

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

ELIZABETH W. HOPKINS

*Interviewed by: G. Lewis Schmidt
Initial interview date: July 24, 1989
Copyright 1998 ADST*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Bio Sketch

Initial Position in Department of State; 1953

The Beginning of the Bi-national Center Operation

Early Struggles in Getting Bi-National Center Operations Underway

Criteria Used for Selecting Bi-National Center Personnel

BNC Programs Achieved Great Success in Latin America and then Expanded to Other Areas

Sources of English Language Teaching Materials for BNCs

A Regular Promotional Structure, Travel Allowances for Families, Housing Allowances and Other “Perks” Common for Regular Foreign Service Personnel Were Obtained Only piecemeal Over Several Years for BNC People

The Eventual Integration of BNC Personnel into Regular Foreign Service was Detrimental to the BNC Program Per Se

Summary of Ways in which Integration Hurt the BNC Operation

INTERVIEW

Q: This is Lew Schmidt and I am interviewing Elizabeth Hopkins at her retirement home in Tarboro, North Carolina. Liz, for a long time, was in the Binational Center program. In fact, she was practically the moving force in the program for many years.

I'm not going to try to say all the things that she did; I'm just going to ask her to take over from here and to start out with a brief discussion of her background, her education and how she got into the service and so forth.

From time to time, I will ask a question. When I do, I will raise my finger. You finish the sentence you are in and then I'll ask my question so I won't just break in. Please go ahead, Liz, and start out by giving us your background.

HOPKINS: I was originally from Henderson, Kentucky. Then my family and I moved around over the country a great deal. As a matter of fact, driving back and forth I've been in most all the states except the most recent ones.

My mother and I spent several years in Salt Lake City where I attended the University of Utah for two and a half years. Then I moved to New York City where I had full-time jobs and continued to study at New York University, receiving a B.A. in English and in Sociology.

While there, I worked in social service organizations. One of my jobs was in a community center in Green Point. I also worked for the Family Welfare Association of America. Then the war came along and I wanted to do something for the war effort.

I took an examination which entitled me to come in to the Government as a junior professional assistant. My grade was quite good. Somebody called me and I went down to Washington for an interview with someone in the State Department.

I was advised that because of the war effort, they were not taking people necessarily from the Civil Service lists. What they needed were secretaries. There was an indication that there would be opportunities for advancement.

Initial Position in Department of State; 1953

Wanting to get into the war effort, I came in at a lower salary than I was making in New York and as a secretary. I first worked in the cultural program. I've forgotten the exact name, but it was the education and cultural division.

Q: What year was that?

HOPKINS: 1943. I came into the cultural division and worked as a secretary for several people. While I was there, Carl Sauer was brought back from overseas to head a Binational Center section. A girl named Mary Agnes Young, who later married and became Mrs. Turner, was his assistant.

The Beginning of the Binational Center Operation

The program had started when Nelson Rockefeller was Coordinator of Inter American Affairs. A woman named Muriel Leach had been the personnel officer. There were a handful of people overseas in the Binational Centers when the program was turned over to the Department of State.

Because of the situation at that time, in some of the countries, anyone who went down under the auspices of the State Department without official status would have had to register as a foreign agent. So that was one of the reasons for sending people out on grants. Money for the grants was given to the ACLS, the American Council of Learned Societies.

The grants were drawn up on ACLS letterheads. They were in charge of the finances. We would take the grants to the ACLS for signature.

Q: I want to ask you, I'm not quite clear on the organizational pattern. You were not in the Office of War Information.

HOPKINS: No, I never was. I was right in the State Department.

Q: Did they still call this organization the Institute of Inter American Affairs at that time or was in under a different title?

HOPKINS: Well, I don't remember what they called it, but it was part of the State Department by this time, and once the transfer was made it was no longer under the Coordinator's office.

Early Struggles in Getting Binational Center Operation Under Way

Hersheld Brickell -- did you ever know him? He was in charge of the Educational and Cultural Division at this time.

Q: No, he was before my time.

HOPKINS: He was one of the top men there. Carl Sauer was with the Binational Centers when it was decided that things had changed so much that -- it was no longer necessary to use the grant system under the ACLS.

So it was decided that it was time to put the grants under the State Department. Mary Agnes, Mr. Sauer and I -- she was the assistant -- worked on all this. By the time that we had gotten it more or less set, Mary Agnes got married and left. I was recommended to take the job.

Q: As the personnel --

HOPKINS: Under Mr. Sauer as the person in charge of all the personnel under Mr. Sauer. Lionel Landry came back from overseas and we worked together. He had English teaching experience and was a good administrator.

We continued then, of course, to build the program up. At that time, I don't remember how many people there were but there were not a great many. From then on, as the program expanded, we had quite a number of people in quite a number of places.

Q: Did you start right away into the recruitment operations to bring these people in?

HOPKINS: Yes, that's right, recruitment was a big part of my job.

Q: How did you go about that? Did you travel to some extent around the country or how did you manage it?

HOPKINS: No, it was through the romance language departments of various colleges and through the people that we knew, and through recommendations of various offices already in the program, that we got a recruitment program started.

At times, I was getting letters from all over the country, people who were interested in the program. Originally, of course, the idea was not to make a career overseas. The grantees were not supposed to make a career of service in the Binational Centers.

They were supposed to have academic backgrounds. Some of them came in as teachers, as directors of courses, and as directors of activities. Those with administrative qualifications came in as Directors.

Most of these we could get through universities. The idea was for grantees to come into the program and be sent overseas. It was thought that this experience would help them to make their programs in the universities more interesting when they returned. As they gained a better knowledge of life overseas they would help this [university] program. So this was supposed to be a revolving arrangement.

Q: Now did you personally draw up the criteria for the hire of these people, or were the criteria already drawn up and given to you?

HOPKINS: Carl Sauer left and Ed Murphy came in. Ed Murphy and I worked on this together in making up a list of the requirements for getting into the program and then the rules and regulations applicable after they were in the program. We also set up standards for making grants for the different categories.

At one point when there was a cutback, Ed Murphy and I were the only two people left, I think, in the whole Binational Center Division. I was able to type then, and I had to type since somebody had to get the work out.

We could only get out things that were really necessary. Mr. Murphy would prepare it and I would write it up. That's the only way things got out for ages.

Q: You were left in the program at that time despite the big cutback. Was that in 1946 or '47?

HOPKINS: Yes, the great cutback, that's about when it was. Gradually, people came back and we went back to our old jobs. You can certainly get information from Edmund R. Murphy in Washington because he was in the program for a long time.

Then, of course, after people got into the Binational Center program, they liked it. Some of them would later be recommended for transfer into the Foreign Service. We required anybody who came in as a Binational Center grantee to give that program a certain amount of time before transferring to the regular Foreign Service. After all, we had put in a great deal of time and effort to recruiting them.

I do remember one man who came in as a grantee. He was from down here at Wake Forest. One of the personnel officers for the Far East persuaded him to go to that area. He was qualified either for Latin America or the Far East. Against all the rules, he insisted that this man go to the Far East. Since we were persuaded that an urgent need existed, we allowed him to be given foreign service status without ever going overseas as a grantee.

Thus he was able to get his way. We tried to avoid that kind of situation. If we had recruited people and brought them in, they were supposed to be interested in the Binational Center program.

Of course, the BNC Program could be used as a stepping-stone to getting into the Foreign Service eventually.

Q: First of all, did you bring them in on a contractual basis?

HOPKINS: Yes.

Q: Secondly, was there a fixed term?

HOPKINS: Yes.

Q: Thirdly, did you ever renew the contracts for an additional period?

HOPKINS: Oh, yes. They were supposed to stay at least two years. Actually, I believe it was originally three years. The contract was renewed on a yearly basis. They didn't come back for reorientation and return or reassignment unless they stayed three years. It was later cut to two years.

The grantees liked the program and some were so good at their jobs that people overseas didn't want to release them. Gradually, we began to see that a core of people who were qualified to move around was better than having to train new people all the time.

Then officers of the Department, and later the Agency began to look to me for watching the progress of these people and recommending them for the regular programs. So a great many of them who were really worthwhile got to be cultural officers. At one time, they told me, the best PAOs and CAO's were from the BNC program in Latin America.

Q: When you say the regular programs, you're talking about the regular --

HOPKINS: Foreign Service, yes. Some, of course, come into the domestic programs.
Criteria Used for Selecting Binational Center Personnel

Q: I'd like to backtrack a little bit. You said that you and Ed Murphy worked out the criteria. Basically, what were the criteria for selecting these people? Did they require a foreign language?

HOPKINS: Oh, yes; for Latin America, Spanish and Portuguese; French for Haiti. We found that if a person spoke Spanish and French, it was easy for him to convert to Portuguese. We didn't always have enough Portuguese-speaking people.

Candidates were supposed to have good academic backgrounds. Of course, their personality had a lot to do with it. I remember we used to say -- they were supposed to have a missionary spirit. We didn't mean in a religious sense. We meant a certain zeal for making a contribution.

Grantees were supposed to be good teachers and administrators. They were supposed to get along well with people and have all the usual academic and administrative qualifications. If they were directors, they had to have had some experience in administration and so on.

Q: Did you bring any of them in directly after graduation from the university or did you bring most of them in after they'd had some additional education experience?

HOPKINS: We wanted them to have some additional experience. Do you know Gloria Wasielewski Kreisher?

Q: Yes.

HOPKINS: She came to me when she was 21. She had just graduated from, I believe it was UCLA, and had also gone to the American Institute for Foreign Trade. I said I didn't think that a girl of 21 should be sent overseas.

She hadn't had any real teaching experience, although she was marvelous in languages. She had excellent Spanish and Portuguese. She went back and got some experience and came back two years later when she was 23 and we hired her.

Q: She's still working?

HOPKINS: Yes, she's in Rome. I think she has done well in the Foreign Service.

Q: I knew Gloria primarily when she was in Turkey when I was over there. She got married in Turkey.

HOPKINS: Her husband died.

Q: I know he died.

HOPKINS: Three years ago I went over to England to visit relatives. I stopped over in Rome and spent nine days with Gloria. Now she speaks excellent Italian. She does a lot of traveling out of Rome to other countries.

Q: She's sort of a regional officer now?

HOPKINS: Yes, she's a regional English teaching officer and sets up seminars. She's even been to China. I think her time is going to be up this September or October unless they persuade her to stay on a little longer.

This is supposed to be her last tour. She has a condominium there in Washington where, I think, she plans to live after she has retired. She can give you a lot of background since she's been in the program so long.

Q: Did she go into the regular service?

HOPKINS: Well, she stayed in the Binational Center for a long time. Somebody suggested that she transfer to the regular service as a secretary. I said, "Gloria, if you're asking my advice, don't do it because you'll get tagged as a secretary and you'll have a hard time getting out of it."

So she was in for quite awhile. She always said she thanked me for that advice because when she came in, she had gained some valuable experience. She became director of courses in Mexico, one of the biggest centers. When she came into the Foreign Service, she came in at a good grade and she's worked up from there.

BNC Programs Achieved Great Success in Latin America
and Then Expanded to Other Areas

After the program had been very successful in Latin America, a decision was made to open centers in the Near East, one of two in Europe, and a number in the Far East.

Then, of course, it was a matter of boning up on all those different countries. Also it was important to know the people in the Latin America program who might have the experience to help establish centers in other areas.

Jeff Sandel is an example. He was in Rio. He speaks excellent Portuguese and was doing well in Brazil. We needed somebody to go into Cambodia. He was all set. I think he had just gone back, following home leave. I called him and asked if he would be willing to go to Cambodia to open a center.

I asked if he would discuss it with his wife and let me know by the next day. He loved his assignment in Brazil. He called me back in an hour and said he had talked it over with Helen and that they would go. They picked up their children and went to Cambodia and did a fine job.

He now speaks Cambodian and Vietnamese and another language, I can't remember which. At one point -- later on we sent him to Vietnam. It was thought he was too old to take up a new language. He sure fooled them. He went in there and got something like a three in Vietnamese in a short time.

Of course, I didn't have that unusual ability. It just comes to some people. So we did use the people from Latin America to build up the other areas. We sent Martin Kushansky over to Manila to open a Center.

We sent a man to Burma. He left the program and has done very well. He's at the health institute in Bethesda and writes books. His name is Jim Cassidy. He went over to that area from Latin America and that's the way the Centers were established.

By this time we had established regulations so grantees could stay in the BNC Program. Of course, Sandel got into the regular program and a great many of the others did so after they had given a number of years to the BNC Program.

Q: Did you have a regular system of promotion?

HOPKINS: Yes. Grantees would progress from teacher to director of courses. Some of them who seemed to have qualifications for promoting activities became Directors of Activity. Then those that showed administrative experience would be promoted to Center Directors. So a great many of them came in as teachers and then worked on up.

Sources of English Language Teaching Materials for BNC's

Q: There were some of them I think who wrote a lot of the materials that were used in the Latin American English teaching program.

HOPKINS: That's right, yes. Some of the people that were in at the time that the program came over from the coordinator's office have gone on into writing materials. Of course, there were Will Sheeler, Ken Croft and Ed Cornelius. They were all in the English program, but broke away and established their own company. I think Will is still writing materials. Of course, Gloria Wasielewski, Jim Schols, Jim McGillary and others wrote materials for the program.

I can't remember all the different people but there were quite a few of them who wrote materials. Some of these materials are still being used in the Centers.

Q: Did you have materials initially that you used before materials were written specifically for the BNC's?

HOPKINS: May I digress a little here, and tell you a little about the set-up. When I first came in, we were in the Grant Building which was right across from the State Department. It has since been torn down. I think it was three stories and a basement.

I was on the top floor. I was told that the building had been condemned and there could only be three people on the top floor with three cabinets. Well, while I was there there were at least six people with fifteen cabinets up there. I felt sometimes that I should take a parachute when I went to work.

I did not have a teaching background. However, materials were needed. So one of my first jobs was to ferret out all the materials on teaching English as a foreign language. I would go to the library and search out materials. So I actually made up the first list of materials that was used in the program for the teaching of English as a foreign language.

Of course, it's been greatly augmented since then because this field has become very specialized. There are several schools there in Washington that have very good programs.

Q: Was that your only experience or only function at that particular time, writing those materials?

HOPKINS: No, that was just part of it.

Q: Did you write later? Did you write additional materials?

HOPKINS: No, I never wrote any materials, but I had to find out what materials were available and make lists so that the grantees knew where they could get materials. That's all I did because I was not an English teacher.

Q: Were any of those who wrote the materials people that did that trained as scientific linguists?

HOPKINS: Well, there was Henry Lee Smith and I've forgotten the name of the other man there in the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). They gave courses. Many of our people took the courses and really became more or less authorities on teaching English as a foreign language. So we really did have a core of professionals.

A regular promotional structure, travel allowances for families, housing allowances and other "perks" common for regular foreign service personnel were obtained only piecemeal over several years for BNC people

Q: A little while ago you said that there was a system of promotion set up within the group even before they went into the regular Foreign Service. Who made the determination as to who went in -- did you have a role in that?

HOPKINS: Oh, yes. I had a role in everything concerning personnel from the start. Of course, at first Ed Murphy was my chief and then much, much later, of course, he went overseas. Then I was under Tony Covins and Frank Cory. All of these officers gave me excellent supervision.

Q: They were personnel people.

HOPKINS: They were personnel people. They put me in Personnel instead of in the Binational Center Division. Of course, they were no authority on Binational Centers, so I was given considerable authority.

Q: Did you have a regular grade structure within the BNC operation, or was it just a matter of being promoted to what you considered to be a higher position from the one a grantee had held before?

HOPKINS: They moved up if they stayed in the program and were qualified. When this program started, teachers salaries were very low all over the country.

We were more or less stuck with -- since grantees were in the academic field -- staying within this range of pay. Then as salaries got better on the outside, we could do better by them but we had a regular structure for the different categories.

There were different levels of centers. The larger centers would be in the higher level, and so forth. Sometimes small centers were just as important because of various factors.

Q: Sometimes, particularly in the larger centers, you got into the position where you had overall directors of the center for grantees.

HOPKINS: Of course, they had to supervise a lot of local teachers because we could never send down enough teachers. Directors would recruit from the American community and get people to teach part-time. Sometimes the wife of the Director would teach.

Some people would go overseas just for a sabbatical or some other reason and find out that they could have a fairly decent job. They liked living overseas and they would just stay for a number of years as local teachers.

Q: For the grantees, was there -- I never was quite clear on this -- was there ever a system of allowances on housing, for example -- allowances as there were with regular Foreign Service people?

HOPKINS: We worked into that. At first, the regulations made no provision for that so the total grant would include enough to cover applicable allowances.

Q: In other words, it was always covered by the grant. It wasn't identified per se as a housing allowance?

HOPKINS: No. Then we finally had new regulations. Also, in the early days of the BNC Program, we only paid the travel of the person who was on grant. Well, not always, because we had several couples where the wife was also a teacher, had linguistic ability, etc., and was thus also allowed travel. So we would give her a part-time grant so we could pay her travel.

We finally had regulations which permitted us to provide the grantees with specified allowances, travel for families, and many of the benefits which regular Foreign Service personnel received. In one instance, we sent a man to Mexico as director and his wife who had really good qualifications, as a Director of Courses.

I always tried to save the department money, so I sent a telegram down giving all of his qualifications and everything and said "wife can be hired locally." You remember Abbie Lincoln in the State Department?

Q: Yes.

HOPKINS: Well, she and I were good friends. She called me and said, "Ms. Hopkins, how do you know he wants to hire a wife?" So I had to change the telegram and say his wife is qualified and may be hired locally.

Q: Until that was worked out, initially the principal was sent but he had to finance his family's trip to the country?

HOPKINS: Yes, but included everything we could in the total grant.

Q: Was there any home leave arrangement provided?

HOPKINS: No, not automatically. I don't know how much of this you want to get into. This was one reason we had to have new regulations, so we could let them have official

home leave when they came up for training prior to transferring or returning to the same port.

Q: They were still covered by a salary under the grant?

HOPKINS: Yes, that's right.

Q: So although there was no official home leave --

HOPKINS: Not official, but by changing the regulations, as I said before, grantees could get many more benefits. We would send them over to the regular travel and the travel people would take care of the whole family just as if they were in the regular program. This made life easier for everybody.

Q: Did you have a role in getting that additional help for them?

HOPKINS: Oh, yes, I was working on that kind of problem all the time. Also we eventually got them covered under the Blue Cross/Blue Shield. My office did that. I was quite busy taking care of the grants, particularly certain times of the year.

All the grants would have to be negotiated. It all seemed to come up at one time. When people came back for home leave, sometimes I'd hold them there in Washington for reorientation, and also to give them a chance to be re-Americanized and so forth.

Several people helped on getting hospitalization coverage. We finally got them so they were covered under the health insurance as a special group. We were always working to try to get them benefits as nearly as possible like those received by those in programs.

Then, of course, the cars, that was a problem. They couldn't get cars in free. I know we worked on that. In some places, they were treated as Foreign Service personnel overseas and some places not. In some places, they could take their cars.

I was constantly working to try to get benefits for them. It was my office that was the central point for that kind of activity.

Q: I know that you helped in many, many ways. I was just trying to bring out the particular areas in which you were able to get the type of benefit available to regular Foreign Service people. How long did it take you on each of these cases? Did you have to work on it for a long period of time; for instance, on the medical coverage?

HOPKINS: Yes, that took quite awhile. We finally got them under the Social Security also. A woman named Lucille Dudgeon who was a librarian became interested. I guess some of them were her friends and she helped a lot in that effort.

Social Security finally came through. That was a big step forward. So at least while they were not working for a pension from the Agency, they were at least covered by Social Security.

Q: Can you think of any other things that are worth recounting about the growth of the program, really, the development, I should say, not so much the growth, because we take that for granted? I'm thinking of the whole matter of gradually improving the lot of the people who went abroad, giving them privileges that were normal for the Foreign Service but that they didn't have?

HOPKINS: It seems like we were always working, along with everything else, on getting benefits. We did want to make benefits as near like the Foreign Service without being the Foreign Service as possible so they would be more content and not feel like they were second-class citizens.

Of course, I think that's one thing they always said. They'd see secretaries who could get a car in and they couldn't. Things like that bothered some of the.

Q: I suppose they were having to travel and be in the other countries on regular passports too?

HOPKINS: Yes, that's right.

Q: Did that mean that in many countries they had to renew their visas for those countries every six months or were they able to get in on a two or three year visa?

HOPKINS: I think they were able to get in on at least a yearly basis. Of course some countries were more difficult than others. I don't remember that living in this country was any great problem. It was the traveling on regular passports, no free entry of the car, and lack of benefits which they thought added to their standing in the community.

I think that some of the grantees really got to know the people of the country far better than the people higher up, because they would work closely with them. So I think it was a good program in that they were really getting to the people.

Of course, now centers don't have very many regular jobs. They have very few. I think it takes the American presence to make it really worthwhile.

The Eventual Integration of BNC Personnel Into Regular Foreign Service was Detrimental to the BNC Program Per Se

Q: I think it does too. You said earlier when we were talking off the record that you felt that the inclusion, the integration of the BNC personnel into the Foreign Service was detrimental to the Binational Center program per se.

I know you gave me some reasons but those are not on tape. Could you talk a little bit about that? Why you feel it was not so good for the program?

HOPKINS: Well, the program -- the number of personnel assigned to the Binational Center has gone down and down because before integration, BNC's were a separate entity, and had a separate budget. We got separate money for the Bi-national Center Program personnel. Even if jobs were cut out of the regular program, we had our money and we could continue to keep personnel overseas. As a matter of fact, the grants were made for a full year at a time.

Once BNC personnel came into the program, if the PAO or whoever was responsible for the post was really interested in the Binational Center, they might keep the Binational Center position. If not, when a cut came, that was the first job to go.

So you got fewer and fewer people overseas. Also as I said, these young Foreign Service officers came in -- not very many of them had a teaching background or an academic background of the kind that they really needed for Binational Center work, and they didn't want to be assigned to a BNC.

They wanted to be in the cultural program in the Embassy. So they were not interested in going to these institutions. Whereas, if you hire people specifically for the Centers, it seemed to work out better. Some Foreign Service officers just go the Centers because they have to, but immediately begin to work on getting out, and getting into some other phase of the program, because they feel that the Centers are sort of low on the totem pole, especially when it comes to promotion.

Q: I know a few who stayed with the Bi-national Center program all the way through even after they got into the regular service.

HOPKINS: Yes.

Q: I guess those were relatively few. Milt Leavitt was one who stayed with it pretty much all the way through.

HOPKINS: He had a heart attack, a stroke or something.

Q: He had a stroke.

HOPKINS: How is he?

Q: He's coming along fairly well, but he hasn't recovered a great deal of his right side mobility. He was not originally brought into the Agency for the Binational Centers. However he did very well.

HOPKINS: Did you know that he was in that Bataan Death march?

I felt he really deserved to have a chance. If he did get into the Binational Centers and did well, then it would give him another chance.

Anyway, this got him back into the main swing. I'm glad of that. People are wandering around the Agency all the time. Then the right job comes up and he or she gets it. I just think it is very sad the way some people wander around for a long time before they find the right assignment.

Q: Some of them are very good people, too.

HOPKINS: I'm sorry that he hasn't completely recovered.

Q: His right hand is hardly useful and he drags his right leg. He can walk now but he hasn't fully recovered by any means.

Let's get to the point here. We may be jumping around a little bit, but let's get to the point. Integration was finally arranged. Did you tell me when we were talking off the record that you really had no great part in the initiating the integration itself but that you did have a substantial role in recommending those people for integration into regular Foreign Service?

HOPKINS: Well, yes, and doing considerable administration work to close out the Grantee program and get the people into the regular programs.

Q: You handled all the administration.

HOPKINS: Yes, some of the administration. There was a great deal that had to be done to effect the change-over.

Q: You also recommended the people whom you felt were qualified to go?

HOPKINS: That's right, yes.

Q: Did some of them -- it wasn't then a wholesale integration. Some of the people didn't make it?

HOPKINS: Well, there were some people who remained. They were overage and not qualified. There was a man who did a very fine job and who recently died -- about two or three years ago -- Reese Wolfe, did you know him?

Q: I knew his name.

HOPKINS: He did a very good job. He was a writer with the Reader's Digest and was going to write a history of the Binational Center program when he got out. We were going to have him stop by several posts. His last post was in Argentina.

Then when the takeover was effected, they wanted the people on grant whose grants were not going to be renewed, to come straight back to their homes because there was no need for them to come here, or make any stopovers.

So he did that and he never did write anything. Then Bernice Schmidt was overage, also. There were some like that. They were just not qualified to come in, but not because they were not doing a good job.

It was rather sad. There was one person who always wanted to come into the program but for some reason or another, we never could get her transferred. She was marvelous with the little people overseas, but she antagonized the Embassy people -- the Americans. So they would not recommend her. She almost got in once and then there was a cutback just before she was to report. Then by the time they were all integrated, she had left the program, and had died. So she didn't even know about the change in status, which is probably a good thing.

It was sad sometimes that people wanted to do good jobs, but fall short. I still get Christmas cards every year from people whom we had to let go. People can do a good job state-side and can seem to have the qualifications but cannot fit in overseas.

There was one man in Brazil who got into trouble with the Brazilian Board. He had an awful temper and got into a fight with the president of the board. They asked that we recall him. We didn't feel that we could put him anywhere else in Brazil. I kept up with him. I felt that he was a human being. He got into a college out in California and did an excellent job. He used to have to go to Latin America to recruit people for his college.

It's a college which has special interests for Latin Americans. So we used to send down to the Binational Centers information regarding his itinerary so he could talk to the local people when he visited BNC cities. Unfortunately, he has died. I get a card from his widow every year just like we're the greatest of friends. I didn't let it make any difference. If they ever came to Washington, I would invite them to the Bi-national Center luncheon at DACOR and nobody would ever know that they had left the program under any kind of a cloud just because they didn't quite make it. It wasn't any use. As individuals, I liked them.

Q: Some people just don't fit in particular areas.

HOPKINS: That's right. They had the language and they had the background, but working with the board -- it's a difficult position sometimes.

Q: It's a diplomatic position all its own very often. You had left the program, I guess, by 1970, but you know Alan Fisher.

HOPKINS: He was in Brazil for a long time?

Q: He was in Brazil for a long time in the 1950s. He then went back many years later for a second tour as branch PAO in Sao Paulo.

HOPKINS: Yes, I remember him.

Q: He had quite a set-to with the original Binational Center in Sao Paulo. He finally withdrew USIA's support from it and established a new Binational Center which became the one to which the USIA thereafter gave its support.

HOPKINS: Yes. There was one man there who was a board member, actually the president of the board, who was very, very difficult. (End of side one of tape)

Q: When our tape ran out a couple of minutes ago, we had gotten a little bit off the subject. We were talking about Alan Fisher's troubles with the Binational Center Director in Sao Paulo.

You had mentioned the man was very difficult up there. I think there were a few things that we didn't cover completely about your feeling and other people's feelings about the implications of the Binational Center's directors integration into the regular foreign service. It was good for them personally, but it didn't help the program.

I think you wanted to make clear that you never said anything against that integration.

HOPKINS: No, I worked for the integration. I had the feeling that once we no longer had a specific budget just for Binational Center personnel and they were integrated into the regular program, that BNC jobs might be the positions that would be eliminated, in the case of a budget reduction. I think this has come to pass because we have a great many fewer positions with Americans from here than we had prior to the integration.

Summary of Ways in Which Integration Hurt the BNC Operation

Q: I think now from what you said -- let me see if I can summarize the results of this change, and you can tell me that I'm wrong if you think so -- I think, one, you felt that when the people were on a contract basis working almost on a separate but parallel career within the Binational Center program, a certain specialist Esprit de Corps arose among the people who were Binational Center directors. They felt they had a cause and a career within the service of BNC's which was more or less -- I hate to use the word destroyed but which sort of disintegrated with the transfer of these people to the regular service. Is that a correct statement?

HOPKINS: Yes, I think that's right. Although there were many who did have this feeling for the program, but because of the fact that they didn't have all of the benefits that the other people had, quite frequently it was hard for them not to be dissatisfied.

So to have a satisfied group of people, that's what you got out of the integration. Gradually the number of American personnel from here has diminished considerably around the world because of the fact that there's no longer a separate budget and a separate program. It's just part of the regular program.

Q: So that's the second point. The Agency has diminished the number of people funded by USIA who are available for work in the Binational Centers. A corollary of that, I guess, is something that we spoke of off the record; that is that with a general cutback in the foreign service, which occurred starting about eight or ten years ago, posts were required to eliminate positions. Very often they cut back one or two positions out of the Binational Center rather than cutting them out of the program within what the post sometimes considered the mainstream of the program. So that was another reason for the decline.

Then the third one that you were talking about off the record is the fact that apparently, and unfortunately, the agency does not seem to have given the same standing within the promotional structure of the agency to Binational Center people that they have from regular cultural officers and other people.

Therefore, most people have the feeling that there's less opportunity for getting into the mainstream of the program if they are assigned to a Binational Center.

HOPKINS: I think that's true.

Q: The result, therefore, is that the new people coming in, come in through the junior office trainee program, and nowadays, through the Foreign Service exam have rather infrequently opted for the BNC program because they feel that their chances of going up in the service are much better by going into other positions.

HOPKINS: That is my opinion, you may want to get other viewpoints. Another thing that we didn't cover was a special arrangement we had. About twice a year, we arranged to have the newcomers come into the Agency during the summer and in December. At the same time that we had new people in, we would bring the overseas people back who were eligible for home leave so that they would have a chance to talk and to help each other.

The ones who were new would benefit greatly. Sometimes there would be a person from the same post to which a new person was going, and they could get a lot of information and help in that way.

We had special training for these people for these specific jobs, which they don't have anymore. There was a regular program set up with the other elements of the agency that

included spending some time with the Book program, the library program and all the various elements affecting BNC work. And time was spent with the area directors and so forth. Some of this was included in the regular training program.

BNC personnel veterans had an opportunity to refresh themselves on what was going on in the Agency. So they would stay several weeks and there would be this overlap with the new people and the old people. We did that for years.

I think that helped. I do think these practices built up an Esprit de Corps among BNC personnel. They all felt that we were all in this thing together and that they benefited.

Q: I think it's true that the success in the Binational Center program does require a certain expertise. If you throw someone in there without special training for that particular type of operation, you do him a disservice and you do the program a disservice.

HOPKINS: Yes.

Q: I hadn't realized -- I guess I just hadn't thought about it, but you had a special training program for these people.

HOPKINS: Yes, we did. We'd have the teachers and the directors of courses, the directors and the directors of the activities. They would have various programs. A lot of it was together and some of it would be separate.

Grantees had the opportunity while they were here to talk to all the various people in the agency. Then we used to have those parties -- do you remember? -- We would give the Grantees an opportunity to meet some of the Agency higher ups. We'd always invite some of the higher ups.

I remember we had one at Ms. Dungeon's. I don't know whether you went to that one or not. Don Wilson came to that one. I guess several of the directors came. that would given an opportunity for all the people than they would have seen in their training program and people in the agency, to see them on a social basis.

Also it was good for the new people coming in. You know, we had quite a number of Mormons come in. They, of course, were against drinking. We had to show them that that's up to them. Nobody wanted them to drink and nobody wanted them to do anything that was against their religion.

However, they should not make remarks about anybody who did take a drink. They were to take a glass of ginger ale or something non-alcoholic and carry it around all evening.

I always thought we were supposed to get a cross section of America. You know, we have some people from Harvard and some people from the other big colleges, some people who were from little tiny colleges out in the Midwest. They are all part of America.

I didn't think we should have all people with Harvard accents. I can tell you several funny things about accents. When we first started the program, we hired a girl from Texas who had excellent qualifications but quite a Texas accent. Under the coordinator's office, personnel went directly overseas without coming through Washington.

When the program came into the State Department, a practice was initiated of having them come in to Washington for training before going abroad. This was much better. And then having group training was even better. Well, anyway, during the war, travelers had to stop in Panama and have a British visa for some reason or another.

I got a call from a woman who said, "Ms. Hopkins, there's a woman here who says you sent her down. She's from Texas and she says that you're sending her overseas to teach English and we can't understand her."

Q: Her Texas accent?

HOPKINS: Yes, she really had a Texas accent. She did a very good job and wrote some good materials and was well- liked overseas.

The group that went from the coordinator's office didn't come through here at all. This was all something that was initiated later. Then, I, at one point, sent -- I think it was to Thailand -- several people from Texas.

I don't know whether you were there or not. Did you send a communication? Somebody said that there was a communication saying, "Tell Ms. Hopkins not to send anymore Texans out here or all the Thais will be speaking with a Texas accent." I had sent several out there.

Q: It was not I. It may have been Jack O'Brien who was my predecessor, or Howard Gomish, or Jack Pickering, all of whom preceded me.

HOPKINS: Something like that happened and the cable said don't send anymore because they'll all be speaking with a Texas accent. I guess it just happened that several went to that particular post at various times.

I always thought the Grantees were such a nice group. Our literature specified that they were supposed to have an outgoing personality, and we tried to see to that, and that they had all the various attributes which would make them fit in overseas and would make them like people and make people like them. The Grantees selected were generally well-liked.

These programs that we arranged to get them together [in Washington], we did that for years and years. I think that was one of the things that drew them together. They met here as a group and then they would write each other from the posts.

Q: USIA had a program -- I have forgotten what they called it -- in which people were asked to send in particular ideas that they had tried and in their posts and had found effective. Those that were selected as being particularly good would then be printed and sent out to other posts as examples of program activities that might work elsewhere.

HOPKINS: Sometimes BNC people would write and say, "What do you do in a case like this? Have you ever had this happen?" They could -- particularly after they got pouch privileges use the pouch for anything that was official.

I worked on those requests for advice for so many years and so many different times. I believe that the first man, whoever he was, was in charge of the pouch said, "Oh, no, you can't do that." Later on we got somebody in charge of the pouch that was a little bit more lenient. So they did have a lot more leeway.

Q: How long was the training program that you were giving?

HOPKINS: Well, from two to six weeks. If they had been overseas for three years and since -- at one point, you see, they couldn't go on home leave for two months like other overseas staff, we'd keep them here for, say, about six weeks.

Q: When you first brought somebody into the program for a training period, how long was it for?

HOPKINS: That would be about the same as for BNC who were in for "home leave", because they would be here together. Some of them had been teaching foreign languages and so forth and didn't have too much background of teaching English as a foreign language.

So we would give them some training. Sometimes we'd send them over to the Foreign Service Institute for a six-week course. We had all kinds of situations. Sometimes we'd give a language brush up -- if they were transferring to another country from Spanish to Portuguese. We always tried to meet special needs.

Q: Were you able to put any of them into the Foreign Service Institute Language Study?

HOPKINS: Well, yes.

Q: I mean, if they were shifting to another language.

HOPKINS: Yes, we did use the services of the FSI. I am trying to remember whether Jeff was in the regular program before he took Cambodian and Vietnamese. They got into the

regular training and we provided short courses. We wouldn't given them a year or anything like that but we'd give them a brush up.

Actually, some of them liked the Binational Center program so much that I'm sure some of them would like to have remained in it. It's always the idea of getting up the ladder and into something permanent which appeals. Therefore, many wanted to get into the regular program.

Some of them, even, who did transfer said that they enjoyed what they did in the Binational Centers as much as any work they had ever done with the Agency.

Q: A lot of the Binational Centers -- I don't know that a lot is a correct statement -- but a fair number of the Binational Centers were so influential in their communities, so well known, that anybody who directed the center had his own prestige within the community.

Often it was higher than the prestige of others in the program, or even more so. Sometimes a Grantee knew the local cultural people, the local educators, and the local artistic groups better than any of the people in the regular Foreign Service.

HOPKINS: They were often invited to special events. Sometimes jealousy was aroused because the Binational Center people would be invited to events by the high officials of the other countries to which other Embassy or USIA people were not invited. So sometimes that caused a little trouble.

We ran into all kinds of problems when we got the salaries up a little bit and were able to have a step up kind of program. I remember we sent somebody to La Pa -- He had been in for a long time, I think -- and his salary was higher -- or at least the same as an assistant CAO. The Assistant CAO didn't like that, having someone on grant to get the same or even more than he was receiving. We ran into all kinds of things like that.

As I look back on it, I couldn't have done anything that I enjoyed more than my work, because I have always liked people. It was hard work. During the war, I put in a lot of overtime, when we were getting the program started. I always felt it was really a worthwhile program.

Q: Did you give some of those parties about which you spoke at your own apartment or were they all in the agency?

HOPKINS: Well, no. I had some at the best addresses in Georgetown. I would ask people to let us use their names. My mother was with me there for a lot of the time and it would be hard to give large parties. She died at 95 years of age, after my retirement. She loved to meet the Grantees, and enjoyed the buffet suppers I have for 12 people. I had some at my apartment, generally in smaller groups. Jim Echols once invited the group down, when he had that place near Annapolis. I don't know whether you went to that one or not; you were probably overseas -- he had a delightful place down on the Severn River.

I said I was trying to find some place where we could have a party out of doors. He and Mary said, "Sure come on down." We fixed a picnic and had it at a lovely spot on the Severn River.

They had a lovely home. We all went down there for one of the best parties ever. I would generally form a committee and then we would all have a certain part of it. I would often cook a ham and deviled eggs and whatever was necessary. Others would have specific assignments and then we'd get it all together.

We'd have quite a few parties in Georgetown. Louise Dudgeon, whom I mentioned before, let us use her house. Of course, she came and helped. Sometimes I used to get a caterer through the Cosmos Club. There was a man who had charge of their dining room whose name was Nipson. I would call him for some of the parties. He would send the glasses and everything I needed, and a man, or sometimes a man and a woman, one to handle the bar and one to serve or do whatever was necessary.

Then we would divide the cost between all the officers who had something to do with grantee training. We had a lot of those.

Q: I remember one party I attended at your apartment.

HOPKINS: I did give some of them.

Q: I don't remember whether it was one for the Binational Center or not. I think it was. The curtain caught fire.

HOPKINS: Yes, Dick Wilhelm put it out. Yes, I remember that. That was one of those parties I had at my house.

Q: Is there anything else you think that you'd like to add?

HOPKINS: Well, let's turn it off.

End of interview