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

ARTHUR S. BERGER

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

[Note: This interview was not edited by Mr. Berger.]

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with Arthur S. Berger. Today is the 28th of August 2003, and we are in Washington DC. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Arthur, let's begin at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family? First, do you go by Art, Arthur, or what?

BERGER: There are some names I don't like to go by, but either Art or Arthur work. I was born on February 12, 1945 in Providence, Rhode Island.

Q: *Let's start on the father's side. Where do the Bergers come from?*

BERGER: My father came to the United States in 1900 with his family. In fact, it is only about two years ago that I was able to find the record in Ellis Island on the manifest of the ship where he and his family came through. So I was able to track that back. He was twelve years old. He was born in a small town called Husiatyn, which is now in the Ukraine. At that time it was on the border between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and

Russia. I think the year he was born it was Russian. Boundaries in those days tended to fluctuate back and forth.

His family had some relatives who had moved to the United States in the preceding ten or fifteen years in the mass-migration of people from eastern and central Europe, and sent back letters to the old homestead saying "Life is a lot better here." "First of all, you don't have to worry about the Czar's army picking up your young men and taking them away for twenty-five years of forcible service and never seeing them again. And you don' have to live as a peasant or a small vendor – you know, a push cart salesman – barely making ends meet."

And so they saved up enough money over a period of years. Got transit on a ship from Hamburg to New York. Spent a short time in New York City. They didn't like the tenement life, from what my father told me. And from what I've heard about it and read about it since then, it sounded pretty awful. And had some relatives living in Providence. And so they went to Providence, Rhode Island and established themselves there.

Q: *In Husiatyn, what were the Bergers doing?*

BERGER: From what I've been able to tell – because my father didn't like to talk about it. It was part of his memory I think that he tried to leave out and talk [instead] about his new life in America, which he cherished – I think that my grandfather was a peddler. And when he came to the United States, to Providence, he took up the business that he know best, which was selling goose feathers for stuffing mattresses and comforters. Had he stayed with it, this would have been great. But he went out of that, I guess, when synthetics came in in the 1940 and there weren't as many rural geese flowing into Providence. He went out of that business and became a petty shopkeeper. A very small shop where he sold feathers by the pound. And he bought a house right in front of it, on Douglas Avenue, in Providence, Rhode Island.

Q: *Was the name originally Berger? It sounds very German.*

BERGER: It sounds German and it was originally Neuberger or Neiberger, depending on the pronunciation. Some of the family changed it to Berger. Some changed it to Neiberg. I imagine that some kept it with the original name, although I've never been able to find any relatives with that name.

Q: *Well, how about your mother's side?*

BERGER: My mother was born in Boston in 1905. Her parents had emigrated from Lithuania around 1900. And went directly to Boston. Also because they had some relatives who were living there. But her father was originally from Lithuania and her mother was originally from Latvia. I'm not sure where they met. But at one point in the early 1890s, my grandfather set off to raise enough money to move the family out of the Baltics. Life was not great. He was a peddler, with a push cart. And went to England because he had a relative that lived in England.

Went there. Didn't like it in England. Then he met somebody who told him "Come with me to Ireland. In Ireland things are really much nicer. The people are great." So he went off to Ireland. Spent five years there. In the process, someone told him "Why don't you change your name?" So he became Robinson.

Q: *What was their name before?*

BERGER: Ridalia. Although I've never been able to find any relatives or any trace of people with that name, Ridalia.

Q: *Where would it have come from?*

BERGER: It sounded very southern European, either Spanish, Portuguese or Italian. And I've never been able to find any source. But maybe now with the internet I'll be able to do more research on it. Maybe when I finally really retire I'll search that out a little more.

But he evidently changed his name to Robinson. Came back to Lithuania with enough money to move the whole family to Boston. Did that in 1900 or 1901. Family is not really sure exactly when. My mother was born in east Boston in 1905.

Q: *What was he doing? What was his thing?*

BERGER: He sold clothing. Basically the accessories. The shirts, ties, belts, socks, underwear, pants. And he would take his pushcart up to different parts of New England. He would go to Maine for two weeks. Sell to shopkeepers. To Hampshire, to Rhode Island, to western Massachusetts. And eventually several of his children went into the business and opened shops in Boston selling these accessories.

Q: *What type of upbringing did your mother have?*

BERGER: I guess the family was probably lower middle class and eventually became middle class. She went through high school in Boston. The family then moved to Malden. She spent at least a year at a business school learning how to become a secretary or book keeper and worked first for her father and then for her eldest brother, who set up a shop and became quite a successful seller of clothing accessories.

Q: *Back to your father. What was he doing?*

BERGER: He started out as a peddler. And with a younger brother of his who wanted to be a song writer, became a publisher of songs that never sold. Songs that, as far as I can tell, never went beyond their publishing. They started a company called Berger Brothers Publishers that became Berger Brothers. And my father then gave up that. My uncle became an orthodontist. Very successful. My father had this small shop in downtown Providence where he sold toys and novelties and postcards. So he kept that part of the publishing side.

I remember every summer he used to go down to the shop early in the morning, take out samples – a lot of boxes of postcards – and sell them whole-sell to the concessionaires at the various beaches along the coast of Rhode Island.

Q: *Your father then did not go to college?*

BERGER: No. He graduated from high school in Providence. And was basically a small businessman for almost all of his life. And eventually went out of business. He was undersold. This was a time in the '50s and early '60s when the large discount sellers – before the Walmarts – one was Kmart and the one store in Rhode Island that is still in existence called Ann & Hope and they began to sell many of the things that he sold, but much cheaper than he could even buy them for. So eventually he went out of business and he just retired.

Q: *How did your mother and father meet?*

BERGER: My father was quite elderly and had two younger sisters who never married. He felt a responsibility towards them. He had a brother who moved to Canada. His other brother, who was an orthodontist. And these two younger sisters, one of whom worked for him at his shop. Because he would fill the car up with samples and, even during the winter, would go on the road to various towns around Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts to sell these toys and novelties – nail clippers, jokes, party favors, the hats that we use for Christmas and New Years parties, things like that.

He kept trying to find somebody that would be appropriate for him and eventually went to a matchmaker. Sort of gave up on his sisters, especially as his parents were getting more elderly and he was approaching fifty. He said "It's time for me otherwise I'm never going to get married and have children." And he wanted that very badly. He was also a very religious man and he wanted somebody who would match his beliefs. So he went to some matchmakers and they said "Well, there's nobody in Providence that you can find. Why don't you come to New York and we'll fix you up and he gradually met various people and finally did find no one that was to his liking. And then somebody told him "Hey you know, not very far away in Boston is this very lovely family. Don't look at the name Robinson. They are really not wasps from New England. But they are a nice Jewish family and have a daughter in her thirties and she's looking to get married too." Somebody fixed them up and it worked out beautifully.

They got married in 1938. They produced three children. I am the youngest. Two older sisters. And they were together until my father died in 1972.

Q: *Well your mother was older than was normal, I guess, when she had you.*

BERGER: Oh yes, she was. She was close to forty when I was born. And my father was about fifty-five, which was really unusual, particularly for a first marriage for both of them.

Q: *How religious was your family?*

BERGER: My family was quite orthodox in their beliefs. My father, as I said, owned a small shop in downtown Providence and it was the only store in downtown that closed for Friday night, Saturdays, and every Jewish holiday. Family was very important. Making a living was important to him. But just as important to him was keeping his faith. And he did not believe that he should keep his store open. Let his sister – who was not religious at all and was willing to keep it open – let her do it. So on Friday afternoon, an hour before sunset, he would lock the doors and he wouldn't open it again until Monday morning.

Q: *By the way, was there a difference between Jewish immigrants from Ukraine/Austria and Lithuania? You sometimes run across these groups within groups. How much of his religious observances were passed on to the children?*

BERGER: In my father's case – my father was the one who was a stronger believer and my mother, although she came from a similar kind of orthodox background was in many cases much more liberal and progressive in her outlook. My father believed that every Friday evening, every Saturday, Saturday afternoon as well, we should go to the synagogue. That we should go for all of the holidays. It was very important.

And at home we also had to practice many of the rituals. Our parents believed as well that their children should get, not only the practice, but also the education. So they sent us to a Hebrew day school, which was a small parochial school in Providence that went through the sixth grade. Both my sisters went through that. And I graduated from that as well. But in my case, my father believed that his son, his only son, should have a very strong Jewish education – history, bible, stories of the prophet, religious laws, to get a great founding. Both of my parents wanted me to become a rabbi. I guess it was very similar to many Catholic families where the family would like their son to become a priest. Very similar kind of thing.

I'm really pleased now that my parents insisted that I have this strong foundation, this strong education. So they sent me to a private school in Boston, called Maimonides School. I went from seventh grade through high school. It was a small school. There were eleven kids in my class. A lot of individual instruction.

And the instruction was rigorous, not only on the religious history text side, but also on the secular side. I had an English teacher who believed firmly that kids were being brought up without learning how to write or read. And he required us to read a novel a week and report on it. Starting in seventh grade. It was great. It opened a new world to me.

Q: *Going back to a question I raised before the noise came in – the Baltic Jews versus the Ukrainian/Hungarian Jews. Was there an animosity there?*

BERGER: Not an animosity. There was a tension. I think probably in some families it might have been an animosity, but you could say that my family became an integrated one because of my mother's side from the Lithuanian, which in the Yiddish parlance was called the Litvish, and my father's side, which came from the Ukraine/Austro-Hungarian/Russian pattern of settlement, which was less well education and sometimes was looked down upon by the Lithuanian cousins. And they were called the Galitzianos because many of them came from that area of eastern Poland called Galitzia. And their accent, in fact, in Yiddish, was very different.

Q: *There are two basic Jewish languages, Hebrew and Yiddish. What were you picking up?*

BERGER: I was picking up both. From the home, my parents both were fluent in English and English was the language of the house, for everything. Except that when my parents wanted to say something that they didn't want the kids to understand, they spoke in Yiddish. When I was fairly young, some of my grandparents were still alive and they would speak mainly in Yiddish to my parents. And they would speak to the kids as well in Yiddish. So I picked up words here and there and over the years really tried to understand what was this secret language.

The instruction in school, both in elementary as well as in high school, was in Hebrew. And the teachers were – as I said – rigorous in their instruction. This Maimonides School was like a prep school. Kind of a Jewish equivalent to Phillips-Andover. And Hebrew was taught as a language – the grammar, the literature. So that when I came into FSI, I tested in Hebrew at a four/four level. [Editor's Note: In FSI grading the first figure is the level of reading attained, here four, generally considered university educated, and the second is speaking.]

Part of it was that I went to school in Boston and I had to either commute every day or board out. There was no dormitory in this high school. And so I would board with a different family every year, just about. And one year I boarded with the Hebrew teacher, Mr. Lambdin. He was an Israeli who had come to the States both to do his undergraduate and graduate education and also to make enough money to go back home. His son was a good friend of mine in my high school class.

Mr. Lambdin had a rule in his house that if you wanted to eat you had to speak Hebrew. So that I not only learned Hebrew as a literature, Hebrew as a religious language, but also Hebrew as a vernacular. And that helped quite a bit.

Q: *Oh, I'm sure. Well now at home? What was home life like when you were younger?*

BERGER: I think it was typical of families where the parents were either immigrant or first generation American. You know, hard life, working hard. My father would go out to work at nine in the morning and rarely come home before 8:30 or nine o'clock at night. He would work on Sundays. Usually, that would be a day when we would pack up the whole family for an outing. And he would drop us off at the beach or wherever was close

to where he was going to do his peddling. He would go do those shops in the resort areas, they were usually open on Sunday because that was a crowded day.

He wouldn't do that on Saturday, of course. Saturday was the day when we went to the synagogue. It was a family day. We had friends who went to the same synagogue. Since they were orthodox, they wouldn't drive. So most of the people who went to the same synagogue became friends and lived in the same neighborhood, within a few blocks of each other.

Q: *Now Saturday is often seen as the day when kids went out and played baseball and did things, did you find by growing up this way a distance between yourself and the "all American kids?"*

BERGER: I found a distance growing both between my parents, who were much older than me, and also with a lot of other kids in the neighborhood. First of all, after elementary school, I was away in Boston in school seven through twelve. And then I went away to college in New York. So I didn't really make a lot of friends in the neighborhood.

When I came back on weekends, my best friend was our downstairs neighbor, who was from a French Catholic family. And we did everything together. He went to a Jesuit school where he was – shall we say – disciplined severely, as only Jesuits can do. But he also moved to another side of the world because Jesuits tended to be more worldly. But he and I had a lot of experiences together. We would go out bike riding on weekends. And sometimes I would try and sneak away on a Saturday afternoon with him and tell my parents that I was going out to meet some friends. My father would say: "You are not going out to do anything you shouldn't be doing on Saturday?" And I said: "Of course not."

But as I said, I was grateful for the education because it was rigorous. It also taught me to think and to question a lot of things. And I think a lot of kids today growing up today and going to high schools – my own kids – didn't get that kind of really strict educational upbringing.

Q: *I'm not sure how to describe it in philosophical terms, but I would think that the type of education you would have had would be kind of examining things. Almost as the Europeans do. In a Cartesian way.*

BERGER: There was a lot of that. The biblical acts of Jesus. The questioning. Trying to understand. What was the background, what caused historians or rabbis at that time – whether it was in the pre-Christian era or during the Babylonian exile – to think in this way or decide on this kind of a law. So there really was quite a bit of this kind of learning how to understand the background behind a decision. It was very much legalese, but with so much reading on the secular side: American history, American literature, European literature, Beowulf. It also opened my mind to a lot of the world.

Q: *By the time you were in high school, the late 1950s, how much was the rest of the world intruding? I mean, we are talking about the Cold War and other things happening?*

BERGER: No. It wasn't the ghetto in the sense of trying to keep yourself out from the outside world. My parents liked to read as well. And they both liked to read in English. We had a television, I remember, from the early fifties. And I loved to watch, whether it was Howdy Doody or any of the other kids programs, and as years went on the situation comedies. And as years went on, my father, when he could, wanted to watch the news. This was very important to him, to try to understand what was happening in the world. And we got a newspaper ever day, the Providence Journal. So I grew up reading about the outside world. We would talk about that a little bit.

And the Cold War certainly, I think, intruded on every family. You could not get away from that, whether it was the McCarthy era or what was happening – I remember going to school in Boston and there was an epidemic of polio one summer. This was at the time when the Salk vaccine was being experimented with. And my school was one of those that was one of the first to get that vaccine. We felt kind of proud about this, that we were being included with Boston Mountain and all of the other schools.

Q: *Did you feel at the time that you were being trained to be different, by having a relatively strict religion?*

BERGER: But we were also trained to be Americans. And so the education, there was American history, including the colonists, the revolution, the civil war, the first world war, the second world war – these were all topics of conversation. And part of it was that this is what we were studying in school. And part of it was that my father, especially, was very interested in history. And the issues of the second world and what the world did and didn't do to help the Jews and have the holocaust happen was a topic of conversation. It wasn't a dominant feature. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and as I was growing up, a young kid, that was part of my education. But not until high school did it become an important feature. I think that in the 1950s, growing up in Providence, and especially the early fifties when a number of refugees came out of displaced persons camps in Europe and then settled . . .

I will tell a little anecdote. I remember one kid in my elementary school class. There were two brothers that came and they moved into the neighborhood with their parents. Their parents were both holocaust survivors. Both from Auschwitz because I remember the tattoos on their arms. My parents always said, "Shhhh, you can't talk about that. Don't ask them about that. They are trying to build a life. They are refugees. Let's try to help them."

I used to go to their house and the holocaust would never be a part of the conversation in their home. And when I would talk and I would ask – I've forgotten his name – we would never talk about it. We would talk about things that kids did. We would talk about the television show. We would talk about the latest fad. We would talk about the hula hoop. All of the things that kids do. And their family was less religious than mine and their

parents would let them watch television on Saturday. We would talk about the toons (cartoons) on Saturday that I couldn't watch.

Q: *Being in Boston did you get a good dose of history as Boston as being the navel of the universe?*

BERGER: Yes. But I didn't pick up the accent, thankfully. My mother always had that. She never lost her Boston accent. And she died when she was 91. There was a good deal of history. I remember there was a kind of tradition – although the teachers didn't like that – but a group of us in high school would cut [during] the first day of baseball when the Boston Red Sox played because we had to get to Fenway Park and watch the opener, especially if it was a Yankee game.

We would do a lot of, you know, going through the historic center of Boston. Whether it was going to Concord, the old trail though Beacon Hill. American history really became a part of our life.

Q: *Did the field of international affairs ever cross your radar during this time?*

BERGER: No. It did not. International affairs did not at all. And part of it was that I really didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew that my parents wanted me to be a rabbi. And when I graduated from high school they gave me a choice. I could live at home and go to the University of Rhode Island. Or I could go to New York and go to Yeshiva University. And the thought of living in New York City just appealed to me greatly. I didn't care what university I was going to go do. But the idea of moving away from home . . .

As I said, there not a real closeness with my parents. There was such a difference. I didn't play baseball with my father. I didn't go fishing with my father. I did play with my French Catholic neighbor. We would go biking. We would play baseball. We would go ice skating in the winter. In high school in Boston, the school did not have a real athletic program, but it did have a small courtyard. And we would play regular teenage American games, you know, baseball, I think they called it "boxball" there because we were in this enclosed area.

Q: *Was there pressure to support Israel and that sort of thing?*

BERGER: Very little. It was kind of taken for granted growing up and right through high school. But Israel was a place that the Jews had founded and that we owed them something, you know, to give kind of a tithe. So that - as much as my parents could give donations to help this fledgling state - we would send old clothing. We would give that away to various non-profits that would be sending it to Israel to help the new immigrants. I know that my father especially wanted to visit Israel before he died. He wanted to do that badly. But both his health and his lack of wealth, especially towards the end when his business was really going under, really precluded his doing that. Plus he was afraid to fly. He might have taken a boat; but his only experience in taking a boat across the Atlantic

was in steerage and he really didn't want to do that again. But when I got into college there was a lot more.

But let me go back and digress. Back in high school when I lived that year with the Israeli family, the Hebrew teacher from high school. They talked a lot about Israel. And we had a lot of these conversations in contemporary Hebrew, modern Hebrew. About life there; about the building up of the state; and also about how people lived. And about how he and his family wanted to go back and contribute to the building of this new state. So that did have an impact on me. In college, I went to Yeshiva University. But yet Yeshiva University at the time I went there from '62 to '66 did not have a year abroad program in Israel. That started later.

Q: *Well going back to your family as you were a young kid growing up, did they have politics?*

BERGER: There was. The politics was, my father said, "You vote Democratic, because Roosevelt was a great man. He brought this family out of the depression. He defeated the Nazis. And we have a duty to support his party." And that was kind of a given. Eisenhower was great. My father – he didn't talk about that. Did he vote for Eisenhower? I don't know. But he respected what he did as leader of allied forces in the Second World War. He said, "He was great." I remember him saying that.

Q: *How about when you were in Boston as a high school kid, the election of 1960, Kennedy versus Nixon?*

BERGER: Oh, that was exciting. That was really exciting, both in school, and it was also exciting at home. Here was this young guy – and I was in my last years of high school I became a little bit more aware of politics – and here was this guy who really was going to change the world. It really was exciting. I was too young to vote in the election of 1962. But it was electrifying, as I think it was for many people of my age. Certainly for my classmates and, as I said, my family felt that same way.

Q: *Did it give you a touch, when Kennedy was inaugurated in 1961 and said "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," of public service?*

BERGER: Oh, no question about it. In fact, during the early years of the Kennedy administration, as he was talking about the Peace Corps, I really though, "Oh, that would really be great. To go someplace for two years and to work in a different culture." I guess that was the first inkling I had of public service as well as living overseas. Certainly, my parents had no desire to have any of their children go overseas, although eventually all three of their kids did. But one of the things that I really got out of that administration was that we have a responsibility as citizens of this democracy to do something for our country. And it must have come out of that speech. It didn't consciously, but I think that unconsciously it made this great impact.

Q: *It is something that I think everybody remembers. It touched an entire generation.*

BERGER: And I remember my first years in college, as the Peace Corps was really taking hold, and as Vietnam was heating up even more, I remember thinking that, "Boy, this would be a great thing to do, both for the country and as alternate service." I did not see myself as a soldier, but I saw myself as an American being able to help others understand what Americans can do. That "can do" spirit.

Q: *You graduated from high school in 1962 and went to New York, to Yeshiva, from '62 to '66? Describe Yeshiva University when you arrived there. What its purpose was, how it was set up, and all of that?*

BERGER: It was a private university and what it tired to do was to have both the religious education, they called it the Torah, and science; to train a new American generation to have that duality of purpose. That you could be a both an American citizen who could contribute to the building of America and at the same time keep your religious tradition.

Q: *How big was it and what was your class like?*

BERGER: Classes were fairly small. The whole university four year program had about fifteen-hundred students. My freshman class had around four hundred. And it was divided in two ways. The morning program, which went from 9:00 until 2:00 was religious education. Depending on your background and education you had a choice of three areas. One was the religious studies towards becoming a rabbi or cantor. Another one was that you could train to be a Jewish educator. And then the third one was called Jewish studies program for those who came out of completely assimilated, secular families who knew they were Jewish but didn't know any more than that – maybe never even attended synagogue or celebrated holidays, but wanted to learn this tradition. So it was basic A, B, C. Some of these students could not read a basic line in Hebrew. Some of them had never attended a bar mitzvah.

I went into the religious education program studying to be a rabbi. I stayed there for four years. As part of that I spent three hours in the morning of independent studies with others who had come in for that, mainly Jewish law, Talmud. Then there would be classes in Jewish history, in Hebrew. There would be a break from 12:00 to 12:30 for lunch. From 12:30 to 2:00 was the class with one of the rabbinic leaders of the university who would basically give a lecture about what we were supposed to have been preparing independently that morning.

I guess I was a little bit of a rebel. I wasn't interested in this. I went to New York because that was the choice I had. But I really wasn't interested in becoming a rabbi. I had decided at that point that I really didn't want to stay religious. I did not want to be a rabbi. But I couldn't break it to my family. So I went though the motions there. I would frequently skip my class in the morning and show up for the lecture, kind of groggy

because I slept late or was doing something else. I didn't follow along very much in that. It wasn't my primary interest.

Q: *Were you equivalent to class advisors beginning to pick up the vibe that you weren't . . . ?*

BERGER: They were. I had a professor in my sophomore or junior year I had my first class in international relations. It was comparative politics. A professor Joseph Dunner, who had come to the States around the same time that Kissinger did and had an even heavier Germanic accent. Went to Grinnell College and was a professor there for many years. Brilliant, brilliant man. He had studied for Hans Morgenthau. And as a graduate student had helped him write his great study of international politics. And that was the text that we had. [Editor's Note: Hans Joachim Morgenthau (February 17, 1904 – July 19, 1980) was one of the leading twentieth-century figures in the study of international politics. He made landmark contributions to international-relations theory and the study of international law, and his Politics Among Nations, first published in 1948, went through many editions and was for decades the most-used textbook in its field in U.S. universities.]

I think it was after that class that Dunner said to me: "Berger, you've got a talent for international relations. Did you ever think of the Foreign Service?" I said: "What's the Foreign Service?" And that's how my interest really began.

Q: *Well tell me a little about New York?*

BERGER: Oh, it was great, living in New York as a college student, who didn't have a lot of money. I had a scholarship from the state of Rhode Island. I didn't compete for it. I got a letter in the mail one day saying, "Would you like to be considered for a scholarship from the state of Rhode Island to go to the college of your choice." And I said, "Oh yes I would." And I really don't know how I got it. Maybe it was anybody in the state who graduated from high school. So I sent my transcript from high school. I was not a great student in high school, a B average, but I must have had some good recommendations. And I won the scholarship, a thousand dollars a year towards tuition. In 1962 that was huge because the entire tuition was $1,500 a year. And I got scholarships and loans from the university to cover the rest. My father's business was going down at that time. He said that he could contribute towards my living expenses in the dormitory, but also that I would have to try to get a part-time job.

This was the beginning of work-study, although I didn't work at the university. I got a job, and this is where my religious education from elementary school right through high school and practicing in the home and living that ritual life really helped because in my sophomore year…Actually during my first year I worked in the library in work-study and made enough to cover my food expenses. My second year, right through to the senior year, I got a job at a synagogue in New Jersey as kind of an assistant ritual director, to help with the services, with junior congregation, with reading the Torah from the scrolls. And it paid me $25.00 a week. And it gave me two advantages. Number one, $25.00 a

week was a lot of money at the time and it paid for all of my expenses, including going out with girls. And I was able to convince my parents that I needed a car because I had to get from Manhattan to New Jersey every Friday afternoon. Then I would come back on Saturday evening. So they let me buy a '56 Chevy for two hundred dollars. That was great.

Q: *Speaking of girls, were you always under constraints that you had to find a nice Jewish girl?*

BERGER: Oh yes. No question about it. Although, in my first summer after graduating from high school I worked in a factory. Part of it was that the owners of the factory lived in our neighborhood, went to our synagogue, and any teenager at least sixteen years old who wanted to work in the factory, they would give them a job on the line. And that convinced me that I had better be a better student. 7:00 in the morning until 3:30 in the afternoon. And it was tough, tough work.

You remember the Mr. Potato Heads? I packed them into boxes. Now it's called Hasbro. Then it was Hassenfeld Brothers who started that factory. And I was at the end of the line. I remember that one time I scored some of the boxes for the pencil cases that they sold. I was called the stripper and I would take these huge strips, as big as this desk. They would come off the assembly line and be scored and I would fold these edges. And somebody after me would have to rip it off of at the score and then take each part of it and somebody else would have to put it in a box. It was an assembly line. But this was Hassenfeld Brothers. I did that for half the summer and then the other half of the summer I was at the end of the Mr. Potato Head assembly line. A dozen boxes shrink wrapped would come off and I would have to pack them in these cartoons and put them on a skid. And it was a tough work. It was like the I Love Lucy show because the boxes would be coming so fast that you couldn't take a break for a moment. Every hour there was a five minute break where you could either smoke or go to the bathroom. I don't think there was time enough to do both. Thirty minutes for lunch. Then at 3:30 the whistle blew and it was time to go home. I made a lot of money that summer, though, and that really helped me that first year.

That first year in college, to get back to your question, there was a lot of pressure to date a Jewish girl. There was a women's division of Yeshiva University. A number of guys in my class would go down there. I think Thursday night was the night. There was a lounge in the dormitory. You went down there and hung out and looked for somebody to meet to go out with on Saturday night. Couldn't go out Friday night, of course.

The first summer after college I got a job at a summer hotel, a resort in the Catskills, the Lighthouse Hotel in Woodbridge, New York. I got a job as a busboy and then a waiter. And it was gruesome work. You had to be up at five o'clock in the morning if you wanted to eat breakfast before the guests came into the dining room. Because they would open the dining room at 6:00 in the morning for early coffee and cake.

This was the kind of hotel, like Grossinger's but at a much small level, where people would come and they would sit in rocking chairs on the porch or play the different sports games, go on canoes on the lake, the swimming pool. There were all kinds of activities – bingo at night, films, everything. But my job was really to work to make sure these people were fed well. And they had meals that went on from six in the morning until a midnight snack. It was like going on a cruise ship except you didn't leave that spot. So there was always food being served.

In the afternoon there would be a break for about three hours, where, thank goodness, you could crash. But that's when you could go and use the facilities. You could go swimming, play volleyball, and you could also meet – of course, we weren't supposed to socialize with the guests. Did you ever seen the film The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz [1974] or Dirty Dancing [1987]? You were a worker. You had to know the dividing line. This was a kosher hotel. People were religious, came mainly from Manhattan, and they paid a lot of money for their week or weekend at the hotel and they demanded good service. We lived on free room and board and tips. There was no salary at all. I think I made about a thousand dollars that summer, but I worked hard.

I met my first girlfriend their too. She wasn't Jewish. She was a chambermaid. I won't mention her name because I don't want her to be part of this record. And it was a summer of awakening. She had a car. And I had a license too. And she would let me driver this old stick shift. That was a great summer. I went back to college and decided for sure that I did not want to be a rabbi, I won't fit in.. But I could not tell my parents.

Q: *Did the school break down into the various Jewish sects, conservative, reform . . .? And also the Hasidic and all of that?*

BERGER: There were no Hasidim at the school. Yeshiva came out of what they call the Lithuanian tradition. And this goes back to your question about the tension. The Hasidim had their own sects, their Yeshivas, their places of worship. And the two – both out of the Lithuanian tradition, which was rigorous study – didn't work with them at all.

But there were breakdowns. You had the ultra-Orthodox, who would wear black hats and would be extremely orthodox in their personal practice. Their beliefs were incredible. They really believed what they said they believed and this was their life. And study was a good part of it. And some of them saw this as one part of what was going to be lifelong study. This was going to be their work. They were going to be academics, or religious trainers, or professors in a Yeshiva. Then there was another group that were modern orthodox, who really believed in the duality of life. You could be a good American and full participant in American life, and at the same time have your religious beliefs. The two did not conflict one another. So you could go into business, law, medicine or the Foreign Service and remain true to that religious tradition. And then there were others – and I felt I fell in that other category – who felt that the education was great, but that was not how I wanted to lead my life. There was another part that I didn't discover yet and I wasn't quite sure what it was going to be. And especially after I took my first course in international relations, began to look more into what was this other world out there?

Q: *I would think that the very devout orthodox people would be almost immune to socializing with others?*

BERGER: That is true. There would be that kind of self-isolation of the ultra-orthodox. It was a small group. I would say no more than 20 to 25 percent of the entire class. They would really just socialize amongst themselves. They wouldn't participate in the sports teams at the university. There was a swim team, a basketball team, a chess team, a fencing team. No football. No baseball. We didn't have big sports fields. But there was also a dramatics club. And I participated in dramatics. And those who were of the more assimilated part of the class, the more secular, would go in for a lot of these other things. And I loved the dramatic part.

Q: *What sort of things were you doing?*

BERGER: I remember Our Town. I also remember Stalag 17. I was the guy who brought in the mail.

Q: *Was the Yiddish theater alive?*

BERGER: Not in the school. I don't know in New York City. I really didn't try to find that. But what I did try to find was exposure to the cultural life of America. And I realized very quickly that New York was the center of that life. When I was growing up in Providence and in Boston I rarely had any exposure to live theater. I did in Boston. I remember a couple of times. There was one teacher in high school did take a class to a couple of live theater performances in Boston. That was great. I really loved that. As I said, we used to cut class for the opening day of the baseball season, went to Fenway Park. But in New York City, it was all around me. This whole life. Music. Theater.

Lincoln Center was being built at that time. I remember my senior year I got a job at Lincoln Center. I got a job as a waiter in the Lincoln Center café. We did not have class after noon on Friday. So I would do this Friday afternoon shift. I think they would have a matinee. I remember the café was open. I worked for one semester as a waiter at Lincoln Center. I had to quickly leave late in the afternoon to get to my job in New Jersey, where I was the assistant ritual director. And we could sit in on the rehearsals. Sometimes I would cut class even to get there in time to hear the rehearsals. That was my first exposure to classical music.

Q: *Coming out of this still relatively enclosed atmosphere, did you experience any anti-Semitism?*

BERGER: I didn't grow up with anti-Semitism. I really didn't feel it. Part of it was that I had a cloistered life. I was going to Jewish religious schools. There was one time in high school. The high school was in a neighborhood that had originally been predominately Jewish and had changed and became predominately black. And there were some of the teenagers in the neighborhood that used to harass those of us as we were walking to the

bus or the subway. They would throw stones and sometimes say "dirty Jews." But that's as far as anything ever went. And I really didn't think about it because I didn't see any restrictions on anything. I knew that when my father was growing up he had wanted to go to college and could not. His younger brother had great talents and got accepted to college, but because of quota systems could not go to medical school and ended up going to dental school instead. I guess there were less quotas over there. And that was the only intimation that I had.

I was another generation. The only time when I saw anything was during college. Every winter during intercession I would go with some friends and we would use somebody else's car to drive down to Miami Beach. The intercession would be mid-January for a couple of weeks. And there were a couple of drive-away companies in New York that would arrange to have somebody's car driven by these "experienced drivers" and taken very carefully down to Miami Beach. We had five days to get there. We wouldn't get paid for it. We would just have the car and they would give us a gas allowance. I think it was one full tank of gas and we could return the car empty.

So we would get a group together and we would drive it 24 hours. Get down there and we had four days in which to use the car before we had to deliver it. We would wash it before we delivered it and usually got a nice tip form that person who lived in some fancy home. Then five days before having to get back to New York, do the same thing on the reverse. So transportation was paid for. That was part of this breaking away with this different group that was what I considered a little more sophisticated, a little more worldly, a little more open to the outside world. Certainly far more pluralistic than my cousins on the right.

Q: *Well, 1966 comes along and with it the moment of truth.*

BERGER: Well, even before that, though. One summer I worked at a hotel as a busboy. The second year I saw a sign that said "Driver Wanted" for this new summer camp. I thought: "I know how to drive. And I've got a car." So I applied and I got a job as a driver at this summer camp. And I drove trucks and busses and a World War II army jeep. And it was great and, in fact, that's how I met my wife.

Q: *What sort of camp was it?*

BERGER: It was a Zionist youth camp called Young Judea, run by Hadassah, which is this huge women's organization that helps support the Hadassah hospitals in Israel. As part of this thing they tried to have a regular camp. It was for teenagers. There were no young kids. It was twelve and up. And the counselors were in college or college graduates. And it was great. I was the garbage truck driver. And the bus driver. We would take the campers out on outings to various places. It was the best job I had. I did this for several summers.

Q: *When you were getting ready to graduate, how did you break it to the family that they had not been raising a rabbi?*

BERGER: It was January of 1966 and I had one of these drive-away cars to Florida. I had been trying to convince my parents to go to Florida. They had never been there. And my father had a cousin who went down to Florida in 1940 and bought a little piece of land on the ocean in Miami Beach, what's now called South Beach. I guess he saw the future. In fact, he tried to get my father to invest with him and my father said, "You're crazy. Nobody will ever go down there. Who would want to spend money to go that far away?" And so my father's cousin became extremely rich. He always had an open invitation to my parents. In fact, every intercession when I went down I used to crash at his place. So my vacations, essentially, were free.

Well that winter my parents accepted. I drove. I had a friend with me, as well, to take over the driving because we did it in 24 hours. My parents were in the backseat. On the way back, someplace in either Georgia or South Carolina in the middle of the night I told them, "This is as good as any to talk to you . . . " And I told them what was going through my mind. That I really didn't want to become a rabbi. That I had some other ideas. And one of them was this thought about going to graduate school and going into the Foreign Service. My parents said, "What, you don't want to be a rabbi?" I said, "No. I want to be a Foreign Service officer."

My father thought I had said foreign legion. And he said, "You mean you are going to go fight in a foreign army and they'll send you who knows where." I said, "No, no, no, I want to be a diplomat. I want to be an American diplomat!" And he said: "What do you want to Europe for? That's where I came from. It's an awful place. It's full of anti-Semitism. But America is a great place, you can be another you want." I said, "Well, you know, I really don't want to go to Europe. I want to go to Africa." He couldn't really understand that at all. And I don't think that he ever did. He died when I was in my first assignment in the Foreign Service. I was in Africa, in Uganda, at the time. My mother eventually came to understand what I meant by what I wanted to do.

Q: *You graduated in '66. One can say one wants to get into the Foreign Service, but it's easier said than done.*

BERGER: Yes. It was a tough grind. And I looked at myself as really having a deprived childhood because while my academic education was pretty good, comparable to anyone else's, the whole other part of the world was left out. I hadn't traveled anywhere, other than New York. Although I did come down to Washington in 1965 for Lyndon Johnson's inauguration. I went with a friend of mine who lived in Washington. When I heard that he was elected, I wrote to his office and said I was interested in politics and the Foreign Service and I really would love to come to the inauguration. And I got an invitation to the inauguration. I think it was twenty-five dollars. I didn't have a tuxedo. But it also included tickets to stand outside there. Went down there with a friend of mine and that was an incredible exciting thing.

I really wanted to get into that political life. And I saw that this was something that I could do. But as you said, it's easier said than done. I took the Foreign Service exam the

first year when I was down in Washington. I went to graduate school at Howard in African studies. Howard was part of a consortium of universities in the Washington area. I took a lot of comparative politics courses. I took the Foreign Service examination the first time and didn't pass. I don't know the reason, but as I said, there was a whole cultural part of America that I really didn't know. And I began to look a lot more into it. Reading more about it. Going to the theater.

Q: *The exam you did not pass was the written?*

BERGER: Yes. I did not pass the written. In fact, I did not pass the written the first couple of times. I think I passed it on the third time.

Q: *So you went to graduate school at Howard. How did that come about?*

BERGER: That came about because I wanted to be in Washington. I had applied to Georgetown School of Foreign Service and Howard. I didn't get into Georgetown. I don't know why. As I said, I didn't take a lot of things very seriously in college, although I did a lot of extracurricular reading and was starting to learn a lot about foreign policy issues. But the exam, as you know, was not only about foreign policy. That was really only a small part of it.

Q: *Yes, it's really about America.*

BERGER: Somebody asked me recently what I would recommend for a young person wanting to take the Foreign Service exam. I said, one thing is, if you have not started preparing for it now, it may be too late. You should have been reading a good daily newspaper, like the New York Times or the Washington Post, cover to cover, every day. Read every section. Read a weekly news magazine. Go to cultural events. Read as many novels about America as you can. Read as much about the history of the world as you can, read economics, read administrative issues. Just keep reading, talking to people, and traveling. And maybe you'll have a chance.

So anyway, the third time I passed it. I was in graduate school taking a lot of courses both in African studies as well as Middle-East politics, political theory, political development. I took just about everything I could. I was in graduate school for almost five years. I took a huge number of courses.

Q: *Were all those classes at Howard?*

BERGER: No. I would say probably forty percent were at Howard. The rest were at the five universities in the consortium, Catholic, American, Georgetown and GW [George Washington University].

Q: *Let's talk about Howard at the time. This is a historic black university, probably one of the preeminent black universities. How did you find it there?*

BERGER: I was going from a cloistered existence at a parochial university. And as sophisticated as it was at the university it still was very much, not quite a ghetto, but certainly insular. Then I came to Howard. This was the first time I was at, so to speak, a public institution. And I was white and Jewish. But I was going to the graduate school. And this was in '66. And I found myself accepted almost immediately. Certainly I think that the racial makeup of the graduate school was very different from the undergraduate school. I would say it was about one third black American, one third white American or European, and about one third other – Asian, African or Latin American. So it was a real mélange of people.

And the teachers were also a mix of everything. I would say that Americans were probably in the minority, especially when it came to this intercultural, international studies. This was not the same at other universities. I took courses with some really incredible people, both at Howard and at other universities.

Q: *Who stands out?*

BERGER: At Howard there were two, actually there were three but I can't think of the name of the third. He was from Africa, from Ghana. The other two were Leslie Rubin, who was an exile from South Africa, and Brian Weinstein, who became my thesis advisor. Both of whom were brilliant and brilliant advisors. At other universities, Jan Karski at Georgetown. He was a Polish émigré. In 1942 he was a young Polish resistance fighter who was smuggled out of Poland with some of the first evidence of the Holocaust. [Editor's Note: In 1944 Karski published Story of a Secret State, in which he related his experiences in wartime Poland.]

Q: *What brought you to African studies?*

BERGER: It goes back to my last year at college. One of the international relations courses that I had – this was 1966, not long after a number of African countries had attained independence from the colonial powers. Part of the reading that semester was about the whole independence movement and the leadership there. It was so exciting. Here was a part of the world that was really being transformed. It's not like old Europe. It's really a different part of the world. And the more I read about it the more exciting the whole issue became. In fact, in graduate school I tried to take more and more courses dealing with political leadership in Africa and the Middle East. I was basically developing my own Ph.D. program, which I never completed.

Q: *While you were taking classes from this consortium, were you coming across Foreign Service types?*

BERGER: Rarely. I rarely met any Foreign Service officers. But I did talk with a number of professors about the Foreign Service. This Jan Karski who I mentioned, the Polish diplomat who went into exile and worked for the Polish underground, was the person who in 1942 went to meet privately with Roosevelt and Churchill to tell them about what was happening in Nazi occupied Poland. And especially about the Nazi persecution and

extermination of the Jews. Nobody could believe what he was talking about, but he said "I'm an eye-witness."

When I took his course, he never talked about his experiences at that time. He got kind of frustrated and it was only later in life that he talked about it again. Right after the Second World War he talked about it. Then for about thirty years he didn't. Then in the '80s he began talking about it again. And I got an opportunity to meet him, in fact, in the early '90s in New York, at a gathering. He was just an incredible human being. A real hero of the Second World War.

And a professor who is now head of the political science department at George Washington University, Bernie Reich, who was then head of Middle East studies, a young assistant professor. He became a great influence on me on a lot of the Middle East courses that I took. There were some others at American University whose names I cannot remember and I used to get into arguments with. But it was a lot of fun. And this was one of the things I really loved about talking to people about what life might be like as a Foreign Service officer. And I became more and more determined to become a Foreign Service officer.

Q: *You were going for a PhD?*

BERGER: I got a Masters in '69 and then I was in a PhD program. It was an interdisciplinary program. It was going to be comparative politics, Middle East and Africa. I was hoping to build on my Masters thesis which was a comparative analysis of Arab and Israeli influence in sub-Saharan Africa. And when I got into the Foreign Service I thought, great, I'm going to go to Africa and can maybe finish some research there an maybe do a case study on Uganda, which was then in the midst of a very strong relationship with Israel and while I was there, however, Uganda broke it off and became very close to the Arab world, especially Qaddafi. It would have been a perfect case study. But as you know in the Foreign Service you begin to work in places that are very interesting and where there are a lot of crises and you really don't have time for anything else.

Q: *You passed the written exam on your third try?*

BERGER: I passed the written exam and took the orals very shortly afterwards.

Q: *This would be when?*

BERGER: I took the orals sometime between February and April 1970. And immediately, on the day I took the orals, I was offered a place in a class. And it turned out to be that June of 1970.

Q: *Do you recall any of the questions?*

BERGER: I recall one, from a former ambassador. It was a three person panel at the time. And this person said: "Well it says in your written statement that you have really done a lot of research on Africa and you consider yourself something of an expert." I said: "Well, I'm not quite an expert, but I know a little bit about it." He said: "Tell me about the Congo crisis." And I began a long discussion about it. I had done quite a bit of research on that and what happened in Congo with the overthrow of (Prime Minister) Lumumba. I also helped to review for the publisher a book that Brian Weinstein had done on the Ubangi-Chari, which was a river that ran through Central African Republic from Gabon. I also did some research on the whole crisis on the Congo and the U.N. action. At that point it time I did not know that much about the U.S. role. But we had a good discussion. And I was offered a place immediately after the orals.

Q: *You were at Howard and other consortium campuses during the height of the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. Did this touch you at all?*

BERGER: It did. In fact, I participated in a number of demonstrations. I marched in 68 and '69. The big march on Washington. I think in November 1969 there was a candlelight march around the White House.

Q: *I was in Saigon as consul general at the time. And I remember we had about four American students and they came and lit candles in front of the embassy. And of course all the news photographers, it was their fifteen seconds [of fame].*

BERGER: I felt very strongly about it. Yet I felt that if I were drafted that would be my duty and I would have to go. I saw my contribution to American in the Foreign Service to be greater than somebody who could go out in the field toting a gun. I think in retrospect I was right. In a way, though, I feel like I missed something by not being in the (military) service. It's a little late for me to try to do something about it. But I think certainly my time in Uganda and Ethiopia and a number of other countries gave me a taste of some of the crisis that America is facing today.

Q: *Today is the 5 August 2004. Art, you came into the Foreign Service in 1970. Did your A-100 course have a number?*

BERGER: I don't remember. I remember it was June of 1970. [Editor's Note: this would have been the 92nd A-100 class.] I went overseas in June of 1971. So I had one year of training, first in the A-100, then language, then specialized courses of all kinds. I guess that was in the day when the Foreign Service had a lot more money for training, and I was happy to take advantage of that.

Q: *Can you give me a little snap shot of your A-100 course?*

BERGER: I know some of the people who were in there. Pete Chaveas, who I think is an ambassador somewhere now. Bob Heath, who is now creating the Diplomacy Center. He had some very interesting experiences as well in Africa. There were several others I am trying to remember their names.

Q: *Many women in there?*

BERGER: No. There were very few women. In fact, recently I found an old picture in my basement. My son is in the Foreign Service now and I remember his swearing in just two years ago. And I would say his class was about fifty-fifty, men and women. And it was quite diverse ethnically as well. Mine was pretty much white male, couple of African Americans, and a couple of women. But very, very few.

Q: *When you came in were you on a track to go anywhere in terms of cones?*

BERGER: I had chosen USIA (U.S. Information Agency) and I wanted what we now call public diplomacy. I don't think I knew the term for it at that time. I don't think any of us really called it that. But I wanted to be in a position where I could really interact with people on a regular basis, get to know the culture, and help people understand a lot more about the culture and the policies of the United States. And I saw USIA as the best place to do that. Although, my training was as a political scientist in graduate school and I never lost that love of politics, political discussion and trying to understand a situation in international politics.

Q: *Did you want to go to a particular area?*

BERGER: I would have probably gone anywhere, but I really wanted to go to Africa. I had just gotten a Masters in African Studies at Howard University and I found the political development of the newly independent states to be fascinating. And I thought this would be great to go off to Africa. The assignments people had no problem with that. I guess there weren't a lot of people who wanted to go to Africa at that time. There were several from my class who did. And I got my first choice, which was Uganda.

Originally I was supposed to go out in January in 1971. To pass my language requirement I was given French language training and passed the exam. Of course, I didn't go to a French speaking country; in fact I have never served in one during my whole Foreign Service career. But it has come in handy a number of times traveling in French speaking West Africa and France.

Instead of going to Uganda in January of 1971, Idi Amin staged a coup. The week that we were supposed to leave my wife was expecting our first baby. The people who were running personnel said: "You are a junior officer. If you feel more comfortable about waiting until after the baby is born, the PAO does not have any problem with that. You are not replacing anybody out there and we have a couple of training courses that you can take." Of course, the grandparents-to-be said "Yes." And my wife said "No question about it." And I felt that if I had something to do that was productive, why not? And I'm glad that I did because I was able to take a couple of cross-cultural communication type courses and a basic course in photography and darkroom technique which came in very handy throughout my career

Q: *When you say cross-cultural communication, what does that mean? How do they teach it?*

BERGER: I don't remember the specifics of it. But I do remember that there were several specialists and one was at FSI and one was at one of the local universities, GW perhaps and he was under contract to USIA. They were talking about trying to look at another culture. How you understand it. How you don't bring your preconceived notions with you. How you try to understand that their frame of reference is different from yours. Although yours is the only one that you know, maybe theirs is equally good. So try to get into a culture by learning a language, listening to people. Let them talk about their lives and be a good observer. Before you go out and say: "I'm an American and I know everything." And that advise has really helped me a lot.

Q: *Finally, you went to Uganda in mid-1971?*

BERGER: In June of 1971.

Q: *What was the situation? What was going on?*

BERGER: Well, Idi Amin had come into power about five months earlier. He was consolidating his hold on the military in the country. Things seemed to be quite calm, in fact, when we arrived. Over the next, I would say, six months, they stayed fairly calm. It was a dictatorship, of course. Everything was run by military officers. But there were a number of technocrats in the government. The U.S. relationship was not bad.

And then toward the end of 1971 and early 1972 Amin got into his mind that he really wanted a corridor to the sea. And since Uganda was landlocked a few hundred miles inland, and Kenya and Tanzania were in the way, the only way to do this was to get some land from one of those two countries. He decided that Tanzania was the easier place. So he tried to convince the Israelis, who had major aid programs, both military and civilian assistance programs, to support him in a war against Tanzania and to carve a corridor to the sea. And I think they said: "What, are you crazy?" Which was probably true. He certainly was, in our terms, crazy.

He decided in any event that he was going to do things on his own. The Israelis would not help him, so he kicked them out. He got a lot of support from Qaddafi, Libya who brought in some money, built some mosques and tried to influence, and probably subvert, Amin. We were there until September 26, 1972. The reason I can remember the date very clearly was because over the months of the spring and summer of 1972 the political and security situations deteriorated rapidly.

Amin started having these delusional dreams about paratroopers coming out of the sky. He called the Asian community, which were mainly Indians and Pakistanis, the blood suckers of East Africa and [said] that they had come and were stealing the jobs and wealth away from the Africans. And he was going to get it back. So he took away their citizenship and kicked them out of the country.

One day, in fact, in the summer of 1972. He had already decided to kick the Asians out of the country. I was coming back from a meeting at Makerere University, which was on the outskirts of Kampala. I was driving an embassy car, an old Chevrolet. I turned the corner to go towards the embassy and had to pass by the British high commission. And there was a big demonstration in the street against the Asians. It was led by some police. Thousands of what they said were students, although they looked a little old to be students. They were on the streets screaming: "Kill the imperialist, kill the Zionist, kick out the British." And I was stuck in traffic. I couldn't move.

Then people started shaking the car. Remember, I'm a junior officer. This isn't supposed to happen! By that summer, because the situation was so precarious, the ambassador ordered us to all carry our diplomatic passports. I had it with me. I took it out of my pocket. And I showed it to one of the people who was right outside of the car window. We didn't have air-conditioning so the windows were wide open. I said: "I'm an American diplomat, can I pass?" And this guy said: "Oh, of course, we are very sorry." And he pushed people away and said: "Please make room, he's an American diplomat." And they let me go. And I went to the garage at the embassy and I could not believe that they let me go. And of course, years later, when American diplomats in Iran were held hostage and the embassy taken over, I thought back to that moment in 1972. I was really lucky.

Q: *Well let's go back. When you arrived in June of '71, was Idi Amin seen as a problem?*

BERGER: He wasn't really a problem for the Americans. He maintained most of the aid relationship. He basically kept the status quo. And a lot of people in Uganda that I knew seemed to think that he wasn't bad. The political situation under Obote, when he was overthrown, and the economic situation were both terrible. So they wanted some stability and he brought some of that.

But then fairly soon afterwards – we began hearing this in the fall of '71 – that there were movements in the military. He was sending people from his own tribe who were in the army – they came from the northwest of the country and it was a very small tribe - into various military bases. They would take out some of the leaders of various other tribes and they would execute them. And this became much more widespread. I guess that part of it was that he gave people from certain tribes the *carte blanche* to go ahead and murder their rivals, who were generally in higher positions. So a lot of the officer corps was being killed.

Then it went on to other parts of government. To the supreme court. But the end of 1971 or early 1972 there was really a climate of fear that had pervaded society. You could still travel around the country. And we did quite a bit of driving around whenever we could. Game parks were only a couple of hours away. The roads were not bad. People were very nice. Hotels in the game parks were wonderful. But the security situation was deteriorating. And by early '72 it had started to go downhill rapidly.

Q: *Who was your ambassador?*

BERGER: There were two ambassadors during the time I was there. The first one was Clarence Clyde Ferguson, who was a political appointee – in fact both were political appointees. He has come out of Harvard Law School. He was a professor at Harvard Law School. And he knew something about Africa and was really very good. He wanted my experience to be a real variety of job situations in the Embassy. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Ferguson served from June 1970 to July 1972. Thomas Patrick Melady served as Ambassador from July 1972 to February 1973.]

Q: *This is Tape Two, Side A, with Art Berger. Yeah?*

BERGER: So I had a very good public affairs officer, PAO, Bob Rothweiler, who really understood what it meant to train a junior officer. Both he and the ambassador encouraged me to take on all kinds of odd positions in the embassy. I was able to rotate; when the political officer was on vacation – it was a small embassy – I would become the political officer for a month. Or the economic officer. Or the consular officer. And, of course, when the PAO was on vacation I could be acting PAO. I got involved in every aspect, from press relations, cultural relations, American speaker programs, the Fulbright Program, international visitors. It was a well rounded experience. I think it helped me understand the variety of things that we could do in a country as long as you opened your mind to trying to do new things.

Q: *Well let's talk a bit about what you were up to from the USIA perspective. What about cultural relations?*

BERGER: I don't remember all the details, but we had a very small cultural exchange program for – I believe we did have some for students as well – but it was mainly for the opinion leaders, new graduates. I should say, the best and the brightest coming up in society. There was a very good university there, Makerere University. One of the best in Africa.

Q: *I remember. It had quite a reputation.*

BERGER: It had an excellent reputation. And it was well deserved. There were a number of American professors who were there. I think there were one or two in the Fulbright Program. One, in fact, was Paul Theroux, the writer, who was there on a sabbatical. And I'm not sure if it was with the Fulbright Program or on his own. He was teaching creative writing at Makerere University.

Q: *I'm reading a book by him right now.*

BERGER: A wonderful writer.

Q: *Well, when you went out there, the bloom was still on the rose, wasn't it, as far as Uganda was concerned? This was considered to be a place of great promise. And a nice place to go to.*

BERGER: Oh, it was. There was a stereotype of it as "the pearl of Africa" or "the Switzerland of Africa." It was neither of course. But at the same time the living was very comfortable. The standard of living was not bad. The public health facilities were not bad for the early '70s in Africa. It wasn't as well developed or it didn't have as strong an infrastructure as Kenya at that time. Although since that time, of course, Kenya has had a series of dictatorships sort of wracked up in corruption. And as Uganda has had continuing problems.

But in the early '70s, Uganda was really pretty nice. The road system was pretty good. The local telephone system worked. Some doctors said you could drink water out of the tap, although we did not. The Danish aid program had a milk project with a diary, where they brought in dairy cows. We got fresh Danish quality milk and other dairy products. The Israelis had a chicken farm with great chickens. The Americans had all kinds of other agricultural projects.

And the weather was really pleasant. Kind of mid-'80s during the day time, low 60s at night. It rained almost every night. Usually rained two or three times a week during lunch time. Rest of the time it was sunny. It was beautiful. There was always a breeze because it was right next to Lake Victoria. A lot of lush vegetation. There was this sense that almost anything could grow there. And of course the coffee was plentiful. And tea. Wonderful tea plantations. Bananas. Most people didn't realize that Uganda was the largest producer of bananas in the world. Exported very few of them because it was the staple of the country; matoke mixed with peanut sauce and meat or other products.

So the standard of living of the African tribes in Uganda was really not bad compared to many of the others. There was a lot of tension between the Africans and the Asians, Indians and Pakistanis. Mainly Indians from Gujarat State, who were petty bourgeois, the small businessman or the middle-men, the technocrats. There was a sizeable ex-pat community of British and others from the commonwealth. And a number of Africans, especially from East Africa, but also from other English speaking African countries.

Q: *What about the media there? How did you find the media?*

BERGER: Well the media was not very good, not very well developed. There was one television station, black and white, I remember. A local radio station. And one newspaper in English. There were a number of newspapers in local vernacular. All of them basically reported the same thing, as you would expect in a military dictatorship. "His Excellency, President for Life Idi Amin Dada did this yesterday, he's going to do this today, and tomorrow he'll do the following." And there were pictures of him all over the front page. And that's how the news every night began. There was a BBC FM repeater station in Kampala. So we picked it up by short wave. So you could listen to BBC on FM twenty-four hours a day. And that was great.

Q: *Was it a dictatorship while you were there? And did it change? That you could go out and talk to Ugandans in positions of authority?*

BERGER: What I remember is that Ugandans had no hesitation talking, at least initially, about their own lives, about what they thought about the government, almost anything. There was relative freedom on that. I was not there the first five of months after Amin came to power. I think it was a little bit more restrictive when he first came into power, then it loosened up a bit, and it stayed fairly loose of a while. I'm not sure when in the fall, but at some point towards the end of 1971 things got a little bit more restrictive. And this was when the military began having these attacks. Military officers from Amin's tribe and others that were considered loyal to him would attack those tribal members that were not considered loyal. That would also infect, I think, the atmosphere in the rest of society. Because the word got around. People knew what was happening. So that did take place. And I think it added a measure of instability. People became a little bit more cautions.

But I do remember that in December of 1971 we had a reception at our home. And I remember doing it because – it was the first time that we had this – it was for the holiday of Chanukah, a Jewish festival, which is also a festival of freedom. And I saw this also as a way to invite some of my Ugandan contacts and give them a sense of this tradition of freedom; freedom of belief, the rights of human beings in a society. And it was a wonderful evening. But I do remember within a couple of months afterwards several of the people who were there, including someone who was on one of the courts, disappeared. Everybody was talking about it and said "They took them to the river." Which meant that they killed them and threw their bodies into the river, where the crocodiles would generally eat them.

Q: *You were there for two years?*

BERGER: I was there for fourteen months. We were evacuated September 26, 1972.

Q: *Was there a point when the ambassador or somebody came in and said "You know, this guy Amin is nuts!"*

BERGER: Well I remember – in fact I remember several people – we talked about it. And then David Newsom was the assistant secretary for Africa at the time. And he visited Uganda. And I remember him coming back to the embassy - and I don't know if Ferguson was still the ambassador or he had left and the new ambassador, Thomas Patrick Melady, was there, but I have a feeling that Melady was already there. Newsom had a meeting with Amin and he came back to the embassy and he said something like – and I'm going to paraphrase it – "That was the craziest man I've ever met."

I don't remember anything one-on-one with Amin because I never had that kind of relation or meeting. But I do remember going to a lunch that he gave once for the war college. I think it was very early in my tour. Probably late summer or early fall of '71,

before the killings in the army started. But when Newsom came in and came back and said that, and we talked a little bit about it. I think it was just his sense that Amin was talking about all of these crazy things that he wants to do and none of them make sense. None of them are possible. I don't remember any specifics.

Q: *But this began to – you might say – penetrate the zeitgeist of the embassy.*

BERGER: Not just the embassy but the entire society. I think people were very nervous. Became more and more nervous. By late spring and summer of '72 there were carjackings. A military officer would decide he wanted your car so he put a submachine gun inside your window and say "Give me your keys." And if you didn't right away, he would shoot you, throw your body out, and steal the car. And this happened to a lot of people. Bob Rothweiler, I think, lost two cars that way. He gave them up very quickly. There was a lot of robbery. There was a sense of chaos for the general society because the military was running rampant. There were no controls on them. And if you were driving down a street and there were no other cars on the road and you saw a military vehicle coming towards you, generally you would get off that street right away. You didn't want to be on the street with them because they were so unpredictable.

Q: *How did the expulsion of the Asians and other non-Ugandans affect you?*

BERGER: It did, because it added another element of insecurity to society. We all felt at the embassy that we were part of the American diplomatic mission, we are not going to be affected in our personal lives, but at the same time you could end up in the wrong place at the wrong time and that could be very dangerous.

On our street, two of our neighbors were Indian. And both of them had to leave. And I do remember that one of our neighbors had two daughters who were getting close to the marrying age. And the family had saved up their dowry. Lots of gold jewelry. And their father asked me one day – we had become fairly friendly – we know we have to leave. We are going to, but we don't know how we can out of the country and take our things with us. But we want to leave right now with just a suitcase and no valuables, we can do that. He was a very wealthy man. He was a printer and had several print shops around the country. He said "Would you do me a favor and hold our daughter's dowry, the jewelry for their dowry, in the embassy safe until I find a way of getting it out of the country?" And I said "of course." I probably shouldn't have done it now. But I didn't hesitate. I took it and put it in the embassy safe, in my office safe, and forgot about it, basically.

About two months later, my neighbor came over one night and said "I've found a way for us to get out of the country and to get our daughter's dowry. Can I have the jewelry box back?" So I brought it back the next day. I could have walked off with it. I could have done what I wanted and he would have had no recourse. I didn't think about that until many years later because I didn't really see that I had any other choice. Here was a neighbor, in trouble, asking me if I could help him out temporarily. It didn't seem to be any risk to me. I was convinced there was no risk whatsoever. I think I was right. And I

did it for him. Two days later, he stopped by and said goodbye, thanked me for everything, and they headed off to England.

Q: *It's the sort of thing you do, but you would never ask permission. So often when something like this sort of corruption happens – it's happening in Zimbabwe right now – those that come in sort of take over the shopkeeper's stocks, but they have no concept of business, restocking. So they just denude the shelves and then . . .*

BERGER: That was a serious problem because the Indians and Pakistanis were the technocrat class. They were the businessmen. They were the middlemen in so many different things. Tea plantations, coffee plantations, all the small shopkeepers, with very few exceptions. There were very few Africans outside of the main marketplace. In the stores, the shops, they were all run by Asians. And they had to give them up. And they gave them to the central office of the government. It required them to give it. They got a piece of paper, a receipt for it, and they would of course never get paid. And the government generally gave it to Africans, but not necessarily those who had worked in those shops. In the farms – like in Zimbabwe today – not necessarily who knew how to run things, but rather to political cronies from the same tribe. So you had people who knew nothing about running a business coming in, from a rural area, to take over, say, a print shop. And ran it into the ground, very quickly. They were sold off and scavenged for materials. They didn't know about re-ordering. They had nobody left on the staff, had fired everybody who had worked for the Asians, including many from other African tribes. Brought in their families and though they were going to become wealthy. But of course, they couldn't.

Towards the end, some of the Indians were getting very bitter because their houses were being invaded, their families violated, some of them were getting beaten up and their property stolen. I remember several of them that I knew said: "When we leave, we have to leave our cars and our houses, but we are going to destroy them. We are going to put sugar in the gas tank. We are going to tear out some part of the spark plug or something in the house – the circuit breakers – so they won't be able to have any electricity. We have worked all our lives for this and we are not just going to give it away, especially since we have been treated this way." And there were quite a few people who had a very bitter experience.

Q: *How was Ambassador Melady during that time?*

BERGER: He was a political appointee. He had come from Burundi, I believe. I don't think he was that great an ambassador. I liked him personally, and his wife. They were really lovely people and they really cared about people within the mission. But I don't think he really understood what an ambassador was supposed to be, what he's supposed to do. And I think we know today that, although we try not to interfere with the internal relations of a country, sometimes when you see that something is going so badly we really do have that responsibility. I have met him a number of times in more recent years, since I retired, and I think he is doing a lot of volunteer work for different organization.

Q: *He's very big on Catholic Relief...*

BERGER: …and education as well. He was the president of Seaton Hall University as well. And he's done quite a bit, and his wife as well, when she was at the American Academy in Rome. What he really wanted to do and what he eventually did do was to become U.S. ambassador to the Vatican. That's what he really wanted to do.

Q: *You say you were evacuated. Was this sort of a family evacuation or was this an embassy evacuation?*

BERGER: This was the beginning of the embassy evacuation. We had at that point two children. Our first child was born about six or seven weeks before we went to Uganda. And the second was born about six or seven weeks before we were evacuated in mid-July. At the time we left Uganda, in the third week of September, 1972, the personal security situation had gotten really precarious. There were armed robbers running on the streets.

I remember one morning waking up, it was a Saturday morning, I heard machine gun fire and it sounded like it was right outside my bedroom window. So I got out of bed and rolled on the floor. Then very carefully peaked out the window to see what was going on and I saw some soldiers shooting up the bushes behind our house. I found out later they were chasing some people they claimed were bank robbers. But it turned out that it had nothing to do with any bank robbery. They were from the wrong tribe and these soldiers wanted their car. So they killed them, they left their bodies there all day, and they went around in a sound truck and said: "This is what we do to the robbers." And thousands of people came to view the bodies. Very, very disgusting and dehumanizing situation.

Then in September of '72, there was an invasion of Ugandan exiles from Tanzania, trying to overthrow Amin. Some were former soldiers who had escaped, others from other tribes, and they had some help from the Tanzanian government. They didn't get very far, but Amin sent out the tanks in the streets and they were going back and forth. The soldiers got ever more brazen in their robbery of the poor civilians. It was mainly the African civilians that suffered from that.

That same time, it was only a very short period after that, the embassy got word that a couple of Americans had been killed. One's name was Stroh, the other Seidel. This was just before the invasion from Tanzania. One was a professor and the other a freelance journalist. Stroh was from the famous Stroh Brewery in Detroit. So his family had some influence. When he went missing his family called their congressman, who called the ambassador and said "Find out what has happened to Nicholas Stroh." And we tried to find out and did eventually find out that the two of them decided to do some research about the army killings. They went to certain military bases and got into one. This was about the time that Amin's picture was on the cover of Time magazine. They did a cover story on him. Amin ordered everybody in the military to buy a copy of it and hang his picture on the wall. And they went to a number of bases and were interviewing people about the intertribal rivalry and killings that were taking place. And apparently some people didn't like them asking questions and there was one base too many that they

didn't leave. I don't think their bodies were every found. But the determination was made that they were killed. There was commission of inquiry into that. It was a British judge who was the head of the supreme court at that time, or acting head. He wrote the commission of inquiry report and was supposed to turn it into Amin and instead took the train to Nairobi and mailed it from there because he was afraid what Amin would do to him when he handed in the report.

Let me tell you about another thing that was happening. During the invasion of exiles from Tanzania – during that same week – this gets back to my work on the cultural side – we had a specialist from the United States, somebody who helped broadcasting stations develop news media capability. A woman from a New York TV station. We had her there for a week and in the middle of it the invasion took place and we had to evacuate all the private Americans. So I took her down to the airport. There were roadblocks in a number of places on the way. On the way coming back, one of the roadblocks had disappeared from the place it had been earlier in the afternoon. We had an embassy driver driving the car. He was driving very slowly by that spot. And we heard shooting. And he stopped immediately and we both got out and raised our hands. And these soldiers came over, visibly drunk. Really, really drunk. Too drunk to hold a weapon, clearly. And they pointed them at us and they started beating up the driver who was tribally from the southwest of the country, from an ethnically Rwandan tribe. Tutsi. They were beating him up pretty severely. I was asking them to stop. They didn't touch me. But they started screaming at me.

And then all of a sudden a lieutenant came over. He told them to let go. The driver got up. And he apologized to both of us. And he said to please get back in the car and not to ride on the roads at night. It's dangerous. And then he started screaming at the soldiers. And I asked the driver – his name was David – I asked David – "what he was screaming about." And David said, "I think you really should leave the country." And I said, "What was he screaming about." David said, "I think you really should leave the country. It's not safe." "But what did he say. Tell me." He said, "He was telling them that we have to let these people go because we've already killed two Americans this week."

So I got home and I told my wife, I said, "Barbara, we are leaving. It's really not safe for us. I don't want to go into too much detail about what happened, but I just had a very unpleasant experience and tomorrow morning I'm going to tell the ambassador and ask him to send a cable to the State Department saying that we really must leave." She said, "But why? I'm just beginning to like it here." It takes my wife a long time to get used to a new place. It took her fourteen months or so, until September of 1972.

The next day I went into the embassy and told Rothweiler's successor, Bill Mateer – a former newspaper man from Ohio who was career foreign service, nice guy and I told him…it also happened that that morning there was a broadcast on the news and Idi Amin was on there saying that he had a dream last night. This dream had two parts to it. One part was that the imperialists and Zionists were landing by parachute and that if his soldiers found and imperialists or Zionists, they should shoot them on the spot. And the other one, he wanted to tell everybody that there was a great man that he was trying to

model himself on, and that man was Adolf Hitler. He had just read about him. And this was a great person. He was going to build a monument to Hitler. And one of the things that Hitler did was he killed all the Jews of Europe. And Amin said: "If I find any Jews in Uganda, I will finish the job."

So I said to the PAO: "I don't think I really want to stay here anymore." I certainly never kept it a secret that I was Jewish. I became extremely nervous at that point. It was very funny because a cable had just come in from the State Department – I guess FBIS [Foreign Broadcast Information Service] had monitored the broadcast and Washington had the transcript. The cable said "anyone who is Jewish or identifies as such, or if you can identify others in the American community who are Jewish, advise them all to leave immediately because the situation is so dangerous." So I spent a good part of that day, first, arranging for our transportation, which was going to be a couple of days later. And GSO managed to get a mover to come in the midst of all of this stuff. And then I went around to people that I knew were Jewish – half a dozen or so – and told them that the embassy was advising them to leave as soon as possible. If they needed any help with a loan, the embassy would help them. But that the situation was getting very bad. But since some people may know that they were Jewish, their lives could be at stake. Some opted to leave. Others, who were American-Ugandans and lived there for years, decided to stay on. I wasn't going to stay.

Q: *What was the thrust of the Time article?*

BERGER: Crazy man.

Q: *It wasn't a laudatory thing?*

BERGER: Oh no. Not at all. But Amin loved the picture. And he had heard of Time Magazine. It was on sale at news stands in Uganda. It was only three or four days later, but it was on sale there. And he ordered all the copies that were left. Bought them up and distributed to all the army camps, had them post it up on their doors because he was proud of it.

Q: *Actually, Amin had been trained by the Israelis, wasn't he? I thought he had Israeli paratrooper wings or something like that?*

BERGER: He did. He did. The Israelis had a – for them - very important military relationship. I guess he was chief of staff of the armed forces under Obote and went to Israel for some training and helped to bring in a number of Israeli trainers. Air force and other forces as well. So they had a number training programs. He did have air force wings.

I remember once, years later, I asked somebody from the Israeli air force who I knew had been in Uganda around that time, I said: "How did Amin get those wings?" He said: "They gave it to him. He didn't really jump out on his own." Somebody held his hand and said "Come on, we're going." And he got his wings. I don't know if that's true, but it's certainly well accepted.

Q: *Well, we too may have kind of fudged a bit on qualifications. How long after you left did we maintain relations with Uganda?*

BERGER: I know that the ambassador left pretty shortly after that. And it had to do with a question about Marine guards. We didn't have any. And I think the ambassador wanted to get some. And he went to Amin and told him that the U.S. was asking permission to bring in the Marine guards to protect the embassy. And Amin told him: "You don't need your Marines. I'm going to send over mine to protect you. They'll sit inside your embassy and make sure nothing happens to you." I think the ambassador got very nervous about that. He must have sent a cable. I was out of Uganda, I was in Ethiopia, at that time. I think that was the beginning of the end.

Also, there was some point, probably early 1973, the ambassador was no longer there. Bob Keeley, who was Chargé, should be able to tell you more because he closed down the embassy. [Editor's Note: Keeley was Chargé when the Embassy closed on November 10, 1973.]

Q: *He's been interviewed. I talked to Bob yesterday. But anyway, this is really very close to the beginning of the end as far as Idi Amin went?*

BERGER: Oh yes. The Peace Corps was evacuated that week because a Peace Corps volunteer had been killed at a road block. We were – and I think there were others with very young children – who were mandatory evacuation.

Q: *The Entebbe thing didn't happen while you were there?*

BERGER: No, that was four years later. That was July 4, 1976.

Q: *So you are evacuated. What happened?*

BERGER: We went to Ethiopia. That was my onward assignment anyways. I was supposed to go in December. My predecessor was still there. But the embassy said, "well, we can always use another hand. We'll make him another assistant cultural officer and there will be a longer transition."

It was a Friday evening, I remember, we got into Nairobi and we were going to spend four days in Nairobi just decompressing and relaxing. And we got to the Nairobi airport and the immigration officer at the airport did not want to let us in. He said, "You have a Ugandan visa, you are a prohibited immigrant." I said: "I'm an American diplomat and I have a valid visa for Kenya. It's a transit visa. Here's my visa for Ethiopia. In four days we are going there." He said, "No, you are a prohibited immigrant." He kept arguing with me and saying "We can't let you in. We can't let you in." I think he was looking for a bribe. I was very naïve at the time and didn't believe in bribing people. And I stood my ground. And he said, "Visa cancelled. Go back into the transit lounge. You and your family will be deported back to Uganda on the first plane in the morning."

And there was somebody from the embassy in Nairobi who was meeting us. In those days there were no hermetically sealed immigration areas. This was the old Entebbe airport. It was really wide open. There were some planters. So I walked over to one of the planters and I saw the guy from the U.S. embassy. And I called him over and I said we were having a problem. I told him what was happening.

And he went over to the immigration officer and said, "You can't do this. He is here. He's a guest of the ambassador for this weekend and he's going on to Ethiopia." The guy said, "Well, I did it and he's not getting out of the airport. I'm putting him on the first plane back to Uganda." They argued for a while and finally the immigration officer said, "I'll let them come into Kenya on one condition: you have your ambassador call the vice president, who was Daniel Arap Moi at the time, to call the chief immigration officer, to order me to let you in. Otherwise, he's out of here." And it happened. It took about two hours and they got it all together. And we were in. Didn't pay the guy a bribe. We spent four relaxing days in Nairobi.

A funny follow-up to that goes to 1997. I'm in New York and participating in a meeting with the Kenyan foreign minister. I said, "I have to tell you. I never thanked your president" – because Arap Moi was president at that point – "for saving our lives, my family and myself, back in September 1973." He asked what happened and I told him. And he said, "And what was the name of that immigration officer?" I had no idea, but I said just tell the president that I said thank you.

Q: *The problems you were having brings up a question. During the sixties, people were thinking that Africa was the wave of the future that this was going to be a wonderful place. And an awful lot of – I would probably include you in this – basically idealistic people came into the Foreign Service who were looking towards Africa. I remember back in the late '50s, in my second post, I asked to go to Nigeria. I mean, this is where the action was. They sent me to Saudi Arabia because they were in the same bureau. But did you get the feeling around this time that the bloom was coming off the rose as far as Africa?*

BERGER: It had not really that much. There were coups and there were problems. But I think it was the late '70s when you really began to have a deteriorating political and economic situation throughout most of the continent. I went back to Africa in the late '70s on a number of trips because I was a desk officer for francophone and Portuguese speaking West Africa and I did a lot of traveling through many of those countries. At that point you could see things were changing quite a bit more.

In the early '70s it really wasn't that bad. I also think that many of the leaders were still somewhat idealistic and maybe even a little honest. But sense of honesty and mission wore off. I think for people like myself you are right, I was certainly idealistic, I had spent several years in graduate school and did a lot of study of political leadership and economic development in Africa. I thought it was fascinating. The independence movements. I studied a lot about the new leaders that had come up, some from trade

unions, some from the military. They were the new modernizers. And it really did sound really exciting to go to Africa and be part of this political experiment.

But I wouldn't go back today. I think that the political leadership in Africa has really destroyed most countries in their capabilities to govern their future. It is very sad.

Q: *So we are talking about '72 when you went to Ethiopia?*

BERGER: Yes.

Q: *And you were there until when?*

BERGER: April 30, 1975.

Q: *What was the situation in Ethiopia when you got there in 1972?*

BERGER: It was wonderful. Ethiopia of course was an absolute kingdom led by Haile Selassie. There was a small parliament that didn't have any power whatsoever. There was a cabinet that supposedly ran the government. But the power was with the king, his family, certain people in the government that were either related to him or from the Amhara tribe. It was a beautiful country. Incredibly poor but a very exciting place because the culture – at least to me – felt so unique. I think it is a very unique culture. And a beautiful country with fantastic weather. Sights that are hard to find anywhere else in the world. Ethiopia is very well isolated by the high mountains. It is part of the high rift valley area. We had a wonderful experience there. And Ethiopians were incredible people.

Q: *Who was our ambassador when you got there?*

BERGER: H. Ross Adair was the first ambassador, a retired congressman from Indiana. And I don't remember who replaced him. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Adair presented his credentials on July 8, 1971 and departed post in late February 1974. He was succeeded by Ambassador Arthur Hummel who presented his credentials in April 1975. Between the two ambassadors Parker Wyman served as Chargé.]

Q: *What was the political situation there? Or was it just Haile Selassie?*

BERGER: It was Haile Selassie. I would say late '72 until late '73 the situation was quite stable. Ethiopia was a major ally of the United States. This was still the Cold War. The Ethiopians allowed the U.S. to have a listening station.

Q: *Kagnew Station.*

BERGER: Kagnew Station. We had a very large embassy. We had a consulate in Asmara. Americans were, I think, very well liked as well. I did a lot of traveling around the country. I had two different jobs in the almost three years that we were there. One half of

the time I was the assistant cultural officer, and half the time I was the assistant information officer. Roger Ross was the PAO. Art Lewis replaced him in late 74, early 75.

As the assistant cultural officer I helped to supervise the library and cultural center at the embassy. It was separate from the embassy. Security situations being what they were then, we were right downtown, plate glass window, in the middle of a huge square where thousands of people would pass by every day. We had these exhibits on America in there, book exhibits, a public library – in fact it was the only public library in the capital. We also, together with the ministry of education, ran six regional reading rooms around the country in different provinces. And I was supposed to be supervising them. So I traveled out to those reading rooms and had some good interaction with people out there and had some good interaction with people out there, in the schools, in the libraries, in the local communities, both political and economic leadership. When an American official came out – and in a number of those places I was the only American official who came out there in a year.

Q: *How did you get to these places?*

BERGER: We had a number of jeeps and we would drive in a jeep. There were one or two places where you had to fly to. And we would take a taxi or somebody would pick us up from the local ministry of education office. But most of the places I preferred to drive to, even if it took a whole day, because then I could see more of the country. And it was a beautiful country. The paved road extended about an hour in almost any direction from Addis. And then it ended. And you would be on these dirt roads if you were lucky. Trails, gravel, potholes, in the rainy season they were washtubs. In the rainy season the roads were almost impassable sometimes.

Q: *Did you run across those Falasha?*

BERGER: Yes. The Falasha. The Jews of Ethiopia. Traditional Ethiopian people from the northwest of the country, mainly from the Gondar area, who lived both in the city, but more so in small villages in the mountains around Gondar and Teaberry Province. Very, very isolated. They believed they were one of the lost tribes and that the Babylonian expulsion of the Jews from Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple in the sixth century BC, that they dispersed and rather than going to Babylonia, they were able to go west to Egypt. Or some of them said they were part of an earlier tribe that came to Egypt during the slavery period. Most historians really don't believe it. They think there was some connection, but certainly from the temple period, because of the way the Falasha observed Jewish law and Jewish holidays. They observed biblical ones, but not any of those that were instituted from the Babylonian period.

Q: *Were you able to get in and watch the rites?*

BERGER: Yes. And they were very strange to me. First, they didn't pray in Hebrew. They prayed in Ge'ez which is the holy language of the Amhara of Ethiopia. It is the

same language that Ethiopian Orthodoxy Church uses. The Orthodoxy Church grew up in the third century and has a connection with the Egyptian Coptic Church.

(End Tape Two, Side A)
(Begin Tape Two, Side B)

There was a theory that the Falasha left Jerusalem at the Babylonian expulsion and in the sixth century BCE and went to Egypt, where they stayed and became early Christians. Then broke off from the Coptic Church and went down to Ethiopia with Ethiopian Copts and adopted many of the customs. A friend of mine wrote a book, in fact, about some of the religious traditions of the Falasha and found there were many similarities, especially in the liturgical music, with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. So it was fascinating to watch them. At the same time to see that they observed many of the ancient Jewish customs – the holidays of Passover, the new year and Yom Kippur, the fast days of the year – they observed all of them, and very religiously. And they always pray to go back to Jerusalem.

Q: *Was there an Israeli embassy while you were there?*

BERGER: There was at first and it was closed down and the Israelis were kicked out in 1973, at the time of the October '73 war. So all of the OAU (Organization for African Unity) states broke relations with Israel.

Q: *Well, how did you find your work there?*

BERGER: Fascinating. I loved it. Part of it because the culture was so different. And I got to know a lot of Ethiopians. Traveled with some around the country. You see the picture on my wall of Haile Selassie and Duke Ellington. I took that picture in November of 1973. Ellington and his band came to Ethiopia as part of an "American Ambassadors of Song." And I was the program officer, the impresario, so to speak. We arranged a week of programming. Jam sessions, public concerts, invitation concerts, dinners, receptions, jam sessions late at night in the cultural center.

The Emperor found out that he was coming and liked Ellington's music. And invited Ellington to come to the palace for a reception, along with everyone from the embassy who had worked on it. So we went along as well. He gave Ellington that award of cultural contribution, the salutary award that he put around his neck. It was Ellington's 80th birthday that week, I believe, as well. It was November 1973. Ellington died the following year. Haile Selassie was overthrown in February of '74, the beginning of the coup. But that was one of the most exciting weeks that I spent there. I could see using music as a way to cross the cultural barriers and understand something about America that they loved.

Q: *How did you find the Ethiopians?*

BERGER: Very proud of their heritage. Very reserved. Always appreciative if somebody tried to learn a few words of their language, because it was so difficult. Very talented people in their creativity. Music, art. There were some incredible artists that I got to meet there. And a very rich history. A magnificent history. Unique in Africa. Unique in the world, for that matter.

Q: *Did the Cold War intrude while you were there?*

BERGER: Yes it did. Haile Selassie was overthrown in what was called the "creeping coup" from February '74 to September '74, when he was arrested from the palace. During that intervening time, what they called the "Derg," a military committee, overthrew him and arrested, and in many cases executed, almost everybody who was around him, all the military, the government officials, high level people. And they instituted a Marxist state. And the relationship with the United State with Ethiopia became colder and colder and colder. It really became extremely difficult. There was a curfew the last year and a half we were there. I think it was 10pm to 6am, you couldn't go out of your house.

It became extremely difficult. The American mission was drawn down quite a bit. And eventually certain of the programs, including Kagnew Station, closed down. I don't remember, but I think Kagnew Station was closed down while we were still there. The lease was up and, of course, they wouldn't even consider renewing it. And then they brought in Cuban soldiers as the major aid program. The Cubans came in after I left though. I don't remember ever seeing any on the streets.

Q: *What happened with the Embassy? Was it sort of withdrawing into itself?*

BERGER: Because it was forced to. Many of the people from the former government, or anybody who had any kind of position, was warned "don't have any dealings with Americans." I had one very close friend who was in the Ethiopian navy. He and his wife and my wife and I were really close personal friends. His wife was very distantly related to the emperor. Very distant. Tenth cousin twice removed or whatever. But extended family meant a lot in Ethiopia. And I would sit down with this guy – I think it was Derek Gabrialzabrah. He was a commander in the navy. He had trained in Europe and in the States. We would go to each others' houses. We would talk politics. We would talk about art. We would talk about culture. We were really close friends.

And then one day they were supposed to come over to our house for dinner. And he called me from a friend of his and said he was calling to let me know he cannot come. I said: "Shall we make another date." He said: "No, I cannot come anymore. This is our last phone call." He said that he was being threatened and he is told he must immediately break off all relationships with Americans. He said that if they even found out about this phone call he would be in deep trouble. So he said not to try to contact him or stop by his house. I did find out though, about two years ago from somebody who was in Ethiopia, that he did survive and is living in Addis. He was in jail for a number of years, but is in

Addis now and, I think, working for a UNDP (United Nation Development Program) program.

Q: *I would imagine that your cultural centers must have been shut down?*

BERGER: Yes. Around the time that I left. Not very long before I left there was the first terrorist bombing that I ever observed. There was opposition to Haile Selassie. There was opposition because of the lack of compassion for people. There was a big famine during that time in the early '70s – and that was part of the reason why he was overthrown. But then in spring of 1975, there were some terror attacks against government installations. One of them was a bombing of the city hall, which was right across the street from the U.S. cultural center. And it blew out most of our building. It killed a number of people in the city hall. It was really frightening. It was the first time I had seen anything like that. It's a scary thing.

Q: *Oh, it's very scary. By the time you were getting ready to leave, were we essentially shutting down?*

BERGER: All of our public programs had stopped. We couldn't do any traveling to the regional reading rooms. I had heard from somebody in the ministry of education that they were shut down and they threw away all the books, because they were American books. My wife had a job teaching at the university, a sociology course. Funny, she had gotten the job not long after the revolution began, in fact. It was her first teaching job that she ever had. She worked hard to prepare a curriculum. And the first day of classes some Marxist students came into the class, disrupted it, and said: "We can't have the imperialists teaching here. This class is over. The university is closed down. We are taking over." That was the end of her teaching career.

Then the government, over a period of many, many months, closed down the university and took all the students and sent them out to collective farms. Destroyed the university. Destroyed the farming. Closed down the medical school. Everything.

Q: *Sounds like a cultural revolution?*

BERGER: It was. It was modeled after the cultural revolution in Cuba and the one in China. And taken to a real extreme degree.

Q: *During the coup, was it hard to figure out who was in charge?*

BERGER: Exactly. It was very hard to figure it out. There were a number of military officers. And then there was this Lt. Colonel Mengistu (Haile Mariam). It turned out that he was behind the whole thing. Or at least he emerged out of whatever kind of power struggle that there was.

Q: *Who was the ambassador when the coup happened?*

BERGER: You will recall, Ambassador Adair left in February 1974 so the head of the mission must have been the Chargé and I can't remember his name right now [Parker Wyman].

Q: *Were you put on a tight leash by senior officers?*

BERGER: We were told it was not safe to travel. But then travel wasn't possible because you could only travel anywhere from six in the morning until ten at night. The roads outside of town were not safe. There were road blocks after dark throughout the city. So we basically stayed home most of the time. We went over to neighbor's houses. Sometimes during the curfew we had these all night parties, too. You went to people's homes and you brought your pillow because if you were there after ten o'clock you were going to sleep on the floor.

Q: *You and your wife must have been getting a pretty good impression of Africa by this point.*

BERGER: Yes. Two very different countries. But also very difficult countries. Very difficult experiences. And at that point I really wanted a different place. And went to Brazil from there.

Q: *How about Asmara? Did you get over to Asmara?*

BERGER: I only got there once. And I found Asmara to be a well ordered city. Much cleaner that Addis. More like a town in Southern Italy. Broad boulevards. They had horse drawn taxis, I remember. Wonderful Italian restaurants. It didn't have as much of a bustle as the capital did. Smaller town, but very pretty.

Q: *Did you get any feeling for the Eritrean Liberation Front?*

BERGER: Not really.

Q: *Were they still called Shiftas?*

BERGER: No. Amhara called them "Shifta." "Shifta" means bandit in Amharic. We never really came across any kind of situation. It was very much in the interior of Tigray and Eritrea.

Q: *How about Tigray?*

BERGER: I never did make it there.

Q: *Anyway, when you left there, I take it that you were not dying to go to another African post.*

BERGER: No. I did not apply, although the Africa bureau wanted to keep me in Africa. I probably could have adapted and gone on to some other place there. But I wanted a change. I wanted to develop a career that wasn't wedded to one geographic region. I also wanted to see something that was very different. I had a bunch of things on my bid list. I don't remember what all of them were. I do remember that Romania was on there. And I got a call from personnel saying, "You are going to Brazil. To Recife, Brazil." First to Portuguese language training and then off to Brazil. And I had no interest whatsoever in going anywhere in Latin America. But I thought "why not?"

Q: *You say you stopped off in Portugal. This was right at the time of great turmoil there, wasn't it?*

BERGER: It was. In fact, the reason we stopped in Portugal, I wanted to hear what Portuguese sounded like. We left Ethiopia and were going back to the States for home leave and the language training, and stopped in Portugal. And I was really taken aback. First of all, it was in the middle of the change from the Salazar regime to a democracy. And they hadn't quite gotten to the democracy stage.

Q: *It was sort of a young Marxist officer coup, wasn't it?*

BERGER: It was. And there were marches. The day we got there was May Day 1975. There were marches. Everything was on strike. We managed to get out of the airport. We had to take our own bags out of the airplane. We were our own baggage handlers. Everyone just climbed in there. There were no customs people. And the people from the airline – I think there were maybe twenty or thirty people there – and the aircraft staff said, "The airline had a bus to take us to a hotel. Anybody who wanted a ride could go." So we went. We had our two kids with us. Our suitcases. And we went to Avenida de Liberdade. Up on a hill. Beautiful hotel. It was the nicest hotel in town at that point. And they gave us a suite for about twenty bucks a day. There was nobody staying in the hotel. And we had a lot of fun in Portugal. Rented a car and drove around the country for about week and loved it. But I couldn't understand a word of the language. I found out afterwards, when I started studying Portuguese that Brazilian Portuguese is very different from metropolitan European Portuguese.

Q: *Okay, today is September 15, 2004. Art, how did you find Portuguese?*

BERGER: I loved it. The language is such a beautiful sing-song. I got to really like the music. And after I moved to Brazil, the Brazilian people have just such a great fun of life that it really made the tour wonderful.

Knowing the language helped me get into the culture in a way that I could not have otherwise. I think also having a first assignment in Brazil, in Recife, in the northeast, which has quite a different culture and mélange than other parts of Brazil. It is still very traditional in many respects. And there is more of a mix of the Portuguese, the Indian and the African. I was the cultural affairs officer for the northeast of Brazil, so I did a lot of traveling around to some fascinating cities and town.

Q: *You mentioned that the Brazilians are a fun loving people. I think De Gaul came and said that not a serious country.*

BERGER: Well a lot of Brazilians joke about themselves as well. I don't like to stereotype any group of people, but I think in the case of Brazil it really is true; the music, the Samba, the sense of a joy of life is unlike anywhere else that I have experienced.

Q: *You were in Recife from what, '76?*

BERGER: From November of '75 until July of '76. It was the first week of July that we moved down to Rio. So it was only about nine months.

Q: *What was Recife like then?*

BERGER: It was a very quiet port town. It was on the river and on the Atlantic. They had lots of problems with flooding. It was a very poor town.

Q: *What river was this?*

BERGER: Recife is at the confluence of the Beberibe and Capibaribe Rivers, which flowed in from the interior. It was not the Amazon or one of the major rivers. But it had problems with flooding periodically. Recife was also on the Atlantic, so there were some beautiful beaches over there. Recife means "reef" in Portuguese. And there is a great reef along the Atlantic coast that you could see from the beach where the waves broke over it. It protected the beaches. It was a very pretty place. A very quiet and lovely place to live. And the culture, as I said, was a mix of so many different cultures that came into Brazil. It was a very interesting place to live.

Q: *What was the government like?*

BERGER: At that time there was the beginning of the transition from the military dictatorship. I think Ernesto Geisel was the president [1974-1979]. But there was the beginning of a discussion. So there was a little more freedom of press. There was a little more discussion about how they were going to go to elections. And there was a discussion, in fact, on how the work out the municipal elections. The presidential elections came after I left Brazil. But it was the beginning of that transition. People were openly talking about how good it was going to be in Brazil.

Q: *Did the people feel the government was oppressive? Was it getting better?*

BERGER: It was getting better. I think life was getting better. There was a lot more freedom of expression. Certainly compared to the rougher times of the military dictatorship a few years before. There was more openness. The economy was booming. So people did feel that they were beginning to benefit a little bit more. And that also caused more people from the interior, who were extremely poor – some parts of the

interiors of the northeast were still very much subsistence economy, although you could see a lot of cottage industry growing over there. But Recife was a magnet for many poor from the interior. And a lot of them also would move down south.

The current president of Brazil, Lula, came from the northeast. Very poor. Moved down to Sao Paolo with his family and they became factory workers. The growth of factories and industries in Brazil is not as much in the northeast, but it was also somewhat in the northeast.

Q: *What did we have there? Who was the consul general?*

BERGER: The consul general was Richard Brown. He recently died. Young guy, very dynamic. It was a small consulate in this beautiful old mansion in the center of the downtown area. And I was the cultural affairs officer for the northeast. And there was a lot of opportunity at that time to really reach out to places like Fortaleza, João Pessoa. There were several bi-national centers that taught English. There was a great demand for English. USIS (United States Information Agency) did not actually run the English teaching programs in Brazil anymore. That had already been turned over, privatized. We didn't speak of it in those terms at that time, but that is essentially what it was. It was turned over to these private organizations called Ebaiyu Instituto Brasil Estados Unidos, the Joint Institute of Brazil and the United States and they had cultural exhibitions there.

And we also brought in a lot of cultural programming. I do remember several of them from the time that we were there. One of them was the Julliard acting school. They put on John Dos Passos' USA, and we staged it in the cultural center in Rio. I'm sorry, I jumped ahead and that was Rio.

One of the cultural programs that sticks in my mind as being incredibly successful – I was only there for about nine months – was the McClain Family Band, a group of bluegrass singers from Berea, Kentucky. They were great. We took them up to Fortaleza. We went to another town in the northeast, I don't remember which one it was. But we also had programs in Recife; jam sessions, concerts. The reaction of the people was tremendous. That was one of the things that my experiences in Ethiopia as well as Brazil in dealing with these cultural exchanges convinced me that this was one of the ways we helped people understand the dynamics of American culture and the diversity of American life.

Q: *Was there any student exchange or anything at that point in time?*

BERGER: There was a student exchange. It was fairly small in the northeast. It was run mainly out of the embassy in Brasilia, although we did have something. We had some graduate students. I think there was a Fulbright professor at one point in Recife from the University of New Hampshire, but I can't remember her name. And there were visiting programs. Lecturers on the cultural side. Gail Godwin came out. I remember her because she made a great impact on me and I read all of her books after that. We hosted some events for her, both lectures and informal programs. It really helped people understand so

much more about American culture. There was very little private exchange that was going on. Although we helped to kind of incubate that through the cultural exchange programs. And then we had of course the international visitor program. And that was a very active one.

Q: *In that part of the country, did you find the hand of Brasilia to be heavy or light?*

BERGER: There was a lot of local autonomy. There really was. And the people in Recife were quite laid back.

Q: *How about the Catholic Church? Was this an important element there at that time?*

BERGER: The Catholic Church is extremely powerful throughout Brazil. And it was more so in the traditional areas. Yet, I think it is true – and this may not be accurate, but it's anecdotal about Brazilians adherence to the Catholic religion. Brazil is the largest Catholic country in the world. Yet the personal observance was minimal. I remember some Brazilian friends telling me that they Catholic Church is all powerful because you go to the Catholic Church after you are born for you baptism, you go there for your first communion, you go there to get married and you go there to be buried. And you never go in between. Personal observance was really minimal. People did not go to church. The observance of Lent – compared to Carnival, which came just before – was almost non-existent.

Q: *I take it that this was a lot of fun?*

BERGER: I enjoyed it tremendously. And it really helped me understand a lot about the impact of culture on society, because it is very heavy in Brazil. Cultural life is so important there. And it helped me realize a lot about American culture and the impact of American culture on American life.

Q: *Did you sense any resentment or anti-Americanism at that time? Basically, we had supported the military coup leaders, I think.*

BERGER: I didn't find that. I really didn't. And I got out a lot. And I traveled a lot in the Northeast. I went to every major city and town throughout there in the nine months that I was in the Northeast, both to meet with people from cultural organizations, municipalities, higher education institutions, the bi-national cultural centers, and if anything, I found a real admiration for American society, American culture, the American way of life, the American governing values. Everybody wanted to go to the States.

Q: *I was wondering because at one point, particularly Argentina and Brazil, looked towards Europe as their center, much more so that countries further north.*

BERGER: That may have been truer of Argentina and others of the Spanish speaking Latin American countries. But Brazilians looked to the United States. They saw themselves as the second United States of the Western Hemisphere. They are such a huge

country. They are expansive. They speak one language. They have really amalgamated a diversity of cultures into one society, of course very unequal. You had strata of society. A lot of it was racially based. Much of it was economically based. Certainly whereas in the United States it was north versus south; in Brazil it was south versus north. The south, further away from the equator, was far more developed, far wealthier, much more sophisticated and looked at themselves as more in charge, both in government and the economy. The north was less developed and got a smaller piece of the economic pie.

Q: *Were we trying to get across our fight for racial equality and all that?*

BERGER: It was part of the message we had. But I think at that point we really looked at the expression of the diversity of American culture as a way to help people understand that what we do in America really does create not only a diverse society but also a prosperous society, and one that is based on some incredible values that can cross borders. Ours was a low pressure message, we didn't try to push people on that. Of course, democracy and institution building was one of our objectives in Brazil. But the Brazilians wanted it even more than we did. And that's what helped them move towards a democracy.

Q: *Did events in Vietnam or Chile impact at all?*

BERGER: Not that I can remember. This was the beginning of the post-Vietnam war period. Certainly Brazilians sometimes would bring it up. I'm looking back 30 years almost at this, but I don't remember it becoming an important part of the conversation.

Q: *Well, again, it's such a big place. They had their own problems.*

BERGER: They did. They were trying to come out of military dictatorship that was oppressive. They looked at the United States as the shining example on the hill that they wanted to emulate, both economically and politically. They saw themselves as embracing democratic values. The government looked at it as going very gradually, very slow. People wanted to move more rapidly. And I think the further away you were from the central government the easier it was. And those who were on the cultural side found it much easier because there was a loosening of culture expression. You could do a lot of things in Brazil in the mid-70s that I think you could not do in the early 70s or late 60s.

Q: *Did they have a cabaret type theater to poke fun at events?*

BERGER: That is where music and theater came in magnificently. People like Chico Buarque, a great singer, Maria Bethânia and others. But Chico Buarque especially. The Pete Seeger of Brazil. Beautiful songs, incredible lyrics, expression of Brazilian people's desire to do what they really love. To Brazilians, the music, the arts, the dance, were ways of getting out of that military stranglehold and becoming free.

I remember that after I moved down to Rio I used to go every Monday night to a small theater called Theatro Opinião; "Opinião" mean opinion. The greats of Samba would

come and they would sing their old songs. Some of the most expressive leaders in Brazilian song and music would come there and both talk, but mainly sing, what they felt from their heart. And they would get the audience dancing. They would dance in the isles. And they didn't care where you were from.

Also in the universities there was a real sense of this society is moving towards free expression and we can say anything we want. And they did. They didn't have public demonstrations. They didn't have demonstrations against the government. And the two years I was in Rio, '76 to '78, there were many more American Fulbrighters there; political science, literature, linguistics, history. And they were very active in Brazil. And I got to know a lot of Brazilian professors. They were not only fun but they knew where they were going. They knew where they were moving the society and they were doing it.

Q: *You weren't that far away from the kidnapping of our ambassador, [Charles] Burke Elbrick.*

BERGER: That was before I was there.

Q: *I know. But I was just wondering about the universities. In so many countries the universities are hotbeds of Marxism and practically no-go areas for Americans.*

BERGER: I don't think Marxism really played a role, certainly not that I can remember in the three years that I was in Brazil. Neither in the northeast nor in Rio. Certainly before that time it was a hotbed of radicalism. Universities led much more, but you also had the middle class leading at that point. Everybody wanted to move forward. And, as I said, the Brazilian economy was booming. A majority of the society was benefiting from it. You had growth of the middle class that was phenomenal. It became a consumerist society. There was a joke in Brazil, especially in the two years I was in Rio, they said, "You really should go visit Buenos Aires and fill up your suitcase." They said, "No, don't bring a suitcase. Buy a suitcase there and fill it up." Everything was so cheap by comparison. But Brazilians had a lot of money, a lot of spendable cash.

But also inflation was a problem. The government was trying to keep up with it, as they have every since. Attempts to reform the economy and get a hold of inflation. I remember there was an introduction of a new currency, cruzeiro. And since that time they have had several other revaluations or introductions of new currency. There were days when you would go into the supermarket and from the morning to the afternoon the prices would change.

Q: *When you went to Rio, what were you doing there?*

BERGER: In Recife I was the cultural affairs officer for the northeast. And then Lyle Copmann, who was the PAO (Public Affairs Officer) in Brasilia, asked me if I would like to move down to Rio. He was going to abolish the Recife position. There was, I guess, a budget cut and they were trying to make the post in the northeast smaller. They saw, looking at the major influence groups, that Rio was far more important. And he offered

me the job of director of the cultural center in Rio. It was a very active cultural center; library, supervising the Fulbright program. I replaced Jeff Biggs, who was down there at that time. And he became the information officer.

And it was great. For two years, I had the time of my life. I had a good budget. A lot of people would come through. Developing cultural programs. A lot of relationship with the university programs. And of course the Fulbright. It was a center. And Brazilians came. Whenever we could develop a program, whether it was a poetry reading, a play – like John Dos Passos USA, music groups from the states, whatever, we would fill up the house. And Brazilians loved it. They saw American culture as something that was akin to the vibrancy of Brazilian culture and music, and in the other arts as well.

Q: *How did the English language training go?*

BERGER: Well there was a big English language teaching program that was run by a private school. It had started years before in the post-Second World War period by the U.S. Government. USIS ran that for many, many years. There was a Foreign Service officer that was head of the school and ran the program. That had been dissolved many years before I came. It was successful. There had been 20,000 students a year who were taking English courses. We are talking about a big business. It was a big school. It was as big as one of the universities. We did a lot of co-sponsorship of programs as well. They had more money that we did.

Q: *How did you find the universities there? Some universities, particularly in Europe at this time, tended to have a rather embedded faculty. They weren't very dynamic.*

BERGER: That was true in Brazil at some levels. But there was a new group of younger faculty members who were bright. Many of them had been trained in the United States for the graduate degrees, either through the Fulbright program or on their own. And these were the people who were really setting the pace at the universities. They were great to work with. Americans like myself and others form the consulate were welcome on the universities. Whenever we had American specialists who were coming down there was no problem in programming them on campus or at the cultural center.

Q: *Did you find that many of the students were pointed towards graduate degrees in the United States?*

BERGER: A lot of them wanted to, whether they could work it out or not I don't know. We had a limited number of scholarships, such as the Fulbright program. But there was a rapidly increasing middle class and upper middle class. It was becoming quite large and people could actually afford themselves to send their kids to the United States. And that was their preference, rather than going to Europe. An American degree was worth a lot in Brazil.

Q: *From you experience, did you find that Brazilians were leaping beyond Miami? For so much of Latin America, they head towards Miami and that's sort of their Spanish home.*

BERGER: The Spanish speaking I think focused on South Florida and New York. The Brazilians focused on everything. Disney World was the first place. But they spread out everywhere. They had a love of America.

Q: *Did politics intrude either from the Brazilian side or the American side in your work while you were there?*

BERGER: I cannot remember anything of that. I really can't.

Q: *How about the library? How was this used?*

BERGER: It was used extensively. It was a good library. We had professional librarians. They were very good.

Q: *This was the pre-computer age.*

BERGER: Yes.

Q: *How did you find the consul general in Rio?*

BERGER: I don't really remember them. They were supportive of everything that we did. But I was physically separated from the consulate building. And most of USIS was located in the consulate building. I remember Don Gould was PAO for most of the time that I was there. The Consul General, John Dexter, hosted a number of events at his residence which I attended. But I basically was autonomous. I thought I had the greatest job in the world. I was the director of the cultural center. I was two blocks from Copacabana Beach. I had developed contacts in Brazilian society, especially the educational and cultural fields, to a great extent. I had a wonderful budget. What more could I ask for? [Editor's Note: other officers at CG Rio by March 1976 were: Political-Myles Frechette; Econ/Commercial-Tom Dawson; Consular-Don Yellman; and Administration Manuel Silberstein.]

Q: *How did you like the staff, the Foreign Service nationals?*

BERGER: They were great. They were fun to be with. They were extremely competent. And we really worked on some good programs together.

Q: *I've talked to people who have served I think before your time, but when Rio was the capital, and they were saying that one of the things they noticed was that some of our senior officers picked up Brazilian habits of having a wife and maybe a significant other somewhere else. And this got to be a little difficult. Did you find that?*

BERGER: I think that was true with some people. It was certainly true with the marine security guards, these young 18 to 20 year olds who were really taken by the Brazilian women, who are gorgeous. I think that a good number of the young marine security guards ended up engaged to Brazilian women. I don't know how long those marriages lasted, but for many of them that was the case.

(End Tape Two, Side B)
(Start Tape Three, Side A)

Q: *Had the adoption of Brasilia as the new capital affected things?*

BERGER: It had been adopted for some time before and the capital was quite built up by the time I got there. I used to go up to Brasilia for a number of meetings we had within the USIS structure. I remember also, after I was down in Rio, going back up to Recife for a visit of Rosalyn Carter. She was in Recife in 1977. But in the Brazilian mind, it still was very important. There was a large influx of Brazilian officials who maintained homes in Rio. And Friday afternoon was what they called the "champagne flight." It was like a wheels up party for the Brazilian officials. And I remember going up to Brasilia a number of times for meetings during the week. And them coming back on Friday afternoon. It was Varig Airlines, which served champagne on the flight, later afternoon or mid afternoon flight, because there were so many Brazilian officials on the flights going down to celebrate the weekend.

Another thing that was the case was that we had a lot of Congressional delegations that came to Brazil. Brazil was the economic powerhouse of Latin America and there were so many new agreements that were coming into force. And so American members of Congress would come down. Inevitably they would arrive in Brazil on a Friday afternoon, coming from somewhere else, either from the States directly or somewhere else in Latin America. And they would spend the weekend in Rio consulting and then on Monday morning go up to Brasilia. We would have to be on duty for them as a control office and help them understand something of the cultural diversity of Rio. This meant making sure that they had tickets to Samba schools, were escorted to different music programs, ate at the best restaurants in Rio. It certainly made me understand one aspect of Congress that I really did not like. But in other positions that I've had since that time, I have really respected the need for Congressional delegations coming down. At the time I just saw this as very much of a boondoggle that took place on weekends.

Q: *But it is a chance to corral members of Congress, which many other organizations never have a chance.*

BERGER: Yes. It was a chance also to explain to them or their staff delegations what USIS did in Brazil and the importance of the cultural exchange program, and especially bringing American experts overseas, the Fulbright exchange program, the international visitor program, voluntary visitors and the like. How important these were. So this part of it was important. And since they didn't have meetings on the weekends, this was an opportunity to – whether you were taking them somewhere or even sightseeing up to

Sugarloaf Mountain – you had them there and you were able to talk to them. It was extremely valuable and I didn't really realize it as much until later on.

Q: *I think so many of us don't.*

BERGER: Yes. We look at the oppressive nature of it. They are wasting our weekends. And in Rio it happened so frequently because Rio is a fun town. It's a great place to spend a weekend.

Q: *What about the trip by Roselyn Carter? This was shortly after Jimmy Carter became president. What was your impression?*

BERGER: I had already been down in Rio. And because I knew Recife I was asked to go up there and be part of that small delegation to help the trip. I thought she was fantastic. She really was quite substantive. Meetings. It was only a couple of days. It wasn't a big entourage that came with her either. She impressed me as a very down-to-earth person who understood the issues, had been very well briefed, had read up on Brazil, understood a lot about the poverty in the northeast. So I was quite impressed by her. And she let me take her picture at the end, which was great. A picture I still have.

Q: *Did you run across the confederacy of Brazil, the descendents of the American confederate veterans?*

BERGER: I heard about them, but I don't think I ever met them. But there was another visit to Brazil. This was the visit of Jimmy Carter, as president, which was separate from his wife's visit. She came down much earlier. He came down in '78 to Rio and Brasilia as part of a major trip through Latin America, and he went to Africa from there. Carter at that time was really a proponent of human rights. It was a major theme of his visit to Brazil. [Editor's Note: This Presidential trip went to Venezuela (March 28-29, 1978), Brazil (March 29-31), Nigeria (March 31-April 3) and Liberia (April 3).]

I can still remember my job on this trip. Everybody in the consulate and the embassy is corralled to do something. I was in charge of the press baggage, which is probably one of the least desirable positions that you want to have. You have two or three hundred members of the press who come down on two planes. And you have to get that the press gets on their bus, their baggage – which is pre-marked – gets onto the trucks and gets delivered to all their hotel rooms in time so by the time they check in . . . And there were a couple of snafus on that whole thing.

But I was also working with an advance team from the White House communications and White House press office. And there is only one thing that I can remember from that. And it really left a bit of a bitter taste in my mouth. But it did teach me a lesson about the importance of American media. I was working on the Brazilian media and trying to get them arranged for various press opportunities with the president. And I remember we had a meeting after we went to various site visits. And someone from the White House advance team and I am not sure if it was someone from the White House press office,

may be a political appointee or someone from the staff, but we were going over the press that we had arranged for various events. For one important speech that Carter was going to give, I went over the list of Brazilian press that would attend. I also mentioned that American television was going to be reporting this event as well. They were going to film it and I said I had no idea where it was going to be used. This White House press person said to me: "But do you have the New York Times at this event?" I said: "No. We haven't been able to get a confirmation. I'm not sure they'll cover that." And he said: "Don't you realize that if the New York Times doesn't cover it, it didn't happen." And this taught me a lesson that if the New York Times doesn't cover it, then nobody else would.

Q: *Did you have any dealings with the Brazilian Government on the cultural side?*

BERGER: We dealt with the state of Rio, the state of Pernambuco when I was in Recife, and the mayor's office for cultural affairs in Rio. But otherwise, I don't think there were any.

Q: *What was the impact of American movies or TV shows or anything like that?*

BERGER: American movies and television was the big rage. And unlike in a lot of other countries, Brazil did not dub television and movies. Everything was subtitled. So it helped Brazilians in learning English; they could hear the spoken language. Brazil had a good movie industry as well.

Q: *Yes, the TV stories.*

BERGER: The TV novellas. This was a huge thing. In fact, now they export them to many countries, including the United States. I remember that we could not have cultural programs start on certain nights at certain times because the popular TV novella would be on at that time and everybody would be home watching television. Couldn't do it.

Q: *I'm surprised they didn't have to drag you out of Rio. Did they?*

BERGER: In a way, yes. But at that point I had been overseas for seven years in a row, other than the short period of language training before going to Brazil. We were ready to come back to the United States. I wanted to have something a little bit more diverse. I also had never had a U.S. assignment. My kids were in elementary school, but it was a good time for them to go to school in the States.

Q: *How did you wife find Brazil?*

BERGER: She loved Recife. She really did. And no sooner than she had gotten used to it, we were moving down to Rio. And she hated Rio. She hated the superficiality of it. She hated the house that we were assigned, even though it was a very convenient neighborhood. She also hated the drivers. Rio was kind of like New York on the beach, with a lot of disadvantages on New York. I looked at the advantages of it. A lot has to do

with our personalities too. I look on the bright side of things and she looks at how difficult life is. She also had to deal much more with our kids schooling and other problems - dealing with a maid that we had who was terrible, a neighborhood that was a little bit isolated. And trying to get used to a new city. I mean, Rio is a huge city, very spread out.

Q: *Well this is often the case. I mean, as an officer, we have an office and all sorts of staff that take care of many of the things. And the women – it has now changed, of course, but in our time the women – are sort of thrown out there. They have to go to the market. They have to drive.*

BERGER: I remember one time my wife had a really rough time in Rio with a bus driver. She passed him on a street in Rio because he was going very slowly. And then she got caught up on traffic and was going to make a right turn. And then he passed her and he cut her off. And so she gave him the finger. Well, the Brazilian version of it which is the okay sign, which in Brazilian culture was the same as giving someone the finger in the United States. And he wasn't going to take that. And so he chased her, with is busload of passengers. He skipped two bus stops. Except that she was coming into a tunnel that went into the neighborhood where we lived, he would have run her down. He didn't care. It was a scary episode.

Q: *In Greece, the evil eye sign in the open palm extended outward. And our ambassador used to tell us not to do it. I mean, the Greek drivers were rude, but if you did this . . .*

BERGER: There was another thing. Shortly after we moved down to Rio she was involved in a traffic accident. She had stopped at a red light and the car behind her came up and hit her, and then took off. He left part of his headlight and some plastic from his grill on the ground. She couldn't move our car because the damage was so extensive. She wasn't really hurt. And then the police came. They said she had to fill out a report. I wasn't with her, so she called me and I came down to the police station. We spent the whole afternoon together filling out the report. I forgot what else happened. We went it to our insurance company. And of course, we have the license plate number of the license plate number that hit her and left. And at the end of these hours spent in there they say: "He didn't have to stay around. You told him you were not injured. If you are not injured, nobody has to stay around. This happens all the time in Rio." It was just so frustration.

Just one more thing. They told us that a lot of drivers don't stop for red lights in Rio because you could be hit by a bandit who wants to steal your car. Definitely part of life in the Foreign Service.

Q: *I know you are terribly busy. Is this a good place to stop?*

BERGER: This would be a good place. Because then we left Rio in the summer of '78. Came back to the States for home leave and then four years in Washington. I went to the African area office and was a desk officer for Francophone and Portuguese speaking West Africa.

Q: *Okay, today is October 1, 2004. Art, we've now got you in the AF bureau, where you served from '78 to '82.*

BERGER: Well I wasn't in the AF bureau for all of that time. I was in African affairs for two years. I was a desk officer for Francophone and Portuguese speaking West Africa. Did quite a bit of traveling there. Supervised I don't remember how many countries. But it was quite a few. And got to know a little bit about them from visits out there, from working with our PAOs and dealing within the bureaucracy at USIA and State.

Q: *And then what did you do?*

BERGER: That was '78 to '80. '80, '81, I had a sabbatical of sorts. I was selected by the agency to be their nominee for the president's executive exchange program for a year. I had to market myself to outside companies because this was a year outside. I went to Price Waterhouse as a management consultant. Fascinating experience for a year.

Q: *Okay. Well let start the AF bureau. What does a USIA officer do in Washington? It always gets a bit nebulous. You know what a desk officer in the State Department does, but . . .*

BERGER: It's certainly not as much fun as being overseas. But one of the things I found most interesting is that you are the key liaison to our embassies overseas. When they need support, when they need information, or when people in Washington at a higher level or at other agencies need information about that country and the U.S. interests and what we are doing, what our programs are in that country – say Mali or Mauritania, for example – you are the person who is supposed to know it all or how to get that information.

Q: *You were there basically during the Carter period?*

BERGER: That was the Carter period.

Q: *From your perspective, how did the Carter administration deal with Africa?*

BERGER: I think there was a real engagement with Africa, which was, I think, genuine. There were more resources to deal with Africa than I think had been the case under some of the other administrations. I think there was a sense that we had a responsibility to try to help, as well, in those countries that were lesser developed and had an opportunity to – whether with the Fulbright program, international visitors, exchange of people, bringing experts out there. It was a good period.

Q: *During these two years, how did you find you related to the State Department and its regional desk officers?*

BERGER: I got along well. I think part of it was that both USIA and State had very limited resources for Africa. Although, as I said, in succeeding administrations there

certainly wasn't as much. But there was an issue also on the issue of human rights. It was a good relationship. I used to go over to a lot of the meetings at State. And in fact that helped me understand a lot about that bureaucracy. Some of the things I didn't like about it. But also, some years later on, when I was detailed over to State for three years.

Q: *What were some of the things that you didn't care for in the State bureaucracy?*

BERGER: I think the bureaucracy was much more hierarchical. There was less flexibility. There was, I think, a need to work on process over programs or innovation or creativity.

Q: *How about of the states that you were dealing with? Were there any that stood out, either for good or ill?*

BERGER: Well one that is in my mind – I visited there a number of times – is Senegal. I thought at that time it was exceptional. I liked the people. I worked on a couple of important arts exchange projects. One with the Corcoran Gallery here in Washington. Worked with the Rockefeller Foundation in trying to get a major exhibit of artifacts from Africa to the United States. That was one country where I found that the people had a sense – at least the people in government that I dealt with – that they were trying to straddle two worlds. One was traditional Africa. The other was European with a veering towards the Untied States.

Countries I didn't like. Well, I visited Nigeria once. It wasn't in my bailiwick. But once was enough. It was just too much wheeler-dealing, corruption, nastiness. It wasn't fun at all. But then I visited other countries – like Mali, for example, or Mauritania – which I visited in that period. I think it was 1979 when I was there, not long after the coup. Then I went back there almost twenty years later, after I had retired. I went with a non-profit for some meetings with the government. I saw a real change had taken place. It changed for the better, which was unusual in Africa during that period.

Q: *You said Portuguese. Did that include Angola?*

BERGER: No. It was just Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Islands.

Q: *And these were kind of minor . . .*

BERGER: Oh, extraordinarily poor, minor. I visited both of them one time. I had fun. I always was happy to visit any new place at least once. I could usually judge if I wanted to go back a second time. I think we all can do that. But it was interesting because of the difference in culture and the impact that the colonial period had on the building style and the attitudes of people. The language, of course, we know that. But the whole culture. A real difference. I've been to a lot of countries in Africa. There's a difference between West Africa and East Africa on the English speaking. And then the French speaking countries in West Africa – the French had a very strong impact in there. And the Portuguese had a very different kind of impact. I think there was more of a *laissez-faire* attitude towards everything.

Q: *You mentioned Senegal. Is that Sékou Touré?*

BERGER: No. Guinea was Sékou Touré. But I did visit Guinea also. That was a depressed country.

Q: *It must have been because of his putting most of his opposition in jail.*

BERGER: Well, that was true in most of these countries. At a certain point in the '60s, these political leaders, these rising young people who were going to take power when they had independence, I think they came in as idealists and very quickly turned into corrupt leaders. And they tried to stifle, and in some cases, extinguish, the opposition.

Q: *With the Carter administration, human rights, of course, was on the front burner.*

BERGER: Human rights became a major issue in our foreign policy.

Q: *I would think you would have a sort of yin and yang working in Africa. On one you had real human rights violations by these leaders. At the same time, this was an administration that came in with a certain amount of idealism and optimism about Africa.*

BERGER: That's very true. It was a kind of conflict of ideology and interest. And clearly the Carter administration thought very highly of putting human rights at the forefront of our foreign policy. And moralism as well. It didn't always work because in many of these countries, they said: "We don't have enough food to feed our people. We don't have enough schools. We don't have any industry. We'll get to human rights someday. But first let's teach our people. Let's bring in the investment." So we were coming from one area and the leadership in these countries for the most part was coming from another. And they didn't really talk to each other.

Q: *What about students on exchange and all? I assume that you were monitoring this. How is it working? You know, the African student can have a bad or a good experience.*

BERGER: Well, of course, the African students that came to the United States from those countries that I dealt with, from what I remember, were among the best and the brightest in their society, or they had good political connections. So you had some really sharp young people who were coming over for a masters degree or for a doctorate. And then the others would come in and some would not want to go back. They would have a real problem with the government in their home country. Or there would be a coup that took place while they were in the United States. So, there were a number of real practical problems to deal with. But those that I met were quite impressive.

Q: *This Washington assignment gave you a chance to see the headquarters of USIA in action. How much of a USIA Africa hand group did you have? The State Department was developing a real Africa hand group. I would think that USIA would have a problem because there really isn't a lot of room to move . . .*

BERGER: No. That was not the case. There were a number of people who really spent a good part of their career in Africa and loved Africa. So I think, very much like the State people, you had some who were so happy to spend their entire career in Africa. And part of it was because they truly believed that we had something to contribute and that our relationships were extremely important.

Q: *Did you consider yourself an Africanist by this time?*

BERGER: Well I had a masters degree in African studies. I wanted to be in Africa. I spent four years in my first two tours, and then after my Brazil assignment – and Brazil has some connection, at least philosophically, with Africa – and then two years of a very intense relationship with African issues. I considered myself an Africanist, but at the same time I did not want to spend my career in Africa. I realized that there was so much more in the world and I wanted to have a very eclectic career. And it worked out that way.

Q: *Are there any programs, issues or visits or something that particularly stand out in your mind during this period?*

BERGER: There is one that does, and that was in Senegal. I was invited by the minister of culture to come out to the interior to his home town to meet his family and have dinner. I was traveling at that time with somebody from the Rockefeller Foundation and we went down there. And they grilled an entire goat over an open charcoal pit in the ground. Just the interaction of family – this was about a hundred miles in the interior – a town called Kaolack. I still remember it. We are talking about 1979. So it was quite a few years ago. But it stands out in my mind as a really good experience.

Another one was, one time I was taking over for a colleague of mine who could not travel and I went to Ghana. It was the only time I had ever been to Ghana. Everybody had told me: "Wait until you meet the people from Ghana. They are just so warm and friendly." And I got to Ghana and the PAO, who was my control officer. I stayed in a hotel, but the hotel had nothing. The PAO gave me soap, gave me towels. And then we were supposed to have breakfast in the hotel. I went to the hotel dining room for breakfast. The smartly dressed waiter comes over and brings me the menu. I took a look and said: "I'll have this, this, this and this, and a cup of coffee." And he said: "Oh, I'm sorry. We don't have this, this, this and this, or coffee." They had terrible shortages. But he said: "I can get you something." He went out of his way to be helpful and warm.

And then we went up to Kumasi, which was a traditional capital in Ghana, and was hosted by one of the traditional tribal chiefs. It was fantastic. They had almost nothing to share. And yet whatever they had they were willing to share. And they were just happy about doing it. They were happy somebody was there interested in them. So those are two things that really stick in my mind. Those are two things that really stick in my mind.

I remember going to Niger, to Niamey, and going into the local museum of culture, of Nigerian history. And it was quite impressive. It was really very nice. People were poor but yet quite proud of themselves.

Q: *Were there certain cultural artifacts which were particularly outstanding and played well in the United States?*

BERGER: Oh yes. And I think anybody can go into the museum of African art and see the kinds of things. I mean, more and more people are getting interested in the kind of African sculpture. And I think the Africans themselves were getting quite sophisticated by this time, by the late '70s, and realizing that their traditional sculptures or artifacts were wanted by people in the West, whether Europe or the United States, who were willing to pay. Not just pennies, but top dollar. And so some of the better dealers in the capitals, certainly places like Abidjan, Dakar, they know what the prices were in Paris or New York. They kept track of that. And I think that showed a new sophistication.

Q: *Did you get involved with museum groups going over there?*

BERGER: No, I didn't.

Q: *How did you find relations between the ambassadors in the region and the public affairs officers? Did they get along fairly well?*

BERGER: Yes, generally. Most of those posts were really quite small so the ambassador was a young career officer, generally, in some of the really tiny posts, it might be an FS-01, which, I guess, would be the old FSO-03 [Editor's Note: Like the military, Foreign Service Officers have rank in person. Unlike the military, the numerical rank starts at FS-08 or FS-07 and goes to FS-01, or colonel equivalent.] They would be the ambassador. And this would be a great opportunity. And they respected all of the people they had with them. But there was always, I think, a little bit of jealousy of the USIA people – usually the PAOs – who would go out into countryside. They would do more of their work out of the office than in the office. And the political officers, DCMs, tended to be bound up in the office or the foreign ministry or the finance ministry. And so there was a little bit of tension over there. But generally I think there was a good working relationship.

Q: *Well then, after two years there, you got this exchange deal?*

BERGER: I was selected for the President's Executive Exchange Program. This was a program that is now defunct, but then tried to take a small number – twenty-five or so – people from the executive branch of government and twenty-five or so people from the private sector. They did not exchange places. But rather each person had to have his resume circulated among the industries you were interested in, or the government agencies that you were interested in. And I had a number of offers of jobs. And the one that I felt that was the most interesting was something that was very different from what was I was doing. I was offered a job by Texaco in the Washington area working on public affairs, and Shell Oil Company in Houston, working for their vice president for public

affairs. But Price Waterhouse offered me a job for a year to work as a management consultant. And it was something I had never done before and I said: "Gee, this is an opportunity – like a sabbatical – to do something different." And I did and it was really great.

They paid my salary. This was part of the agreement that the host institution had to pay your salary. And it was really very nice because that was the year, '80, '81, when there was big adjustment in the salary of the Foreign Service. It was huge. And none of us knew that it was coming. So when it happened I went to the partner in charge at Price Waterhouse and said that this wasn't part of our agreement. They were going to pay my salary and benefits, plus an expense account. And they would pay for any travel or anything else that I needed to do. But I said it wasn't part of our agreement. This was a big one. I think it was twenty-something percent at my level. He said: "Well, if that's what you would have gotten if you were in the Foreign Service, we'll do it here." He called up their head of finance and said: "I'm sending you over a paper with information on where Arthur's salary is supposed to go to." It was really wonderful. It helped me understand a little bit about how things are done in the private sector. When you have somebody who makes a decision it's going to happen. It happens. And I found this with a lot of things.

I had a number of very interesting contracts that I worked on. One of the most interesting – I guess I can talk about it now – was a contract that Price Waterhouse had with the INS, the Immigration and Naturalization Service. If you remember, at that time, there were American hostages still held in Iran. And the INS was trying to figure out where all the Iranian students and other Iranian citizens in the United States [were], because once somebody came in through our port of entry, we lost track of them. America is an easy country to get lost in. I think we found that out also in 2001, the hard way.

But in 1980, after the '79 hostage taking in Tehran, the INS tried to figure out where all these Iranians were. They know there were hundreds of thousands. And they went to see where the I-94 forms were. These are the forms that the non-immigrant alien would fill out on the airplane and hand into the customs and immigration officer upon arrival at the airport or port of entry, and then go off to wherever they wanted to. There was never any follow-up. So if you had a three month tourist visa, well, what if you stayed four months? Or six months? Or a year? What if you had a student visa?

One of the INS took us out on the first day that we joined this contract to try and help them understand what kind of information government agencies needed to be able to keep track of non-immigrant aliens in the United States. They took us out to a warehouse someplace. And we went in there. There was this huge room filled up with shoeboxes full of these forms. They had no index. They didn't know where anything was. I think they were terribly embarrassed by this whole thing. But they also recognized that they needed to move very quickly to try and computerize things so that when somebody comes into the United States we know where they are going and we can easily keep track of them. And when they adjust status, everything can work much more efficiently.

I think we found out a few years ago that that kind of information gathering, sharing just didn't work very well. I was one of the key people going around to different agencies interviewing some of the senior people to find out what kind of information this government agency or that government agency needed about a non-immigrant alien. And the result is the new I-94 form, the one that is much more simplified, I think. And the purpose was to be able to computerize the whole thing.

Q: *What was your impression of the immigration service at the time?*

BERGER: I thought that the ones that I met with were highly professional. The system that they had was awful. And I think that there was not very much communication between them, the FBI, the State Department, and any other government agency.

Q: *I know a year later I spent one year as the State Department's liaison officer in INS. And it was a disaster. There was no interest. When I was there, the Reagan administration had just come in. And their entire top echelons were political appointees who really didn't talk to the professionals. State Department had developed a machine-readable passport. And we wanted INS to have a parallel program and do the same things with their cards. And "no." They went their own way. It was an interesting cultural thing.*

BERGER: Oh, it's very true. When a new administration comes in, no matter what administration, there's a lot of political payoff. And frequently you will get top level political leadership not being willing to communicate with or listen to the career people who are really the continuity within whatever agency it happens to be.

Q: *Well after this year, I assume you came away with a much better feeling about management?*

BERGER: I did. And I really began to understand a lot more about how the private sector works – and not just a private sector agency, but also one that has interaction with government and with private companies. And I worked on a number of things, including some international issues. One with Sao Paulo, Brazil on transportation. They were trying to develop a local light rail urban transit system. We competed on the contract. I helped with that and because of my knowledge of Portuguese and Brazil I went down there and helped to negotiate the contract, helped to write the proposal. We didn't win the contract. But it was a lot of fun.

And in that one year, as well, the President's Executive Exchange Program had a number of training components. One was the two week international business management course at the Wharton School. A very intense program. It was the equivalent, in those two weeks, of one year of graduate school at the business management level. And that opened my eyes a lot too. How the business world looks at itself and also international business. And then we went to Japan for a couple of weeks and Korea for a week to look at how business and government interacted. That was part of the theme the whole year. Went to a fully-automated Toyota plant, a steel plant in Korea. I remember going to a clothing

factory somewhere in Korea where there were four lines of young women and sowing machines. And they were all sewing raincoats. They were just almost exactly the same except that all had different labels. One was London Fog. Another was JC Penny. And so on down the line.

Q: *One learns that labels don't mean that much.*

BERGER: Exactly. It was a fascinating year. It really was.

Q: *Looking overall at your time with USIA, what did you bring out from that year?*

BERGER: I brought a better sense of how to get work done. How to look at a problem in an office or bureaucratic structure. And not to look at the problem, but to try and understand what that group's goal was and to focus not on the problem, but on the solution. How do we get to point X down the road? Who were the people? What kind of resources do we have? How do we work it out in the best way? And a lot of what I found is just by talking to people, they know the solution. It's just that they are too close to the problems to articulate the problem, to understand what the solution is, and to implement it. It did help me a lot in managing my own time and also in dealing with people.

Q: *Well then in '81 you moved where?*

BERGER: I had two jobs in one year. The first part of the year I came back to USIA. When I came back I found out what my next assignment was going to be. A year later, in June of '82, I was going to go to Israel as the embassy spokesman. But before that, I got appointed as director of publishing for USIA. Various magazines. It was an interesting year, negotiating with various countries. Went to Moscow to negotiate with the Soviets on distribution of American Illustrated and their distribution of Soviet Life in the Untied States. We had a number of other publications. Problems of Communism.

And this was a time when CNN and the whole media expansion was taking place. There was a sense I think within the highest echelons of the agency and the State Department and the White House that we didn't really need to distribute this kind of information overseas because the private sector would take care of it. And now that there was CNN, everybody could get instant information everywhere in the world. So what did we need to do these kinds of things for? And private magazines could be circulated. So Time and Newsweek could now go into different countries. Do we really need to do that? And I think we found out in the last couple of years that by cutting out so many of those tools of public diplomacy we have looked at the world in a shortsighted way. People in other societies and other cultures were getting information about the United Stated. But they were getting skewed information. They were getting information that was distorted. They were getting wrong information. They were getting it through a prism that didn't always look at the United States as the society that we understand. So the whole public, cultural exchange program really. . .

Charlie Wick had come on board and he had some grandiose ideas about how to do things. And I think many people thought he was a big joke. A friend of Reagan's, coming from a Hollywood culture. Everything was big and glitzy and glamorous. But Charlie Wick - and I think I saw this later – really had a sense though of what might play in other cultures. I don't think we understood him or he understood government very well. But he did have some big ideas that, had they been implemented in the right way, could have been really good for the U.S. Government overseas. But he also had some hair brained ideas too. And I think that because of his connection with the President a lot of people thought, "Well, we have to do whatever he says." That was one part of it.

The other part of it was that I was in publishing only for six months. Charlie Wick got a phone call from my new ambassador, Sam Lewis, who had been out in Israel since 1977 at that point. But he had gotten the information that I was going to be the information officer and the spokesman for the embassy. He called Charlie and he said: "Well, it's very nice that you want to send this young man out here to be my spokesman, but I want to make sure that he's really the person I want. And I don't know that he understands the politics, the nuances, the difficulty of working in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli dispute." So he told Charlie that if I really wanted to be out there he wanted to interview me.

So I got a call from the director's office that said they wanted me to go out and meet the ambassador to Israel and meet the ambassador, a week's TDY out there. So I did, and it was the beginning of '82. Or December of '81. It was around that time-frame. So I went out there and spent about a week at the embassy meeting a lot of people, being briefed by the political officer, the DCM. And I spent several hours with the ambassador one-on-one. And he was tough. I mean, he grilled me. He had my bio and, you know, I had some background on the Middle East. I had done quite a bit of reading on it. I had taken a number of courses in college. I had done a sub-specialization in graduate school and in my Ph.D. courses I was really focusing on political leadership in Africa and the Middle East. So I had spent a lot of reading and spent a lot of time in graduate seminars on the Middle East, especially at George Washington and American universities.

Well, I guess I passed muster because word got back that I was acceptable, but the ambassador said, "I want him to work in the State Department for the next six months before he comes here. I want him to be in the desk office; I want him to work with the head of public affairs for NEA (Bureau of Near East Affairs). Because when he comes to Israel, we were bound to have a crisis. So, from day one, he has to know all the issues, how the State Department handles it, how the White House deals with things. He has to know the personalities and everything about the policies."

So, two weeks later I was working in NEA. I spent part of my time on the Israel desk with Charlie Hill, who was the head of it and who later became executive secretary of the department, and who had just out as political officer in Israel. And half the time with Chris Ross, who was the head of NEA public affairs. And that really made a difference. I have to say that Sam Lewis was right on target. I thought it was not the best idea to do that. But at the same time, when I arrived out there it was the sixth day of the Lebanon

War. And there were hundreds of American journalists – I'm not exaggerating – hundreds. And every single one of them wanted to know what is the U.S. policy about this; and what are you saying about this;, and what are you doing about this;, and they wanted to talk to the Ambassador. And for my first fifteen months in Israel I think I may have had one or two days off and that was about it. It was crisis after crisis after crisis. And I loved it.

Q: *Was there any concern on anybody's part about having a Jewish public affairs officer in Israel because of a perceived conflicts of interest?*

BERGER: No, there wasn't any at all. I think that back when I first came into the Foreign Service there was this stereotype that if you sent a Jewish officer to Israel he or she may get into a situation where they have to make a tough decision and question where their loyalty lies. I think that by the time of the late 1970s, that had really been thrown out the window. I thought it was a ridiculous thing. An American Jew who was in the Foreign Service has loyalty only to the United States. And in going out there, I knew it. And I got to meet a lot of people and get to know some very, very well. From the editors of every newspaper, the major journalists on radio and television, the American journalists who were there, the European journalists who were there. I had a rolodex of literally hundreds of top journalists from all over the world. And never was there any question that I was not representing U.S. policy. It was U.S. policy that I was explaining. In fact, it was because of that that after I left Israel Dick Murphy asked me to be his spokesman for NEA.

Q: *So we move to Israel. When you arrived, what was the situation?*

BERGER: As I say, it was the tenth day of the Lebanon War. Life was seemed normal though. It was a very strange thing. The war was going on. You could see helicopters buzzing by the embassy, along the beachfront, going north from the Mediterranean to Lebanon. The news on radio and television was consumed by the war. It was all anybody was talking about, certainly at the embassy. That was the main preoccupation. And my job from day one – I came into the office and I remember immediately that the phone was ringing off the hook, from people like John Chancellor on down.

Q: *John Chancellor being . . . ?*

BERGER: He was a major NBC [National Broadcasting Company in USA] commentator. Marvin Kalb, writers from the New York Times, Tom Friedman became the correspondent in Israel. He replaced David Shipley, who was out there first. The top American journalists for radio, television, wires, daily newspapers, news magazines, they were all stationed there because this was the front page news story. It wasn't just the war but the whole U.S.-Israeli relationship. And the search for peace. This was a theme that ran through American policy since the founding of the state of Israel since 1948. Every American president thought that he could do something to bring about peace in the Middle East.

Q: *Somebody once told me that there were over forty plans.*

BERGER: Oh, that is probably an underestimation. There was the Rogers Plan, Weinberger came out with the Reagan Plan while I was there. This was on September 26, 1982. I remember it because I began to smoking again on that day. I had stopped smoking for some time. Weinberger was there, and he was defense secretary, and Sharon was defense minister of Israel. The two of them together. And on that day Reagan announced his plan to bring peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors. And I was up all night. We were transcribing things. We were meeting with journalists. It was one of those all-nighters that we frequently find in those kinds of an environment. And a lot of Israelis smoked. I think that they still do. I think that half of our staff in the embassy were smoking around me. And the Israeli journalists were smoking. And people from Sharon's office that we were meeting with, they were smoking. And it smelled good and I started smoking again. So that was my downfall for another seven years until 1989 when I stopped for good.

Q: *Were you on the Israeli desk when the Israelis went into Lebanon?*

BERGER: No. In fact, I was on vacation in Europe. *En route* to Israel, we stopped in Europe. We stopped in Paris and I remember buying a car and driving it to Rome.

Q: *I've had interviews with Bob Dillon, who was our ambassador in Lebanon (June 1981-October 1983), who has a very – to put it mildly – jaundiced view of what was happening and felt that our embassy in Tel Aviv was not giving them an accurate account of what was happening. What was the Embassy's understanding of this event?*

BERGER: I think there was thought that the initial attack was understandable. And that wasn't just the embassy, but the administration as well. There were cross-border incursions, rockets going into Israel, the shooting of the Israeli Ambassador in London, Ambassador (Shlomo) Argov, was kind of the straw that triggered – that was a bad mixed metaphor – that was the incident that more than anything else triggered the invasion. Remember, of course, that Sharon had his master plan of what he was going to do. But those first couple of weeks we had the same kind of information that just about everybody else did, that I think that probably Prime Minister Begin had. Began – as everybody else – believed that this was to go in there to clean out these PLO nests, to kill the cross-border Fedayeen, to disrupt their whole operation, and basically let the Lebanese be back in charge in Lebanon.

Most people, I think, felt that they would come back to the Litani River. Because they had gone in, in '78, up to the Litani. They would go up maybe a little bit beyond that and then come back in. When I got to Israel though – this was the tenth day of the war – they were basically in Beirut at that point. And nobody seemed to understand what the hell was going on. Very quickly though – Sam Lewis is not an easy person, I don't know if you have interviewed him yet – Sam was very tough. And when he was given instructions and also when he made up his own instructions to go in to find out what was going on - he wasn't the kind of shy person who would stand back and wait for

somebody – the assistant secretary or the director of the desk - to send him instructions to go in and meet with the prime minister or the foreign minister. He would stimulate that to try and find out what was going on.

Tough, tough ambassador, but really good. He understood a lot of the nuances more than most people. I think that to be ambassador in Israel is probably one of the hardest jobs in the world. Not just the crises, but you are dealing with people who not only know your history but think they know your history better than you do to.

Q: *When you got there, was there a concern that Alexander Haig had given Sharon a wink and nudge, basically to say that "if you go in, we won't be upset."*

BERGER: I think some people have called that the blinking orange light. There have been so many rumors about that. In fact, there were a number of Israeli journalists who wrote about that as well and believed that he had. But there has never been any evidence that he actually did that. And I've never seen a memcon (memorandum of conversation) or any other document that said that. Or anybody who was present in any conversation between the two of them that leads me to believe that there was ever that wink. I think that he did not really know what Sharon was going to do. Sharon didn't tell anybody.

Q: *I would have thought that because of this so-called wink on the part of Haig, even the rumor that it was, makes one feel that you are not quite on firm ground.*

BERGER: A lot of people believe that Israel will never go into a war situation, especially a pre-emptive war like it did in Lebanon – it was not a defensive war. It wasn't like '73, when they were attacked, or '67, when they were encircled and about to be attacked. This was really very, very different. This was pre-emptive and the Israelis learned that hard way that sometimes a pre-emptive war doesn't work out to the grandest plans.

Q: *Yes. As we speak, on October 1, 2004, the war in Iraq is not getting better. And there are certain overtones from this earlier Israeli experience.*

BERGER: There are. I don't think there are any parallels to it because the situations are so different. But at the same time, the sense of being bogged down and not thinking through what happens after you win the war. Surely, the Israeli military is so powerful that it can beat any Arab country. Certainly, Lebanon is not a problem. And the Syrian Air Force was destroyed in the first or second day of the Lebanon War. I don't think anybody questions their capabilities whatsoever.

But, as we are learning in Iraq, what happens after you get in there and after you are an occupying power – then what are you going to do? I think that the Israelis were welcomed far more by the Lebanese, by the Shia in South Lebanon, than we were in Iraq. There literally were thousands and thousands of Lebanese that come out of their homes, gave flowers or brought food to Israeli soldiers, because they were really occupied by the PLO. They were fed up with it. They wanted their country back.

Now, had the Israelis gone in and then very quickly given it back to these Lebanese, I think the Israelis would not have had the kind of problems that they had for so many years in Lebanon. But, of course, it's easy in hindsight. But I know that there are many Israeli political and political-military thinkers who have said that same thing. But Sharon made an alliance with some of the Christian leaders in Lebanon. The Christian leaders were the Gamal family and others also saw this as an opportunity to preserve their community, the hegemony they had over a good part of the government and the economy. And they had had a relationship with Sharon and a lot of Israelis for years before that, and a good relationship. So they saw this as an opportunity to recapture what they saw as their rightful place on Mount Lebanon, back in the days when the French formed that little enclave over there in the early '20s.

That was, I think, part of the whole thing. But clearly the U.S. did not orchestrate this. And I don't think the U.S. even gave a wink and a nod. It's just that there are a lot of people in the world who cannot believe that the Israelis would go into a preemptive war – especially anything as brash and extensive as they did in Lebanon – without the United States knowing beforehand and, not saying "yes, go do it," but turning their head away and saying "gee, we don't see anything going on." The Israelis don't share a lot of things with the United States. And this was one of the things I found in my four years there.

Q: *They talk about being close allies.*

BERGER: Well, there is a close alliance on a lot of things. And that's very true. There is no question about that. But even in the closest alliance that the United States has with Britain, with Canada, with Australia – what other country has gone to war with the United States as much as Australia? – I don't think that we share everything in our decision making process with them, or they with us. Nor should they. Even though your values may be the same, your interests may the same, your goal may be the same, not everything is the same. You are different cultures and because you live in different parts of the world, your interests are going to be different in some way. And this is true with the United States and Israel. No question about that.

Q: *You arrived right in the middle of this. What were you doing, sort of from the get-go?*

BERGER: I don't even remember being home on the day that the movers came to deliver our stuff. It was intense. I would say the average day probably extended twelve to fourteen, sixteen hours sometimes. Six, sometimes seven, days a week. Surely every week was a six day week. That was without question. And sometimes seven day weeks. It wasn't just the war. It was the crisis. It was the visitors that came, the high level U.S. visitors that came. I was there when Rumsfeld was the special envoy, when (National Security Advisor Bud) McFarland came through, this one came through and that one. And half the U.S. Congress of course, who all had their own ideas on how to resolve things. And (Secretary of State) George Shultz. It was one right after the other of high level visitors, of special envoys on peace process issues, of staff delegations.

And I was the spokesman for the embassy so I was the first line when it came to journalists who wanted some information. Now, anybody who called the ambassador's office, the ambassador's secretary would transfer that call immediately to me. I would filter those calls. And make certain, number one, was this somebody that the ambassador really should talk to? And he did talk to a lot of journalists. Also, was this somebody that I could handle? Or somebody else in the embassy? Or, was this somebody we weren't going to work with.

One of the first things I learned was that the best way to have a credible relationship with journalists – and it didn't make a difference if it was American, Israeli or a third country – you had to be honest with them. You had to give them as much information as you could legitimately give them. But at the same time never mislead them. Once you mislead them you lose your credibility. If you are honest with them and open with them and when you know that there is something you cannot reveal, just tell them: "Sorry, I can't go there. You've got to understand that there is some information that I cannot discuss." They understand. And I think that's what I learned. Those four years in Israel – probably the most intense years of my life except for the three that I followed up in Washington as head of NEA/P – were a tremendous learning experience.

Q: *You must have been hit square in the face by that 2x4, Shatila and Sabra and the questionable Israeli questionable collusion in the massacre of Palestinians?*

BERGER: Oh yeah. That was an awful night. I can remember exactly where I was, in fact. I was at the DCM's house for a dinner. This was in September of 1982. I had arrived in mid-June. In the middle of this dinner the DCM - who was charge' because Sam Lewis was out of the country on vacation – took this phone call and I could see right away on his face that there was some crisis. And then he took several of us from the embassy staff – a political officer, myself and a few others – and we sat down in a private room and he briefed us what had happened. And from then it was almost non-stop.

There was some misinformation at first as to what was happening. And once we found out – which was within a couple of hours – they immediately demarched the Israeli government. I think he went to Began, the foreign minister, and said: "You've got a responsibility. You've got to stop what is going on there." I will give the Israelis credit for one thing. Surely, they should not have allowed the Lebanese Christian militia to go into Sabra and Shatila because they could know what was going to happen. The hatreds were so awful. This was right after Amin Gamal was killed in the bombing. There was no question that the tempers, the seeking of revenge, were going to be.

The Israelis, who were working with the Christian militia, had to know that any Christian militia men who were going into Sabra and Shatila were going to go after them and would kill as many people as possible. They should have stopped them. And the Israeli commission of inquiry that took place was very clear about that. They said: "The Israelis certainly didn't take the guns to these people, but Sharon, as minister of defense, had this personal responsibility of not stopping something like this from happening." And they

forced him to resign. And he was out of government for a long time because of that. I thought the commission of inquire one of the high points of Israeli democracy.

[Editor's Note: A book on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon which was researched in part from ADST interviews is Cursed in the Peacemaker: The American Diplomat versus the Israeli General, Beirut 1982 by John Boykin, Applegate Press 2002.]

Q: *There had been this point where the Israelis had beaten off this series of wars – '48, '56, '67, '73 – and was seen as the tough Westernized country. But I think that after the invasion of Lebanon, there became a change in American perception. Until then, Israel could absolutely do no wrong, practically, within the public affairs context. Was that perceptible?*

BERGER: Yes it was. It was very perceptible. A lot of Israelis felt it too. Until that war the Israelis felt very strongly that they were in a war for survival. That it was really important for them to be able to maintain that qualitative edge. Until '67 their military alliance was really with the French. The French were the main supplier of weaponry. And it was after the '67 war when the French put a boycott that the United States started selling weaponry to Israel.

'48, clearly, I mean, that was clearly an existential war. Had they lost it there would not be a state of Israel. And this was probably true in '67 as well. '56 was different because that was another mix up and there were British and French interests. That was more, I think, British and French interests.

Q: *Israel was sort of the third hanger-on.*

BERGER: It was. I still haven't read enough about some of the discussions between the British and the French in '56. I know they wanted to get to Suez Canal back. They wanted to denationalize. But I think the Israelis saw this as an opportunity to get back at Egypt. Because in the period '53 to '56 there were a lot of cross-border incursions from Gaza and from Sinai into Israeli settlements nearby.

But Lebanon was different. Lebanon changed the perception, as I said, for a lot of Israelis, but especially I think in the West, the United States and Europe. Here was a country that really did not have to go to war. That took upon itself to be the shaper of the future of the Middle East. Or at least they thought they were going to be the re-shaper of the Middle East. Start a new relationship, a peace treaty, with a new government in Lebanon. And I think that Sharon and a few others in the Israeli government thought that they were really going to change the Arab perception of Israel. That they were really going to have from that a series of peace treaties with all of the Arab countries.

Well, of course, we know that didn't happen and the whole thing backfired badly on the Israelis. And part of it was that the United States got so ticked off at the Israelis not only being in Lebanon up to Beirut, but also bombing the city. I remember some of the messages that went from the United States, from the president and the secretary of state

to the prime minister and foreign minister of Israel, they were some tough messages. Let me tell you, the language in there was extraordinarily severe. There was that special bilateral relationship and sure there was a lot of tension over there, but once the bombing of Beirut started, and then Sabra and Shatila, the language got harsh. And in fact U.S.-Israeli relations went to a low point that really caused an incredible strain. I think that it was probably – except for the '56 war when Eisenhower forced the Israelis and the British and the French to back out of Egypt – I don't think there was any time in the history of U.S.-Israeli relations where the language was so tough and the pressure was so severe. Extraordinary pressure and threat.

I remember reading this year the diary of James Grover McDonald, who was the first U.S. ambassador to Israel [Editor's Note: McDonald served from March 1949 to December 1950]. His family presented them to the museum. His twelve-thousand pages of his typed personal diaries of his years in service to the United States. And there were some things in there, some of the language in some of the demarches that he had during the Israeli war of independence, where the language was just like that. But from that time until '56 and then to the bombing of Beirut, I don't think I've ever seen anything like that.

Q: *Did you feel that the embassy, the officers and all, were changing their attitudes towards Israel? Looking at this as no longer our nice friendly country but another country whose interests are not necessarily America's?*

BERGER: It was true that on every level, that the tension pervaded the relationship. In the military relationship, in the intelligence sharing, in the economic relationship and in the people-to-people relationship. The friendship among people didn't change, among individuals, that didn't change at all. That became strong and deeper, as would happen in any country where American FSOs were stationed. You make friends, I know a number of my local friends there were more critical of the Israelis than even the U.S. government was.

But then I think that there was a real change. The Israelis had several elections, first of all. They changed their leadership. There was a national unity government. And there was a realization by the top Israeli leadership that the United States-Israeli relationship had come to a period of great strain and it could harm the long term relationship and the future strength of Israel if the Israelis didn't change certain aspects of their policy. It wasn't hat we were no longer allies. We were allies; but we were allies that were going through a really rough patch.

And at that point it was really up to the Israelis to change things. And they did. They recognized how serious that breach was and that the reason for it was their policies, not anything that the United States did. So at a certain point, they moved very quickly – I don't remember the exact time. During 1983 there was the bombing of the American embassy in Beirut, there was the bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut. Those were two things that helped to bring the U.S. and Israel together because of a sense of there being a common enemy, the terrorists. The second part of it – I think even more important – was that if we work together, perhaps we can find a way to resolve the Arab-

Israeli conflict that would leave Israel more secure, that would give the Palestinians a sense of a real future, and that would ensure that the Arab neighbors of Israel would have a real rationalization for going to peace with Israel instead of going to war with Israel. So that I think helped turn around the whole thing. And the Israelis tended to have some good intelligence on terrorism as well and they tended to share more and more of it during that period of time.

Also, in the spring of 1983, the U.S. got the Israelis and the Lebanese together in the negotiations for a peace treaty. I was the spokesman for the U.S. delegation. Each week we would fly up and go to the negotiations. I got to know some of the Lebanese who were there. I remember, Shultz came right at the end of the negotiations of that and he felt very strongly that this was an important agreement. We made a very big mistake: We didn't bring Syria in on this. And Syria made sure that the agreement was going to go anywhere. And that's a lesson that we learned very quickly: You cannot bring about comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors without Syria.

Q: *Well our ambassador to Damascus (November 1981-June 1984), Bob Paganelli, was saying that Assad would not be on board when this so-called Shultz Plan came out and Shultz got very mad at him.*

BERGER: There were a number of people. Not just Bob, but others, both within NEA and other places that felt very strongly – I think there were a couple of our political officers in the embassy in Tel Aviv as well – that felt that we were making an error by not brining the Syrians in right at the beginning. The more that you had them in, the more chance they would buy into it and you would be able to work something out. The Syrians were very weak at that point. Remember, their military had been crushed. They didn't see any real benefit from their relationship with the Soviet Union. That was a great relationship. All these great things, including Mid-23s at that point. And it didn't do a damn bit of good against the Israeli pilots.

Q: *Yeah. They just kept getting shot down.*

BERGER: So there was an opportunity over there that we missed by not bringing them in. Whether they would have said yes or no, we don't know. They may have turned down the opportunity and scuttled the whole thing anyway. But there was an opportunity that we missed by not trying.

Q: *Now you came in sort of at the end of the Began government, didn't you?*

BERGER: He came into power in '77 and was in power until 1984. So it was about the first year-and-a-half, two years. then they had an election and Shamir and Perez, the Likud and Labor . . . pretty much, they didn't tie things up, but at the same time neither one could form an absolute majority. They had a coalition government. Neither one wanted to go with a lot of small parties. And they recognized that Israel was in a very difficult situation both militarily – the occupation of Lebanon was beginning to bog down.

There were all kinds of roadside bombs, sort of like the IEDs we are getting in Iraq today. The Hezbollah and other groups in Lebanon were staging them against the Israelis. They were really beginning to get bad casualties. There is one similarity with Iraq. The war was one pretty quickly, but what do you do after that? And the longer you remain an occupier, the more you are hated. And that's exactly what happened.

So they realized they had to do something about Lebanon. They also realized the relationship with the United States had to be repaired and had to be repaired very quickly. And they both understood that very well. And so they formed this national unity government. And it was a weird unity government. One was prime minister the other foreign minister, then after a year they switched. It didn't work very well.

Q: *Was there any warmth between the Began government and our mission in Tel Aviv?*

BERGER: There was on a couple of levels. The first was that Began would never lie to you, unless of course he had been misinformed by his defense minister, which was the case with the Lebanon War. But he was a very truthful person, and a very ethical person. He didn't move into a grand mansion. He was very ethical on a personal level too. I remember when he died, the eulogies that we heard from political opposition – they had opposed him all his life, everything that he stood for – and they said "but I respected him. He was an ethical person." And the more and more we learned about him we began to recognize that maybe he was not a great political leader, but when it came down to political leaders that were ethical, there were few that could equal him. Anywhere. He didn't believe in doing things for politics' sake.

Q: *What about Sharon? I might say in Sam Lewis' oral history, there is thirty pages in which is put on reserve until Sharon really passes from the scene. And this was put in a couple years before Sharon returned as prime minister.*

BERGER: I'm not surprised. Sam had some very difficult dealings with Sharon. Sharon was not an easy person. Not only that, but I think there was a sense by a lot of people that Sharon was really trying to undercut a lot of what the United States was trying to do. He had his own goals in mind and come hell or high water he was going to get them. That's why he was nicknamed by the Israelis as the Bulldozer. He could make your life very, very difficult.

Sharon was looked at by a lot of people both in and out of government as somebody who was a political opportunist. I think he has changed. When I take a look and I compare the 1980s to the last couple of years with him as prime minister, I see a very different person running the government. First, in the 1980s I never thought that he would come back and do government at all, let alone be prime minister. I never thought that he would get that large number of people to vote for him because I thought that vast majority of Israelis really hated him.

Today in Israel I think that the extreme right wing Israelis do hate him. And some of the language that they use against him is very similar to the language that they used against

Rabin before he was assassinated. Sharon – I know you don't want to get into contemporary things right now and that's not my field – but I think there is a useful comparison, even though I haven't been in the foreign service for over ten years now, but I think that he has done really a lot to turn Israel around in two ways. One, deepening its relationship with the United States. I think part of it is that I think he really is committed to pulling Israel out of Gaza and I don't know how much of the West Bank, but certainly part of the West Bank. Not as much as Rabin or certainly Perez would have been willing to do. Second, he recognizes that there is a very strong Palestinian nationalism that must be given respect and must be allowed to develop its own state that it can govern by itself. He's not going to allow that to happen as long as he feels that the State of Israel is threatened.

So you see that he's ready to withdraw today, but at the same time, when he thinks it's necessary he'll have a major incursion into Gaza. The first rule of political leadership is you have got to protect your people. And you cannot allow kids in a small town to be killed by rockets coming over the border from Gaza. He would be booted out on his ass. And I think that if our president ever allowed that to happen in the United States, he would probably be impeached.

Q: *What was your impression of the foreign press corps? All of a sudden you were exposed to the crème de la crème.*

BERGER: I wouldn't say exposed to. I was badgered by them. But also some of them became good friends. In fact, even today, almost twenty years after I left Israel, I continue a relationship with a number of them. Because Israel was such an important assignment many of them came back to the State Department to be the chief diplomatic correspondent for their newspaper or wire service. So my three years there I also deepened that relationship. And a number of them and I keep in very close touch. I don't give them inside information because I don't have any inside information right now. I don't see any classified documents.

(End Tape 3, Side 2)
(Begin Tape 4, Side 1)

BERGER: Dealing with the press…the American press in Israel were incredible. There were a few exceptions, but of the most part the newspapers and magazines, TV and radio sent their best correspondents there. Not only because it was a front page news story, but because it was a most difficult story to understand. It wasn't just covering a bombing and incursion, or this or that event or political crises. It was trying to keep track of the nuances of it and who the players were and the games that they were playing. The leaks that took place in the Israeli government – a lot of leaking of information. You really had to be on top of things.

One of the things that I found very important for me to be able to do my job properly was that – and Sam did this, Tom Pickering, who was the ambassador after that, and Dick Murphy as well – they brought me into their inner councils on everything. There may

have been some things that I still don't know about, but I really don't know of any major issue that they didn't make sure that their spokesman knew about. Now there were things that they would say: "We'll tell you about this, but you really cannot discuss this on any terms with any journalist. But you have to know that this is happening because it can help you put into a framework for journalists everything else that is going on."

I remember one time when Shimon Perez went to Morocco. We know about that in advance. And I couldn't reveal that to anybody. I do remember, though, that I got a phone call from an Israeli journalist – and there were a number of Israeli journalists that had been taken on his plane with him, and they were sworn to secrecy. I found that Israelis could keep secrets when they were really sworn to secrecy by a government official. They knew how to keep ground rules. They also knew how to leak better than any American journalist that I have come across. So, I got a phone call from somebody and he said that he had gotten wind of something that was going on in Morocco. He said: "Is there an Israeli minister, Perez or somebody else, that is having secret talks in Morocco right now?" I said: "Well, I'll have to get back to you." I didn't say I didn't know. I hung up and I called Sam, at that point. And he had just gotten word that Perez's plan had landed. And he said: "It's going to be public in a few minutes. You can confirm it now."

Otherwise you would get on the phone with somebody and they either ask me a question and I would say: "What? What are you talking about?" There was one time a little bit later in my career – in 1986 – when that happened. And that was in Wiesbaden, Germany and I was with Terry Waite. We were out in Wiesbaden for the release of hostages. He and I were watching the news at breakfast and found out about Iran Contra together. That was one thing that was kept from me and I'm glad it was.

Q: *Iran-Contra wais when we were trading arms for hostages and using the Israeli as a middle-man. There was an Israeli connection, right?*

BERGER: There were several people. One was an Israeli arms merchant. There was an Iranian arms merchant, Ghorbanifar. There was Bud McFarland and there was, of course, our good friend Ollie North, who was orchestrating this whole thing. It was a stain on American diplomacy.

Q: *As time went on, were you dealing with the West Bank matters? And what were the Israelis doing there? Or was this handled out of our USIA man in Jerusalem?*

BERGER: Both. You could not divorce what was happening in the West Bank and Gaza from the embassy, even though the prime responsibility for dealing with the West Bank and East Jerusalem was with the consulate in Jerusalem. There was a lot of coordination and consultation between the embassy and the consulate. As much as you might hear that people did not speak to each other, there was a lot of talking together. But on a day-to-day basis, of course, each had different responsibilities. I spoke to my counterpart in the consulate in Jerusalem.

I was the prime spokesman for everybody, though. And part of it was that I think I had a stronger background. I understood a lot of the history on both sides. And I had developed this relationship with these journalists and, you know, say David Shipley or Tom Friedman from the New York Times is going to call you up and talk to you about a story that they are working on, and part of it deals with the West Bank. You are not going to say that you can't answer that question and he had better call your colleague in Jerusalem and he will fill you in on that part of the story. You can't do that. You would lose your credibility.

Q: *What about the Israeli press? How did you interact with them?*

BERGER: On a daily basis. Their diplomatic correspondents, who covered the prime minister's and foreign minister's offices and the U.S.-Israeli relationship, were the best of the Israeli correspondents as well. But they didn't always have the same kind of standards. And I was always a little more careful if I went on to background with them than I would with an American correspondent. But they were professional. They were really professional. And I would tend to learn a lot from them because Israeli government officials would be very open with Israeli journalists. Far more than, say, a desk officer at the State Department would be with somebody who is covering the State Department. So they were really knowledgeable. And I became good friends with some of them. Some I keep in contact with still today.

They were tough though. Every one of the Israeli journalists wanted to get a scoop. They really weren't that concerned with the nuances of things. They wanted a headline that could scream out sensationalism. And that's not what I was about. I wanted people to understand why we came to decision that we had. And so sometimes it took a lot of conversation. "Tell me, are you going to do this and that?" "Well, Shimon, I can't get to that right now, but let me just put it into perspective."

Q: *What about the American Congress? What role did they play and how well did they play it?*

BERGER: Members of Congress had an important role to play. The biggest problem in Israel, though, was that you had so many coming. It was almost on a weekly basis there was another member of Congress coming. Certainly during the recess periods you would get large groups, CODELs, coming through. Christmas, Easter, summer recess, before elections, you name it. It was almost, as you said, a pilgrimage that they had to make.

Some of them were extraordinarily helpful, though. Because whenever a member of Congress came, they wanted to meet with the prime minister, the foreign minister, the defense minister. Not together, but individually. And so this would be an opportunity to hear again how they were briefing them to see if there were any nuances we could get out of it. Of course, the ambassador, whether it was Lewis or Pickering, would go along. And I would go along because we had a rule in the embassy that any time there was a high level visitor and there was a meeting of any of those three people and their spokesperson

was going to be sitting in the room in the meeting, I was there too. So I went to Jerusalem three or four times a week, frequently, because of these meetings.

Their spokespeople would brief immediately after. And it was very important for me to know what was happening. I couldn't wait for a memcon to be written five or six hours later or the next day. There wasn't time for something like that. Because frequently, riding back to Jerusalem, whether it be driving myself or riding in the car with the ambassador, we would listen to the radio. I understand Hebrew very well and we would listen to the next news broadcast. And frequently we would hear on the news broadcast a rundown of what had happened in that meeting. So you had to be very quick on your feet with something like that. This was before the cell phone days.

Q: *What about AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and other American Jews, separately and organization-wise?*

BERGER: Most of the Jewish organizations or leaders came out with their organization. In some cases there were a couple of leaders of different organizations together. They would come out on a regular basis. You have to figure that the leadership of AIPAC, the American-Jewish Committee, ADL (Anti-Defamation League), other organizations, the President's Conference, other American Jewish organizations would come out at least once a year, sometimes more often, depending on what was happening in the relationship. Of course, they would always get a briefing from the embassy before they would begin their meetings with the local government.

Frequently – and I found this out when I got back to Washington and worked for Dick Murphy – they would come over to the State Department before they would go out to the Middle East. And by that time, the '86 to '89 time-frame, more and more of them were going to Egypt and Jordan and other countries in the Arab world. So we would give them a broad NEA briefing before they went out. If the assistant secretary could do it, he would do it. Or the desk person. More often than not, I would do these Washington briefings.

Q: *One last question before we end this discussion. It sounds like you didn't have much real life outside of your job, but how about your family and all of that?*

BERGER: My family loved it. It was very comfortable, very pleasant. It's a very informal life in Israel. At that time, rarely did people wear ties and jackets. Certainly from April to November it was shirt sleeves, open neck, very informal, even when you went to meet the prime minister. That part was really nice. Even though life was really intense, we tried – even if I only had half a day off on a weekend – we tried as a family to get outside of Tel Aviv and see another part of Israel. The history of western civilization really began there. And there was so much – even though my training was more as a political scientists, I'm a history buff as well – it is just amazing to go walking in the footsteps of the people your read about who lived three or four thousand years ago, or go sit in an amphitheater somewhere where the Romans had come; go the Caesarea, the old port, now under water; go to an archeological dig; go to Capernaum; to Mount of

Beatitudes; swim in Galilee. You name it. Walking in the old city of Jerusalem. That was always my favorite thing, to walk in the old city of Jerusalem any time of day, early morning, afternoon, late at night. It was just such an incredible city. I feel badly for my colleagues who are there now and just can't do that. Life in the Foreign Service has changed.

Q: *Okay. Well Art, we'll take this opportunity to say farewell to Israel and we'll pick this up in 86 when you come back and you are what?*

BERGER: I became the director of NEA/P at the State Department. It was the NEA public affairs office and I was the spokesman for Near East and South Asia.

Q: *And you did that for. . . ?*

BERGER: For three years. From 1986 to August of 1989.

Q: *Today is October 22, 2004. Art, you were just starting a new position as the Public Affairs Officer for the Bureau of Near East Affairs (NEA/P).*

BERGER: For the Near East and South Asia. At that time it covered everything from Mauritania eastward though India and Pakistan.

Q: *Refresh my memory, had you served in the Department before that?*

BERGER: Just before I went out to Israel I was there for about six months working with NEA/P, with Chris Ross and with Charlie Hill on the Israel desk. This was part of what Sam Lewis wanted me to do before I came out to my job as spokesman in Israel. He felt I needed to have a taste of fire because there would always be a crisis in Israel, and he was right.

Q: *When you got there in '86, what was the atmosphere and what was the focus of the Near East bureau?*

BERGER: Well the focus in NEA at that time, as it was before then and I think since then, was on peace-making. Trying to find some way to broker a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. That was always the highest priority. Dick Murphy was the assistant secretary and this was a particular interest of his as well.

Q: *At this time, was the Iraq-Iran war still going on?*

BERGER: The Iraq-Iran was still going on. That was also a major focus because…even though the United States had a – I wouldn't call it a "normal" relationship with Iraq, but it was a relationship with Iraq that sought to balance some of the extremism from Iran. I think today we read a lot more about what their relationship was during the 80s.

Q: *Did you find yourself completely consumed by the Arab-Israeli issue?*

BERGER: There were three things that really consumed my time when I think back to that time. Certainly in the first year, 1986, it was Arab-Israeli peace-making. We were trying to find some way to get Arabs and Israelis to talk to each other. There were a number of false starts during that period. The Iran-Iraq war. But I think that most importantly, and especially in the fall of '86, was Iran-Contra and the hostages.

Q: *The hostages were in . . . ?*

BERGER: In Lebanon. What happened was the because of my position as the spokesman for NEA, I was on what was called the "hostage release team." And whenever a hostage was about the be released from Lebanon and then was being transported to the American military hospital in Wiesbaden, Germany, I would go along with a number of other people on that flight to Germany to receive the hostage, to help them understand some of the issues they were going to face, some of the public trauma. They had been kept in captivity, in many cases in the dark, shackled to walls, under really brutal conditions. And then suddenly they were going to come out before the TV cameras. And what were they going to face? What kind of questions? How they were able to deal with this, to help them draft their statements, things like that. So I went along on that to try and help them.

I think it was the second hostage release that I was involved in, in the fall of '86, when I was with Terry Waite, whom we all recognize. He was the representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury and he was the person who did some negotiations with the hostage takers in Lebanon to try and get the Americans free. Unknown to either of us and I think anybody else in the States, certainly, there was another channel going on. And this was the arms for hostages deal that was run out of Ollie North's office. And in fact, I remember going on this trip to Wiesbaden. We had gotten some inkling that there might be a release over the weekend and just to be prepared because, if there was, I would get a phone call probably very early in the morning to get over to Andrews Air Force Base and get on a C-140 to Wiesbaden.

Sunday morning – I still remember this because it was five o'clock in the morning or so – I get this phone call. I am immediately told by somebody that they are from Ollie North's office and this was about a hostage release that would probably take place very quickly and I needed to get over to Andrews Air Force Base. I would be told a little bit more about it when I got over to the airport. Well, I got over there. Here was Jacobson of the American University Hospital in Beirut or was it Sutherland, I'm not certain which, anyway, I do remember the trip because the hostage or hostages come back. We accompanied them through the various procedures. Go into the hospital. They spend the first day basically with the doctors to make sure they are physically okay. Go through a battery of tests, psychiatrists and others.

And I think it was the second morning that we were there in that trip and Terry Waite and I are having breakfast. And we are looking at armed forces TV and suddenly there is this thing about a German newspaper that had broken this news about arms for hostages. And he looked at the screen and you could see his jaw drop. And I said: "What are they

talking about?" And he said: "I don't know, but I cannot believe they would have done this." It was such an incredible thing. Here was a man who thought he was negotiating in good faith and then suddenly he's being undercut by this secret operation. Of course, we didn't know if this was true or not. This was the first inking of this.

I was the main person together with the spokesperson for the U.S. military at Wiesbaden. We worked out a statement. We tried to keep protect the former hostage, not so that they wouldn't talk about their experiences, but to help them understand that whatever they say could also impact on those people who were still being held hostage. And they knew the kinds of conditions, so they were very careful with their words. And then they came back and they were told – in fact I think there was a radio report on the plane coming back to Washington – that they were going to be received at the White House by President Reagan. And we all went there to the White House. There was a reception in the Rose Garden. The press was all there. They gave their statement. Did not take any questions. But I remember hearing some journalists screaming out to the president: "What is this about arms for hostages?" And just a couple of days later the president, Ed Meese and who else, went out there and talked about this operation and that was not authorized.

Q: *As you were the spokesperson on this, did somebody tell you what was going on before?*

BERGER: Nobody at State, myself included, knew *anything* about this. At least nobody I talked to from State, which went from the assistant secretary on down. We were all blindsided by this whole thing. I remember going into meetings with Dick Murphy and he couldn't believe this thing. Nobody knew anything about this.

Q: *During this interim period, between when it was first disclosed and when the President fessed up, how did you deal with it?*

BERGER: It was with great difficulty because, first of all, I didn't know anything about it. I always prided myself on being honest with the press. And whenever they asked me a question that didn't require me to give out any national security information – I was privy to a lot of things because I had a fairly high security clearance including codeword, but nothing on this subject was in anything I read - I would try to accommodate. And it was clear that any of the people that I worked with in NEA didn't know anything about it as well. And I got a lot of phone calls. And I would say: "I'm sorry, I really don't know anything about it and I don't think I'm going to be able to get you anything about it. This is not something that I or anybody I know has been privy to, so I don't know the truth of it, the details of it. There's nothing I can say."

And then over the next couple of months the requests for speakers to go out around the country and talk about American policy in the Middle East multiplied tremendously. And of course nobody wanted to go out there. Nobody from the White House wanted to go out there certainly. Nobody from the top level in the State Department wanted to go. And Dick Murphy, Chuck Redman and I talked about all of these requests. Redman said: "Do you want to go out and speak on behalf of the department?" I said: "Yeah, I'd love to, but

I'm not going to talk about this subject. I'll talk about what U.S. policy really is supposed to be. What our guidelines are. The kinds of things we are trying to accomplish. The broader areas. I'll talk about Arab-Israeli peace. I'll talk about the Iran-Iraq war. I'll talk about the hostage thing and I'll say that this is something that really goes against everything we are trying to do in the Middle East. I'll have to talk honestly about it, but without any knowledge, because I don't know anything. I think that all of us understand that this is not something that helped the United States in the Middle East or anywhere in the world."

Chuck agreed and I went out. In fact, I got that meritorious honor award about a year later for public affairs activities around the country. I went to twenty-four cities around the country in a very short period of time, within eight or nine months. Chuck got (Secretary) Schultz to give me the award. It was the special speaker of the year award, which I shared with somebody else from the Department. And it was really great.

I went out to all of these cities and one of the things that I found running through everyplace - And they appreciated my coming out there - they said: "We just appreciate that there was somebody from the Department who was willing to come out and just talk to us. Tell us what you are doing. Tell what the policy is going to be from here on in." And that's what I found. I went to world affairs councils, I went to universities, I went to Rotary clubs, the real rubber chicken circuit. And if I went into a city I would do six or seven things. It would be world affairs council, university, student groups, panel discussions, radio, television, editorial boards on newspapers. For me it was great. I had never done this before in the United States. I had done this overseas, but I had never done this in the United States. And to see people, whether it was Kansas City or Portland, Oregon – the need for people to be in touch with the foreign affairs establishment was so great, they just wanted to know that people in Washington wanted to hear their opinions.

Q: *While you were on these public speaking tours, there must have been rumors. Ollie North had sort of made a name for himself in Lebanon as being a cowboy. He was not an unknown.*

BERGER: No. He was not an unknown quantity. I had never met him. But I did hear people talking about him, basically that his mandate was to try to coordinate – and this is what I think a lot of people at State thought before the story broke – that he was being allowed to coordinate a lot of things that could get things done regarding hostages, that he had other channels. Nobody really knew what it was. But I don't think anybody knew that it was illegal, either. At least at that time before the story broke, I certainly didn't. Any people I talked with, you know, there was some chatter about these thing but he gets the phone call. He coordinates everything about hostage release. So, you get the phone call from his office. And I may have gotten a phone call for one of the releases, either the first or the second, from him himself. I don't remember, but I know it was from his office, saying, "Get out to Andrews Air Force Base."

And Jerry Bremer was coordinator for counterterrorism at that time at State. And he was involved. And have a number of conversations that he had with the assistant secretary

and others, meetings that I participated in. I remember talking with Jerry about a number of things because we had to coordinate our statements on a many things, including terrorism, counterterrorism, and hostage release. Certainly it did not appear to me that Jerry knew anything about what Ollie North was doing. I don't think Ollie trusted anybody from the State Department, to be frank.

Q: *Well there had been the dispute over what George Schultz knew and didn't know. He was at meetings with Weinberger, how involved was he?*

BERGER: Well, I don't know because that never came to me. Certainly I was in some meetings with Schultz when he came out to Israel, and a couple in Washington as well. You know, sitting in the back of the room like a fly on the wall. But never did I hear anything in any of those meetings that would lead me to believe that he knew anything.

There was one interesting thing that I would say. And this is something that refers to George H.W. Bush, the vice president. And this goes back to my last week in Israel, because it ended there with his trip there and the beginning of what we called strategic cooperation between the United States and Israel. He came there and there were several off the record meetings that he had with Israeli counter-terrorism experts, one of whom later died in an accident. And nobody ever knew what was going on in those meetings; they were not in the official schedule. But they related to counter-terrorism.

Q: *When you were going around the country talking, were people focused on the arms for hostages or were they focused on the Arab-Israeli dispute? What was the interest?*

BERGER: Arms for hostages was not the major focus, although people wanted to know something. What I tried to do was be a little bit on the offensive and say: "I know that you are all curious as to who knew what and when did they know it. I'm happy to tell you that I didn't know anything, but also that what happened really goes against American tradition and American law. People who were involved with this broke the law, and that is being reviewed by another part of the government. I would like to tell you about U.S. policy and what it is related to negotiating on hostages." And I laid out what the policy was. And after that they may be one or two questions, but most of them really dealt with the Arab-Israeli issue. There was a lot of interest in that.

Q: *You had been in the hot house in Tel Aviv with American Jewish groups practically on a conveyer belt coming in to town. When you got away from that, did you find a different focus?*

BERGER: It was really interesting. I think it's a good question to bring up. A lot of the requests were from world affairs councils and universities. But also, whenever I went into a community, the State Department public affairs office arranged meetings with major community Jewish groups. And if there were large Arab-American populations in those towns – Detroit; Ann Arbor; Uniontown, Pennsylvania, there were a number of other places – I would speak to Arab-American groups as well.

I would tell everybody the exact same thing. I don't try to change the story of the policy depending on who I'm speaking to. But I tried to be straight with them, to help them understand that the interests that they have as an interest group or ethnic group, the Department of State wants to hear their concerns. We want to know what they feel about our policies. And I think it's an important thing. I don't know if we do enough of that anymore, but it's something that we surely should do. It's important. They were taxpayers. I said: "You are taxpayers. You pay my salary. You pay the budget of the State Department," and I would try to get something in there that the budget for foreign affairs wasn't enough. And I would help them understand that point. I think it was less than one-percent of federal budget went to pay for the whole foreign affairs establishment, and that included all the aid that we give. I think most people didn't understand that. They didn't know that. It may make big headlines, but it doesn't make the biggest budget impact.

What we tried to help people understand why we do what we do and how their money is being spent on foreign policy. And to help people understand that we really have a number of considerations. First of all, that the United States does not support one side over the other. We try to be an honest broker. I think that we a theme that I gave for everybody.

There were lots of groups that came through the Department during the three years that I was spokesman for NEA – They wanted to talk to the Secretary of State, even if he had agreed, he wasn't always able to do it. There would be sudden meetings, foreign travel, so it would trickle down: the Deputy Secretary, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, or the NEA Assistant Secretary. And there were hundreds of requests for the NEA assistant secretary, for Dick Murphy. Frequently he was unable to meet those requests and he would just pass them on to me. And I loved to do these things. And many of them were either Arab-American or Jewish-American groups that were coming to Washington to lobby members of congress, to go the circuit, and the State Department, of course, would be one of the stops. So it was a good opportunity to tell them what our policy was, what the United States has done in the past, how we look at ourselves as an honest broker, what our goals are and how we are trying to work them out. Such encounters helped me understand their concerns.

Also, on the other side, with the journalists that covered foreign policy. A lot of people in Washington know this, but I'm not sure that many people outside the beltway understand this. Every major newspaper, magazine, wire service, television, radio assigns their best foreign correspondents to cover the State Department. And there are a lot of journalists who cover the State Department who have been following foreign policy for many years longer than I have. They were smart. I would talk to them on a daily basis. They would go to the State Department noon briefing, which usually started at one o'clock. I was usually very busy in the morning getting approved press guidance through the bureau, NEA has a very small press office, maybe three or four of us at any one time. Frequently, especially if it was something on Arab-Israeli issues, which I knew very well from my time in Israel, and travel around the States, or participation in meetings with Dick Murphy, with Ed Djerejian, with Arne Raphel when he was senior Deputy Assistant

Secretary covering the Israeli Desk, with Charley Hill – I knew what the policy was and would just draft it myself. This was something I learned from Chris Ross. He said: "If you know what the policy is, why would you farm it out to the desk? You have to get their clearance, but draft it yourself. It'll save you an hour or more." And it did. It was very good advice that he gave me.

Q: *You say you went out and met these groups that wanted a chance to give their input. How did you act as an implementer of their input into the State Department?*

BERGER: What I tried to do at that time – we didn't have email - when I came back from a trip – and every trip was two or three days, and two or three cities – I would try and give a little bit of a sense of the feedback that I was getting. If there were major threads of concern. I thought it was important to be able to get that back. I sent it to both the spokesman's office as well as to the NEA assistant secretary and the desks. People didn't always agree with our policy, but they really appreciated that they had an opportunity…for so long, no one had been out there to many of these cities. And, especially when Iran-Contra broke, there was a sense in the Department that public affairs and getting out was the lowest priority. And I really wanted to do it and I offered myself us as the guinea pig to go out.

Q: *Correct me if I'm wrong, but there may have been a folk memory of those who had gone out during the Vietnam War. We sent people all over the place and essentially they got verbally beaten up by students. It was a very unpleasant experience.*

BERGER: I found in some places, you get radical students, especially at universities, and especially Palestinian students would come up to you and say "We disagree with your policy" and all of that. But I thought for the most part people were quite rational and willing to listen and willing to engage. One of the things that I found most important for somebody who is speaking on behalf of our establishment. Number one: never lose your cool. Once you lose your cool and get into an argument with someone. Somebody doesn't like your policy, doesn't like what you are doing, it not a personal sort of things; they may raise your voice, they may scream at you. I would very calmly try to explain what it was we were doing. I have this here now at the Holocaust Museum sometimes for the last couple of weeks we have been running a speaker's program. In fact the program we had last night, one of our speakers turned out to be a bit controversial. You don't lose your cool. You calmly try to get your point across.

Q: *Did you run across this organization the Jewish Defense League? Can you explain what it was at that time?*

BERGER: The Jewish Defense League was set up by a firebrand rabbi named Meir Kahane. I don't remember when he set it up, but it was originally to try to protect mainly elderly Jews in certain neighborhoods in New York who were getting beaten up by some of their neighbors who were not Jewish. He thought that this was a feeling of powerlessness, that these elderly people had, that they were being attacked because they

were Jewish, that this was a form of anti-Semitism, and I think he was right. But then he expanded this thing…

(End Tape 4, Side A)
(Start Tape 4, Side B)

He talked about Arab actions and policies and attacks on Israel and he said that this Jewish Defense League was the organization that was going to defend Jews everywhere and was going to help to protect the Jewish state. I remember that when I was in Israel, back in '82 to '86, he became quite active with what they call the Jewish underground, which provoked attacks against Arabs whether in the West Bank and Gaza or other parts. But especially West Bank and Gaza. And then in the United States also it took a very aggressive role. And as time went on, late '80s, became even more aggressive.

We had a policy in the State Department that we would not engage with them. They would always try to get us to get on a radio program with them, go on TV, join them for a panel discussion. We said: "We do not sit down with fringe groups that believe in violence as a method of operation. Period." We wanted to marginalize them. It is very much the same way as here in the museum we deal with Holocaust deniers. We don't engage them because it gives them a platform, gives them credibility, gives them news. Why should we do that? So we try to marginalize them.

They [the Jewish Defense League] were as bad as – in some cases –the terrorist groups. They attacked Arab-American installations, organizations, people. And we were not going to have anything to do with them. If any American cabinet-level department was going to have anything to do with them, it would be the Office of the Attorney General, the Justice Department.

Q: *Well they were also attacking Soviet installations. The Embassy. And every time they did that, something would happen to us in Moscow.*

BERGER: There were other Jewish organizations that demonstrated, had vigils, petitions against Soviet policy towards Jews. And this goes on and on and on. This is before the collapse of the Soviet Union, where Jewish immigration was highly restricted. And in many cases, if somebody tried to apply for emigration from the Soviet Union and they were Jewish, they would lose their job before anything else. If they were a student, they would be kicked out of school. So it was a very different kind of thing. But there were some very responsible organizations that were working on that. It was Senator Scoop Jackson who I think was one of the leaders of the responsible . . . . offered the Jackson-Vanik Amendment

Q: *What was your impression, on the public affairs side, of the Israeli Embassy in Washington?*

BERGER: It depended on who was serving there. And I had a lot of dealings with their spokesman. And there was one in particular who really stood out as a first class

professional. Years later we became close friends, but the name escapes me. He later became spokesman for the Israeli foreign ministry and then, after he became Israeli ambassador in the Netherlands. Now I think he is their MFA director general for Western Europe and business affairs. Quite a sharp, sharp person. When I was in Israel I also became friends with and also worked closely with Abi Pasnaya, who was the spokesman for the foreign ministry. I found them for the most part to be first class professionals. There were exceptions, of course. And there was a big difference, I think, between those who were spokesperson for the foreign minister or for the Israeli embassy. Generally foreign affairs professionals, just like ourselves. And those who were the spokesmen for the prime minister. Just as the spokesman for the president tends to be a political appointee. Very different kids of roles that they play.

Q: *What about AIPAC – America-Israel Public Affairs Committee?*

BERGER: They are a well run operation, a first class lobbying organization. Probably have more impact than their size. They are nowhere near the size of, for example, the NRA (National Rifle Association) or AARP (American Association of Retired People). But very powerful, very influential. I would call them a streamlined operation. When they saw an issue that concerned the U.S.-Israeli relationship and it was of a priority nature to them, they would get out the troops. They would get out hundreds, if not thousands, sometimes, of letter writers, people who would come to members of congress' offices. First class operation.

They would frequently bring to the State Department groups of their supporters to get a briefing. And we gave them as good a briefing as we would give any other group. I found them really professional. One of the things that I found about them was that their goal appeared to me to be to do what they could to strengthen the U.S.-Israeli relationship. And they focused mainly on Congress, at that time. They have since expanded and focused more on executive branch. But their biggest focus has always been on Congress. For example, they would invite probably every new member to go on a trip to Israel. And they would get them meetings with every top leader in Israel. They were, as I said, a very well run operation.

Q: *Did you ever find that they were going in one direction and you, representing the State Department, were going another?*

BERGER: Oh yes. Very much so. And it concerned a couple of things. One was on U.S. aid beyond the green line. This was something that we would not tolerate.

Q: *Can you explain what that means?*

BERGER: The green line is the armistice line of 1949, which ended Arab-Israeli hostilities after the 1948-49 war which resulted in the independence of Israel. This goes back to the 1947 United Nations partition of the western part of the Palestinian mandate – because the original Palestinian mandate included both east of the Jordan and west of the Jordan river. East of the Jordan river through the various agreements, especially Sykes-

Picot and a private agreement that the British Government had with Sharif Hussein of Mecca resulted in taking the eastern part out of the original Palestinian mandate of the League of Nations and creating the Kingdom of Trans-Jordan. Sharif Hussein was King Hussein's great-grandfather. Then the western side became the mandate of Palestine. The 1947 United Nations partition agreement said that that territory would be divided up into what would become a Jewish state and an Arab state and an internationalized city and surrounding area of Jerusalem. The British finally gave up in the spring of '48, said they were pulling out their forces, too many attacks. The Jewish were attacking them. The Arabs were attacking them. And they had to get out, and they did.

And the Jewish Agency for Palestine which became the precursor of the Israeli state declared independence May 14, 1948. The coordinated with the British withdrawal. And at the same time the Palestinians, together with Arab armies from a number of states surrounding, including as far as Iraq, invaded. The nascent Jewish state was divided, there were several different enclaves. At the end of fighting in 1949 an armistice agreement resulted in a State of Israel with undemarcated, or rather temporary boundaries, which was referred to as "the green line." Mainly, I think, somebody used a green magic marker. It had nothing to do with one side having more grass than the other, or better agricultural property. It had to do only with how they put the line on the map.

And that became the temporary boundary. But it wasn't referred to as a boundary. It was referred to as an armistice line. And there was still, according to the United States Government, a feeling that Jerusalem still could be an international city. So the U.S. Government put its embassy in the city of Tel Aviv, which is on the Mediterranean coast. Yet, whenever a U.S. ambassador presented his credentials to the president of Israel, he did it in the president's residence, which was in West Jerusalem.

This is one of the contradictions of American policy. We tried to deal with it in as logical a way as we could. On a *de facto* basis we recognize Israeli sovereignty over West Jerusalem. With the ambassador presenting credentials, with the ambassador and other members of the U.S. Government coming to Jerusalem for all kinds of government meetings, we did that. What we did not do, on two levels: One was – as I started to say - a dispute on the issue of aid. We forbade any U.S. assistant to Israel from being expended beyond that green line, which meant in East Jerusalem or in the territories that were occupied by Israel at the end of the 1967 war: the West Bank and Gaza, principally. So that's one of the areas we disagreed with AIPAC on.

Another area that we disagreed with AIPAC on was on American officials going to Jerusalem. For example, Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, Agriculture, Energy, you name it, because we have a lot of them. Or even a member of Congress. We would not facilitate – and this was really very much of a fiction in real terms, but this was our policy principle – the visit of any American official to East Jerusalem or to any of the territories. And the way that we did this was, we handed over the visitor to our colleagues in the U.S. consulate general in Jerusalem, which had two offices yet under one consul general.

And this was another area where we got into disputes with groups like AIPAC and other Jewish groups. They would frequently talk about: "You've got two U.S. consulates, one in West Jerusalem to deal with Israelis, another in East Jerusalem to deal with the Palestinians." And we would say: "No. You've got it wrong. There is only one consulate in Jerusalem and that consulate was opened in the 1860s in the building that we still have in West Jerusalem." Beautiful old building, by the way. We have one consulate under the authority of the consulate general who predated the Palestinian mandate of the League of Nations. And the reason why we had two buildings really originated in 1948-49 because after the armistice agreement it was so difficult to get through the Mandelbaum Gate, not only for Jews or Arabs, but also for American diplomats. Although we had free passage, it wasn't always so free. It was very difficult. Whether the Jordanians occupied east Jerusalem and the west bank or the Israelis in West Jerusalem, it wasn't easy because there were hostilities between the two. Even though – as we know now – there were so many behind the scenes contacts between the Israelis and the Jordanians, more than anybody ever knew, there was this difficulty in getting back and forth while there was this division of Jerusalem And so that was another area on which we disagreed with AIPAC.

Secondly, we believed that the fate of the city of Jerusalem remained to be determined by negotiations among the parties. And we kept to that line. And Jewish groups, especially AIPAC and others further to the right of AIPAC, disagreed with us. There were very few Jewish groups, in fact, that agreed with us.

Q: *On the other side, what about the various Arab embassies and their ability to make their points?*

BERGER: They were able to make their points. They had great access within the Department of State. I cannot speak for the whole administration, but certainly the Saudis, the Syrians, the Iraqis – when Tariq Aziz was ambassador to Washington he had frequent contact at the assistant secretary or higher level. And of course the Egyptians were our allies and still are, and had very close and frequent contact.

Q: *Did they weigh-in on Arab-Israeli relations?*

BERGER: All the time. There was some disagreement. Although I found that during those years that I was in NEA, '86 to '89, there was a pretty good agreement that the United States Government was taking the right track. The difficulty that we had frequently with the Arab governments – with the exception of Jordan and Egypt – is that they were not helpful in two ways. One, in brining the Palestinians along and trying to convince the Palestinian leadership, and especially Arafat. If your remember how from '86 to '89, with the exception of after '88 when Arafat said the magic words about recognizing Israel's right to exist, we did not have any direct communication with the PLO. So we depended on the Egyptians and the Jordanians principally. And there were times when the Jordanians got fed up with the Palestinians and didn't want to have anything to do with passing messages or trying to bring them to any kind of negotiations,

or negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians. I don't remember the exact time, but I remember that they were throwing their hands up in frustration.

The Saudis were never helpful. And other Arab governments were for the most part away from the center of the conflict. I went on a number of trips when I was in NEA to Arab countries, from Mauritania to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE and then to South Asia, India and Pakistan. And invariably in the Arab countries you would talk about bilateral relations. We talked about U.S. relations with the Arab world. We talked about terrorism issues and we also talked, inevitably, about the Arab-Israeli issues. And there were a couple of anecdotes that if you don't mind I'll just go into while we are here. One concerns a lunch that I had at the DCM's house in Riyadh. And the other a meeting I had with the head of Middle East affairs at the Kuwaiti foreign ministry. This is way before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait.

In 1988 in Saudi Arabia. The DCM had a small group of Saudis who had studied in the United States. Several I think were with the foreign ministry and a couple of them were American affairs experts from one of the universities. First thing that they did when they came in – and this struck me because I had done a lot of studying about Saudi Arabia over the years and some of my colleagues at NEA said: "Don't bring any liquor with you. Be careful of any books you bring with you. However, recognize that as soon as you meet a Saudi in a private home, they will start drinking liquor." I had forgotten about this. And the first thing that happened when they walked in the door was they said: "Where's the scotch?" It just took me aback. I really had forgotten about this. And we had a nice conversation. As I said, it was a very small group sitting around a table.

Inevitably the conversation gets to the Arab-Israeli dispute. Now, the embassy passed around my bio before I came. I was spokesman for NEA, but I had just spent the preceding four years as the spokesman for the U.S. embassy in Israel. And I never kept secret the fact that I was Jewish. But I was representing the State Department and the U.S. Government. So we got into a conversation. I asked them: "You all studied in the United States?" This was after a couple hours of eating and drinking. And I said: "When you were there, did you ever meet any Israelis?" And they looked at each other. And then one of them said: "Yes, I did." And I asked him what was his reaction.

He said: "Well, let me tell you a story." And this guy was at USC. This really stuck in my mind, because it was the first time I had ever asked a Saudi such a question. He said: "I was at USC and I was with a number of friends of mine. He said there were a couple of other Saudis and some Americans and they were sitting at an outdoor café. The weather was beautiful in Los Angeles. Some other graduate students in the university came by and they were friends with somebody else who was sitting in this group. And they sat down, got a drink, and were talking. And he said: "I asked this guy 'Where are you from? Your accent is very familiar." And the guy says "Israel." And the Saudi says: "Oh my God" and looked around him to see who was listening. He said his first reaction was to look and see who was watching him meeting with an Israeli. His first reaction is fear. "Oh my God, there goes my scholarship. The embassy is going to find out about this." And then he looked around and said, okay, and they started talking about things. I said:

"What was your reaction?" He said: "He was a nice guy. And we didn't just talk about the Middle East. We talked about school, other issues, our friends." "Eventually we got to discuss Arab-Israeli issues, but that wasn't the first thing we talked about. We met several other times and had some nice conversations. And I came back to Saudi Arabia and I really couldn't tell anybody about that." I thought that was too bad. It was too bad that there couldn't be this open conversation that you really began to have after 1993. But this was in the late '80s.

The second anecdote was in Kuwait. And we were talking and finally got to the subject of the Arab-Israeli issues. And this guy was head of Middle Eastern affairs at the Kuwaiti foreign ministry. And I said something like, "You know, there is something about Kuwait. A gorgeous country. The building that has been done and the prosperity was amazing." I told him that I had heard about it but never realized how much they had built up in such a short period of time. I said: "You know, there is something about Kuwait that reminds me of Israel" and told him that I had lived in Israel for four years. The guy said: "What do you mean?" He was shocked by this whole thing. And I said: "I'll give you a couple of examples. Number one, the tank traps coming into the foreign ministry. You are afraid of terrorists. Same thing in Israel. Also, a very small country. Your main resource is oil. Their main resource is agriculture and hi-tech. They don't have any oil. But it's also a concentrated amount of resource. People who really want to be left alone to develop on their own. And you are surrounded by enemies. To your north you have Iraq, to your east you've got Iran." This was the time when the U.S. was beginning the reflagging of Kuwaiti tankers because the Iranians were targeting them. And I said: "There are these similarities. It's not the same thing, of course. But there are these similarities." And this guy said: "You may be right, but don't ever tell that to anybody else."

Q: *When you were with NEA, did you ever get the feeling that while the Arab countries profess great support for Palestine, they don't really do much for it?*

BERGER: Oh, there's no question about it. They had to make a ritualistic conversation about the Arab-Israeli dispute, about their strong support, undying support for the Palestinians. But you could tell that they couldn't care less about the Palestinians. First of all, they didn't want any more Palestinians in their country. Secondly, they were jealous of the Palestinians because generally the Palestinians were better educated, had greater technical skills. Especially in the oil countries, they had to depend on the Palestinians to run the oil industries. The became the second-level technocrats in the ministries. And they really disliked them. There was this jealously. And they also used them. And the Palestinians knew this. I talked to a lot of Palestinians over the years and they distrusted the Arabs. This is a stereotype, of course. Because there were some Arabs in some countries who really believed in and really wanted to help the Palestinians. But for the most part, and especially at the governmental levels, they were just using the Palestinians for whatever end they had.

They could have resolved the dispute years and years before. I remember one time at a thing called Philadelphia Camp, in Gaza. This was a refugee camp that the United States, Israel and Egypt agreed on to build new housing for the Palestinians. And the Egyptians

had some hesitation about it, but they could not get agreement from any other Arab country. They said "We can't do it on our own." There were a lot of Palestinians ready to move in. The U.S. was funding most of it, like the U.S. funds most of the UNRA (United Nations Relief Agency). What they could not get was any Arab country to agree to resettle – and this was resettling within the Gaza strip – into new housing. They said "No, we can't do this because this will defuse the issue of the refugees."

So many Palestinians on their own built their own housing. UNRA gave them bricks, cinderblocks, tin roofs, whatever. So if you go into a refugee camp, whether it is in Gaza or West Bank or in some of the other countries, people are not living in tents. A lot of people finally recognized that they could build something more permanent.

Q: *Were there any major developments in Arab-Israeli relations while you were there from '86 to '89?*

BERGER: There were a couple of things and it was principally on the Jordanian side. The Jordanians kept coming up very, very close to doing something. We had a lot of talks, especially with the Saudis. And it was generally kind of one-way talking. We would keep asking them for help and they would say "yes, yes, yes." And of course they didn't do anything. The Jordanians really did try to help. And there were a number of instances where they really tried to move things forward. The Jordanians were ready to sign a peace agreement with the Israelis for years and years, including the period '86 to '89. But they said they could not do anything unless there was progress on the Palestinian side.

And we went through a lot of conversations. I don't remember how many meetings we had with the Israelis, with the Egyptians, with the Jordanians, with other Arabs, about how we can move things incrementally, one step at a time. And of course nothing really happened until the Israeli and the Palestinians on their own brokered the Oslo accord.

Q: *Was there a feeling of frustration of our inability to talk directly to the PLO?*

BERGER: Yes. There was a lot of frustration because, I think, everybody recognized – especially at that time, in the late '80s – that you were not going to get anything moving forward unless you got the Palestinians to come across on this stuff. And the only way to do that would be to get Arafat to be part of any kind of a conversation. But the United States was restricted by an agreement that we had made with Israel a long time before that, because of, this goes back to Khartoum, the "three no's" that the Palestinian Liberation Organization enunciated years before that; that we made a commitment with Israel that we would not get into direct negotiations with the Palestinians. There were a couple of times on security issues where there were exceptions when it related to the safety and security of American diplomats, in Beirut especially, and other points in Lebanon. But on the whole the United States Government really kept to its promise to the Israelis. But we really wanted to get beyond that because we knew that nothing would move ahead. And it was in Israel's interest to have things move ahead. So we kept trying through the Egyptians and the Jordanians to find ways of getting something going on with the Palestinians.

When Arafat was in Sweden in 1988 there was that whole movement forward on "Can we get him to say that Israel has a right to exist?" There were some private Jewish groups that were in Stockholm trying to work with him on that as well. The Swedish Government, of course. There were other Arab governments as well. Our embassy in Stockholm. We here at the State Department. And I remember a number of conversations that went back and forth with NEA, with the Front Office, trying to work on formulations.

We were really tough. I have to say that. We stood on the principal that we were not going to shortcut this. And Dick Murphy was one of those who led this and George Shultz as well. That if it really didn't mean something, in substance, then we were not going to go along with it. So it wasn't just: "Yeah, Israel has a right to exist, consistent with this resolution and that resolution." We wanted a clear statement. A statement from Arafat in English and in Arabic that said Israel had a right to exist behind secure and recognized boundaries. Otherwise we would not begin a dialogue.

And I remember the days leading up to the statement. There were things that went back and forth. "And this was not enough, this was not enough. No! This does not have any meaning." And I'm sure it stuck in Arafat's craw to say those words, finally. And because it was so tough for him, we felt that it really had meaning.

I remember working on the statement with Dan Kurtzer, who was working for the secretary as a speechwriter to do the statement that Schultz would issue on the news, live at six-thirty that evening. Chuck Redmond and I and one or two others made phone calls, very careful phone calls to producers to tell them that there would be a major statement that the Secretary of State would give exactly at six-thirty. They wanted it before because they didn't want to lead off their newscast live. They didn't know what this was about. All we could tell them was that it had to do with the Middle East. And of course it was earth shaking and was worthy of leading the news. And Schultz did do it live on television. And Bob Pelletreau, who was our ambassador in Tunis, it was announced was going to begin the dialog with Chairman Arafat.

Q: *What about the Israelis? Had they been carrying on conversations with the PLO? I find it almost incredible that they wouldn't.*

BERGER: No doubt. I do not know for a fact that they did. They certainly had conversations with Palestinians. Did they have with the PLO? I really don't know. I've never been able to find that out. Someday, I'm sure, we'll have something declassified or somebody will write a book where it'll come out. But I have no doubt that there were conversations.

Q: *Did we ever talk to the Israelis and say, "Come on fellas, let's get this thing going. Let us talk to the Palestinians."*

BERGER: Oh, there were lots of conversations like that. The Israelis were adamant that unless there was a clear recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace and security in the

Middle East, behind recognized boundaries, that they couldn't accept it. They thought it would just be a formula for a continuation of the conflict.

Q: *When you were back in the NEA bureau, what were you getting of evaluations of Arafat?*

BERGER: Nobody trusted him. No one. They all thought he was sleazy. I don't mind saying that. And this is no state secret. They thought he was sleazy. They thought he was a crook. They thought he controlled all of the finances. They thought that he squirreled away money that probably found its way into not only Swiss bank accounts, but graft. I don't think people really questioned his honesty when it came to money. Although I think since that time more and more people have done that. But certainly, we felt, that everybody around him was corrupt. And they would do anything, not necessarily for the Palestinian people, but for their own bank accounts, for their own stature. There were a lot of corrupt people who didn't give a damn about the refugees. All they cared about was how they lived in Tunis and how they were going to travel.

Arafat himself looked at his own stature. When he was in exile, he could get everybody and his uncle to give him a private plane to take him as a head of state to this country and that country, all around the world. Once he became head of Gaza and the West Bank, who wanted to hear him? He had to worry about the garbage pick-up.

Q: *We have talked an awful lot about the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli side. What about Afghanistan, India, Pakistan?*

BERGER: Afghanistan was very interesting. I remember making one trip where I went to Pakistan and I took a bus from Islamabad to Peshawar near the Afghan border. Some of the people in the embassy thought I was crazy to do that. I didn't want to take a plane. I wanted to see what the ground looked like. I really wanted to get a sense of how people travel, what the villages look like. We put a lot of money in aid into that country. What has happened there?

I have to say that the trip was distressing on several account. First, the driver was out of his mind. In Pakistan, as in India, they drive on the left hand side of the road. Except this guy drove in the center of the road. Two lane highway and he drover right down the middle line. And it was minibus. Twenty passengers or something like that. I was frightened out of my mind. Every time a car came towards him, they were also doing the same thing. They were also in the middle of the road. And very quickly this bus driver would move to the left and the car to the right. It was a harrowing experience. Three hours? Four hours? No I think it was longer than that because the bus broke down on the way.

He did stop at one point so people could get coffee or tea on the way. It was supposed to be, I think, a three hour trip. Maybe halfway between that rest stop and Peshawar the bus broke down. Something with the wheel. And we were standing around and I had been talking to some of the people. They were very nice. And it was a range of people from

university professors down to peasant farmers. A couple animals. People going for different reasons to Peshawar. There were a couple of Afghan refugees going back to wherever it was that they were in Peshawar. And these kids came out from a little village nearby.

And inevitably nature called and I couldn't wait any longer. Most people in Pakistan wear the traditional dress. So you squat down when you've got to urinate and you do it that way. Men also could do it that way. Well, I had my pants with my zipper. So I went behind a tree and thought nobody was watching me and started to urinate. Suddenly every kid from the village came around to watch me do this. They were all laughing. This was a great time for them. Something I will never forget.

Then we get to Peshawar. And somebody from the American consulate there meets me at the bus station. And we walked around. We went to a couple of refugee camps. We met with a number of people, both from governments and NGOs. There were a lot of American relief agencies that were working there. And I said to him: "I have a feeling that we must be the only two people in Peshawar that are walking around without a gun." And he said: "You may be right." They were selling AK-47s, RPGs (rocket propelled grenades) openly in the market. It was unbelievable. The only thing I did buy, though, in one of the refugee camps, was a nice rug. I bargained with a guy for a couple of hours on. It was great. We couldn't go over the Khyber Pass. They said it was too dangerous.

Q: *Well, of course, the war was going on between the Afghans and the Soviets.*

BERGER: It was going on and we were supporting it heavily. The CIA was very much involved. And we were giving them all kinds of training and weaponry. And we were working together with the ISI, the Pakistani intelligence service, on that to train them. And I remember when the Soviets finally decided to pull out because they were losing. With the Stinger missiles, the Afghans got very effective in shooting down helicopters and supply planes. The Soviets were really hurting and they decided to cut their losses.

I remember a discussion, and I don't remember who was involved in it. But somebody said: "And what about all of those Stingers that are still out there in the field and we don't know who has them." And somebody said: "Well, don't worry about them. The batteries on the Stingers have a lifetime for only a couple more years."

(End Tape 4, Side B)
(Begin Tape 5, Side A)

Q: *Well, this is tape five, side one, of our conversation with Arthur Berger.*

BERGER: I think that one of the things that you said about missing out on various opportunities is relevant; dealing with people that were questionable, not keeping control. You know, they are on our side today because it is in their interest. But always looking at it from a Western rational, legal, philosophical point of view and saying "Gee, we were their friend and helped them. The Soviets are out of Afghanistan because of it. Now we

are going to be friends." Wait a minute guys. They have a tribal system that we don't understand step one about. And when they go back to their traditional system and the Soviets are out, they have won. They don't give a damn about you and all of your values. And no matter what you gave them, there is somebody else who is going to give them a little bit more. This is the bazaar.

Q: *What about India and Pakistan relations during this period?*

BERGER: They were always tense, although I do remember at one point…I went to India first on this trip and I had to take a plane to Islamabad, but I really wanted to cross the land border, but they said there is no way you of doing that. A lot of tension over there. But I don't remember any hostilities or anything that was extraordinary that sticks in my mind.

Q: *What about foreign press while you were doing this? Were the Indian and Pakistani press around asking questions?*

BERGER: They had come around quite a bit. And they were a one-issue press corps. That's all they cared about. But one of the things that I did because this was not my strength. There was somebody on my staff in NEA/P who had served in South Asia and really knew the issues. So even though I had made one trip out there, I wasn't going to go out there and talk about India and Pakistan from that lack of knowledge. So I gave it to him and that worked out very well. I really focused on Arab-Israeli, which was my strength.

Q: *What about the Arab-Israeli press? One always hears about the questions that Americans ask, but how did you find the press?*

BERGER: I loved it. I loved dealing with them. I dealt with the American press on a daily basis. As I said, the top correspondents at the State Department, immediately after the noon briefing, sometimes early in the morning, we would an inkling from one them who would call and say there was a particular question that they are looking at for broadcast today or for a story they were writing for tomorrow. It wasn't like today with the internet when they are looking for stories for the next two hours. It was a little more relaxed. I would say that every day I got phone calls from at least some of the Israeli and some of the Arab journalists. They understood where the line was or sometimes I would tell them there were some things I could not get into. They may be sensitive; I may not know about them, or I didn't feel it was appropriate for me to get into this issue.

When I started as head of NEA/P, every month I would go over to the foreign press center, the national press club, and this was run by USIA at the time. Once a month they would organize for me an open press forum. It was principally for the Arab and Israeli press. Anybody could come, any kind of question, but it was almost totally dominated by Arabs and Israelis. And it was a great place to have a discussion. It was also a great place to get Arabs and Israelis together. They did. The journalists got together on their own and exchanged ideas. Many of them are still active today, fifteen or twenty years later.

Q: *Would they try to surprise you with questions? Or would it behoove everyone for you to know what was coming up?*

BERGER: There were frequently – but we got to know who the journalists were very quickly – who had these trick questions, surprise questions and didn't want to bring it up even at the noon briefing because that journalist didn't want to share it with his or her colleagues. I would frequently sit in the back of the briefing room or listen to the briefing through the speaker phone in the office and would write down questions that we hadn't handled before. The Assistant Secretary Chuck Redman would say, "Well, we will have to look into this. We'll get back to you. We post the question." Inevitably there were one or two of those for NEA every single day. But then in addition, immediately after the briefing, we would get a call from a journalist or sometimes two, depending on what was happening in the region. Or some of them found out that something was going on in the bowls of the U.S. Government, or they thought that something was going on, and so they would call. I built up a measure of trust with some of them. We had a very open relationship. In fact, even today, so many years later, one of them will from time to time call. Not to get new information, or help them with a story, but really to put what they are hearing into perspective. And I will help them. This is basically something I do off the record and I think it is basically helpful to put things in context.

Q: *Did you find yourself running at almost cross-purposes with the White House press office?*

BERGER: We were very careful in the last part of my time over at State. In the first part, during the Reagan administration and especially in the year after Iran-Contra broke, there was very little good communication. We were basically on our own. The White House was a political operation and we dealt with policy issues. When George Bush Sr. won and Jim Baker came in as Secretary of State everything changed. Boy did everything change! Number one, Baker gave out word to every ambassador around the world that they were not to give interviews unless it was approved by Margaret Tutwiler first. Secondly, within the Department, there was going to be coordination with the White House every day. And she coordinated with the spokesman at the White House. It was a very, very different operation.

Q: *How did this strike you? Did it work in a disciplined way or was it counterproductive?*

BERGER: Both. It was far more disciplined, so you didn't have people going off on their own. Desk officers were afraid to background journalists because they were afraid that the leak would come back to them. So all of the talking to the media in NEA was through my office and I did most of it myself. I would say that I was a bit more careful and that was from January of '89 until I left, which was mid-August of '89. I was a little more careful in what I could say, although I knew which journalists I could go a little bit further with and which I couldn't. I got to know them well and how they would treat a story. They were professionals. It wasn't that I could trust them with everything, because I learned very quickly in the game of dealing with journalists before this tour in State, a

journalist is still a journalist. If you are going to give them something on whatever ground rules that is news or news worthy, they are going to try to find some other source that could confirm it and go on the record, or at least on background so they could use it. It wouldn't be you, so I was fairly careful.

And there was an interesting experience that I had also, when Redmond left. I think he was turning things over to Margaret Tutwiler. When she came in, she really didn't feel well versed in policy issues and she didn't want to go up on the podium to brief. So Redmond carried on for a little while during that transition, the first couple of months of the Bush Sr. administration. And she was looking around for people who would be good to bring up to be her deputy and that person would be the daily spokesperson at the noon briefing. Chuck Redmond recommended me for that position and also recommended Richard Boucher. We were the only two that he recommended. I'm sure she got recommendations from other people as well, but those were the two that came up from the Department.

And I had an interview with Margaret. We talked about policy. She explained about what she wanted to do. By then I had gotten to know her as we discussed the press briefing form time to time and I briefed her on Arab-Israeli issues. In the interview I asked her a question, "Margaret, if I am selected for this job to be your deputy, will I be able to understand clearly what the Secretary of State thinks if there is some real questions on specific things. Will I have access to him?" And her answer was, I guess I realized later I should not have asked it, but I was glad that I asked it, and she said: "There is only one person in public affairs that has access to Secretary Baker and that is me." I never got called back for a second interview. Although I was disappointed not to be selected, years later I was really happy. Boucher turned out to be a fantastic spokesman. He has handled some of the most difficult issues in the most professional way. And he knows the issues about as well as any spokesman in the history of the State Department. And he never loses his cool. Never. I have never seen a spokesman as good as him.

Q: *He's doing it again?*

BERGER: He's doing it again. He's still there.

Q: *I saw something in the paper this morning. Fidel Castro fell and broke his knee and Boucher was asked if he wished him well. And he said "no."*

BERGER: He's good. He's really good. He's quick on his feet and he knows every foreign policy issue quite well, even as good as the policy makers! There is one thing that is a little disappointment in there. After the end of the Bush years, he got appointed ambassador to Cyprus. And I would have loved to have had that job. That was my one disappointment, I never made ambassador.

Q: *Before we finish here, did you find any journalists turn around and bite you?*

BERGER: Not during the time when I was in State. I did when I was in Israel. I got bitten by a journalist, badly; a Washington Post journalist. And I never trusted that person again. And he knew it. But never at State. I was quite mature at that point, had been through some fire.

Q: *Well, Art, this is probably a good place to stop. But in August '89 whither?*

BERGER: In August of '89 I went back to USIA to become the director of USIA's publications, Problems of Communism, America Illustrated, Dialogue Magazine, and all of the magazines that the United States Government distributed overseas. And it was fascinating. Although it was supposed to be a longer assignment than it turned out. It was going to be in Washington for one year. At the end of six months I was asked if I wanted to accept an assignment as public affairs officer in the Netherlands, in The Hague. And it was my first and only opportunity for a European assignment, and I said "Yes!"

Q: *We'll come back to that. Just one final question. During the time you were with State, how did you find your relations with USIA? Out of sight, out of mind?*

BERGER: Yes. They really forgot about me, with the exception of a few people. The personnel people forgot about me. I did have some contact with some of the people from the NEA area office and they wanted me to follow-up this assignment with some PAO-ship in the Near East bureau and to come back there and become one of their senior people in State NEA. But I was interested in doing something different. But otherwise, I got calls from couple of people in the African area because that was my first thing there and I had kept contact with a couple of people there and they wanted to know if I wanted to come to Africa. At that point in my life I said, "no."

Q: *Particularly having tasted the raw meat of the Middle East, if it wasn't Europe and its marble halls, you might as well deal with real issues.*

BERGER: I agree and I ended up going to one of the true plumb assignments in Europe, the Netherlands. One of the nicest places to serve in the world. I'll just mention one thing: Unlike the Middle East where everybody bothers you almost twenty-four hours a day - I'd be home and getting in bed at eleven o'clock at night knowing I had to get up at five-thirty in the morning so I could get down to the office about seven, seven-fifteen to prepare for that news cycle. And I would get called by journalists at home, by the New York Times, the Washington Post, AP (Associated Press), by the Christian Science Monitor, others. They would be right at deadline, eleven o'clock at night, now the deadlines are much later, I think two o'clock in the morning now for the morning papers because everything is done by computer and email. And they would call and say, "I just saw the first issue of the Washington Post for the morning, the early edition, and they are saying, this story, this is happening, and we have to play catch up." So that would happen.

Q: *Okay, we'll pick this up in 1989 when you were on a short term assignment with USIA.*

Q: *Alright, today is the 11th of May, 2005. Arthur, let's go back to 1989.*

BERGER: Summer of 1989 I leave the State Department and I go back to USIA. It was kind of a downer because I had spent the past three years right in the midst of very exciting policy issues in the Middle East – reflagging Kuwaiti tankers, Arab-Israeli peace process, India and Pakistan, the war in Afghanistan. Went back to USIA in August of '89 and was appointed director of publications. America Illustrated, Problems of Communism and other things were under my responsibility. We had a group of very professional writers and editors who took care of producing the magazines. And I had not worked on anything dealing with publishing or editing anything of that serious a nature since graduate school, when I was editor of a graduate student publication on international relations. But it was a fascinating thing.

It was also a time when the East Bloc, the former Soviet Bloc, was changing rapidly. I remember one time going out to Moscow, and this was in 1990. It was right around May Day and the famous time when Gorbachev was hit by lots of tomatoes during the May Day parade. There were questions whether the Soviet Union could survive. It was a time of glasnost and perestroika. I went there to negotiate with the government office that published Soviet Life magazine. Because we had an agreement, so many thousands of copies of our magazine distributed in the Soviet Union and theirs would be distributed here. And we could have distributed hundreds of thousands of more copies, but I think we were limited only by the number that the Soviets would allow us to. Because they could only distribute twenty or thirty thousand because they couldn't get other people to take them. People just weren't interested in the free subscriptions.

So I went there to negotiate. We did negotiate over a three year period to raise the numbers. First year I think was the double the amount that had been done before. The second year was over a hundred thousand. And the third year was going to be whatever the market would bear. We didn't get to the third year. I didn't stay around that long anyways. But we didn't get to the third year because the Soviet Union imploded and market forces took over. It was freedom of distribution of American or any other kind of periodicals. We basically decided to disband our publications or to see if some in the private sector would take them over. One of the magazines that was going to close down was Problems of Communism. And that was a very well respected serious publication.

It was not at all a propaganda magazine. It was a very serious one and you had a lot of writers from major universities, serious Soviet, China, Romanian specialists, Cuban specialists writing pieces. A very well done magazine. A lot of universities and professors used it. It had not a tinge of political points to make. I believe that there was some negotiation with, I think, two different universities and one of them did eventually take it over. I don't know if it is still being published, but there are still problems with the vestiges of communism and lots to write about today.

There is another thing that was rather interesting regarding America magazine that we distributed in the Soviet Union. One of the designers in the publishing branch at USIA made her own dresses. And she had an idea: "I have all these Simplicity patterns. What if we try to get authorization from Simplicity or one of the other pattern companies to insert

a pattern into one of our magazines as an insert. And I would describe- as an article – how to make this dress?" And we agreed and we got the pattern company to agree to donate to us. I think at that point we were distributing about sixty-thousand copies of the magazine and sixty thousand copies of the patterns which we bound in the center of the magazine. It became one of the hottest commodities in the Soviet Union. Everybody in the Soviet Union wanted it. And apparently there were thousands and thousands of women who were wearing the same dress. It's a great story about the kind of desire that people who have been repressed for so long had for something that was western, American, and free.

Q: *Often one of the problems of the USIA officers I interview is that when they are overseas, they are the busiest, best-connected people in an embassy. But when they come back to Washington - unless they get a job such as you had in the bowels of the State Department - they are off to one side and are doing essentially administrative work.*

BERGER: I guess that's probably the case with many. I guess I was very lucky because my three years at the State Department were three of the most exciting years that I've ever had in the Foreign Service. I met a lot of people and worked with a lot of journalists and I also got to understand a lot about the policy-making apparatus that many USIA officers never get a chance to observe or participate in. When they are overseas, they are part of the country team. But when they are in Washington, where the policy is made, they don't get a chance to do that. And I was very lucky because I worked for Dick Murphy, the assistant secretary, who really brought me in in my position as public affairs advisor to the bureau of Near Eastern affairs to really be a part of his senior team. And it was great.

Many of the people who I've dealt with from my position now at the museum at the State Department, are people I worked with in the NEA bureau. People like Mark Grossman, for example, he was desk officer for Jordan at that time. We got to know each other quite well and worked closely together. This happened with a lot of different people who were at the State Department.

Q: *You left Washington when?*

BERGER: That following summer, the summer of 1990, I was asked if I would accept the position of PAO in the Netherlands, at The Hague. I didn't think very long about that because I had never had a European assignment and the Netherlands was a great place. I felt that this was a fantastic opportunity, so I took it. I spent five months studying Dutch and learning about the country and some of the issues that Europe faced. I had been dealing with other parts of the world Middle East, Latin American, arms control issues and Europe was very different. U.S.-European relations are on a very different plane, not only historic, but also some of the tension that we have – on trade issues - I had never dealt with. So I had a lot to learn.

Q: *Also, didn't you arrived just about the time the Maastricht Treaty was signed?*

BERGER: That came later. Then in January of 1991, I went out to The Hague to be PAO.

Q: *Who was the ambassador?*

BERGER: At the beginning, the ambassador was Howard Wilkins, a political appointee who had made a lot of money in the fast food restaurant business, Pizza Huts and the like. He was appointed by President Bush because of a lot of work that he had done in raising funds for the senatorial campaign committee. Bob Dole was one his big sponsors. And he was replaced right before the election that Bush lost in November 1992. He had wanted to go back. He had been in the Netherlands for three years that point and wanted to go back to work on the campaign. And he did. [Editor's Note: Ambassador Wilkins presented his credential in July 1989 and departed post July 1992. FSO Thomas Gewecke became Chargé from July 1992 to July 1993.]

It was an interesting experience working with Howie. He really did not believe in some of the niceties of diplomacy. He had his own views that he followed. Most of them were young with long blond hair. He was divorced. But one of the things that I found was very good about him was that he usually followed my advice in giving him suggestions to do various things, host various things. We had some wonderful experiences.

One of them I will relate. Every year the Danny Kaye Children's Program for UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) came to the Netherlands to film a program. It was an annual fundraiser for UNICEF. And Dena Kaye, Danny Kaye's daughter, would come out there. Smith-Hemion Productions from Los Angeles would film it in a major theater in The Hague. And the year after I arrived I was approached by someone from UNICEF who said, "We've never done this before, but we've invited people from the embassy to come and watch the filming. Do you think there is any possibility that the ambassador might host something?" I said: "I think there is a great possibility that he would do something. Please give me a list of who is going to be coming." Well, it was Gregory Peck and his wife, Audrey Hepburn and her boyfriend, Nipsey Russell, Larry King, Roger Moore, a dozen top entertainers were coming, volunteering their time for UNICEF. And when I saw that list I said: "We'll do something, I don't know what, but we're going to do something."

I ran right into the Ambassador's office and said: "We've got an opportunity that really is unique in the Foreign Service. Would you want to host something for UNICEF, perhaps a black tie affair." He said, "I'd like to something really informal. How about a BBQ, an American BBQ? We'll do it on the back lawn of the residence." Well, the problem in the Netherlands is that you never know if it's going to rain. But this was during the summer. I think it was mid-July, which is usually the best time. That summer turned out to be magnificent. Very warm. We had about six weeks of magnificent weather with no rain. I was going with my wife to Paris for our anniversary. A friend of mine who has an apartment there loaned it to us for a week. We came back a day early just to be there for the event.

I had arranged everything before hand, and we invited the top level of the Dutch Government. We invited every minister, a few senior members of parliament. And just about everyone – unless they were traveling somewhere out of the country- came with spouse, including the foreign minister, who drove himself. And we invited the captains of industry, people like Freddy Heineken, the chairman of KLM, Philips. You name the major Dutch corporations and they were there. We had about 35 or 40 Dutch and 15 Americans, a few from the embassy, a few from the American business resident in the Netherlands. It was an incredible evening. And the night before, the ambassador really wanted to make sure that everything was perfect, because this is something that would impress everybody. And he had a feel for these kinds of things. He had imported food from the States – beef from his home state of Kansas – and he had his chef do a trial run the night before. So he had the steaks on the grill and shrimps on the grill and salmon from the North Sea. It was an incredible meal. About half a dozen of us from the embassy were invited to test it out the first night and then the next night we went to the full thing.

Q: *It was a tough job, but somebody had to do it.*

BERGER: Exactly. It was rough. That was fun, really fun.

Q: *How was the media there?*

BERGER: Media was generally quite serious. The media was unlike the media anywhere else in the world. Television and radio, for example, were divided up according to confessional communities. So you had a broadcasting spectrum for the Catholics, one for the mainstream Protestants, one for the Evangelical Protestants, another one for the Dutch Lutherans, and so on down the line. Everybody had airtime. With newspapers you had all of these communities plus a number of secular newspapers as well. And everything was in some way subsidized by the government. It was very much a country where everybody had their representation. Almost unique.

As PAO I got to know the editors and some of the top broadcasters and the heads of these different companies. Also from the major universities. It was an easy place to make friends because the Dutch are so much like Americans in many respects. Except, they will say to you: "Lets have lunch." They don't mean maybe someday if we ever bump into each other again we'll talk about having lunch. When they say it they take out their agenda and find a date.

When we moved into our house - it was right within walking distance of the embassy – a neighbor from across the way knocked on the door after one day and said "I know you are Americans and I found something that can make you feel right at home. Haagen-Dazs ice cream. They had just begun selling it in the supermarkets there. And we became close friends and we still are today all these years later. It's an unusual country. It's a wonderful country for Americans to serve in. I arrived during the Gulf War.

And the Dutch felt allied with the United States. Thousands of Dutch people brought bouquets of flowers to the embassy. Because they felt that this was something that was

close to them. They needed to support America. They remembered – unlike some Europeans – very clearly what it was like to be under the yoke of Nazi Germany, how much they suffered, how their various communities – including the Jewish community- was decimated, and that they owed the United States a debt of gratitude that they would never forget.

I remember that every year we had a program at Margraten, which was the American military cemetery to which President George W. Bush just visited a couple of days ago on his trip to Europe. At that cemetery there are eight-thousand plus graves of Americans who died trying to liberate the Netherlands. The Dutch of the communities nearby made a pact that different families would adopt graves at that cemetery, so that every single grave site is cared for by a Dutch family. And this is being passed down now to a second generation. I don't know of anywhere else in the world where this takes place. But they keep to it. Every week somebody goes and puts flowers on the grave, they make sure it is being taken care of. We have the American Battle Monuments Commission that is paid to do this. But the families feel that they must do this because these young soldiers died for them.

We went every year, one year the Queen came. In 1994, the anniversary year of the Normandy landing, we went down there with some visiting friends for the ceremony. We went out the night before to a restaurant that was right on the border between the Netherlands and Belgium. An old Belgian man was in the restaurant. I don't remember if it was on the Dutch side of the border or the Belgian side, but in that part of Europe people really feel the same about Americans. They feel deeply indebted to Americans. And this old man, who had no teeth, looked like he must have been about 85 years old, and he heard us talking English. He turned to me and asked if I spoke French. I said yes and he saluted me and said, "Je vous salue, les Américains." And he then explained that he was a young kid in this village and the American soldiers came through there and he felt so proud that he was there and that they saved his community and his family. And he said: "I've never forgotten it." And he said that every year since then he and his family go on the American Memorial Day to the cemetery.

Q: *Did they commemorate the Arnhem…?*

BERGER: Operation Market Garden. Yes. And in fact in 1994, which was my last year there, there was a big celebration of that and a lot of American paratroopers who had landed in Operation Market Garden came back. If you remember the history, they didn't get too far north.

Only the southern tip of the Netherlands was liberated. The rest of the country had to wait until the following May for liberation. It is interesting that we are talking about liberation and we just commemorated the 60th anniversary of liberation. And I was there for the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the southern part of the Netherlands. But each year – and they still do this in the Netherlands – on May 4th, they have a memorial day. May 5th is liberation day because that's when the whole country completed its liberation. On May 4th, it's almost like a day of mourning. At 8:00 pm they have, not only in Amsterdam and

The Hague, Utrecht, but in every city and town in the country, the sirens go off. And everyone in the country stops what they are doing and stands for a moment of silence, to remember. And the following day is Liberation Day and there are parties and everything like that. But the liberation is preceded first by memorial day and they really take it seriously.

One year I was at a conference on a small island in the North Sea. And even there – there was a British military cemetery there – on this little island, at 8:00pm the siren went off. We were walking to dinner with some people and suddenly everybody stopped and they paid attention for two minutes while the sirens went off. There is only one other place in the world where I have ever seen that happen like that, and that was in Israel.

Q: *Who replaced the ambassador?*

BERGER: K. Terry Dornbush [Editor's note: ambassador from March 1994 to July 1998]. And that's another story that is very interesting. When Howard Wilkins left to go work on the campaign and raise money for Bush's campaign in '92, the White House tried to appoint somebody to replace him. Another good party supporter. The problem was this person had been born in the Netherlands, left after university, went to the United States, when to graduate school, changed his name and became a very wealthy real estate developer in the mid-west. The problem, they say, is that when he was going before (Senator) Sarbanes and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee he was proud of his financial donations to the election of the president, number one. And he also had an interview with a journalist and he talked about this as, not only that he had given this money, but he was proud that he gave so much and therefore the White House was going to give him this ambassadorship. Nobody told him you don't do that kind of thing.

The other part of it was – as I said – he was born in the Netherlands and he changed his name from Berrenhouse to Alexander, I believe. One of the reasons why he changed his name and he forgot to mention – or didn't want to mention – that to the FBI was that his father was the mayor of a town in the Netherlands during the German occupation. And his father was a senior member of the NSB, or the Dutch Nazi Party. And after the war was interned in jail for years as a war criminal and died in prison. So I think the son tried to get beyond that history for whatever reason. But neglected to mention that. And a journalist in the Netherlands found out this history and it became a very big headline and the White House pulled his nomination.

So the next ambassador did not come for twenty months. During those twenty months it was kind of embarrassing for all of us because the Dutch people and the Netherlands are our closest friend since revolutionary times. Even before the French. The Dutch like to talk about the time when Dutch ships saluted the revolution. And the relationship has been very special ever since. Dutch loaned money to the revolutionary war efforts. John Adams of course went there. And George Bush Sr. was the first U.S. president to come to the Netherlands since John Adams. And then he came back a second time while I was there. Interesting period. [Editor's Note: President Bush first visited the Netherlands in

July 1989 and last visited the Netherlands in November 1991 to attend the European Community summit in The Hague.]

But during those twenty months when we didn't have an ambassador, there was a U.S. ambassador to the European Union in Brussels, Stuart Eizenstadt whom I had known a little bit. Stuart and I would keep in touch. And he would ask, "Is there anything that I can do since you don't have an ambassador." So I brought him up to the Netherlands a number of times and he would give speeches, we would set up meetings, interviews with the media. This was a way of having a senior American presence in the Netherlands even though we didn't have a resident ambassador. So Stu really helped us a lot with that.

Then we got Terry Dornbush who was a businessman from Atlanta appointed by Clinton. A very nice person. He and his wife came out. I remember his presentation of credentials on March 16, 1994 because I as invited to go along in the coach. In the Netherlands when the ambassador presents credentials, the Queen sends several of her coaches to the residence to pick up the ambassador and member of the staff who are invited to come to the Queen's palace. They block of the traffic a little bit. You are led by the white horsemen. It is really quite a spectacle. And we get to the residence of the Queen and the chief of protocol takes us inside. There is a whole protocol to go through, as you would imagine, with a Queen. The Ambassador says, "I have the honor to present my letters of credence to your Majesty. She takes them and says to him, "Ambassador Dornbush, I'm glad you are here, finally." She was a little upset that the United States had not sent an ambassador in such a long time.

(End Tape 5, Side A)
(Begin Tape 5, Side B)

Q: We run into these hiatus between ambassadors and very seldom does it have anything to do with the politics toward the receiving country. It's our domestic politics.

BERGER: That's the things. One president is leaving office and another one in coming into office, so it take a particularly long time. Even when you have the re-election of the president as we have today in 2005 with George W. Bush, there are a number of embassies that are vacant right now because ambassadors have finished their three years and they have left and nobody has been appointed to replace them yet. And this is really because of our own unique political calendar. It takes a long time.

Q: *Who was your deputy chief of mission?*

BERGER: The first one was Tom Gewecke and the second was Michael Klosson [Editor's Note: who served as Chargé from July 1993 to March 1994]. They were professionals in the Foreign Service and really kept the embassy running. It was not a bad job for anybody to have because the Dutch employees were so competent that they helped make us look very good.

Q: *Had the whole business about the SS-20s and our response, our Pershing missile . . .*

BERGER: That was way before me. That was when Jerry Bremer was ambassador.

Q: *The whole problem with that had gone by the time you got there?*

BERGER: Yes. In fact, there were no hotly contested issues while I was there. So it was a matter of really taking a look at what we could do more cooperatively together in the education field, the political field, the information field. And the Netherlands is a very sophisticated country and we brought out some specialists who were really good. In fact, Stu Eizenstadt before he got his position, was volunteering for the Clinton campaign and he came out and we hosted something in our home for him to talk to a number of Dutch editors and heads of universities about the Clinton campaign. And a short time afterwards Al Haig was out there. I knew somebody who worked for him and I asked her if she could get him to come and do something for us. And he did as well. So we were able to get some high level people to come out there both before the election, during the campaign, afterwards. And there were a lot of people who would come through the Netherlands on their own private business and sometimes we would be able to pick them up as well.

Q: *Was the European Union an issue at all? Were there concerns about this new relationship?*

BERGER: There were a couple of things. One had to do with the rapid deployment force. Another had to do with trade issues, which we didn't always agree with. It doesn't matter if it's a Republican or Democratic administration. Issues like that do come up all the time. There was something that we worked very closely together with, and I worked closely with, that was called the Atlantic Council of the Netherlands. And that was to take advantage of the changed that were taking place in central and eastern Europe and helping to bring and get to know some of the young political leaders, or soon to become political leaders, of Bulgaria, Romania, Germany, Czech Republic, the Baltic states and bring them to the Netherlands, which became a real center for the Partnership for Peace program. In fact, one of the first people that I met that we worked to bring to the Netherlands is now the foreign minister of Bulgaria, Solomon Passy. So those kinds of relationship are very important.

Q: *How did the Dutch feel about the unification of Germany? They had a very bad time during the war. And now suddenly it's a unified country. Was that a concern?*

BERGER: It was. Certainly during the years that I was there you could feel that there was no love from the Dutch to the Germans. Even though most Dutch did not blame the Germans of today for the Germans of the national socialist period, at the same time there was something about Germans that bothered a lot of Dutch. And part of it was the big country to the east who was dominating the economy of the period. Although, when you take a look at the Dutch economy, it's one of the largest in Europe – sixty or seventy billion dollars of Dutch investment in the United States. A huge trading partner. A huge

industrial base. And so they didn't have to worry about competition from Germany. They knew what they did and they did it very well.

A lot of Germans would come to the Netherlands on vacation. And it was almost like you were reading The Ugly American. Trade the name for the ugly German. The guys were coming in shorts and plain shirts and drinking lots of beer and being very loud and coming in with wads of bills into the tourist shops raising the prices. The Dutch would complain with those same kind of stereotypes that people in Europe used to complain about the Americans. So that's one thing.

The other was that in some of the resort communities where a lot of sailing takes place, because the Netherlands has a lot of water. A lot of Germans would come in that same way with these big yachts. The Dutch would kind of resent that. You know, it wasn't that all the Dutch resented all the Germans, but it was a fairly widespread feeling. I think that some of it came out of what they perceived as an arrogance from another time frame, but that was still rather present in some of the Germans who came to the Netherlands.

Q: *Were there any issues or problems that caught you up while you were there?*

BERGER: There really weren't. It was an unusual period. It was after the cruise missile issue. And it was certainly before international terrorism. We worked very closely with the Dutch on a number of stings. DEA and Customs. A lot of drugs went through the Netherlands to the United States. The Dutch had their own view of the harmlessness – what they perceived as the harmlessness – of soft drugs. I think they are changing their mind a little bit about some of that.

There is also the whole issue of multi-cultural societies and pluralistic societies. We always like to talk about that in the United States and the Dutch would talk about a monotheistic society and a society that is very much one language, one people, one ethnic stock. And today, just ten years after I have left there, the country has changed dramatically.

Q: *They are getting quite a backlash against immigration too, aren't they?*

BERGER: There is today. In 2005 there is. You didn't feel it then. And part of it was that it was during the Yugoslav civil war, Yugoslavia's breaking up, and a lot of refugees came from there. And the Dutch really opened their hearts, their homes, and their pocket books to help settle many from the former Yugoslavia in the Netherlands.

Q: *How about Srebrenica?*

BERGER: That took place while I was there. But at the same time the fallout from it took place many years later.

Q: *You might want to explain what that was.*

BERGER: Srebrenica was the community in Bosnia where Dutch U.N. Protection Force (UNPROFOR) troops were supposed to be protecting the community and they had them in one area and then the Serb militia came in and said: "Give us these men." Very much similar to what many of the German army or the S.S. did in various communities. And the Dutch soldiers who were undermanned and didn't have strong weapons decided not to protest and just gave up these men and about seven thousand were murdered by the Serbs. And this became know as the massacre of Srebrenica. Many years later the Dutch Government – not the same one, but another Dutch Government – after a committee of inquiry, recognized that the Dutch commander was at fault and the government fell because of that. They had new elections called. Even though they weren't responsible for it at the time, the government that was in power at the time took full responsibility for it and resigned.

Q: *What was your reading there of the politics of the Netherlands and the role of the royal family?*

BERGER: It was coalition politics; generally a little bit left of center. But even the right of center, did development a more right wing group that is more powerful today. But the right of center and usually the left of center would have coalitions. The queen was very much a figurehead. But a beloved figurehead. There were stories that – I never saw her riding a bicycle around town – but a number of members of the staff would say: "Gee, I bumped into the queen shopping this morning." And for a long time she would come on bicycle. You know, have a security guard or two with her, but would ride her bicycle. I think by the time I left, if she would go anywhere it would usually be by car. I didn't see her ever on a bicycle.

Q: *So this was a pleasant tour of duty and I gather quite productive too?*

BERGER: It was a wonderful tour. It was very productive. One of the things that we did was we recognized that the Dutch lived in a very wealthy country. Even though we invited a lot of people on international visitor grants, we thought that there was a way to get more out of them. And we took our allocation and we told the Dutch that we would invite you on an international visitor grant and we will take care of you once you reach the shores of the United States, but you have to be responsible for your international air travel. And every single Dutch IV visitor paid his or her international airfare. So we got an extra eight-hundred or a thousand dollars from each trip. And together, when you take about twenty-five IVs, we were able to get an extra six or seven IVs every year. At that time, we were the only European country that did that. I think today there are a bunch of others. I used to talk about it at PAO conferences. Unfortunately, my tour of duty was up in January of 1995 and we left the Netherlands.

Q: *Where did you go?*

BERGER: Went to New York. I retired from the Netherlands. I was being assigned as branch PAO in Sao Paolo, Brazil. I did not want to go there. And I wasn't going to leave a career that I loved because I was going to have to take an assignment that I didn't want.

And I argued with personnel over a couple of months on this thing. And it seemed to no avail. Then I went to a PAO conference in Paris. And I brought up a few points there. And I was rather frustrated by some of the answers I got out of Washington. And after that conference, came back to The Hague. I saw the Sunday New York Times from a week or two earlier. I opened it up and in the "week in review" section there was an add for a job in New York. And on a whim I applied for it. And to make a long story short, I got it. I decided that rather than go to Sao Paolo and continue a Foreign Service career, even though I had loved it, I would quit, resign. I had just hit twenty-five years. I turned 50 eleven days earlier. And I went to New York.

Q: *What was the job?*

BERGER: I became Director of Communications and Public Relations for the American Jewish Committee. It was an interesting position because it carried on a lot of the work that I had done in the Foreign Service. They also had a program where every year during the U.N. General Assembly meetings in September we would try to set up meetings with foreign ministers and heads of government and state that came to New York to speak. And we would get to meet about fifty leaders from around the world. And I would participate in those meetings. And we would have a number of issues to talk about, primarily the U.S. relationship with that country. We would do some research on it. It was a way of reinforcing the State Department's proposals and the State Department's positions on things. We would talk to them about their relationships with the Middle East peace process and especially with the government of Israel. And we would also talk about Jewish communities in their countries, if they had Jewish communities. In countries like China there were no Jewish communities. But they were really useful meetings. And sometimes we would turn to a foreign minister and say: "Your ambassador has not been very helpful to us here at the United Nations." And the word would get through very quickly.

Q: *How did you find the Israeli lobby? Were they after you? Did you feel you were an instrument of the Israeli lobby or were you essentially independent?*

BERGER: Not at all. We were an independent Jewish organization in the United States that had as one of its core values support for the state of Israel and for the U.S.-Israeli relationship, trying to strengthen in. But we didn't take marching orders from anybody.

Q: *Did you feel attempts to pressure you?*

BERGER: No.

Q: *This has always been a powerful political instrument in the United States.*

BERGER: Well it's the lobby, AIPAC, that is a registered lobby, a very powerful lobby and has tremendous connections and some would say influence with Congress and the administration. But American Jewish Committee was really a unique organization. I would say there were probably other organizations like that. But this one was started in

1906. It really began on the premise that it could have some influence in the United States to help Jewish communities that were being the victims of pogroms. This started right after the major pogrom in Chisinau, which is now the capital of Moldova. I've forgotten how many Jews were killed, but there were major pogroms in 1906. And these were a number of American Jews who were very well connected in the business community and knew some people in government. There was no such thing as lobbying, I think, at that time. And they set this up.

Over the years it has become much stronger, much larger, and has a great deal of influence. But I found within the organization – we have over a hundred thousand members and about forty offices around the United States – that they take a look at international issues and domestic issues. The domestic issues, however, become almost as important and in some ways even more important than issues that are international or the Israeli issue. Issues like inter-group relations in the United States, Christian-Jewish relations, extreme right wing militias in the United States, the dangers that they pose to pluralism in America. Things like that. Separation of church and state. These were really the major issues I would say most the time was spent on. As well as the international issues.

Very interesting organization in some respects because it has such a diversity of membership; you would have people from the far left wing of the political spectrum to the far right wing all together under an umbrella. And some of the debates that you would listen to within their closed discussions were really quite interesting. It would be a true diversity of opinion before a position was adopted by the leadership.

Q: *Now we are speaking from the administrative offices of the Holocaust Museum. When did that come about?*

BERGER: I was with the American Jewish Committee from February 1995 until August 1998, three and a half years. And then I got an officer I couldn't refuse from another organization, the Weizman Institute of Science. It is a major basic science research institute with the Karolinska Institute in Sweden. They are based in Israel but have an office in the United States. It is mainly public relations and fundraising. I was in charge of their fundraising. I did that for a couple of years and left for a number of reasons. One had to do with some of the internal politics, the leadership there. And one thing had to do with a friend of mine called me and knew that I was looking for a way to come back to Washington. I always wanted to come back. My wife did as well. And she called one day and said: "Arthur, the perfect job is open for you in Washington." And that's this job here, Director of Communications at the Holocaust museum. So I got it and come down here in November of 2000.

Q: *Well, this museum is a remarkable thing. How do you find the administration of it? You are used to looking at political entities in different countries. Is it a good homogeneous one?*

BERGER: I wouldn't say it is homogeneous. It is very focused on what the goals are. And part of it is because the original president's commission that made the recommendation to then-President Carter and the congressional legislation that said we are a federal legislation really laid out very clearly the mandate to what it should be doing. So this is remembering the victims of the holocaust.

Just last week we had the Day of Remembrance. The museum has the responsibilities to organize the national day of commemoration in the capital rotunda, as well as to assist other organizations around the country. So we did that last week. Laura Bush was the keynote speaker. Really quite a moving ceremony. The leadership has become even more focused now in its second decade. The museum is now twelve years old and has welcomed over 22-million visitors.

In the tenth anniversary year a strategic plan was researched and adopted. Since that time we have really begun the implementation of that. So you have these core issues like the remembrance, education – which has become the largest thing. We set up a national institute of holocaust education that is really taking a look at the history of the holocaust and teaching it in schools and institutions around the country. But even more important than the history itself and the basic facts, as important as they are, it's "What do you learn from that? How do you understand personal responsibility? How do you understand better your place in a democracy? How do you understand what one person can do to help other people and to avert evil?" And the third thing is the committee on conscious, which was set up because Elie Wiesel felt very strongly that a memorial that is unresponsive to what happens in the future violates the memory of the past. And so it has a mandate to look at dangers of contemporary genocide in the years since the holocaust.

Q: *We mentioned the problem in Yugoslavia. And then Rwanda and it looks like in Sudan now.*

BERGER: We missed those and we are not doing very well. And I think if you take a look and try to see what has been learned, or should be learned, from the holocaust and the evil that was there, we should be able to learn a lot of things about modern life. And if you take a look at all of the various groups that come in here, the 150,000 teachers that are involved one way or another in our teacher training program every year, police, the ten major jurisdictions around Washington plus the Virginia and Maryland state police, FBI. Now, we've just taken the show on the road to St. Louis and Houston, helping to train the police in looking at themselves and their role in society so that they recognize the limits both to their power but also the responsibilities that they have to the citizenry, to protect them. It's a program that was started by the police chief in Washington D.C. who went through the museum a couple of times and then approached us about developing a training program. And this has become a very successful one. A very important one. We have worked with judges. With Foreign Service officers. Every Foreign Service officer who goes to Europe comes through a day program here at the museum. Not just to go through the exhibition, but also a discussion afterwards. Part of it has to do with "how do we recognize the signs of genocide today?"

You brought up the issue of genocide today in the Sudan. The museum about a year and a half ago took the leadership in the United States of trying to end the killing in the Sudan. First, to make people aware of what was happening. Political leadership, leadership on the Hill, the media, and then in communities around the country. We've set up a major special exhibition in our learning center. The head of our committee on conscience went out last May – so it's a year already – went out to refugee camps in Chad and spent about ten days interviewing refugees so he would have first person witnesses and their testimony. Holocaust survivors who volunteer at the museum have been speaking around the country about the issue of Darfur. And we've also set up a new office within the committee on conscience in the museum to reach out to university students. And we've had some training programs for university students. We had one in February where four-hundred students from ninety universities across the country came here for a day long training program in how to become activists on campus to fight genocide.

So we learned from what we didn't do in Bosnia, what we didn't do in Rwanda. We have a number of programs in the museum especially focusing on Rwanda. Because in Rwanda the case was so clear cut on everything. The memories are still with us. So we've had General (Roméo) Dallaire here in the museum a couple of times. He was the Canadian general who headed U.N. peacekeeping forces in Rwanda during the genocide. And we have had a number of programs with him and with others as well.

We don't do a lot of films here, but we premiered the new film Hotel Rwanda with Don Cheadle, who came here. And Paul Rusesabagina who was the manager of the hotel in Kigali at that time came here as well, with Terry George, not just to see the film but to talk about their own experiences and how they relate to what happened in Rwanda at that time.

Q: *It's a magnificent job. I'm sure you find it very rewarding.*

BERGER: It's something that I find rewarding. It's a wonderful position. It's a chance to help people understand something about not just history, but that history really does have relevance to us today.

Q: *Well thank you very much. We appreciate the time you have spent with us.*

End of interview