

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

**SHAWN DORMAN**

*Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy*

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**INTERVIEW**

*Q: Today is the 10th of July, 2006. This is an interview with Shawn Dorman. Okay Shawn, let's start at the beginning, when and where were you born?*

DORMAN: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1965.

*Q: Alright. Let's start a bit on the background. What do you know about sort of the Dorman side of the family?*

DORMAN: The Dorman side came mostly from Ukraine. My great-great-grandfather Benjamin Dorman came to Baltimore from Kiev in 1904. My ancestors were all Jewish, on both my mom and dad's side, part of the exodus from Eastern Europe. My grandparents and great-grandparents were all born and raised in Baltimore.

*Q: I suppose there are sort of movies about the Jewish community in Baltimore.*

DORMAN: The Barry Levinson movies, yes.

*Q: Barry Levinson movies.*

DORMAN: Barry Levinson was in my mom's high school class. At their junior prom, she was crowned queen and he was king. But yes, his movies like Avalon and Diner are very much Baltimore, my parents' generation.

*Q: Do you have any knowledge of where they came from; was it a village or was it Kiev?*

DORMAN: Some of them were from outside of Kiev. I once took a weekend trip to Kiev (from Leningrad) to look for records. I knew there was at least one town right outside of Kiev that had been all Jewish. I didn't have success finding any Dormans or records of them. I did find an address for the supposedly oldest living "Dorfman" and we went to that apartment and the woman had died. That was as far as I got.

*Q: Do you know Dorman; was this one of these Ellis Island names or something?*

DORMAN: No. Dorman was the name they had already. The few old documents we have say Dorman.

*Q: When your parents, on your father's side, let's take that first, when they came out of the Ukraine and ended up in Baltimore, what sort of occupation, what were they, what was the, sort of the male of the family doing?*

DORMAN: Well one uncle came to be a violinist with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. My great-grandfather was an inventor. Apparently, he invented the ice-shaving machine, but did not handle the patent well and never got anything out of that creation. His son, my grandfather Gerson, started an electrical supply store in Baltimore, Dorman Electric Supply Company, which later expanded into lighting. My father went into the business, starting with dusting shelves at about age 5 as he remembers it. He grew the business; they did international sales for a while and had several satellite stores.

*Q: What about your mother's family, her side of the family? What do you know about them?*

DORMAN: Well, unfortunately, I don't know much. I believe they all emigrated from Eastern Europe. My grandmother's parents (on my mother's side) emigrated (I think) from Lithuania to South Africa, then to Baltimore. My paternal grandparents came from Kiev.

*Q: Brothers, sister?*

DORMAN: I have one younger brother, Josh, who is a wonderful and successful artist in New York City, and an art teacher.

*Q: Where in Baltimore did you grow up?*

DORMAN: We started out in Pikesville, Baltimore County, and then moved to a farm out in Monkton, which is just below the Pennsylvania line. So we were sort of those Jewish farmers that you don't hear about.

*Q: That's kind of an oxymoron.*

DORMAN: It is, it is.

*Q: In the American context.*

DORMAN: Yes.

*Q: How farming were you?*

DORMAN: I guess it was what you'd call a gentleman's farm. The farm was in a valley, a beautiful spot on a river, with a lot of forest around. My mom raised sheep and goats (but never more than a dozen), and we had chickens; there was a brief period when I had a horse. So we had lots of animals and we had fields for hay and always had a very big garden. It was never how anybody was making a living but, you know, we grew food and stuff.

*Q: And I assume this kept you pretty well occupied, too, the kids?*

DORMAN: Yes, we helped; we were in charge of the chickens. I had a pet rooster from a chick. That didn't go so well once he got big, and mean. The goats didn't take much maintenance; they kind of do their own thing. I named one Radis Rose; we were studying vegetable vocabulary in French class. Mom would have the sheep sheared and spin some of the wool. She had a loom for a while and did weaving.

*Q: In your family, how Jewish was it?*

DORMAN: We were on the Reform end of the spectrum, but we did belong to a temple in Baltimore. My brother and I were bar and bat mitzvahed in one ceremony when he was 13 and I was 15. We didn't go through a traditional Hebrew school, in part because my dad had didn't like it as a kid—going three times a week was very oppressive for him, so I think that kind of got us out of the traditional schooling. My parents created an alternative. With a bunch of other families, they started a Jewish history class for the kids that met once a week with a hired instructor.

Then about a year before we were to be bar and bat mitzvahed, the family took Hebrew lessons together, and then Josh and I had a tutor and a tape recorder to help with learning the Torah readings and the rest.

*Q: Where did you go to school?*

DORMAN: Well I went to an amazing elementary school called Blue Bird, which was a very tiny school. Each grade had something like 10 or 12 kids in it. The school was established in 1913 as a neighborhood school in Ruxton, but as part of a progressive education movement happening in Baltimore then. The school was founded by a Swiss tutor named Therese Waelchli.

The philosophy was all about inspiring kids to want to learn, what you'd call hands-on education. The basic philosophy was that children naturally want to learn, and that this love of learning should be nurtured. I remember that the grades would kind of track, trace the development of civilization. First grade we studied origins biology – I remember trilobites – and we read Fleetfoot the Caveman. Second grade was ancient Egypt and then moving on through time. We did a lot of writing. And we read and memorized a lot of poetry.

We had to write our own plays and perform, every third Friday (rotating third, fourth, fifth graders) for what we called “concert.” Each member of the grade would do a play, alone, in front of the whole school. I was quite shy as a kid and I think it was really good for me. I loved doing it. It brought you out and everyone was very supportive. And I would also have to play the piano at concert. Basically, if you knew how to play the piano you were going to play, whether you were ready with something or not. That part came before the plays.

There were always a lot of animals in the school, in the early days monkeys and even an alligator if I’m remembering right. And fish and birds and dogs and cats too. And my best friend lived at the school for a few years when her mom became head of the school. I’d make my parents take me to school on snow days.

*Q: How long did you go to that school?*

DORMAN: I did a year of something like Pre-K and then Kindergarten through fifth grade. And the school stopped pretty much at fifth. We had one sixth grader my last year, and that was not enough to continue with that grade.

*Q: You know, it sounds like you came out of there; did you come feeling kind of confident?*

DORMAN: I did. And I developed a love of writing there which I think was maybe unusual for elementary school. We would write plays, poetry and speeches and a lot of stories and essays. And it was very imagination based. There was a witch who lived in the attic and would start to leave signs before Halloween, notes on chalkboards overnight, doors slamming from above. Then she’d show herself on Halloween and terrify us. Each kid would have a chance to go into the special dark room where she waited and try to grab a cupcake before being chased out. We loved it. It may have been too scary for some, but I have great memories of believing in this witch and I was devastated when I learned (years later) that she wasn’t real, that in fact one year my mom was the witch!

Anyway, Blue Bird was an amazing place, magical place.

*Q: It sounds like a lot of fun.*

DORMAN: Yes.

*Q: Were you much of a reader? Or more a writer?*

DORMAN: Both. I loved Edgar Allan Poe and I memorized and performed “The Raven” for one concert and I liked that kind of stuff pretty early.

*Q: You had a touch of the dark in your background.*

DORMAN: A bit. Well, my dad, I credit him with that gene; he was a great Poe fan too, so yes. We worked on memorizing “The Raven” together.

*Q: After that school where did you go?*

DORMAN: From sixth grade through graduation, I went to Baltimore Friends School.

*Q: What was Friends School like?*

DORMAN: I loved it at Friends. It was a good place for me. We would go to meeting for worship a couple times a week, and I now appreciate that in a way I did not at the time. Through middle school and probably most of high school, we’d mostly just try hard not to laugh and work to stay quiet. I didn’t think a lot about the Quaker philosophy that we were getting, but I think we were getting it. There was definitely a sense of pacifism and, in a way, diplomacy. I think it did have an impact on how I looked at the world.

*Q: What courses particularly interested you and which ones were you having either problems with or didn’t care for?*

DORMAN: Well, the English classes were my favorite. Russian probably had the most significant impact on my life trajectory. I think I started Russian language in tenth grade. It was something different. I took French and Russian at the same time for a couple years. Every other year the junior and senior Russian classes would take a trip to the Soviet Union. I went my senior year of high school, and that is what hooked me on learning about the Soviet Union.

*Q: When did you go there?*

DORMAN: That was 1983.

*Q: ’83. So it was still the Soviet Union.*

DORMAN: Oh yes. It was still very closed and very Soviet.

*Q: Well where did your Russian teacher come from?*

DORMAN: Zita Dabars, she was from Latvia. She had a strong personality and could be a bit scary, but she was a great teacher and if you tried hard she liked you.

*Q: Latvians weren’t the happiest in the Soviet Union to say the least.*

DORMAN: That’s true.

*Q: And did that intrude at all?*

DORMAN: No, I don't remember it intruding on our learning. I think she loved Russian culture too. To pay for the USSR trip, we would help put on a Russian film festival every year at a local theater, and we would learn how to make Russian food to sell at a bake sale there.

*Q: Did you get involved with sports or extracurricular activities?*

DORMAN: Well, I was never that good at sports, although I did try. My closest friends were the top athletes so that was sometimes challenging for me. I played field hockey and lacrosse and winter soccer most of the way through, just not Varsity, and maybe not even JV now that I think about it. Winter soccer only had one team so that was nice.

I was class president in my junior year and senior year. We started a business selling citrus, which was a lot of fun and quite successful. And I was the editor of the school's literary magazine, *The Mock Turtle*, for two years. While I was in high school, I helped create a community service organization that was a little unusual—the Prison Awareness Committee. The Russian teacher was the faculty adviser. We learned about the prison system, we sometimes collected supplies to donate (like toothbrushes from my uncle who was a dentist), we visited. I once interviewed the warden of the Baltimore prison, though that was for a project in middle school, before this committee.

*Q: How much in this period up through high school did the international world, the Cold War, factor in your awareness?*

DORMAN: There was an awareness of the Cold War. Going to the Soviet Union and studying the Soviet Union made us think about the relationships, the difference between the government and the people, and the idea of bridging differences. I had an interest in the Soviet Jews who were not allowed to leave the USSR. When we were on our trip, I was curious about the Jewish community. A friend and I met a young Jewish man who offered to take us to the synagogue in Moscow. We kind of snuck away from our group (it was just before a visit to the U.S. Embassy, and I remember arriving late!) and went off to see the temple. [Note: That friend had a career as a journalist and then joined the Foreign Service.]

*Q: What about when you went to Israel? What were the impressions that you got in Israel?*

DORMAN: My first trip was when I was 16, a summer program with a bunch of teenagers from the D.C. area. We lived on a kibbutz with the Israeli kids, and worked in the pickle factory processing produce that they grew there on the farm. There was a strong sense of community there, and everyone rotated jobs and ate in a big communal cafeteria. Everyone contributed.

*Q: Well, you graduated from Friends in what year now?*

DORMAN: 1983.

*Q: And what trajectory were you off on? Where did you want to go and do?*

DORMAN: I knew I wanted to keep studying Russian, and looking back I can see I was moving in a political science, international relations direction, but I started at Cornell as a natural resources major in the School of Agriculture and Life Sciences. I had this side of me that wanted to be a marine biologist and do environment work. My mom was very active in environmental causes while I was growing up. She worked for a Maryland environmental group for a while and would give talks on water conservation at local schools and was very into recycling early on.

My dad had been gently pushing a science direction; he thought science was the way to go. It was a good idea, but it didn't happen to be what I was particularly interested in or very good at. That feeling was not helped by being in an introductory biology class of some 500 students at Cornell, mostly pre-meds, and chemistry similarly large. What I was feeling inspired by was the Russian language class and a philosophy seminar. I was more a liberal arts type than a science Ag School type, so I applied to switch over to the Arts and Science School and double majored in government and Soviet studies.

*Q: Were you following events in the Soviet Union or was there more Russian literature and culture?*

DORMAN: It was both. I took a lot of government classes. For Soviet studies you took classes in literature, politics, economics, the whole picture.

*Q: The Soviet Union was going through its time of troubles with leaders dying off and embroiled in Afghanistan; it was not a good time for the Soviet Union.*

DORMAN: Right.

*Q: Was this reflected in what you were getting, did you feel that you were sort of plugged in through your school and all?*

DORMAN: I think so. I took a couple of graduate courses on Soviet politics and we were very much looking at the leadership issues and what was happening at the time. I spent a summer during college studying in Volgograd, Russia.

*Q: Volgograd, that was Stalingrad.*

DORMAN: Yes, the city with the most World War II monuments.

*Q: What was it like, what were you doing and what were your experiences?*

DORMAN: I went with a British organization and the students were from all over. There were only a few Americans in the group. We studied in the mornings at an institute in town, and we lived in some kind of dorms. The city is on the Volga River. Often in the

afternoon we would take a boat across the river to a big popular beach and go swimming in the river and hang out. There weren't that many foreigners in Volgograd but we met a lot of local people so it was a pretty immersive experience. It was just a few months after the Chernobyl reactor disaster and I remember we wondered whether it was safe to go to that region of the world. I took iodine for the drinking water and took lots of Tums. The Brits made fun of me for that, but it made my family feel better.

*Q: I imagine by that time the whole control of foreigners was beginning to relax considerably. This is the time of Gorbachev?*

DORMAN: Yes, very early.

*Q: Did the Foreign Service ever intrude upon your radar at all?*

DORMAN: Not up until that point, no. I don't think I knew that this was a career option until junior or senior year. Cornell had a Washington program and I remember having a meeting with the director because I was thinking about doing Cornell in Washington and I saw a pile of State Department internship applications in his trashcan. For some reason I just picked one up and that was kind of like a light went off or something. I thought, what is this?

I ended up applying for an internship with the Soviet desk and that was how I was introduced to the State Department. I mean, I had visited the embassy in Moscow and I remember very distinctly walking out—this is going backwards to high school—but I remember walking out of that building and saying to myself or maybe out loud to someone else—I want to work here. That did register somehow, but connecting that to the rest of it, knowing there was a Foreign Service test and all that came much later.

*Q: When did you do the State Department internship?*

DORMAN: Senior year, my last semester.

*Q: How did you find that?*

DORMAN: It was amazing, an exciting time. It was 1987, and the people who were working in the Soviet Affairs Bureau were very passionate about what they were doing. George Shultz was Secretary of State and the U.S. was paying a lot of attention to the human rights situation in the Soviet Union. The State Department had lists of refuseniks and dissidents who were not allowed to leave. The Secretary would meet with his counterpart and hand over the lists and ask that those on the lists be let go. Part of my job as intern was to help update those lists.

I found some of the smartest and most interesting people working on the desk. I was so impressed by the people and enjoyed my time there.



*Q: Did you get any feel for the people on the desk, were they feeling, you know, Gorbachev was for real and things really were changing? Because this was a debate, many of the, you know, old Soviet hands and particularly in the political world just couldn't believe that things were changing. Well, they had a commitment.*

DORMAN: Right, right. My memory of it is it seemed like things were changing, that that was really happening.

*Q: Well, you graduated in 1987; you had your State Department internship. Whither?*

DORMAN: Well, they hired me when the internship ended, so I had a job after graduation, which was great. Initially I was hired as a clerk typist, which was the way they could bring on a non-Foreign Service support staff person. But the job was contingent on passing a typing test, and I didn't know how to type well. I had to teach myself how to type something like 70 words per minute, accurately. I practiced, and luckily, found a place that would let me retake the test over and over. Eventually, I got it, and in the process became a pretty good typist.

The job on the desk was a good entry-level position, but I really wanted to get to the Soviet Union, to work there and improve my Russian. After only a couple/few months on the job, I put a notice up at the Foreign Service Institute saying I was looking for a Moscow nanny position. I had heard that this was a way to get yourself there; you needed visa support to go live in the Soviet Union, you couldn't just go. I hadn't done much babysitting before, but I was hired by a family heading out to Moscow; Ken and Barbara Hillas. At the time they had three boys; a daughter would come later. A great family.

Before I headed out to Moscow, I was going to resign from my position at State, and some smart person there said, don't resign, just go on leave without pay so that you can keep your security clearance and keep yourself in the system. So I went on leave, which meant that I showed up at Embassy Moscow with a current Top Secret clearance and some Russian. I had intended to look for a part-time job with one of the American newspaper offices, but I was quickly recruited by the embassy's political section. Political-Internal (as opposed to Political-External), which focused on the domestic situation, was looking for someone for a local-hire position, I think it was called a research analyst job, basically it was the librarian position for the section. So anyhow I went to Moscow as a nanny, signed on for a year and worked in the political section.

*Q: How could you nanny and research?*

DORMAN: Well, the kids were in school from nine to three, and the deal I had with the family was that I could take another job for the hours the kids were in school. And we all understood that the nanny job was the priority, that I had to be there if one of the boys was sick or needed something, that was my primary duty and nobody had a problem with that.

*Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?*

DORMAN: Jack Matlock.

*Q: What was the atmosphere that you got in the political section at the time?*

DORMAN: It was a very exciting time.

*Q: 1987 to 1988.*

DORMAN: Yes, 1987 to 1988. At that time we had the contact policy rules in effect, which were that no one could meet with a Russian alone. This was after the Marine scandal...

*Q: Yes, Lonetree, Sergeant Lonetree.*

DORMAN: Yes, that's right. The Lonetree affair, which led to all Soviet citizen employees being pulled from the embassy and Americans had to pick up all the jobs they used to do, like driving, warehouse, and some office worker jobs too.

Political-Internal was not big then, maybe five or six people, so it was not easy for the FSOs to go out to meetings in pairs all the time, there was too much to do. I was very lucky because I was a warm body in the right place at the right time, and ended up being taken along to all kinds of interesting meetings with dissidents and other political section contacts. I was able to accompany (as the second American) Tom Graham, who was probably the best Russian speaker and Soviet history expert in the U.S. government, and listen to fascinating conversations in dark Soviet apartments. We'd assume and sometimes know that there was somebody watching outside. The atmosphere was tense, and we knew many of the people the embassy would meet with were being watched, being harassed, but wanted to talk to the United States.

*Q: How was your Russian by this time?*

DORMAN: Well, it was, it was around a two plus. Not great but functional, and I tried to use it a lot, to practice. For the embassy job, I would scan the Russian-language newspapers every day for leadership movements and changes. We would track Soviet leadership, politburo members, and say, every time Ryzhkov would appear, I'd write it down. It was the tea-leaf reading Sovietology methods that were still needed to try to understand what was going on behind the scenes at the top. Who was standing next to whom, who was missing from photos, etc.

*Q: How was living in Moscow at the time?*

DORMAN: We lived out in the city, not on the embassy compound, which I was thankful for, but it was about a half-hour commute to the embassy. The apartment was in one of those ugly Soviet apartment block buildings. But it was a big apartment; I had my own room with a balcony. The family had a dog that I would take out for walks. There was a

great market down the street where Central Asian vendors would come to sell produce. It was fun to talk to people there and shop for fruits and vegetables. I never did feel comfortable buying meat there, though.

*Q: Did a Reagan–Gorbachev summit happen while you were there?*

DORMAN: Yes, there was a summit in 1988. I worked in the White House advance team office that was set up in the embassy, essentially answering the phones for the White House staffer types. And I got to go to a few meetings. One was with Andrei Sakharov. It was great to be able to see what was going on, be a tiny part of it. But my job was mostly answering phones and finding pantyhose for the staffer women who needed them, and I did other errands for the staffers.

*Q: Did they have pantyhose in the Soviet Union?*

DORMAN: Well, it was always a crisis. We had them, I think, in the commissary. They were a kind of currency in Moscow, because it was difficult to get good ones on the local market. If you were trying to get in somewhere, you could take a pair of pantyhose and sort of sneak it to the woman at the door and get yourself in places with your pantyhose bribe. That was a good currency to have.

*Q: What was your impression of the dissidents that you were seeing? These were mostly Jewish dissidents, weren't they?*

DORMAN: Well, the Refuseniks were generally all Jewish and not all of the Refuseniks were activists, and the dissidents were mixed. You had some that were just politically opposed and not Jewish.

*Q: Were the Pentecostals still in the embassy or not?*

DORMAN: No, they had left by then.

*Q: Did you get involved in any of these conversations with the dissidents or were you sort of a fly on the wall?*

DORMAN: I was a fly on the wall for the most part. I did end up with my picture on the front page of *The New York Times* when Secretary of State George Shultz came to Moscow once. He was joining a reception for Refuseniks in an embassy residence, and I was helping out at the reception. I was standing with a refusenik couple when he came in, and he mistook me for their child, paused and patted me on the head and said something about the couple and how he had just been talking about their case in Seattle. He knew their names. The embassy people following him were saying no, no, she's not one of them. Anyhow, because it caused a little pause, the photographer got a photo of Shultz with the couple, and me in the middle. He was incredible, because he really knew these human rights cases, because he would present the lists at high-level meetings with the Soviets. Ultimately most of those people were allowed to emigrate.

*Q: Shultz comes out as a very admired secretary of state, one of the most, I think.*

DORMAN: Yes, for sure.

*Q: Did you get any feedback about how the Reagan–Gorbachev meeting went in Moscow?*

DORMAN: I'm trying to remember. It went well. I think it was considered a great success for "peace and friendship." My friend sold a lot of t-shirts that said that, anyway. But yes, generally it was very positive. It may have been the only time President Reagan came to Moscow.

*Q: At this point did you have any feelings towards getting in the Foreign Service?*

DORMAN: I thought about it, but wasn't sure. I liked my role, being on the inside, but I didn't belong to the State Department, I was still kind of a free agent. And I had an interest in journalism. I had originally intended to try to get a job with one of the offices of a U.S. newspaper in Moscow, but because the political section recruited me so quickly, that's where I ended up. It was a great place to be, but towards the end of my year when the family went on R&R for a month, I was on my own so had extra free time and was able to help out in the CNN office and *The New York Times* office. I did the night shift at the CNN office for a few weeks, with the job of watching Russian TV for news. And I got to see how the NYT office worked. At that time the Moscow reporters were Bill Keller and Phil Taubman. That was fun.

*Q: After this period what did you do?*

DORMAN: I went back to Washington, back to the Soviet desk to my previous position, moved into a group house in Takoma Park. It was clear pretty quickly that I wasn't going to get anywhere in a Civil Service position on the desk. In those days, it seemed clear that with few exceptions, most of the work of diplomacy was done by the Foreign Service. After what I'd been exposed to in Moscow, I didn't think I wanted to continue long at the desk.

After a few months, an opportunity arose to do a TDY (temporary duty) to Leningrad, now called St. Petersburg. The consular section there was being overwhelmed with visa applicants and they needed help. I think it was the head of Moscow's Consular Section who recommended me, and I said yes, and off I went on a four-month TDY. That was in 1989. I spent a wonderful spring in Leningrad working hard to help ease the load on a tiny consular section, traveling, seeing lots of ballet, enjoying white nights, reading *Crime and Punishment* (in English) and speaking a lot of Russian. I did the four months in Leningrad, applied to grad school while I was there, returned to Washington and resigned, thus ending my brief Civil Service career.

*Q: Well let's talk a little bit about Leningrad at that time. How come there was such a rush on visas?*

DORMAN: I think because things were opening up and everyone thought hey, now we can go visit America and it was like walls were coming down. The consulate would have hundreds of people lined up outside the door in the morning. One of the first things that I had to do was figure out a system for dealing with the crowds and coming up with some way to not have chaos. The consular section had only a couple consular officers, but had to process so many applications for tourist visas as well as immigrant visas, I think. I was not authorized to actually issue visas, but I could do preliminary interviews ahead of the consul.

*Q: What was your impression of the people who were applying?*

DORMAN: It was a mix of people. Probably many of them were actually trying to go to work and live in the U.S. But we were saying yes to almost everyone. I think that was the basic, perhaps unwritten, policy at that time.

*Q: How was life in Leningrad? Did you get much chance to get out there?*

DORMAN: It was great. I did a lot. And it was a bit difficult. I wanted to be out and about—that's why I was there—and my Russian was getting better because I was interviewing for consular, but the contact policy was still in place, that if you want to meet with a Russian, you have to be with a buddy and report back to the embassy on contacts. Luckily, I made a good friend there at the consulate—the consul's daughter. She was my age, visiting her mom, and we did a lot of things together.

I did have some trouble with the regional security officer at post (RSO). I would get called in and he'd say, why were you out, who were you with? We were supposed to keep track of who we talked to, every Russian we met, and I found this to be an oppressive system. I was told at one point, you can't meet with any of these people on your list again, because you're not allowed to have sustained contact with any Soviets, or something like that. It was too strict for someone like me, a young person interested in the culture, in what was going on, in the opening up of society. But there was a very different attitude from the Diplomatic Security side, which is their job. They were still in a kind of Cold War mode of not trusting anyone, and yes, we were probably being monitored.

But the higher ups were supportive of me being out and about. I was doing reporting. I took a trip to previously closed area to check on whether someone on the dissident or refusenik list was still alive. The man had died, but I found his son and visited the grave site. And I was able to write about life in that area. It all worked out well, but I did have to show that it was a good thing for me to be out talking to people. I wrote a cable on Soviet youth perspectives before I left, which was well-received in Washington as it got to some insights that may not have been coming out of other reporting.

*Q: Then what?*

DORMAN: I came back and I went to grad school.

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

DORMAN: I went to Georgetown, starting in the government PhD program. Then I did a semester teaching English in China through Georgetown with my then-boyfriend (now-husband). I had gone into the PhD program thinking I'd study comparative politics, but it started to feel too passive, and I wanted to be doing something in the field sooner. When I went back to Georgetown after China, I checked in with the Russian Area Studies program and they were so welcoming. They gave me a scholarship and a job and a way to get a master's degree and be out of school sooner than the seven or so years it might take to get the PhD.

*Q: Where were you when the Berlin Wall came down November of 1989? Were you at Georgetown?*

DORMAN: Yes. But I was able to visit Berlin and the fallen wall just about four or five months later, on our way back home from the semester in China. We took the Trans-Siberian railroad from Beijing to Moscow, and after visiting friends in Moscow and Leningrad, we took the train through Europe, stopping in Berlin. We went to see what was left of the wall. Everyone there was chipping away, it was a touristy thing to do by then, so we borrowed a chisel and were able to get a small piece as a souvenir.

*Q: How long were you in China?*

DORMAN: One semester.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

DORMAN: Teaching English.

*Q: How'd you find that? What kind of students did you work with?*

DORMAN: We taught at a new university on the outskirts of the city of Changchun, which is in Jilin province, northeast China, Manchuria, coal country. It was a great experience. It was an odd time to be in China, not that long after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. There were fewer foreign English teachers in the country, and university students were required to attend what I remember as "re-education" lectures and such. They had to be fearful of talking about politics openly. But they were also so grateful for the foreigners who did still come to English.

Our students were in an intensive English program for professionals, so they were older, in their 30s even 40s, and they were fairly free to engage with us. They came from various professions: I remember at least three or four were doctors, others were scientists.

They'd teach us to cook local dishes like jiaozi (dumplings) and we'd help them practice English. And there was always singing. We were often asked to sing, which was awkward but we complied. I'll never forget trying to sing a Michelle Shocked song at my 25th birthday party. I had typed out the words to her song "Alaska" for use in class.

*Q: Did they feel free to talk about Tiananmen Square and all of that or was that sort of a forbidden subject?*

DORMAN: It was somewhat forbidden, but many of our students really wanted to talk about politics. In private, they'd tell us to be careful in class because there was at least one person in the class assigned to keep tabs on the conversation. We kept most political discussions out of the classroom, not wanting our students to get in trouble. I do remember lively conversations in class about China's Most Favored Nation status. We spent a lot of time with our students socially, and outside of class everyone could be more open.

*Q: Were you there during the winter?*

DORMAN: We got there in February or March. It was fairly cold, and we didn't really have heat most of the time, or hot water, so it was kind of like camping the whole time. This particular university had been built too quickly, had overused their electricity quota or something, so the government was rationing power to the school buildings. The lights and power would go out at 7 p.m. every night and the heat would be off. The hot water would come on once a day very briefly and would go off again without warning. So bathing was a challenge. We were in an apartment building and under the impression that the water had trouble getting up as high as the fourth floor where we were. And we had no telephone, really no contact with the outside world. It was immersion.

Our students would come by, and we'd go to their apartments. Everywhere we went, people were almost desperate to speak English. Anytime we were out and willing to speak, a small crowd would gather. There were these "English corner" events around town where an English speaker would volunteer to talk with people. For those kinds of events, you'd be answering the same question over and over but the Chinese we came in contact with so appreciated any chance to try out their English. There was a fun group of English teachers in town; Americans, Canadians mostly, and we also got to know foreign university students, mostly from African countries and the Soviet Union. On one trip we took up to Harbin, it was like a parade going down the main street; we had so many following our little group of foreigner travelers.

*Q: After this experience, how'd you find the Trans-Siberian Railroad?*

DORMAN: I was reading *War and Peace*, which seemed like the right thing to read on the Trans-Siberian. We shared our train car with a big group of Dutch people. Everyone was friendly and we had a nice train community going, and it felt strangely wonderful to get back into Russia. Maybe because it was less foreign to me than China was. It was just a wonderful journey.

I remember that when the train would stop, you could jump out. But you didn't have very much time on those stops. We'd jump off to try to see something in this or that little town, and then the train would start going again. I remember one or two times running for the train as it started to pull away, almost missing it. There were always Russian babushkas just outside the train selling pickles or boiled potatoes. It was very picturesque like right out of the Russian novels, truly.

*Q: So by this time you came back and what year was that?*

DORMAN: 1990.

*Q: What happened after that?*

DORMAN: Then I went back to Georgetown and completed an MA in Russian studies while working as a research assistant for Professor Murray Feshbach in the demography department helping put together his book, *Ecocide in the Soviet Union*.

*Q: Well did you get any feel that the Russian studies was beginning to change gears, had to change?*

DORMAN: There was a bit of that. At that time there were more work opportunities for people with Russian and with that background. Even after the Soviet Union broke up, it didn't seem to me like the expertise would be obsolete, although the "Sovietology, Kremlinology" element of the academic study was starting to seem a little old fashioned. People in our program were getting good jobs in new places. But yes, there was some refocusing going on for sure.

*Q: And so what were you pointed towards?*

DORMAN: The Foreign Service wasn't a priority, but it was a possibility. I was still interested in doing something Soviet, Russian related, and by the time I finished the program, the Soviet Union had broken up into some 14 new countries. I figured they'd be needing more Russian speakers to go out to these new countries, which sounded intriguing. I forget what the timing was, but I think I must have taken the test when I was finishing up at Georgetown. I passed the written test but was going about trying to find a job in the meantime. When I finished at Georgetown, I moved to Chapel Hill, where my boyfriend future husband was getting his MPH, and started looking for work down there. At some point in there I took and passed the oral exam.

*Q: Do you recall any of the questions that were asked you on the oral?*

DORMAN: The questions. No. I remember the group exercise where we had to allocate money for a project and negotiate with each other about what project got what amount, and I remember doing a briefing of some kind. Just one or two of us passed that day, and



I remember feeling like I passed because I wasn't so scared, that having a fairly laid back attitude was helpful.

Just a few months after moving to Chapel Hill, I got the call. It was Election Day and I was working at the local polling place. I got home to a phone message from State, which turned out to be an offer to join the January 1993 A-100 class. They gave me just a few days to decide, and after a long talk with my boyfriend, I said yes to the job. We both wanted to work overseas, and it sounded like it could be a great adventure. So I moved back to Washington to join the first A-100 of the Clinton administration, in January 1993.

*Q: What was your A-100 course like at the time?*

DORMAN: We had about 44 people in our class. My class came in following a period of no hiring for a couple years, and we were the first class of the new administration, so it was an exciting time. I felt like there had been this call to serve, like a Kennedy moment. We felt like a new generation coming in, and probably every class gets that feeling, but this was the tone of it. Our class did not have that many women; maybe six or seven. Classes have become much more evenly split between men and women since then.

*Q: It certainly has more recently.*

DORMAN: The Foreign Service Institute was still in Rosslyn at that time. Our training rooms were in a big high-rise there. The 66th was a great class, and a lot of us became friends. Our class still keeps in touch. The training brought people together. We'd have off-site overnight programs, embassy simulation exercises. A-100 is good way to bring people together.

*Q: Were you interested in becoming a Russian specialist?*

DORMAN: Part of the appeal for taking the Foreign Service exam when I did was that the Soviet Union was breaking apart. It had been very hard to get assigned to one of the few Russian speaking posts like Moscow and Leningrad. And then all of a sudden there's all these new countries, and I was thinking, well, there will be all these jobs, I bet I could get myself to one of these places pretty early, which is exactly how it went. I mean, if you spoke Russian you were going to one of these new countries.

*Q: Oh yes.*

DORMAN: And we had three on our bid list: Minsk, Belorussia; Tbilisi, Georgia; and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. And we had three Russian speakers in the class. We were essentially told that we were going to these three posts (partly because as a junior officer you can only get six months of language training and Russian requires longer). We got to decide ourselves who would go to which post. And you know the way the Foreign Service works, people want different things. I liked the idea of Bishkek and a faraway Central Asian adventure, while Cathy thought Minsk sounded great because it was close

to Europe with access to big cities. Anyway, it worked out, and each of us got the place we wanted.

*Q: Where did you go?*

DORMAN: Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

*Q: In that little cottage.*

DORMAN: Yes.

*Q: I know because I came out around that time. I've been long retired, but I came out for three weeks to talk to the foreign ministry about setting up a consular service.*

DORMAN: Really?

*Q: Yes. Who was the consular officer then?*

DORMAN: Julie Ruterbories.

*Q: Yes, yes.*

DORMAN: Yes, that was probably just before my time.

*Q: I dropped by the embassy. I'm not sure they were overly interested in what I was doing, but I was out there under the USIA (United States Information Agency) auspices.*

DORMAN: Oh, interesting.

*Q: But how did you find Kyrgyzstan?*

DORMAN: Well it felt kind of like the frontier, for the United States. It was exciting to be part of a new embassy. The U.S. didn't have a history there, and the relationship with Kyrgyzstan was all new. We were doing first time kind stuff to create a functional embassy, hiring local staff, renting apartments for our people to live in, doing first inventories. My first year there was as the general services officer (GSO), and my second year was as the consular officer.

There was this feeling that you did what you had to do to get things set up and yes, you needed to know the FAM [Foreign Affairs Manual] and follow the rules, but you had to get apartments for people, buy vehicles to build a motor pool, and you had to get things done. I liked that kind of working environment. The GSO work was very intense and overwhelming, as we had emergencies all the time—the pipes in an embassy apartment burst and water is pouring through the ceiling of the downstairs Kyrgyz neighbor; the embassy plumber is not really a plumber so must be fired... The people who had come out to open the embassy had hired a whole bunch of local people to work there without

really sorting out who was going to be and do what. We had to get things set up so that you had a real motor pool with drivers who were drivers and electricians who were electricians. But we did end up with a very good staff, some Russian and some Kyrgyz.

*Q: Well this is the thing that I noticed about that time—almost all the, you might say the technical jobs were filled by Russians whereas all the bureaucratic jobs were filled by Kyrgyz.*

DORMAN: Yes. I think that's a fair way to put it.

*Q: How did you find living there?*

DORMAN: It was an interesting place to live, and it was beautiful, the mountains were so close and took up some 90 percent of the country, which also has numerous lakes, rough rivers and even glaciers. Bishkek was a fairly Soviet city, with the typical Soviet style apartment blocks, but it also had a lot of green. Trees lined the main boulevard the embassy was on in those days. It was not what you'd call a booming metropolis, so it helped to like nature. The mountains and Ala Archa glacial park were within a 30 minute drive, so we would go hiking there often. The ambassador my first year, Ed Hurwitz, enjoyed bird watching, so he'd go out on excursions on weekends and sometimes take me and other staff with him. We got to see a lot of beautiful places outside of Bishkek.

*Q: And there was one restaurant, I think.*

DORMAN: Well, there was more than one when I was there. A pizza place opened up after I got there. Things were changing quickly.

*Q: And I understood that if you go out with Russians or Kyrgyz, the idea was to get a bottle of vodka and drink it all.*

DORMAN: It was certainly local cultural practice (probably more Russian than Kyrgyz) that when you open a bottle (and you always have occasion to open a bottle), you have to finish it. And there is much toasting. That was definitely part of life there.

In Kyrgyzstan, when you have a celebration, the tradition is to slaughter a sheep in honor of whatever or whoever you're celebrating, or mourning, and to roast the whole animal over an open fire and then serve it, in large heaps of meat and fat and entrails, along with plov (a rather greasy rice dish cooked with chunks of mutton, fat and bone), with lots of vodka. Sometimes you'd be served kumis, a drink made from fermented mare's milk. It tasted sour and unpleasant, but I found was super helpful for morning sickness when I was pregnant with Gabe.

The most honored guest is presented with a sheep's eyeball to eat, while the other guests cheer. I always aimed *not* to be the most honored, and since the feasts I attended were generally on travel with Ambassador Eileen Malloy (who was our ambassador my second year at post), she was always more honored than me. The closest I got was an ear,

reserved for third most honored. There was a lot of drinking expected. When traveling with the ambassador, everything was cause for a toast, and another one. To decline was to be impolite and undiplomatic.

*Q: Was there much in the way of political activity? Who was president then?*

DORMAN: Askar Akayev. He was still relatively new, a scientist rather than a communist party operative. Kyrgyzstan was being held up as an island of democracy in Central Asia. The U.S.–Kyrgyz relationship was positive. My third week at post, Vice President Al Gore came to Bishkek, met with President Akayev.

*Q: Well the ambassador to the United States was Rosa somebody.*

DORMAN: Roza Otunbaeva.

*Q: Kyrgyzstan really was a place of great interest at the time.*

DORMAN: Yes. And considering how small it is, with a population of just four million, it was getting a lot of attention. It was not an easy place to get to, you couldn't really fly in or out of there—at that time there were no international commercial flights—so we had to drive over the mountains to Almaty to catch a flight. But yes, Kyrgyzstan was getting a lot of attention and probably a disproportionate amount of aid money too.

*Q: Weren't there an awful lot of Americans doing things there. I'm not sure of any coordination, but you also had the religious types all over Central Asia at that time.*

DORMAN: There were a lot of contractors, Price Waterhouse was running a big privatization program there (funded by USAID) to sell off Soviet enterprises using a coupon system. It was big experiment.

*Q: Did you have much contact with Kyrgyz and Russians?*

DORMAN: Yes. The apartment building where I lived was almost all Kyrgyz, so all our neighbors were Kyrgyz. And also being the GSO in a way is the best place to really get to know real people, because you're dealing with local contractors and landlords, renting apartments and buying supplies and even vehicles on the local economy, so I had a lot of contacts. My Russian got better fast.

*Q: It must have been difficult though, trying to work out of a very small embassy, I mean the building.*

DORMAN: Yes, it was a very small building and we were working in cubicle-type space, but I guess I hadn't seen otherwise. In many ways, Embassy Moscow was worse. The political section [in Moscow] was in very tight quarters, stuffed in a fire-trap of an office building, the old embassy building. (I was there for the 1988 fire when we had to kind of push through construction debris down a dark stairwell to evacuate the building.)

The Bishkek temporary embassy building didn't bother me much. And it was nice that we were right in town, accessible. Later the new embassy would be built out towards Ala Archa, far from the city center and much harder to reach. It was one of the pre-fab type buildings that became popular with the State Department at that time. It became known as the tin-can embassy, because it looked like that.

The consular section was rather a mess, though; a makeshift office in what I guess must have been some kind of expanded shed off a courtyard next to the embassy. When I took on the consul role, my second year there, I hired some local guys to build walls for us in the section and a more proper visa window and tiny waiting area. We knew the builders as "the balcony boys," because they were building enclosed balconies for many of our apartments around the city.

*Q: I remember that shed, yes.*

DORMAN: Yes. And given the space we were dealing with, it worked out pretty well. I even got my own office; it was probably as big as this table but I think it even had a door. Two Kyrgyz consular assistants were in the bigger part of the room. And that felt pretty good to us, to have that functional. The search for a new embassy building or the land to build on took a long time. There were a lot of rules about setbacks to follow, and not a lot of good options in town.

*Q: What sort of consular work did you have?*

DORMAN: There were a lot of Russian women applying for visas at that time, and we uncovered this Russian maid ring scheme. A lot of the women were going to this same place in Brooklyn. There was this one stamp on the invitation document we would see over and over again. Each applicant would have a different story about visiting some relative or vacationing, but they were really heading to work as maids or nannies or maybe worse in New York through this one suspect company, so we were investigating that as best we could. Our refusal rate was very high at that time because there was so much fraud.

*Q: This is a time too when, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, a lot of Russians thought it wasn't the place for them. And employment was an issue too, right?*

DORMAN: Yes, exactly. And it was tough to find work and Russians were starting to leave. I was connected with the Jewish community there. They were Russian Jews, and they were leaving. So there was a major exodus of the non-Kyrgyz as the Kyrgyz were taking over their own country and government, and those positions were not going to be going to the Russians. So yes, that was part of this.

*Q: Where did you go after Bishkek?*

DORMAN: Jakarta.

*Q: Shawn, you were in Jakarta from when to when?*

DORMAN: I arrived in Jakarta in May of 1996 and left in late June of 1998.

*Q: What was your job?*

DORMAN: Political officer.

*Q: Had you taken Indonesian?*

DORMAN: I took about four weeks at FSI. I was nine months pregnant at that time, so I did the beginning of training, had the baby and then we went to Jakarta when Gabe was 10 weeks old. Because of this timing, I was able to do a special language program at post for 12 weeks before starting the job in the political section. It was a USAID-run language program that was amazing. My first 12 weeks at post were for intensive language training, one-on-one alternating teachers, with just a week or so of being pulled out of study to help out with a Secretary of State visit tied to the ASEAN meetings.

*Q: What was your baby's name?*

DORMAN: Gabriel. We call him Gabe.

*Q: Alright. How would you describe the situation in Indonesia when you got there in 1996?*

DORMAN: Within a couple months of our arrival, things started to get tense, and interesting, politically. And then there was an attack on the PDI (Indonesian Democratic Party) headquarters in Jakarta in July. PDI was one of three legal political parties in Indonesia. Megawati, the daughter of former leader Sukarno, was the popular PDI leader, but her criticism of the government led to her being seen as a threat. She was ousted (reportedly by government forces) during an extraordinary PDI conference in June. Her supporters refused to leave PDI headquarters, and instead occupied the building. Then the building was attacked by a mob that many believed to include military forces in plain clothes. This led to several deaths, many injuries and widespread rioting. I was still in language training at that time, so not completely plugged in to what was going on politically. I remember staying by the embassy radio (we all had these walky talky kind of setups at home) waiting for information, wondering if we were in danger. But things calmed down quickly.

*Q: When you arrived there, what was the government like?*

DORMAN: This was the Suharto era. He'd been in power for 30 years. We didn't know what was going to happen, but it felt like it could be getting close to the end of that era.

*Q: How stood Suharto? Was it the problem of his family corruption or health or what was giving sort of this feeling?*

DORMAN: The corruption issue was huge. Corruption, nepotism, the Suharto family wealth, people starting to get frustrated and then the rupiah crashed with the Asian financial crisis in 1997. That caused a lot of hardship for people.

My portfolio for political included student and youth issues. So I set about making contacts, meeting with different youth group leaders, student group leaders, from the time that I started working in the section (which must have been August 1996). Fairly early on in my time they were complaining a lot about the Suharto regime, saying it was time for Suharto to go. Reform became the buzzword of that whole time—*reformasi*.

I was the junior political officer and students hadn't been active politically for decades because in the late 1970s the government issued decrees that banned political expression on campuses and also abolished student councils. But from late 1996, it seemed that the students were starting to get politically active.

In addition, Indonesia had numerous legal youth and student “mass organizations” such as the youth of the Nahdlatul Ulama, the youth of Muhammadiyah. Those were the two largest Muslim groups in the country, NU being the more moderate, with Javanese influence, while Muhammadiyah represented a more conservative “modernist” Islam. There were also mass organizations for Christian youth, nationalist youth, Catholic youth, Hindu youth, Buddhist youth, etc. I'd meet with leaders of these groups and hear about their aspirations and concerns.

*Q: Was there the problem of an American officer going out and messing around with the student groups? From the government point of view?*

DORMAN: It didn't seem to be a problem. I was just getting to know the group leaders to try to understand them. I always found that I could get away with a lot because I looked very young, I'm small, and looked kind of like a student myself. I was the junior officer in the section, and the only woman. Many of my issues to cover were considered the “soft” ones, like youth and women. What could ever happen there? I think it was easier for me to be out and about without causing a lot of attention than say, the ambassador.

*Q: Oh yes.*

DORMAN: What happened later as the political situation heated up, into 1998, was that some of the people I was meeting with started to tell me that they were being watched and that they were feeling like it was more dangerous. But mostly I would go out and meet people in cafes and have coffee and just listen to them. They wanted these meetings. They wanted the American government to know what they were up to and what they were thinking. And I was not a threat.

*Q: So what were they up to and what were they thinking?*

DORMAN: Well, they wanted democracy; that also became a buzzword. Even the less oppositional groups like HMI (the Muslim Students' Association, which was traditionally very tied to the government) were talking democracy, though in a more careful way. And to ensure balance, I'd also meet with heads of the very pro-government, some would say professional thugs, Pemuda Pancasila. They had a reputation for doing pretty terrible things.

But most of the groups I met with, the NU youth, the Christian, Catholic and so-called nationalist groups, they wanted a new government; they wanted Suharto to go. Then eight or nine of these mass student youth groups got together and formed what they called FKPI, the Forum for Indonesian Youth. They'd issue statements and they'd hold meetings and conferences and they would talk about and call for political reform, openly. That's what they were pushing for. And they were protesting against "KKN"—corruption, collusion and nepotism. KKN crossed out became another slogan for the movement.

*Q: Was the corruption, particularly of the Suharto family but beyond that, of the people in power, was that something people felt free to talk about?*

DORMAN: Yes, that came along with the growing student protest movement. By the spring 1998, you could get t-shirts that said things like "No Suharto, No Habibi, No KKN." I also was given a good one that had a picture of a military guy with a big gun pointing at a group of students, and in big letters "Let's talk" (in Bahasa).

It was out there. People were talking, and the students were protesting in larger and larger numbers on and off campuses around the country.

*Q: Were you getting cases in point from the people you were talking to of the corruption and all?*

DORMAN: Sure, yes. I mean, it was very visible. You knew what projects were Suharto kids' projects and you would read in the newspaper about the exploits of the different kids. And it was very much talked about.

*Q: Wasn't Mrs. Suharto known as Mrs. Ten Percent or something like that?*

DORMAN: Yes, that's right. Madame Tien was known as Madame Ten Percent supposedly for taking a 10 percent cut from government projects. She had passed away, and it seemed the first family kids were grabbing up more and more enterprises and wealth. First family daughter Tutut was very visible, and she ended up being named minister of social affairs. (I got to meet her in that position once, when I accompanied the ambassador to meet with her.) This was when Suharto named a new cabinet to show he was going to reform, but instead appointed all these crony types to positions like that.



*Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?*

DORMAN: Stapleton Roy.

*Q: Did you get any feel for how he was approaching what was happening?*

DORMAN: What struck me, I have to say, when I got to Indonesia, was finding how close the U.S. government, and our military especially, was with the Suharto regime and the Indonesian military. That had kind of been how it was for a long time. Stability was good, the economy there had been doing well, there were U.S. business interests; that was the way people approached it, and I don't think anyone was looking for trouble or for things to fall apart.

As it went, Embassy Jakarta got a political section that included several officers who were coming from a background in Soviet affairs, and maybe that's why we saw things through a different lens or perspective. I'm not exactly sure I can tell it objectively, but our political section at that time ended up being a little bit on the outside of what the mainstream embassy view was, which was holding onto the view that the country was stable, things were fine, and our military friends were good partners. I think we held on to that—we the U.S. government—for longer than was appropriate. I came in not knowing that much about Indonesia and was really surprised by the relationship. In the Soviet Union relationship, things were black and white, human rights were a primary concern, and here this was different. I couldn't understand why we were so friendly with the Indonesian military when I kept hearing about cases of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Indonesian military.

Part of my job was to cover Sumatra. The U.S. had shut down the consulate in Medan, Sumatra, and we had no Americans up there anymore. I would go every quarter up to Medan and also to Aceh, north of Medan, which was very much a hot zone with the Indonesian military basically holding the area in tight control. There was rebel activity in the area, the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Local groups would report on human rights cases, problems from what many saw as a military occupation. The military was also making money off local business exploits, which was true around the country.

Maybe because of traveling and spending time with young people, but it seemed obvious that the population wanted change.

*Q: It's interesting; somebody who's doing this should go and look at the interview that I did a decade ago or more with Bob Martens because Bob came out of the Soviet Union when Sukarno was in charge, just before, he was there at the time of the overthrow, and he started looking at this and said hell, this Sukarno guy, this is a real communist, I mean, he's really bringing in communism, you know. And he started using his Sovietology and Kremlinology to start documenting all this. Our embassy before that had tended not to really look at Sukarno in this light. There's this connection. I mean, here we are in the '60s and now you're in the '90s.*

DORMAN: In some ways you could use Kremlinology to look at the Suharto regime. It was this rather closed, secretive regime. Like with the Indonesian shadow puppets, everything wasn't what it seemed, you had to read between the lines.

*Q: Were you getting any feel for the rule of Suharto, was there sort of a secret police type state or military state?*

DORMAN: The military held a lot of power. The system was called “dwifungsi,” the dual function, which gave the military a big role in government, with military personnel holding positions in all levels of government down to the village level. You had military representatives all throughout the hierarchy in very powerful positions. The Kopassus (Special Forces) had a special group, Team 6 or something like that, that was involved in “disappearing” student activists. That was a term that was used a lot, also up in Aceh all the time, people were disappearing. Most of those activists who disappeared in Jakarta were later released following interrogation, I think. It was all rather hard to pin down.

*Q: Well when you went over to Sumatra, what were you getting from people? In general, vis-à-vis the government, and then we'll talk about Aceh. Did you make contact there or was it a little hard to sort of drop in and do that? And did you go to the universities?*

DORMAN: Sumatra is a large island, the sixth largest in the world, and it was quite diverse geographically and even ethnically. I'd go to various provincial capitals and meet with local officials including mayors, sometimes the governor, as well as local NGOs and other groups, and sometimes I'd meet with students at a local university, sometimes with a professor or other civil society representatives. I'd also often check in with the local branches of the student and youth groups I was connected with in Jakarta. And during election season, I'd visit local political party offices to ask how things were going. One visit to a PDI visit in a small city in Sumatra

In Aceh I did meet with people at the main university in Banda Aceh. In Medan there were so many groups that we had to meet with, I can't remember whether I got to universities. Things were happening up there in the same way they were in Jakarta as far as unrest and protest.

*Q: Well with Aceh, how did we see this situation there, what was this rebellion, which is, I guess, still going today?*

DORMAN: Well I think, ironically, the tragic tsunami of 2004 did open the way later for political dialogue and a peace process there. They now have a sort of a ceasefire and it's calmer. Aceh in the late 1990s was challenging. There was the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) rebel group that wanted an independent Aceh. Some of them were in exile in Malaysia. Not many believed that Aceh could be its own country; the GAM was primarily fighting for more autonomy and didn't necessarily think that this part of Indonesia could break away fully. This was different from East Timor, which was struggling for full independence, but had a different history.

Aceh had been part of Indonesia from earlier on, and played a critical role in the fight for Indonesian independence, so there was a tie that was stronger than that of East Timor and

Irian Jaya as well, the other area fighting for independence. The U.S. did not pay much attention to Aceh and certainly was not supporting Aceh's independence movement.

Mobil Oil Indonesia had a big operation in northern Aceh (near Lhokseumawe) and it had a compound that was fenced off, separated from the town. I traveled there with the deputy chief of mission and the defense attaché once. We were hosted by Mobil and spent the night. I was conflicted about this. Aceh was very underdeveloped, yet there was all this money coming out of Aceh because of the oil. But the area wasn't being developed. The resources were being taken, money was all going either out of the country or to Jakarta; I mean, both. There was a sense of a lack of equity locally (as I would hear from NGOs and others), that things were not fair. There was some support in the local population for the rebels, the GAM, which was not coming from this radical Islamic side, but rather was just coming from dissatisfaction with how Aceh was not benefitting from the oil. This seemed a legitimate concern; local people were not seeing the benefits of the money that was being made there.

*Q: In general, what views did you find among the students? How did Islam run in the people you were talking to?*

DORMAN: Well, you saw very different things, depending on what group you were talking to. The two biggest Muslim groups, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, were quite different, as I mentioned earlier. What I'd hear would depend on what kind of people I spoke with. There were extremist groups as well, and I met with a few of those, which was a little unnerving at times.

*Q: Did being a woman cause a problem in dealing with them or did you sort of, as often happens, if you're an American, the sex really doesn't kind of register. I mean, you're sort of an odd creature anyway.*

DORMAN: Right. I think, I never felt like it was a detriment to be a woman, it actually, sometimes helped because I just was not a threatening presence. I could go into these offices or, you know, meet with those groups and the key was that I was American. I did meet with a lot of Islamic student groups and I went in front of some larger groups, maybe 50 people, and what I found was that even the groups that didn't like the U.S. policies, had problems with us, were so happy to have an American come and talk to them that it made a difference even with them.

Once when I took a trip to Cirebon with my friend Deena from USIS, another female FSO, we stopped by a couple pesantren, Islamic boarding schools. West Java was known as a strongly religious area that had many of these Islamic boarding schools, and we were curious what they were like. We didn't have appointments, just showed up. It must have been a surprising sight, two American women, but we were welcomed.

At one, the head guy, called the *kiai*, took us into a big room and we sat in a circle on the floor with maybe 10 or 12 others from the school, including a few students. We were having a friendly conversation about America mostly and about life at the school, and

then he said something about the Jews, I don't remember what that was but that it was not right, and I said, well, you know, I'm Jewish.

And the guy stood up and started to walk away from the circle. I thought he was leaving, like that was it, you're Jewish, I'm not speaking to you, and it felt so tense. But it turned out he was just getting up to turn on a light or something and we proceeded with the conversation.

Even if it was a little intimidating to say it, I felt like it was helpful, because I seemed sort of normal and it was an education for them to see that a Jewish woman, and an American, could be okay; most of them had never seen an American before either.

They had so many questions and were quite friendly. That was the attitude we found at those couple schools. The students were doing almost nothing but studying the Koran all day long and they seemed to have some very inaccurate views about the U.S. and the world, but had all these questions. We had one session with a group of some 20 students, with no adults present, and they felt comfortable asking us a lot of questions about the U.S. They seemed to really appreciate having us there and hearing what we had to say about the outside world. It was so interesting.

*Q: Were you running into students who'd come to the United States and returned? There's quite a few Indonesians that come to Georgetown and I believe most of them are Muslim and I think most of them return.*

DORMAN: In Jakarta, yes, I did meet some. A few of my contacts had been to the U.S. The guy who was the head of HMI, one of the major Islamic student groups that was often the starting place for the political elite, very well connected. He had been to the U.S. and was very smart and articulate and interested in communicating. But plenty of others in his organization thought not great things about the U.S. I went to their office once for USIS to speak to a large group of them, and faced quite a few tough questions.

Later on, I was able to recommend five of the student group leaders that I had gotten to know for a USIS grant to come over to the U.S. for a program on something like civil society and governance. I was able to meet them when they came to Washington, even give them a tour of the State Department Operations Center.

*Q: Was East Timor beyond your portfolio or did it come up?*

DORMAN: Yes, well, we had Gary Gray in the Political Section and he was the East Timor and external political person in our section. I did one trip out there with someone from USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and the Indonesia expert academic Bill Little also went with us. He was doing a project for USAID. It was a fascinating trip. We spent about five days there. At that time in East Timor, there was a heavy Indonesian military presence. They were trying to get rid of the Fretilin rebels who wanted independence for East Timor and who had a lot of support in many areas from local people. I remember being on the road to one town and it was getting to be dark and

our driver said that the rebels control this road at night. We were not supposed to be on the roads after dark. But he said we didn't need to worry about the rebels. It was tense and somewhat uncomfortable traveling around there, more because of the military presence than anything else.

*Q: How did you find the Indonesian press?*

DORMAN: During the time I was there the press was getting more bold. Two journalists from *Tempo* magazine, one of Indonesia's best publications, they were in prison for some of their writing. That trip with Deena to West Java, that was partly to check in on them in prison, which we did. There was still a fair amount of censorship going on and journalists not being able to write. *Tempo* had been shut down. But I think they started to get more bold as things started to change.

*Q: Was there, by the time you, as you're getting close to leaving, sort of the anti-Suharto movement picking up steam would you say or not?*

DORMAN: Yes, I stayed through the fall of Suharto.

*Q: Oh, well how did that go, tell me what you observed?*

DORMAN: Well, I was following the student activities closely and more and more student demonstrations were happening around the country and around Jakarta. At first they were all, for the most part, on campuses, and they were tolerated on the campuses. I would go out to demonstrations and talk to people and just try to see what they were saying. Indonesian groups loved to issue statements, so we were always getting faxes and copies of statements saying we want this, this and this—it was all about democracy and reform and calling for an end to corruption. I was very plugged in because I had made contact with a lot of these groups who were now making a lot of noise and they would call me and want me to know what was happening.

*Q: Well you know, there's that thin line between saying gee, tell me what you got and asking well, what should we do now? In other words, did you feel sort of having to watch yourself that you were being very careful that you were the—*

DORMAN: The observer.

*Q:—the observer and not even a minor participant?*

DORMAN: Yes. I mean, it's interesting now thinking about it with the current emphasis on "transformational diplomacy," because I think today you'd be told to go out there and tell them to, you know, become democratic. But no, that wasn't our marching orders at that time, we were trying to understand what they were doing and I never felt like I was playing a role in advising. I was listening to them. And I think one of the things that I did fairly well as a political officer was to listen. I didn't tend to need to give speeches and talk a lot. But I was a good listener, and people wanted to talk.

Now, the fact that the U.S. was interested probably could have emboldened some, so there is that element and I can't really say for sure that it had no impact. But basically we were interested and we were wanting to know what was going on.

By early May, student demonstrations were going on around Jakarta and around the country pretty much every day. Student protesters were calling for democracy, reform and for Suharto to step down. The background of all this was the Asian financial crisis that caused major stress. The value of the rupiah had fallen severely.

May 12 was the spark that led to the end of the Suharto regime. That day, four students were shot and killed at Trisakti University following a large demonstration and stand-off with the police/military there. Two other students were also shot but survived. Others were wounded. A large number of students were trying to take the demonstration off campus and got stopped in the road. That's where the standoff went on for several hours. Trisakti had been known as a university for reasonably well-off kids of politicians and civil service people, not a center for student protest and activism. I had gone over to Trisakti that morning (unless it was the day before, I can't recall exactly) and witnessed a peaceful demonstration there. They had speakers addressing the crowd and it was a big but not chaotic event.

As word that students had been shot spread, anger mounted. We were hearing that it was military snipers who shot the students, but the situation was not clear. It was the next day that riots got started, and instead of students protesting peacefully on campuses, crowds took to the streets. I say got started because I would hear later, as did my colleagues in POL, that the riots may have been instigated by forces in the military, that it was not purely spontaneous. And it wasn't the students doing the rioting.

It felt like Jakarta was on fire. From the embassy, we could see smoke plumes going up in different parts of the city. As we learned later, it was the ethnic Chinese who became the primary victims of the day of rioting. Chinatown was wrecked—fires, looting, businesses destroyed. We would hear later reports that ethnic Chinese women had been raped. Terrible things happened on that day. In one shopping center being looted, many were trapped inside and died in a fire there.

I remember late morning the day of the riots (May 14) going out with a Canadian diplomat colleague, a woman, and a driver from her embassy, to see if we could get a sense of what was happening. That was scary, and we could feel the chaos in the city. We would come upon crowds, saw burning tires in streets. At one point we were on a bridge and got out of the car to see what a nearby small crowd was doing.

All of the sudden, a military formation appeared on the bridge. There was a moment of wondering, do we run and take cover? Instead we approached the military, said we were diplomats from the American and Canadian embassies, and they let us pass. I made it back to the embassy, where I stayed until about midnight. The road to home, to my 2-

year-old, was blocked by fires and disturbances, and that was one time I was afraid, not being able to reach my child.

That day is what triggered the evacuation. For the previous weeks, the Emergency Action Committee (I think that's what it was called, the EAC) had been meeting due to the tensions and the rising unrest, daily demonstrations. They were talking about trip wires and that day crossed the line. So I think they met that next morning and decided the embassy would go on ordered departure, meaning the evacuation of all non-essential Americans from the embassy and consulate in Surabaya, for what I think was that night.

*Q: Who took care of Gabriel?*

DORMAN: My husband worked for UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) and they were going to evacuate their expat people, and anyway, because he was a U.S. embassy spouse, he would be on ordered departure and would have to leave. Ordered departure meant all family members and all "non-essential" American staff had to leave. I remember going to the embassy-wide meeting that morning after the riots, and they said okay, we're bringing in planes, we're taking everyone out tonight. That was how it went, and at that time I didn't know if I was an essential or non-essential person. I'd never seen any list. I remember going to Ed (my boss) and saying, where do I fit in here? We were actually scheduled to depart post in just a few weeks for my next assignment, for our regular departure. And I think Ed assumed I'd go because of Gabe, but he basically asked me if I'd be willing to stay. I said that I would. I was the one with the most student contacts, and so it made sense to stay.

*Q: It made real sense.*

DORMAN: Yes. At about midnight that night embassy staff and families were to be picked up and taken to the military airport. My husband and son were going. But the embassy bus never showed up and it's like 1 in the morning and luckily our personal driver was standing by (he was so great, Yasin, who later went on to have a big job at the embassy working with the guard force), and he offered to drive them, along with our neighbors, to the airport. The airport scene was rather chaotic from what I heard. But they did get out that night on a flight to Bangkok, and they were then gone. And I stayed on for about another five weeks.

*Q: What happened then? How did this thing, from your perspective, resolve itself?*

DORMAN: The situation remained tense, and I was relieved to have my family out of there. Remaining embassy American staff were moved into consolidated housing, so I was sent to live at the USAID director's house with a couple other embassy people for a few days. When we tried to get to the embassy the next day, we found the city was in lockdown. Basically. There were tanks on the streets, there were blockades up everywhere. We had to go through all these checkpoints and the city was just dead. I mean, there were no people out.

Amien Rais had called for the people to hold a mass protest march to the presidential palace and the military was trying to prevent that from happening. Everyone was worried about what would happen if it went ahead. In the end, Rais seemed to recognize the danger and called it off.

Instead students had begun to head to the DPR, the parliament compound. They started to arrive in buses to this huge fenced-in compound that was an area not in central Jakarta. The students were permitted to enter by the hundreds. And over a couple days some thousands of students wearing their different colored university jackets converged on parliament and essentially they set up camp there. That went on for a couple days with more and more students arriving by bus.

*Q: Did you get in to see them?*

DORMAN: Yes, I did. I went over there two or three times. The few of us left in the political section would go and check in and see what was going on there. And other embassies were sending people in and I was getting calls a lot from people inside. There were times when it got very tense, when you'd hear that there were instigators coming in to try to make trouble. And there were rumors that the military was going to come and start shooting; it was a very contained area, surrounded by high metal fencing. There was a small mosque in the compound, and during Friday prayers, a big group of what looked like Pemuda Pancasila were gathering by the mosque, and it was tense because it seemed like when the mosque emptied out after prayers, something bad might happen. I was up on a rooftop platform area (with lots of people) watching. I was nervous. I tried my borrowed embassy cell phone, which didn't work. Luckily, prayers ended and there was no clash.

More students kept coming, and they were calling for Suharto to step down. Big banners were hanging from windows in the parliament office buildings saying things like "Suharto turun (step down)," etc. And the military was massing outside the fence; they were there with their guns but keeping on the outside. You could show up there and the students were managing the entry process. They'd ask who you were, and they'd let you through. It was tense but we could come and go kind of as we wanted.

It wasn't clear who exactly was supporting the students camping out at parliament, but clearly there were patrons behind the scenes supplying food and water and portable bathrooms. This was another one of these shadow things, more going on that one could see. Anyway, that's kind of an aside.

And then it was the morning of May 21 when Suharto announced he was stepping down. That evening there was this big celebration at the DPR compound. I went over and it was just like a big party. I remember seeing groups of military guys, inside the compound now, celebrating, dancing. It was a very festive atmosphere.

But Suharto immediately named B.J Habibie, his vice president, to be the new president. The students were looking for regime change and the vice president was not what they



were hoping for, so it sort of took the wind out of the sails of this great excitement. He was seen as, well, he was Suharto's guy. But he was talking about bringing democracy, and did start to take actions in that direction pretty quickly. That was the resolution.

*Q: Was that more or less the situation by the time you left?*

DORMAN: I left a few weeks after Habibie took over.

*Q: By the time you left there was there the feeling that Indonesia's not going to break apart into disparate elements, but it was on the way towards something better?*

DORMAN: I think so, yes. But things were moving so fast even by the time I left, it was still very much still in play. There was some sense that while Habibie may not have been the one people thought of to usher in democracy, he was the new leader, so okay, give him a chance. That was kind of the stability card. Habibie was in place, let's see what he can do. But it was still very tense and things were not resolved completely.

*Q: What about the Chinese card? I mean, you mentioned Chinatown got burned and Chinese women were raped during this one day. I mean, it seems like every time things start to go sour in Indonesia they take it out on the Chinese.*

DORMAN: Yes, they tend to be the ones who are targeted. They have a disproportionate amount of the wealth and so at times of economic and political stress, anger has been taken out on them. After the riots, a lot of Chinese were taking their money and leaving the country; they were terrified. And things did calm down, the attacks did not carry on past those couple days, but it was a huge hit and there was an exodus of money and people, for sure.

*Q: What about during this whole time, were there other, did you find you were teaming up or sharing information with other embassies? One thinks, obviously, of Australia, which is the next door neighbor, but also the Chinese, the Brits, others. But was there much collegiality on sort of, you know, reporting, hey what's going on?*

DORMAN: Yes, I would say there was a fair amount of that. As the junior officer in our section, I had less contact with other embassies than my colleagues did as they had direct counterparts. They had regular lunches or other meetings, I think. There were times, like when things were heating up with the students, when I would get calls from the Australian embassy political counselor asking me what my contacts were telling me. And so I got very popular there towards the end because I had spent more time working these contacts than anyone else in the diplomatic community.

*Q: How about communications and all from Washington, from the Indonesia desk? Did you feel the hand of Washington much?*

DORMAN: The political section was in regular contact with the desk, but it wasn't usually through me, though I did serve as control officer for a visit to Sumatra with the desk officer and worked on other visits from D.C. VIPs like Assistant Secretary Roth and quite a few members of Congress.

When the unrest started and through May, we had very regular contact with Washington and the desk, those last few weeks when the regime was coming down, basically. After the riots, the Operations Center set up a task force at the State Department, so they had 24-hour connection with us. We'd get calls from the task force regularly asking for updates and we were preparing daily sit reps and other reporting on what was happening on the ground. There were a couple weeks when it felt like Washington and even the White House wanted to know exactly what was going on, even wanted to know "what are the students going to do?" and there was a lot of back and forth. It felt like it was a moment in history when we were on the ground and they wanted to know what was happening to decide on what the reaction was going to be based, at least in part, on the reality on the ground.

*Q: Well then, when did you leave Indonesia?*

DORMAN: In June 1998.

*Q: Then what?*

DORMAN: Then I went to the State Department Operations Center as a watch officer for a year.

*Q: How did you find that?*

DORMAN: It was fascinating, because you got to see everything, to be in the middle of everything as far as knowing what was going on. I mean, essentially we were phone operators, but phone operators for some very high-level calls and people. Every time the Secretary of State wanted to make a call to a foreign leader, which she did multiple times a day usually, she'd do it through us. We'd find Foreign Minister so and so wherever he was (it was almost always he) and set up the call and put them together and then at least a couple of us would have to listen in on the call as notetakers and then the editor on shift would write up the cable. Both sides had people on the line, it was a known thing. For American-to-American calls, we'd connect the parties and drop off. We never listened in on those.

We also needed to keep up with everything going on around the world that might be of interest to the Secretary and other principals. Sometimes the Secretary would call and you wouldn't know it was her until you picked up the phone, and she'd say "What do I need to know?" And we had to be ready to do a briefing at a second's notice, all the time. We had CNN on, we had other media and we had cable traffic from all the posts around the world. Those were our main sources, plus phone calls.

It was only my second or third week at the Ops Center when the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were bombed in almost simultaneous Al-Qaeda attacks. I was doing a training shift, shadowing an experienced watchstander doing the editor job that night (it was the night shift). I remember that the calls came in within about 5 minutes of each other, both coming to us within minutes of the bombings. Our job was to first decide whether to wake up the Secretary who was on travel: Yes. Then to alert all the principals and set up a task force. The people on the watch are the first ones to know when something major happens everything and if you're a political junkie, it's a great place to be to know what's going on.

Another thing that happened during my time in the Operations Center was the Kosovo conflict. There were weeks when the Secretary would speak to four, sometimes five, other NATO country foreign ministers in one call every day. We'd have to collect all of them onto a phone line and patch her in and then figure out who was saying what and take accurate notes. That was a challenge but also fascinating.

*Q: I was interviewing Marc Grossman last week and we were covering the time when he was in charge of the Secretariat and was saying how they had quite a screening procedure in order to pick up watch officers. I mean, this is considered getting the best officers and training them. This is considered a plum assignment. It shows you were on, you might say, the fast track, or anyway, you had been.*

DORMAN: Could have been, yes.

*Q: Well you had done well in Indonesia otherwise you wouldn't have been chosen.*

DORMAN: Yes. You couldn't even apply to work in the Ops Center without a cable from your ambassador recommending you; that was the first step. It was considered a good job for your career. And there isn't a better place to learn about how the department works. I think everyone should serve there, because you get to see the dynamics of how the desk and embassies interact and what the principals are doing. Everything comes together through the watch. It was amazing.

*Q: Well you did that for a year and then what?*

DORMAN: Well I got pregnant during that year, which was kind of crazy given the schedule; every two days you're on different hours.

*Q: Yes, I was going to say, I almost asked how did that happen.*

DORMAN: It was very interesting having morning sickness while on duty. Especially if you're the lead watch officer on shift it was tough because you really can't get out of the chair much. It was challenging sometimes, but luckily it was not a bad pregnancy. I left the watch maybe two weeks before Hannah was born. I finished my assignment just about on time, maybe a couple weeks early. Then I went on Leave Without Pay—and never went back.

*Q: Well then, you made the decision to leave the Foreign Service at that point?*

DORMAN: I made the decision to go on leave for a year and try to figure out whether to leave the Foreign Service. I struggled with it for quite a long time but yes, essentially during that time decided.

*Q: Well one of the things I've discovered is that many people come in and try the Foreign Service for a little while and it's like trying a little cocaine, it's addictive as hell.*

DORMAN: Yes, yes.

*Q: And it's very, very difficult. Once you get in, and in particular somebody like yourself who obviously was tapped, you could see a solid future.*

DORMAN: I should say that from the beginning I hadn't looked at the Foreign Service as something I would do forever, in part because I married someone who wasn't in the Foreign Service. We had agreed that okay, he would follow me for awhile but at some point, we'd shift out of that. I went in knowing that. So I took the year on LWOP, and I admit it was difficult to go from being so in the loop, to not.

This was especially true coming out of Jakarta. I don't think things get any better for a political officer than that time in Jakarta, being able to witness history from the front lines, to see the fall of a repressive regime and the beginning of a new road to democracy that the people—and especially the students—were demanding. It was inspiring.

Obviously I couldn't stay on endlessly in Jakarta. My tour was over. The Ops Center was expecting me. But that transition back to the U.S. was challenging, a little bit of a letdown. The year in Ops was very intense for the entire time. I was called back over to Jakarta for a 3-week TDY (temporary duty) to help with election coverage during the Ops Center assignment. That was pretty unusual, to be allowed to leave Ops for a few weeks, but it was a high enough level request, I guess, and they let me go. I was 6 months pregnant then. It was a great trip, another "fix" as you'd say.

Going from that to being on leave without pay was tough, but I felt like I had to do that, like I needed to work part-time for a while. I felt like I owed my kids more of my attention. At that time, probably still, there weren't part-time options for FSOs, that's not how the job works, so I resigned.

What happened towards the end of that year, before I resigned, was that I ran across this ad for a half-time job with *The Foreign Service Journal* that sounded just right for me. Even before the Foreign Service, what I had always wanted to do was writing, was more in a journalism direction. I found political officer work to be similar in some ways to that of a reporter so that had been a good fit. But this *FSJ* job seemed like a perfect transitional thing to do.

The pay was terrible, but it was a way to work part-time and get into a new type of work while staying connected to international affairs work and people. It was a nice transition for me. I didn't have to be completely cut off from the Foreign Service and could work for that community through the American Foreign Service Association and the *Journal* and still be very much tied to that world but not owned by it.

*Q: Well you've continued with the American Foreign Service Association, which essentially is the union and the professional association for the Foreign Service. What have you been doing with that?*

DORMAN: I'm the associate editor of the *Journal* and most of what I do is the AFSA News section, which is kind of anything that we think AFSA members would be interested in and reporting on what the association is doing. Some 80 percent of the Foreign Service belongs to AFSA, plus retirees. I do about half editing, half writing. And a couple times a year I do a more major article for what we call the white pages, the rest of the magazine. For example, I did a big article on service in Iraq back in March (2006) that got some attention. [Note: Dorman would become FSJ Editor-in-Chief and AFSA Publications Director in 2014.]

*Q: I saw that and also reports of people who served there.*

DORMAN: Yes, asking people for input.

*Q: I found it very illuminating what people were doing. I think gave a very solid picture of the type of work that was going on there.*

DORMAN: Oh good. Yes, people had a whole lot to say. We essentially just asked for input by sending out a set of questions, and I was shocked at how much people had to say. Every person who responded, which was more than 200 people, shared thoughtful input. Because it's a very tense embassy environment there and sensitive to discuss, we told people they needed to tell us who they were but that, upon request, we would not publish their names. That let a lot of people feel comfortable sharing.

Anyway, I do special reports like that for the magazine and then I do *Inside a U.S. Embassy*. AFSA originally published an initial version of this book in 1996. It was a little book, but useful. The AFSA executive director asked if I wanted to redo it; in 2003, I bumped up to full-time and spent about half my time on the magazine and the other half doing the book, essentially starting from scratch.

We formed an advisory committee to help guide the process. I set about finding people to profile from almost all types of FS embassy jobs, collecting stories and day in the life entries. And I interviewed FS employees around the world for profiles of each type of embassy position, one to represent each job. Altogether people from some 80 missions were included.

And then I had to figure out how to publish it, how to make a book. That was an interesting education for me. Where do you get a cover, how do you design pages, who prints it, what do you charge for it, how do you get an ISBN (International Standard Book Number) number, and then how do you do distribution and sales and marketing—that whole world, which to me is very interesting. This is AFSA’s product and we sell it through a distributor. It’s done very well; we’ve sold more than 50,000 copies. That’s taken up a chunk of my time. Now I’m full-time with AFSA and I keep doing book work and also *Journal* work.

*Q: During the time you’ve been there, what have been the issues that have absorbed most of the attention of the Association would you say?*

DORMAN: Well a big one that’s maybe about to be resolved is overseas comparability pay, where people in Washington at this point get about 17 or 18 percent added to their salary for locality pay that people overseas don’t get. It means that say you’re working in Washington, then you go overseas and it feels like a pay cut because that money disappears and so it’s become a bigger and bigger issue as every year the percentage goes up. When I was in the Service I don’t remember ever hearing about it as an issue because maybe it was only a few percent, I don’t even know.

*Q: In my time, it was completely different. When you went to Washington you lost.*

DORMAN: Yes.

*Q: And then you’d go back to Washington and you’re on your own.*

DORMAN: Right. It has shifted. A couple of years ago senior FS were given “virtual” locality pay that gave them the salary boost, but not mid- and entry-level people. That creates even more of a disparity because you’ve got people overseas in the same embassy, some of whom are getting that 17 percent and some of whom are not. The more junior people are not getting it and they’re the ones with the lower salaries to begin with. That’s very much in play right now because the administration is saying essentially if we can tie it to this “pay for performance” idea, which is now big, then we’ll give you this locality pay bump. It’s complicated because they also have to change the Foreign Service Act so AFSA’s very much involved in making sure that’s done in a way that doesn’t hurt employees.

And AFSA has an outreach mission as well, and that’s where the book program comes in. We’re trying to let Americans know what the Foreign Service is, that’s a part of AFSA’s mission. Most Americans have no idea.

*Q: What is your impression of the Foreign Service and how it feels about our involvement in Iraq?*

DORMAN: Well, I think it is coloring pretty much everything now and it feels like if you’re coming into the Foreign Service today, you’re going to serve there. It’s almost like

it could be another Vietnam as far as being a place most will have to serve. And yet, people are still applying to join, the numbers are up for the exam, recruiting is going well. It doesn't seem like it's turning people off from joining.

But my sense is that so much is focused on Iraq that a lot of people feel like other things don't matter as much. And that seems shortsighted. Iraq is the number one priority and we have to staff Iraq fully, but that might mean other places can't be staffed. AFSA's definitely involved in negotiating the incentives. New incentives were issued recently to encourage people to bid on Iraq and to avoid directed assignments.

*Q: Directed assignment being you're ordered to go there.*

DORMAN: Right.

*Q: As opposed to volunteering.*

DORMAN: Volunteering, yes. Nobody wants to go to directed assignments but that seems to be a threat that's hanging out there. If the Foreign Service can't staff these jobs, that will have to happen.

*Q: Well I mean, you know, as in any organization you have to have something like that, I mean, if the job is to be done.*

DORMAN: If you can't get people to volunteer to do it, sure.

*Q: If you can't get people to volunteer to do it. In fact, this used to be kind of the way the Foreign Service was run.*

DORMAN: Yes.

*Q: You put in your wish list—*

DORMAN: And then they send you to Baghdad.

*Q:—and off you went to wherever you were directed to go. I belong to a different era, but then we kind of saluted and did it.*

DORMAN: Right.

*Q: For awhile and then you went on somewhere else.*

DORMAN: And you have to be able to do that. I mean, running an organization. But the problem I think today more than in the past is the number of unaccompanied jobs. How many years are you willing to spend without your family? They're talking about extending the unaccompanied from one year to 18 months and I think looking at the whole intake process. If we're going to staff a war zone long term, there are some

fundamental questions about what the Foreign Service is and what kind of people we need.

*Q: We're sounding more like the military. I mean, you have this peculiar thing where, in bureaucratic terms the Foreign Service is not considered part of the national security apparatus.*

DORMAN: Right.

*Q: Well anyway, you find this an interesting job?*

DORMAN: I do. I went to AFSA looking at it as a transition job, leaving the Foreign Service and getting into writing and editing work, magazine work. And then I really liked it there and stayed—and I'm still there. And doing the book project added a lot to what I was getting out of it. Essentially it's the kind of work that I've always wanted to do and since now I live in Baltimore it's not very convenient to work at AFSA but it's so flexible that that's been a big incentive to stay.

*Q: Okay. Well Shawn, I think this will be a good place to stop.*

DORMAN: Okay.

*Q: Great.*

*End of interview*