training course and went to our little local travel agency in Homewood, Illinois and applied and was hired almost immediately.

Q: Even with the problems that the airlines were having, the travel agency nevertheless saw some opportunity and was hiring.

BUSS: Exactly. And I had learned tariffs and ticketing, which, in those days, was an incredibly complicated business. You had tariff books of 600-700 pages that you needed to research in order to come up with a fare for a ticket. Nothing was done online in those days, of course. In any event, it was a great job. As I said, I was hired almost immediately. I was already working in March and, I guess, it was in the end of May I got a telephone call from Washington. The CIA wanted to offer me employment. They were working on a security background interview. I learned later that they went to the local church, to my high school, to acquaintances of my parents, and asked lots of questions. I guess it was by August I was offered the job and invited to come to Washington. So, I quit my job at the travel agency at just about the time I would have started earning benefits – you know, free or reduced flight fares, and discounts on hotels and such. Anyway, I accepted the offer of the CIA and travelled to Washington.

Q: Did the CIA give any hint as to what sort of work it would be?

BUSS: No, they made lots of promises about the exotic foreign travel, teaching me languages, *et cetera*. What I was invited to do was to join an induction class. Again, I suppose there were probably 40 or 50 students who showed up at the same time for training and orientation. This orientation went on for, I want to say, a month. Various skills were assessed, we were tested and eventually I was offered an administrative job. They said I tested strong for administration and I was offered a job in the credit union, the CIA credit union, a very closed, obviously, credit union. Membership lists, of course, were classified. It worked like a bank in many respects except you had people with cover names and identities. Obviously it was at the CIA. So I reported to work as a clerk. Again, this was in the early days of computers handling a lot of the transactions and the activities. Eventually it moved into data processing and away from the front lines of the bank. I did a good job; I was promoted fairly well and rapidly.

Back to orientation, though, I became close friends with a number of people, most particularly a young woman that was there. She had gone to Bucknell (University, Lewisburg, PA); she majored in French, and then went to Katie Gibbs Secretarial School in Boston after graduating, but had always been interested in the Central Intelligence Agency. She had written a letter, in fact, to the CIA while she was still in college saying she wanted to work as a bilingual spy. Her name was Nancy and we became very close; we dated. After we were all given our assignments she went to work in the AF Division, the Africa Division, as a bilingual secretary while, as I said, I went to work at the credit union. After a year she was assigned to Kinshasa, Zaire, so she packed up and went. We maintained our long distance relationship just by letters and phone calls, but at the end of, I guess, close to another year, I decided to try to reposition myself within the CIA for a job that would get me posted abroad. The credit union, obviously, wouldn't do that. The

best I could do, I was offered jobs, there were airbases that carried on activities for the agency, one was in California; I think another was in Alaska, but I wasn't meeting any success in getting an assignment abroad.

I requested a leave of absence, which I was permitted, to go visit Nancy in Kinshasa. I didn't know if it would be short term or long term, but in the event, within a week of having arrived there, basically a tourist, word had circulated in the community and I was getting job offers. Two in particular – one was offered by the director of the Zaire-American Language Institute, which was, in those days, an offshoot of USIA (United States Information Agency). They were looking for native English speakers to teach the language to selected Zairians, particularly up and coming members of the government in favorable positions. That was one offer I received and a second offer was to manage the embassy's commissary. The manager of the little embassy store was departing; she had maternity leave or something. Although there were a number of other wives at post that had applied for the position, the administrative counselor was looking for a male. It turned out I did teach English for several months, but then the other job came through. The only problem was I wouldn't be able to remain without a work visa. The solution was for Nancy and I to marry. We were disposed to that anyway; we were close, we were in love. We had a marriage ceremony at the local registrar's office in the city of Kinshasa and got married and I got an official passport and appropriate visa.

Q: Let me back up just one second. Kinshasa is the very first foreign place you've gone; it's not the easiest place to live. What was your impression upon arriving; did you still want an international life after you got to one of the more difficult places?

BUSS: Actually, it was exotic. I was tantalized by the tropical vegetation, the vitality of the people. It was a very crowded, very busy city; there was a huge international community. I was being exposed suddenly to different nationalities, obviously cocktail parties, ambassadors, just a whole panoply of new experiences for me. I was taken; I was really enthralled. I had already spoken some French, but I took classes at the embassy, as time permitted for me to take French classes. Nancy had already been an avid bridge player and tennis player. Although I hit the ball a few times growing up, I never was very serious about it. We became very competitive and, again, this opened more opportunities to meet other people, playing bridge and tennis at the tennis club. It was just a whirlwind of really quite exciting times.

Q: What year did you get married?

BUSS: We were married in October of 1973.

Q: Now you're in Kinshasa and you get your official visa, so now you can take the job in the embassy, or where did it go from there?

BUSS: Yes, I took the job at the commissary in the embassy and did a good job. I was successful. Coincidentally, the administrative officer from Bangui, Central African Republic, often travelled to Kinshasa because we were a regional headquarters; there was

regional security, regional personnel, and regional finance offices headquartered at Embassy Kinshasa. A number of U.S. embassies in neighboring countries relied on support they got from Kinshasa. Later Ambassador Irvin Hicks, then the administrative officer in Bangui, would visit Kinshasa, stop in the commissary, got to know me, and we developed a friendship at that point.

In, I guess it was the end of 1975, Nancy was due to rotate and was offered an assignment at the U.S. embassy in Dar es Salaam. From everything we had heard about it, it sounded like another beautiful tropical posting with the potential for opportunities for me to work. Coincidentally, Irvin Hicks was now the administrative officer in Dar es Salaam. He had moved from Bangui with his family. Again, I was off the plane maybe for a few days when, in preparation for an IG (Inspector General) visit, he asked if I would like to take a job in helping to prepare in the administrative office for the Inspector's visit. So, obviously, I accepted and that was my first real opportunity to get to know the administration of the Foreign Service at the embassy. My work, again, was considered to be good, and he created a permanent position in the general services section for me as an assistant to the career Foreign Service general services officer. During that time we saw a lot of Secretary Kissinger. I guess this was the time of the Front-Line talks on apartheid South Africa. So I became almost professional control officer for the Secretary's visits to Dar es Salaam. Irvin Hicks was appreciative of my work and began to pave the way for a permanent Foreign Service Reserve position for me within the AF Bureau (U.S. State Department Bureau of African Affairs).

Q: Take a moment to say what the Foreign Service Reserve was.

BUSS: In those days, it was a category of only administrative function positions created to meet staffing deficiencies, particularly in hardship posts. I think there were opportunities for general services, budget, communications, and security. You were world-wide available, but if I recall correctly, the positions topped out at the equivalent of an FSO-1 (Foreign Service Officer Grade 1). You couldn't get into the senior service as a reserve officer. By, I guess the end of Nancy's assignment in Dar es Salaam, the paperwork had all been processed and I was offered a Foreign Service Reserve appointment. I guess it would have to have been the spring of '77. My appointment was based on my acceptance of my first assignment in Nouakchott, Mauritania as a general services officer.

Q: How did the move from the CIA to the State Department... In other words, you're now actually changing the department for which you're working?

BUSS: Exactly. I think that my leave of absence had lapsed by the time we arrived in Dar es Salaam. I had already cut the strings with the CIA in that respect. Nancy, however, was still, and I don't know if there is any issue here, she was obviously under cover. But she was what was known as an ops support assistant, by this time more than a secretary. She handled other logistical, financial and administrative arrangements for the people in her office as well as being a secretary. In any event, there was division opening for her in Nouakchott as well. This was all facilitated by both agencies working together

collaboratively. So this was our first tandem assignment. We were both assigned to Nouakchott. That was a transfer that took place in 1977.

Q: Were there other African events going on in 1977. I'm not recalling very well. In western Africa, issues with Morocco and so on?

BUSS: Yes. Coincidentally, the day I arrived at post, and I had to arrive at post before Nancy got there, there had been an emergency appendectomy or something of the woman who was both embassy cashier and the one-person budget officer for the post. So, in addition to going out as the general services officer, I was sidelined to Abidjan to the regional finance center at the embassy there to have two days of training, to go and pick up the reins of the finance office when I arrive at Nouakchott. I arrived in Nouakchott Fourth of July weekend. There was a picnic at the compound pool, which was immediately adjacent to the presidential compound, with a thousand miles of desert behind our concrete walls. We were at poolside when we suddenly started hearing noises, and it was the Polisario (from the Spanish abbreviation, Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio del Oro) staging an attack on the presidential palace; but instead, they actually hit the walls of our compound.

Q: Incredible. You're in the country not even a week.

BUSS: Twenty-four hours. Anyway, that was an interesting time. The Polisario were disputing the land, I guess, between Morocco and the capital of Nouakchott for the control of the Western Sahara. So that made it somewhat interesting. It was an amazingly difficult environment in that, AID (U.S. Agency for International Development) had discovered the Sahara just recently. Whereas when I arrived at post I think we had a three or four person AID contingent, we were growing to, by the time I left, 75, I think, American either direct hire or contractors working on efforts to stabilize the sand dunes and create oases where there were none. The working environment was extremely stressful. I was working probably 18-hour days between managing the budget office and general services. I was brought in as the only general services officer, but within, I guess, my year there two additional positions were created in general services to help with, particularly finding and preparing housing for all these new AID personnel and then just the rapid expansion of our embassy community.

Q: In addition to actually finding housing, did some have to be created or renovated?

BUSS: Totally. As you can imagine, whatever standards there may have been, they would not accommodate an American family with a level of comfort. It was a huge, huge undertaking. We hired lots of local staff, but they all practically needed to be trained to do whatever it was we were hiring them to do, whether it was an electrician or a plumber or auto mechanic. It was probably more educational for me than any job I've had had up until then, to learn the trades that I have basically today.

Q: And to do it also in French!

BUSS: Exactly! Yes, it was fabulous for my French. Coincidentally, there was a very large French presence as well. It was a French speaking country; it had been part of what had been French West Africa. So there was a large French community and we became close friends with a number of the people both in the French embassy's cultural and military sections. We did a lot of entertaining, back and forth. In fact, the cultural center presented productions. One in particular was based on the American musical. And so they, drafted a number of us from the U.S. embassy to participate. Many of the French were fulfilling national service obligations in their equivalent of the U.S. Peace Corps. They had people out from all walks of life, but in particular there was one fellow who was an entertainer and he taught tap dance to a number of us from both the American embassy and his own mission to put on this Broadway spectacular.

Q: That is one of those very hilarious Foreign Service stories.

BUSS: Olivier was gay as well, so this might have been might first encounter with someone who was openly gay.

Q: Interesting. I imagine in your home town it was not discussed or you really had no other outlets or opportunities to even investigate.

BUSS: Exactly. In those days it was so taboo anyway. Anything that you had ever heard or learned about it was either a persecution type story or derogatory culturally; there was just so much stigma attached to it. In any event, Nouakchott was a very trying experience for the hard work we had to do under very difficult conditions. Meanwhile, Nancy was also having some difficulties with a difficult supervisor. There were only two of them in the office and he was a difficult individual. It was very trying, so we both request and were granted curtailments to 18 months. The difference between CIA and State was that she was the property of the Africa Bureau [*sic*]. She wasn't worldwide available. She was granted the curtailment, but she was not offered the new position if she was going to take it outside of Africa. I, however, was actively recruited for a job in Port-au-Prince by the State Department. I was offered the job in Port-au-Prince via some additional language training and Nancy was basically granted a leave of absence with no promises of re-employment unless she came back to Africa. Basically she was going out as my dependent now.

Q: A very quick question about your language, was that additional French?

BUSS: It was additional French.

Q: So they were not training in Haitian patois (creole) yet?

BUSS: Not at all. We returned to the United States for home leave and I went to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) for I think it was six weeks of additional French. I think I ended up with a 3+4 (reading/speaking proficiency) or something like that.

Q: I imagine, especially after Nouakchott, where your vocabulary went sky high with incredible abilities in engineering and all of that.

BUSS: Yes, true. In Port-au-Prince my job was general services officer again. We had a relatively large crew; there was a large American presence -- again, a very large AID presence. President Carter at the time was leading what I think he called the Caribbean Basin Initiative.

Q: That also went into the Reagan administration as I recall.

BUSS: Yes. But I think he was particularly emphasizing development, economic development, particularly for places like Haiti. Haiti was the seat of a lot of transformation industries where Sears or Wilson, the sports company, would send materials from the United States to Port-au-Prince and in little factories they were being transformed into a finished product. In the case of Sears there was a lot of clothing, brassieres, things made, softballs. At the time almost all the worlds softballs, baseballs were being sewn in Port-au-Prince. GE (General Electric) had a large assembly facility there. In any event, actually it was a time of relative – for Haiti – prosperity. You saw lots and lots of American businesses showing some interest in having manufacturing facilities there. My job was basic general services and a respite from the chaotic atmosphere of Nouakchott. I had forged mutually trusting relationships with both FBO (Foreign Buildings Office) and OPR (Operations) by this time and was able to launch a buildings acquisition program to hedge against the rapidly rising residential rents, as well as capital improvements to existing USG-owned properties. Nancy, with her bilingual secretarial skills, was quickly picked up by the embassy as a part-time employee, temporary at first to support an OIG (Office of the Inspector General) inspection of the post. Then later, actually, a position became vacant in the economic section, which was growing because of the president's initiatives. She was offered a full-time secretarial position which eventually led her into a career position with the Foreign Service. I don't know if there was anything remarkable otherwise about Port-au-Prince. We lived through a couple of serious hurricanes, but that was about it. We extended there; we stayed until '82.

Q: So you arrived in '78?

BUSS: In '79 and remained until '82, at which point we were both offered positions in Brussels.

Q: So no position in Washington yet, and no pressure to have a position in Washington yet?

BUSS: No, none. We took off, we transferred to Brussels. Brussels, again, is in one of these countries with three different missions; the U.S. Mission to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), the bilateral mission, and the U.S. Mission to the European Community – at least that's what it was in those days. Nancy had a position at the European Community mission. I want to say, again, it was in the economic section, it was political, political-economic mixed, combined. I was put into a rotational position in the

administrative section as, again, because of my experience in Nouakchott, as a budget officer for one year, and then to general services for a second year.

Q: So now you're in the Foreign Service permanently now?

BUSS: Permanently, but still a reserve officer.

Q: Reserve officer even after the 1980 reform of the Foreign Service? They didn't get rid of the reserve in that reform? It still remained?

BUSS: I don't know if they hired any further reserve officers, but I was not obliged to leave. Meanwhile, I had taken the written examination while posted in Port-au-Prince, when it was offered in Miami. There were opportunities (windows) offered for reserve officers to convert to the officer corps, via a mix of written and oral examinations. I don't think I passed it the first time. In any event, I had taken the exam but I remained a reserve officer.

Not a lot remarkable about our living in Brussels; it was a French environment, French speaking mostly, but I did take Flemish, language lessons, because the staff I supervised was almost evenly divided between French and Flemish speakers.

Q: They didn't prefer to speak English in that situation as a common language?

BUSS: Yes, of course, in the embassy. That was our *lingua franca*, but I thought, in fairness, I enjoyed conversations in French with those who spoke it, I thought it was only fair that I try to make an effort in Flemish as well. Again, not a lot remarkable about our time in Brussels, I guess. We went in there for three years also; we were both extended. For me, it was a second year in general services.

Q: That takes you from '82 to '85?

BUSS: Exactly. We're bidding, or we're getting rotated in the spring of '85 when we had a telephone call from home from our old friend Irvin Hicks, who had just been nominated as ambassador to Seychelles. He needed an administrative officer and secretary. So, basically, he facilitated our move from Brussels to Seychelles. It was a beautiful, beautiful place. I don't know if you have ever been.

Q: No, I haven't. Please go right ahead.

BUSS: It's just a magical, gorgeous grouping of, I think, some 90 islands – 'tho only a handful of those inhabited - with a million square miles of territorial waters, very lucrative fishing contracts with both Asian and European fishing companies. We had a very small embassy. I want to say seven, I think, Americans and an equal number of Foreign Service Nationals. It was already a very popular, but relatively exclusive and expensive holiday destination for a lot of Europeans. There was a Peace Corps program there. But unlike any other Peace Corps program I had known before, the volunteers were

placed in the government ministries as, basically, trainers for people in their specialties. We had people in the sanitation department that were actually water engineers, master's degrees in engineering from the United States. We had dental hygienists that were training in the ministry of health, teachers who were stationed to train teachers in the ministry of education. Again, largely French speaking but also both French and English were official language and the local *patois* was very similar to the creole spoken in Haiti. We would bring a little of that information along with us.

Q: Also the Seychelles had become known as an off-shore financial haven and already perhaps getting a reputation for being a money laundering location.

BUSS: Exactly. In fact, the building in which the embassy was located; we were on the top floor of a commercial property in Victoria. The Brits occupied the floor below us and the ground floor was a Pakistani bank, which was in the news a lot for its role in processing a lot of this laundering. In any event, even though I was not a commissioned officer of the Foreign Service, Ambassador Hicks was able to get me a commission so that I could serve as *chargé* (*chargé d'affaires*) in his absence. I suddenly became a commissioned officer; this was in the Reagan Administration.

Q: What I wondered was, did you end up having any contretemps (dispute) or problems related to this money laundering or any illegal activities?

BUSS: We really did not. We collaborated very closely with our British neighbors downstairs on a lot of the reports, political and financial, that went on, but I think it was much later that that became a news item. However, there was a new contingent of Peace Corps volunteers that arrived about six months after Nancy and I had been at post, and among those volunteers was David Larson, who was training science teachers, ministry of education. Again, in a small island, a small community, we suddenly became very close friends. In fact, David and the woman who managed the Peace Corps program, the country representative I think they called her, were both bridge players and would join Nancy and I for games of bridge. During the course of our friendship David disclosed, he wasn't very public about it, but he disclosed that he was gay. This was my really first encounter with an American who was very proud, highly educated and not at all squeamish in his sexual orientation. It began to give me thoughts of my own long suppressed suspicions that I probably was gay as well.

Q: But now you and Nancy had been married some ...

BUSS: Actually, David was there for our 13th anniversary party. It wasn't long after that that basically I think I realized I was falling in love with him and certain about my orientation.

Q: How old were you at this time?

BUSS: That would have been in 1985, 33. With great difficulty, I disclosed to Nancy what had happened and that I felt that I could no longer sort of live a lie, deceive the

world for what I really was and, although I loved her very much, and continued to love her, and we remain the best friends even today, we decided we needed to separate. Coincided, actually, was Ambassador Hicks, being offered the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary (of State) to the Director General (of the U.S. Foreign Service) for personnel back in Washington. I disclosed to him what Nancy and I were going through; he was the only person I confided in, other than Nancy. He decided that, for everyone's sake, he would offer her a position in the DG's (Director General) office to be his secretary when he returned to Washington that spring. He did so. His successor had already been nominated -- Jim Moran, who been the executive director for many years of the Africa Bureau (U.S. State Department Bureau of African Affairs). He was awaiting confirmation, but Nancy and Ambassador Hicks both returned to the United States in March, I believe it was, leaving me as *chargé*.

Q: This was still '85 now?

BUSS: No, this was '87. We moved to the Seychelles in '85, I met David. It basically became serious about a year later. And it was then in the spring of '87 that Nancy and Ambassador Hicks returned to Washington. Meanwhile, I'm *chargé* and there's a visiting Russian circus in town and one morning a married couple working for the circus, both acrobats, showed up asking for asylum. So, I ended up moving into the embassy for, I think it was almost a week with these Russians. We kept it from the Foreign Service Nationals. We ended up having to move a mattress in, and bring food in, and clothing and eventually I ended up having to face the Russian ambassador in a meeting with the minister of foreign affairs of the Seychelles. We were able to reach an agreement. It wasn't at all easy, but we were able to reach an agreement on facilitating the transfer of these two to the United States.

Q: That's amazing. You don't expect that in the Seychelles.

BUSS: No, you wouldn't. Meanwhile, eventually, a few months after Nancy's departure, the Peace Corps representative, who had been an avid tennis partner of Nancy's, realized what was going on, and that Nancy hadn't just left for another job in Washington, and she found that David and I were having a relationship. She decided to have him removed from the Peace Corps for his inappropriate lifestyle. So, that transpired and by this time. Of course, everyone on the island seemed to be learning about our relationship. It was a very uncomfortable time. She had him removed from his position successfully, but then she wanted me to order him out of the country.

Q: The Peace Corps rules can do that? His relationship was with another American.

BUSS: Exactly. She thought the lifestyle was inappropriate, though, for him to be seen riding in my car, sitting in my property, or co-hosting events with me. Unfortunately, by the time she acted on making a formal request that I have him sent from the country, he was no longer an employee of the Peace Corps, so I had no authority to do so.

Q: Well, a nice sort of legal conclusion to it at least.

BUSS: Meanwhile, back in Washington, Senator Jesse Helms was holding up confirmation of an entire list of nomination based on the nomination of Melissa Wells, who had made statements, I'm trying to remember... Anyway, she was making statements critical of the administration's policy for something, so her assignment I think it was to Mozambique was being held by Helms and everyone else that was in line behind her waiting for a hearing.

Q: She had made statements critical of the Reagan Administration, even though she had been nominated as a Reagan Administration appointee.

BUSS: That's my recollection. You can probably go back and check that. I'm sure it's available. So, when Ambassador Hicks and Nancy left in March, they were anticipating that the new ambassador would arrive by summer. It turned out he was not confirmed to come to post until December.

Q: So you remained chargé for some time then?

BUSS: Yes. Basically, through the end of '87, no actually, '88. At that point then I requested an assignment to Washington. I hadn't been forced to, but I asked for it. I was assigned as a post management officer in the Africa Bureau.

Q: Now it's '88. Had you taken the Foreign Service exam again or what was your status?

BUSS: I took that soon after I returned to Washington. I passed and was lateralled from FSR to FSO at grade. It was '92, about the time GLIFAA (a non-profit organization that advocates for full legal and social equality on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees of U.S. government international affairs agencies) was being founded.

Q: That's quite a long time to be reserve before entering as full Foreign Service.

BUSS: True. But fortunately I hadn't yet hit the ceiling – the 01 (grade) ceiling, so that turned out well.

Q: In terms of benefits and everything, you didn't lose anything by entering at that point?

BUSS: No, not at all. It was invisible, basically.

Q: So, now the two of you are back in Washington?

BUSS: David and I are back in Washington. We purchased a row house on Capitol Hill and began renovating it, a hundred year old house.

Q: And with everything you had learned from all of those Africa tours where you had to very quickly put stuff together I imagine you had quite a number of skills.

BUSS: We did. Fortunately, David is extremely handy as well, so we could do just about anything. We obviously did have to hire professionals for work that needed certification by the city, like plumbing and electricity, but otherwise we did almost everything ourselves, drywall and created a kitchen, laid mosaic floors, baths and even masonry. So it was quite an undertaking. It was fun and it turned out that David didn't have a job immediately upon returning to Washington, so that was good. Basically, he could devote himself to most of the daytime work anyway.

Again, I mentioned that I was a post management officer. It was for nine Central African posts and I was obliged to travel back to Africa on visits and support missions. One of the posts was Bangui, in the Central African Republic. Our ambassador there was David Fields at the time.

Q: Is this still '88?

BUSS: No, actually we're now in '89 I would say. In any event, I mention him just because David Fields comes back. We developed a rapport, he appreciated my support for Bangui in getting whatever it was they needed, budget wise or whatever, staffing. So there was a good relationship there. At the end of his tour in Bangui, he was brought back to be the first head of the Office of Foreign Missions in Washington.

Q: I didn't realize that OFM (Office of Foreign Missions) had not been established before.

BUSS. No. It was established I think in '88 by an Act of Congress – in '87 or '88 – over the controversy over the Russians' [embassy] location in Washington. Anyway, he came back to be its first full director. I'm trying to remember if... I believe diplomatic security fell under that realm. So he was basically the head of both the Office of Foreign Missions and, in those days it was still SY, Security. It was in '89 that I learned from Nancy that SY was investigating an allegation of my sexual orientation. They had learned, apparently a regional security officer had learned on a visit to the Seychelles that, I believe it was from a secretary that was out there, that I had had an affair with a Peace Corps volunteer. They asked Nancy what she knew about it. She telephoned me to tell me that I was being investigated and I was furious. That's the way they went about it. I called security to find out why a criminal investigation division of security was going to my ex-wife to investigate an allegation rather than coming to me. It was the criminal investigation division of SY that handled this. I went to an initial interview when they began asking a number of very personal questions. I said I would like to return to complete the interview with a representative of AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) and a lawyer. They said that would be fine and that's, in fact, what eventually happened.

Q: In the initial interview did they describe the reasons they were investigating you? Aside from simply having a sexual relationship, were there other allegations? The reason I'm asking is that I wasn't aware, even in 1989, that any relationship between two

Americans, as long as it didn't result in a huge scandal of some kind, that security would even take notice.

BUSS: They claim that what they had to do, let me see if I've got it here... The disclosure I would have to sign during my first interview: "This is an official administrative inquiry regarding misconduct or improper performance of official duties. This inquiry pertains to an allegation that the employee is a homosexual." They wanted to "obtain information which would assist in the determination of whether administrative action is warranted, to determine suitability for assignments to certain sensitive positions or to geographic areas."

Q: As far as you know the regulations at the time, you would still be vulnerable for administrative action, disciplining simply for that reason?

BUSS: Yes. The agent actually stated that the Department (of State) does not view homosexuality as a problem *per se*, as long as the individual is up front about it and is on record as being a homosexual. The thing they are concerned about, this is verbatim, is that "if it is not on record, that a foreign government or foreign intelligence service would discover it, they could possibly use it against the individual to the detriment of the U.S. Government." So, I went back... First of all, I contacted Frank Kameny who was rather renowned in the Washington area as being a...

Q: He had developed quite a reputation over many years in dealing with issues like this.

BUSS: Exactly. I consulted with him and then I approached the AFSA attorney who would accompany me to my subsequent interview. It was necessary for them to establish that I had not had an affair with a foreign national and that I had disclosed my orientation to friends and family, so that I would not be subject to, if you will, vulnerable to blackmail. Anyway, I raised many objections to the course that the questions were taking. They wanted dates of my first encounters, and people with whom I had an encounter, and did I know anyone else who was gay in the Foreign Service. It was a witch hunt. Not only did I decline these, they told me that I needed a statement in my file that clearly laid out the sexual orientation and that I was not vulnerable to blackmail as a result of it. So I prepared the statement, but then the agent said they didn't have to have a statement after all. Anyway, I thought he was acting duplicitously.

Fortunately, by this time, I guess I was an FSO-01, but I'd been in the service 15 years and knew enough people, was respected by enough people in relatively high places that I decided, although I hadn't previously wanted to make an issue out of my orientation, that I didn't think it was fair that I was being singled out for this invasive line of questioning and behavior and that I wanted to do something about it. Fortunately, at this time, one of the people in a very high position in the office which has now been renamed Diplomatic Security, was Greg Bujak, who had been my RSO (regional security officer) in Brussels. We had a very close personal relationship and, although I hadn't seen him since Brussels, I made an appointment to go see him. I disclosed my orientation and he said he had no idea that these inquiries were still taking place. But he was going to look into it.

Then I made an appointment to go see the Director General (of the Foreign Service), who was now my ex-wife's boss. She'd moved from the Irvin Hicks' position to be the Director General's secretary and George Vest had been her ambassador at USEC (U.S. Mission to the European Community) in Brussels. So we made an appointment, and he too, claimed to know nothing about this and perceived this was clearly a discriminatory procedure. He was the first of many Directors General with whom I would meet to start moving towards a policy of non-discrimination. The first real manifestation though that anyone took was in the Office of Diplomatic Security when it pledged to stop the procedure of hauling gays in.

Q: Pause here one second. This investigation is beginning with you. Once you had established a relationship with David, had you explained it to your family, did your family know?

BUSS: My family did know. Following Nancy's departure from Seychelles, I felt I owed them an explanation, so wrote a long letter to my parents.

Q: It's a big change of life.

BUSS: It is. Everybody loved Nancy. It was a bitter pill for my mother, who was religious, and my news made her very unhappy. My father was better; he decided that whatever made me happy was good for me. He had regrets, but otherwise accepting. My brother and sister never really cottoned very well to it, but, again, we were so many years apart, we hadn't been close ever.

Q: So now, you're speaking with the Directory General, Vest, about the entire issue now.

BUSS: Meanwhile, after I had the company of the AFSA attorney in my interview with the security agents, I told them that if anyone else came to them with a similar concern that they should please contact me and I would be happy to assist them to assuage whatever feeling they have to try to work together to resolve any questions that they might be having about their continued employment. Again, this was '89, and it was over the course of the next, I would say, 18 months that I learned, much to my surprise, that there were like a dozen others who either were in the midst of an investigation or had been investigated and had gone through similar interviews as I had. This culminated in the famous brunch that David and I hosted in the spring of '92.

Q: So, a fair amount of time actually passes now between when you resolve your particular issue and, I guess, the additional cases that you're talking about now, the 12 or how many others, kind of reach you over a period of time.

BUSS: Yes. About the same time, I had taken and passed the Foreign Service officer exam, which did wonders for my self-confidence. I was now playing on a more even field, I felt -- less vulnerable to whatever whims. Also, Ambassador David Fields, who had come back to Washington from Central African Republic to lead the Office of

Foreign Missions and the newly named Diplomatic Security, offered me a position in the Office of Foreign Missions as director of the tax and customs programs. It was probably the most wonderful job I think I had in all of my career.

Q: That's interesting. I wouldn't have expected that. From the sound, it doesn't sound particularly fulfilling. What made it so wonderful?

BUSS: For whatever reason, it really challenged my thinking skills, my analytical abilities, my ability to take information and it was almost paralegal work – basically taking and interpreting policies mostly involving reciprocity between countries and exploration of previous treaties and obligations and the treatment of our personnel vis-à-vis their own. We worked very closely with the Office of the Legal Advisor and the Director General, the office of Protocol and all of the regional bureaus. I had developed really good relations with the executive directors of all the regional bureaus in developing strategies and agreements that would best benefit our people abroad on par with benefits realized by the foreign diplomats in our country.

Q: And this would go over the whole range of issues, everything from cars to the hiring of au pairs or...

BUSS: Yes, housing, tax exemptions, just about everything.

Q: It does carry quite a broad range of activities.

BUSS: It was just a fabulous mental activity at the time, it really was; it really got the juices going.

Q: At this point, you're living on Capitol Hill. Is David employed?

BUSS: With the house renovations complete, David found work at an agency called the Communications Consortium. It was a public relations company that sold itself for democratic liberal causes mostly, funded by various grants and national organizations for the promotion of some of their agenda. The Consortium was active and effective in the derailing of the Bork nomination. David did a lot of odd jobs: he was the technical support supervisor for the office but monitored nationwide press reporting on relevant issues, developed press kits and massaged the egos of some difficult but important benefactors. It was a fascinating place for him to work. Their work ebbed and flowed, but it was an exciting time for him. Eventually, as we considered returning to assignments abroad, David enrolled in an elementary education certification program to ensure he had a saleable option for potential jobs at overseas schools.

Q: You're in OFM. You begin in '90 in OFM?

BUSS: '91 to '93 I was in OFM.

Q: Then you had mentioned the famous brunch. This was the sort of first founding meeting? Let's pick up there because this is now a pretty historic moment. It's a group of other people, principally gay men?

BUSS: The first meeting was all men. Most of the meetings were all men. We had input from females but for the most part they preferred not to attend.

Q: So, the initial bunch you're talking about establishing a professional organization?

BUSS: Yes.

Q: I imagine from your background in personnel that you knew what it meant to establish a professional organization in the Department, what you would need to do, what steps you would need to take?

BUSS: Exactly. Again, we have the alliance with AFSA on our side to help guide up but also, again, I knew enough people in the administration that I could also benefit from their guidance.

Q: From the first sort of founding meeting did you talk about what it would take to establish the group? In other words, was everybody on board?

BUSS: Pretty much yes. Everyone at that brunch knew someone else or multiple people who either had had experiences similar to ours or could be helpful in establishing the organization, including a couple of really great legal minds who volunteered to take on the drafting of by-laws.

Q: So, this was 1992 when you had the initial meeting. As I recall, there were one or two at least additional organizational meetings.

BUSS: Oh, yes. The first meeting was called, I think, maybe, for a couple of weeks later to which everyone who knew someone was invited to attend. We had people showing interest from outside of State as well. We had individuals from AID, USIA, which was a separate agency still at that time. We had one person who worked at the Department of Commerce but wanted to become a Foreign Service Officer.

Q: Peace Corps as well?

BUSS: Not in the early days. Eventually there were, but I don't think at the first couple of meetings there were. It was probably a year before somebody who was a DS (Diplomatic Security) agent showed up. But in the early days it was a cluster of mostly State generalists, most of whom had experiences similar to my own, but, as one might expect, there had often been a foreign national involved. So their cases were less cut and dried and there was one also which, unfortunately, we tried to keep our distance from who was alleged to have had a relationship with a minor.

Q: This was also a moment in time, I believe, when the International Lesbian and Gay Association, ILGA, was coming into ... Are you still there?

Q: It is March 17th and we are resuming our narrative with David Buss discussing the establishment of the first gay professional organization in the State Department.

BUSS: By word of mouth, those of us who attended that brunch in early March of '92 disseminated information that there would be a general meeting and I believe that meeting took place the following month. Surprisingly, we had more than 50 show up at that first meeting. That would have been in April of '92. There was a unanimous vote to incorporate and employ the organization with the goal of working to advance the objective of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Q: And you'd say roughly there were a dozen people there or so?

BUSS: At the first meeting? Fifty. The brunch was half a dozen, I think. But in the subsequent month we had a meeting with 50.

Q: I believe I remember the first meeting because I think I was there, but was it not at the house of Drew Mann?

BUSS: It may have been but my recollection is that it was at the apartment of Bryan Dalton. I can't recall exactly. I didn't write down the venues of these things in my notes. We took notes on suggestions from the group on how we would form as an organization. We developed a draft statement of purpose to determine that we needed to do research first on those foreign laws and other agency regulations and treatments of gays and lesbians; to determine that we really needed to do outreach both in the Department and on the Hill (*i.e.*, Congress) and other agencies, and of course have a social committee as well. One of the very, very first standing rules would be that there would be no outing of or speculation about anyone present at the meeting or not present – no disclosure of anybody who did or didn't show up at a meeting. There was enormous fear still among most of us that outing could be detrimental.

Q: One quick moment, this is 1992 and it's shortly after the election of Bill Clinton and it's shortly after the dust up that happened with Clinton's initial attempt to eliminate discrimination against gays in the military and his retreat to "don't ask don't tell". I remember thinking, "Wow, I'm almost astonished that in this environment there are people in the State Department who are senior to me, who've been in the State Department longer and think that this organization could be founded and thrive." I was even a little surprised.

BUSS: In fact, can I read you the opening line of a letter we received from somebody stationed abroad in Budapest?

Q: Of course, yes please!

BUSS: This is dated July 17th, 1992. “Dear Friend, I’m sure that by now I’m not the first to tell you how he almost swallowed his gum upon discovering the article ‘Gays in the Foreign Service’ in the July issue of the *Foreign Service Journal*.” He goes on to explain his history of being out and honest about his sexual orientation and the few obstacles that he had faced over the course of his career. Anyway, he was just actually delighted that there was suddenly going to be voice for our group. The agenda then for the next meeting, by which time we had already come up with a draft set of by-laws and statement of principles, we developed, describing the formation of the group, the issues, the objectives, our strategy for success, security issues, partner issues, and how to form core agenda for the year ahead. Elections were held and I was voted in as first president. I don’t have the names of the others at the time. I do have them somewhere. I’m sorry.

In any event, we worked very, very swiftly on a number of items and in our first official newsletter, which only appeared in February of ’93. We had held meetings already not only with AFSA (American Foreign Service Association), but the Under Secretary for Management, the Director General, the Assistant Secretary for DS (Diplomatic Security), and the Deputy Director of the State Transition Team (the team managing the transition in the State Department from one Presidential Administration to the next) for the incoming Clinton Administration. All of them, at that point, had received a copy of our statement of principles and briefed on why we had to come together. We had also, by this time, received assurances from Tony Quainton (Anthony C. E. Quainton), the Director of Diplomatic Security at the time, that he was putting an end to the investigation of sexual orientation *per se* as a specific requirement for investigation.

We had already begun developing a list of priorities for ourselves and for the treatment of our partners. At that point we were looking at only no cost to the Department or government, or benefits. Unfortunately, that continued for easily, almost a decade, I think. We kept getting rebuffed every time that we requested a benefit; if a benefit might appear to cost, we were rebuffed and we were always told it was because of OPM (U.S. Office of Personnel Management) regulations or OMB (White House Office of Management and Budget), one of the two, and that the Department (of State) had its hands tied. I was again elected president the following year.

Q: So the organization had decided on yearly presidencies?

BUSS: Exactly. That was part of the by-laws. The decision each October to switch offices.

Q: I think that was a good thing for continuity. Also, because you had the best experience of anyone there in terms of both the personnel side of things and the notion of what constituted benefits from a strictly administrative point of view.

BUSS: We pushed and pushed the Department to come out with a statement of policy with respect to discrimination employment and got a very lukewarm draft only in the spring of ’94. It wasn’t until Clinton issued an executive order I believe in the summer of ’94 that the Department accepted our suggested change and came out with a clear policy

of non-discrimination. Again, that had nothing to do with recognition of our partners yet. It was significantly later that the members of household issues got the attention of management in the Department. In this respect, I don't know if you recall, when we were on an OSCE (Office for Security Cooperation in Europe) trip to Turkey, to Istanbul, were you on that trip?

Q: No, no I was not.

BUSS: I personally delivered a request to Madeleine Albright that consideration be given to recognition of our partners.

Q: I'm sorry; you said this was an OSCE trip?

BUSS: U.S. OSCE. When I was in Vienna working for the three missions. I would say it was at least '96, probably more like '97 or '98.

Q: My tour ended in Vienna in '97.

BUSS: Yes, it was subsequent to that. I know you were on the trip to Lisbon, right?

Q: Yes. Absolutely.

BUSS: I ended up having to fend off the presidency while, probably mid- to late '93 as my Estonian language training and areas studies was becoming...

Q: I remember people being disappointed, but, of course, you can't be president forever. You had sort of taken the initiative to start it and I think people felt very comfortable with you as president, but, of course, the nature of the Foreign Service, you would not have been able to maintain responsibilities forever.

BUSS: Exactly. In fact, I have a membership list dated 1993 which has approximately 60 or 70 names listed with maybe a quarter of them being abroad, if not a third.

Q: This is, of course, a problem for every professional group in the State Department in maintaining cohesion and consistency.

BUSS: Absolutely right. I think I can put it in a bigger job in that respect. I think Brian Dalton succeeded me and I think it might have been Ed Pope who succeeded him.

Q: That seems right. I'm trying to remember as well, but that does seem right.

BUSS: Coincidentally, I got a request from Ed Pope to be a friend on Facebook just a few weeks ago. He's a locally employed American at our embassy I think in Rio (de Janeiro). He left the Foreign Service, went to the west coast, became a real estate agent, I think, and then somehow I think he met a Brazilian and opted to move there. He has only been an employee of the embassy for a few weeks.

So, I don't know what more I can tell you specifically about GLIFAA (a non-profit organization that advocates for full legal and social equality on behalf of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender employees of U.S. government international affairs agencies) during that period other than it really was, obviously, the formative years. I think it became a legitimate employee group with a clear agenda during those days.

This puts me then ready to head out to Estonia. I went to Tallinn in '94. There was no chief of mission at the time. The previous chief of mission, whose name escapes me at the moment (Robert Frasier), had died in an airplane crash. Tragic. Anyway, there was no chief of mission. The political officer, an Estonian-American woman, was the *chargé* (*chargé d'affaires*) at the time. However, upon her departure, I became the most senior ranking FSO (Foreign Service Officer) at post. My position had been changed from administrative officer to, what did they call it in those days, SEP DCM (Special Embassy Program Deputy Chief of Mission)?

Q: Right! Special Embassy Program.

BUSS: That was the second post that I spent significant time as *chargé*.

Q: Can you pause for a second to describe what an SEP post is?

BUSS: If I'm not mistaken, the Special Embassy Program is a product of or the result of the break-up of the Soviet Union. All of a sudden there was a need to build a dozen or more embassies in what had been Soviet republics. Estonia was one on the Baltic, of course. These were basically embassies with skeleton staff and diminished reporting requirements. In general, I think they were to be established without USMC security; rather local security guard programs. Because of principally financial concerns, these were pared-down junior embassies, so there would not be a designated deputy chief of mission as in most embassies around the world. Therefore, my position became that of acting, acting DCM, in addition to my principal responsibilities in management.

Q: Do you recall how many Americans were part of the embassy when you arrived?

BUSS: It started off with approximately, I want to say, maybe nine or ten. I was the second wave of American personnel in. We arrived at what had, up until then, seemed to be "Fort Apache". They had just moved out of a hotel, where they were for the first 18 months, into a permanent office facility. People had worked 'round the clock in offices where they were living in this hotel. I don't know if there was anyone at post with a family. I think only the communicator had had a family there – but even his wife and children had departed the post before our arrival. David and I actually became the first family at post and ended up within a week of arrival hosting a newcomer in a party at our house. It functioned really as an embassy family. I want to say we civilized the post.

Q: I had a similar experience with an SEP post in Yerevan. However, it grew significantly while I was there and became a full embassy. By the time I had reached

there, it had been established for six or seven years and was getting its first marine contingent before I left. I saw both the SEP and the transition into a full embassy.

BUSS: That happened in Estonia as well, but it was a little bit later. I know they do have a full complement now – marine security guards, residence, the whole shebang. David had completed while we were in Washington a certificate program at George Mason (University) for elementary school teaching. He'd previously been a university professor in the sciences before going out as a Peace Corps volunteer to Seychelles, but decided, in order to enhance his employability, sort of, that he would seek a teaching certificate, which he did in Washington before we headed out to Estonia. In fact, there had been a sort of an international school in Tallinn, but it was not particularly popular and its curriculum was dated. It certainly wasn't an American model. In fact, at the time we went out, the Department's Office of Overseas Schools did not recommend that people with school age children apply for positions there. David started working on staff at the international school and the multi-national board that sort of directed things decided that they liked David's approach a lot better than what was going on so they encouraged him to establish a new American international school. So David facilitated the founding of that new school and was a teacher as well.

Q: This school that he founded was elementary level?

BUSS: Yes, elementary level. There might have even been a pre-K (pre-Kindergarten) element, but it was specifically K through fifth grade or sixth grade I think. By the time we left Estonia two years later, not only was it accredited by the Overseas Schools, but it was receiving grant money. That was quite an accomplishment.

Q: Before you leave Estonia, you're working toward this SEP embassy becoming a full embassy, were there major issues with the Estonians that you had to deal with?

BUSS: Not big issues. We enjoyed a very, very casual but close relationship with the Estonians. Hillary Clinton made a visit there as First Lady, and was very warmly embraced by the president. They had several casual meetings during her stay and they did a walk-through of the town together, driving the Secret Service crazy. There weren't any real hot ticket issues while we were there. In fact, the Estonians were so successful at developing so quickly from their Soviet-controlled past that they were the first country, as I understand it, to ever graduate from the U.S. AID (Agency for International Development) assistance program. That happened before I left. They had been receiving assistance for maybe four years. Obviously they continued to receive like military assistance, commercial benefits, trade benefits, but otherwise they were taken away from AID's clutches.

Q: Also, there was no Peace Corps. If there were any, they also graduated from that.

BUSS: There was not. One aside is that, when I arrived it was my office in the administrative section that did diplomatic notes for various things; we managed them anyway. The question came up as to a visa for David. I was asked by the *chargé* to draft

the note that would request his visa. Fortunately, she did not think we needed Department guidance for it. So, I went ahead and drafted the note and enclosed both my passport and that of David and requested the standard diplomatic visa for myself and, I said, an appropriate visa for a member of my household. They came back; his was basically a multiple-entry tourist visa, but with the same duration as my diplomatic one, which was perfectly fine.

I wish to relate a couple of anecdotes from our term in Estonia:

After several months at post, we decided to take advantage of proximity and low airfares to visit other Scandinavian cities. On an autumn visit to Stockholm, we encountered a gentleman one evening at a local bar and asked whether he could recommend an optician – David had a problem with the fit of a pair of frames for his glasses which he had obtained before leaving the U.S. Coincidentally, Bjorn-Ake was an optician and arranged for us to meet him at his place of business the following day. Over the course of re-fitting David's lenses, we learned that Bjorn-Ake was a member of the Stockholm Gay Men's Chorus and that they were scheduled to travel to Tallinn in the coming months and would be performing at both a concert hall and at a gay venue (a Soviet-era tractor factory dining hall converted to a discotheque). David and I attended the traditional concert in a Tallinn church and later that evening, the show-tunes gig at the disco. It was much fun meeting the chorus and we invited everyone back to our home for drinks. Hailing a fleet of taxis, we got home and the chorus members discovered the cavernous wood-fired sauna in our basement and, within hours, the rafters were ringing with Cole Porter tunes.

From my days as GLIFAA president, I had kept in touch with representatives of ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Alliance) and learned that their annual meeting of '95 would take place in Helsinki between Christmas and New Year's. Helsinki was just across the Baltic from Tallinn – a ferry ride of 90 minutes. Following their meeting, they planned to ring in the New Year in Tallinn – again with a party at the tractor factory/disco. Some thirty or so ILGA representatives, from throughout the world, made the trip to Tallinn and we had a wonderful time celebrating both the New Year and progress on ILGA's agenda during the preceding year. Since they were not scheduled to return to Helsinki until January 2, David and I invited the group to join us for a buffet at our house New Year's Day. We scrambled home and thawed the two turkeys we had in our basement freezer, raided our consumables pantry for pounds of rice and canned vegetables, threw together a couple of sheet cakes and had what we thought was a generous meal for the throngs. ILGA reps from Japan, Greece, Russia, Turkey, Netherlands and many other countries I can no longer recall, all came together and marveled at our Christmas tree, the CD collection (Streisand and Midler are beloved everywhere!) and not least, the food and drink. Once again, the sauna was fired up and an amazing evening of cross-cultural relations was lived and we are still in contact with members of the group.

Just before our departure from Estonia, the security firm that provided guards for our residences – also presumed to be keeping tabs on us - was celebrating their foundation's anniversary and David and I were invited as guests of honor. In a pull-aside at the

conclusion of the party, David and I were offered “dates” with Miss Estonia and her runner-up. We declined the gracious offer, but concluded they clearly were not particularly well-informed of events at our residence.

Moving on, however, to Vienna...

Q: You arrived there in what year?

BUSS: In Vienna? In '96. My assignment there was to be the deputy administrative counselor for the joint administrative operations of our three missions there – OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), UNVIE (U.S. Mission to International Organizations – Vienna), our mission to the United Nations, primarily nuclear, and the bilateral mission. Until our arrival there had been really significant problems apparently with administration and the provision of administrative services equitably among the three missions. In fact, there had been an inspection by the Inspector General's office to find out what the problems were and to make recommendations for correcting it. The principal recommendation that came out of it was that my position was to be designated as specifically responsible for the equitable distribution of administrative services to all three missions. I was not physically at the bilateral mission as was my boss, but I was in the building that housed the OSCE and UNVIE missions.

Back to visas, on arrival, the personnel office was uncomfortable asking for a visa for David without Department permission. A long series of cables were exchanged between the Department and embassy Vienna on the subject, the end of which the Department denied the embassy request to officially ask for a visa for David.

Q: Any visa?

BUSS: Any visa. The Austrians had been consulted and they said that if they had received an official request through diplomatic channels for a visa they would expect reciprocity.

Q: OK. Let me tell you a very quick aside here that is related. While I was in Vienna over the four years from '93 to '97, I happened to meet via an acquaintance a member of the Austrian foreign service, a young man in his early thirties. He had a partner at that time from Hungary. Although neighboring countries, obviously there were still visa issues for the partner, and also simply issues for the young diplomat in the Austrian Foreign Service. Although the Austrian foreign service undoubtedly had a few officers who were gay, it had never been publicly discussed within the service until this individual, this one young diplomat of my acquaintance went to the personnel office of the Austrian foreign ministry and said “I want to continue working here but I've got to have some status for my partner because I'm not going to give him up.” Austria doesn't move quickly but they do tend to try to find some kind of management of issues like this that are difficult but not insoluble. Eventually, a way was found to give the partner a visa in Austria for permanent residency, not Austrian citizenship, but residency that would allow him to work, go to school, as long as he was in this relationship. That sort of began, to my

knowledge, the Austrian foreign ministry's treatment of its own gay officers. Hence, when you say that the Austrians would want similar treatment if the U.S. requested a visa for a gay partner, it may have been because they were literally just establishing their own regulations on it.

BUSS: In fact, they were. Yes, I have that on good authority. However, when one of the local employees of our embassy learned what I was doing, and this is somebody affiliated with people at all levels of government within the Austrian ministry, in fact, she was our security liaison to the Austrian authorities. She asked, and found out, apparently, our request had to be cemented in the district in which we would reside. The residence permit had to be filed in the neighborhood or the area, jurisdiction, in which we would reside, and there was an empathetic individual in that district who ended up issuing an identity card for David. She was also able to assist him in facilitating a multiple-entry tourist visa, so it accomplished what we needed, but not until October of '96. Basically, he was hostage in Vienna without papers from our arrival I think it was in June until October. It was exceedingly frustrating. It was, I believe in the subsequent year, that the Department actually began entertaining the question of member of household benefits and encouraging chiefs of mission, while not stepping out of line and doing anything that might indicate a request for reciprocity or obligation for reciprocity, that they take manageable steps to make welcome members of household.

Q: There was a definition of what members of household included and so on so that it was clear for chiefs of mission what was meant by this term.

BUSS: Exactly. I can't say that we accrued any benefit that we hadn't basically already earned on our tour. David was never not invited to a diplomatic reception. He never encountered some of the issues that a lot of people I know did. Coincidentally, Swanee Hunt, our bilateral ambassador when we arrived there, not only was most welcoming, but when she learned what David's background was, she hired him to tutor her young daughter. She instructed the security and personnel offices to make sure he would have a pass to get into the mission.

Q: Very nice. In fact, once again as a brief aside, I've written to Swanee Hunt to ask her to take part in the oral history and hope that she will. That's just an aside.

BUSS: Actually, I found the notes from an address she asked me to give to the country team to explain the Department's treatment of gays and lesbians. I thought that was quite forward of her. The job was fabulous for me in Vienna, working among the three missions I ended up, you may recall, being the administrative control officer travelling with delegations to the annual rotating OSCE meeting wherever it took place in Europe.

Q: Those were big jobs, there's no question, because you were basically moving the entire function of the mission or the embassy to a different location temporarily.

BUSS: Exactly. Similarly, most of these meetings took place in Vienna itself, but there were occasions when I also moved with our delegation for a special meeting. At least by

the end of my four years there, I had received a superior honor award for having fulfilled the inspector's desire for proof of equitable treatment of all three missions. Other good news is that, although it took him two years, David was finally employed as a full time kindergarten teacher at the American International School in Vienna and was distraught when we had to leave. I could no longer stay there, you know, four years.

Q: Well, I certainly understand that having stayed in Vienna four years myself.

BUSS: I can't think of anything further other than the fact that the Director General of the Foreign Service, "Skip" Gnehm (Edward W. Gnehm, Jr.), during that period, was on a tour of overseas posts and with the cooperation of other GLIFAA members who I knew were stationed overseas we developed an agenda of tasking him to address the Department's movement on these members of household initiatives at the town hall meetings he was conducting around the posts. My notes reveal several very intense grillings that he got on the road and the result of which I think, again, ended up in some action having been taken on a few of our requests.

Q: As I recall, the definitions broadened the encouragement to chiefs of mission increased in terms of the kinds of benefits that a member of household could be granted. In other words, there is a slow, but steady increase of recognition of benefits moving toward equality of benefits, but not quite there yet.

BUSS: Exactly. Again, he continued to insist that the Department's hands were tied by other federal regulations.

Q: During this time, because you mentioned that you also developed some contacts on the Hill, do you have any recollections of Congressional interest at all one way or the other?

BUSS: Certain members. I'm trying to think it was the guy with the bow ties – Paul Simon.

Q: That could have been the senator from Illinois?

BUSS: Yes.

Q: Was it Stone?

BUSS: He, in particular, was effective in part, I believe, because John Long, who was one of our founding members and who was largely responsible for drafting our by-laws, had been a staffer at one point. Similarly, Bill Eaton had been a Congressional staffer and he's another retiree you might want to ...

Q: Bill Eaton?

BUSS: E-A-T-O-N. He retired; I think he was ambassador to Panama last. Yes, he was a GLIFAA member at the outset. He was reluctant to be a visible member because of his management roles. But he was supportive.

Q: The other reason I ask is because the Senate Foreign Relations Committee moves from Democrat control to Republican control and moves into the hands of Jesse Helms who, in general was hostile to the development of additional benefits for gay partners. I think hostile would be a fair term.

BUSS: I think it's fair. He was hostile to recognition of AIDS as a public health problem; he was hostile to anything that had to do with anyone gay. So, at the end of four years in Vienna, it was time to move on and I finally got the assignment I longed for all my career, which was embassy Paris, where I was, again, deputy. I had just made this transition from administrative officer to management officer. So, I was the deputy management counselor in the embassy in Paris from 2000. But again David and I encountered difficulty. With difficulty, we got a visa for David, again a tourist visa, but they refused to recognize him as eligible for a work permit.

Q: And that was due to reciprocity because French foreign service officers could not get the same thing from the U.S.?

BUSS: They didn't say as much, but, apparently, the agreement that the school where he was eligible to teach, which was the American international school of Paris (American School of Paris), had an agreement that they could accept a diplomatic spouse, but not someone who was in the country on a tourist visa.

Q: There could be no exception made?

BUSS: No, apparently they were quite firm. Everything we tried...

Q: David could not get a visa on his own? In other words, being hired simply as a foreigner to come and teach in that school?

BUSS: That would apparently have had a different tax status and would have put obligations on the school that they weren't prepared to...

Q: You arrive in Paris in which year?

BUSS: We arrived in 2000.

Q: The Department is still under the member of household policy.

BUSS: Exactly. They had asked for an appropriate visa, which turned out to be a tourist visa, and so that's all we got. We ended up staying only two years because David couldn't work. I had been assigned for four years, but requested a curtailment.

Q: It's sad to have to request a curtailment from Paris, but that does get very frustrating.

BUSS: The most significant, I think, thing that occurred while we were in Paris, of course, was 9/11. I was the *de facto* control officer, if you will, for the many, many tributes paid to the U.S. during that time. We had a tent put up opposite the embassy in a park for a condolence book and had it manned around the clock for at least a week, and the floral tributes just turned into mountains on the sidewalk.

Q: Did you have anything to do with the NATO meeting that followed the attack? If I recall right, the U.S. did invoke article six and did request a meeting of all NATO countries because of the attack.

BUSS: That would have taken place in Brussels, right?

Q: Correct. I just wondered if there had been any other special activity that you were required to do for that.

BUSS: No, no. I'm trying to remember. Albright, who was constantly in Paris, as I recall, the most significant meetings she was holding there during my tenure had to do with Palestine and Israel. No, I don't think she really did have that much to do with NATO initiatives with the French. Or at least I didn't have any specific roles to play there. It was a good assignment for me as it went. It was quite a responsible job, but actually it was good preparation for my next and final career move, which was to USUN (U.S. Mission to the United Nations), where I was management counselor.

Q: At this point, were you an FS-01 (grade) or did you enter the Senior Foreign Service?

BUSS: I was an OC (Counselor, senior grade) by then.

Q: When did you enter the Senior Foreign Service, because you hadn't mentioned that?

BUSS: I think that was in Paris. I'm pretty sure that took place in Paris. Anyway, I applied for it and was awarded the job at USUN, which is a huge mission with three ambassadors and at least a dozen political appointees as well as a local staff, which is, if you will, of permanent residents, New Yorkers, if you will, and then a Foreign Service staff as well, of perhaps 20.

Q: And the unique housing issues that are involved with the USUN mission.

BUSS: Yes. Lots of issues – parking tickets for diplomats... Another huge thing was the decision to build a new USUN headquarters. I was tasked with finding an appropriate leased building to move the mission to and attached to a team to work on the design of the new building.

Q: That's pretty big. You said you arrived at USUN in 2002 and this is already after the Clinton Administration's deal with Jesse Helms to pay the arrearages in exchange for the

elimination of ACDA (U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) and USIA (U.S. Information Agency)?

BUSS: Right.

Q: Was that still playing when you arrived?

BUSS: No, but it had an effect in Paris because we again opened up ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) mission, or we prepared to.

Q: And UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) as well?

BUSS: That's what I mean, UNESCO, not ECOSOC.

Q: Right, the U.S. formal return to UNESCO.

BUSS: Exactly, that's it. I'm sorry; ECOSOC was one of the departments, if you will, of USUN, the Economic and Social Committee [*sic*].

Q: I'm not trying to confuse you; I'm just trying to throw in details that may jog your memory.

BUSS: Actually, USUN management was a delight for me at the beginning. Ambassador Negroponte was our permanent representative – a delight to work with.

Q: I'm sorry, repeat that name?

BUSS: John Negroponte. By coincidence, his country team was, I would say, 75% gay -- the political counselor, the economic counselor, the management counselor, public affairs and his staff assistant. It was quite a table.

Q: Of course, there were not many issues related to benefits for gay spouses in New York, I imagine other than housing.

BUSS: Right. Obviously, by this time, of course, we have a Republican administration, and most of the political appointees, some of them came in... Sometimes we'd get a phone call from Karl Rove's office saying "We need to find a position for this individual that's come out of college and wants to live in New York."

Q: Well, at least he's clear about it.

BUSS: And, in fact, they were always qualified for something, but it would be a personnel officer's headache. We didn't have a personnel officer *per se*, we had a longtime USUN employee from New York who worked with the staff to agree on various

personnel issues, but I would spend the lion's share of my day dealing with personnel issues. Hybrid political appointees and, if you will, local nationals.

Q: The building of the new headquarters, did that continue or how did that end?

BUSS: We moved from our old office building opposite the United Nations in, I want to say, August of 2004, August-September, into the new secure facilities we had leased about four blocks away. They were built to our specifications with heavy input by DS (Diplomatic Security), of course. Obviously not foreign buildings, but we had consultants from the office of foreign buildings (Office of Overseas Buildings Operations) for the design layouts and a representative on staff full time from diplomatic security. An architect was hired as well to work under me on managing the hands-on sort of development of leased quarters while, at the same time, all of these people were then also providing their input to the new construction project as well. Ground was broken, I believe, in 2005, after we had vacated the old building. They razed it and basically began construction of what is now the home of USUN. They occupied, I think it was the year after I left, so that was when they occupied the new space.

Q: So is it exclusively office space or does it also include quarters, residences?

BUSS: No, just office space. Because of set-back requirements, we were unable to build with the same footprint that the old building had had, so we had to go much, much taller and, in fact, as I recall, it might be 23 stories, whereas before it was eight.

Q: And, of course, there are all the difficulties of managing the classified parts.

BUSS: Yes, it was epic -- moving our classified files from one building to the other and then managing the distribution of space. We had an active, very active press office there that had to be, obviously, public available. There were separate entrances for secure and, if you will, less secure office space. I was beginning to think about 2005, and the arrival of John Bolton, and some of the policy changes taking place at USUN just within procedures, dealing with the front office, dealing with the various individuals that were a part of his personal team. Rice (Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice) herself had a reputation for sort of gathering the wagons among her clique of political assistants. It was very similar at USUN and became a very frustrating environment for me to work in. It became a far more didactic and dictatorial, if you will, seventh floor.

Between that and the fact that I was very certain that if I moved on to another post, having gone from Vienna to Paris to New York, it was clear I was going to have a choice of Baghdad or Kabul next. At the end, having to deal again with not knowing whether David could get a visa or work permit, or he certainly couldn't get a separate maintenance allowance... Basically, I decided that I was going to have 34 years in the government and I doubted that I would be promoted again for any significant amount of time, although in fact I was. Of course, it was the year that I retired that I was promoted to MC (Minister Counselor, grade). So I decided that I was going to just put in my papers to retire. It was time to unpack in one place anyway. So, that's what happened.

Q: So, after UN, you retire in 2006?

BUSS: Correct.

Q: Did you have sort of subsequent connections with GLIFAA or in providing assistance with the further development of any of the policies regarding benefits or recognition of gay couples? You had had now so much experience and people knew you. Were you pretty much out?

BUSS: Pretty much. I must admit I continued correspondence from other GLIFAA members. As I mentioned in Vienna the number of household issues that we were all providing guidance on, if you will, and the Skip Gnehm DG (Director General) circus in which we all exchanged suggestions and things. Otherwise I don't think that I've had much to do... I was asked to address the celebration of GLIFAA at the end of Secretary Clinton's term, December of 2012. That was quite an event. It was in the Benjamin Franklin Room, huge attendance, the DC gay men's' chorus, gay ambassadors on the stage. It was a lovely event, so I was back for that and addressed it. There had been a brunch to mark GLIFAA's 20th anniversary in 2012 too, earlier in the year, so I came down for that. Otherwise there was a woman at *Huffington Post* exchanging phone calls with me, also apparently doing something on the Foreign Service.

Q: If you like we can conclude here.

BUSS: I've got two comments to make and I don't know if you need the recorder on for those. I wanted to clarify what I mentioned that Senator Helms had been holding up ambassadors, specifically Melissa Wells. In '97 it was not because of Ambassador Wells herself. Helms and other Republicans in the Senate were unhappy with the Reagan Administration's support for the government of Mozambique at the time. Unfortunately, it was Melissa Wells who was the nominee to be the ambassador to Mozambique. That was the reason for that. I just wanted to clarify that.

[Discussion of administrative questions not included here.]

I will tell you one other thing that I am contemplating, going through all the files, made me think seriously about wondering whether we have a class action case for reparations. The financial and emotional costs of dealing with the relocations of our family members were significant and, 'tho we were always told that it would require a change in law, same-sex partner recognition and accompanying benefits were awarded with the stroke of a pen by Secretary Clinton.

Q: It's always been sort of in the back of my mind but I never pursued it. I never even had a question about it. I wondered, but since no one else had brought it up I just sort of left it.

End of interview

February 2019

Post Script:

Upon my retiring in September 2006, David and I left Manhattan for Poughkeepsie, NY, approximately 70 miles up the Hudson River from NYC, where we purchased a sprawling 100 year old home on nearly an acre of land. David's father was coaxed to leave his farmstead in rural Rockford, Illinois to spend most of his remaining years with us here.

We garden, cook and entertain extensively. A tradition born in Seychelles where David and I first met of hosting a Thanksgiving for anyone with no place to go continued for decades. We still host an annual "proper dress" Christmas Eve cocktail to keep the stemware in active service – morning-after entails hand-washing up to 90 stems. David and I married in Great Barrington, Massachusetts in 2010 and spent July of that year visiting old FS haunts and acquaintances in Sweden, Denmark, Germany Austria, France, Belgium, Switzerland and Netherlands.

In 2014 we were joined by David's brothers and their spouse/partners for a 2-week cruise of the Mediterranean. 2018 brought us a month situated in a lovely hilltop villa in Umbria – again with the Larson family and extensions.

As I finally file this, we are about to embark on a month-long trans-continental drive to visit family, friends and venues across the U.S. and Canada I've never before encountered.

So many years in third-world countries lacking access to museums and libraries instilled a hunger for art and literature which I attempted to sate by acquiring antiques, drawings, paintings, and books. We're now studying the gentle art of saying good-bye to things.

End of interview