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

MICHAEL A. BOORSTEIN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is the 13th of September, 2005. This is an interview with Michael. Do you have a middle initial?

BOORSTEIN: A.

Q: Michael A. What does the A stand for?

BOORSTEIN: Alan.

Q: Do you pronounce it Boorstein or stein?

BOORSTEIN: BoorSTEEN.

Q: Boorstein. B-O-O-R-S-T-E-I-N. All right, Mike, let's sort of start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

BOORSTEIN: I was born in Washington, D.C. on September 29th, 1946.

Q: You want to talk about, can you tell me a little about on your father's side first, then we'll go to the mother's side. Where did they come from? What do you know?

BOORSTEIN: Well, I know quite a bit. My father was born in London, England in February of 1906. Next February will be his 100th birthday, but he's no longer living. He was the only son of a family that had a total of six children and the other five being girls. An older brother died as an infant. His parents were Ukrainian Jews from Kharkov and my grandfather was in the laundry business and during the early part of the 20th Century there was a period of upsurge and anti-Semitism.

Q: There were some pogroms in that area, weren't there?

BOORSTEIN: Exactly. So, my grandfather had the wherewithal and the wisdom and he went with his wife and children before my father was born to London. Again I don't know why he picked London or what exactly he did when he was there, but nonetheless while my grandparents were in London my father was born. When my father was about two years old my grandfather decided things were okay and they went back to Kharkov.

Q: This would have been about?

BOORSTEIN: 1908 or 1909. The last child, another girl was born back in Kharkov. Then of course they endured the Russian revolution. In the early 1920s my grandfather found the means to legally immigrate to the United States. My father came over with his mother, father, and younger sister leaving the four older sisters who already were either engaged or married back in the USSR at that point. Well, in the early 20s, it was not quite formed as the USSR obviously, but what became the USSR. They immigrated to the United States and first settled in Philadelphia. How much further do you want me to go with my father?

Q: Did you know your grandfather?

BOORSTEIN: No, my grandfather died before I was born. I did know my grandmother. She lived until about 1955 or '56.

Q: Well, we will come back there, but how about did your father talk about the Ukraine?

BOORSTEIN: Well, unfortunately, my dad died at the age of 55 when I was 14 years old so that was a factor and I did not know that much about my father's life in the Ukraine from him. I can later on tell you about whatever family was left in the Soviet Union who I actually saw and interacted with in the late 1970s when I was assigned to Moscow.

Q: Okay, we will pick that up, but how about on your grandmother, we are talking your grandmother, your grandfather rather.

BOORSTEIN: Well, she lived to her early '80s and I didn't know her that well because when I was you know, six, seven, eight years old she was living with my aunt and uncle in New Jersey and we were living in Bethesda, Maryland. She would come down two or three times a year to visit. Her English was never that good. She spoke predominantly Yiddish and Russian. I do not know whether I was so young, I did not have that kind of curiosity. I kind of wish now that I had. I heard stories from my older sisters and my older brother about her and about the family later on, but in terms of my own interaction with her, it was pretty minimal. I found out later that she was originally from Lithuania.

Q: How about on your mother's side?

BOORSTEIN: Well that is even a more interesting story. My mother also was from Ukraine. She was born in a village called Chudnov, which is 35 miles southwest of Zhitomir, which is in turn about maybe 100 miles west of Kiev. She was born, her exact date of birth is unknown because the records were lost, but she believes it was sometime June July of 1909. She was the youngest of eight children. She had six brothers and a sister and her older brother, actually oldest brother had immigrated to the United States before she was born. Another brother left when she was like two years old. Then after the outbreak of the Russian Revolution and its aftermath, by the time she was 11 she was an orphan. Her father died of Typhoid Fever when she was 10 or 11 and six weeks later her mother was killed by marauding bandits and bled to death in the forest before they could get any help. So, with two of her older siblings, I guess three of them through the auspices of one of the Jewish welfare organizations I think the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) or something like that, that was very active in bringing Jewish refugees over from the Shtetl, basically, they were able to leave and go to Warsaw where she told me years later that she lived in Mila Street, from the book Mila 18. She lived there for about a year and then with one of her brothers and her only sister they all came over by ship to the United States in 1922. There she was met by this older brother whom she had never met and settled also in Philadelphia and that is where she and my father met.

Q: Well, how did they meet?

BOORSTEIN: You know, I am not really sure other than the fact that they were in Philadelphia. My mother was only 17 when she got married. My dad was 20 or 21. I imagine just through the closely-knit Jewish community of ï¿½migrï¿½s at the time, that is where they met. My grandfather resumed the laundry business in Philadelphia at that time and my father worked in that business with him and ultimately took it over.

Q: On your mother's and father's education, how far did they go, do you have any idea?

BOORSTEIN: Neither my mother or father ever completed high school. Whatever education they had, well my dad was 17 when he left Kharkov so maybe he had early high school education. I do not believe he ever completed a high school equivalency in the United States. My mother definitely because she was only 11 when she came over, 11 or 12, she took some courses to help with learning English when she got to the United States, but never formally completed high school. I was just going to add that my mother because she came over at a relatively young age, she bore no accent from the old country. My father had a very slight accent that was not all that apparent, you had to talk to him for a few minutes to get a sense that English was not his native language.

Q: In your family how Jewish was your family, religious, that sort of thing?

BOORSTEIN: Not very. We were basically secular Jews, I mean, I certainly had a very strong identity as being Jewish and in growing up even though I was born in Washington and grew up in Bethesda, Maryland, and I was really a minority. I think in my elementary school class out of 30 or 35 kids there were two other Jewish children, so I felt a degree of bigotry growing up. I got into fights and was called names and whatever, nothing that I think scarred me deeply, but nonetheless in the family we celebrated the Jewish holidays. We would go to the synagogue for those occasions, but we did not keep a kosher. My grandmother, my paternal grandmother kept kosher, but nobody else did.

Q: Where does the family fall politically?

BOORSTEIN: Democratic and liberal, very traditional at that time for most Jewish immigrants.

Q: Your father in Bethesda, what was he doing?

BOORSTEIN: Like I said, he originally went to Philadelphia with his parents and then shortly after my parents were married, the family relocated to the northern part of New Jersey. There was a business opportunity and my grandfather again was in the laundry business. My grandfather I am told holds a patent in the Soviet Union for inventing the first automatic dry cleaning machine in the Soviet Union. I have never gotten proof of this, but it is sort of in the family lore. I guess I should do some research to find that out, but you know, dry cleaning as a way of doing business really didn't get active in the United States until after the Second World War as I understand it. They branched out in a little bit of dry cleaning and towards the end of the war like '44 or '45 my father's first cousin was also in the laundry business in Washington and offered my dad the partnership to move to Washington, to help with an expanding business. My father, this was again before I was born, with my mother and my three older siblings moved from north New Jersey in early 1945 and I was born the next year.

Q: What do you recall about your early years? Was this a family that kind of met together a lot or were your parents busy with business or how would you put it?

BOORSTEIN: We were a very close-knit family. The idea of family was very important and I think looking back on it, particularly my mother because she had such a traumatic childhood, the idea of the family as a place of security for her was very important. I also was considerably younger than my other siblings. I think I was not a planned child. I was a loved child, but I came 10 years after my next oldest sibling. I have one sister who is 18 years older than I am, another sister is 16 years older, and my brother is 10 years older and then there is me. I was an uncle when I was six for example and so my two older sisters and shortly thereafter my brother all got married and stayed in the Washington area and then had their own children so we would often on a Sunday have a large family dinner where the daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren would get together and I'd be there too as the only single one left. There was a lot of closeness in that regard. Yes, we were a close-knit family in that fashion.

Q: With your brothers and sisters, were they going to be different from your parents because your parents obviously were having to work.

BOORSTEIN: No, my mother never worked. She was a stay at home mom, very typical of the '50s and whatever, very much in the kitchen and cooking and baking and raising the kids and driving us around and doing whatever and my dad was the breadwinner and he had his role and even on a Sunday he put on a white shirt and a tie, a very formal kind of guy and it was sort of hands off. My mother's name was Rose. Rose, you take care of the kids; I bring home the paycheck. Very clearly defined, old European kind of division of labor and it worked by and large.

Q: Was your mother pointing you towards higher education and all or not?

BOORSTEIN: My parents made it clear and this was I think an immigrant philosophy and a Jewish philosophy that you will go to college. There is no choice. There is no, you know, if you do not you are going to lose a limb. It was sort of implied. The threat was there and so you will succeed. All four of us got college degrees. I am the only one who got a master's degree, but my two sisters although they did get bachelors of arts degrees from the University of Maryland, my one sister, the second sister, did work for a while as a school teacher. My oldest sister got married shortly after college and she really never worked, and my brother got a degree in accountancy from Bucknell University and worked many years. He is now retired. He worked in business as an accountant. He was a very early professional in the computer field actually.

Q: Well, then what was it like growing up, you grew up in Bethesda?

BOORSTEIN: In Bethesda.

Q: Talk about Bethesda at the time. Where did you live in Bethesda?

BOORSTEIN: Well, the reason we lived in Bethesda was that my dad's main cleaning plant, laundry and dry cleaning plant was at the corner of Hampden Lane and Wisconsin Avenue. If you know Wisconsin Avenue and Bethesda and can picture, if you know where the statue of Madonna of the Trail is at the post office?

Q: Oh, yes by the post office.

BOORSTEIN: Okay, we were two blocks, a block and a half south on Wisconsin Avenue and then maybe two blocks, I guess that would be west going down the hill. My dad was able to walk to work when the weather was good.

Q: Where did you live, I mean do you remember the address?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, 4956 Hamden Lane. That house has been torn down. It is now a parking lot for that area. Bethesda is largely commercialized. I went to an elementary school which was about five blocks away, walked to school, had lots of young boys and girls in the neighborhood and we palled around and did all kinds of exploring and you know, trick or treating. I was never at home and it was just an era that is so sadly gone in most neighborhoods now where kids have to be so protected and by the time I was able to ride a two wheeler I was just gone. I was very active.

Q: Our kids, at one point we lived in Bethesda and they went to an elementary school right across the street from the library.

BOORSTEIN: That is exactly where I went to school. That is Bethesda Elementary.

Q: That is where they went.

BOORSTEIN: Oh yes.

Q: We would send them off in the morning and they would get on their bikes or walk or something. Well, how about as a kid, what were you interested in?

BOORSTEIN: I was destined for the Foreign Service. I think looking back on it now it was not anything where my mom and dad said, well, I think you should be a diplomat, but because of my dad, my mom had nobody left in the old country. All of her siblings immigrated except one and he was likely killed during World War II by the Germans in this little town because there was just no trace of him left. My dad on the other hand had left behind these three sisters, no, come to think of it there were five sisters and a brother. You have to count. Two of the sisters died also of Typhoid Fever in an epidemic in the 1920s. Two others survived and after the war was over and they reestablished contact my parents would often send care packages. I was aware, I would be aware of these trips to Philadelphia to mail these packages to whatever relief organizations helped. I was interested in this and from time to time my parents had some connection, I do not know exactly through whom and they knew people in the Soviet Embassy and so I remember Russian diplomats, Soviet diplomats coming to our house. They spoke English and I would interact with them and talk to them. I had this comfort level. When I was in 4th or 5th grade, for show and tell I brought in a book that I had gotten. I do not know whether I got it as a gift or I found it in a bookstore. It was called Rainbow Around the World and it was a book that had little vignettes written for a nine or ten year old about children from other countries. I brought it to school and I reported on it. I don't know whether the principal was in the room or the teacher was so taken with this that she told the principal that I had done this and the principal wrote a letter home to my parents saying what a wonderful little boy I was, that I had this broad horizon in the world, etc. I still have that letter in that book on my shelf at home. So, for whatever reason I had this worldly outlook.

I think another factor that came later was growing up in the Washington area. So many of my friends' parents' dads were either in the Foreign Service or the military. Someone was here today and then he was off in Ramstein Air Force Base in Germany or another kid whose father was in the Foreign Service was transferred to Argentina, so I remember writing letters. I had that kind of orientation.

Q: Did you pick up stamp collecting or anything like that?

BOORSTEIN: Briefly. I cannot say that it was a passion. I did collect stamps for a couple of years.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

BOORSTEIN: Voracious reader. I was also into baseball trivia. I was a big fan of the old Washington Senators and my dad through his business used to give complimentary opening day tickets to the game because his old supplier was Griffith Consumers. Remember that company? I saw Eisenhower throw out the first ball. I saw Kennedy throw out the first ball with my dad and just followed the Senators and just cried like a baby when they left. I read a lot of biographies, a lot of history books, a lot of baseball history books.

Q: Can you think of any author or books that made quite an impression on you?

BOORSTEIN: I remember reading Exodus. A lot of the books that had to do with Jews basically historically and the Holocaust and World War II, that was a big focus of mine when I was 10, 11, 12 years old. Leon Uris.

Q: Well, did you I mean you had this dual background, Jewish and Russian, well, I mean what we call Russian.

BOORSTEIN: Well, my parents spoke Russian and Yiddish. Where my dad was from was really the Russian speaking part of the Ukraine and it still is today, but my mother grew up as more Ukrainian and she professed it that she spoke Ukrainian and Russian and Yiddish and of course English. I do not know that I ever heard her speak Ukrainian.

Q: I was wondering this is also the height of the Cold War, I was wondering in the first place did you have a grandmother or somebody who would go around muttering about the Cossacks? I mean this goes back to the Pogroms.

BOORSTEIN: No, Not really.

Q: What about the Soviet Union? I mean this is the enemy.

BOORSTEIN: Well, I tell you, now that I am at the end of my career I probably, there is parts that diplomatic security probably would not like to hear, but I had definitely relatives that were communist sympathizers. I had an uncle this is my mother's sister's husband who really espoused the whole Soviet line. My father used to get into vicious fights with him because my father loved America. There was just no question about it, as with my mother. My Uncle Albert would find things bad to say about a country that he was now a citizen of and would think that the Soviet model was wonderful, a worker's paradise and all this other stuff. I had a cousin on my mother's side named Benjamin Gitlow who wrote a book called I Confess. It was a book that was written in the late '20s, early '30s because he broke with the communist party.

Q: I remember that. That was an important book.

BOORSTEIN: He broke with the communist party, but again this was a cousin on my mother's side, I am not quite sure how the connection was there. Of course when I was putting my paperwork in for the Foreign Service you have to list if you have any relatives who are not Americans, I had to list these two aunts and several first cousins who lived in the Soviet Union. It did not stop me from getting my clearance, but I had to have a special interview I remember because of that fact. There was no, in terms of my parents, there was no question that they were truly Americans and loved their country and as a matter of fact when I went on a trip with my parents to the Soviet Union when I was 14 my dad went to see his sisters and he was so proud and could speak Russian well enough to get into these political discussions with family members and others obviously with a bit of caution and he would take a Polaroid camera and show this off as the height of American technology and just very proud as an American and so that sense of pride as an American and yet feeling a very strong pride in my ethnic roots was something that definitely was imprinted upon me as an adult in the Foreign Service.

Q: Were there any subjects that particularly struck you in elementary or middle school or in high school?

BOORSTEIN: Well, like I said I enjoyed social studies. I enjoyed language arts. I was not very good in art itself. I took piano lessons for a long time and still enjoyed playing the piano and I do not have one now, but I still know how to read music and I took guitar lessons in high school. My dad was a real opera buff and often I listened to operas with him on WGMS on Saturday afternoons. He would sing arias and he would recognize much better than I would ever be able to do. I was not that good at math or science. That was clear from the start.

Q: That starts like the ultimate qualification for the Foreign Service.

BOORSTEIN: Exactly.

Q: What about the world? Were you a newspaper reader? A news listener?

BOORSTEIN: You know, again, I attribute to my father a world outlook and a curiosity that I think really led me to this career as well. There used to be in the old Evening Star, I do not know whether it was daily or several times a week, but there was a quiz related to a president. They would give you a little vignette and then you would have to guess which president is this and my dad and I would do this together. Again, this is a man who was not a native born American, so he was also curious. There was a time that I could recite in chronological order every president from Washington to Eisenhower.

Q: You're one of those nasty little kids, right?

BOORSTEIN: I probably could not do it today. My brother was even worse, or better I should say in terms of being a history buff. I loved Civil War history, would read a lot of books, and went to the battlefields, so many of them are so close to Washington. I had that kind of orientation.

Q: Did segregation hit you at all or were you aware of it because you were growing up at a time when schools were beginning to be hit. I remember there used to be schools that had been whites only and then they shut down.

BOORSTEIN: You know, I had a lot of contact with African Americans in my father's business. Being in the laundry business, a lot of the people who worked for him were black. From the time I was seven, eight, nine years old began a great bonding thing with my father. He would take me to work on a Saturday morning and I would sit by his desk and I had a little adding machine, one of those crank things and I would play around with it and he would show me how the ledgers were kept. He would take me around the plant and it got to a point where you talk about OSHA getting upset, you could never do it today, an eight or nine year old kid, I would just have the run of the place.

Q: OSHA being?

BOORSTEIN: The safety and health administration.

Q: Work safety.

BOORSTEIN: Exactly, you know, I would go running around all by myself. I remember I would help this one woman who ran a machine that you would put the boxes, the shirts in a box and there was a foot pedal, you put it in a certain way and the string would go and tie it up and you'd move it the other way and the string would move and I was able to operate that machine and I would do it because it was fun. My dad and his partner would have an annual fishing trip to the Chesapeake Bay where he would invite his foreman level people, which included a number of African Americans as well. By then there was no problem with that happening. I imagine maybe earlier in the '50s the black people would not have been allowed on the charter boat, but that was not a problem.

In the elementary school we just had a handful of blacks so there was sort of like more of a geographic segregation. I did not have any black friends even through high school. Not until I got to college did I have any friends that were black, but we did know a lot of African Americans through my dad's business. We had a maid in the house that was black.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

BOORSTEIN: I went to Bethesda Chevy Chase High School.

Q: How did you find that?

BOORSTEIN: It was a bit of a challenge for me because my dad had died the summer before I started high school between 9th and 10th grade because we had moved from the house on Hampden Lane when I was 10 and moved to a street in that area of Bethesda, the street we lived on was called Huntington Parkway very near Bradley Boulevard. I was on the border and I ended up going to a different junior high school, I normally would have gone to Leland Junior High School, but I ended up going to North Bethesda Junior High School which is the feeder school to Walter Johnson High School and ultimately to Walt Whitman High School. After 9th grade when my dad died, my mom went into the business and she wanted me to help her after school with the business and because BCC was so close to where the plant was I switched and went to school. A number of the kids that I saw in the 10th grade were kids that I had not seen since the 6th grade, but there was a lot of adjustment and I felt awkward because my dad was not living any longer and it was a tough time to adjust. I mean I ultimately did fine, but 10th grade was a bit tough.

Q: Did you find that because things were changing an awful lot in our society and I am not sure that you would have been taking note of this, but anti-Semitism was sort of on its way. I won't say completely or was it still a factor or something about BCC high school?

BOORSTEIN: Well, I tell you, even though we were fairly secular I still went to Hebrew School and I had a Bar Mitzvah and I went to Sunday School and I had a lot of friends who were Jewish, not exclusively. In high school the majority of my friends were Jewish so we had our own little circle and there was a large number of them. For example, well, I think she was Jewish, yes. Peter Jennings' previous wife, the mother of his children was Kati Marton who is now married to Richard Holbrooke and she and her sister, Julie, were immigrants from Hungary from 1956 Budapest, Hungary. She wasn't a close friend, I actually knew her sister better so she was also in my high school. My two best friends were Jewish, so we had our own little group and it wasn't exclusively that way. I felt a comfort level in that, not that we did anything that was reflective of our Jewish heritage other than just our names, but I didn't feel any prejudice. I was in a bowling league on a Saturday morning. There were very few other Jewish kids in that and activities in school. I didn't feel a sense; I felt more of that sense when I was younger in elementary school.

Q: Did Israel play a role?

BOORSTEIN: Well, there certainly was a focus on Israel and its needs. My mother was a member of Hadassah, which is one of these organizations that raise money and she had this little tin bank called a pushka where we used to go around and collect money and we would put our spare change in there and that went to Israel. Through the Diaspora of our family of origin from the old country we actually had cousins in Israel and on that same trip where I went with my parents to the Soviet Union we had gone on that same trip earlier on to Israel and spent a week or so and visited with relatives there. So, I visited Israel in 1961 and actually went back with my mother when we were stationed in Palermo in '72, went back with my wife, daughter and my mother. There was an orientation and a focus, yes absolutely.

Q: Back to your trip to the Soviet Union, this was 1961?

BOORSTEIN: '61.

Q: You were what about 14?

BOORSTEIN: 14.

Q: How did it strike you?

BOORSTEIN: In those days when you planned a trip like that you planned for months and months. This was a big deal for my parents. Now my mom and dad had gone there in 1959 and I stayed with my older sister who was married and so that was the first time my father had seen his two sisters in 36 years. Two years later they went back and I went with them. For that entire year particularly my mother, she would help me with Russian words. I had maybe a 300 or 400 word vocabulary where I could identify. I knew a few phrases. I could name knife, fork, spoon, glass, shoes, and socks, whatever and so I had a little bit of interchange with my Russian relatives who could not speak any English. There were a number of friends that were introduced to us who had kids my age, some of whom spoke fluent English because they were in the interpreter's school so I was able to have some English language contacts and I felt quite comfortable with all of that. I thought it was kind of neat.

Q: Then in high school did one at BCC major or socialize in something?

BOORSTEIN: Not really. I was in the college preparatory track. There was no such thing as either gifted and talented or advanced placement in those days. At BCC 97% of the kids went to college anyway and the objective was to get your grades high enough so that you wouldn't go to the University of Maryland.

Q: Yes. So, what were you planning for and what happened?

BOORSTEIN: I applied to a variety of schools and I did not have a stellar grade point average in high school. Once I got my driver's license and discovered girls.

Q: Were you getting pressure from your mother to date nice Jewish girls?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, but I defied her not exclusively, but did not date only Jewish girls. The one serious girlfriend I had for a year or so in high school was Jewish. Again, not a religious one at all. Anyway, I applied to Georgetown School of Foreign Service, to GW, to American University and a number of small schools in Pennsylvania and because the girl that I was dating at the time had discovered this small liberal arts college in southern Wisconsin that had a strong international affairs program, we decided we'd apply together. This is Beloit College. We both applied to Beloit College and we were both accepted and that's where we both went. The irony of it is that even though I had been accepted to the Georgetown School of Foreign Service I didn't go. It was Bill Clinton's class. He's exactly my age.

Q: Who?

BOORSTEIN: Bill Clinton.

Q: Oh yes.

BOORSTEIN: He was in the class of '68 at Georgetown.

Q: You blew it.

BOORSTEIN: I blew it, but little did I know. My objective at the time was to get away from my mother. My dad was gone. I did a lot of caring for my mother and was working in the store and preparing dinner at home and sometimes when I'd come home from school and help her out in the store and I was ready to move on. She had other adult children at home and I was appropriately selfish and my mother went along with it. Fortunately my dad's life insurance policy left money to pay for the college and so I went. The girlfriend and I lasted about another three or four months and that was it. That typically happens.

Q: You were at Beloit from when to when?

BOORSTEIN: 1964 to 1968.

Q: By the way when you were in high school were you caught up in you might say the Kennedy phenomenon?

BOORSTEIN: Oh, absolutely. Yes. I saw Kennedy when John Glenn made his orbit trip around the world and there was a big ticker tape parade down Pennsylvania Avenue. They declared it a holiday in the Washington area and a friend of mine whose father had an office near the RKO Keith's Movie Theater on 15th Street where we could look out of the window, we went down there and I watched the parade and saw Kennedy go by in the open limousine with John Glenn. We went to a ball game like I said with my dad when he threw out the first ball, just like so many other people of that age, I just adored the man and learned everything about the Kennedy family and often described him as an inspiration for me also to be involved in international affairs. Yes, definitely.

Q: The assassination I suppose hit you pretty hard.

BOORSTEIN: It was devastating. I was a senior in high school and I was not in school that day. My mom asked me to take the car into the repair shop. This was a repair shop on Arlington Road. You know where Strosnider's Hardware was on Arlington Road?

Q: I lived one block over from there.

BOORSTEIN: At that point we lived on Huntington Parkway.

Q: I lived there.

BOORSTEIN: Okay, that's where you lived. Anyway, there was a Cadillac Oldsmobile dealership across from the concrete place? Okay, that's where the car was and that's where I was when the news came that he had been killed. All of us around that waiting room just didn't know what to say to each other. I remember spending a lot of time with my girlfriend at the time just glued to the television. My close friend in high school and I went down to the Rotunda to wait in line to see the coffin. The crowds were so bad we never got there. We finally gave up because we couldn't stay out. We knew we would never make it until they cut the line off at night. Certainly watching everything on television and commiserating with my friends. It was a tragic event.

Q: Did you feel though that Kennedy's spirit had an effect on you later on as far as pointing you toward government service?

BOORSTEIN: In and of itself, no, but certainly as another piece of the puzzle, a big piece I would have to say and I think that the international orientation of my parents, the first generation of immigrants growing up in the Washington area, the friends whose fathers were in the Foreign Service and the military and the Kennedy piece were all parts of the same equation.

Q: Well, then Beloit in 1964, what was it like? What was your impression of it?

BOORSTEIN: Well, that was another culture shock because here I was the first time I'd ever been west of West Virginia and off going to the heartland of America, flat fields, different accents, easy access to beer. In those days Wisconsin had 3.2% beer availability if you were 18, so I discovered beer and I discovered the fraternities. Again, my first couple of semesters I didn't flunk out, but I was not a prized student.

Q: Well, for a lot of people it's a very close call.

BOORSTEIN: Exactly. I also had the two pronged cloud over my head of oh my God my parents would kill me or my mother if I flunked out and B) if I flunked out I was draft material. Somehow I managed to claw my way back and by the time I graduated I had a 3.5, I was on the dean's list, I did quite well. It was a hard adjustment to the cold winters of southern Wisconsin, extremely difficult, but again because of the social, close-knit and just a good atmosphere at campus, I thrived.

Q: How big was the school, I mean how big did you feel it was?

BOORSTEIN: It was a small school. It was 1,200 kids, 1,200 students. Liberal arts, strong international affairs, very liberal in its attitudes and we were caught up in all the campus fervent at the time of pushing back against no more rules, coed dorms, all this other stuff, most of which occurred after I left, but the fervor started.

Q: Shucks you missed it.

BOORSTEIN: I know, not all, but a good deal of it. The appearance of pot and things of that nature. That really happened, we were starting to build it up and three or four after years after I left it reached a crescendo in the early '70s.

Q: Was this don't trust anyone over the age of 30?

BOORSTEIN: There was a bit of that and the whole fear of the draft in Vietnam and the number of kids that did flunk out, the men of course were drafted. I remember going to my fifth college reunion in 1973 after I'd already completed my first tour in the Foreign Service and seeing how so many of my alumni, the men, were just back from Vietnam and were just getting their lives back in order and here I was already on my way.

Q: How did you find the classes?

BOORSTEIN: The classes were good. They were challenging. As a matter of fact, I had a little bit of arrogance coming out of Montgomery County, Maryland because in Chevy Chase, I thought I had been properly educated. Well, I got a very poor grade on my first English theme. Sometimes I think the old school English professors do that on purpose and I was just shocked, God what did I do wrong? This professor took me under his wing and said, "You know, I want to help you do better. You come to my office, Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 4:00 and we'll go over these things and I'll teach you how to write better." He did. Whatever he instilled in me gave me skills in writing that I was able to use in my Foreign Service career. I always prided myself on being an excellent writer in being able to formulate thought and organizing things or whatever and I think this man really helped me. I know he did.

Q: Did you take political science?

BOORSTEIN: I was a psychology major actually. I took a number of courses in political science and economics and history, but my focus was on a psychology major. I just was fascinated with the whole human behavior and psychological components and it's something that I'm still interested in. I didn't obviously pursue it beyond the undergraduate level. I did have two tours as a personnel officer in the State Department; there was somewhat of a linkage there.

Q: Was there much of the anti-Vietnam movement while you were there because you were there '64 to '68.

BOORSTEIN: More in the latter two years, not so much in the early two years. I mean we had a very strong young Republican component on campus during the Barry Goldwater campaign for example, but there was always. There was the hippie fringe on the left and that hippie fringe tended to grow as the years went on and sort of predominated by the time I graduated.

Q: The University of Wisconsin has quite a reputation for going back to the'30s of being very much on the avant garde on the liberal causes. Did that reflect itself or was Beloit an antithesis or something?

BOORSTEIN: Beloit was about, we were about 60 miles south of the University of Wisconsin. Madison was a place we used to go to on a Saturday night to go drinking, all the bars there. There really wasn't much interchange with the students. There wasn't a sense of they're doing this so we have to do it, too. The communications were not all that close. We were kind of off in our own little world, but obviously the trends that were on campuses certainly swept through ours as well.

Q: While you were there, particularly as you moved up towards your senior year, were you thinking about what you were going to do?

BOORSTEIN: Well, I ended up thinking about graduate school in business and public administration and I got married in my senior year to the woman I'm still married to. She was a Russian major. We met in Russian class. I chose Russian as my foreign language because I knew a little bit. I never studied any other foreign language in high school. I had two years in Latin which looking back at it now that I've been to FSI for six languages it was kind of a shame that I didn't take Spanish or French or something because I knew a little bit of Russian I tended towards that and that's where I met my wife so that was nice. I knew I wasn't interested in becoming a clinical psychologist or a social worker or something like that. I still even though I was a psychology major, I still had interest in political science and then looking at the applications of that I looked at government. I originally went to the University of Colorado to graduate school in Boulder, originally in their graduate program of public administration but, I wasn't thinking about the Foreign Service. I was thinking about government in general. I was interested in the United Nations for example and took a course on United Nations administration at the University of Colorado. After my first semester at the University of Colorado I switched to the business because I felt I needed more substance on what I wanted to study. Again my international orientation was further stimulated because I spent part of my junior year abroad in Finland. One of our professors, an art professor had been a Fulbright professor at the University of Turku, which is a town about four hours west of Helsinki and through this connection, took courses at the Swedish university because there is a fairly significant Swedish speaking minority in southwest Finland. It's not as great as it is now as it was then, but the kids who could speak English better were the kids whose native tongue was Swedish. Now the young people in Finland, they all speak English, but then the second language if it wasn't Swedish it was German because of the war. The last language you admitted knowing was Russian. You figured that one out quickly. We had a wonderful program and that also again stimulated my interest in international affairs.

Q: While you were in Finland, were you picking up anti-Vietnam feelings?

BOORSTEIN: Oh, a lot and there were a number of Americans that were living there whether they were married to Finns or they were there for academic reasons, they were very outspoken. Fortunately when you're 20 years old if you're smart you listen. I think I was smart enough where I didn't really feel I had to spout off that I knew better than anybody and either agree with somebody's anti-war position or defend the government. I felt I just needed to be better informed. I didn't take sides in particular. I remember consciously saying you know, I don't know enough about this, but certainly it was. I never felt that I was discriminated against or put upon because I was an American and I represented something. The young people tended to be more forgiving I think at least in smaller groups. I remember having a lot of philosophical discussions over a beer or a cognac or a coffee in a little coffeehouse late into the night about the meaning of life or whatever. These kids from Sweden and Finland among our little group, which was kind of neat.

Q: You graduated in 1968.

BOORSTEIN: 1968.

Q: The war was going hot and heavy and you were prime meat. What happened?

BOORSTEIN: I flunked my physical. When I was in high school I was not on the wrestling team, but because of physical education we were engaged in wrestling and one of my partners threw me the wrong way and twisted my knee. As a result of that I had to have surgery when I was 16 to remove some ligaments. Also when I was in high school just coincidentally about a year later I was visiting an aunt in the hospital in Philadelphia who was dying of cancer and they had just washed the floor and they didn't have a protective thing there and I slipped in the hospital and broke my kneecap. My brother-in-law was a lawyer and he said we're going to sue this hospital and we discovered that there was a law in the state of Pennsylvania that you couldn't sue a non-profit organization, but they paid all the costs. Between that, oh and there was a third incident actually. The summer before my senior year I was working in Colorado and I did some mountain climbing and I slipped and reinjured that same knee and had to have a second operation. So, those three incidents basically screwed up my knee so badly that I took my physical at Fitzsimmons Army Hospital in Denver and was called back for a consult by the orthopedic doctor who basically said you're going to go to basic training and you're going to blow out your knee again and we're going to be paying you a disability check for the rest of your life. We don't need you. I was categorized as 1Y where when I went to the little sergeant at the desk and I said, "What does that mean?" I'll never forget this, he said, "Well, that means when the Viet Cong are on the outskirts of Denver we'll give you a call." I never served in the military.

Q: You say you were pointed towards a master's degree anyway. What happened?

BOORSTEIN: While we were in Colorado, we already had a child, our daughter, and my wife got her certification to be an elementary school teacher and the grand plan was she was going to get a job teaching full time and I was going to be able to go to school full time because I was only taking a few courses a semester and doing part time work and I was going to finish. Well, believe it or not in 1969, 1970 there were a glut of teachers particularly teachers who wanted to live and work in nice parts of the United States like the Boulder Denver area. My wife couldn't get a job. In the meantime I had already taken and passed the Foreign Service exam. I took it in December of 1969.

Q: This was the written exam?

BOORSTEIN: The written exam and I passed it. I had put down that my availability was going to be 1971 thinking by then I would have finished my master's degree. I took my oral exam in April of 1970.

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

BOORSTEIN: It was a panel of three white guys sitting around a table like this, a lot of questions. I had passed the written exam, and this was one of the first times they divided the written test into, you had your basic test in the morning and the three options of the afternoon were one was an administration and management which I took. One was on economic and commercial and one was on history, politics and international affairs. I took the one on administration because I figured that was the one I had the best chance on and that was when they were just starting the cone system. They were screening people in each of the three areas. On the oral exam, they didn't ask me a damn question about administration. It was all about history, politics, American culture, art and I didn't think I did all that well, but obviously I passed. I don't know whether they were just looking for a pool of people from each of the areas.

Q: Or maybe they didn't know much about administration anyway.

BOORSTEIN: Well, one of the three guys was an admin officer. His name was Bob Waska. The other two were definitely political officers and so when my wife couldn't get a job in June of 1970 I called the board of examiners and I said, can you advance my arrival date and she said, well, as a matter of fact we're looking for a couple of people to come into the August class, can you make it? I said yes. I think that's how I got in because if I had languished on the register, I may not have been touched. You never know, sometimes you get lucky. I had gone through about a third of my graduate courses in business because I was not going full-time.

Q: This was where?

BOORSTEIN: The University of Colorado, because I was not a business major in accounting or marketing or whatever, I had to take a lot of the prerequisite courses for business so I completed most of those and I was going to embark on the one year intensive actual graduate program and then I never got to do, not there anyway. I finished it later at George Washington. I ended up coming to Washington in the fall of 1970.

Q: All right, well, this is probably a good place to stop and we'll pick this up, I also put at the end where we are so we can pick this up. We'll pick this up in 1970, what August?

BOORSTEIN: August.

Q: When you enter the Foreign Service and we'll talk about the class you came in with and the whole schmeer.

BOORSTEIN: Absolutely. Sounds great.

Q: Great.

Q: Today is the 22nd of September, 2005. Okay, you came into the Foreign Service, when Mike, 1970?

BOORSTEIN: It was August 1970 I believe the entering date exactly was August 18th when my junior officer class started.

Q: What was your A100 course like, the characterized or describe it.

BOORSTEIN: I was I believe a member of the second class that came in under the new cone system and I came in as an administrative officer. Our class was small. I think we had maybe 18 people, 12 State and six USIA. Four of us were admin cone officers and the rest were divided among the consular, political and economic and then there was the USIA contingent. We were a very compatible group. As a matter of fact one single man and one single woman actually started dating and ended up getting married. This was Suzanne Sekerak and Larry Butcher, both are now retired.

Q: I've interviewed Suzanne.

BOORSTEIN: One of my classmates, John Wolf, became an ambassador to Malaysia. Then the most recently I think he came back as assistant secretary for arms control. Pat Wardlaw became, I think he was DCM in Copenhagen and he was consul general in Shanghai. The others we had only one fellow leave the Foreign Service after one or two tours. His name was Bob Scott. He was single when he came in I believe, but he was married and subsequently one of his children developed some health problems and I think that's what led him to leave. Everybody else stayed in. There was a woman named Donna Oglesby, she was USIA and she rose fairly high in the ranks and became a counselor for USIA. Oh and another USIA woman I should add also became an ambassador and that was Anne Sigmund and she retired about a year ago and she I believe was ambassador to one of the Stan countries in the former Soviet Union.

Q: Do you know if she is in the area of not?

BOORSTEIN: I have no idea.

Q: How do you spell her name?

BOORSTEIN: S-I-G-M-U-N-D. She would have some good stories to tell because she, her educational background was in Soviet studies and because she was a single woman, they didn't send her to the Soviet Union in those days. She ultimately did end up going to the Soviet Union. I believe, well, I know for sure at one point in the early '80s she was the branch public affairs officer in Leningrad. She may have had a tour in Moscow. She then ultimately later in her career as a senior officer was the senior country public affairs officer in Poland, in Warsaw. I would see her from time to time in the Department. I also saw her both in Leningrad and Warsaw when I was there.

Q: How did, did you sense an almost class difference or cultural difference between being in the administrative cone and as they started this thing because one can do a pecking order and the counselor administrative are lower than the economic and political.

BOORSTEIN: You know, Stu, the people that were running the junior officer program and those that were in the board of examiners and the recruitment branch in the bureau of personnel, went out of their way to infuse exactly the opposite sense. This was a great experiment to bring people in under the cone system. I had a very close friend from high school whose mother worked for the State Department for many years as a civil servant. Her name was Ann Bleecker. I believe she worked for the bureau of international organization affairs and when I ran into her early in my junior officer course in the shopping center in Bethesda I told her what I was doing and told her what I was coming in to do and she just shook her head and said you're in for a tough time because admin officers are really second class citizens. I said, well, that remains to be seen. I did not sense that certainly in the way the leadership of the junior officer training program treated us, never had that sense at all. Frankly throughout my career did not have that sense. When I came into the Foreign Service the staff corps still existed. You had your FSSOs I believe was the terminology and were largely consular officers and I believe that ended with the whole Civil Service Foreign Service Reform Act of 1980 so there was a 10 year period where there was some of that transition if you will and some of the people that were brought in under that, I think that's still the residue of resentment primarily on the consular side, of that. I did not sense that in the admin area and of course the specialists within admin to this day we remain separate and we're not brought in under the exam.

I would like to describe a little bit about with an answer more directly to your earlier question, your first question about how I characterized the program. I don't know if I mentioned this in the previous tape, but the senior person who was overseeing the junior officer program was I guess he was a deputy assistant secretary from the bureau of personnel or certainly an office director and his name was John Stutesman.

Q: Well, John Stutesman I think is one of the unsung heroes of the Foreign Service.

BOORSTEIN: Yes and he was quite a character. He had this scar on the side of his face, which I believe he got at the Anzio beachhead from World War II. He was a Princeton graduate, had an incredibly good sense of humor, always quick with a joke and always smiling and laughing and he really had tremendous rapport with the junior officers. As a matter of fact, it was his practice for as long as he was in that job, he would pick one person out of the junior officer class to work directly for him after the six week course was over as a staff assistant until the end of the next course. It was eight, nine, ten weeks of time and he chose me to be his staff assistant. Let me put that aside and I'll come back to it because that's a whole other story. The head of the actual junior officer program who I believe was assigned to FSI was, his name was John Day. John actually was one of the people who was on my oral exam panel and he was a political officer. He was quite the opposite of John Stutesman in that he was very quiet, very reserved, and very placid. He smoked a pipe. He conveyed that intellectual kind of coolness. It was hard to warm up to him, but he was a nice enough fellow and he was attentive and whatever. The actual course coordinator was a Foreign Service Officer named John Hurley. Now, John Hurley was single. I think in today's context I would have characterized it perhaps as being gay, but that's neither here nor there, just an observation, very friendly hands on kind of guy, great rapport with the junior officers. Shortly after I came in he resigned from the Foreign Service and became an Episcopal priest and he is still practicing as far as I know in Washington and he's know as the priest of the Foreign Service. He operates out of some Episcopal Church somewhere in Washington, but he was a very attentive person and would counsel us individually and we really as a group liked him quite a bit. There was a woman; I'm going to grasp at her name. She had been in the junior officer program for years and years by the time I was there and stayed on forever and ever as a civil servant and her name escapes me now. She had scraggly long hair that went down the side, semi-curly, I think her name was Magillian.

Q: You can fill it in later if it comes back to you.

BOORSTEIN: She was quite an icon. She did a lot of the paperwork and kept us on top of things. The course itself was good. It was six weeks long. We had an offsite at Front Royal right to begin with that was facilitated with by some outside consultants. They basically tried to do group dynamics and discussions and whatever. We had an informal evening with some senior people and Marshall Green was the senior person who came out there and as hard as he tried, he couldn't sort of shed that senior aristocratic demeanor.

Q: Yes, well, he goes back to, he was a Japanese hand. He was a staff aide to Joseph Grew in wartime.

BOORSTEIN: Either before or after we met him he was ambassador to Australia at one point. It was sort of our first taste of that upper crust pin striped suit, dyed in the wool diplomat, but underneath he obviously had had an impression and it was so funny because I remember him going around the room with our small group saying, well, why did you join the foreign Service and people had these lofty notions on wanting to serve my country and of course I did, too, it was in my written statement, but I don't know what possessed me because when he came to me and asked me the question I said, well, I needed a job. He really was sort of taken aback. Of course the truth of the matter was I was motivated to do it for all the reasons, that I expressed the last time we spoke, but the truth of the matter was, I was married. I had a two-year-old child. I had chosen not to complete my graduate school as I explained the other time and a job was important, so I took it and I was glad that I did and I'm still glad that I did. I guess you'd call that something that was a little bit out of the mainstream that he was expecting to hear.

Oh, another person who was fairly significant in our group who rose fairly high in the Foreign Service was Mike Hancock, a junior officer in my class. He was a consular cone. He was consul general in Ciudad Juarez. He was an office director with CA and I think he's still in the area. He came back to work with Consular Affairs. Of our class of 18, the only person who is still on the roles other than me and who will last beyond my retirement next week is Fred Cook. Fred Cook is just finishing his tour as executive director of the bureau of East Asia and Pacific affairs. He also was an admin officer and admin counselor in Mexico City. He was post management officer for China. He's had a variety of admin experiences. He has a subspecialty in computers. I still see him from time to time.

I recall going to Capitol Hill. I recall the security briefing and the film about the young secretary who gets compromised on the ski slope by someone obviously who is a KGB agent that he passes himself off as a German businessman and he really was an East German agent. Toured the Ops Center and Ted Elliott was the director at the time and went off to be ambassador Afghanistan and was director of the Fletcher School after he left. I think William Macomber was the man who swore us in. I remember that again being at the cusp of this new cone system another innovation that they introduced at the time that was almost laughable if you look at the way the assignments work now is that we were the second class maybe even the first, but certainly not more than the second to experience the beginnings of the open assignments in that as a junior officer and perhaps it was your experience you were told where you were going to go basically. Now, we were given a list and we were able to prioritize within and the list was admin, consular, none of this rotational business. The rotational program had gone by the wayside. It came and went over the years, but it was out of favor at that time, but they wanted you to get right into your cone so the jobs that they offered to me as an incoming administrative officer were strictly admin jobs.

The job that I was ultimately assigned, being the administrative officer in Palermo, Italy, was one of a number of them. I recall two of them on the list were both as personnel officers and immediately would go right from being an incoming junior officer to the training to go out to be a personnel officer in the embassy. Looking at it from today's standpoint it is highly unusual because you have to go through it might be your third tour if you were in management or if you're not a specialist. I believe the personnel job in Asuncion and the one in La Paz definitely were on the list. The administrative job in Port Louis, Mauritius was on it which was an embassy and also the admin officer job in Bujumbura, that's where Fred Cook went and the fellow Bob Scott who left the Foreign Service he went to Port Louis, Mauritius from here, first tour going out as an admin officer in albeit a small embassy, it was still an embassy. Well, I ended up in Palermo, but not by choice. In talking to a whole bunch of people in the system and one person I remember who influenced me quite a bit was a gentleman named Don Woodward who I understand has passed away recently. At the end of his career he was the head of the career transition center. He was an admin person, an admin officer and he influenced me and I put down at the top of my bid list to be a personnel officer in La Paz and people were saying, oh, you don't want to go to La Paz because they're going to teach you Spanish. You'll never see north of the Rio Grande again. You sure you want to do this? I was motivated a lot frankly by the financial considerations of that assignment. You had fully furnished government housing and I barely had sticks of furniture in my apartment in Falls Church. I could take the big American car that I brought with me to Washington. My wife could get a job teaching. There was a good school for my daughter and there was a 20% hardship allowance. I was interested in paying off college debts and getting a firm financial footing. I focused on La Paz. I put that as number one on my list. I basically put down the others with not much thought because I was expecting to be assigned to La Paz. Lo and behold we had this big ceremony and they announced sort of like with a drum roll where everybody was going to go. Most people got what they expected to get except me. I got assigned to Palermo. To this day I don't know why. I just decided at that point I figured out the system early enough, don't ask. It wasn't worth it. Plus of course the idea of going to Italy even though it became at the time a financial hardship, it was a wonderful assignment, met a lot of interesting people, learned Italian, which to this day the best, I have the best recall of all the languages that I learned probably because I was younger and I have no idea who ended up going to La Paz after all, I never really dwelled on it.

Q: When you were there, you finish your basic six weeks or whatever it was, usually they do something if you're going to be a consular officer, you get a real dose of consular stuff or if you're going to be an admin officer, I would assume that you at least learn how to use the manuals or something.

BOORSTEIN: Well, I tell you, let me go back to what I mentioned earlier about being a staff aide to John Stutesman.

Q: Oh, yes.

BOORSTEIN: Well, the junior officer course ended in I don't know early October, six weeks from August 18th, you do the math, September to October. I was not due to go to Palermo until July of 1971. I had a lot of time to fill in. The first eight to ten weeks as I mentioned I was John Stutesman's staff aide and then after that I had Western European area studies, Italian language training and administrative training and that all took me to July of '71, but the experience being John Stutesman's staff aide was fascinating.

Q: Let's talk about this.

BOORSTEIN: His deputy was an officer named Owen Roberts and I don't recall what he ended up doing in his career.

Q: I think Owen ended up, he was ambassador to an African country.

BOORSTEIN: But anyway, I believe he's still living and retired and in this area.

Q: Owen came in with me. Fifty years ago as we speak we were both in basic officer training.

BOORSTEIN: Right. Now, Owen will always have a special place in my heart. He co-signed a loan. Here I was and I remember to the dollar my incoming salary was $10,080 a year as an FSO-7 Step 4. They gave me credit of having a full year of graduate school and a full year of work experience at the GS-9 level from my work in Colorado that I talked about before with the Environmental Sciences Services Administration, now known as NOAA from the Department of Commerce. When I calculated what I needed to have in Palermo my big American car was out of the question. I sold it. I had to get a new car. A car suitable to the narrow streets of Palermo. I bought a Fiat. I had to have enough money to pay the first month's rent deposit. There was no such thing as advance pay in those days. I had to have enough money to equip a totally unfurnished and by European standards naked apartment which included kitchen cabinets, hot water heaters, a washer, a dryer, wardrobes and of course basic furniture. My wife wasn't going to work. There was no International American School in Palermo, so she wasn't going to work so I figured it out and I filled out an application to borrow $4,400. So, figure over 40% of my annual salary, you put it into today's terms is staggering. The limit in those days for unco-signed, you know a signature loan at the Credit Union was $2,500. Owen Roberts co-signed my loan and that was a hell of a risk when you think about it. Thank God my second assignment was to Kinshasa, which was a hardship with fully furnished quarters, and my wife was able to work. I paid off that loan halfway through my tour. Anyway, just a little aside about the dynamics of it. Really the family spirit of the Foreign Service at least as far as Owen Roberts was concerned.

Anyway, John Stutesman and the staff aide experience was wonderful. I really was a staff aide. I helped draft memos, I attended all kinds of meetings at the senior level, witnessed some friendly and unfriendly food fights within the bureaucracy because the bureaucracy was trying to deal with the whole ramification of the cone system and it did have sort of a cultural ripple effect throughout the organization and there were movements and I can't recall the specifics now, but anyway, there was something that he asked me to get my junior officer admin colleagues to attend a meeting where we could voice our views as incoming admin officers and the whole business of the equality of the cones. I did that and I just recall there's some as part of the job search I reviewed a lot of my old evaluation reports and he put in language in there that I rallied these administrative colleagues to pack this meeting and to make our voices heard and he gave me credit for that. In my junior officer class they kind of chided me at the fact that I was selected as the staff aide thing because I believe he didn't select anybody who didn't express an interest and I expressed an interest in it. I have no idea if anybody else did, but that's neither here nor there. I have somewhere in my personal memorabilia a cartoon from the Washington Star or the Washington Post which depicts a State Department staff aide standing by his boss. The staff aide is young and bright and the other person says, now I want you to go out and fetch me a ham on rye and tell them to go diplomatically easy on the mustard. They handed this to me at our junior officer farewell party as sort of a joke saying well, this is what you're going to be asked to do. Well, it really wasn't the case at all. It was all in good fun and I got this and I kept it on my desk for years as a little memento. But he, Stutesman, was just terrific and out of that I got my first evaluation.

You also, one of the things that you did is you in a way provided evidence to the next incoming officer class that you had survived the process. I had a lot of interaction with that next incoming class. I did that for like I said, eight, nine, ten weeks.

Q: I consider Stutesman who I've run across from time to time, not very close, but just by reputation as being one of the seminal figures in the Foreign Service, one of the few figures, most of our people don't think of the Foreign Service as any more than their career or their policy. They don't think of it as an entity. He did. Another one is actually Marshall Green. I mean I've been observing this now for 20 years and there are very few who look upon this as a profession.

BOORSTEIN: Well, I think you're right. I didn't have that perspective or perception, being so new to the Service and obviously much younger, but Stutesman is a bit of a tragic figure also because you realize what happened to him.

Q: Well, I mean I know he never made an ambassador.

BOORSTEIN: There was an officer named John Thomas and he was in his late '40s and he was selected out for poor performance. In those days apparently they didn't have the safety net as is today that happens before you're 50 and he committed suicide because he calculated as the story goes the only way his wife could get benefits is if he died and she got his life insurance so he killed himself. Stutesman being a deputy assistant secretary in the bureau of personnel at the time became the fall guy. He was up for nomination to be an ambassador I believe to the Ivory Coast and Thomas' widow made such a fuss.

Q: This is Cynthia Thomas.

BOORSTEIN: Cynthia Thomas. She was ultimately brought into the Foreign Service as a sympathy case and I understand was fairly problematic during the whole time she was in the Service.

Q: Yes, well, she was very much, I mean she continued her crusade that got little long after a while.

BOORSTEIN: Exactly. So, he ended up, I remember there was a big 50th birthday party for Stutesman while I was a staff aide so that would have been in November or December of 1970 so that makes him what now if he's still living, I think he is, in his '80s and he lives in California in San Francisco. I remember being to his house in Georgetown. He had a lovely apartment in Georgetown. He invited me to lunch. Again as a staff aide to show his egalitarian view. Whoever was the director general at the time, the name escapes me. A short guy. Someone from Oklahoma.

Q: Oh, yes, John Burns.

BOORSTEIN: There you go.

Q: He was my consul general, my first consul general in Frankfurt.

BOORSTEIN: Anyway, so he was at that lunch. Anyway, getting back to Stutesman he then was assigned to be consul general in Vancouver and looking at what Vancouver is today that's kind of a nothing kind of thing. I mean it was a very comfortable place to be and it may have been bigger than it is today and that was his retirement tour. He probably by the time he was 52 or 53 retired.

Q: Oh, yes.

BOORSTEIN: And under very unfortunate and probably undeserved circumstances.

Q: Yes, the John Thomas case was sort of a thing it helped spur to change things. Thomas himself is probably as not as sympathetic a character as one might think anyway and his wife didn't help things as far as the Foreign Service goes, but anyway.

BOORSTEIN: That's pretty much what I recall about the staff aide experience and then from there like I said I went to Western European area studies at FSI and then took Italian from roughly late December 1970 through the end of March 1971. That was a wonderful experience. Small classes. There was a guy named Bill Braun, B-R-A-U-N, I believe and his wife Wanda were in language training with me. He was going off as the cultural counselor, the cultural attachï¿½ to Rome. Just a wonderful person. He was friendly, he was in his late '40s or early '50s at the time. I remember as a couple my wife and I going out with Bill and Wanda to a Spanish restaurant in Georgetown and there was another couple, the officer's name was Paul Altemus. He was with USIA and his wife Ming was Vietnamese. They were in training. He went off to Naples. He resigned from the Foreign Service not much after his tour in Naples, I don't know why. I think ultimately they divorced and I've lost touch with them. I'm trying to think of who else. Oh, yes an officer named Charlie Billo who was also in Italian training with me. He was going off to Turin as an econ officer and he stayed in the Foreign Service. He's been retired for a while. I don't recall other jobs that he would have been in. The Italian training, the linguist was Steve Zapata, who I think is retired by now. He is an Italian American and his mother emigrated from Sicily. While I was in Palermo he came on a visit as the linguist and brought his mother with him. He was so good in the way he approached learning the Italian language. He was very creative and he did not use the textbook approach to grammar. He had his own system and it worked. Like I said Italian is the language I can recall the most. The vocabulary may be lacking, but my grammar is I think the best of any of the foreign languages I've learned.

One of the teachers, the native speakers was Johnny Palazzolo and Johnny Palazzolo had been an FSN (Foreign Service National) in Palermo and he married a woman who was a vice consul in Palermo whose name escapes me, but it may come back, but anyway. After they got married they returned to the United States and he became an American citizen and ended up teaching at FSI and he was wonderful. He was such a Sicilian in terms of his orientation towards Italy. I remember coming into language class one day and telling him in Italian that I saw the movie Patton over the weekend and of course much of that movie deals with the campaign in Sicily. That entire day if not that entire week in Italian he was reliving World War II and so Bill Braun at the end of that said, Mike, don't you ever tell us what movie you saw over the weekend. He said it sort of tongue in cheek. Johnny and his wife actually lived in the same apartment house as my mother in Chevy Chase. I remember visiting that apartment in-between assignments for a number of years throughout the '70s and lost track of him. After he became an American citizen he came into the Foreign Service as a middle grade officer and I know he had a tour as a desk officer for some Caribbean countries in the old ARA bureau and may have gone overseas after his wife retired. In any event, the experience was quite good.

Q: What about, I mean you're going to Sicily where they speak a dialect.

BOORSTEIN: You know, Italian is, well, Italy is a country that has a lot of dialects and as it through its history became consolidated as a nation which really didn't happen until the 19th Century, late 19th Century, they adopted the dialect of Siena as the national language. Yes, you would hear Sicilian dialect which I never learned except a few phrases which I don't want to repeat on tape, some of the, we had two INS officers in Palermo that had been there for over 10 years and they were Italian Americans. They could speak Sicilian and they would start bantering with each other at a party and talk in the Sicilian dialect with each other and nobody at least among the Americans, nobody could understand. It was different. You could understand it if you heard it sort of in context, but with a much lower level of comprehension than the basic Italian. Of course as a foreigner and you were speaking Italian, you're pegged as a foreigner right away. Again I never really learned it. You hear different variations of dialect when you're in Naples or whether you're in Florence or elsewhere.

I had a bit of a disadvantage because I finished the Italian language training which was at the end of March and I didn't go out until July because they had to stick me in administrative training. Now, again to show you what the Department offered and didn't offer in those years, there was no such thing.

Q: Oh, wait a second.

Q: This is tape two, side one with Mike Boorstein. Yes?

BOORSTEIN: So, anyway there was no such thing as a basic training for administrative officers. Again, they created a cone system, but they really didn't think it through looking back on it as something that had a certain set of training requirements that went with it. They had to do something for me with me for four months so they put me in a mid-level administrative training course. There were only two of us who were going out on our first assignment. The other officer's name was Ken Chard. Ken I think was in the class following mine. I don't recall where he went, Brussels comes to mind, but I'm not sure. The rest of the class and there may have been 15 people were all middle grade officers of a whole range of backgrounds in administration. You had women who had done primarily personnel work. You had two people who were diplomatic couriers. You had a couple of people who were communicators. You had a couple of people who had done admin, GSO, budget and fiscal, etc. We were a great bunch. We really liked each other as a group and did things socially. In my files at home I have a group picture. That training was not so much the nuts and bolts of doing administration because most of these people had done it. It was more on organizational behavior, psychology, leadership skills, management and whatever and I had just finished a whole number of graduate courses at the University of Colorado in exactly those things and I wanted to know what's in the FAM.

Q: The FAM is the Foreign Affairs Manual. It's our instruction book where you look for answers.

BOORSTEIN: Right. I was going to explain that, but anyway, so there was precious little of that. I enjoyed the rest of it and particularly putting it into a Foreign Service State Department U.S. government context, but a lot of the theory of organizational behavior and psychology was stuff that I had just spent the previous two years studying in graduate school. It was a bit of a mixed bag, but nonetheless, they obviously had to give me something to do. That particular course no longer exists, the mid-level administrative training. It was supplanted by the basic admin course and then the specialized courses in general services, budget and fiscal, etc. A good bunch of people a lot of whom I kept in touch with over the years. One that I was actually closest to was an officer named Greg Johnson. Greg was African American, rose quite rapidly through the ranks. In his final assignment he was ambassador to Swaziland. He's now retired and lives in the Seattle area. He was a consul general in Osaka Kobe, DCM in Stockholm, consul general in Toronto and I believe, well, he served as the number two administrative officer in Moscow, which was a job I had during my career about two tours after me. He'd be a good person for you to go to.

Q: Yes, he's in Seattle?

BOORSTEIN: Yes.

Q: Is it G-R-E-G?

BOORSTEIN: Yes.

Q: And Johnson?

BOORSTEIN: Yes. Anyway, a gentleman named Wayne Hanks who rose to be I think pretty much the top of the courier service was in that group. Jim Vandivier was also a senior courier ultimately. I believe he's still living, was in the group. Anyway, that took me through to early July when I took off for Palermo.

Q: You were in Palermo from when to when?

BOORSTEIN: Early July 1971 for two years almost to the day, to early July 1973. We arrived in a rather unusual fashion in that because of the summer tourist season we could not get a flight from Rome to Palermo. Through arrangements with the embassy in Rome, primarily the personnel officer, her name was Alice Westbrook who was a legendary personnel officer in the Foreign Service. She arranged for an embassy car and driver to pick us up at the airport in Rome and to drive us to Naples. There we spent the afternoon visiting with Ming and Paul Altemus with whom we'd been in language training and our daughter at that point was three and a half so she was tired and she took a nap. We just visited with them and freshened up a bit. That night we took the overnight ferry from Naples to Palermo, which was kind of neat. We arrived by ship in Palermo. Now, until about 1969 or 1970 people going to Italy were authorized travel by ship under the PL480 program, excess currency could be used to buy transatlantic ship passage and so the fellow I replaced came over on one of the American president line ships.

Q: Constitution and Independence.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, it was the ship that I took with my parents, the Constitution in 1961 when we went to Europe, which I believe I covered in the last segment. Anyway, we arrived and we were then taken to our hotel for temporary lodging which was on the beach near Palermo in a little resort area called Mondello and there we stayed for three months. I mean I went to work everyday, but my wife and daughter went to the beach everyday when they weren't assisting me in looking for a place to live because we had to find our own housing. We stayed for the whole 90 days that we were entitled to on the beach. The allowances were adequate to cover the hotel and the meals. I mean after a while it got a little bit long in the tooth, you eat all your meals in the dining room of the hotel, but the staff adored my daughter who was like I said three and a half, blonde, blue-eyed and very verbal. The Italians love children and the Sicilians particularly love children who are blonde. She thrived reasonably well, quite well.

After we were there I don't recall how long, we all went back on the ferry to Naples, my wife, daughter and I because I was going up to Rome to pick up my car. My best friend from college, whose name is Jim Zimmerman, he was in the Navy and he was stationed at Gaeta which is between Rome and Naples and he had a little rented villa in the hills near Gaeta and we stayed with him and then one morning I just took the train up to Rome, picked up my car and drove back to Gaeta. It wasn't until a few months later that I actually went up to Rome for formal consultations with the embassy that I had to forego because it was urgency in me getting to the post, but that was nice to pick up my little red Fiat. I put it back on the ferryboat and went back to Palermo. Ultimately we moved into a nice apartment on the ground floor. It was a new apartment in a new apartment building. Like I said we had to buy two hot water heaters, wardrobes for the two bedrooms, a whole array of kitchen cabinets, combination washer, actually it wasn't a dryer. We had to hang the clothes up. We had a little balcony on the back that we could hang the clothes up to dry. The climate was such that they would basically dry pretty quickly. We really had no dryer. My daughter went off to nursery school and very quickly learned Italian and forgot her English. We made friends within the apartment complex. It was a nice, really, probably the most foreign living experience we had our entire time in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was the situation in Sicily, who was the consul general and also what were the currents going around at the time?

BOORSTEIN: Well, Sicily in the Italian context economically, culturally is sort of like Appalachia. It really was and perhaps it still is a real backwater and of course is Mafia country. The Italian government in Rome had a whole Department devoted to the problems of the South, which the Italians called the Mezzogiorno, like Le Midi in France, the same thing meaning "in the afternoon or midday." It was a very poor region. The traffic in Palermo was horrendous, very undisciplined drivers even by Italian standards. Very family oriented, but this chronic poverty particularly outside the main cities and you have Palermo, Catania, Messina, Siracusa, Agrigento were the towns of significant size. The rest were just little villages tucked into the mountains, poor, poor little places. You'd still see donkeys as the main beast of burden. As a matter of fact somewhere in my slide archives I have a picture of our household effects crate arrived in Palermo. It obviously came by ship and it was offloaded and it was delivered to our house on a flatbed cart drawn by two donkeys. That is just trying to give you a flavor of what it was like. The Consulate General had 50 Foreign Service National staff, I was the administrative officer and there were 10 Americans at the time in Palermo and that's pretty big. It closed in 1993. The consul general was Alfred Vigderman. Alfred Vigderman came into the Foreign Service as a mid-career entrant in the early '50s at a fairly high rank. He had spent a lot of years on Capitol Hill and so he came in like I said as an FSO-2 I believe which is already a senior officer. He had been political military counselor in Athens. He had been office director in the Department and Palermo was his retirement tour and he was at that point in his late '50s. His wife's name was Edith. Very nice normal people, but you know, kind of old school Foreign Service. I remember that my wife had to make a call on his wife and all of this and the protocol was expected to be just so. But they were warm people and Palermo as I said had a staff of 10 Americans and of the 10 Americans four of us were first tour junior officers. The only one who is still in the Service is Cameron Hume. Cameron Hume is currently the number two in the office of the inspector general. He recently completed his tour as our ambassador in South Africa. He had been our ambassador to Algeria and a couple of tours at the UN as part of our mission. He had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Libya, a graduate of Princeton. He's a political officer, very well educated, well read, he's written a couple of books. He was on his first tour in the Foreign Service and spoke excellent Italian. He was a visa officer like everybody else was. The other two who were on their first tour was Russ La Mantia who is now retired. Russ rose into the senior ranks. He specialized in sort of European community and aviation affairs ultimately. He had a tour in Brussels. He had a tour in Canberra. I don't know that he ever served in any hardship post. Oh, well, he was economic counselor in Cairo, so that I suppose counts. His wife Kathy, they didn't have any kids at the time and they really were among our best friends.

Another couple actually, he was on his second tour because he curtailed from his first tour was Tom Longo. Tom is an Italian America and we're still very much in touch. He's been retired now for 10 years. He lives near Ocean City, Maryland. His wife Lili is Italian, born in Naples. I believe she still has some brothers in Italy and they were there with their son Eric who was a year younger than my daughter and their son Marc was born while we were there. Her aunt who we all knew affectionately as Zia Amelia was living with them as sort of a housekeeper and she was Neapolitan to the core. She spoke decent Italian, but it was hard for her, she preferred the Neapolitan dialect. Italian was sort of really a foreign language, but she could cook like nobody's business and was very good with the kids and very almost like a peasant in a way, but a cut above. Still very much that maternal kind of person. That was the junior officer group.

The consul general's secretary was a woman named Helen Kalkbrenner. Helen Kalkbrenner, you really, I think she's still living, you ought to get her oral history. This is a woman who was born in China. Her parents were White Russians who fled the revolution. Helen's got to be 80 years old if she's still alive and at the end of World War II she met a young American soldier and got married. Now because of her upbringing in China and the fact that her parents were Russian, her first language was Russian; her second language was Chinese. Because of the Japanese occupation, she learned Japanese. A real linguist. She married this man, had four children and they were in Rome sometime in the mid '60s and he left her. He left her high and dry. Don't know the circumstances, essentially abandoned her. Again, to show you what the Foreign Service was like in those days, there was no safety net for her. There was no well, we'll pay your airfare home, you'll get half his pension, nothing. She was left at the mercy of whatever charity she could get from the embassy. She was hired as a commissary manager in Rome and by that time she had picked up and became fluent in Italian and then ultimately was hired as a Foreign Service Secretary and was assigned to Palermo. She was good. Really a wonderful woman who at that time was probably in her late '40s.

Our number two in the consulate was a guy who spent his career doing consular work, Ernie Gutierrez and Ernie if he is still living has been long retired. He spoke Spanish of course with a name like Gutierrez. He then I think went to Guadalajara after he left and he was there when our consul general was kidnapped. You know that story from the mid '70s? I forget the name of our consul general.

Q: Oh, yes.

BOORSTEIN: He was there and he was basically in charge while he was being held for many months. Leon or Lindbergh?

Q: Leon Harvey or something like that.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, anyway and his wife's name was Maruka, a very unusual name. The other Foreign Service Officer was Carlotta Allen, Charlotte Allen. She was single. She was the passport and citizenship officer and had been in the Foreign Service for a long time. She is still living and to the best of my knowledge she is still living in Palermo. She had a boyfriend at the time. I have no idea, she's either living with him or found somebody else, but she's retired and living in Palermo. The other two Americans, I don't know if that totals up to 10, but more or less were Fred Davino and Aldo Settimo, these were the Italian American immigration officers and Aldo Settimo was from New Jersey. Fred Davino was probably from that part of the world, too. They had been in Italy since the mid '50s. They were there helping to process the immigrants under the Refugee Relief Act and after 10, 12 years in Naples they were then transferred to Palermo. They were wonderful people. They took all the junior officers under their wings. They knew everybody. I remember going with them to a country restaurant with some of the other junior officers and a place we never ever would have found. They were selling wine from the vineyards behind the restaurant that they had pressed and made themselves and they were just basically putting them into old mineral water bottles and stuffing a cork in it and taking it home. It was very young wine because I remember taking it home, putting it in the refrigerator and a few days later I opened it up and had a drink, poured a glass, put it back in the refrigerator and the next day it was vinegar. It turned just like that. They were very good sources of advice particularly to the officers who did the visa work and I was an administrative officer and I had no consular training. It was an adjustment for me. I was highly stressed. I was 24 years old. The bulk of my staff were in their late '40s or early '50s and I had almost 40, 45 Italians working for me. The drivers from the motor pool, the mechanic, the switchboard operator, virtually all of the specialties within the administration were all held by FSNs. Personnel, general services, budget and fiscal, the cashier, my secretary, these were all Italians, the supply clerk and so my little empire was 35, 40 maybe even more, FSNs. Got along fine with them. It was really a family atmosphere. My daughter went to nursery school and everyday my wife would take the bus down to pick her up and either take the bus back or walk to the consulate, meet me and they had a lengthy lunch period from like I don't know noon until 2:30. It was like a siesta time. It was just the way it was. There were four rush hours in Palermo. We all went home for lunch and we'd go to the bakery to get some fresh bread. We'd go to the Salumeria, and buy some good sliced ham and cheese. We'd have a nice lunch and I'd typically take a little nap and about a quarter to three I'd get up and drive back to work and stay at work until about 6:15 and then go home.

I was stressed in the sense that I was a little unsure of how to do my job. It was new to me. The consul general was good. He wasn't overbearing, but particularly his wife was very fussy about their residence and how it was cared for. There were problems with their internal hot water system. It was just a villa that they lived in. He brought in building engineers to look into this and it turned out it was a whistling problem that wouldn't go away when you turned the water on and the hot water heater had a sort of you know the air had to get bled out of it and it was just a whole mess. Finally we called in a specialist who found a defective valve and so he handed me the valve and I kept that as a symbol of perseverance and had it on my desk. He wasn't mean spirited, but he was just very persistent in things getting done. He wouldn't give me the more sensitive things to do in the admin area for example, the lease of the consular building was coming up and he did the negotiations with the landlord. I sat in on the meeting, but he just clearly the one who wanted to do this. I don't recall resenting it at the time. I felt that it probably just lent some weight of importance and he never said I'm going to do it, he just did it. You know I think 10 years later I would have been a little bit annoyed at that kind of thing, but it was the correct thing to do.

The thing that was interesting about the tour as well was that I got to do other things than just being the administrative officer, which is a tribute to the consul general. I did some political reporting. In 1968 there was a very severe earthquake that struck Sicily, killed a number of people, displaced hundreds if not thousands that were all put into these little Quonset huts. It was a very poor region. Very much Mafia country. With the FSN political advisor or whatever his job was, who had his undergraduate degree from the University of Alabama. He obviously he was from Sicily, but he spoke English with a southern accent. It was really great to watch that sort of deteriorate over time. Michele Calderone. He ended up after the consulate was closed transferring up to Rome where he worked for many years in public diplomacy for the embassy. The two of us went off to this place, Valle del Belice in the mountainous region of Sicily, we were met by a local priest. He took us around and showed us the houses and talked about basically he thought it was a scandal of how mismanaged the effort to help the displaced people and how the Mafia skimmed the money. One of the things I'll never forget is that we came in a consular car, but the two of us got into his little Volkswagen to go around the area and the first time he got in the car, he puts the key in and he says to us sort of in an offhanded way, he said, "You know for a split second whenever I turn the ignition on I wonder if the car is going to blow up." He then proceeded to turn the key. You don't forget something like that. I wrote an airgram, you recall them, obviously I don't think they're used anymore, on that experience. I was really happy to have done it, the good training and career development. I tell you what, let's stop right now. I'm not quite finished with Palermo.

Q: All right. I've got one question I want to ask is the influence of the Mafia in your work. I mean you had jobs, you were dealing with money and all this and did this impact? Also, the problem of sometimes getting rid of people because I speak as a former consul general of Naples, you know, jobs were practically inherited and I mean this, it's a family thing. We'll talk about it.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, I do have a very interesting and fairly intricate story to tell about the Mafia.

Q: Okay and also did you get involved in seeing any of the trends and what the INS people were doing returning people and all that.

BOORSTEIN: I can talk about that. It also relates to the Mafia story and then also as another reminder to myself I can tell you about a CODEL that I assisted where we all went off to Mount Edna.

Q: Okay, great.

Q: Today is the 22nd of September.

BOORSTEIN: 27th.

Q: 27th oh, excuse me, 27th of September, 2005. Mike, you heard where we left off.

BOORSTEIN: Yes.

Q: In the first place you were in Palermo from when to when?

BOORSTEIN: July 1971 to July 1973.

Q: Okay.

BOORSTEIN: I have three vignettes to pass onto you, one of which relates to your last question about the Mafia. I was the administrative officer in Palermo the first officer assigned there for a full two-year tour as administrative officer in recent history. Prior to that the junior officers would be on a rotation where they'd spend three months, six months as the administrative officer, but went back to consular. In my case I was there on a full two-year assignment as a coned admin officer. There was no rotation unlike we have today, we've sort of gone back to the pure sense of the affairs of the admin officer and that's it. Well, the consul general had a different idea in mind. Probably about halfway through my tour I came down with severe stomach problems and I was, I thought I had appendicitis. I was medically evacuated to the navy hospital in Naples. They discovered that I simply had a bad case of gastroenteritis, but it shook up the consul general when he realized that by my being out of action for any significant period of time he didn't have a backup. He got it into his head that he was going to do a swap for about six weeks. He took another first tour duty officer named Russ La Mantia whom I talked about the last time and me and we basically swapped jobs. I went down to the non-immigrant visa section as the chief of that unit and he came upstairs to be the administrative officer for six weeks. I was very resentful of this initially, but after a while I realized that the consul general was doing me a favor because I acquired ultimately another skill code in the consular area. I learned a whole new set of Italian vocabulary and was able to manage another aspect of the operation.

During my time there, there was a natural gas explosion in Long Island and it killed 35 or 40 workers, most of whom were illegal Italian immigrants. One day shortly after that terrible incident, accident an elderly gentleman with his travel agent whom I knew showed up and he applied for an emergency visa to fly to New York to reclaim his nephew's body and fly him back to Italy for burial. In doing the name check on this elderly gentleman it was discovered in the mid '50s under the Refugee Relief Act he was denied an immigrant visa on the basis that he was found to be a member of the Mafia, under Section 212.A27 of the immigration code. That's a very rare finding. It means that they really had evidence that he was a participant in Mafia activities. So, I went to the INS officers for guidance and they said, you are the official empowered to either issue the visa or deny it. You're looking to us for advice, our advice to you is not to give a visa even though there are extraordinary humanitarian type reasons to do it, so this man's record is such that even though he is elderly this would not be the thing to do. I took their advice and I turned the visa down. This all happened over a period of a day or two. I turned the visa down and he was weeping in my office and he was going on and on. He said he had raised his nephew as his son because his parents had died and this and that. I was unmoved and I stuck by my decision. About two or three weeks later in my mailbox at home, I lived in an apartment complex, so I had a lock type box for all local mail. I would only check it once a week or so because we had the Military Postal System and there in my mailbox a piece of you know how in Europe you have the paper, like graph paper that they use a lot like notebook paper, was a small piece of paper and written in blue ink were the following words La Vecchia Mafia Vive meaning the old Mafia will live or still lives. Then also in blue ink was a small crudely drawn picture of a knife and then in red ink there were little drops of blood that were put below the tip of the blade. I thought to myself, hum, this is something I should be concerned with. I immediately thought of the turn down of the visa for this elderly Mafioso. I took it into the office and showed it to the head of the consular operations and then ultimately it was shown to the consul general. He got on the phone with the chief of police and that same afternoon I had 24-hour coverage in front of my apartment by the Italian police. We had a police officer escort my wife and daughter to her nursery school every morning. There was an investigation. The old gentleman was called in. He denied everything and then eventually the protection was lifted and here I am to tell the tale. It was deemed to be highly unusual for the Mafia to move against a foreigner. This was in the era where the Mafia had not yet gotten into the illegal drug trade. So, pretty much whatever violence they committed was against other Italians, revenge on a killing others in the Mafia.. That was a rather disconcerting event and a product of my experience as a consular officer for six weeks.

Before we ended the last session I mentioned a story of my involvement in a CODEL (Congressional Delegation). We didn't have a lot of big wig official business in Palermo, but towards the end of my tour in the spring of 1973, we got word through a telegram that a professional delegation headed by Congressman Pogue who I believe was the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. A very big influential man from Waco, Texas was leading an Agriculture Committee CODEL to the Middle East and South Asia and had his own aircraft. At that time it was a U.S. air force DC-7, a propeller plane. Took it from Andrews all the way, I think it went as far as Kuwait and India and then on the way back they were starting out their last stop was Kuwait and they were flying from Kuwait back to the United States. Well, in order to do that they had to stop to refuel twice and one of their refueling stops was the naval air station in Sigonella in eastern Sicily. I think from there they flew to the Azores and then on to Washington. All they were doing was overnighting. There were probably 15 members of Congress plus staffers. It was a pretty big deal to plan for this. They didn't want to fly into Palermo. They wanted to stop at the naval air station, which as I said was in Sigonella, which was very near to Catania and also very near to Mount Edna. I'm not sure whether we recommended it or they already knew from experience they wanted to stay at the Hotel San Domenico, which is a very famous resort above the ocean, above the sea.

Q: Is that in Taormina?

BOORSTEIN: It's in Taormina.

Q: I've stayed there.

BOORSTEIN: It's a Middle Ages monastery that's been transformed and renovated into a five star hotel.

Q: No, I didn't stay there. I didn't stay in any five star hotel, but I stayed at one of those places in Taormina.

BOORSTEIN: Anyway, so, it was necessary to do an advance trip. I worked with the protocol officer of the naval air base in Sigonella. He was navy lieutenant commander, a young fellow like me and we had a good time and we went up the slopes of Mount Edna because they wanted to do that as a day trip and we went to some local restaurants that they wanted to see and whatever. The planning went reasonably well and I was prepared. When they were going to arrive I believe my wife came with me, yes she did and went there the day before and we were allowed to stay in the Hotel San Domenico because after all I was the control officer. We arrived at the naval air base in Sigonella waiting for the plane to land. The time comes and no plane. We call up Embassy Rome. Embassy Rome calls down to the naval base in Naples. The information is relayed from the aircraft. The aircraft had already landed on the commercial side of the Catania airport. Then we had to high tail it over from the military side of the airport over to the civilian side, which you would think you could just sort of drive across the runway. Well, it didn't work that way. You have to go outside and go around. It took us about 45 minutes and the CODEL is cooling its heels. I thought to myself, oh my God, my career is over. Then the pilot gets off the plane with this piece of paper and just shoves it in my face saying, "Why weren't you waiting for us here? We cabled you about this." I looked at it, looked at all the addressees and Amconsul Palermo was not an addressee. The office that had dropped the ball was the visitors' office at Embassy Rome. They failed to call down to me or to the consular people and say be sure you meet the plane on the commercial side of the airport. That's what started out the CODEL visit.

I then I wanted to get the passports for the group because in those years whenever you stayed in a hotel in Italy, the security people required a record from the hotel of every guest plus their nationality and their passport number. The air force liaison officer refused to give it to me saying they're going to be locked up on the aircraft. We don't need them and I said, I guarantee you that when we get to the hotel the hotel will tell you to go back to the airport and get them. He said, I'll take my chances. Sure enough I was right and so I didn't go down with them. I think there was someone from the hotel who went down with him or maybe the navy liaison guy from Sigonella went down with him, but I didn't go and I basically said, look I told you so. He had to go down and get all the passports.

Then we had set up an evening of entertainment of Sicilian folk dancing and music at a local nightclub. None of the Congressmen wanted to go. All they wanted to do was sit around the bar and drink Johnny Walker Scotch. Particularly there was a Congressman from Arkansas named Bill Alexander who actually was in Congress for a long time, well into the late '80s, early '90s. He was one of the more prolific Scotch drinkers. It was nice music and whatever and so my wife at that time was about 24 or 25 years old. They liked to have this young blonde woman there to liven the evening and we were there and the next day we all went up. They did go on the tour of Taormina. That was my first CODEL experience.

The last thing I want to tell you about, actually no, it wasn't my last CODEL. It was my first large CODEL. I want to tell you about another misadventure of a CODEL that happened shortly after I arrived in Palermo involving Congressman Rooney who of course at the time was the chairman on the subcommittee on appropriations for State, Commerce and Justice and had that position for many, many years. I was still living in the hotel and it was my turn to be duty officer. I get a phone call from the concierge of the consulate general office who in effect was my relay point. Obviously, that was before the era of cell phones and what have you. The embassy in Rome was calling. He gave me the phone number and I called back from the hotel and they said, Congressman Rooney and whoever was the assistant secretary for administration at the time, the name may come to me, but he's no longer living and I just don't remember now who he was. They were onboard the Christopher Colombo, the Italian line and they were literally taking that ship from New York. He was going on a fact finding trip of Europe and the means of transportation was the Christopher Colombo and it was sailing down to Palermo and it was only going to be in Palermo for about six hours and then it was going to turn around and go. Congressman Rooney wanted something to do. This was 10:00 in the morning and the ship was going to dock at 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon. I called the consul general, Alfred Vigderman, who thought very quickly on his feet. It was a Sunday, everything was closed. Didn't want to go to any museums or churches, he just wanted to find a nice restaurant and probably drink. The consul general had an honorary membership in a sailing club on the Mediterranean near the port. It was called the La Vela - vela means sail. He said, look why don't you suggest to the escort officers, his name was Connelly, that you'll meet the ship and I will meet the congressman at the club and we'll sit outside, it was August and hotter than hell. We'll sit outside, there's a breeze off the port off the sea and we'll drink for a while and then we'll have dinner and Mike, why don't you go down ahead to the club and see if you can ask if they can open up the dining room at 6:00. Well, this was just unheard of. It wasn't as bad as having dinner in a restaurant, but the Sicilians wouldn't eat until 8:30 or 9:00 at night. I went down to the club and asked them to open up and I had tested at the two level in speaking at FSI before I left. My Italian was good, but it wasn't great. I didn't know how to say a member of congress. All I could think of which was simply to say member of parliament, the equivalent in Italian. I couldn't drag that out, but what I could drag out because at the time that reminds me of yet another story that I'll tell you, Kissinger had made his secret visit to China, so in the Italian press he was referred to as the consigliere del presidente, the counselor of the president. I touted Congressman Rooney to these people at the club that he was a consigliere del presidente. That made them stand up and salute and they did arrange to bring in the staff and the cook to have dinner at 6:00. The ship was going to sail to go back to Naples or Rome or wherever generally they went around 10:00 at night. Sure enough the ship docks around 4:30ish, we get to the club at 5:00. We sat outside and they drank and they drank and they drank. I'm sitting there in the wings. I had a Coca-Cola, that's the strongest thing I had so I could stay alert. 7:00 went by, 8:00 went by and the maitre d' came and said, are they going to eat or are they going to sit there and drink and I said I don't know. He looked at me and he said, altro che, meaning right away, they don't need any of this sarcasm. So, to make a long story short, they never ate. They simply drank until 9:30, went back to the ship and sailed and stop the tape for a second.

Q: I might mention that John Rooney was such a power that he made strong ambassadors wet their pants because he could cut off your funds. He used to talk about the liquor, which is our representation thing. Well, here he was the biggest boozer. You had to have certain bottles when he went on a trip, you had to have certain bottles, Johnny Walker or something available in the room.

BOORSTEIN: Palermo was my first tour and we had really good relations with other first tour officers on a family level. My Italian became quite good and it really has very fond memories as first tours often do. I was in touch with my career counselor towards the end of my tour on wanting to find a good second tour. My objectives were largely motivated by the need to go to a post and save money. As I had mentioned to you earlier I had borrowed money, a loan that Roberts co-signed. I wanted to go to a hardship post where my wife could teach and I could take the car that I acquired in Palermo, the Fiat and where there was furnished government housing. So, my career counselor said you know, it looked like I could go to Addis Ababa as the personnel officer. I originally was interested in that field and that didn't work out and then all of a sudden he called me up and said how would you like to go to Budapest as the admin officer via a year of Hungarian. This would be quite a feather in your cap on your second tour in the Foreign Service to be admin officer at an embassy. Would you be interested? I said, absolutely. I didn't think much of it. I thought it was going to be able to work. Two or three days later he called up and said, "You can't go to Budapest, Mike because we have to get special clearances from security for anybody going behind the Iron Curtain and your file shows that you have relatives in the Soviet Union", which I think I mentioned in my application earlier. "They will not clear you for an assignment to Budapest." I remember saying to my career counselor, who was Nick Baskey, very senior officer in the admin area. I said, "Nick, this is absurd. I can understand them not sending me to Moscow or Leningrad, but to close off all of Eastern Europe is outrageous. I'm going to write a letter to the head of the security department to protest." He said, "Mike you go ahead and do that, but meanwhile we have to find you an assignment." The assignment they found which turned out to be quite fine was to go to Kinshasa as personnel officer via French language training. I did write the letter to G. Marvin Gentile who was the deputy assistant secretary for SY in those days. It was part of the bureau of administration and pointed all these things out. He never answered my letter.

Now, I will tell you another story later on when it comes to my onward assignment out of Ottawa that will refer back to this particular issue of my assignment anywhere in the USSR or Eastern Europe. So, I was assigned to Kinshasa. We went back to the States, had a nice home leave. Went and rented a townhouse in Springfield, Virginia and I went off to study French. My wife took French language training with me. French language training was not nearly as effective as Italian. It was a whole different linguist. French instructors tended to be French. A lot of the cultural baggage and transfers and they weren't as laid back or Latin as the Italian group. There was one particular incident. There was a French instructor. Her name was Kitty. I don't remember what her last name was. She was from Monaco. We were talking language training as Thanksgiving approached and the cafeteria at Main State as they always do had a Thanksgiving lunch Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of that week. Our whole class decided we were going to take the shuttle over to have the turkey dinner in the cafeteria and come back all within an hour. Well, we missed because of the lines in the cafeteria we missed the shuttle to get back to class in Roslyn by 2:00. She was so mad that she canceled our break between 2:50 and 3:00 and my wife was incredibly incensed over that and it was towards the end of the language training so she quit. Now, she's sort of shooting herself in the foot to look back on it. This was sort of the attitude of the French instructors. You had to tow the mark. The training was good. I think I got a 2+ in speaking and reading.

Off we went to Kinshasa. We arrived there in January of 1974. We had heard of course that the place was rampant with crime and being our first time in Africa coming out of a European assignment, albeit, Palermo, Sicily was a port area of Italy. Relatively speaking it was heaven compared to what you would find in Central Africa. I remember being quite uptight about the whole security thing because I had my wife and daughter and we stayed in temporary housing and somebody at the embassy recommended that we get a dog. This guy came out to our hotel with a young German Shepherd that was basically trained to lunge anybody with a black skin. I just looked at that and I said I cannot do this. I cannot do this. We'll just make sure, that whatever house we get the embassy will make sure it is secure.

We were assigned to a house with a swimming pool. Very nice, the first embassy as a FSO-6. I was 27 years old.. My wife got a job as a teacher's aide at the American School of Kinshasa. We arrived in the middle of the year so she couldn't get a full time job then, but she got one the following fall. Our daughter at that point was enrolled in first grade, no kindergarten. The admin counselor's name was Richard W. Berg. Dick Berg had been an executive officer in USIA for many, many years and at some point he converted over to the State Department. He had I think he was the Supervisory GSO in Jakarta. He had been deputy admin officer in Brussels and from there he went to Kinshasa. His wife's name was Cecily and they had a daughter named Alix, who was the same age as my daughter and they became very good friends. So, in addition to him being my boss; we had a social relationship. The deputy chief of mission was a gentleman by the name of Mike Newlin, who went on to be ambassador to Algeria. Bob Andrews was the political counselor. Charles Stephan was the consular officer. I don't know if you ever knew Chuck Stephan in your consular years. He had four kids and we became very friendly with that family. As a matter of fact his eldest daughter is married to, a fellow that just finished his assignment as ambassador to Lithuania.

Q: You can fill this in.

BOORSTEIN: I'll fill you in later, but anyway, her name was Sherry Stephan. Marie was Chuck's wife, Sherry was the daughter. So, she would babysit for us. I was the personnel officer. I had a deputy personnel officer named Eloise Robertson who was from USAID. I had a staff of, I supervised the travel clerk who was French, the protocol officer who was from Belgium, a senior FSN was also from Belgium, one was Walloon and one was Flemish, so they hated each other. I had a Belgian who was the airport expediter. I had a secretary who was Portuguese. No, she was French, her husband was Portuguese. I had one Zairian employee who was a junior ranking clerk. In those years the bulk of the Foreign Service National staff were third country people because really they constituted the bulk of the educated class in Zaire. What can I tell you about Zaire? I enjoyed the job. I enjoyed the people. We were never personally affected by crime even though we were nervous about it. We had night guards first just for the evening hours 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM and ultimately when local crime became so great we even had day guards. The windows all had bars on them. You'd lock yourself in at night and hope there wasn't a fire. You keep all the keys by your side to unlock yourself to get out. Your kitchen was like your, your bedroom was your safe haven. We had one attempted break in during our time there. We were very social in Kinshasa. A lot of activity. The embassy was large, had a very large USAID mission, the U.S. Information Service was quite large. They had a whole separate building on the other side of town. Jim Tull was the public affairs officer. He was quite a character. He had a parrot. I think he's still living somewhere down in Louisiana. He must be around 80. The AID mission was quite large as I said and they were integrated into the admin section, so the deputy administrative counselor was from AID, his name was Chuck Herter. One of the GSOs was also from AID and my number two in personnel was also from AID.

The challenges of Kinshasa were not internal in the embassy. It ran pretty well, but there were a lot of challenges for us as an embassy because there were a lot of political issues in Zaire that impacted on our operations. Vance was the ambassador when I arrived.

Q: Sheldon Vance.

BOORSTEIN: Sheldon Vance. He left within a couple of months of my departure and then Deane Hinton came in as the ambassador and he didn't of course, it was sort of like Tom Pickering was ambassador to a lot of places. He had a very acerbic personality, but he was a good ambassador. His wife I believe was Chilean and they had had children from previous marriages so they were collectively raising eight kids not all of whom were at post, but they had four or five maybe living with them. A lot of care and feeding for the residence.

In my job I don't recall a lot of huge issues. We had, I helped administer a very large contract force of Zairian employees that were under a contract through the commissary association, which was very common in those years and I would have to help set the standards for benefits and salaries and talk to the supervisory contractor who was a Greek fellow. His English was very limited, but he spoke Italian quite well. I would speak with him in Italian, but I used my French quite a bit, mainly to my senior FSN from Belgium. Her name was Annie De Wulf and she was Flemish so her first language was Flemish, but her French was flawless. She overheard me speaking French one day and she said to me, "Mr. Boorstein, your French is pretty good. Why don't we just speak in French and it will help your language and will be a little more comfortable for me and we'll see how it goes?" So, I agreed. We would conduct all our business in French for two and a half years and it was such a gift that she gave to me because it increased my confidence because I was so comfortable speaking Italian and I hadn't gotten my French up to that level, but certainly when I went home on R&R I tested very easily 3/3 level in French. She was quite good.

The main objective for me as the personnel officer was to make sure that every Foreign Service National who was not Zairian who left was replaced by a Zairian employee. We were trying to improve the ratio of Zairian and non-Zairian staff. By policy. So, the Belgian airport expediter was fired because he clearly was a racist and he didn't take care of the wife of the USAID mission director. The AID mission director was named Fermino Spencer, who was black. He was originally from Cape Verde and his wife also was black. One night she was flying out of Kinshasa and he just simply didn't show up. He showed up later and he refused to help her. It was reported and we fired him. We replaced him with his substitute, with his number two who was Zairian and he performed pretty well, except when he drank too much beer and then he was a problem. I remember going to where he lived one day and there was no phone, no running water. Going out to his small little hut with dirt floors to counsel him on proper behavior. Even though the hut was fairly new it was built under some public housing program, the rest of it was still pretty rudimentary, so it was the first time I saw the way the locals lived and it was quite an eye opener. That was pretty much the main challenge of my work there.

I traveled too, in those years we had a consulate in Lubumbashi and a consulate in Bukavu. We did have a consulate in Kisangani, which used to be called Stanleyville and it was closed during my time there. The trip to Lubumbashi was just wonderful. The administrative officer there was Bill Hudson who is still in the Foreign Service. He's our ambassador to Tunisia and he and I became very good friends and we're close to this day. While I went to Lubumbashi and he was single at the time with the Peace Corps director, his wife and daughter and myself, the five of us took the Peace Corps director's Land Rover and went into the game park. We had a guide and saw all kinds of wildlife although it was very limited because so much of the wildlife has been decimated during the period of revolution in the mid '60s. A lot of that game was just eaten and hadn't quite returned. I took some fantastic pictures, wonderful pictures. Later when I went to Bukavu, which was one man post, the Consul's name was Mike Adams who had been an assistant GSO in Kinshasa and transferred out to Bukavu to be the Consul. I went on a visit to the game park, which was a gorilla reserve, and there again I took some fantastic pictures, very close and we had a French speaking guide. He took out a machete and would whack his way through the dense jungle underbrush went up hills, down hills and sweating like crazy, but we had a great time. Encounters very close with the gorillas.

Yes, I know I told a huge amount of stories about Palermo. In Kinshasa there was one incredible story that I can tell you. Again like I said we were quite active socially, the commissary and recreation association had a lot of activity. Of course these were the years before you had the community liaison officer. There was an arrangement to go out on the falls on the Zaire River for a picnic. We went out in a group and some of the local staff went out to help us haul the stuff. There was a young USIA officer, a woman who decided oh this would really be neat to do a little bit of rock jumping in and among the rapids. She took off her shoes and she went and stepped onto a stone that was surrounded by swirling waters not realizing that the stone was wet. As soon as she stepped onto the stone her feet went out from under her and she lost her grip and fell into the rapids. She had the presence of mind to find a tree, a small tree that was growing out of the end of another rock. She grabbed onto it and so we all then got energized to try and figure out how to save this woman because if she was swept away from that tree she was holding onto and could not get any kind of a hold elsewhere she would have gone over the falls and would have been killed. There was a third country national named Santos who was Portuguese. He was the senior plumber, basically as a guest with his family at this picnic. He spoke in addition to speaking French and English, he spoke Lingala. He'd been in Zaire for many years. Lingala was the native language of that region. He managed to grab a bunch of the Zairian men who were fishing in the area who knew every rock and every foothold and we agreed we would pay them money to help and they had some rope in one of the cars. They went down and fetched the rope and he basically supervised a rescue of this poor woman. Well, we couldn't reach her from where she was. It was just totally out of reach. We had to persuade her to let go and float with the rapids down another rock. There was another outcropping that she could grab onto. She didn't want to do it. She was scared I was certainly witnessing it. She finally agreed to do it and she let go and calmly went down there grabbed onto the other thing, held on and at that point they were able to, with her holding on with one arm were able to throw her the rope which had a loop in it, she put it around her body nice and snug. The rescue took a couple of hours. Of course when she got onshore she went into shock. She was cold, wet and basically the women took her off and got her clothes off, got her wrapped up in blankets. She obviously lived to tell the tale. I don't recall her name. I don't have any idea where she went after that in the Foreign Service, but she was a first tour junior officer for USIS.

Q: Oh boy.

BOORSTEIN: It was something else.

Q: Did you get involved, what was happening in Zaire at the time, I mean were there any of the Shaba incidents or any of the insurrections that went on?

BOORSTEIN: No. What was happening politically internally in the country, there were at least two things I can comment on. Number one, Mobutu Sese Seko was the president of Zaire as he was for many years afterwards. He decided that to consolidate his power he had to show that foreign commercial interests were no longer welcome. The country was able to fend for itself without the presence of the Indians, the Pakistanis and the Lebanese primarily. They basically were running the small businesses in the country. They were the shopkeepers, hotel clerks, ran the restaurants. There were a few Italian and French restaurants, but a lot of the commercial infrastructure was run by Pakistanis and Lebanese. The Lebanese were primarily Jews. The little hotel that we ran through the commissary association was known as the Aladeff Arms because Mr. Aladeff was a Lebanese Jew who came to the former Belgian Congo years and years ago and his family was still involved there. Mobutu basically kicked out a lot of those people.

Well, the country went to hell in a hand basket economically. The crime rate skyrocketed. People were hungry in the countryside starting to come into the big cities including Kinshasa and they were living by robbing the white people. That's when we got the 24 hour presence in the house, our post differential rate went up and then eventually Mobutu saw the error of his ways and invited the people to come back. A lot of them did. Now, again, at the same time the Belgians were still a huge presence. They were running a very large technical assistance program, had their own schools. My senior FSN's husband was a teacher at the Belgian school. That was a time of internal political turmoil.

There may, I believe, '74, '75 sometime during that link there was an attempted coup against Mobutu. Mobutu blamed the CIA, totally unfounded as far as I knew. In the midst of all of that our defense attachï¿½ who had his own aircraft decided he was going to fly to Lubumbashi and failed to file a flight plan with the local aviation and military or whatever. He simply got on his plane and flew. He landed at the airport in Lubumbashi and was promptly arrested and thrown in prison. Well, Bill Hudson who was the admin officer, and he did consular work, too he became the prison visitor. He would bring the guy food and newspapers and was the liaison and basically help convince them not to beat this guy up and was instrumental in helping get him released. For his efforts he got a meritorious honor award and in the midst of that alleged attempted coup, Mobutu blamed the CIA and Deane Hinton was declared persona non grata and had to get out.

At that time Mike Newlin had left as DCM and our new DCM was Lannon Walker. Lannon Walker became quite a senior figure in African affairs because he had been the ambassador in three of four African countries before he retired. Ambassador to Nigeria, the Ivory Coast and several other spots. I forget where he was before, but he came to Kinshasa fairly young as the econ counselor, very energetic and really took charge. He was the Charge I venture to say for six months at least and then Walter Cutler came in as ambassador and is now head of the Meridian House. During the inter regnum with Lannon Walker as Charge, he took the country team and subdivided it. He had the big country team where the large group, all the agency heads that he met with once a week. Then he had the core country team, which he expanded to include several of the admin unit chiefs and I was then included in the mini-core country team meeting which was a real boon for me. I was in my first embassy, as a second tour officer, being the personnel office I was still an FSO-6. I wasn't promoted to 5 for another few years after that. I remember going to meetings twice a week in his office to deal with a lot of the problems of the embassy from a more of a senior management perspective.

Part of what we had to deal with before Cutler arrived was the spillover of the civil war in Angola. In 1975 at some point late '75, early '76 the Portuguese announced their intention to leave Angola and I don't know whether they formally left during the time that they were planning to leave, civil war broke out and there was Savimbi and all those different factions that were fighting each other. If you look at the map you'll see how close Kinshasa is to the northern border of Angola. The Agency brought in maybe 50 temporary duty personnel and they were assigned to the embassy as temporary duty people, but they really were observers and they would go out to the front everyday. They'd take vehicles and they'd drive maybe 50, 60, 70 miles whatever it was to that northern border area. Maybe they were doing advising one faction or another and certain things they never told you that they did and at night they'd come back and they had been leasing houses and the administrative officer of the Agency became a real force to contend with because doling out money and doing this and doing that and I don't know whether Lannon Walker, the Charge, lost control, but it was a bit of a wild time in the embassy with all these people running around. That was a particular focus of the embassy to try and deal with all that.Again, those were kind of the political forces that impacted on embassy operations.

Q: Did you as personnel officer, did you run across problems of the discrepancy between administrative support for two other elements, AID and CIA?

BOORSTEIN: AID was more of a problem because they would be independent, but yet they wouldn't. In other words a part of the shared administrative arrangement, the administrative section of Kinshasa was called CAMO, C-A-M-O, Consolidated Administrative Management Office. With that arrangement, AID as I said had several of their American staff as officers within general services and personnel and like I said my immediate supervisor was an AID officer, Chuck Herter. They were sort of in bed with the State admin section if you will, but yet they had their own controller Art Thompson and they were able to dispense funds and they didn't seem to want to follow the same rules as we did when it came to regulations governing R&R travel and so there was a bit of friction in that area. It was never resolved. We had sort of a problem and everybody agreed to disagree. With the Agency, they had their own little pool of housing with the station chief. He of course had a car and driver. Particularly when their numbers increased dramatically, they became a more of a force themselves. Yet, by and large at the working level and again I was not a senior officer by any means at that time. A lot of our friends were from AID and from the Agency. The Agency had its own film circuit and it was really great to get invited to their houses to watch the movies.

Another source of social contact for us was the American School of Kinshasa because my wife taught there. I was not involved as I was later on in my career with the school board, but we just had a lot of friends who worked at the school. Again, at that point we were in our mid to late '20s and we would hang around with the younger crowd. Our daughter had a lot of friends. To this day at my retirement reception on Friday I've invited a couple of gentleman, one named Ron Bitondo who was the English language teacher and his wife, Pat, because their daughter, Barbara, was also my daughter's age and she's going to be there as well. She works now at the World Bank. For my first embassy, it was a great experience.

Q: Was there much contact with the embassy people and the Zairians?

BOORSTEIN: Not on the social level because it was such a poor country. I would for wage surveys to help the medical unit; I had a lot of contacts, local, the clinic that was part of the Organization of African Unity. The actress Glenn Close, her father was Mobutu's personal physician. Of course Glenn Close was not a famous actress in those days, but Dr. Close, and his son was also a physician. I remember knowing his son and daughter-in-law and they were part of a square dance group that we had. No, there really was, the ones that you would know the best would be educated Zairian staff in the embassy. We had a number of those folks who worked for AID who were educated in Europe. They spoke excellent French, spoke English and were helping on the program side. Those were the kind of people whom we could relate to. Frankly I don't mean to sound racist at all, but the reality was that in those years, perhaps even worse today it is an extremely poor country, very rich in minerals, but very corrupt. The Belgians did not do a very good job at all as a colonial power to prepare that country to govern itself at all. There was still very much of a dependency factor I think. You could still hear when the Belgians would talk to the Zairians; they would invariably use the "tu" form in French. Very condescending. The Zairians would refer to the white people at "Patron." That's the way they were raised. I doubt today you would hear that. They were trying to move into that area of more an egalitarian approach and under Mobutu, the common reference where one Zairian would refer to another because almost like the Soviet Union, the equivalent of comrade. They would call each other "citoyen" meaning citizen.

Q: Yes, well, this happened during the French Revolution, too.

BOORSTEIN: Yes. There was that aspect of it that was an effort to try to make it more egalitarian, but they had a long way to go.

Q: What about, I mean, in your job in corruption, did you, was this a problem?

BOORSTEIN: Well, yes as the personnel officer, I don't recall any concerns that I personally had. I do know I'm not sure it happened while I was still there, but I remember as part of the effort to increase the number of Zairian staff in the embassy that the European cashier's assistant either left, I don't think she was fired, but she left and was replaced by a Zairian gentleman who went on the take and when he was caught he committed suicide. That happened after I left. There was that aspect. We even had a number of employees, local employees who were Africans, but not from Zaire. Our senior Foreign Service National in budget and fiscal was from Nigeria. That's a country with its share of corruption.

Q: I was just going to say.

BOORSTEIN: He was sophisticated. He knew his stuff quite well. In those years Kinshasa was a regional budget and fiscal office and we had two or three of the American staff who flew quite a bit throughout Central Africa on the regional budget. During my tour there other than traveling to Lubumbashi and Bukavu, my wife, daughter and I took a vacation trip to Angola. This was in the spring of 1976, a couple of months before we left and the civil war was still going on. What we had in Luanda was still a consulate general. The administrative officer was a gentleman named Ed Fugit who is now retired. He rose pretty high in the ranks of the Foreign Service, did a lot of service elsewhere in Africa. Through the consulate general we arranged for a hotel to stay in and after the Portuguese left and while things were still in a state of flux air links were established directly from Kinshasa to Rwanda. Before that, if you wanted to go from Kinshasa to Luanda you had to fly to Johannesburg and change planes. It was prohibitively expensive. We were able to afford to take a trip there and we spent a lovely week in Luanda going to the beach everyday. The economy was essentially living on the black market. We even went into the consulate, turned in a check for $100, left the "pay to the order of" line blank and later that day came back to get our supply of Angolan Escudos at whatever rate the black market would have that day and then later on the check would show up later "pay to the order of Jose Gomez" or whatever, you just didn't know who it was. The consulate general allowed that to happen. That's the way they dealt obviously with Washington's permission with their financial operations. We lived quite well for that week. We had wonderful lobster dinners with good Portuguese wine. We would hear gunfire at night from our hotel. We were very circumspect on where we went and what we did. It was a wonderful vacation. We went to the market the morning of the day that we left and filled up an entire ice chest full of fresh fish, clams, lobster tails and whatever and brought it back on the plane. When it landed in Kinshasa I immediately got off and went down to the belly of the aircraft and talk about a lack of security in those days as they were unloading that crate, saw that cooler and I said, "That's mine" and I immediately took it because otherwise I would have never seen it. It was such valuable cargo.

My trip to Bukavu, I flew there directly, but on the way back I couldn't get a flight when I wanted to because the direct flight was booked to return, so they had to drive me to the airport in Bujumbura. I had to get transit visas for Rwanda and Burundi, and the consulate driver took me in the Land Rover and it was like going through a circuitous route because that part of far eastern Zaire had been a real hotbed of the hostilities during the '60s. We went near the area where the aircraft that carried Dag Hammarskjï¿½ld, the United Nations Secretary General crashed and he was killed. We had to drive around bombed out bridges and dry riverbeds. Those bridges that were bombed out in 1964 and '65, 10, 11 years later had not been repaired. I went through all the checkpoints. A very memorable trip.

I also got sick, something I ate the night before. It was not the place to get stomach troubles when you're driving across the country or flying. It was a fairly long flight to get to Bujumbura to Kinshasa. It was about a three-hour flight.

Q: While you were dealing with personnel, just to get a feel for it, did we have cases of people having to leave because of marital problems, alcoholism or just couldn't take it, an adjustment?

BOORSTEIN: By and large for an embassy of its size, the morale was pretty high and I think you would find that was the case at a lot of the hardship posts. As long as you had good leadership in the embassy and you had the right mix of personnel. It's been certainly my experience. The housing was good. There were a lot of good recreational facilities. There were periods of tension like when the crime rate rose and when the Americans were being looked on as the cause of the problems and the ambassador was declared persona non grata.

There were a number of cases. We had one officer who was medically evacuated basically for mental illness. The doctor detected this and I'm not sure, but he was flown back to the States with his wife. He was given treatment and some kind of medicine, drugs, came back to post and he was fine. We had a visit while I was there by someone from the Office of Medical Services who was a reformed alcoholic and his job was to fly around the world and give lectures.

Q: I remember this, yes.

BOORSTEIN: He was an Irish American, tall fellow, gray hair and I'll never forget this because I was his control officer and I went to the airport to meet him. I forget where he was flying in from, but his suitcase didn't make it. He was well over six feet tall. I remember lending him a pair of my pajamas to sleep and I'm sure they came halfway up to his knees or whatever and so the next day his suitcase arrived. I think his name was McGuire, a very friendly guy. There was one communications officer whom he met with as having had a drinking problem in the past. I was privy to that information as personnel officer, so I made sure that the two of them met and they talked privately. This particular communications officer did not exhibit any signs of relapse, but I think he appreciated the counseling, and even hosted a dinner for him.We had one woman who was the wife of the defense attachï¿½ who came down with sort of like a jungle fever and she died. She was evacuated to Europe and she died in the medical evacuation aircraft en route to Europe. I certainly didn't have any health issues. My family didn't have any health issues.

Charles Grace was the doctor who recently passed away and oh, I know I can tell you about this and it was kind of scary. The house we were in had a swimming pool. One day I decided I was going to light up my barbecue and I had some local charcoal. It was not like buying those briquettes and throw a match on them and they automatically light or buying lighter fluid that is not as flammable. I did something that wasn't very bright. I had a mayonnaise jar full of high-octane gasoline. I poured a little bit of it on the charcoal, threw a match on it and it started to light. It didn't catch and I decided, well, what it needs is some more fuel, so I dribbled a little bit in and of course being so high octane the flame came right back into the jar, the jar exploded and the flames went onto my shorts. I had on shorts and a tee shirt. My wife was outside; I don't know where my daughter was. I literally was on fire. I had fire on my leg, on my shorts and I'm doing this and that and jumping around. My wife says, "Mike, jump in the pool." She probably saved my life. I did not have the presence of mind to jump in the pool. Well, I was severely burned on one leg. My shorts had little holes of fire in them in a very ominous place, but thank God it didn't get any worse. It was on a Sunday and we called in the doctor. At that time we didn't have our regional medical physician. Our doctor was the Peace Corps doctor. His name was Bob Morris, a young fellow. We met at the medical unit. He treated me and he was so excited because he had done his internship at the UCLA burn center. He was like, "wow, look what I have here." He knew exactly what to do and I literally had damages all up and down one leg and I was out of the office for an entire week where I really had to lie in bed with my leg elevated in a very cool room. He was very concerned about infection because it was the tropics. I just sat there with all kinds of books to read because there was no good local television, I don't even know that we had a television. Everyday my wife would drive me to the medical unit for him to change the dressing. Afterwards I was able to work half a day. That was my encounter with the hardship conditions and to this day whenever I light a charcoal fire, I get a little skittish.

Q: Your mentioning of Mr. McGuire, the man who came around and talked about alcoholism and as I recall it this was really the first time that the Foreign Service faced up to the problem of alcoholism and was making before it you either didn't mention it or you didn't treat it as something. The effort was to almost bring it out into the open.

BOORSTEIN: Well, when you think about what was available to individuals with families and what the social attitudes were towards the Foreign Service and the families, they really mirrored and continue to mirror the way these things are viewed by American society as a whole. I mean think about how it was when you came into the Foreign Service and when I came into the Foreign Service 15 years later when, if you were a single woman, you could not go to the Soviet Union or anywhere in Eastern Europe. If you were even a single man I don't think you could go to those places. They really feared a compromise. If you were a homosexual you couldn't even get into the Foreign Service and you basically kept that sexual tendency to yourself. You stayed in the closet. As I mentioned before, there was no social safety net if you were sitting at a post and you abandon your family, yet alone considerations for treatment for mental illness, emotional disturbances, alcoholism and things of this nature. These were things that were just not dealt with in society as a whole; they also weren't dealt with.

Q: This is tape three, side one with Mike Boorstein. Yes, go ahead.

BOORSTEIN: Anyway, to answer your question, these things evolved and they continue to evolve. When you think about it, I'm sure you've interviewed a number of women officers who were in the Foreign Service, they got married, they had to resign and then they came back when the rules changed. I don't know if you've interviewed Joanne Jenkins for example.

Q: No.

BOORSTEIN: She's another person you should add to your list. She retired about four years ago. She was a senior administrative officer and came in as a single officer, got married, had to quit and then came back again after the rules changed. I witnessed that among my own colleagues over time. I told you the story about I believe Anne Sigmund from the officer class who was a Soviet specialist, couldn't go to the USSR as her first tour, but may have been there 10 years later. Again, Kinshasa was pretty much a positive experience. It was my only tour in Africa. I was just looking for broader experiences and I didn't necessarily shy away from going there again. I just never ended up there again.

At the end of our tour we took a wonderful trip. We took a photographic safari. In those years, Pan Am had pretty much a daily flight that left New York and depending on the day of the week it had a number of intermediate stops, Abidjan, Dakar, Lagos, Kinshasa and then went down to Johannesburg and then once or twice a week for a while they actually puddle jumped down to Kinshasa and went straight across to Nairobi. We left and took that Pan Am flight from Kinshasa to Nairobi, got off and had arranged through help with the American Embassy in Nairobi, in those years, there was no e-mail. You picked up the phone and called a travel agent. You relied on telex and informal cables and other things that people did in those years to get things done. One of the regional security officers arranged for a lovely photographic safari through Thorn Tree Travel. We got a Volkswagen bus, a driver guide and a went to a number of the game parks in Kenya and in those years we could cross the border into Tanzania and back to Kenya, took some wonderful pictures. You're going to see some of them on Friday because my wife put together a memory book with two pages of Kinshasa that shows a number of really good pictures from Africa, I think a couple from our trip to Kenya and Tanzania. We spent some time on the beach in Mombasa. Then we flew on to Greece and had a lovely cruise through the Greek Islands. We saved so much money we could afford all of that. It was great. Then we went to Paris and went to the States.

My next assignment was again as personnel officer was in our embassy in Ottawa. Any more questions about Zaire?

Q: No, not now.

BOORSTEIN: Again I was interested in remaining in the personnel area and I don't recall that Ottawa was tops on my list, but it certainly sounded like a lovely, comfortable assignment. I was looking forward to my ability to use my French in the French speaking part of Canada. The tour in Ottawa turned out to be the shortest tour I had in the Foreign Service. I was only there for 20 months, the reasons I'll explain later on, but I was assigned originally on a four year tour and again like in Palermo we were on a local economy in terms of the living quarters' allowance. We rented a nice house on the outskirts of Ottawa. My daughter attended a Canadian elementary school. My wife couldn't teach so she went to graduate school and got her master's in education from the University of Ottawa and that took her two years to do and that was basically her job. Those years, this again talking about the social norms and what the Department did or did not do for its people. We didn't have reciprocal work agreements with any country. Ultimately, we did get one with Canada that allowed our embassy spouses to work. In those years, unless you were a nuclear physicist or whatever, the immigration people would say, no, you can't be a teacher because you're taking a job away from a Canadian, so my wife didn't work. She went to school. That was her job and it was a good focus for her.

I had wonderful embassy colleagues. Perhaps the best boss I ever had in the Foreign Service was the administrative counselor. His name was Don Bouchard. He's been retired now for 18 years. He retired pretty much as soon as he turned 50 or a few months later. He rose to be assistant secretary of administration. At the time, I believe Ottawa was his first assignment as the administrative counselor. He may have been the admin officer in some smaller countries in Africa. He was just a wonderful guy. Very relaxed, laid back, friendly, non-threatening, person that really mentored people well and it was just a real joy to work for him. I worked for him later on actually in Washington when he was the executive director of the Latin American bureau.

I was the personnel officer. The budget and fiscal officer was a gentleman named Alex Jackson who at the end of his tour developed multiple sclerosis. He ended up staying in the service a while longer. He actually went with me when I went to my next post, which was Moscow. Then he had to retire for medical reasons and passed away about six years ago. The general services officer was a gentleman named Frank Berry. He basically was a career general services officer. He's been retired a long time. I've lost track of him. The security officer was a gentleman named John Clemmons. John Clemmons was a good old boy from North Carolina who had a twin brother who was a domestic diplomatic security officer. John, I think, his only Foreign Service post as security officer was in Ottawa because he really was a domestic guy. I understand he died just about a month ago. The DCM was Bob Duemling. After he retired became the director of the National Building Museum.

Q: Yes, the old pension building in Washington.

BOORSTEIN: Right. He was a bachelor at the time. He's since married a woman whom I've never met and the ambassador was the legendary Thomas Oswald Enders. All six foot six or eight of him with his wife Gaetana, who was about four foot ten. They were quite a couple. I was as I said the personnel officer. I had a significantly smaller staff than I had in Kinshasa. I just had two Canadian women who worked for me. They were marvelous people. One of them had been there for a number of years and stayed on a long time afterward. I am still in touch with her from time to time. She's retired and still in the Ottawa area.

Ottawa was a great post from a family standpoint and a work standpoint. There were at the time I was there we had consulates in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal.

Q: Quebec.

BOORSTEIN: Quebec and Halifax. We had seven. Our consulate in St. John's Newfoundland had just closed the summer I arrived in 1976. As personnel officer I got to go to every one of the consulates at least once and in some cases I remember I went twice to Winnipeg. I went three or four times to Montreal. I could go there in a day, but a couple of times to Toronto, but at least once to every consulate. Shortly after I arrived I went on a, flew out to Vancouver and then took the overnight train to the Canadian Rockies to Calgary and then flew to Winnipeg and flew home. I would constantly be on the phone. There was a lot of coordination work we would do countrywide wage surveys. You'd have to coordinate the evaluation cycle for the American Foreign Service staff, which was an enormous job of making sure stuff, was sent by overnight express mail and things were kept on target. To go from a country like Zaire where nothing worked to a country like Canada, which in many respects worked better than the United States, was just a dream. The only down side of the tour in Canada is if you didn't like cold weather because it would get cold fast. You first saw snow by the middle of October. It may have been only a flurry or two, but by early to mid November you had serious snow. The second winter I was there it was incredibly cold. That's when I first experienced the point where Fahrenheit and Centigrade meet. It was minus 42 below. We lived in a house and it seemed like every night it would snow two inches and by the end of the winter, snow by my sidewalk and by my driveway was taller than I was and I did all the shoveling. I had two cars, both of which had those plug ins, which kept the oil viscous in your crankshaft and that got a little old. My wife and daughter were good ice skaters. My wife being from Indiana learned to ice skate at a very young age. My daughter learned it in Ottawa. I didn't ice skate until I was a teenager. I never took to it, never liked it and just under sufferance would go with them to the Rideau Canal, which was frozen solid, and I was looking for a place to hold on, but I still went. What we did learn there and did as a family was ski, downhill skiing. We took ski classes every Saturday for two hours. We drove to a place called Calabogie Peaks in Western Ottawa, about an hour or hour and a half away from Ottawa. With our class we would go skiing and sometimes it was so cold we'd have to take breaks so that frostbite wouldn't set in. We'd have a bowl of soup or a hot chocolate, something to stay warm, but it was fun. I turned 30 in Ottawa, so I was still quite young. As a matter of fact, I was the youngest Foreign Service Officer in the embassy.

Q: Well, now as personnel officer, I know personnel officers have had terrible times with not necessarily the ambassador, but the ambassador's wife. I was in Athens where Mrs. Tasca, I think had 100 people go through, some were repeats, but going through the household staff and all. Did you have problems with Mrs. Enders at all?

BOORSTEIN: Not me personally even though I would be involved in the hiring of the staff for the residence and the DCM's residence. I would do many wage surveys to determine their salary. I do not recall personally having any issues with Mrs. Enders. She had issues with the security officer because I believe there was a cook who the security officer refused to give clearance to work on the residence because he discovered something about his background and she was very upset because she thought he was an excellent cook and at the end of the day I just don't remember whether he was hired or not. That was a long time ago, but he was just infuriated that she was trying to push him and I just remember him being incredibly angry and wanted to talk to me about and talk to the admin counselor about these kinds of issues. I did not have any problems with Mrs. Enders personally at all.

The ambassador was a whirlwind. In many ways he was like Tom Pickering in terms of being very activist. He was traveling constantly and Bob Duemling was the DCM was really the man who ran the embassy and I remember I had been at post already for three months and it was the night of the Marine Ball. The agricultural counselor, his name was Clancy Jean had a reception at his apartment. My wife and I went and were standing around having a drink or whatever and the ambassador arrived. He went around greeting people. He turned to me and shook my hand and said, "Hi, I'm Tom Enders, a pleasure." Don Bouchard, the admin counselor, just about choked on his drink when he overheard this. He put his arm around me and he said, "Mike, we've got to get you upstairs so the ambassador knows who you are." I'd already been at post for three months. Eventually I did sit in on some more meetings in the front office, budget briefings or this or that and at the end of the day the ambassador did know who I was. I wasn't his next best friend, but nevertheless it goes to show you how he was oriented. He went to the Yukon; he went to the Northwest Territory. He was here, he was there. He was all over the place.

Q: As personnel officer, did you run into a genre that I was familiar with in the '60s, I was a what you called a core management officer in personnel and I was dealing with consular officers. At one point we got a complaint from our embassy in London and also from Canada in different places and some in Mexico saying you're sending all these problem cases to us as consular officers. It was close to home and for one thing we had an awful lot of in those days this was, a consular office is one place where women often became officers, low-ranking and many of them weren't married because of the system and they usually had mothers who they were taking care of or they couldn't be far from home. So, Canada was the place where we were putting them. It was developing almost a personality of having relatively elderly women at consular posts and also people, I mean in other words, they were problem cases.

BOORSTEIN: Well, there were a number of those in Canada while I was there. I had no particular reason for having to be in Canada, but there were a number of people that had limited medical clearances, had elderly or ill parents in the United States and they needed to be nearby, may have had children who couldn't get medical clearances, who would get better medical care in Canada, but it wasn't that much of a negative factor on how well things ran. The morale among the single women in Canada was not good for a couple of reasons. If they tended to be older by and large they didn't like the cold weather. There was one woman who was the secretary to the DCM and the political counselor who slipped on the ice and broke her arm. She was just miserable before. She was just disconsolate after that, inconsolable. She just hated it there, the cold weather, this or that. The women who were younger the Marines could have cared less about because they had the pick up the crop out there on the street, the Canadian girls. You walked out on a nice spring or summer day it was nice scenery to look at frankly. Again if you weren't the kind of person that embraced cold weather, you'd be unhappy. We just did it. In addition to learning how to downhill ski, we learned how to cross country ski because we lived very close to a large sports complex and park that had trails. We were young. Our daughter at that point was seven or eight years old. She was active. We did a lot of stuff with her as a family that involved physical activity. We went and took advantage of the recreation center and took physical fitness classes, exercise classes, swimming, but other people were miserable. They just didn't like the cold weather. It sort of got to them. Again, like I said I was the youngest Foreign Service Officer even though it was my third tour. But by and large the people who were there had these medical or personal issues, but it wasn't debilitating by and large except like I said the cold weather being the real factor.

Q: What about Canadian contacts? I mean there's all this business love hate relationship. The Canadians follow everything we do avidly in the United States and Americans just think of Canada kind of the cold part of the U.S.

BOORSTEIN: Again, I was struck as coming from the United States how really different Canada and Canadians are. How different it is. Because I was a French speaker and I didn't want to lose my French ability, I enrolled in a course of intermediate conversational French through a local university. There was a night class. I got there in August of 1976, and it was on the eve of that very historic election in Quebec when Rene Lï¿½vesque won the premiership of that province and he was advocating separation. I realized very quickly how sensitive Canadians are to the word "America." For example, in most places around the world when you go to an American Embassy and you see the plaque outside the door which says "American Embassy," but you go to Ottawa at least when I was there and the plaque says "Embassy of the United States of America" or you would always refer to it and you learned very quickly never say you work at the American Embassy, say U.S. Embassy. I remember the first night at this French class we went around the room introducing ourselves and I said in French" I am Mike Boorstein and I'm an American." The professor turned to me and replied: "We are all Americans here." As I said, I quickly learned to say "I'm from the United States" in French. Again there was that sensitivity. And there was a lot of internal turmoil in Canada over the issue of separation.

I remember early on taking this orientation trip and flew to Vancouver and went to the admin officer's apartment for a cocktail party and he invited a lot of his local staff. I remember the topic, it was a fairly small group, it wasn't that big of a consulate, getting into this argument about western Canada versus eastern Canada. Basically they were saying, we don't give a damn about those people in Quebec. We can have our own nice little country just British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. We can just be fine. We've got the oil, we've got the wheat, we've got the minerals. We don't need the rest of the country. There was that kind of stuff going on and less of this you people from south of the border, you don't understand us. That really wasn't a factor at least not in my experience.

Q: Well, then, did you get involved in any presidential visits? Talking about Jimmy Carter.

BOORSTEIN: That reminds me about another story I forgot to tell you about Kinshasa, but we'll come back to it. Let me jot that down before I forget it. Kinshasa and Kissinger. I still don't know what it is that I forgot to tell you about Palermo, but anyway. Mondale was Vice President in '77 and '78 and that was the first vice presidential and presidential visit that I had had. I was in charge of the hotel operation as the personnel officer. It involved one night stay up all night doing duty in the control room. I don't remember anything problematic. Frankly, just a lot of work, a lot of coordination, keeping tabs on rooms and changes. A lot of time on the phone, but like I said, this is Canada. We didn't have any time zone difference. The phones worked. It was fine.

Q: Well, you wanted to add something about Zaire?

BOORSTEIN: Actually, let me go back. One of the other thrills about my tour in Ottawa was this was the year of Queen Elizabeth's silver jubilee, 25 years on the throne, 1977 so she was touring all of the Commonwealth. She and Prince Philip made a trip to Ottawa. I remember it was in July, my mother was with me. I remember going up to the roof of the embassy to view her carriage going along Wellington Street in a horse drawn carriage. She was riding, she would open up part of it and that was quite a thrill to see the Queen up close.

In Kinshasa, getting back to that, Henry Kissinger paid us a visit, the Secretary of State. This was my first Secretary of State visit and as the personnel officer, again, I was in charge of the hotel rooms at the Hotel Intercontinental. You can imagine. Kissinger made a very historic trip around Africa and he, you know, I don't remember where he was before Kinshasa, but after Kinshasa he was supposed to go to Accra, Ghana. That trip was canceled because of rioting.

Q: Yes and also there was a problem, but I can't remember what it was.

BOORSTEIN: There were riots in the street because of the Kissinger visit and as a result when he landed in Kinshasa, it was announced by the Department that the stop in Accra was scrubbed. So, he had an extra day in Kinshasa and that again was part of the story. From there his last stop was to go to Nairobi where he was delivering an important speech to what was called UNCTAD, UN Commission on Trade and Development. Like I said I was responsible for the hotel. That was my thing to do. I remember there was a very famous French interpreter named Alec Toumayan who flew out the day before Kissinger was to travel. We had his room assigned. I went out to the airport to meet him and we came back and he didn't like his room. His room overlooked the street and he wanted his room overlooking the swimming pool. I basically told him you're out of luck. These rooms are all booked. They're all assigned; you've got to live with it. He wasn't very happy, but you know. I remember seeing him at Foreign Affairs Day last spring and I reminded him of that story and he looked at me and said, "oh, yes I remember."

In any event, shortly after Kissinger arrived I was also involved in setting up the control room at the presidential guesthouse where Kissinger stayed and while I was there the fellow from the secretariat and his name was Myles Pendleton.

Q: I've interviewed Myles.

BOORSTEIN: Now, he went by something else like Skip or Chip.

Q: Kim.

BOORSTEIN: Kim. There you go, I'm glad you remember. Kim said I need someone to help put together the press release with the text of the UNCTAD speech. Mike I want you to do that. Well, again, think of this 1976, no computers, no fax machines. You had barely functioning Xerox machines in those days. You relied a lot on mimeograph paper and just plain old labor. Very quickly, I had to arrange for the machinery, the paper, the labor and the whole logistics for delivering I don't know 500 copies of the speech once it was polished and ready to go. Then I had to protect it because it was embargoed until a certain point when it was going to be released on the aircraft I guess. I don't know, probably to the traveling press. The Bureau of Reclamation in those years was overseeing a huge dam project called Inga Shaba. I believe it was on the Congo River. Morris & Knudsen was the firm that had the contract. There were a lot of these American contractors and Reclamation folks running around. I had a contact through Morris & Knudsen and got a big warehouse and set up a huge long table and got together the mimeograph machines and had a cadre of I don't know 20 Zairian laborers and literally worked all night to run off I don't know whether it was a hand cranked machine or an electric machine to run off the masters and run off the 500 copies of each page, hand them to the Zairian workers who literally walked around the table to collate. Kim Pendleton said to me, I'll never forget this, he said, "Mike, I'm sure that this requirement is supported by the embassy and that you will succeed. If you don't you will look back on your short and enjoyable career in the Foreign Service." Ultimately, obviously, I did succeed, but I missed part of the concert, the folk concert the Zairian hosts were putting on for Kissinger at this big outdoor arena. My wife was there. We had a baby-sitter for our daughter, and I joined her close to the end of the concert and I think this was actually the second day after I'd been up all night. I went home that night and as we had already made that trip to Angola. I still had several lobster tails in the freezer. I took one of them out, thawed it, grilled it and at 1:00 in the morning had myself a late dinner with lobster tails. It tasted very good. That was my Kissinger story.

Again, the embassy had to fumble around real quickly in preparing a program for him for the last day. Well, as it turned out Kissinger became violently ill. He was just confined to his bedroom popping Lomotil and the press was having a field day. There was all this talk that he was having secret discussions with the Angolan rebels and he was doing this and that and the answer was that he was going from his bed to his toilet.

Q: Well, of course supposedly he had tummy trouble when he was in Pakistan when actually he went to China.

BOORSTEIN: That's true so there was that suspicion of course.

Q: Oh boy.

BOORSTEIN: Well, why don't we, I think I'm pretty much. Well, let me finish up Ottawa.

Q: Okay.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, this is actually a good way to end it. I was in Ottawa for a year and I get a phone call from Washington and its Mary Ryan who was my career counselor. She said, "Mike, I have a requirement to fill a job in Moscow. I see from your personnel record that you came into the Foreign Service, you have some Russian language ability." I think I tested at a 0+/0+, next to nothing, but I had studied Russian in college, I knew a few words and I tested and that was the only foreign language I tested in. "We have an opening for the number two position as the admin officer working for the admin counselor. It's a double stretch for you."

Q: You might explain what a double stretch is.

BOORSTEIN: Well, because your personal rank usually coincides with the classification rank of the position you hold. Often for shortages or for other reasons you can get jobs at higher than your grade level and that's called a stretch. In my case the job in Moscow was two grades above my personal grade. I said to Mary, "You know, Mary, four years when I was leaving Palermo I was offered the job as administrative officer in Budapest and security wouldn't give me a clearance because I have relatives in the Soviet Union and they also denied me all of Eastern Europe, so I'm sure they would never assign me to the USSR." She said, "Well, Mike, let me look into it." She called me the next day and said, "Security says there's no problem with you going to Moscow." I laughed like crazy. Expediency rules. Again, I'd only been in Ottawa a year on a four-year assignment. My wife was happy going to graduate school; my daughter loved her school. This was a career opportunity for me and at that point I was already pretty much decided that I wasn't going to be a personnel officer for the rest of my career. I wanted to go into the mainstream of things and I was afraid that if I spent four years doing personnel work after almost three years in Kinshasa, I would be classified as a personnel officer. This was my exit. I enjoyed being personnel officer, but I was looking at my career. I went to the florist. I bought a dozen roses and I went home and told my wife who was a Russian major by the way in college. I said, "Sue, I imagine you will be really excited to learn of an opportunity for us to go to Moscow." She said, "Well, no, I'm really happy here." I said, "Well, look the timing is such that you could finish your master's and I wouldn't be going until next summer. Then back to Washington for intensive Russian out of cycle. We could probably stay in Ottawa through the end of your school year so you could finish up your master's." I said and I was trying to be very diplomatic in front of my eight-year-old daughter, almost nine, no she was nine. "You know, this really is a family decision." My daughter, the smart little nine year old that she was pops up and says, "Okay, Dad, it is a family decision so this means if I don't want to go to Moscow, we'll stay here in Ottawa, right?" I said basically, "No, not exactly." It's something that she'll joke about from time to time to this day; this is what Dad means by family decisions. I agreed and I was curtailed. I left Ottawa in April of 1978. I left my family there and the embassy was very creative in figuring out a way where they could stay in privately leased quarters and get some sort of allowance. That again goes to show you how flexible and benevolent Don Bouchard was as the admin counselor. He said to me early on, "Mike I predict you're not going to have a full tour here. Somebody is going to snag you away early." He didn't plant that seed. It just happened.

Off I went to Washington, left my family in Ottawa. I went to Washington and rented a sublet, rented a second story walk up apartment off the Georgetown campus above a dry cleaning store. Walked across the river every morning. I basically had one on one Russian tutoring and got to a 0+ to a 2+ in about 12 weeks. Nina De La Cruz, who was the dean of the Russian language teachers, became my teacher and it was just wonderful. My wife came down and I went up to help them pack out and came to Washington. She took a little bit of Russian in August of 1978 and we went to Moscow. That's a good place to break.

Q: Okay, we'll pick this up when you went to Moscow when?

BOORSTEIN: August 1978.

Q: You were there from '78 to when?

BOORSTEIN: July of '81, three years.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then, great.

Q: All right. Today is the 11th of October, 2005. Mike, what was the situation in Moscow when you got there in 1978?

BOORSTEIN: In 1978, we were in basically the high point of detente. We were somewhere in, I forget whether it was Salt I or Salt II. Malcolm Toon was the ambassador, one of our more distinguished career people at the time. He went out to Geneva. That would have been I believe the fall of 1978 to be there for arms control discussions between Secretary Vance and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko. I went on that trip not because I was part of the party, but one of the interesting benefits that people in Moscow had was that the American ambassador had rights to draw on the airing out of Rhine Main air base for basically a plane that was part of the medevac medical evacuation wing two or three times a year basically under the rubric of resupplying the ambassador's residence. Someone from the embassy would be a designated shopper and fly out commercially one way with a big shopping list from the ambassador's wife for basically non-perishables to put into the storage areas of the residence. If there were things that were needed from the PX or the commissary to help service the residence that shopper would buy those, too. It also became on a space available basis a rest and recreation means at no cost for embassy staff and their families to fly to Western Europe. On that particular trip my wife, daughter and I went to Geneva, just simply hitched a ride and went to Geneva and stayed in the Intercontinental Hotel at a good rate and then when the talks were over, four or five days later, we showed up at the airport and flew home. It was an interesting benefit that obviously there was some agreement between the USSR and the United States that allowed that to happen. Perhaps the Russians or the Soviets had some similar privilege in Washington, but be that as it may.

Our relations were for Cold War adversaries; they probably were at their best for that particular era in the late '70s. Malcolm Toon left in the fall of 1979 and as an indicator of the warming of relations, President Carter appointed Thomas J. Watson, Jr., the retired CEO of IBM, to be the ambassador. Watson was one of these people who obviously was very wealthy. He had very much been involved in the U.S.- Soviet relations from the standpoint of someone who was a big promoter of Detente and big business development and what have you and because he also, I believe, was involved in arms control. I'm not quite sure what capacity, but because of his success in nurturing the better part of our relationship, he was appointed as the ambassador. Well, be careful of a good thing because again, he arrived in mid-October of 1979 and two months and two weeks later, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. Then the warmth quickly deteriorated into a deep freeze, but I'm sort of getting ahead of myself.

Q: Yes, but at the time you went out things were pretty good?

BOORSTEIN: Yes and as a matter of fact one of the things that I got involved in very early in my tour, I was the number two in the administrative section. The administrative counselor was John Condayan, who was a highly regarded senior officer and he had come out of Washington I believe. I basically was his deputy. I did all the things that you do in a large administrative section in an embassy that is in an environment such as the Soviet Union where you have government housing, government furnishing, a lot of interface with the host government to provide you with services. All of our foreign national staff was provided to us by the Soviet arm of the Foreign Ministry called Agency for Services to the Diplomatic Corps. It was a difficult relationship because basically we had to treat all of those staff as being spies. They were effective, obviously because a lot of them spoke English quite well. They knew how to work through the bureaucracy, but at the same token, we had to keep a great deal of distance in terms of the information they dealt with.

It was a busy period in that in the fall of 1978 October and November the Secretary of State visited Moscow and in the ensuing 10 to 12 months we had a series of high Congressional delegations. We had the Joint U.S. USSR Trade Council, which basically brought together at the same time our Secretary of the Treasury and Secretary of Commerce for meetings with their Soviet counterparts, so that involved separate control rooms, separate delegations. As a matter of fact, I recall that for the post inspection that occurred a year after I was there, one of the things I had put in the questionnaire was what percentage of time did you spend in handling and supporting high level visits. I added up all the time and the effort and I think it was 40% of my time that first year I was in Moscow dealing with the Secretary of State's visit, two other Cabinet level visits and one high level senatorial delegation, you know, John Glenn was on it, Senator Ribicoff, Senator Dole, Senator Javits. I figured the crï¿½me de la crï¿½me of the Senate of that era; they were on that trip. Then later on that spring of 1979 there was a high level visit by Congressman Wolfe who I believe at the time was the chairman of the House International Relations Committee. That was a very large delegation. It was just a huge effort to support all these things and I was in charge of all of them in terms of the job that I had.

Q: Tell me, what Moscow being sort of unique in the diplomatic world as far as living there goes, what were the challenges that you and the rest of the, particularly on the administrative side had with operating and living there?

BOORSTEIN: Well, you're quite correct. I mean because it was such a controlled society and because the Soviet government wanted to control the comings and the goings of the diplomats, they, in the name of that control, they provided a lot of services that in effect forced you into certain patterns of behavior when they control your activities. For example, the best sources for your food stocks; particularly the perishables, were at stores that were only open to diplomats. These were diplomatic gastronomes. They would sell the goods to you for coupons that were called D-coupons "D" meaning for diplomats. You could buy them at the embassy cashier at the official exchange rate. Now, there was an active black market and the ruble to the dollar at the time, was it cost $1.50 to buy one ruble. On the black market I think you could get four rubles to the dollar. A ruble was worth about a quarter, so it was worth roughly one-sixth of what it was officially. We were counseled strongly over and over again in terms of our own embassy policy, not to buy on the black market. I certainly was faithful to that during the time I was there.

Q: How about other embassies?

BOORSTEIN: Other embassies were looser in their moral code, if you will, in their sanctions against their people. There was a little bit of disparity. Some of your colleagues and I don't know if I want to name any countries in particular, none really come to mind readily. There were also shops that only accepted hard currency, but if you paid in dollars, you might get your change in French Francs, German Marks, Japanese Yen, and so forth. At the end of our tour, wanting to buy little gifts for relatives and friends, particularly if you were staying with people, we shopped at the hard currency store and I said to my wife, "It is payback time". We took this big jar filled with all these coins divided by currency in individual baggies and went to the dollar gastronome and got a couple of hundred dollars worth of things, went to the checkout counter and she gave me the total in U.S. dollars and I proceeded to put all the various coins in baggies from the jar on the counter. The Russian woman said to me, "you can't do that." I said "I am only paying in what you see here. This is a collection of hard currency coins that over the course of three years we collected from you and now I want to return it and this is actual money and if you want me to buy these things and get credit for the sale this is what you're going to accept." Well, she did and it was a great feeling to be able to return all of those coins, most of which would have been totally useless to us taking them out of the country. That was again one of the more challenging aspects of shopping.

We had a whole regime. Moscow and Leningrad were designated as posts that were authorized consumables shipment, which means that you could go and shop at one of these warehouses in the Washington area, tax-free and have the things available for pickup by the moving company, and those things were added to your household shipment from Washington to Moscow and these would be a two or three year supply of toilet paper, paper towels, aluminum foil, coffee, dry cereal, canned fruits and vegetables, things that you knew you would store. Once you received these things, you would have usually a little closet with shelves in your apartment, but it wouldn't be nearly big enough, so wherever you found a square inch of space that was hidden from you like under beds or inside other closets, you would store things there because it was certainly cheaper if you could indeed find it, than buying them locally. The embassy would also sponsor probably about every three months a frozen food shipment from the commissary in Berlin. That was in conjunction also with a bulk order of non-perishable goods that you could order from the commissary in Berlin and it would be brought in overland by truck. When it came for your to get your perishables you had to be there whatever time the truck arrived, whether it was 5:00 in the morning or 11:00 at night. You had to be there, and you had to stake out your own little area and you had a number and that had been coordinated with the people in Berlin to pack it and you would go and pick up your stuff as it came off the truck with your number on it and put it in your area, and then you'd settle up and write a check right there on the spot, or you'd put it on your bill and take it home because there was no room in the main commissary in the embassy because it was just in the basement and was a very small shop given the size of the mission, but that was the only space we had.

There were also things like whether it was quarterly or semi-annually a fresh meat air shipment from the United Kingdom. You would order ground beef and steak and lamb chops and fresh chickens and things like that that would be flown in and it would arrive fresh. It was refrigerated and you would pick it up and immediately take it up and typically wrap it up and put it in your freezer.

Q: This was from the UK?

BOORSTEIN: Yes.

Q: You can't give blood now because of that.

BOORSTEIN: Really?

Q: Maybe they haven't caught you if you give blood. I've been giving blood religiously three or four times a year, but if you've been getting because of Mad Cow. Maybe this was.

BOORSTEIN: This was 28 years ago.

Q: Yes, well, they're still playing with it.

BOORSTEIN: Well, I'll keep that in mind. That was more on the quality of life side. In terms of the embassy operations, the Soviet Union, they were very sensitive about where diplomats could travel. You had a regime that if you traveled by overnight train or by air I think there was a 24-hour notification if you were going to another city where you had a consular post. In the case of the Soviet Union that was only Leningrad when I arrived. You could not, for example, take the day train between Moscow and Leningrad. You could take the overnight train because it was thought you couldn't see everything out the window. If you would travel elsewhere for political reporting to pay a call on a provincial mayor or governor or whatever, the people in the political section did, that required, I don't recall exactly, the 48 or 72 hour notice via diplomatic note. You were given a map by the Foreign Ministry of the entire Soviet Union that showed what areas are closed and what areas are open. Sometimes, you would have open cities within closed areas which meant the only way to get there was to fly. Now, on the basis of reciprocity, we had a similar map of the United States. I really wish I had taken that map as a souvenir because it showed what cities are open and what cities are closed to Soviet diplomats. Later on, after I left Moscow I had a tour on the Soviet desk and I was often involved in telling primarily their journalists and their visiting scientists where they could go and where they couldn't go. It was great fun.

Often, sometimes without warning they would declare an open city closed because there was a particular reason why they didn't want us to go there at the time or it was done in retaliation that we had done on this side if we caught a Soviet diplomat doing something in a place he or she should not have been or done something in a place, done something even if it was in a place that they were allowed to be in. That was a big problem that you had to sort of watch where you went. You did all your planning. You couldn't just go to your local American Express office and book a ticket to any place. You had to go to the embassy's Miscellaneous Services Unit. To do anything you had to go through the official channels. If you wanted a ticket to the Bolshoi Ballet, you had to go to Miscellaneous Services. If you wanted to take a day train trip to Zagorsk or one of the other areas in and around Moscow for the day, you had to do that through the local services place. The same thing, you couldn't exactly put an ad in the newspaper saying you wanted to hire a plumber for the embassy. You wanted a maid; you had to do it through official channels and pay their rates, which were exorbitant. Needless to say very few people other than the ambassador and the deputy chief of mission had household help.

Q: How about au pairs coming from somewhere?

BOORSTEIN: Those were mostly brought in by the military attaches, mainly because by nature of what military attaches do, they spent a lot of time traveling and because of the rule the embassy imposed where you could not travel by yourself, you would travel in pairs as a way of protecting yourself, the attaches would often travel with their spouses and the spouse would have their way paid to travel around. Even if they had kids the au pair, the nanny would stay there and take care of the kids. It really wasn't a problem for the nanny to get a visa to come in. Typically, the nannies came from Finland. They were a great source of female companionship to the Marines, many of whom married Finnish girls who were nannies.

Q: How about while you were there, let's say, was there a dividing line, but problems of the people that you were involved with were the KGB harassment, that sort of thing.

BOORSTEIN: Not me personally. I was never deemed a threat or a target even though obviously I had a full clearance and I sat in on the meetings and I was privy to a lot of information that obviously I could not, would not and did not share with anybody else. If you were undercover and either in the rubric of how we operate overseas often our intelligence assets are declared to those countries because there's a degree of intelligence cooperation even with countries that are considered our adversaries. If you were not a declared intelligence asset, you obviously were undercover and you sometimes were doing things that I didn't even know about and other people that were not part of that group would not know about and if they were caught they were often asked to leave the country. When that happened there was a period of tension. Sometimes there was some additional harassment. You heard stories of earlier times in the mid '70s where people would have their tires slashed or they would find their windshield wipers bent or there would be little gifts of human excrement left in apartments or people would come home and find windows opened or papers strewn about because the KGB wanted people to know that they could get into their places. We were told if we had any sensitive personal papers, bank statements, personal correspondence that might make us vulnerable for compromise that those things should be kept in your safe in the embassy. I personally have no issues with that, but there was a lot of sensitivity to that and as part of the in brief from the security officer that these things were emphasized quite a bit. We were even told if you're having a very difficult argument with your spouse and you don't want other people to hear it, to be picked up by bugs, you can arrange to come in and go in a particular protected room in the embassy and go at it. I never took advantage of that. My wife and I just kept our arguments above board or we'd go outside for a walk, but again there was that level of awareness in the community and looking back on it and I commented on it after we left that there was a degree of stress and tension because of all of these factors that I mentioned. You didn't necessarily know that it was there until you had reason to leave Moscow and go to the West. If you went to Berlin or you went to Helsinki or you went anywhere else and you were in an environment where these things were not on you, you felt the absence of those oppressive stressful factors. When you went back to Moscow the weight returned. That's why we got the hardship pay.

Q: Since you were dealing with the major Soviet Russian workforce, how did you find it?

BOORSTEIN: They were quite efficient as a matter of fact. As a matter of fact there's a number of interesting incidents that happened while I was there that are worth mentioning here. I believe it was the fall of 1979. There was a group of Pentecostals from Siberia who came to the embassy seeking immigrant visas. I don't know whether they had any appointments or they got through the gauntlet to get to where they were. My recollection is that the militia guards in front of the embassy wouldn't let them through and so they as a group, there were seven or eight of them, they rushed through the embassy past the militia guard and sought refuge in the consular section and we let them stay and while they were rushing into the embassy, an Armenian woman with one or two children took advantage of that and just on the spur of the moment decided to rush in the embassy also. Here we were with these two families that didn't know each other figuring out what to do. The Pentecostal group and the Armenian group, I don't know remember whether they were kept together or separate, but they were kept on the compound. Again this compound had a lot of housing units for embassy staff. The deputy chief of mission's apartment was there. All the major counselors' apartments were on the compound and then at the opposite end of the spectrum we had the Marine house, we had the Navy Seabees who were part of the maintenance of the secure area of the embassy. They had their own housing. We had a number of single communicators and secretarial staff who had housing. In that wing that housed the secretarial and communications staff in the basement we very quickly put together a couple of apartments for these people and of course the Soviet authorities wanted us to release them. What ensued and again I don't know exactly why we treated the two families differently; we were able to cut a deal with the Soviet immigration authorities. The acronym was OVIR, O-V-I-R. We persuaded the Armenian woman and her children to fly back to Yerevan and to go into the local immigration office there and they would be given permission to leave.

I got involved in helping with the travel arrangements for this woman and her children to fly from Moscow to Europe. I had to go to the travel clerk; Nina was her name, to make the arrangements. Nina was extremely helpful. She made all kinds of calls. Traveling in the Soviet Union was a nightmare to begin with. I mean flights were canceled, they were late, it was a whole mess. She was just hell bent on getting it right and so she did. The Pentecostal family on the other hand, they refused to leave, they felt they were going to be shipped to Siberia, probably put in some Gulag and persecuted. Through negotiations and they were there for several months, we finally got them immigrant visas, so they came over to the United States the winter of 1980 sometime and I think most of them went to Montana. Maybe that's where they still are. Again, the facilitation of that, the people in the administrative unit were very helpful by and large. There was a Soviet woman. Her name was Galia and she manned the main telephone in the general services office. If you had a problem in your apartment and you submitted a work order, you submitted it to Galia. She would take in the work order and she would mark it in and distribute it to the plumbers, or the electricians or the carpenters or whatever and she was a real powerhouse, power force and we nicknamed her the colonel because we felt she had a high rank in the KGB. I remember one day for whatever reason our phone in the apartment didn't work. I came into the office and went to Galia and I wrote a work order and I said the phone doesn't work. She said to me, "Well, have you been playing around with it trying to fix it?" I looked at her and I said, "Your people are the ones who play around with the phone. I don't touch it." She laughed. That was basically the supposition. She arranged for it to be fixed. Sometimes you'd have an emergency after hours and you would have to call the duty plumber or electrician and they were quite effective.

Q: On these things there were two sort of administrative nightmare that happened. I don't know whether they happened on your watch and all. One was the Sergeant Lonetree episode with the Marine guard.

BOORSTEIN: That was after I was gone.

Q: And the fire.

BOORSTEIN: Well, I tell you, there was a big fire in Moscow in 1977, the year before I arrived and the people that were still there in 1978 sort of had this red badge of courage almost like they had a "we survived the great Moscow fire tee shirt," and we newcomers clearly didn't know what suffering was. So, there was a bit of a rift to the community until finally all those people left. I mean I remember actually going up to the attic and seeing the charred timbers. It was a serious thing and fortunately nobody was hurt or killed. The ambassador had to make a judgment to let people in. By the time we arrived, most of the renovations were in the upper offices. It was mainly offices that were affected, not apartments. That work was still going on a year later and finished everything a few months after I arrived. There were other fires afterwards, but none during the three years that I was there.

Q: How much did, in the first place was there microwave business going on or not?

BOORSTEIN: That also predated my arrival, but not by much. That was very sad because there were some people who contracted cancer. There was an officer named Gordon Shouse who was in the junior officer class right after mine who died of cancer. His wife, Eloise, also had breast cancer. She entered the Foreign Service I believe after her husband died and Johns Hopkins did all of these epidemiological studies to see if there was truly a link and they found that it was moderate, but there was some statistical aberration. We knew exactly where the microwaves were coming from. As a matter of fact during my tour there was a big fire in the place where the microwaves emanated from and then they just stopped.

While I was there they discovered that the Soviets were successful in implanting some sort of a listening device capability into the electric typewriters that were not shipped securely. We used to be able to figure out if they were okay. You would take an IBM Selectric typewriter and when you turned off the electricity and pushed the spacebar, if the electric current continued to let the carriage go across a few more seconds you knew it was okay. If it stopped immediately it alerted you that there was a problem. We would often test our typewriters in that way. We had to ship them out and get replacements in. The incident with Lonetree in '86, '87. I was in Poland at the time and when I get to Warsaw I'll tell you stories about that, the impact of that, but we and then of course in 1986, there were some problems, the Soviet government withdrew all of their Russian staff of the embassy and that was another huge problem that impacted the American staff..

Q: What did happen, was there a change in as you saw it in your work and all after was it December of 1978?

BOORSTEIN: Oh, '79. Yes, as I was saying earlier, that first year I was there I was really busy with high level congressional delegations. All these bilateral cabinet level visits that included the Secretary of State. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and it all stopped. There was a big debate that went on between Washington and the embassy about whether we should remove some staff. We had at the time one of the largest USIS contingents in the world. I think they were in excess of 15 USIS officers. Exchanges, cultural scientific exchanges, all kinds of stuff going on. I remember going to a wonderful production of The Gin Game with Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn, the husband and wife.

Q: Yes, great actors.

BOORSTEIN: It was just wonderful. There were traveling exhibits Agricultural USA where we had our own Foreign Service people acting as guides, helped them with the language, they did a lot of traveling. They would spend the first year doing that and the second year they'd come into the embassy for a job. It was a great training means for some of our junior political and economic officers. Things were booming. After the invasion of Afghanistan, it all stopped and as a matter of fact, the other main activity of that was during that first year that I was there we were making efforts to open up a new consulate in Kiev. It was a reciprocal deal because the Soviets wanted to open a consulate in New York. Obviously, they had their mission to the UN, but their only consulate in the United States was in San Francisco so again it was one for one. We had Leningrad, they had San Francisco, we wanted Kiev, they wanted New York.

We had the beginnings of a consulate, it was called the Kiev Advance Party and the head of that operation was David Swarz. I don't know if you ever met David with his oral history. He's been retired now for six or eight years. S-W-A-R-Z. David I believe is working somewhere in the Soviet Union under the auspices of the OSCE, but maybe you could track him down somewhere. Anyway, David was the head of the Kiev Advance Party and we had an administrative officer, we had a consular officer, a few other assorted people down there. We had property and were renovating an office building and were renovating housing and we were all prepared to put in a communications unit and open it up sometime in the spring of 1980. There were teams and I was part of a team that went down to Kiev in the spring of 1979, the first time I visited their place and went down with someone from the foreign buildings office and there were negotiations and discussions were being, the Ukrainian provincial people on different things. After the invasion of Afghanistan as part of the sanctions, President Carter said we're not going to open Kiev and the Soviets cannot open New York so we closed it all down. That was a complete flip-flop and for the rest of the time that I was there for a year and a half, the only Washington visitor outside the State Department to my knowledge that came to Moscow was Congressman Solarz, Steve Solarz. He came by himself and he had no appointments with any Soviet officials. He simply wanted to have some consultations with the ambassador and embassy staff. It was the deep freeze. It didn't impact on me in the administrative section other than it freed up a lot of my time. I didn't have to deal with these official visits anymore. My third year in Moscow I actually switched jobs. I went from being number two in the administrative section to being the supervisory general services officer, handling the motor pool, transportation, housing and furniture, supplies. It was a big job. I wouldn't say that I was bored, but it was not as frenzied a place. The people who were bored were all the officers from USIS what we called the press and culture section. They had nothing to do. For optics reasons it was decided that they wouldn't be moved.

Q: How did you find in your varying jobs living in Moscow? There was a high rate of divorce, and things of this nature, children.

BOORSTEIN: Well, surprisingly little. In the late 1970s the medical division started recruiting and hiring psychiatrists and Ph.D. clinical psychologist. Now of course we have them at a number of regional places around the world. The first embassy to have a resident psychiatrist who traveled around regionally was Vienna of course. Paul Eggertsen was assigned there as the regional psychiatrist. He traveled 70% to 80% of the time. Every six weeks he was in Moscow, every six to eight weeks. He had a lot of clients. I didn't have any particular huge problems, but I found it comforting to talk with him, jut one on one, talk about the stresses in the family, talk about the stresses at work. It was all of course very confidential. It wasn't done in any secure environment, so whatever the Soviets learned, they learned. He would do workshops on stress management, looking for signs of alcoholism. He would consult a lot at the Anglo American School. There were kids that were having some particular problems that were emotionally related, he would talk to the teachers and talk to the administration, perhaps even observe the youngsters in the classroom. It was an enormous benefit to have that asset. He was just a good guy. Moscow was the post he visited the most. His territory included Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, so he was on the road a lot. I can't think of any marriages that broke up while we were there. Nothing comes to mind. Maybe I'll have to ask my wife if she remembers.

Q: Well, no, some posts do and I think probably Paris and Rio de Janeiro had their problems, too.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, I'll get to my time in Caracas. That was the Peyton Place of my Foreign Service career, but you would kind of wonder why, but it was just the people who were there. I don't recall Moscow having, if there were issues they were kept pretty quiet.

Q: How about our post in Leningrad, were there any particular problems that you saw with keeping it going?

BOORSTEIN: Well, you know, I visited Leningrad maybe a half a dozen times during my tour. It required a lot of attention from Moscow. Leningrad had the benefit of being geographically close to Finland. You could literally go up for the day, cross the border, do some shopping and then drive back to Leningrad and that was great morale booster for people there. The local secret police or whatever, the KGB, were more active up there. There were a lot of efforts to attack the embassy in terms of implanting bugs and doing things. We devoted a lot of attention to the internal security posture. Those problems continued well after I left. There were constantly renovation projects going on there. There was a very small number of school age children. There was a branch of the Anglo American School of Moscow that operated up there that may have had 10 kids. They had an American teacher and his wife. They both were teachers. They were credentialed and they had a small group of kids that they taught. Nothing really stands out as to anything that happened while I was there.

Q: What about the bugging? Did one just say well its there and relax or what did you do about it?

BOORSTEIN: Well, you know, we had secure conference rooms, which we used a lot. Now, you know, I was there as we, one of the main things I wanted to convey, I was there as we were ramping up to start the construction of our new embassy in Moscow. The notoriously failed project. So, the first year I was there the foreign buildings office at the State Department hired a cadre of native Russian speaking top secret cleared American engineers and architects. These were people that, as I said, Russian was their native language. They predominantly were people who were either born or grew up in Yugoslavia. I don't know whether after the revolution their parents went from Russia to Yugoslavia.

Q: It was a significant sort of White Russian colony.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, that's probably where they came from. They were recruited. Like I said they were American citizens, they had top secret clearance and they represented a series of the trade expertise in electrical, mechanical, civil engineering, architectural security aspects and there were probably 12 of them. There was a project director named Vic Vespertino. He's now retired. It would be marvelous if you could talk to him, too. I really think the State Department should commission its own history on that project. They're afraid to do it, I don't know. They had an administrative officer. They rented actually apartment units for them in a new building, brought in new sets of furniture from Denmark and they were all set to go. This was all tied in to the history of the effort for us to build a new embassy in Moscow which was done on the basis of reciprocity because the Soviet Union wanted to build a new embassy here and they had their site at Mount Alto and this dates back to the signed agreement that provided the sites in Moscow and Washington was signed in 1969. Then there were three years of negotiations between the Soviets and the Americans on what are called "Conditions of Construction." In other words, how were materials going to be imported? What kind of security would be guaranteed by each party? What was the regime to approve the drawings inspect the facility. Everything that you can think of that goes into this, but to do it in a way where we on the American side felt that we would have a secure facility. Now, we were looking back on it we were incredibly naï¿½ve and had a degree of hubris that ended up being very harmful to us because we allowed the Soviet authorities to say: "You know, we have a lot of experience of foreign governments building embassies in Moscow and here's what we do for all of them. We can't treat you any differently." They insisted that their state corporation have the contract for the construction and that we could provide our own people to observe how the concrete was poured, how the bricks were put together, how the wiring was done, etc. for the main super structure of the building. In those areas that were secure then we of course could then take it over and without any use of any Soviet people do the final fit out ourselves. That basic contract I believe was $55 million and a mere pittance of what it costs us to build an embassy that size and scope today. It was a comprehensive project. It included 125 apartments, 10 representational townhouses, a school, a Marine House, an indoor swimming pool and gymnasium, a bowling alley and as I said a huge project. It took three years to negotiate the conditions of construction and these talks would have dragged on longer, but Nixon apparently was scheduling a trip to the Soviet Union and he told Henry Kissinger "I want these talks concluded, I don't want this to be an impediment to my visit." So, whatever concessions we were resisting I can't tell you which ones they were, but the lore is that we sort of caved in and signed the agreement in 1972.

From '72 to '78 we were developing the design, we were getting funding from Congress. We were arranging for all the logistics. In the meantime at a faster pace the Soviet Union was moving forward with their project on Mount Alto. They had an American contractor and they did whatever they did. The stories came out years later that the CIA and the FBI were keeping a pretty good eye on what was happening. It was a tunnel that they discovered later, this was all in the open press. I knew nothing about it at the time, but in the spring or the summer of 1979 there was a formal ground breaking for our project and the senior U.S. government representative who was there for the groundbreaking was Daniel Boorstin the person who everybody thinks I'm related to. He was the Librarian of Congress at the time. He flew out and he was the senior American official for the cutting of the ribbon. I still have my invitation for that event. So, for the rest of the time that I was there, there was a lot of earth moving and pouring of concrete and this, that and the other thing. I left in the summer of 1981 and of course the project came to a screeching halt in 1985 when the bugs were discovered in the concrete super structure. That is a whole other story, but that was the major focus of my section and what I was doing during the time I was there, building up to that.

Q: Just to give in a fill in later, but you were not hearing any people say, oh, God we shouldn't be doing this?

BOORSTEIN: No, absolutely not.

Q: There were no sort of warning bells coming from others?

BOORSTEIN: I mean, look, even though I was in the administrative section because the foreign buildings office had their own unit, it was pretty self-contained and if there were discussions they were handled at a higher level.

Q: I'm just saying that there were no warning flags going up?

BOORSTEIN: No, not that I heard of and I certainly didn't think any of it myself. Again, that group was a big presence and there was a big focus on that project as it got underway.

Q: Did you get any reflections about the hostage taking in Iran?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, thank you for mentioning that. It happened obviously while I was there and that was a source of considerable tension. We were on high alert. I remember riding on the school bus with some concerns that the Iranian militants that might have a presence in Moscow were going to highjack a bus of American school children. For several days parents and I had a daughter, at the time she was fifth or sixth grade, I rode the bus in my official capacity. Obviously nothing ever happened, but there was obviously heightened concerns and major concerns that our people were vulnerable. Our security posture was beefed up. The embassy was right on the street. There were no threats. We felt, again the good side of being in a totalitarian state like the Soviet Union, if anybody was going to move against it was going to be their own people.

Q: Let me stop.

Q: This is tape four, side one with Mike Boorstein. Well, Mike, you left in 1980?

BOORSTEIN: '81.

Q: '81. That's a fairly long tour there isn't it?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, that was the longest time I had spent at any one post. As a matter of fact, I went there on a direct transfer from Ottawa and took home leave after being in Moscow for a year and then went back for two more years. One of the things that was an added dimension to my job was that I was the ambassador's representative on the school board of the Anglo-American School in Moscow and that was an added feature. My wife taught second grade at the school and my daughter was there as well. I was the treasurer of the school board and the chairmanship would rotate. The three main embassies that had an interest in the school were the British, American and Canadian embassies. The chairman was always either British, American or Canadian. The deputy chief of mission's wife Betty Garrison was the chairwoman for one year. The British cultural attachï¿½ was the chairman for one year and the Canadian was the third year I was there. Just very active, the cadre of the teachers came primarily from those three countries as overseas hires. It was an excellent school. It probably had about no more than 150 students and the way the Soviet government dealt with the education for foreigners first of all they didn't let any of their own children go to this school. They also did not acknowledge that the school existed as its own entity so in effect what they said was that these were three schools. There was the American school, the British school and the Canadian school. It so happened that the building they gave us had three stories to it and so there were three leases. One was with the British Embassy, one was with the American Embassy and one was with the Canadian Embassy. Now, for purposes of accreditation by an American association and accredited schools, the school was an entity and it was called the Anglo American School of Moscow and actually was formed in 1949. Because of the way under the Soviet system that they wanted to again control the kind of things that were taking place in their midst, they structured it in such a way that its clout and its authority was limited.

There were no real incidents that I can think of that happened other than there typically was a flea market that the school would sponsor once or twice a year and eventually it got out of hand because what it was a place where embassy people and sometimes even Third World people would basically bring all of their second hand clothes, socks, underwear and have them up for sale. The Soviet citizens would come in and swarm the place and buy things either to use them themselves or to resell them. While we were there the Soviet authorities said, "look this is getting out of hand; you can't do this anymore." After that the annual fund-raiser and you could raise maybe $5,000 or $10,000, not a lot of money. It was handled more as a fun fair and you would do things like be able to sling a water balloon at the principal or pay a certain fee. I remember my wife organized that one year and we had fun because the night before we had bought this huge supply of these huge bricks of vanilla ice cream, which were delicious in the Soviet Union. That's all you could get was vanilla ice cream, but what we did we had a whole array of flavors. We would add chocolate and strawberry and this and that and we'd invent the names of these ice creams. We had Lenin Lime and Khrushchev Chocolate and Stalin Strawberry and we would mix them all together and sell them. That was the time Baskin Robbins had just decided they were going to come in, they came in after we left. We basically were doing a little play on having a Baskin Robbins, 31 flavors, but we really had about five and for the other ones we had names for, we wrote up in Russian "Nyet," which means is not available which often happened when you went out to a restaurant. So, we had a lot of fun with that.

The school group was a big source of social entertainment for my wife and me that sort of augmented what we had within the embassy. It was a lot of fun. I remember twice going up with the school director to drive back a new van the school ordered in Helsinki. The school paid my way to fly to Helsinki and the director and I would drive back and it was a two-day trip to come back in the overnight in Leningrad. I enjoyed it immensely and I ended up doing a lot of stuff the school board subsequently in Warsaw in my tour, but that was the first time I had served on a school board so it added flavor.

Q: Well, I'm just looking at the time. It's probably a good place to stop Mike. Where did you go in '81?

BOORSTEIN: Yes. I came back to Washington and had a tour on the Soviet desk. I think there are some more things I can talk about in Moscow.

Q: All right, well, sort of make note and next time we'll do that.

BOORSTEIN: All right. Now, let me give you a call when I get home either today or.

Q: Okay, today is the 20th of October, 2005. Mike, before we get to '91 where you went to.

BOORSTEIN: '81.

Q: What?

BOORSTEIN: '81.

Q: '81 I mean, if you want to you said you wanted to talk a little bit about the relationship business.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, as I said earlier, my parents had emigrated from pre-revolutionary Russia and met in the United States and married. On my father's side he had two older sisters who remained behind. He actually had four, two of them died in the '20s in a typhoid fever epidemic, but the other two married and had children and whatever and these were all people that I listed when I got into this, when I was applying for the State Department and they were doing my security clearance and they also, the State Department was aware of them when I went for my assignment and I reported to the security officer on arrival that I had these family members both in Moscow and in Leningrad and I had an expectation that I would see them because I had seen them as a teenager when I traveled there with my parents. He said, "fine, you can see them, but you have to abide by certain ground rules and they are don't go alone, take your wife, take your daughter, take an embassy colleague, you take a colleague from a friendly embassy, the Canadians, the Brits, the Aussies or whatever and if there's ever any hint of difficulty either towards you or towards your family you have to report it to me as the security officer and you have to break off the relationship until the matter is deemed to be okay." So, I followed those ground rules scrupulously. There really were no incidents regarding well in Moscow I had a first cousin and she was a widow and she had a married daughter and that married daughter had a husband who had just returned from military service in Afghanistan, the Soviet army and they had two young children. I would see them on the average of about once a month. We would bring them into our apartment on the diplomatic compound. I'd have to meet them there and it was a very enriching part of the experience because they were family. None of them spoke any English so it was a matter of another dimension to my Russian language use because it was very much family and home oriented. During my assignment there my mother came to visit. Two of my sisters and their family came to visit. It was a great opportunity to acquaint. You know, my mother had met, these were actually on my father's side, but she had met them before on other trips. That was a good element, aspect of the assignment.

The family in Leningrad also one of my aunts was still living and she had two children, a son who had completed a career in the Red Army and he after retirement was working as an instructor at a military academy in Leningrad and the daughter was a Ph.D. chemical engineer and she worked in the defense industry as did her husband and they had one daughter. They were a little nervous seeing me. They wanted to see me and my family and I made fairly frequent visits to Leningrad and occasionally she would come down to Moscow. We did spend time in their apartment and again when my mother and sisters came out a variety of visits we saw them as well.

There was one occasion where I flew to Helsinki with the director of the Anglo American School to pick up a new van for the school and drive it back to Moscow, which was a two day trip. The first day was by road from Helsinki across the border into Leningrad and we had arranged to stay in a consulate apartment. When I got settled in I called my cousin in Leningrad and said I was in town and had not called ahead of time and would it be possible to see her. She responded looking back on it now or afterwards with quite a nervous voice saying, well you know our apartment is really kind of a mess. It's undergoing renovation. In Russian they use the word "remont" all the time for anything that's undergoing renovation. She could meet me outside a particular metro stop and we could have a chat. I thought this was a little strange, but nonetheless I listened. I got to the metro station and typically as a family member and a close relative we would hug and kiss each other when we would see each other. She greeted and said in Russian with her eyes not making contact with me, don't hug me, don't kiss me, just walk with me. So, we walked and obviously I knew something was amiss and she proceeded to tell me with a great deal of emotion that her husband had gotten into trouble at work because he was confronted by his superior who said he had knowledge of the fact that against his signed contract as a security cleared chemical engineer in the defense industry he had had contact with foreigners and relatives to boot, even though it was his wife's relatives. As a result he was told he could not see these relatives any longer, nor can his wife who also was employed and that he was going to be watched very carefully about his loyalty and so on. It was a great deal of emotion when my cousin told me this and I said, well, does this apply to your brother? Does this apply to your mother? The answer was "no, you could still see them," but I could have no contact, no phone calls, nothing with them until further notice. This was, I still had about a year left in my assignment. That was disturbing and I reported this to the embassy and nothing further happened and I did not see my cousin again until I was back on a temporary duty trip to Moscow when I was assigned in Washington following my tour in Moscow and she actually was visiting my other cousin in Moscow and I saw her there. Subsequently, this family, unlike my family in Moscow, had been quite vocal in trying to find a way to immigrate to Israel. They wanted me to help and this was in the late '70s, early '80s and I said, "this is not the time to do this. It's very rare. They're cracking down on the dissidents and you just have to lie low." Well, ultimately by the late '80s when the situation improved they did immigrate to Israel and they are still there now. That was a bit of a troublesome aspect of the tour, but we all survived it unscathed. Again it is sort of representative of the way that the Soviet government looked at relations with foreigners. I wanted to mention that, but at the same time, primarily with the family in Moscow, it really was a very satisfying part of the assignment.

I remember taking my cousin to at the time USIS had a traveling exhibit called Agriculture USA and my cousin in Moscow was just absolutely floored at the slideshow that showed a supermarket in Minneapolis with all the array in winter of fruits and vegetables. She basically said, "this is American propaganda." I kept assuring her saying "it is not at all." The other interesting vignette was that in those days the embassy had access to a film circuit, these 35-millimeter big rolls of film would come in. Depending on your position in the embassy or whatever you would have a projector at home that you could use and we had one and I remember on the film circuit the movie The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming with Theodore Bikel, came in and I showed it to my Russian cousin and her family and there was a line in there where the young sailor says to the girl in I think its Nantucket.

Q: Yes, it was Nantucket I think.

BOORSTEIN: That he was surprised at how warm and friendly she was because they had learned in school how much Americans hated the Russians and I'm translating this all along to my cousin and she just looked shocked and said, they never taught us that in school. They were never taught how much the Russians hated us and whatever. Anyway, or Americans hated the Russians, but anyway it was kind of amusing. I learned a great deal about Russian cooking and culture and just their way of life. It was good. I did talk the previous time about the nature of the work and what the environment was like in the embassy and the embassy projects. Let's move on.

In July of 1981 I left Moscow and my family traveled ahead and actually went to a beach in the Adriatic in Italy and I stayed behind for about two weeks and then on the way out as part of the development of the embassy dacha project that I was in charge of, the second summer house, I traveled via Helsinki to consult with the architects and then from there flew down to Italy to join my family. We had a wonderful vacation in a little town called Pesaro on the Adriatic and then from there I think we pretty much flew straight back to the States. We settled into a, we rented a house in the Virginia suburbs. My daughter entered the eighth grade and my wife got a job just by answering an ad in the Washington Post at a small Episcopal day school called St. Patrick's off of Foxhall Road in Washington, not as a teacher, but as a program director. She was in charge of fundraising bazaars and other kinds of things that supported the education programs. She had that job for five years and enjoyed it quite a bit. We had entrï¿½e into a whole range of sort of upper crust Washington society.

For example, when Kenneth Dam became the Deputy Secretary of State, his son went to the school and I remember when he first moved to the area and every morning my wife dropped me off at the State Department and Kenneth Dam would deliver his son to our car and she would then take him to school until they got settled in. George Will the columnist his child went to the school, so it was quite a socially prominent school population.

The job I had in the State Department was the first full-time Washington assignment that I had and it was unusual as an administrative officer because I was a desk officer in the Office of Soviet Union affairs. I was attracted to the job because I was ready to try something different and a lot of my administrative colleagues were counseling me against it, saying "you're going to make a mistake, its going to hurt your career, you're going to be out of the mainstream." I said, "thank you for your advice, but I want to do this," and I did and I'm really happy that I did.

Q: You did this from when to when?

BOORSTEIN: August of 1981 to July of 1983, so just about two years. The office director at the time was Tom Simons. The office of Soviet Union affairs was probably the largest country desk directorate in the whole Department of State. We had four divisions. There was the office of bilateral relations. There was the office of multilateral relations. There was the office of economic affairs and the office of science, technology and cultural exchanges and that was the office that I was in. My boss for the first year was Ed Hurwitz who has been retired for quite a while, but he was Charge' in Kabul towards the end of his career. He was consul general in Leningrad. He was a real Soviet hand. I was probably the second ranking officer and there were two other junior officers.

Q: Did you have a piece of the action?

BOORSTEIN: Yes I was going to say that you have to sort of look at the backdrop of U.S. Soviet relations in the summer of 1981 in late 1979, was it '79?

Q: December.

BOORSTEIN: December of?

Q: '79.

BOORSTEIN: December of '79, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. The relations got very chilly. I talked about the closing down of our effort to open up a consulate in Kiev. Among the sanctions that President Carter imposed was that he basically ratcheted down with that order the array of formal bilateral science and technology and cultural agreements between the U.S. and the USSR to barely survival level. We didn't want to abrogate any of those agreements, but we didn't want to use them as a vehicle that would run counter to our effort to show our displeasure across the board to the Soviets' action against Afghanistan. There was a whole array of these agreements that had been developed and signed after the Second World War, primarily in the '50s, the umbrella agreement of science and technology exchanges and under that there were whole other agreements for cooperation in space, health, primarily heart. You know, Michael DeBakey the guy who did the first artificial heart was honorary chairman of the USSR joint commission on heart research. There was an agreement on housing, an agreement on transportation, an agreement on the environment, a whole array of things that were government-to-government agreements and the office that I was in was in charge of monitoring and supporting and backstopping those agreements and the activities that stemmed from them. When they operated in a very robust fashion, they sort of had a life of their own. Constantly delegations were going back and forth for different meetings and discussions and workshops and joint research and whatever. After the invasion of Afghanistan there was a requirement that any time a delegation was proposed either by the U.S. or was invited by the Soviet Union to go over to the USSR or the U.S. counterparts invited a Soviet delegation to come over, it had to have White House approval. I spent most of my tour writing these memos from the Department to the NSC. They were known as Bremer-Clarks because they went from Jerry Bremer who was the executive secretary to Clark who I guess was the national security advisor at the time. I learned a whole new style of drafting. I don't believe any of the proposed trips in either direction were ever turned down, but nonetheless it was a bureaucratic impediment that needed to be done for the sake of showing the Soviet government that they just couldn't take these things for granted. It was a fascinating tour in that I went all over Washington to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Transportation, National Institutes of Health, the Department of Energy, NASA. I had contacts in all of these places that I worked with on a daily basis. One of the more interesting aspects of that assignment was the controversy surrounding a high energy electromagnet that had been loaned to the Soviet Institute of High Energy Physics in the mid 1970s and that magnet, multi, multi ton thing, probably the size of this room that we're in which is what about eight by sixteen or twenty.

Q: Yes.

BOORSTEIN: Was owned by the Argonne National Labs in Illinois.

Q: A big nuclear lab, yes.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, well, but this was not a nuclear thing. This was basically a way to extract more energy out of burning coal to produce electricity. The initials are MHD. I don't remember what they stood for. It's a physics term, but it's a high-energy kind of thing that will produce energy cleanly and more efficiently. Its never even today gotten to the point I believe of being viable commercially, but nonetheless it was lent and one of the outcries from largely the conservative wing of the Republican party in Congress was to bring the magnet home. You would think that this was silly, but it was a big deal at the time. Towards the end of my tour I was sent to Moscow with one of the scientists from the Argonne National Labs to negotiate the terms by which the magnet would be returned to the United States and it was really bizarre because it was like going to a bazaar in the Third World to negotiate the terms because the director of the Institute of High Energy Physics in Moscow didn't want dollars as compensation to arrange for moving this behemoth thing through the streets of Moscow and out to the airport and whatever. We were going to fly in a C5A.

Q: That's our biggest cargo plane.

BOORSTEIN: That's right. What he wanted in exchange for him facilitating all of this was a whole array of audiovisual equipment, which was to help him with his presentation abilities in the institute. It was a barter kind of a thing. We talked about it and agreed that we would talk some more. Then my tour was over. Well, in August or September of 1983 after I left that assignment, the Soviet Air Force shot down that Korean airline, 747, and then all thoughts of us sending a C5A into Soviet air space was absolutely squelched. I believe to this day 22 years later that magnet is still in Moscow. It may be in mothballs. The technology may have totally surpassed its utility as a research tool, but to my knowledge that magnet never was returned.

I made one other trip back to the Soviet Union after a year on this job. I convinced Tom Simons that the woman I work the most closely with in the Bureau of Oceans Environment and Science, a woman named Sharon Cleary as a civil servant had never been to the Soviet Union and yet she worked closely with all the people across the board in the U.S. government with our visa office, obviously with me on the Soviet desk and would meet the Soviet scientists when they came to the United States. I thought it would really be good for her to have a flavor of actually going to the Soviet Union, going to Moscow and Leningrad and conferring with people in the embassy and Tom Simons agreed and the office director of OES, his name was Thomsen was the last name, he agreed, too.

So, Sharon and I went off on this trip. Sharon was an interesting woman. Her father was a CIA agent who was killed in Vietnam. Like I said, she had never been to the Soviet Union and for reasons that were never apparent, when she and I got to Moscow she underwent culture shock. This was a very with it kind of young woman who at that point, how old was I, I was 35 and she was about my age and we had a friendly professional relationship. We got there I just noticed visibly that she stopped talking, looked distracted, looked depressed and wasn't eating. We were staying in the same hotel and so we would meet to have a meal and after, I mean we were in Moscow for about five days and then we were going to take the train up to Leningrad and then on to Helsinki and then fly home. Like the second day there we're having dinner in the Ukraine Hotel, one of these big wedding cake buildings that were there. One of seven with similar designs known as a group as "The Seven Sisters. I said, "Sharon, I have to tell you that you're acting strangely, that you're not just yourself. Is anything the matter?" She just looked at me and she said, "I don't want to be here. I don't like this place. I just want to leave." I said, "well, you know, we have work to do here. Are you going to be able to cope with it?" She said, "yes I can, but I'm just not very happy being here." I said, "well, how would you like me to treat you? Should I be concerned about your welfare or should I just basically leave you alone," and she said, "I just want you to leave me alone. If I need anything from you I'll let you know." This went on for another couple of days and then she sort of gradually came out of it. That was the strangest thing to witness in somebody else and I really never had. Later on she said that it just, she just felt totally out of her element and she had traveled abroad before, but somehow the environment there was such that this was the way she reacted.

In Leningrad she had pretty much recovered and we took the overnight train and we dealt a lot with Anne Sigmund. Anne Sigmund at the time was the branch public affairs officer. She was career USIA and she went on later to be public affairs officer in Warsaw. She was ambassador to one of the Stans (former Soviet Republic), I forget which. Then she was the deputy director of the office of the inspector general and she just recently retired.

Q: Do you know where she is?

BOORSTEIN: I don't.

Q: How do you spell that?

BOORSTEIN: S-I-G-M-U-N-D.

Q: S-I-G-M-U-N-D.

BOORSTEIN: Anne was her first name. She was also in my junior officer class. She'd be a good person for you to talk to because she was in the State Department for, maybe she retired two years ago, 33 years. She was a Soviet specialist and came in as a single woman and was told you can't go to the Soviet Union. Ultimately those rules changed. Ultimately those rules changed and she was able to go.

Well, anyway, working on Soviet affairs in Washington during those years was tough because of the sanctions against the Soviet Union.

Q: This is early Reagan, too.

BOORSTEIN: Reagan was elected in.

Q: This was.

BOORSTEIN: In 1980, so it was just within his first year.

Q: It was the evil empire, it was towards the end of the Reagan when things pretty well opened up.

BOORSTEIN: Exactly and it was interesting to be part of and I was still at a fairly junior level, the tussle between the NSC and the State Department over who owned Soviet policy. Ultimately the State Department prevailed as it usually does with a new president and new political appointees, but it took a while until a level of trust was developed between the White House, the NSC and the Department and that the career people were listened to. Rather than take this harsh attitude toward the Soviet Union there was still ultimately a sense of okay, look, we still need to engage with these people. We don't want to isolate them and alienate them too much. We have points to be made and after all it was Jimmy Carter who imposed the sanctions, it wasn't Ronald Reagan, but he certainly supported them and continued that attitude and that was appropriate, but again the nuances ultimately entered into the picture. Of course we were very much courting the beginnings of the changes in Eastern Europe at the time, but pretty much my activities were confined to the Soviet Union.

On the cultural side there was absolutely nothing that went on. It was just totally dead in the water whereas when I was in Moscow the cultural visits, the traveling exhibits I told you about, Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn in The Gin Game the last time that I spoke they came over and did that, but it was very rich. During the time I was on the desk, it was totally dead.

One other little story about that tour. There was a very wealthy Washingtonian, I wish the name would come to me who was the owner of the Madison Hotel and he lived on Massachusetts Avenue, very close to the British Embassy, but on the other side, had a fabulous home filled with wonderful art. He very much liked Russia; he traveled there many times and knew a lot of the Soviet officials. The name may come to me, it may not and he was giving a farewell party to the science counselor at the Soviet Embassy and so the invitation went out to Tom Simons to attend. (His name was Marshall Coyne.) I don't know whether it was for political reasons or Tom had a conflict, he said he wasn't going to go and the invitation trickled down to me and I was told to go to represent the office of Soviet Union affairs. Off I went with my wife to this fantastic home and I remember when I met the Soviet diplomat who I believe was going to be assigned as the Soviet consul general in San Francisco and he greeted me and started to me in rapid fire Russian and we knew that he spoke fluent English. My Russian was good, but I hadn't used it in a while and it was a little bit rusty and I was sort of taken aback and I chatted a little with him and I thought to myself this guy is just testing me. He's just playing games.

The party was like a buffet dinner and it was free seating so my wife and I saw this Russian gentleman and his wife, had no idea who he was and we offered to sit down and introduced ourselves and he introduced himself to me and it was Melor Sturua. Melor Sturua was a Soviet journalist and he spoke fluent English, didn't play any Russian language games with me and its an interesting story about his name Melor and he was probably born in the late '20s, early '30s. Apparently, it was in vogue in those years to name your children with letters that referred to the Russian revolution. So, Melor,M-E-L-O-R stands for Marx Engels Lenin October Revolution.

Q: Oh God.

BOORSTEIN: It's a fascinating little story and my one cousin the one in Leningrad who was the Ph.D. chemical engineer, her name is Ninel. Ninel is Lenin spelled backwards, we called her Nyela, but nonetheless that is another derivative of that kind of name. Melor Sturua lived in the same apartment house as my mother in Chevy Chase, Maryland and he, all he wanted to talk about was fine wine, what were the best restaurants in Washington and he was dressed to kill. He had great Saville Row suit and very polished, you know, Soviet journalist. That was the dinner and it was very memorable. I'm telling you this because there's a follow-on story. Shortly after that dinner, within a week, Andrew Nagorski who was the Newsweek correspondent in Moscow was out doing something. I don't know whether he was in the Baltics and I don't know exactly what, but he was expelled. So, we retaliated. Who did we retaliate against? Melor Sturua and he was told to leave the United States. Tom Simons in a staff meeting turned to me and said, "Mike, I bet you they're writing up some extra things about you in the Soviet Embassy because you know, they're going to warn your people if you have dinner with Mike Boorstein and the next thing you'll be asked to leave the country." Anyway, Melor Sturua came back many years later after the fall of communism and was a visiting professor at the Humphrey Institute at the University of Minnesota. The other thing that happened at that party it goes to show you the impact of our policy on the families, diplomats and their families and I talk about it when I talked about the closed and the opened areas in the Soviet Union and how we had the same sort of map in the United States, the Soviet Embassy had put in a request as an exception to allow one of their cruise ships to pay a call at the Port of Baltimore which was a closed area because what they wanted to do was to have the Soviet diplomats that were finishing their tour of duties and their families get on that ship and sail back to the Soviet Union. I handled that request as part of what I was; my office got involved in that a bit. They had just gotten the favorable word. Here I was the representative of the State Department there and people were thanking me profusely for this effort and of course it wasn't my decision, but then of course there was a follow by the expulsion of Melor Sturua. It was a very interesting tour of duty and like I said I took two trips to the Soviet Union during that time. The one with the magnet was a fascinating trip.

My next assignment was a follow-on assignment that again brought me back to administrative work. I was assigned to be a post management officer in what was called then the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. The Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, which is now known as Western Hemisphere Affairs, was the geographic bureau that compromised Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean and South America. Now the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs includes Canada. It did not in those years. A post management officer is assigned to the Office of the Executive Director of the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs or any bureau with responsibility of administrative backstops to a group of countries. My region was probably the most volatile region in all of that bureau at the time. It was Mexico, Central America and Panama. When you think about this 1983 to 1985 that was when there was the big hue and cry that communism was creeping up the Isthmus and we were supporting the, you know there was a revolution going on.

Q: The Contras.

BOORSTEIN: We had a revolution going on in El Salvador, was the hottest spot. We had all kinds of advisors and troops in Honduras where John Negroponte was the ambassador and we were fighting the Sandinistas and the Daniel Ortega and his left wing tendencies in Nicaragua. So, very much our political activities had the attention of the White House, high visibility and so I, there were two other post management officers, one fellow his territory was the Caribbean and the third fellow and his territory was South America. I was the most senior of the three and I had the toughest group of countries.

I was recruited for that job by the executive director, Don Bouchard, who had been my boss in Ottawa. He had been the administrative counselor and he worked for Tom Enders who was the ambassador then and Tom Enders after his stint as ambassador to Spain, he then became assistant secretary for Inter-American Affairs and Don Bouchard followed him because he'd been Don Bouchard's admin counselor in Madrid also. Don wanted me for that job and it was highly, I think I was one of 42 bidders on the job and Don picked me. I basically said at the time are you sure you want me, I don't speak any Spanish. He smiled and said neither do I. So, off I went. Literally, I got back from that trip to Moscow dealing with the return of the magnet in early July of 1983 and reported for work after the 4th of July weekend on Monday and on Friday I got on another plane and headed for my orientation trip to the region.

Q: Wow.

BOORSTEIN: So, I in eight or nine days I flew to Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras and Guatemala on that first trip. It was just a whirlwind kind of a trip. Very much touring the embassy, conferring with administrative people, meeting the ambassador and getting violently ill in San Salvador. Given that region and the Montezuma's revenge and everything else, it hit me big time and I spent most of my time in San Salvador in bed.

Are you recording now?

Q: Yes, I'm recording now. It must have been, I mean we had Central America, which was ablaze, more or less or was it?

BOORSTEIN: Well, not totally. I mean Panama was fairly calm. In Costa Rica there were no problems. Nicaragua was just simply a leftist country, extremely poor, a country that had not yet recovered and probably still today never recovered from this colossal earthquake that hit there in 1970 or '71. We weren't doing much of anything in Nicaragua other than dealing with the regime there. Tony Quainton was the, was he the ambassador, yes, he was the ambassador Tony Quainton was the ambassador. A set of marvelously respected and esteemed Foreign Service careerists were heading missions all over that area. Everett Briggs was the ambassador in Panama when I was there. Deane Hinton was the ambassador in El Salvador followed by Tom Pickering. John Negroponte as I said was ambassador to Honduras. Quainton was in Nicaragua. I can't recall now who was the ambassador to Guatemala. Guatemala was relative to the other countries fairly stable.

Q: Let's talk about Central America and then we'll talk about Mexico. What were you might say the challenges in Central America?

BOORSTEIN: Well, it was dealing, they differed country to country. I spent most of my time dealing with issues in El Salvador and Honduras related to the war in El Salvador. The embassy was growing by leaps and bounds. There were huge security problems. I was there when I think there were three Marines that were gunned down at a sidewalk cafï¿½ and I was there when they brought the bodies home at Andrews Air Force Base. The president was there to meet the families. It was quite upsetting. The embassy in Honduras was a staging area also grew by leaps and bounds. There was just a frenetic pace to meet those challenges no matter what and I was in the thick of it and dealing with a renovation, upgrades of communications centers, acquisition of new office buildings and leases and hiring more staff and wage surveys and all these other things and just constant demands. In Nicaragua, we were doing some upgrades in the chancery again. The chancery was just a series of Quonset huts. The ambassador's residence was a huge piece of property that was owned by the U.S. government and it was called the Casa Grande and that was abandoned. It was not used as an ambassador's residence after Daniel Ortega took over because symbolically we didn't want to elevate relations to that level. So, the ambassador's residence became a transient hotel. I remember staying there on my visit. The ambassador's residence was a leased home. It was very nice. I remember going there for a Sunday afternoon picnic barbecue and a swim. The ambassador's residence and the DCM's residence were separated by a fence and it was easy for them to visit back and forth.

Panama, we were dealing with some of the issues related to the treaty that was returning the zone to the Panamanians and there were some issues regarding the status of the Foreign Service Nationals, the status of some of our properties, the loss of APO, military mail privileges and things of this nature, which made it rather unique. I visited the region a lot. I had that orientation trip. I made two subsequent trips, which were mostly visiting the posts in Mexico. We had I don't know seven consulates and I visited. No, I think we had nine consulates and I visited seven of them. I'll have to count them and get back to that later. I also visited Belize, but I went to El Salvador I think twice. I went to Panama three times. The rest of the places I went to once. Usually multiple stops and it was not that far away. There were very little jet lag involved so it was easy to go and often it was just a more effective way of dealing with the issues. Towards the end of my tour I guess about six months before I finished and I was there for two years, they created a new position and they rejiggled the portfolios of the post management officers and I lost Mexico. For a year and a half, Mexico because of its size and the multiplicity of posts, that took up alone maybe 35% of my time. Honduras and El Salvador took up another 30% of my time. Panama took up maybe 10% and the other posts took up the rest. It was definitely a skewed kind of percentage. In Mexico we had huge reciprocity issues regarding what kind of vehicles our people could import into Mexico and we let the Mexicans, the Mexicans had something like 40 consular posts around the United States staffed by Mexican Foreign Service people and we had Ciudad Juarez, Tijuana, Matamoros, Nuevo Laredo, Mazatlan, Hermosillo, Guadalajara. Well, those are the seven.

Q: Monterrey.

BOORSTEIN: Oh, Monterrey, there's eight. I think we had nine and I visited seven of them. The only two I did not visit Hermosillo or Matamoros, but the others.

Q: Mazatlan.

BOORSTEIN: Mazatlan is now closed. I took a wonderful fishing trip out of Mazatlan one Sunday morning, didn't catch anything, but it was a great trip.

Q: Who was the ambassador in Mexico?

BOORSTEIN: Well, that was an interesting story. It was Jack Gavin, John Jack Gavin who was Ronald Reagan's buddy and also a movie actor. He was a very difficult, some people would say almost verging on being mentally unbalanced. He ran that embassy almost like Captain Queeg from The Caine Mutiny. He had served in the Navy so everything he talked about was filled with Navy jargon. Well, you're now in officer country or so and so is at the helm or whatever. I remember going to breakfast at his home.

Q: The mess.

BOORSTEIN: Well, he didn't refer to it as the mess and he invited one of the junior general services officers and then he led me on a tour of the residence which he personally was having renovated top to bottom and the people who would talk behind his back basically said he was converting it into a Ramada Inn. It was just taking some of the beautiful dark Mexican wood and covering it with plaster. He just wanted things to be sort of white. He was very almost anal I guess is the right term about the work being just so. I remember going into this one bedroom where the wall was being replastered and he took his finger and he went along the wall and he said, "Look, Patrick" the name of the general services guy, "this wall is not smooth. Have it redone." He was just very, very demanding. He and you know there are a handful of people I'm sure you knew over your career that they basically went through several deputy chiefs of mission and administrative counselors and he was one of them. He was just notorious. He also had his personal bugaboo; he wanted to change the way the consular operation ran. He thought it was just too much of a disorganized zoo and he wanted to purchase a building next to the embassy to be used for consular affairs. The State Department foreign buildings office didn't want to do it. Gavin basically said you're not going to get in my way and he went to the Hill and used his connections on the Hill and they came up with the money and basically told the State Department you are going to get that building and we did. He was a very powerful guy. The embassy there was and still is one of the biggest ones we have in the world, just enormous in size and the number of people there and just dealing with those problems at the embassy and the coordination of the consulates and some of the consulates were in pretty bad shape, old buildings that had been neglected. It was a wonderful assignment because again it was the first truly administrative assignment I had in the State Department and it really helped me learn the apparatus of how the Department works. I had made a lot of contacts with the administrative area that stood me well later on.

Q: How did the administrative counselor, I assume that was his title, deal with Gavin?

BOORSTEIN: Well, not very well. I mean there was one administrative counselor who basically Gavin kicked out from post and that was Don Woodward who just passed away a couple of weeks ago and Don was just a wonderful guy. I knew him when he was in Washington when I was an entering junior officer and I don't know what he did that didn't suit Gavin, but Gavin asked him to leave. Gavin also removed I believe the number two in the administrative section, Herb Schultz who went on later to be the executive director of the East Asia bureau, admin counselor in Madrid, highly regarded officer. Then Doug Watson came in as the administrative counselor and Doug stood, you know, stayed, but what Gavin did was he reconstituted the country team and took his commercial counselor and I don't remember the gentleman's name and said, "You're really the administrative counselor and I will take your advice and guidance on some of the broader management issues in administration and Doug, you just make sure the place runs well." Now, Doug, some people would have said, that's not what I'm here for and ask to be removed. Doug did not do that. He stuck it out. I remember on my visit to Mexico City he was in the throes of that and I had to do a lot of listening to his complaints about how bad it was, but he ultimately just stayed. I remember staying at his house and listening a lot to those kinds of things. I believe and I don't remember the names of the people anymore, but I believe he went through at least two DCMs at the time.

Q: I think so because, I think maybe three. At one point I think I interviewed somebody who was the DCM or somebody who dealt with the situation and said that Gavin was finally told by the State Department, we can't do this anymore. I mean you sort of run out of this and you're just not going to replace them.

BOORSTEIN: Yes. The last person who was his DCM went on to be ambassador to Columbia. The name may come to me, but anyway. He was a highly regarded guy and finally was able to make peace with Gavin at whatever. He was quite something.

Q: Well, how did you find, did you have to work the Hill?

BOORSTEIN: No, I was not that, again I was a middle grade officer and any work on the Hill, I mean regarding resources would have been done by the executive director or the assistant secretary or other elements of the administration outside the geographic bureau like the undersecretary for management. I had to prepare things for those kind of briefings, but I did not do any of it myself.

Q: As a bureau, how did you find ARA at the time?

BOORSTEIN: They were a good bureau. They were a bunch of very dedicated people. A lot of them much like the African bureau tended to just stay in that bureau and those that were Latin American hands and fluent Spanish speakers, they liked it and they didn't want to do anything else. I met a lot of people and had some good personal relationships that have lasted many years.

Q: Well, then you did that until what '85?

BOORSTEIN: I did that until '85 and I was assigned at that point to Warsaw as the administrative counselor via a year of Polish language training. I think maybe we ought to close it off now because I have to move on to a couple of things.

Q: So, that's okay, we'll pick this up in '85 and you want to talk about how you found Poland.

BOORSTEIN: Well, having a background in Russian was helpful.

Q: I'm told that Polish of the Slavic languages is the most difficult. It's got a lot more cases.

BOORSTEIN: No, Polish its nouns and adjectives are pretty much like Russian. The pronunciation is difficult. It's harder to understand because you know they slur their words. There's a lot of sssh and ccch in Polish. The verb system is more complicated and they also have a way of when you address a man and you address a woman you have a grammatical construct called the vocative and essentially where we say you know, Mr. Kennedy or Miss Jones, they use the term pan and pani, which literally means lord and lady. Now, that's common I believe in some other Slavic languages. It's not the way they do it in Russian. In Russian you use your name and your patronymic.

Q: Okay, well we'll pick this up in '85.

BOORSTEIN: '85.

Q: Okay, today is the 23rd of November, 2005. Mike, 1985, you were saying a couple of TDYs, were these of any particular interest or not?

BOORSTEIN: I'm trying to recall whether I covered my two TDYs to Rome in April and July of 1985 before I started Polish language training.

Q: What were you doing in Rome?

BOORSTEIN: I finished my two year assignment that I've already mentioned as the post management officer for Mexico, Central America and Panama and in April of 1985 I heard about the need for our embassy to the Holy See was in need of some help because Nancy Reagan was going to take a side trip to Rome and the Vatican in connection with the at that time the G7 summit which was being hosted by Germany.

Q: I don't think she did. It doesn't ring a bell with me.

BOORSTEIN: Okay, well, I can tell you a couple of very interesting stories because again it was a wonderful experience. I went out under orders from the bureau of European affairs rather than the office of support for presidential and vice presidential travel so I was an asset for the European bureau and the reason was that our embassy to the Vatican was fairly small. It only opened I think a year or two beforehand and Ambassador, his name was William Wilson, a very close friend of Ronald Reagan, who was a very wealthy real estate developer from Southern California and a Catholic obviously was the ambassador to the Vatican. He was the first ambassador since we established relations in recent times. Apparently, the administrative officer was kind of burned out and so the European bureau wanted to send someone to help the little embassy with all the details related to the Vatican portion of Nancy Reagan's visit. As I spoke Italian from my earlier tour in Palermo, I was asked to go and so I went out the middle of April, roughly two, two and a half weeks before Nancy Reagan arrived to help the embassy with their planning. Nancy Reagan's visit was both to Italy and to the Holy See and while she was there she had an audience with the Pope. She visited a drug rehabilitation center south of Rome, but she gained access to it by taking the helicopter to Castel Gandolfo, the Pope's summer residence using the helicopter-landing pad there and then the motorcade was going to then take her into Italy, to the drug center and return.

I ended up working with the Secret Service and the White House advance people and the political officer, Lou Nigro from the embassy to the Holy See, on just the overall planning. I spent a lot of time in the Vatican dealing with their protocol people, going back and forth to other meetings in Embassy Rome where there was coordination and I really was, the key almost the interpreter for the head of the Secret Service. It was a fascinating three weeks for the planning stages. The one particular thing that I will always remember is that we got the Italian helicopter and the crew that normally is used to transport the Pope. That was being offered to transport Nancy Reagan. We did a trial run of the route so we met up with the helicopter on the rooftop of the Quirinale, which is the president's office building in Rome and then we flew from there down to Castel Gandolfo and then back to Ciampino Airport. So, the day that we did this was just a spectacularly beautiful day, hardly a cloud in the sky and I had this aerial tour of ancient Rome that you couldn't, I probably could have chartered a private helicopter for a couple of thousand dollars to do, but I got it free of charge. I remember sitting in the Pope's seat on the helicopter and it was neat. On the day of the visit itself I was the event officer for, oh, the other thing that was kind of neat in the planning was that we got into the Sistine Chapel before it was open to the public.

Q: It had been renovated.

BOORSTEIN: Well, it was partially renovated, but still open to the public, but there was still scaffolding up and whatever. To get in there with nobody else, wander about without any disturbance from anybody else, plus Nancy Reagan was being taken to a chapel that was not normally open to the public. I don't recall the name of it any longer, but again it had artwork, frescoes and things on the ceiling. They were just gorgeous. Again it was not open to the public. On the day of the actual visit, I went down with the motorcade fairly early in the morning to get the motorcade all into position for Nancy Reagan's arrival by helicopter to Castel Gandolfo and going off to this drug rehabilitation center. We get to Castel Gandolfo and out of the blue these two or three Jeeps show up that are part of some SWAT team that was assigned in the case of any attack against Nancy Reagan or if she fell unexpectedly ill that they were there to form some sort of a defensive perimeter, or whatever. This had never been discussed with anybody in the embassy at the Vatican, certainly not with the Vatican protocol people. They just showed up. I had to sort of negotiate them being part of the motorcade.

Q: Who were they? Were they Italian?

BOORSTEIN: No, these were U.S. I don't know whether they were part of the Secret Service or they were military that were seconded to the Secret Service, but we just had no warning that these guys were coming and I think they had weapons. It came as a bit of a surprise certainly to us and of course to the Vatican officials, but they were allowed to stay. We had fundamentally such good relations with the Italians and with the people in the Vatican that it was not an issue. Nancy Reagan flies in and gets off the helicopter, goes immediately to the motorcade and the motorcade whisks off. I stayed with the helicopter crew just to be there while they were off on this event and waiting for them to come back. Well, out of the blue the young major I think that was his rank, the commander of the helicopter says that he was going to take the helicopter to fly to Ciampino to top off his tanks because after he returned Nancy Reagan to Ciampino Airport in Rome he had to ferry some Italian admiral down to Naples. I said, "you can't do that. It's part of the protection for the first lady that helicopter needs to stay here," and he basically looked at me and said, "This is my helicopter. I'll take it wherever I want." I said, "Well, then, I'm going to go with you because I want to make sure that you come back on time." I had a little walkie talkie and I called the embassy rep that was with the group at the drug rehab center, you know, the old expression "Houston, we have a problem." I said "we have a problem here and this is what I'm going to do. I will be in touch."

With several of the protocol people from the Vatican and this Italian flight crew and me, we flew back to Ciampino near Rome and of course, this defensive group was with the motorcade and basically, nobody else was left in the landing pad at Castel Gandolfo. We land at the air base. Ciampino is adjacent to Leonardo Da Vinci Airport and it is used a lot for charter flights, but it basically has a military component. Because there were officials from the Vatican on this helicopter, the protocol officer from the airfield greets the helicopter, invites everybody in for a drink while the flight crew is doing its thing. I went with them and I didn't have any alcohol, I had a Coca-Cola and I'm looking at my watch. Pretty much on time the captain, the major come back and said that they were ready to fly back. We fly back. We land back in Castel Gandolfo and literally as the rotors are still going around, they're slowing, the motorcade arrives about five minutes early and I thought to myself, you know, there but for the grace of God, had we been a little bit later the motorcade could have literally have arrived with no helicopter. Those are the kind of things that people get fired from the Foreign Service. Fortunately the gods were with me. It didn't happen. Nancy Reagan and her chief of staff and the others in the entourage were totally oblivious to this. Got in the helicopter and off they went and I stayed on the ground because I was going back with the motorcade. As the helicopter is taking off I'm standing right in front of it within distance and the major gives me this big smile and sort of does like this and I almost wanted to give him an obscene gesture in Italian, one of these, but I refrained and sort of shook my fist back at him and I smiled, too because after all it all worked out.

The next day I was invited to a luncheon at the ambassador's residence that he was hosting for the first lady at the end of her trip. This was the ambassador to the Vatican. She was staying with our ambassador to Italy, but you could tell the level of friendship between the Reagans and this Ambassador Wilson and his wife because their house was just festooned with all these pictures of the four of them. So, with a small luncheon I was not sitting at the main table with others, but sort in the back with the staff, but at the end of the luncheon a few of us were then brought forward to meet some of the other luncheon guests and that was where I had one of the biggest thrills of my career as a Foreign Service Officer because I got to shake hands and talk with Audrey Hepburn. It was one of these things that you just.

Q: Audrey Hepburn being.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, being a major American actress. Well, I don't know that she was American. I think her.

Q: I think she was Belgian, wasn't she?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, her father was British and her mother was Belgian. She grew up in I think in Bruges, in Belgium. It was still such a thrill to talk to her. I probably said some of the things, like "I'm a really big fan" or some inane thing like that, you know, and shook her hand and whatever. She looked pretty good. She died probably about six or seven years later.

Q: Yes, it was very sad.

BOORSTEIN: At a fairly young age. Anyway, so and that was pretty much it because I think after that lunch they went off to the airport and left.

Q: Well, did you get any impression about our Secret Service and the Vatican protocol? The Secret Service could be pretty difficult at times, but was this a solid, I mean a well experienced unit?

BOORSTEIN: Yes. I've experienced the Secret Service in a number of places. The fellow that was the head of their detail was a very smooth, Irish American, had a great way of dealing with people. He got what he wanted. He was not overbearing. I don't recall a lot of detail whether there were compromises to be made, but there were some discussions into which elevator going up to have the audience with the Pope. We had elevator manifests and things of this nature. I was disappointed that I wasn't part of the group. I never met the Pope. Nancy Reagan's hairdresser for example was on the list to meet the Pope.

Q: Listen, don't kid yourself. There's a matter of priority.

BOORSTEIN: I know, I certainly was not naï¿½ve, I knew it, but that didn't mean I couldn't feel disappointed. Again, the White House and the State Department and the embassy staff or whatever paid a great deal of attention to this. She flew down in the air force plane from Andrews and it was a good visit. Then I went back and finished my assignment in post management for Mexico, Central America and Panama and I had already been assigned to start language training, but then the European bureau asked me if I'd go back to the Vatican for about three weeks in basically late July and early August to again cover for this beleaguered admin officer who needed a break. I got permission to leave my assignment a few weeks early and I knew the date of my start of language training. No, I guess it was actually pretty much in July because I took a couple of weeks vacation and it was pretty much three weeks in July. Actually at that point I rented a little apartment and just because I knew I was going to be there for a while, I was able to prepare some meals on my own and that was not terribly memorable. I just recall doing a lot of things like any admin officer would do.

Q: Did you get a feel for the ambassador, how he operated?

BOORSTEIN: Well, at that particular point he was gone for a couple of weeks. He was very active. This is the ambassador that got into a little bit of trouble because he made the secret trip to Libya.

Q: To my mind this is the pits of American diplomacy, but anyway, you might explain what happened.

BOORSTEIN: Well, this happened before I went. I frankly don't recall the details other than he made an unauthorized trip to Libya and talked to Muammar Qadhafi over whatever it was that was on his mind to talk about whether he had an inside communications with Ronald Reagan that you know that it was okay to do this, but the State Department sure slapped him on the wrist. Do you recall anything about what was behind it?

Q: No, I don't except just what you said, but this time we did not have relations.

BOORSTEIN: No.

Q: With Libya. Libya was a source of a great deal of difficulty for us and international terrorism being very high on the agenda.

BOORSTEIN: Well, this was 1985 when there were still hijackings going on and I remember being very wary traveling with a diplomatic passport. I was there it was either before or after that visit to Rome in April of '85 where a TWA plane was hijacked in I think it was in Beirut and they killed that Seabee. They dumped his body on the tarmac.

Q: I mean doing this, you think it would, I mean frankly the enormity of a man who was accredited to the Holy See running off on a mission of his own unless he may have asked Ronald Reagan who could have offhanded say sure, whatever you could do or something. I mean I wouldn't put it past him, but I never heard that. Yet because of this relationship to Reagan he was kept on, but I mean this is, well, anyway. I sort of sputter when I even think of it.

BOORSTEIN: Yes. I didn't have any particular problems with him. He was pretty much approachable, but it was clear that this was a very influential man. He brought over his own secretary who basically was in charge of his own non-State Department life correspondence or whatever. He demanded a lot. He had an American protective detail from the bureau of diplomatic security, three or four guys who were sent over from Washington who had lived in Rome at great expense to the taxpayer. I remember going over there for one of the planning meetings from the embassy to his residence crossing St. Peter's Square in this little motorcade with the ambassador with a Carabinieri, Italian police car in front and in back, horns blaring and guys leaning out the window basically telling people to get out of the way. I kept thinking to myself, you're bringing attention to this man rather than being discrete and letting him go about his business, but that was the way that security worked in those days. Maybe it still does work that way, I don't know, but it was something else. Part of the time that I was back in July he was on vacation. I do recall in the planning for Nancy Reagan's visit while I was there all of a sudden one day he wasn't there and I asked around and I was told he flew to New York to meet with Nancy Reagan's chief of staff and he basically took the TWA afternoon or early afternoon flight out of Rome, landed at Kennedy Airport in New York, met the chief of staff at the terminal and stayed and took the flight that night to fly back to Rome. He just wanted to, whatever it was he wanted to say to this guy he wanted to do it face to face. Again this is the year obviously before fax machines or certainly e-mails and maybe he didn't trust the phones and he just wanted to say whatever he wanted to say. I never really found out what it was all about. He was very much hands on and took his relationship with the Reagans very seriously.

Q: Well, then we're talking about '85, you took, you went to language training.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, then I had a 10 month language training at FSI which was probably the best of my six language experiences at the Foreign Service Institute in that it was comprehensive and it was associated with area studies where I got a real flavor of Polish history, culture, government, politics, through lectures, field trips. In the spring of '86 I believe it was, we went up under orders from FSI all of us that were studying Polish to New York for the day and we went to the Polish Mission to the United Nations, went to the Polish press, the various Jewish non-profit organizations were having some sort of a meeting where we were able to talk to all of them to hear how they were doing to support the small remnants of the Jewish population of Poland and there's an organization I think called the Appeal of Conscience Foundation run by a Rabbi Schneier who was, actually he's going to be coming to FSI to speak.

Q: He's on our board.

BOORSTEIN: Later this month in December. I remember meeting him. That was a very worthwhile program. We did some cultural things around Washington related to Polish American community. One of the neatest things that I did with two of my colleagues who were studying Polish, Ellen Conway who was going to be assistant GSO in Warsaw and Steve Blake who went out as the pol/econ officer to Krakow. The three of us with an instructor and a linguist, also a Polish native, went skiing at Snowshoe, West Virginia in February of '86 and we went with a proviso that from the time we went until the time we returned we wouldn't speak any English. We shopped together. We went up and down the ski slopes together. We played trivial pursuit by the fireplace in this condo that we rented. It was a great help to the language. Later before we finished they also had a tradition in the Polish session where we went to the beach for a week. Mike Hornblow who was going out as the consul general in Krakow he actually owned a very large house in Duck, North Carolina in the Outer Banks. We rented another house and there must have been between teachers and students probably 25 of us who went down there also for a week. Now, this was in early to mid May. It was still a little chilly. Didn't do much swimming in the ocean. Again the whole thing about preparing food and having discussions and going into town and going into restaurants, again it was all in Polish.

Q: An excellent idea.

BOORSTEIN: Now, the ski trip was something that we just thought up to do ourselves. I don't know if they ever did it again, but the week at the beach, they typically had gone to Ocean City, Maryland, but that year we went to North Carolina. I don't know if they continued the tradition going back to Ocean City afterwards, but it was a great benefit. I got my 3/3 in Polish, which gave me two step increases, and I think a 10% bonus when I was at post, which was a great help.

Q: Well, Mike what did you pick up I mean being of Jewish background. Did you pick up any resonance of the strong anti-Jewish sentiment in Poland? I mean before you went out there in the Jewish community or even from the Polish community about this.

BOORSTEIN: Well, I have to say a number of my family members were aghast at the idea that I was being assigned to Poland and I said, look, I actually I think it's a good opportunity for me. Obviously we'll be very sensitive and I'll keep my eyes and ears open to any of this and deal with it. There was one of the instructors at FSI who was older. I always sensed a little bit of antagonism towards me. She was just sort of a cranky person to begin with. Maybe I read too much into it, but when I took my language test she was the native speaker and the other person who was sitting there was the linguist, who was the same guy that I went skiing with. I thought I did really well and having spoken Russian, which is very close in many respects to Polish. My main teacher the other one that I went skiing with was quite confident that I'd get the 3/3. I was the first one to take the test because I needed to leave the end of June to go to post. The rest of my colleagues were all waiting to take me out to lunch at a Mexican restaurant in Roslyn and I'm waiting and waiting for the results. They came out and they said your score is a 3/2+ meaning I got a 3 in speaking and I got a 2+ in reading. I said that's unacceptable. I believe I can read at the 3 level and by doing this you're denying me two step increases and a 10% bonus at post. Give me another reading at the 3 level and see how I do. So, they agreed to do it. They gave me another reading, which I did reasonably well. I ran into a bit of a problem, but I was able to work around it and then the linguist and the native speaker were having this chat in Polish basically saying, the guy said to her, "I'm satisfied that he can read at the 3 level and I suggest that the score be changed." She kind of looked at him and snarled and erased the 2+ and wrote in a 3. That's how I got my 3/3 in Polish. I suspect that there may have been a little bit of anti-Semitism at play here, but I have to say here while I was in Poland I did not experience it at all. They clearly knew from my name that I was Jewish.

Q: I was just wondering you know in the United States if you have a "stein" at the end of your name it tends to be thought of as being Jewish, but it could be just plain German.

BOORSTEIN: I mean, you know, my name's equivalent in German is Bernstein which means amber stone and if you're named Bernstein and you're from Germany, chances are 99 out of 100 that you're Jewish and again my name in the Polish version also means amber stone. It is actually the word for amber. The word for amber in Russian is something different and that is a whole other story, but anyway, my name really is of Ukrainian origin rather than Russian. In any event there was no inkling of that at all while I was in Poland, which was very pleasant. My one sister and her husband came to visit me there and of course, we went down with them to the Auschwitz and Birkenau camps, which was extremely depressing. My sister was very upset about all of that. I also took her to see the remnants of the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, which was largely falling apart and been neglected. She basically said that coming here knowing how large and vibrant the Jewish population was in Poland prior to the Second World War, she felt that she was on an archaeological dig, which was the way she put it, which was kind of apt even at the time we went up to New York to look at the various Jewish organizations they said that their view is that there are so few Jews left in Poland and most of them are elderly, but they are in effect acting in a caretaker capacity. Now, since the fall of communism that's changed radically.

Q: Has it?

BOORSTEIN: Oh yes. There has been a huge influx.

Q: This is tape five, side one with Mike Boorstein. Yes, you were saying the government itself is sanctioned?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, the government has sanctioned many of these Jewish organizations to have a greater presence in Poland and Jewish community life and culture have been revived quite a bit. I'll give you an example of what it was like when I was there in probably the fall of 1987 before the celebration of the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement. There was no resident rabbi in all of Warsaw and so the small Jewish community had to basically bring in a rabbi from Israel. He didn't even speak Polish and he was able to communicate with the people who came to the central synagogue by speaking in Yiddish. The older people were able to understand. Then, while my wife and I went for the services, Israel had recently established a very low level of diplomatic presence in Poland by basically opening up a trade office and they had three diplomats there. I had met them, they made the rounds of the embassies to meet people and I was meeting as the administrative officer, counselor. They were young and they were all married and they had young children. They brought, all the families came to this religious service at this synagogue. The rabbi said, maybe at that point there were some other people who were helping talk and speak Polish and so these young families were invited to come up to the, in the Jewish faith its called the bema, its like the alter. That's normally not done for the whole family. Well, it was a huge emotional scene to have these families of young Israeli Jews come up to the front of the synagogue and you had these elderly people who reached out to the aisle as these people passed and wanted to touch the children. As best as I can figure out is that they sensed themselves that they were dying out and they saw this as a continuity of the Jewish faith that they perhaps could not contribute to themselves. Again, how do you put words on something like this? It was an emotional gesture, but it was extremely touching to be witness to something like that. Anyway, my two years in Warsaw.

Q: You were there from '85 to '87.

BOORSTEIN: No, '86 to '88.

Q: '86 to '88.

BOORSTEIN: Yes. That was of my fifth of seven overseas assignments, I always say that was the one I enjoyed the most. I say that because of several factors. The people in the embassy, it was just a good chemistry of the group, the Americans who were assigned there.

Q: Who were the ambassador and DCM?

BOORSTEIN: Okay, well, when I arrived there because of the nature of our relations, we did not have an ambassador. We had a charge' and he was John Davis who had been I think it was his second tour in Poland. He had been DCM years before. The DCM was David Swartz and I had known David Swartz from my assignment to Moscow. He was the head of the Kiev advance party and I got along very fine with David and it was probably because David knew I was interested in the assignment and he was instrumental in my getting it. The political counselor was David Pozorski. The Econ counselor was Howard Lange. The head of the consular section was a gentleman named David Borichter. So many of these people came the same summer that I did and we had gone through language training together. Not David Swartz, he had already been there and David Pozorski was already there of the other people, particularly those who worked for me I met in language training. I got to know these people socially on a personal level before we even went there which was a big help.

The embassy was by today's standards, I mean it has grown quite a bit since the fall of communism. It probably had maybe I'd say 75 Americans, which is a good solid, medium size embassy and Polish staff that unlike the staff in the Soviet Union, we were able to recruit locally and a great source of the Foreign Service National staff came from recruitment through the Catholic church. By and large some good people who worked for us. Now, they were under a lot of harassment from the Polish secret police or whatever, but by and large they served us well. Had a good American staff, a good Foreign Service National staff. Housing was good and certainly in those years we felt we were at a very important post doing important work as a way to counter the heavy handedness of the Polish government under General Jaruzelski. At that point I believe when I arrived, Lech Walesa was in jail. The solidarity movement had started in 1980 and of course the Pope, the Pope coming from Poland, he had been Pope since '78, this was already eight years later and he had already made at least one trip back to Poland. I was there when he made another trip back and I actually went. I was still three-quarters of a mile away from him in this big open field, but I was able to hear him speak through a microphone. It was just a very exciting time to be there.

Q: Your job was what?

BOORSTEIN: I was head of the administrative section. It was my first time as the senior administrative officer at an embassy.

Q: Now, how would you describe the state of relations when you got there in '86 to '88?

BOORSTEIN: Well, they were poor. In essence, we had made no bones about the fact that we supported the solidarity movement. We felt that it was in the interest of human rights and all these other things and just part of our, again under Ronald Reagan, he was very pro-active in all of this engagement. That in essence what led ultimately, many people credit Ronald Reagan with the fall of the Soviet Union. Now, you know, to give credit to him alone I think is a bit over the top, but nonetheless on his watch and then followed by George Bush, there was a concerted effort to have this engagement and be the alternative, if you will, to socialism and communism and everything that we represented and we succeeded. I don't know if you were there for all of my retirement ceremony, but when I made my remarks I made reference to a discussion that I had had just a week or so before I retired with the father of one of my good personal friends who we saw on another occasion and he knew I was retiring and he said well what was the most significant event that occurred while you were in the State Department in the Foreign Service that you felt you were a part of? I didn't have to think for long and my answer was the fall of communism. Having had a tour in Poland and a tour in the Soviet Union and then subsequently a tour in China, you know, I really felt that I was a part of it. I can take my share of credit, however small it is for that, but so there was very much a key element in what we were doing there in terms of engagement. It was adversarial, it really was.

Q: What was the government doing? I mean what sort of government did Poland have?

BOORSTEIN: Well, it was a socialist government, just like existed in Hungary and Romania, and East Germany. It was not as severe and repressive as perhaps East Germany and Romania or Bulgaria, nor was it as liberal as Czechoslovakia or Hungary. Now, those are all very relative terms. I mean all those countries were part of the Warsaw Pact and they were part of the great divide between East and West. Poland was not as strictly a communist country as the Soviet Union and it was interesting for me to learn more about that as I went through language training and the associated area studies to learn for example that Poland's agriculture had never been collectivized as it was in the Soviet Union. The Polish farmer was a very major force in Polish society. A good deal of the country was still rural. The farms were still held in private hands. You could have private property.

Of course another major influence that set Poland apart from the Soviet Union was the Catholic Church. Nobody messed with the Catholic Church. These areas that were not part of the doctrinaire communist system already you could see little fissures in the communist monolith in Poland. The Poles historically had looked to the West. They were not looking to the East. When you cross the border from the Soviet Union to Poland, you had to change your clock by two hours, not by one. I know of no other place, there may be in the world, but nothing comes to mind where literally your time zone jumps by two hours, so what does that tell you? That Warsaw is on the same time zone as Paris or Rome on the continent of Western Europe. Just culturally, intellectually where Poland fits in with the Chopin and how Kosciusko fought in the American Revolution or whatever. Their orientation was very much to the West. Looking back on it, communism was a terribly odd fit for a country that has an entrepreneurial spirit, has a strong agricultural base, strong influence of the Catholic Church. Poland really was at the forefront of the dissent outside the Soviet Union.

Now, the solidarity movement, there were severe riots in Poland in the mid '50s basically because of food shortages. There was this undercurrent of dissatisfaction, but yet because of its strategic position of being between Germany and the Soviet Union and where that was historically and of course the first battleground of the Second World War occurred at the frontier between Germany and Poland. The Soviet Union and Germany sort of converged and gobbled up portions of the country. You really were at the heart of a lot of history and political turmoil. I'd have to think back on what it was that led to our relations being downgraded and the ambassador being replaced or being called a charge' as opposed to ambassador. I believe it was related to our response to the crackdown on solidarity. While I was there things warmed up a little bit. Lech Walesa was released from jail. There was a certain level of change or tacit acceptance of the labor movement. At that particular point our relations were elevated again to ambassadorial status and John Davis then became the ambassador and that was in '87.

Q: How did you find working there? Did you have a Polish staff and you had to rely on the Polish economy.

BOORSTEIN: It worked reasonably well. Again we had a lot of freedom of action that was not the case in the Soviet Union. We were able to rent our houses and apartments directly with landlords. There was a system of offshore payments because the Polish Zloty was a soft currency and a lot of these landlords wanted to have hard currency and there was an arrangement that was made to do that. It was certainly not sanctioned by the Polish government. It was sanctioned by the U.S. government and the Poles probably knew about it, but they turned a blind eye and they allowed it to happen. There was a pretty decent level of goods and services available because again the nature of the economy. You often had to pay dollars for things that you wanted done in terms of construction, repairs and sometimes the purchase of goods. We were not allowed to be on the black market for our own individual needs. As a matter of fact the DCM would review the records of accommodation exchange to make sure the people were changing money, which we did. My wife worked at the international school, which was called the American School of Warsaw. I was an appointed member of the school board. I was the vice chairman. David Swarz was the chairman, so the school was a big factor in the things that I had to do.

We had Vice President Bush visit us in the fall of '87 and that was pretty much the start of his bid for the presidential nomination. There were efforts made by his advance people to show him at the forefront of the fight against the communist devil. There was a scene at the church where Father Popieluszko used to work. Popieluszko was the Polish priest who was murdered by the Polish authorities for being active in the solidarity movement, in some of the church activities. He basically was a martyr. Bush was there at the church, where there was basically a shrine for Popieluszko, and he was photographed standing on the back of like a hay wagon on the back of a truck that hauled stuff, talking to the masses. The advance people wanted to play this up as him fighting communism. I remember the ambassador wanted to sort of just soften it a bit, didn't want to alienate the Polish authorities all that much. I remember him asking me to come into the secure room to be a witness of his conversation with the White House guy to try to soften this up. He wanted me there as a witness. It was handled in an acceptable fashion. I think that the vice president stayed at the ambassador's residence and that trip went particularly well.

There were pressures while we were there to close our little consulate in Poznan and I remember being asked to write the cable justifying its continuance and I did and the post was allowed to remain open, but it eventually closed I think in the early '90s. It was a very small post. I think we had maybe two or three Americans. Our consulate general in Krakow remained an important post. This was also during the time that made the job difficult for me was this was the time where there was the incident in Moscow where the Marine security guard was caught in the honey trap.

Q: Sergeant Lonetree.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, yes. There was a black Marine who was also caught up into this, too. I forget his name. As a result of that there was this huge outcry that we had better tighten up our security throughout Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. I remember being called back to Washington in I think it was June of '87 for a conference of all the admin officers and ambassadors from all the countries in Eastern Europe including Yugoslavia. Now in Yugoslavia they were going to be observers because they were slightly different, but I remember Bill Hudson was the admin counselor in Belgrade and he flew back for that occasion. He's a good friend of mine and Bill is currently our ambassador in Tunisia. George Schultz came to talk to us. He felt that we could do just fine by not having any local staff in any of our embassies, which was a huge extreme position that was not adopted anywhere. By then the Soviet Union had withdrawn all of their local staff and it was all the Americans that were working there at the time. The idea was to take the necessary steps to physically separate the Foreign Service staff from the American staff so I was engaged in all this planning to shift all of the administrative support operations and the protocol and the translators and everything else over to a building, which was largely a staff apartment house and to convert most of it into offices. I was involved in the planning for that. I remember looking for contractors to do the job. We didn't want to have it done by Polish contractors. I traveled to Helsinki. I traveled to Bonn and Frankfurt a couple of times to try to enlist the interest of some of these contractors to do the work. Then eventually it was done and it happened after I left. I went back in '92 for a month's temporary duty and saw a lot of the stuff that I started planning that was actually completed.

It was, you know, much like I describe my experience in the Soviet Union of being meaningful to me because I had family connections there, we had family connections on my wife's side in Poland. We had much of a similar experience. Her relatives were not as close as mine, but these were basically first cousins of both, well first cousins of my wife's father, so it was one generation removed. We tracked them down and a number of the families lived in close proximity of each other, about 80 miles northwest of Warsaw. They were just farmers and they were genuinely good people and we tracked them down one day and made contact and we'd see them about once a month and remembered in the fall of '87 we invited them down to Warsaw for Thanksgiving dinner. I was able to explain to them in Polish entirely, the whole tradition of American Thanksgiving. That was another very meaningful aspect of the tour.

One incident that I'll describe to you that gives an idea of the pressure that our Foreign Service National staff was under. My senior Polish employee in the budget and fiscal section, and one day I get a call from the embassy nurse Mary Cloud whose husband is now I think the DCM in Berlin, John Cloud. She said that she was called by the British doctor. We had this relationship with the British doctor. We did not have our own doctor, but we were able to use the British Embassy clinic down the street, and Mary told me that this Foreign Service National employee was in a psychiatric ward because she had slit her wrists. Mary and I went down to this psychiatric ward and we saw this woman who just looked in terrible shape and basically ascertained that she had been under such huge pressure from the secret police to talk about the kind of paperwork that she was processing, did she have guest lists to representational events at the ambassador's residence, etc. Not all of this came out that particular day, it came out eventually and the answer to that of course is no and for reasons that were obvious. We just didn't want to have the locals handle that information. They just handled the payment. What she had done is her husband had gotten a visa to go to the United States and of course it was illegal because he stayed and he was working on construction projects in the Chicago area. She was living with her son who was about 9 or 10 and her mother-in-law. It was the mother-in-law that called the British doctor and then the nurse and then I got involved. The nurse and I were able, no I take it back, it was just a regular hospital emergency room. We were able to get her transferred to a psychiatric hospital because basically what she did it was that she got into a bath tub, took a razor blade, slit both her wrists and drank most of a bottle of cognac. The mother-in-law discovered her and basically prevented her from bleeding to death. She was in the psychiatric hospital for about a month. When she was released the security officer and I debriefed her and that's when a lot of this stuff came out. None of which surprised us, but she had taken rather an extreme measure. The thing that was very heartening was I remember talking to a guy in the consular section, Tom Krajeski, who is now our ambassador in Yemen I believe. He was the number two in the consular section at the time and we were able to contact her husband in Chicago and Tom said he won't come back. Within 24 hours he was back in Poland to be with his wife, knowing that he could never go back to the United States.

This FSN at least up through the time I retired was still working for the embassy because occasionally I'd send her an e-mail. She sent me this wonderful letter after I left Poland to basically thank me for saving her life. The DCM wrote it up in my evaluation report that I saved her life. A bit of an exaggeration, but I took a great interest in that, but again it gives you a flavor of the kind of pressures. Another employee in the budget office refused to go with me to a regional budget and admin conference in Paris very early in my tour, basically saying that when she had done this in the past because Paris is where we have our regional finance center, that the Polish secret police attached to the Polish Embassy in Paris would harass her while she was there. She said I want no part of that and she just refused to go and so I went myself.

Q: Was our American staff harassed sort of the way that it happens in the Soviet Union?

BOORSTEIN: Again it depended on what your job was. I personally was not. My next-door neighbor, Bruce Donohue, was the liaison with the solidarity movement and when Lech Walesa was out of jail he would often go see him and Bruce was followed around. I do not know that he was, I cannot recall any physical harassment, but he certainly was aware of a heavy-handed presence that wanted to make sure they knew where, he knew that they were watching him and whatever. I do not recall, nothing jumps out that there was a lot of activity in that area, but you were always wary about your conversations.

Q: Well, after the Sergeant Lonetree compromise of our embassy in Moscow was there sort of an immediate change in our security arrangements with our Marine guards because you would have that under your wing.

BOORSTEIN: Well, you know, the Marines themselves and the security people in the State Department gave a great deal of attention. I remember having a senior security official that was retired and he was brought back on contract to come and basically assess whether or not to change the whole system where the head of the Marine detachment was a sergeant and to replace all these sergeants with lieutenants and they'd be officers. Of course that was never adopted, but it was seriously considered for these high threat posts. We certainly reviewed the regime. You have to understand that relative to the Soviet Union there were a number of cases of fraternization that went on in Poland. If you were caught you were shipped home, but the Polish women were quite attractive. A lot of them spoke English. There was a pretty good bar scene in Warsaw and early when I arrived there was a Marine who was caught or he admitted to an involvement with a Polish girl and he was sent home. There was a case of a consular officer whose name I don't recall who basically had an affair with. Not an affair, he wasn't married, but he had a relationship, a sexual ongoing relationship with his senior FSN in the consular section. He basically issued her a visa and she went off to the United States. He then joined her and they ultimately ended up getting married. Now, he lost his security clearance, but I don't believe he was fired.

Q: Well, I know, I go back a long time and I remember there was a case and I think the man's name was Scarbeck or something like that. This was back around 1961 or so.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, Scarbeck.

Q: Or '62.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, Scarbeck I believe was his name and he was either the senior general services officer or the assistant general services officer and he was I think he served jail time.

Q: He served jail time. He got involved with a Polish woman and they leaned on the Polish woman and he was supplying information to her. It wasn't of any great import, but the point being that he had got himself compromised.

BOORSTEIN: Yes and I believe he's the only FSO ever to have served jail time for espionage. Yes, I had forgotten about that, but you're quite correct. There was a strong view. We had lectures and like any other assignment to the bloc you had to have a special endorsement by the security that you were okay. There was one of the people in the station in Warsaw was caught doing something that he did with a Polish contact and he was declared persona non grata and shipped home.

Q: What was social life like? I mean can you contrast it to the social life in the Soviet Union.

BOORSTEIN: It was easier to have social relationships with the Poles. We would often have at embassy parties; we would include the Foreign Service National staff, which was rarely done in the Soviet Union. You could have friends if you spoke the language, such as with your neighbors. Right across the street from us there was a Polish physicist and his wife and he had been on exchanges in the United States two or three times. We would entertain him and his wife and daughter in our home and we'd go over to their place and when I went back four years later for a month's TDY, I was staying in another residence, but I looked him up and I went over there for dinner and we haven't corresponded recently, but for a number of years after we left, we would exchange letters once or twice a year. The diplomatic community was quite active. You would have friends in the British Embassy, the Canadian Embassy, the Germans, the Finns, the Swedes, whatever. In that respect it was not quite as active or as close as it was in the Soviet Union, because they were pretty much with the school, the international school, the only main source of socializing because the rest was just not done. There were sanctions against the Russians if they would fraternize with you in a social way, but it was much less so in Poland. That was a very excellent aspect of the tour, it made it very enjoyable.

Q: Well, you left there in '88.

BOORSTEIN: '88.

Q: Where did you go?

BOORSTEIN: Then I was assigned again via language number five, Spanish, to be administrative counselor in Caracas, Venezuela.

Q: You were there from '80?

BOORSTEIN: '88 to '91.

Q: '88 to '91. What was Caracas like when you went there?

BOORSTEIN: In contrast to Warsaw, which I said was my favorite post in the Foreign Service, Caracas was my least favorite post in the Foreign Service. Are we going to go into that because I was going to stop it right now.

Q: Well, we can stop it.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, let's stop now and pick it up the next time.

Q: Okay and we'll pick this up in 1988 after Spanish training you were off to Caracas.

BOORSTEIN: Right.

Q: Okay, today is the 30th of November, 2005. Mike, we're going to your least favorite post in Caracas. You were there from when to when?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, I arrived there in early November of 1988 and left in June I believe 1991. I left Warsaw in June of 1988 and then had about 16 weeks of Spanish language training which was language number five in my career and on top of the Italian and the French it was fairly easy for me to get to the 3/3 level in the 16 weeks. Off we went, arrived there literally on election day of 1988 and learned in the course of that evening that George Bush had been elected president defeating Michael Dukakis. Caracas, as I said, was my least favorite post in the Foreign Service, but it was also in its own way a fascinating place. A country of enormous contrasts. Like many countries in Latin America, you had a small elite, very wealthy slice of society of people who had made their money in oil predominantly and Venezuela being a member of OPEC. It was at the time one of the oldest, if not the oldest, democracies in Latin America. It had a reputation for enormous corruption in government. In the late 1980s they were just beginning to wean themselves away from a long period of government subsidies of almost everything, which sustained a very high standard of living, which reached well down into the middle class. The cost of living was low. I believe the price of a gallon of gasoline in 1988 was about 12 cents, maybe in the U.S. at that point it was maybe 60 cents, so it was still pretty low back home as well. No, it was more than that. It had been well over a dollar at that point in the U.S.

In any event, for a foreigner living in Venezuela, the rents were low, restaurant meals were very inexpensive, the price of gasoline as I said was quite low, but the economy was pretty much in shambles because they had been involved in a lot of deficits and they had borrowed money, and as part of borrowing that money, of course, under the trademark of the international monetary fund, they had to make certain structural changes in their economic framework, which led to some belt tightening and a downward spiral in the economy. The cost of living went up dramatically. In late February of 1989, we were still in temporary quarters. It took us a long time for the embassy to find us a rented apartment, so we were still living in another rented apartment temporarily and in late February of 1989 about a week of very violent civil unrest broke out because the government, what triggered it, was that the government raised the price of gasoline from 12 cents to 25 cents a gallon. This sparked, like I said, about a week of enormous civil unrest throughout the country, a lot of riots, a lot of fire bombings and the embassy was for at least one day was under siege because in the neighborhood there were roving gangs of people just causing trouble, firing guns or whatever. We had established a task force and were in touch with the operation center at the State Department.

The embassy compound at the time had two buildings. We had the main chancery where the ambassador was and I was working in a separate building, which housed the administrative section, the consular section and the U.S. Information Service. It was in the same compound, but it was separated by a parking lot. The disturbance was worse down at our end of the compound outside of our fence and so we were ordered by the security officer to basically flee from our building and take refuge in the main chancery. This was in broad daylight. We did, and nobody was hurt, and we just basically abandoned the other building. Things calmed down a little later in the day and we were able to go home, but we had a very active radio net and every morning we were all told to tune in around 7:00 in the morning and the ambassador, based on reports that were given to him from the security officer who was in touch with local authorities, would make a determination whether we should come to work or not. It was also giving advice to our families. Well, we were never told to stay home. I believe at one point for maybe two days the families were told to just stay put. There was really never that degree of a risk, but I have to say in my whole time in the Foreign Service that was the closest I came to internal strife, having spent so many years serving in controlled societies and the Soviet Union, Poland and later on in China. This was a real rarity. That wasn't the reason I didn't particularly care for Venezuela. In late 1988 Carlos Andres Perez was elected president of Venezuela and his term after I left was marked with a lot of scandal and I believe he was forced to resign, but that was after I left. That pretty much describes the social economic political backdrop of my tour there.

The ambassador when I arrived was Otto J. Reich and Otto Reich was a political appointee from Ronald Reagan and because Bush was elected, even though Bush was still a Republican Reich left in about I think May or June of 1989 and Reich had previously in a special envoy for the State Department doing diplomatic work in Central America and he was somehow implicated in the Iran Contra business during Reagan's second term and had been investigated for some financial improprieties and I believe he was cleared. He was and still is the darling of the Cuban American community in south Florida. Otto Reich was born in Cuba, his father was German, his mother was Cuban and at a young age with his parents he fled to the United States, where he grew up. He was totally bilingual in Spanish and English. Very conservative and that was his background. He was a difficult ambassador in the sense that he was good in dealing with the Venezuelans. He did represent our country well. He had entrï¿½e into the Venezuelan government. Unlike today, we were on relatively good terms with the Venezuelan government.

Using his Latin roots and his language ability certainly helped. He made pretty good judgments. Where he was more controversial was in his particular management style within the embassy. He didn't give much support for any of the needs of the American staff. He really gave the impression that he basically cared very little for what concerns we might have had or I might have had as the administrative counselor. He was liked by the local staff, but again I think his Latin roots and his just way of operating was more familiar to their way of doing business. He was most loyal to his staff at the residence, . his major domo, the maids, the cook, the butlers. I had most of my difficulties with him regarding the salary and benefits of the household staff. He seemed to care very little about any other administrative issues as long as he felt his household staff was adequately compensated. It caused some problems because there were limits in how much we could actually pay because it came out of the embassy's budget, and of course I had to justify any increases back to Washington. There were some sparks that flew between the ambassador and me when I felt it was improper to give them raises beyond which they were justified receiving. We had a little bit of a tussle over that. The bureau of Inter-American affairs, the executive office, supported me on that and the executive director, Gene Scassa at the time was very smooth and basically told Ambassador Reich if he didn't stop pushing the envelope with regard to me and my responsibilities that he could end up under investigation by the inspector general and could go to jail. When he was told this all of a sudden he changed his tune and I remember once coming back from Washington where he was told this he said, "well, Mike, why didn't you warn me about this? About the trouble I could get into?" I looked at him and smiled and said, "well, I thought it best if it communicated from the executive director back in Washington. I certainly support what he was saying."

We had another bit of disagreement and that was over of all things the management of the embassy snack bar. The embassy snack bar was run by a woman named Dioni who as a young girl came over to Venezuela from Spain and had started working in the embassy cafeteria and eventually ran it and had been there for over 30 years. She just was a force to be reckoned with. She didn't like the idea that she had to follow certain rules and regulations that the Department imposed in how you ran a concession on embassy grounds. I felt fairly powerless to deal with her while Otto Reich was there. As soon as he left Ken Skoug, who was the DCM, became the charge', and he was amenable to taking necessary steps to bring the snack bar's quality up to better or higher standards and to have them operate in a way that was consistent with what the State Department required. Part of the impetus came also from the embassy nurse who felt that there were certain hygienic standards that were being violated. She was seeing a lot of people coming in being treated for parasites and other stomach problems that she traced back to poor food handling techniques in the snack bar. At the end of the day, Dioni did not agree to sign a new agreement as a concessionaire in accordance with the different rules and basically quit. We were all delighted that she quit because that's exactly what we wanted to happen. It created some tension in the embassy because Dioni was liked by the Venezuelan staff because the menu was largely in tune with the kind of things they liked to eat. So, where it was very hard to get a good hamburger for example, you could get all the black beans and rice you wanted, which is not anything that I cared to eat at all. The best thing I could say about there is that they made a terrific cup of coffee and some of their pastries were good. We were able to get in a restaurant consultant from the Department's office of Commissary and Recreation Affairs, who came down and gave us advice on menu preparation, creating some dishes that were more in tune with the American palate.

We were fortunate also in that we had a 17-month hiatus between ambassadors after Otto Reich for reasons I'll go into shortly. Because of that the ambassador's chef was left with nothing to do and he expressed an interest in becoming the new snack bar head and we took him up on it and he came over and ran the snack bar. Now he was British and he did a marvelous job. I don't know how much longer he remained in that job because he did not go back to the residence after the next ambassador came, as I recall.

Again we were, it was a bit of an advantage that we had a long hiatus in regard to the improvement of the cafeteria. The reason we were without an ambassador for 17 months is a wonderful Washington story. A few months after Reich left, George Bush nominated another political appointee named Eric Javits, the nephew of the late Senator Jacob Javits.

Q: Of New York.

BOORSTEIN: Of New York, to become the next ambassador to Venezuela. I believe Javits had been the campaign chair or the finance chair of the reelection campaign for Bush in 1988. He was a wealthy guy from New York State. He made his money in real estate like so many other people.

Q: It was the election, not reelection.

BOORSTEIN: You're right, the election of George Bush. You're correct. He was nominated and before he came up for his hearings in the senate, in doing some background, it was discovered that he had been sucked into this Wedtech scandal. Now, I have to confess I don't recall any longer what Wedtech was.

Q: I know it was a scandal and I don't either. We've had so many since.

BOORSTEIN: It had something to do with finances, contracting, something like that and so after a period of time Eric Javits believed that his nomination was in jeopardy and so he withdrew his name. In the meantime Eric Javits had sent his wife down to Caracas to look at the residence and was starting to make decisions about changing the carpeting and the draperies and he even wanted to add electrical outlets to his little office in the residence. He gave clear instructions about what his dietary needs were. He was lactose intolerant so he wanted to make sure the kitchen help didn't make anything with regular milk and we got down to that level of detail. I remember I was up in Washington for one reason or another and he invited me to dinner and treated me to a lovely dinner at the Hay Adams Hotel. Then he sort of dropped out of sight. Now, I learned quite by accident and coincidence when I was getting ready to retire from the State Department and I was a nominee by the State Department for a UN agency position in The Hague with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, that Eric Javits is now the U.S. representative to the OPCW. Whatever tainted him back in 1988 was not a problem in 2005 and he's actually had that job for several years, but anyway. For that reason, Ken Skoug was the charge' for 17 months. Then eventually in the fall of 1990 Michael Skol arrived as ambassador. Mike Skol was a career officer, S-K-O-L. He's now retired and he's somebody you should.

Q: Is he here?

BOORSTEIN: I believe so. His wife may still be in the Foreign Service. They were a tandem couple. Her name is Claudia Serwer, S-E-R-W-E-R, I believe that was how you spell her name. She may still be floating around. Mike Skol had been I believe at the time one of the deputy assistant secretaries in the old ARA bureau, the bureau of Inter-American Affairs. Prior to that, I believe he had been deputy chief of mission in Bogota. Most of his career had been served in Latin America. I think early in his career he was vice consul in Naples. Mike Skol arrived in early to mid November of 1990 and so I was with him for about seven months. He was a very effective ambassador. He spoke excellent Spanish, was very comfortable in serving in that part of the world, and clearly was familiar with it from his previous work as well. He was highly regarded within the Department. I remember as a deputy assistant secretary he stopped over briefly in Caracas with Larry Eagleburger at the time he was undersecretary for political affairs. They were going off to some conference in Asuncion and they had a government aircraft and stopped briefly at the airport and we had a little meeting with him there. Michael Skol was not a problem for me in terms of administrative operations as long as things ran well and the house ran well and he had enough money for representation, he kind of left me alone, which is fine. An administrative officer will say that's pretty good. He had a bit of a temper and he was well known for his temper and he only got into it with me once over a silly issue of the miscount of a number of guests at an event that he hosted where he wasn't going to get reimbursed. There was a tradition in Caracas and again in many embassies where an ambassador would host a hail and farewell every six months or so for the people who had arrived recently and for those people that were leaving in the near future, and they're not reimbursed for that because its just solely the American staff and their families. For some reason the count was not correct and he ordered too much food and had a lot of waste and his secretary blamed my secretary and he wanted to summon my secretary up to see him, basically to be chewed out, to be disciplined for her mistake. I remember when my secretary came in telling me that she was summoned to go up to the ambassador's office and I knew what it was about, I told her that she's not to go, that I would go instead, that it wasn't her fault and I would deal with the ambassador. Well, I went up there and clearly he was very flustered, he didn't know what to say to me. He was all prepared to dress down a very junior secretary, who wasn't even a career secretary, she was the wife of one of the assistant air attaches and a young woman who was very capable, who just may have made an unfortunate mistake. Frankly I don't know whether she gave the right information to the ambassador's secretary and she misinterpreted it. He didn't raise his voice to me at all and I offered a suggestion that maybe in the future that he should convey this information in writing so that there wouldn't be any misunderstanding and he thought that was just great and that was the end of it. He did have a temper and he sort of took pride in the fact that he could yell and scream at people. He and I had a respectful relationship.

Q: How did you get along with Ken Skoug, how did he operate?

BOORSTEIN: You know Ken Skoug?

Q: I've interviewed him and he had a reputation of being a very hardliner I think on Cuba.

BOORSTEIN: Well, he was the director of the office of Cuban affairs.

Q: Yes, I've talked with somebody who didn't agree with a hardliner, I don't know, but there was obviously considerable disagreement between Skoug and somebody else and I don't know, but anyway.

BOORSTEIN: I got along fine with Ken. I actually served with Ken in Moscow. He was the economic counselor in Moscow in the late '70s. If I'm not mistaken, this was his second tour in Venezuela, but I can't say for sure. Anyway, he and I got along pretty well. We had a regular meeting once a week or once every other week and he would have an agenda. He was a bit of a micromanager, had no sense of humor, very serious minded guy. His wife on the other hand was an absolute sweetheart. She was an accomplished artist and we still to this day have two of her paintings in an extra bedroom in our house. She made these lovely floral paintings. Their youngest son was about the age of my daughter and they knew each other at the University of Virginia as well as in school in Moscow earlier. We had a pretty good relationship with Ken.

When he was the charge' for 17 months, he never appointed an acting deputy chief of mission. He essentially did it all and he just about burned himself out. He relied on me a lot during those 17 months to help him with things. I was already a senior officer at that point because I was promoted while I was in Spanish language training into the senior service. He could have appointed the economic counselor a fellow named Al White to be the acting DCM, but he never did it. I don't know whether he didn't have confidence in Al or what the story was. The political counselor was an FS-1. As a matter of fact it was Donna Hrinak at the time that then rose to real stardom in the Foreign Service afterwards, ambassador to four different countries and whatever. Then she left to become DCM in Tegucigalpa and then Bill Milan arrived and he was also an FS-1, and the head of the consular section was Dan Welter. Dan was a senior officer as well, but for whatever reason he didn't tap any of us to be the acting DCM and it was tough, it was really tough.

He was dedicated. He very much wanted to be appointed as chief of mission to Managua, Nicaragua and that was the time when we didn't have an ambassador and we downscaled, demoted the relationship much like we had done in Poland.

Q: Downgraded.

BOORSTEIN: Downgraded, there you go. Downgraded the relationship. He didn't get that assignment and he then said the hell with it and he retired. He was a bit bitter about that.

Q: You mentioned as long as the house went well, this is something that often isn't noted in normal diplomatic memoirs and all this, but for the administrative officer, the ambassador's house is someplace that can be extremely absorbing. I know when I was in Greece, Ambassador Tasca's wife was very difficult. I think we had something like out of a staff of maybe five, I think for the four years I was there they had over 100 people and some were repeats, but could you talk about that in general and in particular?

BOORSTEIN: Sure. Well, Caracas was my second post as the senior administrative officer so I certainly had a taste of it from my previous tour in Warsaw and I don't recall any problems at all. John Davis and his wife, Helen, were very easy going. They spoke the language. The help was very good. I can't think of any issue that I recollect now, maybe closer to the time maybe there were a few things, but Caracas on the other hand, the ambassador Reich was very concerned about the perks of his household staff and wanted to make sure that they were adequately compensated. There was a high rate of inflation and economic turndown and these people would be affected by it. He was on my case for that.

Now, Ambassador Skol, while I said he didn't give me a hard time, there were some issues regarding the residence that were rather unique because Mike Skol arrived in early November and three weeks later the President of the United States arrived on a visit. This was right, he was originally going to come in September, but because of the lead up of the first Gulf War, that trip was canceled and he did make later, which was just a few weeks I believe before we started bombing Iraq. Mike Skol moved into the residence. The White House advance people wanted George Bush and his entourage to stay in the residence. The residence was quite bare. It had fresh paint on the walls. The Art in Embassies collection had not yet arrived, so Mike Skol wanted to have artwork in the residence. On his own, perhaps going through the cultural affairs office, he arranged for a loan of Venezuelan contemporary art from the Venezuelan art museum to be put in the residence and basically said to me, "Mike you take care of it, getting it delivered, getting it hung and taking care of it." I said, "what about liability?" He said, "well, you figure something out. You know that's what admin officers are there to do." I called up the bureau. First I called up the foreign buildings office and talked to an official there who said we can't support that cost. We self-insure. I think in this case its rather unique that there should be an insurance policy and you have to get the bureau of Inter-American affairs to pony up the money for that. I think I got an insurance quote. Let's just say it was, I don't know, $1,500, a very small amount of money, but I didn't have it in my budget. I had to call up the Inter-American bureau, ARA/EX and talk to the deputy executive director and arrange for funding. We got the funding, but I did not commit to the ambassador that I was going to support this until we got the funding taken care of. He was rather testy to me about you know, the residence needs to look good and this, that and the other thing.

Then there was a big job to replace some of the carpeting so that it could look better rather than to do it in a more normal fashion and one of the advance people from the State Department who had been sent down was a bit disdainful about how the place looked. I was quite upset at this fellow. He was a fellow administrative officer and I said to him, "look, you're not in charge here, I am and you don't need to undermine my authority in what I'm trying to do." I'm happy to say that this gentleman didn't have nearly as successful a career in the State Department as I did and he's now gone. Be that as it may, that was a very special requirement to put the artwork up and we did and it did make a difference. I admire Ambassador Skol to have taken those extra steps to make it look good. He got annoyed once over a reimbursement voucher for a breakfast that he held at the residence because you could be reimbursed so much per head for a representational meal if it was breakfast, lunch, dinner, cocktail party, etc. So, he exceeded the limit for breakfast because he had bought a very high end melon and the budget and fiscal officer reduced the reimbursement amount down to the standard amount for the breakfast and the ambassador got really annoyed and called him into the office and chewed on him for a while. Frankly I don't remember if the amount was changed or not, I don't think it was. Sometimes these small things can be, these minor irritants can become major irritants.

Q: Also, too, it didn't happen here, but you can have the particularly the ambassador's wife, both career and non-career get very much involved in the house and sort of use it as their play thing.

BOORSTEIN: I was fortunate, you're quite correct, but I was fortunate in the sense that Otto Reich's wife, there were two small children at the house I believe and she was very much wrapped up in the kids, getting them off to school and whatever. I don't remember any difficulties with her. Mike Skol's wife was working. She was a Foreign Service Officer. She was the like the petroleum attachï¿½ I believe. This was a first because of conflict of interest that the lawyers agreed that because her supervisor, there had to be some special provisions made or understanding that she could actually go and work even though her husband was the ambassador. This was precedence setting for a tandem couple. She really wasn't all that interested. As a matter of fact we got extra money to hire a house manager, a residence manager, which before had basically been handled by the spouse of the previous ambassador. It can be a huge issue and also some of the renovation work in a residence. The ambassador and his wife would take a great deal of interest in what color paint goes on, the quality of the carpeting, changing pieces of furniture or linens and towels and whatever. It does take up an awful lot of time.

Q: What about security at the embassy and the whole thing, how did that work there?

BOORSTEIN: One of the reasons why I didn't like Caracas was that it was a very high risk post in terms of personal security. A lot of homes had break-ins. It got to the point where we would not allow any embassy officer to live in an individual house, that we would only lease apartments, lease housing in apartment buildings that had 24 hour security. We didn't force people who were in houses to leave. We had people who literally had had their homes broken into a half a dozen times. Fortunately, we didn't have any severe violence. We had a couple of cases where people were beaten up, pistol-whipped. There was a case where the new cultural affairs officer arrived and was living in a temporary house with a wife and two or three young children. Thieves broke in while they were there and took one of the kids, like a four year old kid, put a pistol up to the kid's head and said to the father, now, show us the money. Of course they did.

There were cases where if you were waiting in traffic someone would come up with a gun and rob you right there waiting in traffic in broad daylight. That was very stressful. We, me personally, I was never, my apartment was never broken into. It was a lovely apartment in a very secure building. It was a penthouse apartment with a gorgeous view of the valley looking down into Caracas and it was quite nice. The crime rate was significant and it was a factor.

Caracas was a bit of an anomaly because I felt it should have been given a hardship allowance and yet when you added up all the factors that go into what's called a hardship differential, 10% or 15% payment over and above salary, it never made the cut because again it was okay when it came to a lot of other aspects and quality of life. The availability of food, the quality of your medical services. You had a large number of physicians, generalists and specialists who had been trained in the United States, who spoke fluent English. The hospitals were considered good from a sanitary standpoint. A lot of embassy people, particularly the wives, would have cosmetic surgery done in Venezuela because, relative to the United States, it was dirt cheap. Those factors did not count numerically and in the formula used to grant a post differential. We never had one while I was there. We tried a couple of times. What was a particular stressful experience for me as the administrative counselor was that while we were there we lost our benefit of rest and recuperation travel.

Q: Of what?

BOORSTEIN: Rest and recreation travel, R&R and even though we didn't have a hardship differential we had an annual R&R trip which was the cost of a full fare economy to Miami. You could parlay that into an economy ticket to go pretty much wherever you wanted to in the United States. The reason for that was the criteria for R&R were such that it was deemed that it was a stressful enough post that necessitated a trip at government expense for purposes of reculturation, change of scenery, change of climate and whatever. Well, the Bureau of Inter-American affairs decided to take a review of all the posts that had rest and recreation travel with the idea that they could save money. So, those posts that had no post differential and an R&R benefit were particularly targeted, and we lost the R&R. I went on a campaign to get it restored. I tried three times and I brought up all kinds of evidence. I was particularly concerned, I was grandfathered because it existed when I arrived and I was able to take them while I was there. I was concerned about the lower ranking people in the staff and I used the particular case of one communicator who had four children who could never afford to take a trip outside the country where he would have to get on an airplane because he couldn't afford it with his salary. He was stuck in Venezuela for three years. It was a stressful place.

Well, I lost some credibility with Washington because I was a bit of a pest. I was quite aggressive. Now, I had the front office's support to do a special study and do things out of cycle and whatever. About four months after I left I got a letter from my secretary, the same secretary who had gotten into trouble with the ambassador and she basically said, "Mike, congratulations the R&R was restored." She enclosed an embassy notice announcing the restoration of the R&R and then attached to that was a special thanks to me for my persistence in getting the benefit restored.

Q: Well done.

BOORSTEIN: Yes.

Q: Were you under any threat from terrorists of some kind of another?

BOORSTEIN: Absolutely not. I mean I'm trying to think during the Gulf War we were on very much of a heightened alert. We were concerned about indigenous Muslims. There were some. I can't give you a number of people from the Middle East who were living in Venezuela because it was a bit of a melting pot. Whatever the intelligence people felt could have been difficult. We were on pretty much high alert. I remember we were doing a lot of cooperation with the British, for example, and we had extra forces from the Venezuelan army surrounding the embassy during the first few weeks of the Gulf War. It didn't last all that long, at least the ground phase didn't, but during the bombing phase.

Q: Were there any guerrilla movements? You know, I'm thinking of what's the name?

BOORSTEIN: Sendero Luminoso?

Q: Well, I was thinking of Betancourt, who is French. She's been kidnapped now for three years. But anyway.

BOORSTEIN: No, there was none of that, certainly not targeting the diplomats that I can recall at all. Like I said crime was the big concern. Terrorism, anything directed against us as Americans, there really wasn't any.

Q: Were you having any problems maintaining staff there because of crime and all that?

BOORSTEIN: Oh, the American staff.

Q: Yes.

BOORSTEIN: Not really. People who liked serving in Latin America looked upon Caracas as a better than average post. I remember when I got assigned as administrative counselor there were not a lot of competition at least for my job. I don't recall any difficult recruiting at all for anybody.

Q: Well, did you feel going there, did you feel you weren't a member of the Latin American club or not?

BOORSTEIN: To some extent. A lot of the male officers had wives from Latin American whom they had met early in their career. Bob Felder was the DCM and Bob's wife is Argentinean. Of course Otto Reich being from Cuba himself his wife actually was not Hispanic, not Latina. A number of other people either themselves, we had a high contingent of officers from Puerto Rico for example. There were a lot of these people who knew how to dance the Salsa, I never learned how to dance the Salsa, doing those kinds of things and linguistically they were quite comfortable. You know, I had already had a Washington assignment as a post management officer for the Bureau of Inter-American affairs, so I felt quite at home in that bureau. I was not interested in having another assignment in Latin America and I never did. I never sought one.

Q: Why not?

BOORSTEIN: For the factors that I cited, I just didn't care for Venezuela, the crime, I didn't mention it before, but Caracas had horrendous traffic. Depending on your timing of when you left for work or when you left work to go home I remember getting into, having a sort of friendly disagreement with the deputy chief of mission, Bob Felder because at 5:30 I'd want to leave to go home because I usually was at work at 7:15 in the morning because I'd leave my house at 7:00 and I could get to work in a straight shot, 10 or 12 minutes, I was into the office and I would often have 45 minutes of real quiet time to do work or I'd go down to the cafeteria and have a cup of that wonderful Venezuelan coffee and a pastry and schmooze with my buddies and then start work. The embassy's official closing time I believe was 5:00 and at 5:30 I wanted to leave because if I waited until even a quarter to six it could take me an hour to an hour and a half to get home. If I left at 5:30 it would probably take me 20 minutes. There was that very narrow window of opportunity. I remember the DCM saying, "You know, Mike, I often want to see you about 6:00 and you're never here." I said, "I really don't want to get into the habit of having to stay until 6:00." He didn't come to work until 8:30 and he had a car and driver.

That was a factor. I also found the Venezuelan staff to be really, essentially with a few exceptions, fairly lazy, fairly by and large, kind of arrogant with a great sense of entitlement. Every time some new statistics came out about inflation they would beat the drums, we need a wage increase and whatever. They didn't particularly like me because I wanted to play it by the book and you really couldn't play it any other way because you just couldn't say "well, fine we'll give you a raise," because you need to get money to fund it. We would do wage surveys and I remember getting people down from Washington to try to do something special and one of the things that was particularly difficult and again it sort of shows you the cultural clash that occurs sometimes in working overseas.

This was the era where the U.S. government embraced the no smoking policy. The State Department had already imposed a no smoking ban in the State Department building in Washington and all the annexes and other offices in the United States and wanted to extend that ban to all the embassies around the world. So, we got a telegram from the Department probably from the undersecretary for management saying effective on such and such a date each embassy is to promulgate its own administrative guidelines, but essentially it must contain this which is now a legislative authority and this is the way its going to be. We wrote these regulations. Perhaps we had some informal means with the staff to let them know this was the way it was going to be. Well, you would have thought we had told every Venezuelan who smoked that they had to cut off one of their fingers. They just resisted it like crazy. For a while a number of us had to become the smoking police, had to go around to desks where we could literally see smoke coming out of a cubicle and say you can't do this. There are designated smoking areas outside the building. You have to leave in order to smoke. There was one younger FSN in general services, a Foreign Service National in the general services section, Tony was his name. Tony was probably 27 or 28 years old. A pretty good employee. He spoke fluent English. I think he had some university schooling in the States and he just wouldn't give up smoking. I would sometimes find him smoking, his feet would be up on the desk and he'd be smoking away. I went by one time and I said, "You know, Tony, first of all it is not good. You're in a public area. I don't really appreciate you having your feet up on the desk and secondly you know that you can't smoke. Put out that cigarette. You can smoke outside and that's the way it is." So, you know, one week went by, two weeks went by, saw him doing it again, came back and warned him the second time. Maybe I put it in writing. He kept doing it. The third time I came back I said, "okay, this is it. I'm going to put this in writing. If I see you smoking with or without your feet up, you will be fired because we have rules and you are not obeying them." Then he finally stopped. He kept pushing the envelope on that.

Q: That gets old.

BOORSTEIN: Those were the factors, but you know, the good part about Venezuela was the climate was idyllic. We had no screens on the windows, we had no central heating, no central air conditioning, the only problem was occasionally at night because the people loved to party it would be a little noisy. We traveled in- country and went to Angel Falls. We went to a wonderful agricultural, almost like a game park preserve with a couple from the Canadian Embassy. Slept in mosquito netting and had wonderful guided four wheel drive tours throughout this wonderful area. Saw a guy handling a, oh, what is the thing, it's a huge, huge snake. Not a Cobra, an Anaconda that are common in Latin America. I mean these snakes honest to God were six to eight inches across in terms of diameter, huge things. Learned how to scuba dive. Got my certification as a scuba diver. As a matter of fact our security officer had gone through training to become a certified instructor and so he gave the classes. We did scuba diving and went off to Curacao, to Bonaire, Tobago as well as off the coast of Venezuela to go scuba diving. It was enjoyable from that standpoint. We had a lovely apartment. We were able to entertain quite a bit. It was good, learned Spanish, got to use Spanish. So from that standpoint it was all right, but against all these other things, especially coming from a post that I enjoyed as much as I did in Poland, it was quite a change.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

BOORSTEIN: I left there in June July of 1991 and I was then selected to participate in the senior seminar and we can pick that up the next time.

Q: All right, we'll pick it up the next time. The senior seminar in 1991.

BOORSTEIN: In 1991.

Q: This is tape six, side one with Mike Boorstein and we're talking about 1991and the senior seminar.

BOORSTEIN: Right.

Q: Which ran from '91 to '92. How did you find the senior seminar?

BOORSTEIN: It was a wonderful experience. It's certainly quite sad that the Department has eliminated it. Anyway, I really enjoyed the senior seminar and as I said it is a shame that the Department has now eliminated it. The reason I say that is that at the senior level, working particularly in Washington, the kind of networking that you have by living, working, traveling, bonding with 35, 34 other people over the course of nine or ten months really is a thing that is sustained and can be helpful when down the line when you're having a problem and you remember well, I worked with so and so from AID or I worked with so and so who was a captain in the navy and now he's a rear admiral and I need to give him a call and find out what's going on. You know, you don't really measure it, but it really pays a lot of dividends in how we conduct our business. Our group was a very typical group where we had I think 32 or 33 people. Half of us were Foreign Service. The other half were with the exception of one civil service person from the State Department were all other agencies that were involved in foreign affairs, be it the CIA, Department of Defense, all branches of the Service, the Coast Guard, the FBI, USAID, USIA at the time. I mean it was just a very, very good group and we still get together those of us that are in the Washington area a couple of times a year, Christmastime and in the summer too to get together to reminisce.

Q: Do you recall any kind of exercise project or trip that sort of illuminated something for you?

BOORSTEIN: Let me get to one aspect of that in a little bit, but I think it's also important to frame that point in history when I took the senior seminar. We started in August of 1991 and we were the first senior seminar to occur after the Gulf War. Because the senior seminar has as members, colonel level, people from each of the services and relies on or relied on a military aircraft to take us around on several trips and we had trips that were oriented towards specifically what trip related to the army, what trip related to the navy and the marines and a trip related to the air force. Every time we made a trip that had a military theme it was all related to revisiting the Gulf War through the eyes in the prism of the air force, the navy and the marines and the army. So, that was particularly interesting to get that perspective at the time.

The purpose of the senior seminar, which was so compelling to most of us is that when the rationale for having it was that when people in the government that are oriented towards foreign affairs reach the senior level, by and large they've spent the bulk of their careers living and working outside the country that we represent. So, the focus of the senior seminar is to acquaint us with our own country beyond the beltway. There was extensive travel ranging from the first trip to Alaska to our last trip, which included Puerto Rico, so literally far northwest to far southeast and a lot of points in-between and then Canada and Mexico was very, very illuminating to most of us. Although of course all of us came from different places around the country and its not that we were strangers to any place outside of Washington, but by and large orientation in our professional lives had been in Washington. So to talk about the work that we did and to get the perspective from people from the heartland of America, be it from southern California, the Pacific Northwest, Alaska or down in Florida was very very useful because after all these were people that we represent in one way or the other. In the broadest sense that was very valuable. In terms of things that resonated with me personally, I would say the trip to Alaska, which had only started, I think we were the third group to take this week long trip to Alaska where we had our own aircraft, it was a DC Air National Guard Boeing 727. It didn't have a far range. I think we had to make two refueling stops to even get to Alaska, but it allowed us to get around Alaska in a way that we never could have done commercially.

In the space of seven days we went to Nome, the northern Prudhoe Bay where the oil pipeline starts, Juneau, Anchorage, Fairbanks, and Kodiak Island, all within literally I think it was only six days. It was quite a pace, but we met Native Americans. We met academics. We met state legislators in Juneau. We had a home stay on Kodiak Island, where we were each farmed out to spend the night with a resident family. We saw the bears on Kodiak Island. The only thing that we missed because of the weather, we were due to do a flyover over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge that even in 1991 was a hot topic, which continues to be debated today. We also were supposed to fly to the southern terminus of the pipeline and because of weather we were not allowed to do that, we couldn't land so instead we made an unscheduled stop in Sitka and saw the remnants of the old Russian settlement and went to a sanctuary where trained personnel took care of eagles that had been injured flying into high tension wires. Some of them were injured so badly that they could never fly again and those birds remained in the refuge, but others that were not so severely injured were treated medically and then set free into the wild. We saw a lot of the eagles up close.

That was, you know, Alaska is a place that for most Americans still conjures up a sense of romance and remoteness and whatever and some of that was the case, but its just a vast, vast area to fly from the north to the south. We were in the air three hours and we also were struck and were told in no uncertain terms that the Alaskans have a strong orientation to the Far East and that Tokyo was closer to Anchorage than New York was. Now, I'm not sure that's true or not, but that's what they claimed.

Q: Yes.

BOORSTEIN: Of course in the summertime they have direct links from Alaska to Siberia and so from the standpoint of getting the perspective of the Alaskans, now Alaska is a state in the United States, but yet they view themselves as a place that some people I think would like to see be in a separate country at least that was the view then. It wasn't a breakaway, a thing like you have or perhaps have to a certain extent in Canada, but nonetheless, they had a very strong disdain for Washington. It was a place that was far away. They felt a sense of smugness if you will because they had the oil revenue so they felt that they could get along just fine, but yet it was a little bit of a paradox because they still said that we're Americans. That left me with a very, very strong impression.

The other thing that I also found to be remarkably meaningful to me was that it was a tradition in the senior seminar that each student craft an individual project for the month of February and there was a little bit of money that was made available I think $1,500 to defray travel and personal expenses. There was no requirement that you physically leave Washington, although it was their preference that you would find something to do outside of Washington that would again be part of this broadening experience. It didn't have to necessarily be in the United States although the bulk of the people did do things in the U.S. In my case my idea emanated from an experience that we did in the fall where we were also obliged on an individual basis to spend two or three days volunteering. One person hung out in Dupont Circle and basically talked to and helped and bought lunch and dinner for homeless people or maybe would go to a shelter and do whatever to get a sense of what is the plight of the homeless. How can you interact with them and whatever. Our FBI rep went to Australia and spent time doing liaison work with his counterparts in Australia. Someone else, the USIA guy, did a stint as a disc jockey for a small radio station in Colorado through connections that he had. In my case my volunteer work, I volunteered with the Jewish Social Services agency in Rockville, Maryland, whose main focus was assisting Jews who had emigrated from the Soviet Union. I guess in 1991 it was already the former Soviet Union and some of them didn't speak English all that well, most of whom or all of whom really didn't know quite how to interact with the whole U.S. bureaucracy, the welfare, how do you rent an apartment, how do you get insurance, all these things that are alien to an immigrant.

I was basically helping an individual. I took an individual to apply for his driver's license. One morning I spent making a bunch of phone calls devising sort of a directory for Montgomery County of different welfare agencies that people could use because you know, this was prior to the Internet. You just couldn't go up and do a Google search and get all these things. There was no Yellow Pages on-line or whatever. So, I did that and while I was there one of the people I worked with knew someone else who worked for a non-profit organization that was doing the same thing to help the Jews that were immigrating from the former Soviet Union to Israel and looking at the social impact and whatever. This was in October that I did this volunteer work. One thing led to another and between October and February I did some planning and did some, made some contacts.

I ended up going to Israel for a month as the guest of the mayor of a small town in the northern Galilee. There was a town between Haifa and Nazareth and the town had maybe 50,000 people. It was originally settled by immigrants from Morocco and then another wave came in the middle '50s from Argentina. Of course the most recent wave arrived from the former Soviet Union. As a guest of the mayor, I was helped by the deputy director of the office of resettlement and she was originally from Algeria herself and I ended up living in a bed and breakfast situation with an immigrant family from Ukraine and I paid a certain price and they gave me the master bedroom and they slept on the couch and they gave me breakfast. Then I had this program that was set up through this resettlement office. I had rented a car and with this woman from Algeria we traveled all over central and northern Israel from the Lebanese border down through and including Tel Aviv and then east of Jerusalem interviewing people from different government agencies, non-profit organizations, the immigrants themselves. I did a lot of interviews using a tape recorder. I did not speak Hebrew, but I conducted a lot of my interviews in Russian. I remember going to one particular dinner where I was dealing with immigrants from Argentina and I had to do that in Spanish. The woman who was my sponsor being from Algeria, her English wasn't all that good and she found out I could speak French so we spoke French all the time. I was really able to use my various language skills including I think even talking to some Catholic priests in Italian when I was in Jerusalem. One session on the kibbutz talking Polish, so I got sort of everything but my Chinese, which I didn't know yet. It was just fascinating to interact with these people and it turned out that this one branch of my family that I had from the Soviet Union that I mentioned earlier had since I had left the Soviet Union and immigrated to Israel and so I spent some time with them and they were living in Haifa. Through them I actually had an interview with a lot of the Ph.D. level Russian scientists who had immigrated and were working at the Technion, which is a very famous technical institute in Haifa. That was really the high point of the experience and basically I was looking at trying to get a sense of what all the issues were in the Middle East. Being Jewish and being a Foreign Service Officer at the time, the views of the Arabists in the State Department were pretty paramount and many of my colleagues were openly kind of hostile towards Israel and what they saw as perceived aggressiveness and inflexibility in dealing with the Palestinian issue, etc. I was trying to understand a little bit more about that point of view and it was very helpful.

Q: While you were doing these interviews were you able to talk to Arab Israelis?

BOORSTEIN: It wasn't my focus. I did during my visit to Jerusalem. Of course my visit to Israel had to be cleared by the embassy because I was still, I traveled under a diplomatic passport and whatever and there was some sensitivity because I was out and about in the country on my own asking all these questions. As a matter of fact the Israeli intelligence service contacted the embassy during my time there and wanted to know if they were aware that one of their diplomats was running about the country asking all these questions. I kind of took that as a compliment, I was being pretty effective, but I did it in order to get that different perspective, I'm glad you asked that, the consulate in Jerusalem set up a dinner, one of the American officers had me over for dinner. He invited over some Palestinian contacts as well as I think a couple of FSNs who were Arab Israelis and we had quite a spirited discussion where their frustrations and their point of view were expressed and I appreciated that.

Q: I was wondering if you got a feel for the settlement policy and seeing this as a collision over a limited amount of space, but you keep trying.

BOORSTEIN: Well, as I recall, the extent of the settlements into the territories that were conquered in the '67 War had not reached its pinnacle in 1991, '92. I was there in February 1992. Nor had the sense of the creation of a separate Palestinian state reached that level of maturity. The Oslo Accords were a number of years later for example. There was unrest in the occupied territories. The embassy did not want me to go to the occupied territories and I did not.

Q: Gaza?

BOORSTEIN: I did not go to Gaza. It just wasn't, like I said it wasn't the focus and the feeling was you know, I should stay away from those particular areas. The embassy itself was sensitive.

Q: I would think Mike that coming from a Jewish background going in a country, the Jewish settlers in a place where there's great dispute. It can only help but reinforce the ethnic biases and all that.

BOORSTEIN: Not necessarily. I don't agree with that. I mean I think that the people I spoke with were not, were primarily, well, I spoke to the Israeli government officials, social service agencies, non-profit people that were supporting the needs of the newcomers and I was speaking to the newcomers about how they felt about being in the new country and what it was like as Jews and how they felt about leaving the former Soviet Union, etc. My focus was to make the report a fairly tight one I didn't have that much of this political overlay or overview. I certainly heard a lot about it and got opinions from people, but I was mainly looking at it from sort of a social economic aspect, but of course the political, by policy, the government wanted these people to come, to help them demographically.

Q: Yes.

BOORSTEIN: They became a force. You know, I met Natan Sharansky in Jerusalem and chatted with him a little bit. He was very much an advocate of these people coming over and getting into becoming Israelis and then contributing.

Q: And also establishing settlements.

BOORSTEIN: Exactly. I didn't delve into that. I didn't feel I had the background to give in a space of three, three and a half weeks to do an in-depth analysis of it. Certainly the Arab Israelis, the Palestinians that I talked to were obviously resentful of the settlements and they felt that it was their country, too, so it was some of the classic conflicts that exist today in a less organized fashion was certainly present. There were no ready expressions of you know, I have the magic solution. It was just a very good experience for me to have and to carry away with me and it was just enjoyable. I remember thanks to the administrative counselor in Tel Aviv I ended up spending the night in the ambassador's suite at the King David Hotel. That's when Tom Pickering was the ambassador and the admin officer said, "Ambassador Pickering won't be in Jerusalem that night. We pay around all year round to have this suite at the King David. If you'd like to stay there, be our guest." So, I stayed in this lovely suite. I slept in Tom Pickering's bed. But, no, clearly it was very worthwhile and I still keep in touch with some of the Israelis that I met there.

Q: Did you have any feel for both the new immigrants and the Israeli citizens that bringing immigrants that had been brought up under the Soviet system. They might be Jewish, but they were also the new communist man or woman, or whatever you want to call it. I mean they come out of the system. Did they feel that this was going to change the force different than what they already had in Israel?

BOORSTEIN: Well, I tell you, my sense now and it was then, was that their immigrant experience was pretty much in line with those that we know that have taken place in our own country. A lot of these people left to try to up the odds that their children would have a better life. It wasn't so much a sense that they were discriminated against as Jews in the former Soviet Union. Certainly in some cases that did happen. They mostly did not have any strong religious identity as Jews, more of an ethnic identity and some of them left because they had a yearning to learn more about their religious backgrounds and heritage and felt it would be safer to do it in Israel and they had the opportunity to leave so they did. Like I said I think the fundamental theme that was common across the board was we're doing this to have a better life for our children and let them live openly as practicing Jews. You have to realize that one of the conclusions that I reached or one of the things that I hadn't realized before I went is the extent that by and large the vast majority of Jews in Israel are highly secular. They're not all that observant. I had sort of known that, but it really struck home the extent that that was the case. There were even conflicts within Israeli society among the Jews over what the secular Jews felt was the inordinate amount of power that the Orthodox Jews had within the legal system and the social system in Israel. Of course a far greater percentage of the more zealous Jews were the settlers in the occupied territories. We see today with the efforts to kick them out just how fanatical some of them have been.

Q: Somebody who I think was in Jerusalem said they thought that often they were tall, bearded people from Long Island who were very fanatic in their religion and in the occupied territory, the settlers.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, but again on the other side of the coin in talking to the family I was living with there was some ambivalence. They had two teenage sons. While they wanted a better life for their children they were also fearful of the military and the draft and when I was there, there were a couple of soldiers who were killed who were immigrants from The Former Soviet Union. That was the downside. Of course some of the older people didn't want to learn Hebrew, didn't want to interact, they stayed in their little enclaves, talking Russian and they were mainly the elderly. This couple that I lived with they had these teenage boys. I think both of them had their parents and then there was even a great grandmother on the scene. We had all these generations and I remember going to one of the grandparents' apartments and there was the elderly mother and it was like all these generations that were there. Anyway it was a very remarkable experience and I really enjoyed it.

Q: When you left the senior seminar, this was '92, where did you go?

BOORSTEIN: Okay, well, during the fall of the senior seminar we had to bid on onward assignments and that's when I assigned to go to Beijing as the administrative counselor via a year of Chinese language. I was quite excited about that. I had never served in the Far East. As a matter of fact the only time I'd ever been to the Far East was that year at the senior seminar, our daughter had graduated from college at the University of Virginia the previous June and went overseas as a teacher to Japan under what's called the JET Program, Japanese Educational Exchange Program for Teachers. She was living near Tokyo and over the Christmas break the senior seminar shut down as all of the Foreign Service Institute did and so my wife and I flew to Tokyo and spent a couple of weeks in Japan and went around by train. Our daughter took us around and she already spoke a good deal of Japanese and at that point I already knew that I was due to go to Beijing. I was quite excited about that. The seminar ended in June and language didn't start until August and I had to figure out what to do because I didn't want to have to take annual leave and so through contacts in the European bureau I was sent to Warsaw for a month to be the acting administrative counselor because the other fellow had left and the new guy hadn't come in yet. I was quite delighted to do that because I had been the admin counselor in Warsaw from 1986 to 1988, so I went there after having been gone for four years and in the ensuing four years of course communism fell throughout Eastern Europe and I think Lech Walesa was the president and it was a whole different world. I spent a lovely month in Warsaw helping to run the administrative section. The new airport had opened and one of the things that I accomplished while I was there was working with the airport authorities to establish procedures in the new facility for our diplomatic courier. Typically the courier would fly up to Vienna and do an airport exchange. He would offload his classified bags and pick up what it was that we had to send out and turn around and take the flight back to Vienna. It was a different facility and it worked differently because you had the new airport. We had to hammer out a new procedure of when to notify them, how to notify them, where the bags would be taken through. How the courier's visa would be stamped that he arrived in Poland and he turned around and left. I dealt with people in the foreign ministry as well as the airport and I was struck by how friendly everybody was and how they all loved Americans where four years ago we were the bad guys. I mean the Polish people always by and large loved Americans, but the official Polish government had to sing a different tune. There were even some people in the foreign ministry that we had pretty good evidence that in the communist days that they were part of the secret police apparatus and now they were sitting there as regular diplomats under a democratic Poland. It was rather unique. I enjoyed that experience immensely and I got down to Krakow, I took a day trip down there to our consulate down there. That was a nice interlude before I started language training.

The experience of studying Chinese, which was the sixth language that I studied during my Foreign Service career, was extremely difficult. I was 46 years old. I was among the, I wasn't the oldest, but I think there were maybe two other people who were older than I was. Like it or not that was a factor in how quickly I could learn the language.

Q: They say that by the time you hit the early '20s it's almost not too late, but the ability falls rapidly.

BOORSTEIN: But it was clear that the younger officers, even if they had the same level of language aptitude as I did, they absorbed it much more readily. They were able to remember all the characters much more quickly and it was very, very hard work and you had your five hours of classes a day and typically I would not leave at 4:00. I'd stay behind and spend another hour in the language lab and every evening after dinner I would say goodbye to my wife. I'd go downstairs to my little study with a tape recorder and again more lab time and repeat, repeat, repeat and we had homework every night. We had to prepare something either based, obviously as we went further along we had more and more words and grammatical structures to work with, but whether it was writing a little prï¿½cis what we had heard in the area studies portion and rendering it into Chinese or every Monday we had to deliver a little report on what we did over the weekend. That was the standard theme of course. That was the way it was for almost every language that you studied at FSI. It was difficult. I had the added complication in that in early November of 1992 my mother passed away quite suddenly and so I had to take off about a week to attend the funeral and deal with other family things. That set me back a bit, but I recovered. I kept up with things pretty well and roughly two-thirds of the students who were studying Chinese with me went on and studied a second year in Taipei and it was amazing when these people actually arrived in China following the second year and I would hear them speak Chinese, how significantly better they were than I was after a year. I was a little jealous because I'd only had the opportunity of one year and in the ranking system typically if you have a good language aptitude and you apply yourself you can get to the two level in speaking after one year and they expect you to get to the three level after two years. It's a big climb and leap between the two and the three.

I used my Chinese quite a bit while I was there, not so much the written Chinese. Being the administrative counselor you really didn't have to read the newspapers and certainly not even those who studied for two years were ever expected to write anything in Chinese. Certainly they were expected to read the press and read things and be able to follow it. I could rudimentally read a menu and I could read some headlines in the newspaper but that was about it. My speaking was okay. If there was anything that required some sensitivity or precision in the foreign ministry we would rely on an interpreter. Typically they would have one or the embassy would, we would bring our own. This would be a Chinese national. I remember in one instance where I took my interpreter the Chinese national to the foreign ministry and I said something and he put it into Chinese. I knew enough Chinese that I was able to turn to him and say, "No, you didn't get that right, I didn't say it that way." I felt very proud that I. Whether he did it on purpose because he thought he could get away with it or perhaps he didn't understand correctly, I don't know, but I really was able to get that corrected.

Serving in China in 1993 to 1996 was an interesting period of time. The opening up of China to the West economically was just on the verge or just started its major, major explosion. The embassy had to react to a vastly increasing workload. A lot of high level visits and congressional delegations. A great deal of business facilitation, our foreign commercial service office was quite big and it grew. I was quite active in the work of the international school of Beijing. I was one of the two appointed members of the school board. The school had an enrollment of 600 and a backlog, a waiting list of 500 students. That created enormous pressure to add to the capacity of the school and I was involved in that project. We basically imported a whole modular campus to be put on about a third of a playground in order to accommodate the backlog and within the one year to the next we eliminated the waiting list and it was a great accomplishment. I worked very closely with the ambassador and worked closely with the other school board members and obviously with the school administration and the Chinese authorities, both at the foreign ministry because the school was chartered as a diplomatic school and with the Beijing municipal government.

I traveled to all of our consulates within the first few months of my arrival and we had great challenges on the facilities side all over China. The challenges and shortfalls that we're just now starting to meet with the construction of our new embassy in Beijing, which is about halfway done, and with plans to start building our new consulate general complex in Guangzhou. I was heavily involved in a series of bilateral negotiations with the Chinese on these property issues to give us a new site for building our new embassy. There were previous rounds of property talks that had given us a small site in what was called the third diplomatic zone, which was the new area in the northeast quadrant of the city near the beginning of the airport road. After the bombings in Africa after I left, it was deemed that that site was too small because the embassy required more setback. We had to end up thinking we'd use that to be the ambassador's residence. There were other thoughts that we could use it as a recreational facility. At the end of the day we traded our value in that land to get a larger site in the same zone for the embassy. That happened after I left.

Q: Well, while you were setting up all these new sites and all this, when you were working in Moscow, everything seemed to be dominated by security, eavesdropping and all that. How stood things when you were in China?

BOORSTEIN: Oh, exactly the same. The threat level was viewed at the same level as it was in the Soviet Union. The need, well, basically, we operated under the assumption that our embassy was insecure and at the end of the day the only way to fix that was to build a whole new facility and that's what we're doing now in Beijing. Even though we had secure conference rooms where we would go, the view was it was better than nothing, but not as good as it really needed to be. We were very much disciplined to the need to segregate the Chinese national staff from the areas we worked in. You had your secure spaces that were only for the Americans and the Chinese were not allowed in. Of course in the chancery the Marine guard barred the entrance from having people go upstairs which was totally an American area. I worked on another compound which had the consular section and I'm trying to think, yes, the consular section and a lot of the administrative operations and we had the Chinese staff back in my little area, my immediate office and that of my deputy and the secretary was an area where the Chinese staff was not allowed to come back. They could come under escort. You could invite a Chinese Embassy person to your office for a meeting, but that person could not go in and out on his or her own.

You know the same kind of regime that operated that if we had a sensitive personal issue at home and we wanted to have a discussion with our spouse we were allowed to come in and use the secure conference room to have that kind of a discussion. We were told not to keep any sensitive personal papers at home, but in our office in the safe. So, there was that great deal of sensitivity. Of course the planning for our new embassy and in the case of Guangzhou just like we did in Moscow, there are only top secret cleared American workers building those parts of the compound that are only going to be used by Americans for the classified work.

Stu, I'm going to end this now because it is 10 minutes to 2:00 and I want to catch the shuttle back to Rosslyn.

Q: All right. The shuttle is not until 20 past.

BOORSTEIN: No, isn't there, did I miss the 10 of?

Q: Yes.

BOORSTEIN: Oh, shoot. Well, all right, you want to take a little break. Do you want to shut off the machine and let me take a. Still in Beijing.

Q: Yes.

BOORSTEIN: My preoccupation as the administrative counselor as I was saying was on the facilities side and being a member of the school board. Let me talk about the school board experience a little bit because that really was a dominant part of my life and again it helps to illustrate some of the roles that Foreign Service diplomatic people play in our more important overseas posts. The International School of Beijing was founded in 1980 as a diplomatic school for the children from five nations, the U.S., the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In 1980 there were no students whose parents were expatriate business people because there just weren't any there, very, very few. It started off in an embassy apartment and then it gradually grew to the size where they had to get leased quarters. The school was housed in a housing complex that included apartments and a Holiday Inn and like I said the capacity of the school had maxed out at about 600. We did this modular campus to increase the capacity, basically doubled the size, had a new multipurpose building, had a new cafeteria. It had new two story modular classrooms that basically became the middle school and the upper school, the high school. Until I arrived until 1994 it was the only school in Beijing that taught in English for foreigners. Subsequent to that and again as part of the critical mass of people, the number of expatriates as well as the diversification, new English language schools started up afterwards, but only the international school retained, it was the only high school available in Beijing.

I was on the school board for three years. The second year I was the vice chairman and the third year I was the chairman of the board. The efforts got into serious high gear to find a new campus and to find funding to build and design a new school. In order to do that we had to get the permission of the Chinese government to move the school. The Chinese government took advantage of that request to basically eliminate the school's diplomatic status eventually, since the vast majority of students were the children of expatriate business people rather than diplomats. In order to place the modular campus, the school had to use about one-third of a playground that it had leased from the Chinese government. This was the summer of 1994. The previous fall the International Olympic Committee was voting on which country and which city was going to get the Olympics for the year 2000. China was advocating like crazy to have it in Beijing in the year 2000. That was the year that there was a non-binding resolution in congress that said that the U.S. position was not in favor of granting the games to Beijing because of China's poor human rights record. As a result, in China there were a lot of strong anti-American and anti-British sentiment that led up to the vote. This was in October or November of 1993 and by a very close vote the nod went to Sydney to get the Olympics in the year 2000. The mayor of Beijing at the time a gentleman named Chen Xi Tong was very resentful of the fact that Beijing didn't get the Olympics and blamed the Americans. He was no longer mayor I believe by the spring of 1994, but he was still a senior party official and he retained his title I think of being head of the committee for the Chinese Olympic Committee. We learned from pretty reliable sources that he was behind a unilateral action that the Chinese city government took. We had started the construction of the modular campus. We laid down the foundation on which these modular buildings would lie and one of the buildings was going to be very near the fence line separating the school's property from the highway leading to the airport. Well, this former mayor was able to enforce a decision that expropriated a strip of land no more than 20 or 30 feet wide from the fence inward, which they claimed was needed as a green space. So, therefore the amount of room available to build the modular campus shrunk. We literally had to dig up the footings that were placed and move them 30 feet inward and use up even more of the playground to accomplish this. There were all kinds of protests from the diplomatic missions that were the sponsors of the school, but to no avail. There was no due process here. It was not like it was an action of some sort of land commission that the school could appeal. It was simply a bullying tactic on the part of the Chinese government.

Q: Well, apparently we keep seeing articles about this all the time that the communist officials use power without redress.

BOORSTEIN: That's right. That was done and so the school was smarting from that. We got the campus done and whatever, but ultimately a year and a half later when we were looking to get new land and to get the Chinese government to agree through basically the Beijing municipal government that we could move, the foreign ministry got into the act and basically then unilaterally lifted the school's duty free status and then said that the customs authorities were free to bill the school for the duty on the imported classrooms after the fact. Well, the embassies protested and basically the school with the backing of the U.S. Embassy and the others refused to pay the bill and I don't believe the bill was ever paid. It was a very Chinese solution in that the Chinese basically said "we have the right to charge duty," and the American Embassy I believe said, "we acknowledge your right to charge the duty, but we also inform you of our right to refuse to pay it on behalf of the school." So, it reached an impasse. In any event the school did get its land, did get its permission to move. The capital fee levy was imposed. It took a great deal of selling to the parent organizations that were not as supportive of the school or they didn't support their parents to the extent that the American government did. At the end of the day we got through. The school was built and I was invited to the dedication ceremony in April of 2002. I saw this beautiful campus and it was a great feeling of satisfaction that I was very instrumental at its beginning.

Q: Well, we'll stop at this point.

BOORSTEIN: Yes.

Q: We've talked about the school.

BOORSTEIN: There's a lot more to talk about.

Q: Okay well, if you'll just remember where we were on this and then we'll talk more about the school in Beijing.

BOORSTEIN: Right.

Q: Today is the 22nd of May, 2006. Mike, you were in Beijing from when to when?

BOORSTEIN: I arrived in August of 1993 and left at the end of July of 1996. It was a three-year tour.

Q: We're a little unclear of where we left off the last time. We know we talked about the school. I suppose, why don't we talk about the living there.

BOORSTEIN: Okay, let me certainly touch on that. To put the assignment into context. In 1993 China was 10 plus years into their reaching out to the West for economic development and it was a very active period with lots of Western firms from the U.S., from Western Europe, from Australia, Japan and Taiwan sending business experts to stimulate trade with China. As I spoke about the school this was reflected in a demand for more seats in the International School of Beijing and it also led to the start up of other international schools. This was a very typical pattern when you're in international education as you equate the growth of foreign investment into; you can almost extrapolate it on a straight-line curve of the growth of enrollment at international schools. So, very much moving away from the school situation, this was a period of growth. You had IBM, AT&T, Motorola to name three very big American corporations at the time that were looking for business in China, mainly as a manufacturing base. Motorola has and had a very large plant in Tianjin, which is the port area about maybe 40 miles northeast of Beijing as a plant that produced cell phones and I believe it still is doing so.

There was a great deal of interest. A lot of companies were there. Most of which were not making any money during the time that I was there, but they looked at it as a long term investment and they were there to get a foot in and to be successful. As another reflection of the growth of the U.S. presence specifically, the American Chamber of Commerce chapter in Beijing grew significantly and as a matter of fact once a month the American ambassador spoke to the AmCham to give his perspective on the overall geopolitical economic environment that would enhance or detract from the ability of the American firms to do business. It was a very close relationship between the embassy and the resident American community. That was reflected also by the fact that for a number of years in addition to the representational event of the 4th of July, you know, our national day, there was a community picnic that through, well through 1996 was always held on the grounds of the American Embassy, well, with one exception it was held at another location one year, but the Chinese authorities made it so difficult because they were worried about having a large gathering of people whether it was Westerners or Chinese because a lot of the Western companies would bring their Chinese employees and there was a great deal of concern among the police forces, the municipal authorities that there shouldn't be such a large gathering. That was a one-time shot and after that that occurred I think right before I arrived, it went back to being on the grounds of the American Embassy. Now after I left I understand that that whole thing was disbanded because there were so many people that the grounds of the American Embassy could no longer accommodate them. It was a way that the American firms could use their influence, fly in hot dogs, and fly in kegs of beer. We would even have non-American companies like Lufthansa, they provided the beer, and McDonalds provided the burgers and the hot dogs and whatever. Of course, there was a nominal charge.

I recall that in 1996 the committee and I, I was on the committee because I was the administrative counselor, brought in a singing group that they weren't the original group but they had bought the right to use their names and this was the Platters, which was a black group which had been very popular in the '50s and the '60s so they came, the current version and they sang in the same style as the Platters and it was kind of neat. We had wanted to bring in John Denver, but the Chinese wouldn't give him a visa. I guess they viewed him as a left wing radical. There were some other singing groups that were brought in and it was really a very good event. I'm offering this as just an example of the nature of the expatriate community, which has grown significantly more since then.

Q: How were living conditions both in the embassy personnel and for the expatriate community at that time?

BOORSTEIN: Well, it underwent a change during the three years that I was there and that change accelerated after I left. Virtually 100% of our staff until about 1992, '93 lived in apartments that were provided by the services arm of the ministry of foreign affairs known as the Housing Services Corporation, which was an arm of the diplomatic services bureau.

Q: It sort of replicated the Soviet system.

BOORSTEIN: Exactly. An exact mirror image of what was called UPDK (pronounced ooh pe de kah), which in Russian meant the Organization for Services to the Diplomatic Community, you do the translation of the acronym from Russian into English. In Chinese, they refer to it as the Diplomatic Services Bureau. So, these were Soviet style apartments. Lots of cockroaches, just like it was in Moscow when I served there. You had a garbage chute and everybody just taped up the garbage chute and never used it as a way to keep the cockroaches from encroaching. Your neighbors could be from any number of countries and of course, their own lifestyles and hygiene habits could vary. Old, rickety elevators that were often broken. Lobbies where you typically didn't have good lighting and light bulbs were always out. I remember we stocked up the commissary with these long life light bulbs that had the little coils. You just plug them into a regular outlet and they would last for months and months. I got the bright idea, I'll just buy one, I'll put it right outside the apartment, and I won't have to change the bulb every so often. Well, that lasted about a week and then it was stolen. You're laughing because you knew exactly what I was going to say, so so much for that. We used them inside the apartment. The apartments were not well insulated. The ubiquitous coal dust got through the windows and got onto everything. It was a constant battle in using our Chinese maid to dust and to clean and wash and so goodness knows how much of that stuff we inhaled. Of course when we moved back to the States we had to literally wash everything that came out of those boxes because no matter how hard we tried it was still that oily black dust that got into everything.

We would buy plastic covers for our computers, one to put over the monitor, another to put over the hard drive, another to put over the printer. When we weren't using it, we would put those on. About every three months we would literally soak those covers in a solution of soap and Clorox bleach to clean the covers because they got so dirty themselves. Goodness knows what it is that went into our lungs and that was a good reason why we got the 15 to 20% hardship pay was that factor alone. We were told that as bad as the pollution was it was even worse in the '70s. The Chinese had gone through a major program in Beijing to relocate industry outside of town to convert the individual coal burning heating arrangement that they would have into apartments to more centralized natural gas. As a result, the pollution as bad as it was, was not as bad as it had been 15 or 20 years before I got there.

Pollution also was a seasonal thing. In the winter, it was particularly bad because of course you had the coal burning. You also had dry climatic conditions. It seldom snowed in the winter even though it was extremely cold. You would often go from October to April with no precipitation at all and you would have cold blustery winds that would come in off of the Gobi Desert and that would bring in dust. The dust would mix with the oil grit of the coal and it would create this oily airborne pollution. In the summer where you would in-between your torrential downpours because you got 90% of your rain, let's say 40 or 50 inches of rain a year, but you would get it between June and September, you'd get 10 inches a month. It was like you were in Panama for God's sake. It would just come down in sheets. When that happened of course it would clean the air, but then often in-between the rain showers it was sort of like being in a bowl, like in Los Angeles, with the inversion with the humidity and you'd have a lot of pollution then as well. It was not a very healthy environment.

Q: What about just getting out and around? I'm not talking about fancy trips. I'm talking about living in the city.

BOORSTEIN: Well, it wasn't bad. The apartment we were in was four blocks from the embassy so I would either walk or ride my bicycle. On occasion I will confess I would drive if I knew I needed to use the car and I didn't want to bother the motor pool or for personal reasons or I was lazy or I was late or any combination. I would drive the four blocks and park the car. My wife taught at the international school and she would either drive in some sort of a car pool arrangement or she'd get a ride with somebody else. For her that was about a half an hour ride in ever increasing traffic, a lot of and of course you have to cope not only with the cars, but with the bicycles. It was a real challenge to drive. I was just in Beijing in March on this job I was just telling you about that I'm now doing and the traffic was exponentially worse than it was when I was there. I had been back as recently as 2002, but even in the last four years, you could tell. They've opened up new highways and this and that. It would take an hour to get anywhere if you're going across town. That's the price of becoming a modern economy and people now want to replace their bicycles with cars as they, you know, wanted a truly middle class life and they could afford it.

When I was there, we had a little commissary that sold dry goods, coffee and dry cereal and jelly and peanut butter, flour, sugar and soft drinks and beer and liquor and whatever. There were diplomatic stores like in the former Soviet Union where they would take hard currency, but by and large, you could go to markets and go to the butcher and go to little supermarkets that were in the malls that had been built in conjunction with luxury hotels. There was a store called Watsons I believe, which was like a Hong Kong British chain that had an outlet in the mall by the China World Hotel. The people there spoke English and it was like you were in a little mini mart and did a lot of shopping there. We had a maid that was provided again by the diplomatic services bureau and we paid her salary directly to someone in the embassy who took care of her benefits, but every so often, I would give Mrs. Lee I don't know $20 and she would keep the refrigerator stocked with fresh fruits and vegetables. She'd give me an accounting, which she would write out in Mandarin. I could speak Chinese, but my ability to read Mandarin was very limited. I wasn't a language officer and really had to be into it and have your 3/3, which I had a 2 level speaking and a 1/1+ in reading. I never got to the point, I mean I could write in Pinion using the English letters and she understood that you know, about this is what I want or she would just in general buy fruits and vegetables. That $20 would last forever. When we'd go to the market my wife or I, we would get taken because they would treat us differently than they would our maid. We sort of got into that habit of having her do that shopping.

The first year I was there my wife did not come with me. We just had some personal reasons why she stayed behind to help our daughter get settled in New York and for a variety of other reasons and so I used the maid to cook meals for me and I often would go home for lunch because it was so close by or she would cook and leave it there and I would just heat it up and have it for dinner. It was pretty good food. It was Chinese obviously, but she had a nice repertoire and would buy the stuff and sometimes it would last for two or three meals and even after my wife came, we had her cook several times. We used her if we would entertain at night and pay her some extra and she would stay on. She rode her bicycle. It probably took her an hour to ride her bicycle. She probably made it faster than being in a car. It was a reasonably comfortable lifestyle. In terms of health care, we had a resident doctor in the embassy, a regional medical officer and his territory was all of our posts in China and Ulan Bator, Mongolia. Towards the end of our tour, his region was expanded to include our consulate general in Vladivostok. It took him two days to get there and two days to get back and it was still considered more expeditious to have him do it than the regional medical officer in Moscow. You'd have to go to Seoul overnight and take a plane the next day into Vladivostok and do it in reverse on the way back.

Q: Were you harassed, you know, we've had over the years lots of stories about the KGB harassing American diplomats and all. How heavy was the hand of the Chinese security service?

BOORSTEIN: Speaking personally they didn't bother me at all. Maybe they felt I didn't know as much as a political officer or whatever, but in terms of the embassy as a whole, we went on fairly high security alert shortly after I arrived because the international Olympic committee was voting on which city was going to get the Olympics in the year 2000. This was in the fall of 1993 and Beijing was competing for it mightily and that was the year that Sydney was awarded the games. So, there was a lot of anti-China feeling in the congress because of their human rights level, the Chinese human rights record. There was a sense of congress resolution as I recall against China being awarded the Olympics for Beijing in 2000. The Chinese were not happy with that and so on the day that the vote was held I believe it was the evening in Beijing we took some security precautions. We coordinated with the Brits and the Australians and some others. We for example took all of our motor pool vehicles, which we were very comfortable in parking on the street overnight and moved them inside our compound. We advised people to stay home, low profile. China of course did not get the games, Sydney did. There were no riots. There was a lot of anti-American rhetoric in the press and this, that and the other thing, but nothing that was taken out on us. I mean unlike whatever the year was where during the campaign in the former Yugoslavia where there was all this NATO bombing and we inadvertently bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade and killed several of their people.

Q: Were you there when that happened?

BOORSTEIN: No. That was in '99, 2000, something like that and of course that was very serious. Our poor ambassador was basically held hostage in the embassy for three or four days. There were all kinds of pictures of paint being splattered and rocks being thrown and that was part of the impetus where we felt that it was very important for us to have land with the proper setback to build our new embassy. None of that, I'm trying to think in terms of other people in the embassy. Some of our military attachï¿½s that of course it was their job to push the envelope when they went out on their trips and if the Chinese caught them being too close to military installations taking pictures or whatever they would file a protest and in some cases they would kick them out of the country. My sense is that it didn't happen as often as it did when I was in Moscow in the late '70s, early '80s.

Q: How did you find the Chinese Foreign Service Nationals?

BOORSTEIN: By and large, they were very good. They were good at what they did. It was a double-edged sword because you knew that they were planted there and in particular, even when you would have counter intelligence briefings before going overseas, the security officials would have some specific information or had come to some conclusions about a certain number of the local staff that you were basically told to trust less than others. At the same token, I'm not going to name any names here you would still find these people to be very helpful, whether it came to, there were times where we had to get visas for people that were transiting Beijing and they were going to North Korea where of course we had no relations. It was during a time where we were considering establishing relations and there were some of our local staff that were very adept at dealing with the North Koreans at their embassy in Beijing to get the visas. When you want stuff done, they were there and they were helpful. But of course, we were very careful in what we gave them access to. We were very careful because of the category of threat that was established for all of our posts in China. We had certain protocols in place that separated even our unclassified information systems from the Chinese. Our computer center for example was staffed entirely by Americans with security clearances whereas in other countries you could have locals in the computer centers. That certainly was not the case in Beijing. We would have certain floors in the embassy that were totally off limits to the Chinese, except we would let the char force in there in the evenings under escorts by the Marines under escort. As I said we were very careful and it was a regime where the security officer kept. He ran a very tight ship and we had a lot of awareness. We were reminded and if we wanted to have any sensitive conversations at all, we had to use the special rooms that were designed for that purpose. That was just a factor. You just sort of got used to it. You knew you were not in friendly territory.

You also, in dealing with the foreign ministry I recall one instance where I went in there, I forget what the issue was and I, which I typically did, I took one of the DSB employees to be the interpreter. Of course, he was a Chinese national and my Chinese was not fluent by any stretch of the imagination, but I knew enough that I could follow along when he interpreted my comments and there was one case where I stopped him and I said, "No, Mr. Chung, that's not what I said." I repeated it in English. He apologized and he said, "Oh, I heard it differently." Well, you know, I think that's bologna. I think he knew exactly what it is that he wanted to say and he wanted to characterize what I had to say in a different way and I caught him. I was quite gratified that my Chinese was good enough to having picked out that nuance.

Q: Did you have overall responsibility for the administration of our post?

BOORSTEIN: That's right.

Q: How many posts were there and could you characterize what their problems were?

BOORSTEIN: Sure. We had four consulates in China. Our two largest were Shanghai and Guangzhou and the two smaller ones were Shenyang and Chengdu. Shenyang is in northeastern China.

Q: Is that all Dalian or is that?

BOORSTEIN: No. I don't know that it ever went under another name. You're thinking of Port Arthur, not Dalian. Guangzhou was Canton in the old days and that was our largest and it remains our largest consulate. Shanghai a little bit smaller. Chengdu and Shenyang were roughly a quarter of the size each of those other two. They were mainly listening posts. Shenyang being fairly close to the Korean, the North Korean border. Chengdu, which is the capital of Szechwan province where the pandas come from, where the spicy Chinese food comes from, was also the closest post we had to Tibet and that was a major reason why we had our consulate there. At the time and I believe to this day Chengdu remains, we are the only consular presence in Chengdu. No other countries have a presence there. In Shenyang there are other consulates, the Japanese, the North Koreans, I think even the South Koreans have something there. I'm not sure about any other countries.

They each had their own management challenges. Guangzhou was and remains the only post in China that issues immigrant visas. The consular section there is enormous, the biggest we have in China. Southern China being a very economically active area, a booming area, the demand for non-immigrant visas for business purposes for other travel increased enormously. The largest number of immigrant visas that would be issued, would be issued to orphans. American families would go to adopt Chinese children, mainly girls that were abandoned by their families. It was always heartening to go down to Guangzhou and stay at the White Swan Hotel, which was just down the street from where the consulate was. It was basically the same complex. To see all these parents that were there to adopt children and the children were with them while they underwent the formalities. They were basically seeing these kids for the first time and seeing how they interacted and how joyous it was for the most part, to see them and it was very gratifying to see that.

Even on this last trip that I made in March even though the consular section has relocated to a high-rise office building because of the demand for the space they still use the White Swan because the White Swan is used to catering to their needs and still see the parents and the kids. There was one instance where they were taking a group picture by this lovely Chinese fountain in the lobby of the hotel. That's really a major focus of our consulate there, plus of course the consular district that encompasses, that Guangzhou is responsible for, probably has 90, or 100 million people and so that's more than the population of Germany, more than the population of Italy. There's a lot of interest by our consulate staff to get out and about to talk to the provincial authorities to see what's going on with business. Wal-Mart has invested a lot.

Q: It's also the area of special business areas.

BOORSTEIN: Shenzhen, yes, that's the special administrative zone up from Hong Kong. It's a two hour train ride from Hong Kong and it's a very, which I did in March when I was there, the first time I'd done that. It's an easy trip to make.

Q: You didn't mention Hong Kong. Hong Kong did fall under you?

BOORSTEIN: No. Hong Kong, there was a debate while I was there because of the return in 1997, that's when it returned to Chinese control. There was a debate whether administratively it should be brought under the jurisdiction of the ambassador in Beijing or remain an independent consulate. It remains an independent consulate. The government of the Peoples Republic of China under the terms of the return of Hong Kong is responsible for foreign affairs and for defense of Hong Kong. Everything else it retains its independence. Economically primarily. When you fly from Beijing to Hong Kong, still to this day it is an international flight. You go through customs. You get your passport stamped that you've entered the territory of Hong Kong and that will be the case I believe for 50 years. So, for a variety of reasons it was decided that Hong Kong, the consul general will not report to the ambassador in Beijing. The four consulates that we have in China are as I mentioned. We have the right under the Shanghai protocol of I think 1979 to open up a fifth consulate in Wuhan. We have never exercised that right. The Chinese on the other hand have five existing consulates in the U.S., in New York, which is separate from their UN Mission, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Q: Were there any of these consulates cause problems for you?

BOORSTEIN: Well, yes, they required a lot of administrative coordination and help. For example, while I was there the consulate general in Guangzhou underwent a major renovation just to deal with the growing demand in the consular section and they were adding staff and they had to rearrange it to make sure the staff could all be accommodated and we didn't have any ability to at that time to expand as they did now into a separate location, but it ultimately got to that point. We were constantly having teams from Washington and local contractors and other things going on there. Shanghai was the same thing. A lot of pressures for the consular section, which only gave out non-immigrant, visas. They ultimately ended up in a new space in leased quarters for the consular operation. The consulate general in Shanghai was in an older building, which had a lot of maintenance problems. A lot of maintenance challenges. It was a compound in and of itself. There were grounds and you couldn't build onto the grounds. They were protected as historical properties. Shenyang and Chengdu were in compounds that were leased to us under the provisions of an agreement that dated back to 1991 a lot of maintenance problems. When I was there, we were renovating an apartment house for our staff in Chengdu that was then occupied and just a lot. The Chinese just messed up the internal construction and you would have toilet pipes that would not be routed correctly and you would get the products that would come out of a toilet coming out of your bathtub and it required a lot of retrofitting. You would have pipes that would burst in walls and cause all this mildew and mold that would have to be fixed and it was just a constant effort. It was finally dealt with, but one of the things that and we were also supporting the embassy in Ulan Bator. I went and visited there during my tour in November and it was already extremely cold, snow on the ground and they also had space issues. They also had maintenance issues in their chancery. There was constant travel on the part of our general services people. There was constant travel to support their financial systems in making sure that vouchers were properly processed and whatever because their local staff was not very experienced. It was a lot of handholding that went on, plus the administrative Americans in the two smaller posts were largely inexperienced and so you had to keep an eye out on them. I visited Shanghai and Guangzhou probably three or four times while I was there. I visited Chengdu a couple of times and I went to Shenyang only once and to Ulan Bator. You have to keep hands on these kinds of places.

Q: Did you run across any manifestations of the locals, not really warlordism, but the local parties. I'm told that there are a lot of little almost like dukedoms or communist party cadre in places where they control an awful lot of corruption.

BOORSTEIN: Nothing that was really surprising. We had an issue in Shenyang over payment of back rent and that issue, we were ready to pay a certain amount and the Chinese took issue for that, I don't recall whether it was based on an exchange rate or based on whatever and that issue went on for years. We would pay what we thought was right into an escrow account just because we didn't want to have one big bill at the end. These were all local government officials I'm sure were influenced by the party whether they saw an opportunity to make some extra money, I don't know.

Each city where we had a consulate had its own branch of the Diplomatic Services Bureau. They had a system of the foreign affairs offices of the provincial governments were the ones that we'd have to deal with. Sometimes they would listen to Beijing, sometimes they wouldn't. Nothing really jumps out at me to think wow, it was any more significant in one place than the other.

Q: Before we leave here, can you characterize how you felt maybe of some of your fellow officers about China because you know China in some ways is seen as the great power of the 21st Century or a menace. It's got so many internal problems that just keeping it together is going to keep it pretty well inward looking. What were you getting?

BOORSTEIN: Let me comment on that. I wanted to finish a thought that you had asked me a question earlier about living conditions to show what has changed in China that started while I was there. When I got there like I said 100% of us all lived in Chinese government supplied housing. We then, to meet our demand, leased several apartments in commercial high-rise apartment houses. In 1995, we initiated negotiations with the Chinese to hold them accountable to deliver under the 1991 property agreement, which provided our ability to buy land for a future embassy in Beijing and also to buy a site for a future consulate in Shanghai. We also wanted the right to buy commercial real estate. Now in China, being a communist country, you can't own land. The state owns the land. You can rent for up to seventy years by paying a lump sum once at the beginning and that's yours for seventy years. We had been giving the Chinese the right to buy property in the United States for their staff and we basically said we're not going to do that anymore until we get something approaching that in China. We negotiated that in 1995 and we obtained the right to buy commercial property. Well, you go to Beijing today, we do not have anybody living in government provided housing in Beijing. Everybody is either living in apartments or villas in the suburbs that were built to cater to the growing expatriate community that we had bought or that we leased. That has been a huge, huge improvement in post morale. So, I just wanted to make that point and that started on my watch. I am very pleased that I was part of that negotiation. I was on the negotiating team that hammered that one out and it really has had enormous consequences for the morale in the quality of our living conditions.

Anyway to get back to your question, during my tour there was recognition.

Q: This is Tape 7 Side 1 with Mike Boorstein.

BOORSTEIN: It was recognized that the nature of our relationship was growing so rapidly that we could no longer from a Washington perspective try to run it on a shoestring. The mission in Beijing, it's hard to say, was significantly smaller than Moscow for example, which grew by leaps and bounds after the fall of the Soviet Union. It was smaller than our embassy in Tokyo, it was smaller than our embassy in Manila, Bangkok, and certainly Seoul, Korea but it wasn't reflective of here's a nation of 1.2 billion people generating the largest trade deficit for the U.S. of any other country in the world as of yet, and an emerging power. So this was the beginning of efforts to look into the future and figure out what was going to be needed to really be adequately staffed and resourced to conduct relations with China.

So my last year there, in particular, was the beginning of the planning for what lead to the China 2000 program. That was spearheaded largely by the person who replaced me in Beijing, Pat Hayes, when he was the deputy director of the executive office of the East Asia Pacific Bureau and with the support of Undersecretary Moose who visited Beijing in the spring of 1996 and walked away shaking his head at our poor housing, the decrepit state of the chancery and recognized that this was a post that was under funded, under staffed and the facilities were in awful shape. You could only do so much to upgrade it. So that gave strong impetus to the discussions that lead to our purchase of a site for our new embassy and ultimately getting, I think it was $435 million from Congress, the largest single appropriation for an American diplomatic mission ever to build a new embassy. The number of desks the size of that embassy are roughly I'd say at least three times greater than what it was when I was there.

Where we first had a presence in China we had nothing there from '49 to '72 and then when we had the liaison office, when George Bush, Sr. was there in the mid-70s then we opened up our consulate in Guangzhou, we opened up our consulate in Shanghai and ultimately the other two. It was all done on a shoestring and initially our staff stayed in hotel rooms, we purchased the chancery that we still are in today from the Pakistani's, which we took over from them. Then ultimately, I believe, the second big building in our compound, I think the Romanians had it at some point and, of course, all the Communist countries had palatial buildings in Beijing, which now are largely rattling around with hardly anybody in them. Even across the street, the Bulgarians at one point we were negotiating with the Bulgarians to help them move to another place in Beijing so we could take over that compound and combine it and that would be the site of our future embassy. Well, even we recognized that was inadequate, that plus after the bombings in Africa and the change in the set-back requirements we realized, when I was running the Beijing program office, that we couldn't possibly manage our projected growth by building a new embassy on that property.

So we think we have it right although we know that when the day that embassy opens in 2008 it's going to be bursting at the seams already. So we may have to build an annex, we have enough ground on that property to build another building and we probably will do so two or three years later. In terms of the resources that the U.S. government, number of government agencies, the size of the staff, the dollars pouring in to support the infrastructure, the platform for us to conduct diplomacy have just multiplied enormously since I was there in the early and mid 1990s. Like I said, it was just the beginning of the recognition that we no longer could be the pioneers and there was an attitude among some of the early senior diplomats and I won't name any names of, well, we are just here and we just have to roll up our sleeves and do our job and live with these lousy conditions because that's the way it is. We are American diplomats and we don't need to ask for anything.

Well, fine when you got to a point though and maybe this represents a change in the attitude in the Foreign Service and people going abroad in general, that we have positions that were vacant, largely the lower ranking communications staff, the secretarial staff and so a big push was made to improve overall conditions and afterwards they came up with a nice video saying how wonderful it is to serve in China. Well, they were able to show footage of some of these new commercial apartments that we had bought or leased that were really quite nice and so they don't have those recruitment problems anymore that they had when I was there.

So, that really was a watershed moment that I was there, I helped stimulate it, I helped respond to the people and what...again zeitgeist was there where you had sympathetic people in Washington, you had sympathetic people at senior post management and they all, we worked together. I was not there for the crest of the wave but I was there for the building up of it and the resources all came together probably in 1999, 2000, three or four years after I left.

Q: Now tell me back to the question of when you left there in what '90...

BOORSTEIN: '96.

Q: '96. What was, you know, talking to your colleagues and your own feeling whither China particularly vis-ï¿½-vis the United States?

BOORSTEIN: Well you know, we felt that we were in China for the long haul and that we wanted to promote human rights, we wanted to set an example of much like what we did in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. We felt that in the long run maybe democracy will come to China. It was not an overt every day kind of thing that you hear more by this administration but still with our outreach through our press and culture sections, the USIA (U.S. Information Agency) kind of thing, and trying to promote the rule of law into China there was a sense I mean again I don't know that you would see it in any overt unclassified policy documents or even the classified ones but there was a sense of eventually the Communist structure in China will collapse. It was important for us to help them get there without it being destabilizing. So in effect that continues, the engagement bringing Congressional delegations.

The biggest bilateral issue between the United States and China was and probably still remains, Taiwan. In the Fall, no the Spring of 1995, I had been there a little less than two years the U.S. agreed to issue a visa to the president of Taiwan, who was an alumnus of Cornell University, to come to a reunion and I believe event to be a keynote speaker. Well, the People's Republic of China (PRC) reacted violently to this, I think they conducted war games in the straits; they just basically threw a blanket of ice over our relations. This was a time; our ambassador to China J. Stapleton Roy was a man that I respect enormously, personally and professionally. He was a consummate China hand, he was born in China, his parents were missionaries, he spoke fluent Chinese, he grew up in China and left in 1949 as a teenager. He had served earlier as deputy chief of mission back in the late '70s, early '80s and came back as the ambassador in 1991 and was very well liked by the Chinese, well respected by the Chinese officials in the ministry of foreign affairs but here at the end of his four years he left under this enormous cloud because of this polity decision. Whether he agreed or not, I have no idea, to issue this visa. So he left, the foreign minister did give him a farewell dinner and I attended it and we gave him a send off in the embassy. I had a particular closeness with him because he was there at the founding of the international school of Beijing and I was one of his two representatives on the board and I always had ready access to him on any issues involving the school that I needed his advice in dealing with the Chinese authorities and I had almost this unwritten agreement with the deputy chief of mission that I didn't have to go through him, I would just go right to the ambassador. He was very supportive and he left under this cloud and it just took a long time for that ill will of that act to dissipate. So anything whether it was the sale of more military jets to Taiwan or its allowing even a future president of Taiwan to even get a transit visa to go through Los Angeles to fly to El Salvador because Taiwan was very successful in having diplomatic relations with some countries in Central America in lieu of the PRC it was just a constant irritant. So they are just emotional about that little island being a rogue element and they feel that if they don't eventually take it over it's just going to speak terrible things for their ability to be unified.

Q: Well it does give the ruling party something on which to rally I mean they don't really have a hell of a lot of other things going for them.

BOORSTEIN: Right.

Q: Why don't we pick this up the next time in '96?

BOORSTEIN: Right, when I left.

Q: Where did you go?

BOORSTEIN: I was assigned as the deputy director of the Moscow Embassy Building Control Office (MEBCO), which was managing the reconstruction of the embassy in Moscow.

Q: OK, today is the 12th of June 2006. Mike, I want to talk about...give us the background of this Moscow building project and then where you came in and what you were doing.

BOORSTEIN: OK, this is something that I've often felt the Office of the Historian should take it upon themselves to do a special history of how we came to have a secure embassy in Moscow because so much is a reflection of the history of U.S.-Soviet relations. It also is a bit of a microcosm of internal American politics and the interplay among the intelligence community, the Congress and the State Department, but that's another broader topic.

But almost as soon as the U.S. established diplomatic relations with the Soviet regime in the 1930s, there was a sense that we did not have proper facilities to conduct our business. There was an expectation, of course, that everything, every conversation was monitored, there was just no place to have a secure conversation and as the technology developed and we were able to have secure conversations there was still a feeling that even having a secure room within an insecure building was a point of vulnerability. Efforts started, as best as I can recall, in it in some earlier investigations I did into this, in the 1950s, to find a better place.

Now the location of the embassy at the time the construction started of the first phase of the project in 1979 was a building that I believe we occupied in the early 1950s. This was an office building that was built, I believe, in large measure by German prisoners of war that were kept on after 1945. This was a very fine location right along the ring road not too far from the Kremlin and it was a whole complex that had probably at the time it was build all of the American diplomats and staff support people lived on the compound because you had two housing wings, which were known as the south and the north wing, and in the middle, the central wing, was where the office building was but it also had when I arrive in 1978 on assignment, it had the Marine House, it had the defense attachï¿½, the DCM's residence was probably I think that was more in the north wing but a good percentage of the housing even through the '70s and the early '80s was housed on that compound. Of course, you had the office buildings. The ambassadors office was on the tenth floor, the defense attaches office was above it, the communications unit was also on the same floor as the ambassador and then you had the 9th, the eighth and the seventh floor all had the political, economic and science sections and then the sections that dealt with the public and the administrative sections were all on the ground floor. The foreign commercial service was right around the corner but general services had its own compound, the doctor was there, the commissary was there, it was all a self-contained little city. I venture to say that in the '70s when the project was being designed there were maybe 150 Americans, now there are probably 600 Americans in Moscow.

Efforts were made, like I said, into the '50s and the '60s to identify new land. At the same time, the Soviet Union recognized that their embassy on 16th Street was inadequate so things developed where there was a reciprocal requirement for each country to have a new embassy. Well that really was a huge advantage and the two sides started to have talks in the '60s. I can't pinpoint the year but I believe the initial agreement that identified each property that was going to be provided by each country to the other was signed in 1969 and that gave the Soviet Union the Mt. Alto site, which had a lot of criticism because it was very high up, I believe it was a former veterans hospital that was surplused by the government and the land we got was behind the existing embassy to the West and it was a low area but it was a fairly good sized lot and we wanted to build not only a new chancery office building but we wanted to have housing, mainly garden apartments, representational townhouses, we wanted to have a marine house and we wanted to build the American school. The Anglo-American School at the time was located elsewhere in the city and it was a very small school maybe it had 100-120 kids. So it was deemed adequate enough to build and plan for a school that might have 300 kids to allow for growth, so all on that same compound, the housing of about 125 families, which would have housed the bulk of the people that was anticipated.

Well, from 1969 to 1972, I believe it was there were negotiations on an agreement on conditions of construction, which was a document that would set in place the reciprocal regime for giving each country what it needed to build its embassy. So, if we were going to bring in materials and consider containers or big crates to be diplomatic pouches then the Soviets wanted the same privilege for anything that they would bring in. There were certain things that were spelled out in terms of the status of the workers, the inviolability of the sites and the records, the whole regime for who was going to inspect it and to what degree were they going to inspect or was there going to be no inspection of all of certain parts. It was all very detailed. It was hammered out for three years and there was a bit of an impasse and I believe it got to the point that when Kissinger was the national security advisor there was to be a summit with Nixon and Brezhnev and Kissinger let the word be know that to the State Department find a way to get this agreement done. Kissinger didn't want this to be an irritant in the relationship against the backdrop of Nixon's summit, I forget whether it was in Moscow or in Washington or wherever. So as a result, the agreement was signed.

In retrospect, when the first project failed because of a security compromise, it was felt that the haste in which it was finalized played into the Soviets hands because the deal was that a Soviet construction company was to do the site preparation, the excavation and the building of the frame of the office building. We didn't really care about the housing, but the frame of the building, even though we were allowed to have inspectors at the cement plant that made these molds for the framework for the beams, the cement pillars and whatever that went into the structure of the building.

So, it took a while between 1972 and when money was appropriated and the design was done. The U.S. chose Skidmore, Owens and Merrill to be the design firm and groundbreaking was held in October of 1979. The senior U.S. government representative at the groundbreaking was Daniel Boorstin, the Librarian of Congress at the time. (Throughout my adult life, I have been asked innumerable times if I am related to him, given the close spelling of our names. The truth of the matter is that we are not.) There was a big ceremony, the ambassador was Malcolm Toon, it was right before he left and Thomas J. Watson arrived a few weeks later. I remember the big tent, I was there as I was on assignment in Moscow so it was like I came back.

So construction progressed and it wasn't until 1985 when, in a routine test of one of the pillars by a super x-ray machine, that it was discovered that there were devices that had been implanted, and then a further inspection revealed that there were devices implanted in virtually every pillar, and it created a grid like an electrical grid, a passive electrical grid that would allow them to listen in. It was so unsophisticated that it caught everybody by surprise and, in effect, they did it to us even though we had inspectors. So the project was shut down and in the meantime, they had proceeded to build their embassy on Mt. Alto. Evidence came out years later that our own intelligence services, the FBI, I believe, did some things in terms of tunneling and whatever so we weren't exactly pure as the driven snow either. But that was the Cold War.

After 1985, the project stopped in terms of building the chancery. The housing, the school, the marine house were all completed, I would like to say maybe about 1989-1990 and people moved into it but the nine story office building sat there like an abandoned hulk. It had been bricked in and the cement work was there and there were arguments what to do, what to do and finger pointing all over the place. The State Department you know, the CIA was accused of having demonstrated a great deal of hubris that they said, "Oh we don't care what they do to us, we can always overcome it." Well they were wrong. Congress wanted to know how much was it going to cost to fix it, how was it going to be fixed. So all of these different studies and commissions were done.

In 1989, the Department decided that the office of foreign buildings operations, which had managed the first Moscow project, had essentially failed and that they could not be trusted to manage any effort to create secure space in Moscow. So they created, this is when Ivan Selin was the under secretary for management and what was created was a special office that reported directly to the undersecretary for management and that was the Moscow embassy buildings control office or MEBCO. To head MEBCO the Department brought in a retired Navy captain named Carl Cristenson who had a career in the facility service of the Navy, in other words supervising Seabees, building hospitals, renovating bases, and he was an old salt in every sense of the word. He didn't care about the politics of the State Department; he was just there to build a building. So from 1989 to about 1992, he was part of the wrangling and the studies of what do we do with it? Do we tear the building down to the ground? Do we leave it there and make it unclassified and build a classified annex behind it? There was one proposal to move the building, to sell it to Archer, Daniels, Midland, you know the big grain commodities company, to use as a business center, and they were going to jack it up, put it on rollers and transport it to some other part of the city. Well that was kind of absurd, so that never happened. At the end of the day, there was a compromise not to tear down the entire building but to rebuild it, renovate it, deconstruct it down to a certain point so that the point that you built it up from was new construction and would be totally under our control.

Well, in the meantime, the Soviet embassy in Washington was done and then the Soviet Union fell, the Russian Federal was formed, and so we negotiated, after a decision was made, which was called Operation Top Hat, was made to do this, that money was appropriated, I think $240 million was the budgeted amount and we then negotiated a new Conditions of Construction Agreement with the Russian Federation. The only lever we had was that in order for us to get what we wanted, we had to allow the Russians to move in to their chancery because it was all done. Their housing was done and operated, their school was up and running but they were not occupying their chancery.

So we let go of our last piece of leverage in order for them to agree to give us what we wanted and our security regime was based on the following pillars. That we were only going to use top-secret cleared American workers to rebuild that office building. We were going to import via secure means every nut and bolt and brick with the exception of maybe premixed cement below a certain floor, sand, gravel and water. Everything else was sent over in sealed and trapped containers in a highly classified technical regime to be able to know if they had been tampered with. As a result of all of this and that the containers were to be considered by the Russian authorities as diplomatic pouches, so we didn't have to tell them what was in them, we didn't have to open them up in their presence and we still had them cleared through customs, but it was a pro forma thing where we had our diplomatic couriers present when these things were trucked in under escort from Finland, but they were never out of our control. After they were cleared by customs, they were delivered to our secure warehouse, which was totally under U.S. control and then broken into and basically decertified by people who were technically competent and high enough security clearance that nothing was tampered with. To the best of my knowledge, none of the roughly 1,500 containers that were shipped over during the life of the project were ever tampered with.

So on the basis of that the Russians agreed to all those conditions and we signed the Conditions of Construction Agreement in 1992, I believe. Then the project was let out to bid and a joint venture company, Zachary, Parsons and Sundt (ZPS) were the three companies. The H.B. Zachary Company out of San Antonio was the prime contractor. They had done a lot of work overseas with DOD. They had built the landing strip at Diego Garcia; they had done a lot of work in Iran during the years of the Shah. They were very, very well equipped to do that kind of work. So a whole mechanism was set up in Washington. The office where I was the deputy director had about 35 people in it and these were construction people, architects, engineers and an ever increasing number of security people because not only did we have to have, we had to have a counter intelligence program in place in Moscow to brief the workers about what they could and couldn't do in terms of...they were allowed to date Russian women because the whole non-frat policy had been lifted by 1995 '96 in China as well as in Russian and a lot of the rest of Eastern Europe with the exception of, I think, Cuba was the only place left where we still had a non-frat policy. But still if they had a Russian girlfriend they...

Q: Non-frat meaning?

BOORSTEIN: Non-fraternization that it was against government policy for diplomats, support staff or whatever to have basically dating, social and sexual relations with Soviet or Russian citizens. Well that changed but if you were going to have that kind of relationship you had to report it, you couldn't just do it and that applied to the embassy staff as well so there was an equal kind of treatment. You had to have in place very, very strong, physical and technical security regime. You had to have a state of the art fence, you had to have alarms and so we had people back here who helping to develop that and making sure that it was implemented and tested while the project was underway. We also had what are called industrial security officers who were responsible for the integrity of our record keeping, making sure that if we received and sent out drawings that they were done securely, even domestically they would inspect the facilities where materials were being made, assembled and trucked to the warehouse in Texas, where they were put into the containers, that those offices were run properly and that there were no Chinese nationals working in the factory or things of this nature. So the oversight was just enormous. It was, in effect, a zero tolerance for security failure, given what had happened before.

So the approach that Congress finally agreed to was the right approach, it was cost effective and secure, was to take the existing, I believe it was an eight-story building, and deconstruct it down to the sixth floor slab. In other words, destroy the top three floors. On top of that put a separate four story, a separate I mean in that it was resting on the sixth floor but in a way that there was a separation between the top floors and the bottom floors structurally. Again, there was a security classification involved in just how that was done. But in effect, a steel superstructure four-story building that was isolated from the rest of the building was the premise under which the building was built. That portion of the building was to contain the secure operations even though the bottom six floors, five floors and the fifth floor was a transition floor, even though those would be occupied by Russian nationals from the day it opened, the whole building was rebuilt as if it were all going to be secure so that we didn't allow any potential compromise on the lower floors to somehow have the potential to compromise the upper floors. It was a double, triple, quadruple level of security and it was done that way because the whole building had to be built in a classified manner.

No Russian nationals were allowed on to the site except for debris removal. Trucks were allowed to come on to a certain point on the compound when there was debris to be, you know, from deconstructing the top floors and from other things that they had to do to prepare the bottom floors, there was all kinds of debris. So the debris was removed, but with careful escorting that went on. There were guards twenty-four hours a day; there was a whole regime. The first time I went to Moscow they had the beginning of palm print recognition so you put in your palm and your palm was there and then you put in a pin number. A palm and pin number got you into the compound.

Q: A pin number is a personal...

BOORSTEIN: Personal identification. Right. So that eventually gave way to a more of a standard sliding kind of an ID card and the personal identification number.

So that was the regime that the office where I was the deputy was managing from Washington. In twenty-four months where I was the deputy director I made nine trips to Moscow and about half of them included a stop at our logistics base in Helsinki. We had a resident, actually a retired Foreign Service officer named Carl Clement, was the resident MEBCO officer. He was attached to the embassy in Helsinki and his job was to be the liaison with the port of Helsinki with the trucking firm, with the Finnish customs people and any logistical issues, which arose. Carl was a unique individual in that he was born in Finland and at a young age after the Second World War immigrated to the States with his family and became an American citizen, was educated in the U.S. and joined the Foreign Service. He was bilingual, so that was just a very unique ability that we were able to tap into. He was there for four or five years.

We also had a staff in Moscow that was the project director, the deputy, security director, probably about 15 people and most of these people came from diplomatic security, they came from the foreign buildings office even though they weren't managing the project they still were the source of the experts of the architects and the engineers. So the project director, a gentleman named John Sligh, was a career foreign buildings officer, he is an architect by training. His deputy, P.K. Bagchi, was an engineer by training and security director, well there were several security directors, Bernie Indal was the one there for the longest period of time, then he left the Foreign Service, retired and Tim Dixon replaced him. So there was the technical security officer, there was a specialist in counter-intelligence; all kinds of disciplines had their own specialists there.

It was really quite a finally well-oiled machine and it worked well. There were some glitches that it required some investigation to make sure that indeed things were shipped in a secure matter. There was a question about the origin of some materials that caused a major, major headache in one point in the project. I think that those topics remain classified in nature but at the end of the day the Department of State was confident enough and the intelligence community was confident enough to certify to the Congress, well it was up to the director of central intelligence at the end of the project to certify to Congress that the facility was secure.

So, basically it was my job to advise the director of MEBCO on the internal workings of the State Department bureaucracy on how you handle issues, how you handle crises, how you got things done and whether he liked it or not, it was a reality he had to accept. I also was given responsibility for handling a specially put-together office of the inspector general's security team, an oversight team that had people from the intelligence community, diplomatic security and the inspection corps who would travel to Moscow on a quarterly basis and spend a week or two there. So every time they went to Moscow I went with them. They when they made one particular trip to the main contractors headquarters in San Antonio, Texas, and to the consolidated receiving point in Houston by the port, I went with them. It was an idea that I could help minimize any perceived or real crisis that they identified and helped to manage it. Really there was nothing that arose that reached a crisis proportion but I was there as insurance.

Occasionally there were meetings with the senior management of the joint venture and senior State Department officials in the field and I would go on those trips. The times I went to Helsinki, the first time I traveled to Helsinki was with the director we took a week's trip and we flew together to Moscow and then we went to Helsinki to look at the situation there. He basically wanted to introduce me to the project because at that point he had already been running it for seven years. I was the second deputy and it was a two-year assignment. I was replaced by a third deputy who held it for two years until the project was finished. So I was right there in the middle, I was there at the start up so it was perhaps the most critical period of time and certainly the most active.

The second trip that I took to Helsinki in November of 1996 was to be part of the first official convoy of containers that were being taken overland from Helsinki to Moscow and that was a big deal because we had made one or two test runs with one or two containers but this was the first ten-container convoy. So the ten containers arrived by ship, they were shipped out of the port of Houston and they were shipped to Rotterdam without any physical escort, but again they were protected technically and Rotterdam is considered one of the larges ports in the world. Their whole system of transferring containers from one vessel to another is all automated. There are no human beings involved in these riderless tractors that take containers from one point to another in the yard, so it was felt that our containers, ten at a time, would be totally lost among the thousands that would be in the yard. So we were comfortable enough that we didn't need any presence there.

So then they were transferred to a Baltic feeder, I believe it was the Maersk Line. The Maersk Line then took these containers; the first port of call was Helsinki so again with no escorts. They were off loaded in Helsinki in a special part of the port, which we had negotiated with the Finnish authorities with lighting and alarms and whatever and then within a certain number of days the contractor would agree to then transport them via one container per tractor-trailer in a ten-container convoy to Moscow. At that point we had escorts from the U.S. diplomatic courier service.

For a ten-container convoy there were probably four to six couriers. They had their own little Winnebago because it was a two-day trip and they would have to sleep in it overnight. The drivers would sleep, these were Finnish drivers, they were a sub-contractor to the joint venture and they would, of course, sleep in their cabs. So I with our security officer from Washington went with the convoy to the Finnish border and because it was the first time we had done this our representative had set up this whole regime of meetings and protocol and the deputy project director flew up from Moscow and met us on the Russian side, the nearest city was Vyborg which used to be part of Finland until the Second World War. In the winter war with Finland they lost that whole area north of Leningrad.

So we had a woman who was a trilingual interpreter, Russian, Finnish and English and she presided over our meetings first with the Finnish customs authorities and then with the Russian custom authorities and it involved tea, cookies and vodka at 11 o'clock in the morning. It was a dull, dismal, dreary, rainy, drizzly kind of a day in the middle of November and very little daylight already in that part of Finland. But you know we did it and the security officer actually rode in the convoy all the way to Moscow. I went back to Helsinki and the next day I flew home.

Q: I would think that the Finns must have watched this with a great deal of amusement, the ones who were doing this.

BOORSTEIN: Well, you know I don't know if it was so much amusement. The Finns are incredibly pragmatic people; they are probably one of the...if not the only country that borders the Soviet Union that did not become a satellite of the Soviet Union after the Second World War. So they recognized that they had to maintain their neutrality but they are also very entrepreneurial people and they just made it work. They were very interested in earning money and being efficient and effective. Whether they were amused or not frankly they never shared that. They are rather taciturn individuals and don't show too much of their emotions unlike the Italians, for example, but I enjoyed working with them immensely. I enjoyed it in particular because in my university years I spent a semester of studying in Finland so it was nice to spend some more time there later on in my life. I made a number of friends and people that I am still in touch with to this day but it all worked quite well and we really never had any issues with the Finns and they were cooperative.

Q: The Russians how did you find them?

BOORSTEIN: Well, again you found all kinds of different officials. This was a little bit of the boondocks even though it was their busiest customs border crossing by land, I believe, anywhere. You found that they wanted to make sure the paper work was just so and the stamp was just where it belonged, whatever. The fax machine was a great boom and they were all into the fax era, in 1996, this was before email, of course, at least in that part of the world. But I don't recall that there was ever an incident where they held up a shipment at all but they demanded the paperwork.

Q: In your career you've worn two major hats, one's the Russian one and other is the Chinese one. Were we looking while you were doing this at the future for China for our embassy there, I mean was this considered a unique experience or was this the wave of the future in difficult places?

BOORSTEIN: Well it certainly was the wave of the future. We were not at a point in the early to mid-1990s where we were starting to plan for the embassy in Beijing. I will come to that later because that was something that I was also in charge of, I was the logical choice to do it. It was certainly felt that certainly once the project was finished successfully that this was a good model, in terms of lessons learned, in terms of the key provisions of secure shipment of your materials, top secret cleared American workers, take advantage of reciprocity as the keystone, the pillars if you will, of successful projects. But there was no specific discussion at the time, we were focused on the Moscow project and it just came along about three years later when that project was winding down and we felt increasing pressure to improve our situation for our people in Beijing that some of the transferability occurred and I was part of that effort.

Q: Well tell me, my experience having dealt with contract employees in various parts of the world including Saigon, I mean the guys who pour cement and put up things are pretty rough guys and they like their women and they like their liquor. I would think this, did you put saltpeter in their vodka or what did you do to keep these guys from compromise?

BOORSTEIN: Well, like I said we did not have a non-fraternization policy, we allowed these people to have social, sexual relations with Russian women or with Bulgarian women or with whatever women they happened to find in Moscow. Believe you me, they did, all over the place and we built a camp on embassy property where these workers were housed and that camp was off limits to women. So whatever liaisons they had were done elsewhere whether they took these women to hotels or they took them back to their apartments, I mean to the women's apartment, whatever. I'm sure both things occurred but again there was a requirement that they needed to report that they were having a relationship with Tatiana, Galena or whomever. If the relationship got to the point that they wanted to marry, they were not allowed to marry the women while they were on the project and if they couldn't wait they had to resign.

There were cases where, isolated cases, where people went out and they weren't staying in the camp, they were cohabitating with the Russian women, not reporting it at night and those people were disciplined and perhaps they were warned once but if they continued to do it they were shipped home. Of course you realize that if these people got into problems, got into trouble, they were there less than a year it had enormous tax consequences for them. They had to be on the job for over a year in order to get the tax-free benefit, so that was an enormous incentive for them to behave in a way.

Yes, there were problems with gambling; there were problems with getting drunk and breaking stuff up in bars so yeah even though these people did have top secret clearances with even an added almost a notch above almost like what we call as SCI clearance level.. So there you explore the individual's financial background to make sure there are no outstanding gambling debts, unpaid alimony or this that and the other thing.

But it took a lot of in-briefing before they even left the United States and there were counter intelligence briefings when they got to the post, basically there was an effort to scare the bejesus out of these people about what would happen to them if they didn't report anything where they should of and it wasn't only having relationships. If all of a sudden they found they were in a bar one night and some guy would come and strike up a conversation who spoke fluent English, who would steer the conversation around "what are you doing here, where are you working, what are..." "Oh you're a welder? Well really what floor are you working on in the embassy?" Then all of a sudden the red light goes on and basically the worker had to be counseled to say, "I'm working on the project, that's really all I need to tell you" and that's it and then to try and get information on the person who was asking them to feed that information back into the database.

The Russian services were trying like crazy to compromise the project, that's just what they are there to do. To the best of our knowledge they did not succeed. So it required enormous resources on the part of the government and the contractor working together to control this in a manner that allowed these guys to have social outlets, girlfriends, etc. and yet maintain the integrity of the project.

Q: When you did this from '90...

BOORSTEIN: '96 to '98, two years.

Q: Then what?

BOORSTEIN: Then I had a very unique experience; I was assigned to represent the State Department at Harvard University in their Fellows program at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. This program started in the late-1950s when Henry Kissinger was a professor at Harvard and he and another professor, Robert Bowie, came up with the idea that there wasn't much cross fertilization between the academics in the field of diplomacy and the practitioners. So they devised a program that would bring senior level diplomats from all over the world, 15 or 20 of them a year, into Harvard, give them a special university basically faculty status and allow them to do research, allow them to attend classes as auditors and make themselves available to do presentations, lectures, seminars based on their own experiences as diplomats in country X and to attend lectures, seminars and programs not only at Harvard but in the whole Boston, Cambridge area.

So the Fellows, again when I was there the program had been in existence for 40 years and the State Department had a representative there every year without a break from 1958 to 1994. Then in 1994 we stopped sending people mainly because the department was in such dire financial straits, as was the entire government because Bill Clinton wanted to balance the budget and there were cuts left and right as you can well remember in those years. So even though the fee was like $15,000 there was $15,000 to be saved and there was nobody from the State Department in that program from '94 to '98.

As it turned out our Undersecretary for Management Bonnie Cohen had two children at Harvard and the director of the Fellows program knew that and a letter was sent, I believe with Bonnie Cohen's prior knowledge that a letter was going to be sent, from maybe the president of Harvard or certainly the director of the Weatherhead Center to I guess it was Warren Christopher at the time, I'm trying to think. No it was Madeline Albright, of course, '98, it was Madeline Albright decrying the fact that the State Debarment no longer had a representative in the program, while at the same time, of course, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Air Force and the Navy continued to send each year a representative. So it was felt that there was not a proper balance by not having a State Department person there to be a balance for the military side of the house.

Anyway, money was found, it was made available to the personnel system, I was told about it because I was looking for an assignment, nothing had jelled, and I wasn't interested in going overseas. I was looking for something in Washington but nothing really materialized so I said, "Fine." I bid on the job and I got it and I went off to Harvard in August of 1998 for about ten months.

Q: How did you find, what was your impression of Harvard you know the faculty and all at that time?

BOORSTEIN: Well I was incredibly impressed; I had never been to that part of the country in my life. Here I had been all over the world, maybe I had changed planes in the Boston airport en route to here and there, I know I had. I just found a great deal of respect for the fact that I had been an American diplomat at that point for almost 30 years. They brought together, there were twenty of us, four of us were Americans, a guy from the Navy, Army and Air Force and myself. There were two Brits, a Canadian and then the rest of us were from all over, Germany, France, Vietnam, Peru, Columbia, Japan. We had two journalists, a woman from Finland and a man from Uganda who was actually a refugee in the Netherlands at that time. So as a group we were treated with really a great deal of respect and we got entrï¿½e...the joke was "how many free meals could you get a week" because you would sign up or be invited to lectures and whatever and in particular if you offered to be a speaker there was a meal that went along with it.

We developed close ties with the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. Our British guy who had been ambassador to Bosnia, he was very, again this was in 1998 during the time of all the problems in Yugoslavia, he was highly sought after as a speaker. He went down to the Naval War College in Newport, Boston University. I used some of the research facilities at M.I.T. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). I didn't find any sort of intellectual snobbism, maybe that is where your question was going, not at all and I found the faculty very, very open to help.

Now see, while we didn't have to read any books or do any papers or take any exams because we were auditors we did have something to do. We were required to do a research paper so even at the time that I applied I had to give sort of like a skeletal framework of a research project. I offered up something on the effectiveness of the UN International Children's Program, UNICEF, because I had an interest in it and whatever. By the time I got there I was refocusing my research on doing something related to the rise of the Internet in American diplomacy. So I ended up doing a research project on the State Department in the digital age, preparing for the diplomatic challenges of the 21st century.

It was a wonderful, wonderful choice of a topic because you had people at the Kennedy School who had an international affairs orientation and an IT orientation and they took a great interest in the topic. I had one young professor who was Austrian who had done a lot of, he actually taught a course in digital diplomacy, and I was a guest speaker where I was trying to explain how our bureau of information resource management works and how we basically communicate and how the trends...I had to do some research.

The Fellows group met every Wednesday for breakfast and after the first few months then we were told we had to sign up to give a presentation to the Fellows on something we had done in our career or some topic that we had something to offer. So I did my presentation on the history of the project in Moscow. I had to make sure it was unclassified because the office still existed there and I had people back there sending me stuff. Most of the Fellows had heard about the embarrassment of the U.S. over this issue with the Russians but they were intrigued about the politics of it so it was a great choice of a topic to do.

I had all kinds of advice and guidance on my project from people at the Kennedy School and I did...and they also hooked me up to a lot of people to interview in Washington. I mean I interviewed a lot of people in the State Department who I knew myself to speak with, but they were able to direct me to DOD, to the CIA, I got an interview with the head of the office of reinventing government. Remember the Gore initiative? There was a woman at Harvard named Elaine Kamarck whose husband had been the head of the Export-Import Bank during the first Clinton term, I believe. She was a big Gore person and if Gore had won the election she may have been the head of OMB or something like that but she was there and she was very helpful. I became very close to Professor Alan Henrikson at the Fletcher School and when I came into the museum project I drew on his expertise. You know that charrette that we had in the fall of 2002; I invited him down for that. Again, the networking paid dividends longer term.

I even got funding from the State Department to travel to Ottawa, Paris, Vienna and Frankfurt to do research on my project, mainly interviewing people at the American embassies in Ottawa, Paris and Vienna and the Consulate General in Frankfurt on how they were using information technology, what trends they saw and identified a major flaw in that we had all of these systems that the State Department installed, Agriculture installed and DOD installed on the unclassified level, but they couldn't talk to each other very effectively. One of my main recommendations was that effort should be made sort of like the E-government initiative that eventually came to be to have more robust networking within an embassy and yet the State Department adopted that recommendation and started in a small scale to implement it and it's still sort of on going although there are some problems. So the State Department leadership was quite appreciative of the work that I did and it was all...I made sure that they knew what I was up to. I interviewed the chief information officer and interviewed people up in Bonnie Cohen's office and that was during the time of the Kaden Report, following the bombings in Africa. The guy who was the executive director of the Kaden Report, Don Hays was the one that asked me for those recommendation, and he included them in his report.

I was delighted to return, to be the one to return to the fold at Harvard in terms of State Department participation and a State Department Fellow followed me the next year but now nobody is going again. There may be somebody next year but again there has been a gap now for five years. What I found so incredibly shortsighted that at one point the State Department was sending eight, ten, twelve people a year to the Kennedy School of Government at the mid-level to get masters in public administration on a one-year program. There is nobody going up there any more because they don't want to pay the money. Yet, you go on that campus and it's just crawling with people from DOD, from the Coast Guard, from the Department of Transportation, from other government departments that are not so shortsighted. So I made a little bit of a stink about that when I came back to the director general and to others and to the head of FSI (Foreign Service Institute) but it really fell on deaf ears.

Q: Well then you came back in '90...?

BOORSTEIN: In June of 1999.

Q: In '99. By the way, was Clinton's trouble with Congress going on at this time or did that come later?

BOORSTEIN: Oh no, that was in the whole in the midst of impeachment and everything else.

Q: I was wondering how it played there.

BOORSTEIN: I'm glad you asked that question because one of the things I had forgotten to give you was some other insights into what I got out of the program and what I offered. I went off to Harvard thinking, wow, here I am going to be in the midst of these high powered diplomats, a number of whom were ambassadorial level, from all these countries and what an intellectually stimulating thing it's going to be for me to get more...here I've done the bulk of my work in administration and management, but yet I was going to be expected to hold my own intellectually in political science, international affairs and all these other things. I did a lot of reading making sure that I wasn't going to put my foot in my mouth, not that I wasn't well-read or I didn't know enough, but still when you are trying to hold your own in a debate in representing the United States or whatever and the guy across the table is the former foreign minister of Peru who was in our group. He was the guy, by the way, who was held hostage by the terrorists at the Japanese's embassy.

Q: At the Japanese...

BOORSTEIN: The ambassador's residence.

Q: Reception.

BOORSTEIN: Yeah, Francisco Tudela. He was the intellectual giant of our group. I shared an office with him and the woman from Finland so we became quite close. But what I found was that as intellectually curious as I was, the bulk of the Fellows were even more curious about the United States and looked upon me, more than the military people, as being the person that could answer their questions. So I had to become like the spokesman, if you will, for the U.S. government, obviously it was all off the record and whatever, but questions...we took a trip to Canada. The Canadian foreign ministry sponsors a trip to Canada every year for the Fellows, it's quite a commitment, so our trip we went to Ottawa, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City and St. John's Newfoundland. I had had a tour in Canada so, with the exception of Newfoundland I had been there before, it was still good to go back, but I'm sitting in a cafï¿½ in Montreal having breakfast with the British representative, Charles Crawford, and we had just gotten a lecture about how the Canadian West was settled and he looked at me and said, "I don't understand, you know I have these images of the wild, West in the United States and they explained to us how orderly it was how the Canadian West was settled. How do you explain the difference?" So I kind of paused and I was able to talk about the different way that the U.S. and Canada evolved as nations and where the U.S., our motto is "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness", and the Canadian's motto is "Law, Order and Good Government". So that explains the mindset almost like a social contract of how you live your life. This was my explanation and how it played out in the way that things got done. He seemed to buy that explanation but it still required me to draw on some things and to have the knowledge about American history and government. So it was a real surprise for me.

At the end we had a year-end banquet and I really became the spokesman for the State Department, if you will, on behalf of, as the host nation and the people in the program they never told me to take on that role but I kind of implicitly felt that that was what I needed to do and it was correct. It really was. So I was the keynote speaker at that end of the year banquet.

Q: I would have thought that there would have been an awful lot of questions by these non-Americans about...we were going through a very difficult time in our government because you had a vicious, the best description I can say, Congress trying to knock off the president.

BOORSTEIN: Well you know you had on the part of the Europeans, particularly the French representative, the sense of the bemusement about what's all this uproar about the president's sex life, the whole puritan streak of the nation and all this other stuff or the hypocrisy, if you will. So it wasn't, it didn't dominate things, it was just sort of there and from time to time it would come up. The Cambridge area, of course, is quite liberal and there was a lot of defense of the president even though his behavior was hard to defend it obviously at the time. But, I kind of felt that I was able to speak personally and was able to defend almost using as an example of this is the way our democracy is, it's kind of messy but it works.

It didn't really cast a shadow or a pallor on the overall program.

Q: Well then in 1990...where are you now?

BOORSTEIN: I'm in June of 1999. At that point the Assistant Secretary for Administration Pat Kennedy who had also been in that job when I was doing the Moscow project asked me to return to Washington to start a new office that was going to plan for the future American embassy in Beijing. That office would be in the foreign buildings office because it was felt that that office had matured to a point where it could be given a responsibility to manage a secure project.

So the Beijing program office was created and I was the first director of it and I reported for work in July of 1999.

Q: You did that how long?

BOORSTEIN: Well you know this might be a good time for us to stop and I can devote...

Q: OK, today is the 31st of August 2006 and we're in 1999.

BOORSTEIN: Correct.

Q: So what was up?

BOORSTEIN: OK, well I had just come on board as the first director of the Beijing program office in the office of foreign buildings in the bureau of administration and this was a new office that was created for the purpose of planning for the future new embassy in Beijing. I've already covered the rationale for why a special office was required because of the overriding security requirements in Beijing, similar to what we had done in Moscow, but with the much wiser perspective of having gone through the debacle of the first Moscow project and having figured out how to do it right ten years and a couple hundred million dollars later.

So it was decided to treat the future embassy in Beijing with similar security attention but to have it within the office of foreign buildings rather than a separate office that was done for Moscow. Because of my experience with the embassy in Moscow and having served as the admin counselor in Beijing, Pat Kennedy, the assistant secretary for administration, asked me to head this office, which I was delighted to do.

I started out...the office of foreign buildings at the time was headed by Patsy Thomasson, who was a political appointee from the Clinton administration. Patsy Thomasson was a political operative from Arkansas, close to the president. She had come to the foreign buildings office after having worked in the White House office of personnel as I recall, and during the shake up there when there was a bit of a travel controversy in that office, she was sent to the State Department to be a deputy assistant secretary. She was pretty effective in that job. She took it quite seriously; she had some background having been involved in some construction of highways in Arkansas. She was a bit ambivalent about the idea of having a special office only dealing with one embassy project even though here supervisor, the assistant secretary for administration, decreed that was the way it was going to be. There was some reluctance to be as supportive and as embracing of the concept as I would have hoped would have been the case, but nonetheless the office thrived, developed and we very quickly were given some additional resources.

I had a full time security officer, I had a full time engineer, I had a full time asset from the intelligence community, a gentleman who was a China analyst. He was very, very effective in sort of guiding the effort on how we were going to frame the relationship with the Chinese because we knew also that the Chinese wanted to build a new embassy in Washington. So much like the underpinnings of the Moscow project in the 1960s, where that was also driven by reciprocity we had the same reciprocal dynamics going on, which really gave us a wonderful opportunity to get what it was that we needed.

So building on the Moscow model, and the Moscow project was still under construction, so I took my little team to Moscow in late 1999 and also visited Helsinki to have them see the logistical arrangement through the port of Helsinki. Earlier I had already been to China, accompanied the Undersecretary Bonnie Cohen on her first trip to China, along with the Executive Director of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, Bart Flaherty. We went to Beijing, Guangzhou and Chengdu. Chengdu had their consulate compound walls breached by Chinese rioters, who were protesting the inadvertent bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the Balkans campaign.

Q: Kosovo.

BOORSTEIN: Kosovo intervention. So the Department and the East Asian bureau very much wanted the undersecretary for management to see this small consulate and see the ravages of the effect of the rioting because they had basically come over the wall and they had burned the consul general's residence, which was in the compound. The consul general and his wife basically had to flee for their lives back into the main embassy, excuse me, the main consulate office building. The people in the consulate who lived also in an apartment house that was also on the compound also took refuge in the compound and their lives were saved because of the hard-line and everything else that prevented the Chinese from breaching the walls. Some actually stayed in their apartments as well, but there were no casualties, but a lot of damage, in the consul general's residence essentially a shell remained, but the inside was burned out.

We did some preliminary planning for the new embassy in Beijing and through a series of trips and interactions with the East Asian bureau and with the embassy we developed what's called the Space Program. We figured out how big the embassy needed to be in terms of the staff, taking into account the very rapid growth that had been pent up due to the limitations of the existing facility. This lead, after one round of negotiations, I believe in early the year 2000, we had to inform, no actually it was during the visit of Bonnie Cohen to Beijing, we actually had to inform the Chinese that the earlier arrangement that had been developed through an earlier bilateral agreement would not work. That agreement would have allowed us to purchase the Bulgarian embassy compound, which is right next door to the compound existing at the time, but because of the bombings in Africa in 1998, the standards for set-back for embassies changed and were increased from 50 feet to 100 feet. So by doing that, the footprint that would be left to build the new embassy was not sufficient to utilize the Bulgarian compound. So we told the Chinese we needed a new ten-acre site, 40,00 square meters, within the city limits convenient to our housing and convenient to the foreign ministry. That was a very tall order but we basically offered the Chinese very plum property in Washington in our international center for their embassy.

Q: Where was that located?

BOORSTEIN: The international center is near the zoo. It's an area that was set aside in the 1950s when the Bureau of Standards moved out to upper Montgomery county in Maryland with the idea of relocating embassies there to allow embassies to build new buildings designed for that purpose rather than to be scattered around or be in smaller, inadequate quarters along the Massachusetts Avenue corridor.

So a number of embassies had already moved or were already in the process of building. Egypt, Bangladesh, Austria, the United Arab Emirates, I think there are ten or twelve, the Israelis are there, Singapore. As a matter of fact, Singapore was right next to the sites we had...we offered three contiguous sites to the Chinese, the last undeveloped sites on that property. So, of course, we were not going to finalize the deal until we got what we needed. So ultimately the Chinese did offer us the ten-acre site roughly rectangular even though it's called the third diplomatic zone in Beijing and it really was quite a good site in an area where new embassies were also being built in Beijing.

We hammered out a final agreement in November of 2005, which set the stage for further negotiations on conditions of construction that applied to both the embassies in Washington and Beijing. That turned out to be more problematic. Those negotiations took almost three years. The Conditions of Construction Agreement was signed in November 2003; the main issue that divided the two sides at the time was our insistence that we had to have 100 percent visual contact with our shipping containers that were shipping over materials for construction of the embassy. We originally wanted to use the Moscow model where the Russian government allowed us to designate a forty-foot container or a twenty-foot container as a diplomatic pouch. The Chinese for their own reasons refused to do that but at the end of the day did agree to the principal of constant visual contact by U.S. eyes and so that was allowed and that allowed the agreement to be signed.

After that happened and even as those negotiations were occurring, the foreign buildings office conducted a design competition that was sponsored by the General Services Administration (GSA), it was called the design excellence process. Through that process the firm Skidmore, Owens and Merrill or SOM, based in San Francisco, was selected as the designer. I found that personally rather ironic, because SOM was also the original design firm for the failed Moscow project of the mid-'70s. But, of course, their product, in terms of the housing compound, the school and the marine house still remain today.

So the development of the plans went fairly rapidly. We had our staffing plan laid out, we had our government estimate of how much it would cost to build, we set out the standards based on the conditions of construction, which required a great use of top-secret cleared American workers for again the same reasons that we did in Moscow.

In the midst of all of this in January of 2001, after George Bush was elected president and that was dragged out and the Supreme Court decision that gave him the election in December, Patsy Thomasson as the deputy assistant secretary left on January 20th.

Pat Kennedy appointed me as the acting-deputy assistant secretary for the entire foreign buildings office. I was the senior ranking Foreign Service officer at the time and even though my portfolio was only Beijing until a little bit more other stuff in China, he would give me that responsibility, which I did for about two months. In that capacity I went to Guatemala for a regional administrative conference for the Western hemisphere posts, was involved in some planning issues and construction issues in the form...

Q: This is Tape 8, Side 1 with Mike Boorstein. Yeah.

BOORSTEIN: So I was the deputy assistant secretary for foreign buildings for about two months. Colin Powell came in as secretary of state; I was involved also as the deputy assistant secretary in a very important decision memo one of the first he received as secretary to determine which site would be selected to build our new embassy in Berlin. I believe that the one site that ultimately Powell agreed to pick was provided to the U.S. government right before the Second World War. It was right next to the Brandenburg Gate, very plumb property, the only problem was it was too small. Again, given the set back requirements, it would not suffice given our staff requirements for the embassy in Berlin. There was a conflict within the department in that the foreign buildings office wanted another site, which was bigger, not anywhere near the Brandenburg Gate but it would have provided the necessary 100-foot setback given the security posture needed. The European bureau on the other hand for political reasons and as a way of showing the importance of U.S.-German relationship preferred the site closest to the Brandenburg Gate. Well to nobody's surprise the secretary picked the site closest to the Brandenburg Gate and basically said to the engineers and the architects and the security people, "Make it work."

So there were some interesting requirements we had to convince the German authorities, primarily the municipal government of Berlin, to move a street, to move it away from our property and have a buffer built to increase the setback. I believe we had to get the approval of the residents of a high-rise condominium building which was right behind our embassy property so that they would be comfortable having the American embassy literally a wall away. So, there were a series of negotiations, that all happened after I was no longer...

Q: You didn't find yourself saying, "I wonder if you could move the Brandenburg Gate, did you?"

BOORSTEIN: No, no, maybe some security type may have fantasized about that but it was a very high traffic area, a very symbolic area. It was also next to a very major Holocaust memorial that was going to go up in that area and I presume by now is already up. So it was going to be an area of a lot of traffic, both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. But decisions were made to give a set-back waiver and to do the blast enhancement and all these other things that can be done to give roughly the same equivalency as having a 100-foot setback. So I was involved in putting together that decision memo and getting all the clearances and that was a big deal.

Secretary Powell brought in as the next head of the foreign buildings office a retired two-star general from the Army Corps of Engineers named Charles E. Williams. Williams had retired from the Corps about 15 years prior to taking on this job and had spent some time in private industry, he had also worked for a while heading the facilities program for the New York City schools and for the Washington, D.C. schools. He had a bit of a checkered background particularly with the D.C. schools, I'm not really quite sure why. That was during the time where the mayor brought in another retired general, I believe an Air Force general. So Chuck Williams was part of that team and he was tasked with trying to rehabilitate the physical plant throughout the school system, which was an enormous task, which continues to this day. He also was the project manager for the construction of the Dulles Greenway, the highway that goes between Dulles Airport and Leesburg, Virginia, which was a very successful project. He had a very good reputation in the Corps; he apparently was the youngest person ever to reach the rank of two-star general in the history of the Corps. So because of Powell's knowledge of him he was appointed as the head of the foreign buildings office.

We learned he was in the transition space pretty much by the middle of January because Powell was the first cabinet secretary to have been nominated, appointed, sworn-in, I believe. He interviewed me and talked to a few other people behind the scenes. We picked up rumors that there was going to be a big reorganization in the foreign buildings office and there would be a bureau that would be created and that this function would be removed from the bureau of administration. Well, Pat Kennedy was still the head of the A bureau; he was pretty much left in the dark and sure enough by the end of March Williams came on board, guess it was more like the middle of March, within his first couple of days held an off-site at Fort Myers and there he announced the reorganization. He did say that we were going to become a bureau and it was unclear at that time whether the bureau would report directly to the deputy secretary of state or to the under secretary for management.

Q: Becoming a bureau in bureaucratic terms meant what?

BOORSTEIN: Well it meant that in the State Department you have your hierarchy of titles. You have the secretary of state, you have the deputy secretary you have, I believe, seven under secretaries. The under secretaries each have a collection of bureaus under them. For example, the under secretary for political affairs supervises the geographic bureaus, the bureau of European affairs, the bureau of African affairs, the bureau of Near East Affairs, the bureau of South Asian Affairs, etc. Within a bureau you have offices so before the office of foreign buildings operations reported to the assistant secretary for administration. So by having the foreign buildings office be elevated to be a bureau it was on par with the bureau of administration. So that meant that the bureau of administration lost its largest component, so they were left with language services, with what is called the office of operations which runs the main state department building and the annexes and some warehouses, what was left were operational, managerial, contract and procurement, shipping and overseas schools and whatever.

Q: Was this a power play to make the new man feel happy by giving him more? It does seem to...I mean why?

BOORSTEIN: Well a lot of people had that basic question, particularly the assistant secretary for administration. But it probably was, I mean again I'm only speculating, it was probably a condition that Chuck Williams gave to the secretary to allow him to be comfortable with taking the job. He felt that he wanted to have some stature; he wanted to have as direct a line to the secretary as possible. There also was the expectation...after the bombings of our two embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in 1998, significantly more money was given to the office of foreign buildings to build new embassies to make them more secure, to give us new secure facilities, to get our people out of harm's way. So we had, obviously we were given money to rebuild the embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and with the expectation that there would be more to come. When Williams came in he must have gotten Powell's commitment ahead of time that he was going to support a massive, massive increase in funding to start building eight to ten new embassies a year. That would require a certain level of funding that now exceeds a billion dollars a year in new appropriations for capital projects, an enormous uptake. In the 1990's for example we opened one embassy, Ottawa, as far as I know, the only one can think of that opened, maybe Caracas was another one under what was called the old Inman program that was the result of the bombing of our embassy in Beirut in the 1980s. So we really were not building new embassies and it was very hard to get money from Congress. So with Powell's popularity and this very high-powered engineering specialist two-star general from the Corps of Engineers, it was the golden years for the building business in the State Department.

So, with the announcement of the creation of this bureau, Chuck Williams, who basically wanted everybody to still call him General Williams because of his title that he retired as general, and still to this day that is what you call him, unless you are his wife I guess or the secretary of state or the undersecretary for management, they all call him Chuck. But to everybody else his first name is general and he deserves that kind of respect. He's done a very good job in keeping that level of funding and visibility and with a lot of internal reorganization. So, with that internal reorganization the initial phase when he put the wiring diagram up on the board with all of his senior people around him, I looked and I didn't see any place for the Beijing program office, which had subsequently been renamed the China Capital Program office because we were given responsibility for planning for the future consulate in Guangzhou as well. So I remember raising my hand, at this off-site in front of my colleagues, and I said, "General Williams, I have a question." There was a big smile on his face because he knew what was coming. I said, "I don't see any notation there about my office, what's going to happen to it?" He smiled and he said, "Oh, I have great plans for you Mike." Then he didn't say anything else. Then at the end of the day I sort of hung around and I went up to him and I said, "I'm sure you're not surprised that I'm hanging around here wanting to know what is this great surprise you have in store for me." He smiled at me and said, "Well Mike, you noticed here on the new wiring diagram that I created a new office, a senior office..." what he called a management directorate, called planning and development, which did not exist under the old foreign buildings office. We had a planning office but it was at one level down and it was linked with real estate, and it was not in fact visible and didn't stand-alone at the higher level. He said, "I want you to head that office." Which means I became his de facto deputy. Now he was doing it, I think, in part because I was the man that passed the baton to him when he came over and he alluded to...he had my background information, he knew that I had spent that year at Harvard and that he felt that I had the intellectual horse power to handle this new area. Granted, you know, I am a Foreign Service officer, not an architect, I'm not an engineer, but so much of what we do in the Foreign Service is learning on the job as you know and here was another opportunity.

So, I took that on and the planning for the Beijing project was then relegated under the new management director to what was called project execution, the office of project planning, no I'm sorry, let me think about this for a second, project direction. Anyway I can't remember, it was a PD, project direction I think so once the project...that office had really handled the cradle to the grave management of the project, which included the planning. He cut it off and he was in the business of saying, "Okay, it was a different way of doing business," and that in essence is pretty much the way it still is today. So he broke a lot of crockery, there was a lot of unhappiness. So, he put the China project under the project execution office and didn't have it at the senior level any more, he relegated it down as a subunit within an office so he put it down two levels in the bureaucracy. The man that I had hired under a competitive process as my deputy, in effect, became the director of that unit.

Well, over time to fast forward to the future, because of the importance of the China project and the amount of money and scrutiny that office rose again to being an office as opposed to being a sub-unit and was removed from the project direction office and made a direct office under the head of project execution. So, it rose up one level, but not two. So, I then inherited functions that included roughly about 90 people, architects, engineers, planners, estimators and our charge was to do all the planning for new projects as well as the planning for major renovation projects at existing embassies. So one of the first products that General Williams wanted me to supervise was the publication of what's called the Long Range Overseas Building Plan. Never before, in a comprehensive fashion, had a document been published that members of Congress could have, other Cabinet departments could have and so my staff was charged with developing this book, which we published within about 90-120 days after he took over, that was the first product out the door.

I got involved in things all over the world. One of the first challenges, it was almost like a public relations challenge with General Williams, was in April, I believe, of 2001, again this was pre-9/11, OK? Tom Brokaw had a little segment on his evening news called The Fleecing of America, named after the Proxmire award, a senator from Wisconsin. So a candidate for the Fleecing of America Award that he reported on was the existence of a very small parking lot behind the ambassador's residence in Paris. This was a very prime piece of real estate that was used for the country team to park their cars in and as an over- flow lot for the motor pool. The General Accounting Office had gone to Paris and had reported on this and felt that this was an albatross that could be sold or I'd have to be guessing now, I don't remember the number, but let's say $10 million and that money could be used by the State Department. So because this hit the fan, Secretary Powell ordered General Williams to go to Paris and look into it. So he went with his real estate specialist to Paris in April of 2001 and came back with a comprehensive plan on how to deal with a whole range of property issues in Paris. So we got a flavor of the way that this guy operates. He would go to a post, he wouldn't just look at one little thing in isolation, he would look at everything and he would say, "Well OK, we are going to do these things." Then it all came back to me, "Plan it." If the real estate people had to dispose of property obviously that was their thing. But where the people from the disposed property were going to go became my problem.

So, I put together a team and in June of that year I went to Paris for about a week, a lovely TDY, Paris in June, lots of late night dinners and walking around and it was light until about 11 o'clock. But we worked hard on figuring out what to do with that parking lot that was going to be sold, that was our main focus. We dealt with some other things as well. So, we went to visit the underground garage that the British embassy had near their ambassador's residence or underneath, so we were able to look at that as an example. We brought along a landscape architect, who looked at how we were going to restore, rebuild that portion of the ambassador's backyard that would have to be destroyed in order to build this underground garage. In a lot of European countries, not just in Europe, but particularly in France and in Paris if you are a tree you probably have more status than a person, you are protected, particularly an old tree. So, we couldn't disturb the roots of certain big trees that were on that property, so we had to work around that. So, we worked on some of the planning for this, reported to the ambassador who was a very high-powered political appointee from California.

Q: Who was this?

BOORSTEIN: Leach, Howard Leach, he made his money from the Hunter Fan business, you know the decorative fans? He was a billionaire and very, very influential, very close to the president. He was not terribly excited about having his lawn ripped up. So, then we went back and continued the planning. I got very much involved in the new consulate project in Frankfurt, where we took over an old hospital, which in the war was a German hospital. It was excess, I believe it was an Army hospital and General Williams had gone to Frankfurt as well and had decreed this is where we are going to move our consulate. We are going to rehab this hospital and make it work as a consulate and that consulate is open today. So, I got involved in the planning for that, I took a trip to Frankfurt and Berlin, well that was a year later in May.

Q: Well the consulate in Frankfurt my first post in '65 was quite renown because it was all glass.

BOORSTEIN: Well that's the one that was replaced but it was a very vulnerable...

Q: Very vulnerable but it was quite an architectural jewel.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, it still looked quite attractive but I was there during the bombing campaign in Kosovo and they had all kinds of security and guys with sandbags, machine guns and whatever outside for your protection. So we clearly had to deal with that. I also represented the...no; the bureau was now called the bureau of overseas buildings operations or OBO. I represented the General, General Williams at a East Asia conference in Hong Kong in March of 2002.

But again, let me go back to 9/11 because I think that is an important thing to report on. On the morning of September 11th I had a doctors appointment in the morning in Alexandria, very early in the morning like eight o'clock. I was going to go to work afterwards and I drove my car and I got into my car a little after nine in the morning and turned on the news because the news also would give me the traffic report. It was the ABC News and Peter Jennings was reporting that one plane had hit the World Trade Center. As he was reporting on that the second plane hit and my daughter lives and lived at the time in Brooklyn. I immediately thought of her, "Oh my God." Because she was a freelance public relations person and would go all over the city of New York to clients and she had said in the past that she had clients in the World Trade Towers. I thought, "Oh my God, I hope she isn't in there." I tried to call her when I got to the office...but anyway I am jumping ahead of the story.

As I approached the building, where the overseas building office is located, which is in Rosslyn about maybe three miles as the crow flies from the Pentagon, I heard that the Pentagon had been hit. So, I parked my car and I quickly went up to the top floor and our office is on the 13th floor. I get up there and I can see from the I guess at that point it would be the East side of the building line of site from one of my colleagues windows we could see still flames, it had just been ten minutes after the plane hit and huge columns of smoke. People told me that where else in the building that they could feel, they could hear the windows rattle from the effect of the blast three miles away. I was informed by General Williams' secretary that he was off at Walter Reed that morning having his annual physical and I was in charge. So I thought, "Oh my God." So immediately I invoked our emergency action plan. We had an operations center on the ground floor, we moved down there and established contact with the operations center in main State. One of my colleagues was very nervous because on CNN, we had the TV monitor, that there was a rumor that a bomb had gone off in the garage at the State Department as part of this.

Q: I recall they were talking about; it was on the news.

BOORSTEIN: So it was on CNN. This friend of mine, his wife worked in Main State and he was all nervous, "What do I do? What do I do?" So I picked up the phone and I called the operations center and they answered the phone. I said, "We are just seeing a report of a bomb having gone off in the garage of the State Department, what's the story?" This woman on the phone laughed and she said, "Rest assured, if a bomb had gone off you wouldn't be talking to me now we'd all would have either been hurt or have fled." So I turned to my colleague and said, "Relax, your wife if fine."

So, I guess it was about a couple of hours later that the word to go home was given. In the meantime I finally called my daughter, couldn't get through, couldn't get through, and kept trying. Called her cell phone, couldn't get through, send her and email; of course, she got the email three days later. Finally I left her a message on her home machine. She called back while I was still at work, I mean talk about relief. Anybody who is a parent will know I understood for the first time of my life what it is when someone says they have had a panic attack. Because here it is your flesh and blood could have been killed and to think about the people that didn't have the good news was hard. So, she had been on the subway going from Brooklyn into Manhattan and they stopped because that train was due to go right through the World Trade Center station and told people get off and turn around, go home, whatever. So, she took, that was after the first plane hit, so she was on her way back and she decided at one point that she was going to get off and walk home. It was further than her normal stop but she felt she'd be safer. She got off and she was on the elevated platform and she saw the second plane hit. She was traumatized. So, she then walked home and that's when she found the message and she was able to get a line clear to call me back. We went and saw her about a month later during the Columbus Day long weekend and we just felt we wanted to be close to her. You could still see at the fire stations and at the police stations that people were lost, the wreaths the flowers, the notes, the whatever. It was a city that was just in a shock, in grief and shock.

Anyway, back to Washington, so about 11 o'clock we all went home, of course the traffic was horrendous. I was able to get out a little bit easier than others because my car was parked at a higher level in the garage than others and I was able to get out on the street that was higher up on the hill and then I was able to scoot off and get onto Route 66 to go home. I get home and, of course, I had messages from my sister, from my niece wanting to make sure I was OK because they knew I worked in Washington and these were both local I mean in the Washington area. So I reached them and, of course, I called my wife's school, I couldn't get through. So I just went...and my wife worked in Falls Church, which is towards Washington in Virginia about five miles from our house and maybe about ten miles from the Pentagon. I mean, I'm sure she was OK, but just a matter of wanting to be close to people who were important, it is a common reaction. So, they were in the process of dismissing the kids and she followed me home in her car and we obviously were glued to the television for the rest of the day. But our awareness back at the office on the importance of the physical security constraints and upping the priority in vulnerable areas was just so much informed by September 11th. We obviously were already in a alert mode because of what happened in 1998 at our embassies in Africa but this was just reinforced significantly. So, to this day we are getting enough money to build eight to ten new embassies and I believe that given the time that it takes to build embassies and the timeline that since 2001 we have either started, have under construction or have completed almost fifty new facilities at posts around the world.

Q: When you say embassies do you mean consulates? Are they included?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, I mean we built a new consulate in Istanbul; we built a new consulate in Cape Town. We built a new consulate in Sao Paulo in Brazil, it actually was a retrofit of a former pharmaceutical factory but it had sufficient grounds and sufficient office space in buildings that we could renovate. We have retrofit it to fit our needs but still within the set back that we needed for security reasons purposes. So its been a phenomenal...you know when you read the history of our buildings of embassies around the world we had a similar, perhaps not quite as ambitious, but still a fairly robust period of construction in the '50s and look around where we still have some of our embassies. Our embassy in Helsinki, for example, was built in those years; the consulate general in Frankfurt, as you mentioned, our embassy in Canberra was built in the fifties.

Q: Accra?

BOORSTEIN: Ankara?

Q: Accra?

BOORSTEIN: Oh Accra? Yeah.

Q: Accra, Ghana has grown.

BOORSTEIN: But you know some of those now are being replaced because of the security but some are still standing.

Q: You know the ones in the fifties were high on architectural values. What was...when you are doing a big program like this and security is a concern how did we feel architecturally wise?

BOORSTEIN: Well we sacrificed in my opinion a lot of the truly powerful architectural statements that our embassy in New Delhi makes for example or the embassy in London that was designed by Saarinen, the guy who designed Dulles Airport, the real signature buildings. With the exception of the embassy in Beijing and maybe a few others we build these in accordance in what is called a design built concept where we let a contractor oversees both the architectural design, usually through a subcontract, and they work together on a fast track for a new building. Where as in Beijing for example, we did what's called design- bid-build, where the first contract is with the design firm, in this case Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, which is a very highly renown firm with building projects all over the world. There are some very aesthetic elements built into the design.

That's not to say that the other embassy's aren't aesthetically attractive but there was an effort that was started prior to General Williams coming on board, which he developed even further called the standard embassy design where you take certain relationships of how big is a consular section, where is the consular section in relation to another section and you can expand and contract in accordance with how big it needs to be. You can put a different faï¿½ade on so that it fits in appropriately into your host country environment. You are not going to have the same faï¿½ade in Reykjavik, Iceland, as you would have in South Africa. You would have to have some cultural sensitivities. But we have sacrificed some in terms of the more signature buildings. Berlin is a signature building, Beijing will be a signature building, but beyond that, if it fits into the framework and design, you're not going to have the famous architectural firms getting involved any more. But it's a trade off because we estimated that with the projects that have been completed to date that we have removed or we have moved about 8,000 U.S. government employees including the foreign nationals out of harms way. So that's a significant achievement.

Q: Well I've talked to Pru Bushnell and Bob Dillon; both of them had embassies blown up under them.

BOORSTEIN: Where was Dillon?

Q: Beirut.

BOORSTEIN: Oh, Beirut in '83.

Q: Yeah. So it needs to be done.

BOORSTEIN: Yes, it certainly does.

Q: How did you find...did security crop up; I'm talking about security of eavesdropping and this sort of thing. Was this pretty well limited to...obviously we have to be careful but it was an absolute priority in Moscow and Beijing.

BOORSTEIN: Oh absolutely. As a matter of fact, we often joke in the project for the embassy in Beijing which I will come to at the end because after retiring I've now come back to work in that office, the office that I founded in 1999. We started talking even back then that this building the new embassy in Beijing was fundamentally a security project with a little bit of construction involved because it was driven by the need to be sure that we at the end of the day we could certify to Congress that the intelligence agency, maybe now it's the new directorate of national intelligence that has to confirm to the Congress that these facilities are secure for the carrying out of national security business of the United States. That certainly was done with total honesty and conviction in the case of Moscow and so far the embassy in Beijing is being carried out with similar degrees of insurance that it's being done.

Q: I just realized that you have to make a certain assumption but back in your mind did you feel that the Chinese security people, the eavesdroppers were as diligent, as aggressive as the Soviets were?

BOORSTEIN: Well, first of all I mean what one of the things that perhaps is not widely known by the public at large is that the intelligence community in the United States did not diminish it's level of vigilance vis-ï¿½-vis the Soviet Union once the Russian Federal was formed. So, the security forces are as aggressive and as capable, it's widely believed as during the old Soviet days. Is the general operating assumption, with regard to the Chinese that these folks are capable also? They may use different methods but the precautions that we take to protect our operations, those that are on going in the current embassy as well as those that we are building into the future embassy represent that level of care and concern and there is no question about it. Again, this is not my area of expertise, I can't for other reasons can not cite you chapter and verse anyway but this is the overarching belief and Congress in particular has zeroed in on that particular aspect it and wants to be sure that when you are spending a huge amount of money largely driven by the security overlay, which otherwise would be a normal office building, it was felt that on a square footage basis the rebuilding of the building in Moscow was six times as expensive on a square footage basis as building a similar high-rise office building in any big city of the United States.Q: Did you find was there a problem in letting out contracts and all of padded contracts, cozy deals, like in American. I would think that the sharks would gather with what was going on?

BOORSTEIN: Well, the answer is no. I mean the U.S. government and certainly my experience in the State Department is that over the years perhaps as a consequence of some of these cozy deals in the earlier eras has developed a pretty transparent structure for the way in which private companies do business with the government. You are talking in the case of Beijing I think the construction itself is well over $200 million, the government overhead adds another big component to it but the money budgeted from Congress is public information and was over $400 million. Of which $200 million plus was just the contract with the joint venture that's building the embassy in Beijing. The primary company, the H.B. Zachary Company, was also the prime contractor for the Moscow project. So the U.S. government, the State Department, was attracted to their bid because they had done a decent job, I mean they made some money and they were tough in terms of negotiating change orders and making claims and doing whatever, but at the end of the day we felt that their experience was a real factor and they, with new joint venture partners, or a new joint venture partner were picked for the Beijing project as well.

We haven't had any evidence that they're putting in claims during the contract itself for unforeseen site conditions or other demands the government would lay on after they exceeded the scope of the requested proposal, for example, contract structure. So we don't feel that they are taking us to the cleaners at all. I haven't had any inkling of that.

Q: How about the Chinese? Do you do any looking at the other side of the wall? I mean what about the Chinese here in the States because I wouldn't think we would have either the money or the capacity to duplicate what we were doing.

BOORSTEIN: Well for the Chinese this is the largest construction project of a new stand-alone building that they have ever done. I think they built a new embassy in Canberra a number of years ago. It's an interesting story that I can tell about it, so I'm glad that you steered me in that direction. Early in my tenure as the head of the Beijing program office maybe in, I'm trying to think, spring or summer of 2000, I get a call from the Chinese embassy. The woman who I had dealt with because we were still talking to the Chinese about property in both Washington and Beijing and sometimes the talks were here and sometimes they were in Beijing. A woman who was my main counterpart called me up and said that the Chinese embassy had engaged I. M. Pei, renowned Chinese-American architect, probably the most well-known living architect in the world, one could argue.

Q: With the east wing of the National Gallery, etc., etc., etc.

BOORSTEIN: The Bank of China building in Hong Kong is a very signature piece with cross beams. He wanted to talk to me and would I mind giving him a call and here is his phone number. So I called and got through to him and he picked up the phone. I said, "I am very pleased to talk to you Dr. Pei, what's on your mind?" He said, "Well you know of my love for my adopted land the United States and love of my country of origin China and that the Chinese ambassador in Washington reached out to me as an ideal bridge to help ensure the progress for these embassies in both of our capitals. I am doing this as a friend to both the United States and China. So as a result of that request he asked me to look at the site that the State Department has offered the Chinese." I said, "Well I think that's wonderful." He said, "I have to tell you I don't like the site, it has bad feng shui." Feng shui is the Chinese principle of...feng shui literally means air and water and it is the relationship of the elements, it is the relationship of where do you put the living room, where do you put the bedroom...

Q: How it faces?

BOORSTEIN: Whether your main entrance should be on the north side, the south side and all these consequences and we had gone through great lengths to convince the Chinese that this site was in fact good for them not for any feng shui reasons, but because this was on federal land and outside the purview of the government of the District of Columbia. We didn't want to get the Chinese to have to deal with the DC government and have the DC government be difficult and snub their nose at the State Department as a federal government entity because they wouldn't care about or wouldn't understand the sensitivity of the whole bilateral-political relationship and therefore try to play hardball with the Chinese, because we wanted them to play ball with us in Beijing. So by having them on federal land it came under the jurisdiction of a National Capital Planning Commission, which does have a representative from the DC government but they can't sing the tune, they can't force the decisions alone. So this is all going on in my mind as I. M. Pei is telling me that he doesn't like the site. So here I am, Mike Boorstein, senior Foreign Service officer, telling the most renown living architect in the world today, "I wish you hadn't said that Dr. Pei because we are trying to make that site work and we believe that it is in the best interest of the U.S.-China relationship that the Chinese find that site acceptable. That I'm sure that you with your architectural talent can find a way to make that site work." Then his reaction was, "Oh, do you think that I made a mistake?" I sort of repeated myself and I said, "Not one that can't be rectified." You have to pull out all your diplomatic skills and I was telling one of my architectural colleagues and he said, "Well Mike, you were talking to the equivalent of a rock star in the world of architecture." Here I am talking to the Mick Jagger of architects about this.

Q: This is May 2007. We have been talking about the siting of the new Chinese embassy here in Washington and go ahead.

BOORSTEIN: OK, I want to talk about the time that I was the director of the Beijing program office from that time forward from my recollection of where we picked up on the tape I think we are roughly in 1999-2000. When I finished my year at Harvard I became the director of the Beijing program office which is a new office within the Foreign Buildings Office of the bureau of administration that was created in order to consolidate within one organizational structure, the planning for the new embassy in Beijing and to model the kind of resources that were integrated along the same lines that were used to build the embassy in Moscow because of the very heavy focus on security. So we also were taking advantage of the fact that just like the early days of negotiating with the government of the Soviet Union back in the late '60s early '70s we had a very good opportunity because the Chinese and the U.S. both wanted to build new embassies in their respective capitals. So the whole arrangement where in we could build our embassy and build it in accordance with a program that would maximize our security, we had leverage because the Chinese wanted to build a new embassy in Washington that would be really their signature embassy of any place in the world. So that is what was behind our trying to facilitate the Chinese getting their site in Washington and putting it on federal land.

So, there was a series of negotiating type trips that were organized that were held both in Washington and in Beijing. I was the deputy chief negotiator. The negotiating team on the U.S. side was headed by Terry Wilmer who was the director of real estate for the foreign buildings office and had a lot of experience in negotiating property acquisitions for the State Department and he did a superb job. I had worked with him dating back to 1995 when I was the administrative minister-counselor in Beijing when we were negotiating the gain the ability to actually purchase the equivalent of ownership in China under 70 or 90-year leases to allow us to have residential apartments and things of this nature. In exchange, we were able to grant the Chinese an arrangement they wanted for their UN mission in New York, which was a very diplomatically finessed kind of arrangement because it wasn't a bilateral issue, it was a multilateral issue. The State Department itself was kind of internally conflicted because the people in New York, at the time at the U.S. mission to the United Nations, including Madeline Albright who was the U.S. ambassador to the UN at that time, were very much in favor of helping the Chinese whereas the bilateral side of the house, the China desk, the office of foreign missions etc., were interested in finding a linkage as tenuous as it was with what we were looking for in China. It all worked out by sort of smoke and mirrors and winks and nods and letting the Chinese know that we weren't going to help them in New York unless they helped us in China and ultimately we got what we needed. But over several series of negotiations we were able to work out the arrangement where we acquired our ten-acre site in Beijing and the Chinese were able to get the land that they wanted in the international chancery center, which was on federal land. The short version is we ultimately were able to negotiate the acquisition on a 90-year lease renewal for another 90 years on the property in Beijing and we negotiated it in part by giving back another piece of land that they had allowed us to buy under a previous agreement that was signed I believe in 1995, if not earlier.

So we ended up by... I'd say the deal was signed, the last round of negotiations was in November of 2000 and so we got the site and then through a series of agreements and whatever, the site was cleared. We did our geo-technical studies and then in early 2001 at the end of the Clinton administration the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Foreign Buildings, Patsy Thomasson, who was a political appointee, she had to leave because George Bush was elected. She was very, very sad and upset to leave because she really liked the job. I was named as the interim acting deputy assistant secretary for foreign buildings. I was the senior foreign service officer in the organization at the time and Pat Kennedy, who was the assistant secretary for administration put me in the position on an interim basis, on an acting basis, and I did that for about two months.

When Colin Powell came in his first nominee for appointment, as a new deputy assistant secretary was a retired two-star general from the Army Corps of Engineers, Charles E. Williams. He came in having negotiated an arrangement with the new secretary of state that the foreign buildings office would be removed from the bureau of administration and be made a bureau in and of itself. This was not apparent at the time he came in because he was sworn in as the deputy assistant secretary but within a few weeks it was clear that was the direction we were going in. That had all been agreed upon before he came because during the transition period he was brought in to evaluate for the secretary the whole program of how we managed our overseas construction and maintenance and management of our properties for diplomatic facilities and consular facilities and housing.

So by the second or third week in March he was sworn in and I was no longer the acting deputy assistant secretary and I went back to being the director of the Beijing program office. Well within a couple of weeks, no his first week actually the third or fourth day he help an off-site at Fort Meyer where he was going to unveil his reorganization arrangement for this new bureau. So he unveiled it sort of piece by piece, sort of like peeling off a layer of onion or sort of like a very non-titillating striptease where he would take off a glove and take off his shirt and expose this new organization to his senior people. Sure enough there was an organizational chart and I didn't see the Beijing program office on it. So during a break at the end of the first day, I went up to him and I said, "General Williams," and by the way that is what he wanted to be called. He was not Chuck he was not Mr. Williams, he was General Williams because of his Army career, that was what he identified as and that was what he was known and is still known today because he is still doing the same job. So he smiled and said, "Well, don't worry Mike I have something even better in store for you." Well I sort of dragged it out of him and what he wanted me to do and what he appointed me to do was to be the director of the office of planning and development of the new overseas building bureau.

So this was one of the senior jobs, it was the equivalent because he became the equivalent of an assistant secretary so I basically was elevated to be the equivalent of a deputy assistant secretary of this new office that he had created called planning and development because before under the foreign buildings office there was no discrete office of planning. It was sort of part and parcel of the real estate function and it was not as prominent. So I then became the director of planning and development for the entire world. I inherited a staff of about 85 architects, engineers, space planners and cost specialist, cost engineers. So the first thing that we were asked to do by General Williams was to put together a compendium in accordance with a set of criteria of the most critical projects for new embassy or new consulate construction as well as the most critical rehab renovation projects around the world. It was called a long-range overseas building plan. So this was delivered to Congress, it was used by OMB (Office of Management and Budget), a copy was given to the secretary. We turned this thing around in about three months. This thing has been updated ever since 2001 annually, The Long-Range Overseas Buildings Plan is the official title.

I got involved in the roughly 15-months that I was in this job. I took a team to Paris twice to try to improve some of the space issues there. There was the Talleyrand building, which is very historic; it is where the Marshall Plan was administered. It is right on the street by the Place de la Concorde and deemed to be very vulnerable. The idea was to take our people out and put them elsewhere either within the Chancery or in leased quarters in other parts of the city of Paris that were more secure, to basically move out the consular section and public diplomacy. This was very delicate because there were some representational rooms in there that were being renovated by use of private funds because of their historical nature, there was the idea to build an underground parking garage underneath the backyard, so to speak, I mean the garden of the American ambassador's residence. This was all politically motivated because on Tom Brokaw's NBC Evening News the segment he would have from time to time called the Fleecing of America broadcast about a GAO (General Accounting Office) report that said that there was a sliver of land next to the ambassador's backyard that was being used for parking space for senior officers of the American embassy in Paris at no cost and the GAO had recommended it be sold because it was worth several million dollars. So I was going there, General Williams had gone there initially after this story broke at the request of the secretary to look into it and then I did the follow up visits to look into what it would take, how much it would cost to put in an underground garage and whether we would have to tear up the back third of the ambassador's very beautiful garden and then rebuild it. So we even took along a landscape architect. Long story short that garage was never built but I had two wonderful trips to Paris, and did further the planning process for that.

I continued to be involved in the China program preparations when it came to some of the reciprocal discussions even though the Beijing program office was put lower into the new organization chart as part of the larger office of construction and commission. I went to a East Asia-Pacific administrative conference in Hong Kong, I went to Moscow and Oslo after 9/11. The threats to our chancery in Moscow because after we moved into the new embassy we maintained the old one which was right near the street so we were trying to find a way to protect by enhancing the blast resistance of the original building so I led a team over to look at some of those studies and had a lot of interaction with Ambassador Vershbow and his team. Then I went through Oslo on the way home and looked at property options for building a new embassy in Oslo because even though the embassy in Oslo was designed, I believe by Saarinen, it was on a triangular piece of property in Oslo that was very vulnerable from a security standpoint. So I was looking at a site where the former Fornebu Airport was which was just being abandoned. Ultimately there was another site that was going to be a military barracks. That had been abandoned by the Norwegian military and it's my understanding, this was after I left, that's the site that ultimately was chosen and the embassy is either under construction or is already finished. So I was glad that I played a roll in that particular undertaking.

I went to a European conference of administrative officers in Frankfurt. The objective was to convince a lot of these agencies from other embassies around Europe to consolidate their regional functions in Frankfurt where we were building a new consulate in the former Army hospital there, which before the war or during the war had been a German Army hospital.

Q: Is that the 97th General?

BOORSTEIN: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: I have a daughter who was born there.

BOORSTEIN: Actually so did General Williams, he had a child that was born there and you can still look above one of the doors and see the German crest that they never took down.

Q: I at one point this as an aside, in Frankfurt at my first post I was baby birth officer, this was 1956 or '57. I was registering about 300 babies a month and most of the...

BOORSTEIN: From the GI's right?

Q: Yeah, and most of them coming out of the 97th General.

BOORSTEIN: It is a sprawling facility and you know we acquired it and converted it into a consulate and it's up and running today but it actually had more space than we really needed initially so the idea was to convince the regional offices that were in Paris and Madrid and Vienna and whatever to consolidate. It met with mixed success.

Q: What by the way did you do with the old consulate they had in the courtyard they had a Calder, an early Calder?

BOORSTEIN: You know, I don't know. I don't know what they did.

Q: I remember I met Calder putting it up.

BOORSTEIN: Really, really. I don't know. It was in its day quite an attractive building but again very vulnerable from a security point of view.

Q: Oh very.

BOORSTEIN: A security point of view, exactly. So I left that office in early July of 2002.

Q: What we're going to do I think some of the stuff we've talked about before and if we haven't we can fill in. But why don't we start with when did you get in, shall we start with when you got involved with the diplomacy center?

BOORSTEIN: Right and I think that's fine. Well I finished my tour in overseas buildings in July of 2002 and in about April of that year I had pretty much decided I was going to retire and then Dick Shinnick, who was the executive assistant to the Undersecretary for Management Grant Green sent me an email saying, "Mike, how would you like to build a museum?" What this led to and what convinced me to stay was the Department was in the early stages of the planning for the establishment of a museum of the history of American diplomacy, as it was thought of then conceptually, to be put into the original, what's called the Marshall wing of the State Department, or old State whatever you want to call it, the original building that was built in 1941 as the War Department and then the department inherited after the war once the Pentagon was built in the late '40s. That building was under renovation and the concept was to put a diplomacy museum that would be accessible to the public and adjacent to a conference center that was being created. So I thought about it and met with Richard Boucher who was the assistant secretary in public affairs, I met with Betsy Murphy who was deputy assistant secretary in that bureau, I met with Marc Sasser, who's the department's historian and I made the decision, OK I'll do it.

So I started that job in late August of 2002. My office was in the basement of the State Department building and I had a staff of four. I had Bob Heath who was a retired USIA officer who had been with the project since about 1999 on a sort of a part time basis when it was part of the bureau of administration and Priscilla Lynn who was a contract curator who had been with the project also since 1998-1999 and two summer interns and that was it.

The idea was to basically formulate a business plan for the creation of the museum and this was going to be a public-private partnership in conjunction with the Foreign Affairs Museum Counsel a non-profit 501(C3) organization whose chairman was former Senator Mack Mathias and whose president was Stephen Lowe, a retired Foreign Service officer who had been ambassador to Zambia or Nigeria I believe. He had been the director of the Foreign Service Institute; and after he retired he had been the director of the Johns Hopkins campus in Bologna. It was basically he was one of the key conceivers of this idea to have this diplomacy museum as a way of telling the story of American diplomacy and the work of American diplomats to the American public because it's not all that well known and the idea is and was and still is to put the Department of State on the map and let the American people know the importance of the work of American diplomats on behalf of our nation.

So I started out, we had already an initial design had been done by Ralph Appelbaum, who was considered and probably still is the foremost museum designer working in America today. Among his creations were the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the early version and I guess the future version of the Newseum. He did the updated, upgraded display at the New York Museum of Natural History, I believe. He did an exhibit on the solar system and space and whatever. He then ultimately did the Clinton library, the historical exhibit there. He's done a lot of work overseas, he's doing the equivalent of a presidential library for Deng Xiaoping's in China, so he's a very accomplished guy. He was a Peace Corps volunteer, I believe, in Peru and did some of the traveling exhibits for USIA.

So he did a design. We had a museum planner on loan from the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum and his name was Stephen Estrada. We had a little committee that had been established to critique the content that was being developed. Well at the beginning when we got the design from Ralph Appelbaum most people didn't like it. They felt that it was just not conveying what it was that we were seeking to convey. So one of the first things that I did was to convene what's called a design charrette to bring together some historians. I invited down Dr. Alan Henrikson, who is a professor of diplomatic history at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, someone I had met during my year at Harvard. We had some people from the Smithsonian, some people from the department to critique the design and we had a consulting firm Lord Museum Management, I think is what the name of it was. They are based in Canada, in Toronto, but they have an office in Washington. So they were the facilitators for this. So we got some other ideas on how to beef up the concept for the museum. It ultimately evolved into the concept growing to have a combination of a visitor's center and a museum. The museum and visitors center together would depict the work of the Department of State, the challenges of American diplomacy and the history of American diplomacy.

So it was both a present day, this is the work that we do, and a historical look back that would link it to great achievements in U.S. history like the Louisiana Purchase, like the work that American diplomats in the north did to help the cause of the north in the Civil War, things of this nature. The Marshall Plan coming more into the 20th Century and also to develop a communications strategy that would assist with fund raising. So Appelbaum with our assistance and input and a lot of iterations back and forth, created a picture book with text that was called American DiplomacTelling the Story. That was done by about the early 2004.

One of the main features of the work of the U.S. Diplomacy Center, which is what the office was called, was the management and exhibiting of a traveling exhibit called "After 9/11, Messages From the World and Images from Ground Zero," which was put together largely by Priscilla Lynn, the curator, in the wake of the 9/11 tragedy, when a lot of expressions, outpouring of grief and sympathy and support for the American people just started appearing at American embassies and consulates around the world. This became a display because those objects, letters, signed fireman's helmets, small teddy bears, children's drawings, technically became the property of the future George W. Bush presidential library but the department needed to maintain stewardship over those materials, so they were all sent to the department and archived. They were going through by Priscilla and some other people and she conceived of this exhibit. This exhibit went to the Gerald Ford presidential museum in Grand Rapids, Michigan. That was there on display for the first anniversary of 9/11 and that was a couple of weeks after I had started the job and I went there with Priscilla and Marc Sasser, the department's historian. Marc Sasser made a sort for the keynote address, and I spoke to the group. From there it went to the George Bush, Sr. presidential library in College Station, Texas, on the grounds adjacent to the campus of Texas A&M. I went there as well and spoke to the visitors on the opening night of the exhibit. From there it went to Florida International Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida, it was there for the second anniversary of 9/11. That was a very, very meaningful experience. The mayor of St. Petersburg presided over the ceremony. I spoke, the fire chief spoke, the police chief spoke, there were press interviews, and actually at all places there were press interviews. I appeared on TV, Priscilla appeared on TV, we did radio interviews which was not only about the exhibit it was about the diplomacy center and also since I was there as a representative of the State Department, I had to field broader questions, which was quite a challenge, particularly after the war in Iraq started.

But at the second anniversary of 9/11 when the exhibit was in St. Petersburg, Florida, this was in September of 2003; right before the beginning of the ceremony, we all noticed this elderly gentleman dressed in a New York City fireman's uniform. He was there and a member of the press went over to him and said, "Why are you dressed in this uniform?" He said, "I was a New York City fireman for many years, I've been retired for quite a while. I live here in Florida and I heard about this exhibit being here today and opening on the second anniversary of 9/11 and I knew this is where I had to be." So he was very sprightly, he had all his faculties about him; he was well into his eighties I believe. The mayor, being a good politician, singled him out during his remarks, and the crowd acknowledged him and then after the ceremony part of what we needed to do was to light a candle and one candle would light another candle and we would then have a moment of silence. The mayor went over to this retired New York City fireman and had him light the first candle, it was all very, very touching. It was a great moment.

The next day, I appeared on a noon talk show in Tampa on Fox network and I was teamed up with a security expert on one of these talk shows and the woman who was the hostess asked some good questions and the idea was for me to give a flavor of how terrorism had impacted on the lives of American diplomats living overseas. I certainly could comment on that quite a bit.

The exhibit subsequently then went to the Carter presidential library in Atlanta and then the last venue it went to, while I was the director of the diplomacy center, was the San Francisco War Memorial on the West Coast and that was in March of 2005. George Shultz was there because he lives in San Francisco, his wife is the chief of protocol for the city of San Francisco. She was there and Shultz made some remarks, I made some remarks and it was very, very well received. The big sponsors of it were the Philippino-American veterans and so I met a lot of Philippino-Americans and went to lunch with a group of them. While I was there, I also organized a fund raising related dinner on behalf of the diplomacy center and the featured guest was the executive director of the San Francisco World Affairs Council. I had also invited the director of the office of foreign missions based in San Francisco, and a couple of retired ambassadors and we had a very lovely dinner just to talk about the concept of fund raising and perhaps this group could form the nucleus of a local fund raising committee once we got into serious fund raising.

In the meantime, we had developed a business plan for a future staff, a future cost of running it, set fund raising goals, had gotten preliminary fund raising authority from the under secretary for management, the staff had expanded to include a full time development officer who was really in charge of the fund raising planning. The guy who was on loan from the Smithsonian Air and Space became a regular State Department officer, and we brought on board an education specialist who had been with the New York historical society. We expanded our contractor base to have a full time registrar as retired Foreign Service people cleaned out their attics and had other things to donate, she would receive and record them. We would send letters of thanks to acknowledge their contributions. We got a research assistant, we had a series of interns that came from universities that were impeccably talented, creative and just helped do research on various things.

We also developed a mini-exhibit on the Marshall Plan that we assisted the overseas building bureau with having a permanent exhibit at the Talleyrand building in Paris and we also used a copy of that same exhibit we went with a group to the University of West Virginia and we had a display there. It was a very modest sort of poster exhibit with a video that depicted George Marshall's work in promoting the Marshall Plan and its effectiveness. Connie Morella, who was the U.S. ambassador to the Organization of Economic, Cooperation and Development and formerly a Congresswoman from Maryland, was on the program at the University of West Virginia and I participated in the program and her overall program as well. The president of the University of West Virginia hosted a dinner for her and I was there with the local Congressman from West Virginia, I think his name was Mollohan, something like that I don't recall now, a Democrat. Some people from the George Marshall Institute at VMI (Virginia Military Institute) were there and the George Marshall Foundation where there is a small museum and VMI is where he went to college, they were at the dinner. So there was a good close collaboration that was done not only by the George Marshall Institute but another Marshall foundation in Leesburg, Virginia, which was supporting the preservation for Dodona Manor, which was Marshall's home. So, we also took that exhibit to the Dodona Manor and it was on display and I was there for the opening. A person came from the bureau of legislative Affairs and made some remarks. You know, we developed some good, close collaboration and created a viable and vibrant network.

That's sort of the good news about the museum project. Unfortunately, the project really never got the full support of the department in order to move it forward in a meaningful way. Because, although Secretary Powell signed a letter of support, there was a great deal of reluctance to have Powell and other senior officials of the department appear as if they were doing fund raising. There is a great deal of sensitivity over senior officials of the government getting involved in this, although by regulation and policy there are ways to do it and whatever plan you put forward has to be approved by the under secretary for management. We were trying to formulate that plan and finally got the under secretary for management to agree to let us put together a plan after the secretary had signed the letter of support. Once we had the business plan and the parameters of the fund raising, we actually engaged a couple of fund raising consultants who were helping us with some of the details to put together a conceptual framework for doing it. Then Powell's tenure ended and when Condoleezza Rice came in January of 2005, we had to basically start from scratch to convince her and her new team of the impact of the museum. She was less interested in it than Colin Powell. As far as I know, it's been almost two years since I retired; and she has not signed a comparable letter of support.

Q: It is my understanding it's in limbo right now.

BOORSTEIN: So there's been no basis to do any serious fund raising. The goal is $25 million under the public-private partnership where the department is providing the space, doing the basic renovations which are done, providing a small staff to run it during the planning and development stage and some number more or less what it is now to actually run it and the department would continue to support it. So there was a challenge to sustain the budget level, the staffing level with the idea under the business plan that it was going to grow and perhaps double. Well that seemed to have gotten nowhere in the department because of concern even as small as the budget is in an ever tightening fiscal environment with the war going on in Iraq this was just not tenable. I left the project in July of 2005 and retired in September after the Job Search Program and the guy that came from the Air and Space Museum has been the acting director ever since. There has been no permanent senior person as director. The staff has stayed about the same and it's not been killed, but it has not been nourished either.

Q: Did you get any feeling Mike that there were individuals or forces within the Department of State who didn't want this to happen?

BOORSTEIN: Oh absolutely Stu and again the main detracting factor of the museum was the real estate. This was 20 thousand, 20 thousand square feet on the ground floor of the old wing of the State Department that's now been renovated and space has always been an issue for the Department of State in that everybody wants to be close to the mother ship, close to where the action is, close to the secretary and that means being at 2201 C Street. The idea that 20 thousand square feet, which probably could accommodate 150 or 200 people in modular type offices, those people have to go elsewhere where the Department pays rent and extra money for fitting it out, utilities and etc. and the inconvenience of not being in Main State. There are people that don't care about the long term benefits to the department that many of us felt would accrue by having this important facility, this landmark, that could attract tourists, attract school groups, be a factor in a network that brings together the major universities that have graduate programs in international affairs and diplomacy like George Washington, Georgetown, American University, Johns Hopkins, etc. where we were just starting to build up networks it seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Q: Well I have to say with prejudice I've been involved with this thing from the beginning. My involvement in, as I'm doing right now and also I've written the definitive book called The American Consul and I say the definitive book because it's the only book written on the consulate service and it's out of print. No, I hope something will happen and quite frankly I'm a little bit surprised in seeing that Secretary Rice comes out of the academic world and she doesn't...and people talk about public diplomacy and support for diplomacy where we are right and this would be a place that every high school kid who comes to Washington would go through. To let this go is very short sighted and it's stupid.

BOORSTEIN: Well the business plan was going to and perhaps it was no doubt an ambitions business plan in the sense we felt that we could have content through a very rich website, interaction and programming through a theater and whatever this could become a desired and sought after attraction and venue for visitors to Washington. I learned a lot about the museum business in my three years on that job. Because I'm a graduate of George Washington University, I audited two courses in museum management and the cutting edge of what's going on in the museum world in terms of exhibitions and what attracts people. I went on a number of field trips; I went to several national conventions of the American association of museums. I really dove into it deeply because I felt so strongly about the concept. Our notion was that we could attract, not millions of visitors but several hundred thousand visitors a year and this could become the museum people know. From statistics it is known that the average American comes to Washington three times in their lives, once as a child because their school group comes, their parents or grandparents bring them. They come to Washington, they go to primarily the White House, the Capital and the Museum of American History, maybe the Air and Space Museum. The acting director of the American history museum said, "We don't have a business plan because basically our motto is we don't care, they'll come anyway."

Q: Yeah.

BOORSTEIN: I'll never forget that, that was during the charrette in 2002 when we were critiquing the Appelbaum design. People come as an adult because they are bringing their own children and they'll come when they are senior citizens to bring their grandchildren. These are three pilgrimages. So we would like to have that pilgrimage and that was our business plan, to include the diplomacy museum because there are stories to tell.

The department, I need to mention that the department does have an exhibit hall, it is internal to the department so the average American or foreigner or any visitor to Washington can't simply walk in and say, "I want to see the exhibit hall." The exhibit hall itself is a collection of diplomatica, of gifts to secretaries of state, the typewriter used by...

Q: Woodrow Wilson?

BOORSTEIN: No, it is either George Kennan or who was the fellow that died recently?

Q: George Kennan.

BOORSTEIN: Was it George Kennan? But who was another fellow from his era?

Q: Chip Bohlen?

BOORSTEIN: No, no.

Q: Well anyway...

BOORSTEIN: But anyway, the typewriter that was used...maybe it was used by Kennan to write his whatever his famous...

Q: Hysterics?

BOORSTEIN: Yeah, I'm not sure it was that but it's old pictures, a photograph of the entire Department of State on the steps of the Old Executive Office Building where the State Department used to be, the courier bag with all the baggage labels of a diplomatic courier who retired in the late '60s early '70s. It is a marvelous thing there and these kinds of things can be transferred to the new facility. The Great Seal of the United States that is used for official treaties and documents is there. Plans were made to move that and incorporate it. So none of that's going to happen unless there is some champion who emerges and it was very disappointing for me. I felt this was going to be the greatest legacy that a Foreign Service officer could ever hope to have. I felt that I moved it along, I created a basis but it's still sort of sitting there.

Q: Such is bureaucracy.

BOORSTEIN: Yeah.

Q: Well Mike, I think this is probably a good place to stop. What I would like to do is you're now working as what's your title?

BOORSTEIN: OK, I am now the director of the administration at the Pan American Health Organization, which is the regional office for the Americas of the World Health Organization, a United Nations agency. This position has been held by a retired Foreign Service officer who has done management and administration since at least 1983. I am the third person in a row with that same background to have this position.

Q: Well we are going to cut this off at this point but I would encourage you at some point we'll continue on and put this into the hopper and fix it up but to do an addendum or either write it up or we can have an interview whenever you retire from this or so. So save up your stories.

BOORSTEIN: Okay, well that will be in about four and a half years if I survive, all right? Thank you so much Stuart.

End of interview