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

AMBASSADOR MARILYN JOHNSON

Interviewed by: Ann Miller Morin
Initial interview date: August 4, 1986

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background
- Early Years in Massachusetts
- Woodward School for Girls
- Radcliffe

United States Navy
- Midshipman School at Smith College
- Communications Security
- Counselor at Philadelphia Naval Hospital

Further Schooling
- University of Geneva
- Sorbonne
- Middlebury

Professional Life
- High School French Teacher
- Fulbright Teacher Exchange, Orleans, France

West Africa; Conakry, Douala, Bamako
- Smith-Mundt Grantee
- English Language Services
- USIA appointment

Tunis; Cultural Affairs Officer
- Anti-American Demonstrations
- Personal Position on Viet Nam War
- Foreign Service Inspector

Niger; Public Affairs Officer
- President Diori's Teacher
- Information Center Services

Travels in Africa

Senior Seminar

Soviet Union; Cultural Affairs Officer
- Russian Language Training
- Many American Visitors
- Police Controls
- Limitations on Contacts with Locals
- Exchange Program
- Difficult Negotiations
- Limitations in Political Negotiations
- Effect of Microwaves on Health
- Unhappy Post

Reminiscences

Togo as Ambassador
- Surprise Notification
- Preparations
  - Selection of DCM
  - Senate Hearings
  - Briefings
  - Swearing-in Ceremony
- First Days
  - Presentation of Credentials
  - Relations with President

- Staff
  - Relations with DCM
  - Country Team Meetings
  - Relations with PAO
  - Leader Grants

Operations
- Typical Day
- Grumman Bribery Case
- Refinery
- Anti-government Plots
- Chadienne Revolution
- Development Projects
- Local Politics

- Relations
  - Western Diplomatic Colleagues

Iron Curtain Ambassadors
Chinese Ambassador
Minister of Commerce and Industry
American Businessmen
Visitors

Official Entertainment
Fourth of July Reception
Dinners at Residence

Facilities
Embassy School
Commissary

Agencies
USIS
Peace Corps

Miscellaneous Activities and Comments
Travels Within Country
U.S. Naval Exercise
Educational Exchanges
Selection of DCMs
Integrated Mission

Pakistan; Public Affairs Officer
Three Cultural Centers
Living Conditions
Mountain Climbing
Ruins at Mohenjo-Daro

Washington; USIS Inspector

Retirement
Comments on Achievements

Views on Women in the Foreign Service
No Discrimination
Interest in Women's Movement
Advantage to Being a Woman
Pres. Carter's Interest in Women
Opportunities for Women

INTERVIEW

[Note: Persis Johnson is Ambassador Johnson's sister]

Q: Interview with Ambassador Johnson, Bethlehem, New Hampshire, August 4, 1986.

JOHNSON: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts. As you can see we came from New England. My father was born up in Whitefield and was brought up in this house as a child.

Q: And your mother?

JOHNSON: My mother was born in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales [Great Britain]. Her father came to Boston for reasons of health, and my father, as many young men up in the north country, left Bethlehem to go to Boston to work. They met in Boston. So we have a Welsh part of the family. My father's family was over here before the revolution so they're old New England Yankees. They first settled a town in western Massachusetts.

PERSIS: They came over to the Connecticut River and then came up the valley.

JOHNSON: Came up the Connecticut valley. They settled in a town called Colrain. They had originated in Scotland and stopped off in northern Ireland and evidently there was a town named Colrain in northern Ireland. Then when they came to western Massachusetts, they established a town called Colrain. Then came up the valley and ended up here in Whitefield-Bethlehem area.

JOHNSON: My sister is the expert on what family history...

PERSIS: No, we're not really. We didn't care too much about it.

JOHNSON: We had an aunt who was a little bit proud of her heritage and she thought that she'd be a Colonial Dame. She went into the genealogy of the family and my father said to her, "Watch out, Tussie. You'll find a lot of horse thieves in your ancestors." [Laughter] So we haven't done that. We do know the roots are up here.

Q: Yes, certainly they are, which is a wonderful thing. Now when you say you were born in Boston, do you mean actually in Boston?

JOHNSON: I was born in a hospital in Boston. My family was living in Wollaston at the time.

PERSIS: New England Baptist Hospital.

Q: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: New England Baptist Hospital. But we had lived in Boston. Persis was born in Boston when the family was there and then they moved out to the South Shore. I grew up mainly in Squantum on the peninsula. A lot of swimming and sailing and boating. As you

look back it was an ideal childhood.

Q: I can imagine. And you liked outdoor activities?

JOHNSON: Yes, very much. I still play some tennis and golf. I played some tennis there, but mostly our activities centered around the water. And of course we had a group of young people. I also played baseball and football with the boys and girls. It was really a wonderful, warm community feeling there. Squantum was a small community.

Q: Is that down near Duxbury?

JOHNSON: No, it's off as you go to the South Shore. As you go toward Wollaston there used to be a causeway. It used to be Dennison's airport. I don't know if you ever knew that on the corner. It's developed now. There are a lot of condominiums down there. Because there's a peninsula on Quincy bay on one side and Boston right across from Columbia Point where the John F. Kennedy library is now. It's right across from there. We went there summers, I think, originally and then they winterized the house and we spent the winter there. They also had some houses in Wollaston. So I spent most of my childhood in Wollaston and Squantum.

Q: Were there just you two girls?

JOHNSON: Yes, there had been a brother between us who died when he was a child.

Q: What ages were you when this happened?

JOHNSON: I hadn't been born. Persis was about... How old were you?

PERSIS: About eleven or twelve.

Q: I see.

JOHNSON: He died at five. Then I was born, probably to make up for the loss.

PERSIS: To replace him.

JOHNSON: There's fourteen years difference between you and me? No, there's only twelve years difference between Persis and me.

Q: I understand now.

JOHNSON: Persis had polio when she was fourteen, and has not been able to walk since then, but she's been very active mentally, intellectually... She's the brains of the family.

Q: She's the brains, is she?

JOHNSON: Yes, she is. She does all of the planning and she's a lot more thoughtful. I'm the muscle and she's the brain.

PERSIS: That's not really true. [Laughter]

Q: It sounds as though you have a lovely relationship.

JOHNSON: It's very good. It's symbiotic. Each one does what the other can't do. She does all the writing and the tax forms, and she has since 1970...

PERSIS: Since I joined her.

JOHNSON: Yes, since she joined me. She had kept an apartment in Wollaston when my mother was alive. My father died in 1948. February of '48, I think. We were living in Boston at the time on the Fenway. Then after my father's death, we took a trip out west to visit friends and family and spent, I guess, about six to eight months traveling around and then went back to a home we had had in Wollaston We had that modified so that Persis could get in and out easily. Long, low steps built and the first floor made into an apartment that was convenient for her. She and my mother lived there when I went away to... first, I had... maybe I'm jumping ahead but I had a Fulbright to France, but we can come back to that.

Q: Yes. Getting back to the early days, if I have this correct now, Persis was twelve...

PERSIS: I was almost twelve.

Q: When she was born and your brother had died the year before.

PERSIS: Yes, that's right.

Q: Then two years later you developed polio?

PERSIS: Yes.

Q: Now what effect did this have on the father and the mother as far as bringing you up, the baby?

JOHNSON: It was a shock to them. The death of the son almost broke my mother's heart. She was...

Q: Was this an accident?

PERSIS: Childhood disease, I guess.

Q: A disease. So there's two childhood diseases that hit your family.

JOHNSON: Like rheumatic fever. He had what they thought was rheumatic fever.

PERSIS: They called it rheumatic fever, but it became a complicated thing and in those days they didn't have the things to work with. I remember...

JOHNSON: Very traumatic. I don't remember, of course.

Q: Very traumatic, but I wondered, were your parents very protective, especially where they had one daughter who was so ill and a son...

JOHNSON: I don't think so.

PERSIS: I think they were marvelous.

JOHNSON: As we look back now, they were understanding and let us have freedom. There was never any fear that we... I first recognized this when I went away and was in the WAVES and heard of other family relationships, and the more I heard, the more I appreciated my family. Our parents were wonderful, caring but not over caring. They gave us a sense of responsibility. I think we learned by just looking at them.

Q: You described your activities when you were young. It sounds as though you were a bit of a tomboy.

JOHNSON: Yes, I was. I was a tomboy and they let me do my own thing. I think our mother was advanced for her time. She was one of the first women to have her hair bobbed. She drove a car.

PERSIS: But even before that when she was younger, she went into the business world when she...
Q: Did she?

PERSIS: Yes, she became secretary to a very prosperous firm. She was much more of a companion to my father, in one sense.

Q: Yes, an intellectual companion.

JOHNSON: We weren't intellectuals. We were working people. There was no intellectual. But...

Q: What I meant was that she could share. She wasn't just the housekeeper.

JOHNSON: Far from that.

Q: That's what I meant. They could talk together.

JOHNSON: And as I said, there was a causeway that led out to Squantum and my father

would be coming home on the bus and he'd see my mother pass the bus in the car to get home and set the table so he'd think the dinner was coming. [Laughter]

Q: What sort of work did your father do?

JOHNSON: He was an electrician and was the first man to be licensed as a motion picture operator.

Q: Is that right?

JOHNSON: In Massachusetts.

PERSIS: He went down to Massachusetts to be the coachman for B.F. Keith, the B.F. Keith theater chain because my uncle was the manager of the Boston B.F. Keith theater. The Keiths were wealthy people. They lived on the North Shore and they had coaches. My great-grandfather and grandfather owned the coaches up here that came up through the mountains. My father was very familiar with horses. He went down there to be the coachman and he eventually went to work in the theater and also went to school to learn the trade of electrician, and became an electrician, via B.F. Keith.

JOHNSON: Then a stagehand.

PERSIS: He was a stagehand first and then an electrician At that time the B.F. Keith theater was just variety acts, vaudeville acts. One of the vaudeville things that came was the first motion picture. Being an electrician, he was in charge of cranking. [Laughter]

Q: Isn't that wonderful?

PERSIS: As I say when it became a popular thing he was the first man to receive a license in Boston to be a motion picture operator. And that's what he did all his life.

JOHNSON: He didn't have much education. We found a little certificate of attendance up here that brought tears to our eyes. Because he wasn't allowed to go to school. His father sent him out at 13 to be a cook... was it 13?

PERSIS: I think it was 11 or 12.

JOHNSON: To be a cook in a lumber camp.

PERSIS: His own grandfather's lumber camp. I remember my grandmother telling him the tears were pouring down her cheeks when she would be writing out recipes for him.
Q: That little boy?

JOHNSON: That little boy. The grandfather was what they called “a darling of the street and a devil at home.” Everybody liked him in town. He was a good man about town, but his children hated him.

Q: Was he sadistic?

JOHNSON: Not sadistic, but he just thought of himself first, evidently, and not of the children. He said they were to go to work, not to go to school. That is happening in the developing world. We've seen it so much, but with the girls now. We had a driver in Pakistan that took his girl out of school when she finished, I guess, the primary school. Persis was talking with him one day and he said, she could stay home and help take care of the family. Then I was talking with him and he said "Girls don't need an education." I said, "They do." We persuaded him by helping to pay for transportation and books to keep his girl in school.

PERSIS: She wanted to go.

JOHNSON: Yes, she did. She wanted to go and now we still write to him and he said she's still in and she got very good grades. She caught up for the year she missed. Again, it's something... The parents don't think of the children. They don't think of the girls. They take care of the boys in the Muslim world. But our grandfather didn't think of his son wanting to continue in school. He had to go out and help earn a living.

Q: How much education had your mother had?

JOHNSON: She had gone through high school. She went to secretarial school. Her mother...
PERSIS: No, I don't think so, Marilyn. She took it in high school. Because that, again, was something... She had wanted to continue. She wanted to go to a regular secretarial school and my grandfather, a railway man, would have been perfectly willing for her to, but my grandmother was the stronger of the two and felt that she should go to work. So she went to work. She did very well. She was a business woman.

JOHNSON: As we were growing up, to come back to that, she wasn't in any business as such but they bought houses and fixed them up. I think it started out by them loaning money to relatives and then they would default on a mortgage and they ended up with the property. So she was busy seeing about having the houses fixed up and rented. That was the extent after marriage of her... and after we grew up. When we were growing up I don't think that she was in very much. They tried to better themselves, in the old tradition. They wanted their children to be better off than they.

Q: Exactly. At what age had she come over from Wales?

PERSIS: About five or six. She was very young.

Q: You seem to have had a very expensive education yourself. Radcliffe, Middlebury.

JOHNSON: Yes, they were working people and they worked hard and those were before the days of scholarships.

PERSIS: She was the first person in our immediate family who had gone to college.

Q: How did you happen to choose Radcliffe?

JOHNSON: My sister chose it for me. As you said, I had been a tomboy. I liked sports and during the summer went to camp. I learned to ride and became quite good at riding and I taught riding at Sargent College camp in Peterborough. Was thinking of becoming a physical education teacher. They said, "Fine, but first get a good education." Then there was a course at Wellesley that you could have physical education and a masters degree. So they said get a good education first, and Radcliffe was a good school. I went to Woodward School for Girls in Quincy.

Q: Oh, you did? Was this all through?

JOHNSON: For the four years. I went to high school there. I went to Squantum elementary school and in Wollaston, and then I think one or two years of junior high school in North Quincy. But the four years of high school I went to Woodward.

Q: Is that W-O-O-D-W-A-R-D?

JOHNSON: It used to be Woodward School for Girls and now it the Woodward School, I think.

Q: And where is that?

JOHNSON: It's in Quincy. It was founded by Ebenezer Woodward, who also gave a lot of money to Dartmouth. I don't think he founded Dartmouth, but he was one of the strong supporters of Dartmouth. He left money for a school for the girls of Quincy. You had to be born in Quincy to go to that.

PERSIS: There was an Adams Academy for Boys in Quincy. Apparently he was a forward-looking man for his time and he felt that girls should be educated, too. So he left the funds to found a companion school.

JOHNSON: It was diagonally opposite.
Q: Was this a school where you had to pay a tuition?

PERSIS: No, at that point...

JOHNSON: I think there was a slight tuition, but you had to be born in Quincy.

PERSIS: You had to pay for books.

JOHNSON: It was only girls.

Q: But there was a town high school as well?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. There was North Quincy high school and Quincy high school. This was a school for girls specifically. It was a small school when I went there. I know that I took Latin and there weren't many people who did. The principal... it was in her office across the desk. There was one other girl who took Latin, two of us in the fourth year Latin class. The principal, Katherine Bacon, was a remarkable woman, would give us our Latin class sitting opposite the principal's desk.

Q: Was she somebody you looked up to? Was she perhaps a role model?

JOHNSON: Yes I did. She was a fine woman and well-educated for the time, I guess. I think she had been involved in university. But she was a good steadying influence, I think, on the girls there.

PERSIS: She was beloved by them. She was strict, but they respected and admired her. Marilyn has always felt she had a strong influence on her.

Q: That's very interesting to know. How did you get along with your ambition to become a physical education teacher?

JOHNSON: I guess I lost that along the way. When I graduated in 1944 from Radcliffe, the war was on of course, and I had always liked the Navy. We had a friend of the family who had been in the Navy and I thought he was something, John Tabor. He was from up this way. His mother was a friend of the family up here. I just liked the Navy and when it came an opportunity, the WAVES were formed, I joined the WAVES after graduation. They had a special course. None of us knew what it was about, but they said, would you like to take a special course and go in as a midshipman.

PERSIS: This was when she was at Radcliffe.

JOHNSON: When I was in Radcliffe.

Q: Sort of the way the men did, the V-7 type?

JOHNSON: It was just a special course for people with certain aptitudes. Then I went to Smith for midshipman training. It was the last class of midshipmen. As we marched down the main street of Northampton it was the closing of the school there. Then I, because of this training, went into communications security down in Washington.

Q: Now, what year was this, that you got your commission?

JOHNSON: This was in 1944 when I graduated. I went up and taught writing at Sargent camp and college that summer, then joined the WAVES in October. Graduated as a midshipman in November of 1944. Then was working on something with the Japanese aspect of the war. Then when that finished in 1945, they trained me for guidance work with

people who had been injured in the war. Then the Navy sent me to the Philadelphia Naval hospital where I did counseling for those who were - many were blind - and who had been incapacitated and we tried to help them find the proper training and the proper work for them.

Q: Now this work you had done before, you said that was communications...

JOHNSON: Communications security. It's to do with codes, breaking codes.

Q: That was in Washington?

JOHNSON: That was in Washington out at the Naval security headquarters, which is still there at Ward Circle. You know that little navy chapel? Ward Circle is opposite. It used to be Mt. Vernon College until the war came and then they converted it into naval security headquarters. After the war they combined the Army Signal Corps, the Navy Communications Security, and the Air Force, and created the National Security Agency. This was a precursor.

Q: A precursor of National Security.

JOHNSON: National Security Agency, the Navy part of it.

PERSIS: What she hasn't told you was that her last year at Radcliffe she was one of not very many who was chosen for this course. It was a very, I want to call it secret course, but she wasn't supposed to, and she didn't tell us.

JOHNSON: You're not supposed to talk about that.

PERSIS: We didn't know she was in it until at the end when she was going to go to midshipmen [school]. It wasn't just an ordinary...

Q: No, no, I'm sure of that.

JOHNSON: We didn't even know what it was. They gave us some tests, you know, and they selected certain people.

Q: You've mentioned that the war had an impact on you. Would you develop that a little bit more? How much influence did the war have on your development as a responsible citizen?

JOHNSON: I think that I felt that I was doing my duty and responsibility towards the country. I graduated during the war and to me that was the thing to do, to join a service and also...

Q: Did you follow the war closely?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't follow it. I wasn't fascinated by the war. I think that I was interested in my horses and riding and camp and getting through school. Because I did not know what I wanted to be, I had selected - as a sophomore at Radcliffe you have to select a major at that time - but I didn't want to major in any one thing, I wanted to be able to take courses in any field, so I selected the one possibility that was in the handbook, which was classics and anthropology, and in that way I could take anything in the liberal arts because it was related to the classics part of it, and I could take anything in science that was related to anthropology. As I read now, most people say a general education is much better and I certainly had it.

PERSIS: That was one of the goals we had set for her. Because we felt she was capable of more than being a physical education teacher, that she wouldn't really be satisfied in her life, in that sense. This is one of the things we said, that she could get a good liberal education and then you can build on it. So she was wise enough to choose. But I think the horses had something to do with the schedule, too. [Laughter]

JOHNSON: That's right. There was a Miss Linnington, a British woman. She had a stable, a riding school, out in Milton. It was one where girls from very fine families could come and live and learn how to take care of horses and how to ride. Because I had learned some riding - I think I inherited a love of horses because my great-grandfather had a stagecoach line that ran up through here - that's why they had this house, it was on the road. I've always have liked horses and was able to ride well enough for this Miss Linnington to accept me to come out there and learn. I also cleaned out the stalls and cleaned the horses and took care of the...

PERSIS: All the girls did.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, they all... That was part of the training.

Q: Where was this Miss Linnington?

JOHNSON: It's in Milton. In Milton, Massachusetts. We lived not too far, in Wollaston, so that I would go over there. The girls came from all over the country to live there and learn how to take care of horses, how to ride...

PERSIS: How to breed.

JOHNSON: I was able to get that... They paid a lot of money and I could get it for nothing because I helped out and she, I guess, liked me. As a matter of fact, she left - it must have been about 1943, '42 or '43 - to join the Royal Canadian Air Force. She was a British woman who came over. She trained hunters and she also boarded horses for wealthy people in Milton. So we not only took care of our own horses but those that were owned by other people, and rode them, exercised them, and trained them for them, too. And rode with the children of the wealthy people. We went to the Dedham Hunt Club.

Q: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: When she went to join the Royal Canadian Air Force as a British woman she felt she should - it must have been 1942, earlier in the war - she asked me if I would run the stable. She had a handyman, but she asked if I would run the stable, so I did that part of the time. I'd go out there part of the time. My riding was on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. I wanted to be able to go three days a week there. I was taking some course that ran Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. I guess I had been going to start in science and zoology was Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, the only one that I had on that day, so then I switched to classics. [Laughter]

Q: Couldn't fit it in. I think that's delightful.

JOHNSON: That's right, it was the riding that had a lot to do with it. But it turned out serendipitously that I was able to take everything. I wasn't an outstanding scholar. I was more interested in other things. All my life I've been more interested in the active [things].

Q: Did you ever write for the school paper, for example?

JOHNSON: No, I never did.

Q: Were you in any clubs?

JOHNSON: Maybe we did have a school paper, maybe I did, that's right, come to think of it. I know I started a paper for the alumni of the Russian school at Middlebury when I was there. I never had thought of writing or anything, but they needed an alumni bulletin, so I started that when I was in Amherst. I guess we did have a school paper and I did. Because I remember now going to the print shop. You're bringing back memories, you see. I'd forgotten about this. But we did because that was when I would take it up to be duplicated.

Q: This is Radcliffe?

JOHNSON: No, this was in...

PERSIS: High school.

JOHNSON: At Woodward. I remember putting it out. I was one of the main ones.

Q: There you go, you see.

JOHNSON: I forgot about that.

PERSIS: She never liked to write, that's probably...

JOHNSON: My problem was reports, you know.

Q: And you've had to do so much of it.

JOHNSON: Yes. That's, I guess, the punishment. No, at Radcliffe I had nothing to do with the paper. At Radcliffe most of my time was spent out riding.

Q: Yes, you liked the active pursuits. I can see why.

JOHNSON: I did join the Radcliffe choral society. But then the rehearsals... G. Wallace Woodworth, I don't know if you remember the name?

Q: No.

JOHNSON: He was a wonderful man with a great sense of humor. But the rehearsals took up too much time.

Q: You had to let it go. What part did religion play in your growing up?

JOHNSON: We'd not been a very religious family. I went to Sunday school as a child. There was a church in Squantum where I went to Sunday school, and occasionally my father - I don't remember Mother ever going - but Daddy would go on Easter or so.

Q: Was this the congregational...

JOHNSON: It was the congregational church, yes, in Squantum. We also had an aunt who was a very strong Christian Scientist.

PERSIS: My father's family was.

JOHNSON: Nana was, too, his mother?

PERSIS: Not as strong as Aunt Florence.

JOHNSON: We had an aunt who was a Christian Scientist.

PERSIS: And a great-aunt. Aunt Jewel was a Scientist. So Science was in my father's family, but organized religion played very little part in our lives.

JOHNSON: I think that we were brought up with all of the tenets of religion. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Tolerance. This is another thing that I realized growing up, once I had come into the world. Our family never knew of discrimination in any way. We never heard a racial slur. Nothing was ever said against any race or creed. Our family just accepted everybody and it's the same as a religion. We respect all of the religions and I believe that there is a master, God or Allah or whatever you want to call him. And I believe that we have to act to help our fellow man. We don't accept any one creed as the way to get to heaven and save your soul.

Q: It's just something that is one of the threads that make you up.

PERSIS: It's just part of your character.

Q: It's part of your character, exactly.

PERSIS: We went to Sunday school nearby, but there was no great religious talk about. I always thought that one of the reasons that we perhaps have our outlook, as far as that is concerned, is because we had an in-law who was very dear to us, my one aunt was a strong Roman Catholic, another one was a very strong Christian Scientist, and a third one was a Jehovah's Witness. We also grew up in a family enclave, not that it was wealthy or anything, but there was a triangle.

JOHNSON: My father's family. He had bought a house in Wollaston and his sister built a house next door and his brother bought a house in the back. So it was a little triangle.

Q: I see. You literally mean a triangle?

JOHNSON: We grew up in the kitchens of my aunts, and as Persis said, one was a strong Roman Catholic, the other a strong Christian Scientist...
Q: Wonderful training for a child, isn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes. You just accept them and what they believe in. We came up and spent summers here. My mother didn't like the country. She was a city girl. She'd come up when my father was here, but she said why should she come and work in an old kitchen with nothing to do with? It was no pleasure for her. But Persis and I liked it. The aunts... we would come up with them and open up the house every spring. You know the mice get in and you have to clean house. We would spend the summer opening up the house. Then our father and mother would come up. Our uncles would come and they would spend a week or two and we would spend a lot of time with the aunts. I remember driving both of them, driving one to the Catholic church and one to the Christian Science church in Littleton.

Q: Did you ever go with them to these churches?

JOHNSON: I think occasionally. Sometimes I go into a church, but I find it hypocritical to go on a special day.

Q: Did you have cousins?

JOHNSON: Yes, we had on my father's side only one. His sister had a son. We grew up back and forth right next door to him. In my mother's family, she had a sister who had no children, a younger sister and an older sister who had several children in British Colombia, one girl who was here in Boston, my mother's niece, who was like a cousin to us. She had four sons and one was just about my age. He was...

PERSIS: He was in the Navy.

JOHNSON: He was in the Navy, too. So we grew up with the one son on my father's side

and four sons on my mother's side that were my age. Then we had cousins by my mother's sister on the west coast in Vancouver. That's when we took the trip with our mother in 1948 after our father's death. We visited them, and two other daughters there who would come and visit us.

Q: What about grandparents? You mentioned them before.

JOHNSON: I knew my grandmother from here, but she died when I was quite young. I knew her when she was in Wollaston across the driveway. We had two driveways between the houses. Then between the garages you would go to the other house.

Q: This would be your father's...

JOHNSON: My father's mother. I knew her. I remember holding her hands and the veins on the hands. A kindly, white-haired woman. But she's the only one that I remember. The others had died.

PERSIS: I always felt that was something that she missed because a grandparent's relationship with a child is marvelous.

Q: Oh, yes. And you had obviously experienced that.

PERSIS: I had it. I always felt terrible that Marilyn missed something in life.

Q: It sounds as if you really had an ideal bringing up to represent your country abroad. You had good strong roots and a good warm climate.

JOHNSON: Without being super patriots we felt that we were Americans, and good Americans, and we did our part for the country. I know we
PERSIS: We never thought about it.

JOHNSON: We never thought about it and we were shocked during the war when there was rationing, that people would cheat. I remember some would come up here and buy butter and they would take other people's coupons.

Q: Or go over the line to Canada.

JOHNSON: I never knew that. Just that anybody would do it. Then we always said we never suffered, the Americans have never really suffered, except in loss of life. We don't know. I was breaking up wood the other day. I don't know why, but I began to think about the military, and I was thinking the United States is so fortunate. All of our wars have been on, except for the Civil War, of course, have been on somebody else's soil. We don't know what it is to be a defeated nation. We had a friend last week, a friend came up to visit with another friend from Germany. We have very close friends in Austria. It's a girl that I met when I was skiing in Austria right after the war. She was in training in medical school at the time and took a residency at Boston City Hospital. So she spent a lot of time with us in

Boston. Then when I've been in Europe I've spent time with her family, so her children are like godchildren to us, and when we've been in Europe and in Africa we've always spent Christmas with them. So we have very good friends, Austrians, and Germans. Then I spent a year in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. You know how they feel, and what most impressed upon us is the feeling of the Russians. They talk of the Great Patriotic War and they just... war to them is a terrible experience. A lot of people in the United States today think you go off and you win this country for us and win that country for us. They don't know. They don't really know what war is.

Q: No, no, they don't. They have no conception of how terrible it is.

PERSIS: You mustn't get the impression we talked about these things at home. I mean it was just a sort of part of life. I think that we eventually had to form them in our mind, that this is what had happened to us. There was no talking about being patriotic. It would be the last thing that they would think of.

Q: I wondered if perhaps since your mother had come from England she was terribly concerned over... England was in dreadful trouble.

PERSIS: No, there was no connection. I never felt that.

Q: She had become an American.

JOHNSON: They had family, the Welsh you know. We had cousins and... the Evans... when we were young, I remember all of those names, of the Blodwins, and the Bronwyns, and the Davies and David. We did take a trip when I was in France on a Fulbright. First Persis came over and joined me. I was living in Orleans and then mother came and we drove all through Europe and went to England because she wanted to go in the church in Shrewsbury where her father's family was from. We went through the countryside in Shrewsbury where her father was from and then we drove to Wales to see where her mother's family was from. So she had a little bit of nostalgia to go back. I must say she was a very energetic tourist in wanting to look at the churches and the old places. But I think that they accepted being Americans, without any flag waving, but this is what the normal patriotic person does, without calling it patriotic.

PERSIS: It's just what you did.

Q: Your father had not been involved in the First World War?

PERSIS: No. I think he always felt a little lack there. But he was not in either. He came in between.
JOHNSON: He was too old.

Q: His age was off.

PERSIS: Too young for the first.

JOHNSON: No, he couldn't have been because Uncle Smithy was in the first World War, but he was married, I guess. He had a family and evidently they didn't take him because of that. His brother was not married at the time or he was newly married and no children, so he was in the army. We had cousins over in Littleton. Clark was the family name. We had a cousin on the Clark side who married a doctor who was in the war and died in the war and their son who was a dentist in Littleton spent a lot of time with us while studying dentistry in Boston.

Q: How close were you two? Did your sister have a role to play in what you decided to do?

JOHNSON: Oh, my gosh, all my life. As we said, my mother was interested in getting out of the house. She didn't want to be a housewife.

Q: That's what I wondered.

JOHNSON: And Persis, because of her incapacity, was at home, and this was the time when they had books on bringing up children and she read the books, and she was the one that knew how I should be brought up, I guess. Although when I was young, and probably the reason I have such an easy going-lackadaisical way about me, is that my mother breast-fed me. Now that you realize - especially seeing Africans with children on the backs close to their parents - I was close to my mother for almost two years.

PERSIS: Oh, you weren't a cranky child.

JOHNSON: At least there was reason for my mother to pay a lot of attention to me.

Q: She might have anyway, given the circumstances.

PERSIS: There's nothing like a brother's death.

JOHNSON: So I was secure. I had a lot of security in my childhood and have not developed the angst or anxieties that drive people to ambition. I've never had any ambition, I've just gone along and done things as one thing comes along.

Q: With the feeling of inner security that you could, which is wonderful. Were you your sister's little toy, perhaps?

JOHNSON: As a baby I probably was.

PERSIS: That's right. I remember the church had a baby contest and my mother did keep her beautifully and...

JOHNSON: I was not an attractive child. I've never been a pretty person. But I was well-dressed and neat I guess.

PERSIS: I thought she was beautiful and took her up to the contest and was crushed when she didn't win the prize.[Laughter] I can remember that very clearly. Unfortunately I've probably had a strong influence.

JOHNSON: Fortunately. I think it's a very good thing.

Q: I do, too.

JOHNSON: She has such good ideas.

PERSIS: I had the time in the family. Our people were working people. As you can see, they had had no further education. I don't know whether my father got through the sixth grade or not here before he was put out to work. I had the time and the liking for reading and literature and that sort of thing. I just knew that Marilyn was going to go to college. Where it's by example so much because we had a cousin who, not a real cousin but in the family, that had been kept home by her parents to take care of a smaller sister. We just felt it was such a cruel thing to do. It was one of my ideas that Marilyn must not be sacrificed to stay at home for me. She was going to go to college, as far as I was concerned. We just assumed she was going to college. No ifs, ands, or buts about it.

Q: Why do you suppose that was? It wasn't all that common that girls went to college.

PERSIS: I don't know. I guess because maybe I had been a good student when I was in school. I also had a cousin who was very liberal minded and we were very close to each other. The newspaper we had, although we were not Scientists and my parents had no pretensions to religion, the Christian Science Monitor was the newspaper that came to the house. Things like that. My mother was a great reader. She had a tremendous memory. I suppose... I don't know why.

Q: Had you yourself been to the same girls' school she had?

PERSIS: No, I hadn't. I wasn't born in Quincy, I was born in Boston. We didn't live in Quincy.

JOHNSON: I was born in Boston but we were residing in Quincy at that time. And they were residing in Boston when Persis was born.

PERSIS: I went to the Quincy schools at first. I went to Boston schools and then after the death of my brother, my parents sent me to a private school. Then we moved to Quincy. It was a suburban area.

Q: So you were all determined that your little girl was going to go to college.

JOHNSON: I don't think I was the little girl. I was more the tomboy.

PERSIS: That's right. In fact, when you said did your parents let you do this? - they used to

buy the clothes she wanted and all she ever wanted was boys' clothes.

JOHNSON: I was wearing jeans before they became popular.

PERSIS: It wasn't pressure but you just assumed she was. Let's assume it so that therefore she does well in school.

Q: She mentioned something about you had thought Radcliffe would be a good place for her.

PERSIS: We had an uncle or a cousin, I don't know how close, who was a professor at Carnegie Tech, and I used to talk with him. They came on every summer and spent it with the family. We're a very close family. As I say, my father's family lived close to one another. My mother's family were within a mile or two of us. and we spent a great deal of time with them. We didn't need outsiders to entertain us. As I say, this uncle was the only one that had had further education and we would talk to him and he said to us...

JOHNSON: He went to MIT.
PERSIS: ...she should go to the best school that she can get into. He was the authority. So Radcliffe was the best school.

Q: It certainly is. Had you had to do pass any test to get into this private school?

JOHNSON: No, I don't think so. I think you just had to be...

PERSIS: I'm sure you had to take some kind of a test.

JOHNSON: I can't remember any special test.

Q: You certainly had to to get into Radcliffe?

JOHNSON: Yes, then there was the college board. As a matter of fact, I was up here in New Hampshire. Again I didn't want to have the scholastic interfere with my life and so I arranged to have the test taken over here. [laughter] There was a school, St. Mary's of the Mountains.

Q: Oh, I remember that.

JOHNSON: Remember that one? And they gave the college board there. So I said I was going to be up in New Hampshire and I might as well take it over at St. Mary's in the mountains.

Q: Can you remember any books you read as a child?

JOHNSON: The Bobbsey Twins. Nothing of classic. I think I had to read the classics but the ones that I liked were the Bobbsey Twins and Rusty of the Tall Pines, you know.

Q: What about the Nancy Drews?

JOHNSON: No, I don't remember them.

Q: What about the boys' equivalent? What were they?

PERSIS: No, neither one of us.

JOHNSON: I remember reading Alice in Wonderland and thinking how silly, she's going down in a hole. There used to be a woodchuck hole out here, and I was trying to visualize going down in the woodchuck hole.

Q: You thought the book was kind of silly?

JOHNSON: I don't think I got beyond her going down a hole [Laughter]. I was too realistic. Not much imagination. Later on I read it and found more things in it.

Q: Were you an early reader?

JOHNSON: I don't know. They subscribed to the "St. Nicholas" magazine for me. There was a child's magazine, "St. Nicholas."

Q: Oh, yes, sure, I remember that.

JOHNSON: I probably read things. I remember when I was a teenager I wanted to read all the time, but I was reading novels at that time.

PERSIS: Much to the concern of an aunt, she was reading Gone with the Wind.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, I remember Gone with the Wind when it first came out. The aunt thought this was terrible that they would let me read books like that. But nobody ever said you should read this or don't read that. I went to the library and took out books.

Q: Just took out what you wanted. Did you have any hobbies when you were young?

JOHNSON: No, mostly sports. As I say, there was a group of young people. We did things together.

PERSIS: Played tennis.

JOHNSON: Tennis, swimming, riding. I remember when the ice came on the bay, we'd go out.

Q: Large group of friends you played with?

JOHNSON: Probably not. They were mixed boys and girls. There were probably about six or eight. It must have been enough. We would gather other friends, enough to make up two baseball teams.

Q: Now you say you weren't a good student, is that true?

PERSIS: No, it's not true.

Q: It's not true.

JOHNSON: I was normal. I never studied much.

PERSIS: She never studied.
JOHNSON: I never would study until the last minute and I was able to get through.

PERSIS: She got very good grades in school.

JOHNSON: I probably was on the honor roll.

PERSIS: But she wasn't high honors. But she doesn't like to study.

JOHNSON: No, I would do the least amount of studying and, as I say, I chose classics and anthropology for the breadth and the scheduling of it. Then in the beginning of my senior year, he was looking through the rules for graduation and he found that if you choose classics and anthropology, you are of necessity an honors candidate. I had said no, I didn't want to go out for honors because I was doing other things. So I suddenly had to study for honors and write a dissertation. There was special work.

Q: You did?

JOHNSON: Yes. And I snuck through.

PERSIS: She had some very good tutors and some excellent teachers.

JOHNSON: Clyde Kluckohm I don't know if you know the anthropologist who happened to be the tutor that I had for anthropology. There was an old one they called “philology,” now it's “linguistics.” There was an old philologist, Joshua Whatmough.

Q: How do you spell that?

JOHNSON: W-H-A-T-M-O-U-G-H. He was at Harvard and he was a real intellectual, a purist in the old sense, a classicist.
PERSIS: I remember her saying that he influenced her probably more at Harvard than anyone else at the school. She had great respect for him.

JOHNSON: I think we were translating Ovid or Catullus or something one time and he

came across what the Latin amount of money was, and it was like two cents. He said, "What can you buy for two cents?" I said, "A stick of gum." He said, "Better not bought."

PERSIS: What was the other one, Marilyn? I remember her last year in school, she said...

JOHNSON: Hooten, Ernest Hooten the physical anthropologist.

PERSIS: She had to take her orals before him, I think. She said really if you were smart you could figure out where the next big push is coming by the people who leave from the anthropology department to brief the military on what they should expect from the population.

JOHNSON: Carleton Coon was a specialist...

Q: You knew Carleton Coon?

JOHNSON: Yes, he was a professor, the father of the ambassador [Carleton Coon, former ambassador to Nepal and husband of Jane Abell Coon, former ambassador to Bangladesh, whose oral history is part of this project]. He was a specialist on tribes in the Rif mountains in Morocco and was called up.

Q: That's why he was down there, of course. In fact he was in the OSS. That's fascinating, that comment that you could predict the war.
PERSIS: No, you couldn't predict the war.

Q: But you really could, in a way. So we've got you in the Waves.

JOHNSON: And then out of the Waves. I left the Waves in September of 1946. Then I was at home for a while and I wanted to go to school overseas. I've always also wanted to travel. The GI bill was available and I thought, well, with the anthropology, I would try to follow that up. I had wanted to continue in social anthropology. Looking through the schools available overseas, I found there was a school of international studies in Geneva, L'Institut des Hautes Etudes Internationales. I had thought that would be someplace where I could study cultural anthropology, but I got over there and found it was political science, and I had had no courses in political science... I'd had one course in political science, I guess, as an undergraduate.

PERSIS: Also you wanted to ski. That's why she chose Switzerland. [Morin laughs]

JOHNSON: I like skiing, too.

Q: Isn't that funny.

JOHNSON: So I went over to Geneva. First of all, I didn't have enough French. I had taken French at Radcliffe for the language test, a written language test. But I wasn't good enough in speaking. I took a quick course at Berlitz before I went over, but I realized I didn't have

the language and I didn't have the specialty of political science.

PERSIS: May I interject here, because I think this is a little anecdote that is typical of Marilyn and perhaps is a clue to her. At the time of her graduation from college, she said to us a week or two or sometime before, "I had to do this thing for honors and so therefore I'm not going to graduate, probably." So she said, "We'll go to the graduation and they will give me a rolled-up paper so as not to embarrass you, but don't think that... I probably am not going to graduate." We said, "Fine."

Q: Had she convinced you this was going to happen?

PERSIS: Yes. Absolutely. If she said something you believed it.

JOHNSON: I didn't think the dissertation I wrote was any good.

PERSIS: As I say, if Marilyn said something you accepted it because she knew what she was doing. Anyhow we went to the graduation and she graduated with honors. I could have killed her. But I can remember my parents saying before, "That's all right darling. You'll just be home with us another year. You can take another year at Radcliffe, and you'll just be with us another year. We liked having you at home."

Q: They'd be charmed. Isn't that something? She graduated with honors.

PERSIS: I can remember that. But it's typical. It's something that is a clue to her.

Q: It certainly is. Well, what did you do?

JOHNSON: I ended up traveling and skiing. I did a lot of skiing in Switzerland and then traveled, took a cruise through the Mediterranean. Didn't do much studying. I had some friends there too. One was going off to study in Paris. I remember one morning I had a bicycle and we lived on a hill and I was pedaling to class and skidded and fell and I said, "I don't want to go to class anyway." So I went back to the pension where I was staying and heard 'Paris in the Spring,' the song on the radio, and I said, "Oh, I'll go to Paris." So I signed up for the French civilization course at the Sorbonne and transferred from the University of Geneva to the Sorbonne. Didn't do much more studying there. They had special trips for Americans, for foreigners, to go to the Cote d'Azur and the Champagne country. I had a group of friends that I traveled with. Was probably not going to finish up there, but then my father became ill. He had a heart attack. They wrote and said, "Don't change anything, but you should know." We have a very close friend who married a doctor and they're part of the family now. Their children are our godchildren. He said to Persis, I guess, "You'd better write and tell Marilyn that your father is ill." So the minute I got word that he was ill, I flew home and we came up here for the summer. He was ill and then he had another stroke and we took him to the Littleton hospital. At that time we were living in Boston on the Fenway. He and my mother, I remember, went down in the ambulance. Persis and I drove down. I stayed at home to help take care of him for a year. Then after he died... our mother was not too well. She had had some problems. She thought it was her

back and her shoulder and it turned out eventually to be her gallbladder. But we took the trip out west and she had a gallbladder attack when we were staying with these friends in Salt Lake city. That kept us there for a month or so. After the experience there and after our father's death, as I said earlier, we moved from the Fenway back to the house in Wollaston. We fixed up the first floor for Persis.

Q: So you commuted then to Radcliffe?

JOHNSON: From the Fenway, yes.

Q: Then you moved from Fenway back to Wollaston.

JOHNSON: Back to Wollaston..

Q: Now this was the house that was in the triangle.

JOHNSON: In the triangle, right, where the family was.

Q: How did it happen that you had moved back to Boston? Your father's work took you there, did it?

PERSIS: No, they owned a piece of property in Boston and it needed renovation and so forth. My mother was in there and father, part time too, taking care of it and she was taken very ill, was taken to the hospital and was operated on. We just left the house in Wollaston and went into this big house in Boston and just stayed there until she got on her feet again. Then I guess they had rented the house in Wollaston in the meantime. She decided she wanted to live in Boston [but] she didn't like the location. It wasn't suitable as a family home. So she went out and found a very beautiful apartment on the Fenway.

JOHNSON: It was on the first floor, so it was easy for Persis.

PERSIS: It was very nice because we were in Boston and we could do the things that...

JOHNSON: It was right near Symphony Hall and the Opera House.

PERSIS: That's another thing Marilyn always had, that part of a background. My father was in the theater so we went to the theater, not just the movies. We went to plays in Boston. Boston at that time was the try-out town.

Q: Yes, indeed.

PERSIS: We always had that.

Q: You went to all of those.

PERSIS: She used to go to the Friday afternoon symphonies

JOHNSON: Stand in line for the seat. Fifty cent seat, we used to get on a Friday afternoon. It was a rehearsal, I think.

PERSIS: Friday afternoon concert.

Q: Had you ever played an instrument yourself?

JOHNSON: No, I never did. I guess I took a few piano lessons at one time, but I never played.

PERSIS: She had guitar lessons.

JOHNSON: That's right, I had a friend. He was going to play the Hawaiian guitar and I was going to play the Spanish guitar.

Q: You had a large group of friends in Paris, too, I believe that's where...

JOHNSON: Yes, I did.

Q: You knew Perry Stieglitz there?

JOHNSON: Yes. How did you know about Perry Stieglitz?

Q: He told me.

JOHNSON: You've been talking to Perry?

Q: Yes, I was talking to him about another ambassador. He said, "By the way, I know Marilyn Johnson." I said, "How do you know her?" "I knew her in Paris when we were both students."

JOHNSON: That's right. We were both so-called students. He and Larry Morgan, the three of us, would travel around. We went to the Riviera together and up to the Champagne country, to Rheims and Epernay.

Q: He's a big fan of yours.

JOHNSON: Oh, is he?

Q: He's a big fan of yours.

JOHNSON: I'd like to see him. I saw him and Moon after he came back. I stopped off in Paris because he joined... We paralleled each other a lot. We were both studying in Paris at the same time.

PERSIS: And he wrote a play about Marilyn, too, one of the plays that he wrote.

Q: Is that so? He didn't tell me that.

JOHNSON: I don't remember that.

PERSIS: I remember. I was very impressed. He was a student in Paris, and he'd gone to live in a garret and so forth.

JOHNSON: He didn't live in a garret. He lived at the Fondation des Etats-Unis.

PERSIS: But then he did go and take a small garret apartment.

JOHNSON: Maybe he stayed on there, that's right.

Q: You have to. It's de rigueur.

JOHNSON: That's right. And I knew a Romanian and a Hungarian. One was a composer who now is in the United States and he gave me a score that he wrote "To Marilyn" and then drew a picture of the tennis court where we used to play tennis, doubles at tennis.

Q: And your French got good?

PERSIS: Yes.

Q: Your French got very good?

JOHNSON: It didn't get good. That was the thing. I was off having a good time traveling with Americans and all the Frenchmen wanted to practice their English on us. So I came back and after the year at home, after we had redone the house... I did a lot of the paper work. I papered the house and painted the inside. Put in electrical...

Q: Did you?

JOHNSON: We had a contractor doing the furnace and the main kitchen, doing over the kitchen, but he helped me and I wired some fluorescent lights. We had indirect lighting. I did a lot of the interior work.

Q: This was when your father was ill?

JOHNSON: This was after he died. And after we went - we're back picking up where we left off there. Went back to Wollaston and fixed the apartment up there so that it would be convenient and modernized for my mother and Persis. Then when it was ready and I could leave them, I applied for Middlebury, once again for the skiing. I had gone to a city college and I wanted a typical New England college.

PERSIS: Not too far away from us.

JOHNSON: Not too far from Boston.

Q: So this was around 1950 or so?

JOHNSON: This was 1951, it must have been. No, it must have been about 1950, that's right. I went to summer school. I wanted to continue anthropology. Once again, this is how things change. Middlebury fit the bill for being a small New England college, not too far from Boston, and where there was good skiing, but it didn't have a department of anthropology at the time. French was their specialty. So I said, "I'll go and get a master's in French." So I went for the summer to take the French course and then spent a year and got my master's in French in 1952 from Middlebury.

Q: Good for you. Serendipity seems to play a large part in your life, doesn't it?

JOHNSON: It does. All my life. That's the name of my life. There I learned the French that I didn't learn in Paris because you sign a pledge that you will speak only the language that you are studying for six weeks while you're there. Again, you know, I'm very naïve, even in my old age. I believe when there are rules you're supposed to obey them. That was a rule, and I know I was going out with a fellow who was quite good in French. We'd go off to Middlebury tavern - in the middle of the hotel they had a tavern downstairs - on Saturday night and everybody would go and drink beer and he would speak English [and I spoke French].
So I was at Middlebury and I got my master's in French. But the year that I was up there for the full year, I took an elementary course in Russian because I had studied a little bit of Russian. Did I study it when I was in the WAVES or what?

PERSIS: Yes, then you went the year you were at home with Daddy...

JOHNSON: That's right. I took it when I was in Boston. I took some adult education courses at Harvard. It wasn't a regular Harvard course.

Q: University extension, perhaps?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was university extension courses. So I did take some Russian there.

PERSIS: But you had started in the Navy, I think, Marilyn.

JOHNSON: I think I started in the Navy. I can't remember how or why because we weren't working with Russian at all. Maybe it wasn't the first year, maybe it was the second year course. Anyway while I was up there at Middlebury there was a very fine professor of Russian who was a friend as well as a teacher. He happened to be there for just one year when Misha Fayer, the regular professor, was on sabbatical. He said that if I wanted they could make an exception. With just one year of Russian they would let me into the summer school because I wanted to continue. Middlebury is a lovely spot and I had started to... Again, I played a lot of tennis up at Middlebury and had gone to the Breadloaf writers'

conference at the end of the [term], not as a writer but as a waitress. I met the secretary of the schools, of the summer schools. She became a friend and she said, "Why don't you come up and if you like it here you can go up to Breadloaf? It's a lovely spot and I waited on table. You're with the John Ciardi, Richard Wilbur." The other day they had something on Katherine Anne Porter. She was there and of course Robert Frost lived on a farm next door. Theodore Morrison was head of the school at the beginning and then John Ciardi. So I would go for the two weeks of the Breadloaf writers' conference after the Russian school. It started out after the French school, then after the Russian school.

So I went to the Russian school that first year and it was terribly hard. I had to study, study, study all the time because everybody else knew so much more.

Q: This was summer school?

JOHNSON: Summer school.

Q: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Then I went for another year. I had avoided working all my life, as you can see. I was about 28 then, I think. The friend who was a secretary of the school said, "Marilyn, you've got to keep up your GI Bill to keep coming up here in the summer time. You have to have a job, and one that would allow you to do this would be teaching."

PERSIS: You said, "No."

JOHNSON: I never knew what I wanted to be when I grew up but there was one thing I knew I didn't want to be, and that was a teacher. I wasn't enthusiastic about it. Evidently Middlebury must have had some schools that let them know they were looking for teachers.

PERSIS: When you went to school there, you could put in for a job.

JOHNSON: I think the schools probably let Middlebury know.

Q: A job bank, maybe.

PERSIS: Marilyn didn't put her name in.

JOHNSON: No, I didn't put my name down.

PERSIS: She didn't want to teach.

JOHNSON: But this friend, Margaret Hopkins, who was the secretary of the schools, said that the Amherst Regional High School in Amherst was looking for a French teacher.

PERSIS: Marilyn had come home and we had come back up here. The telegram came to

Wollaston and so mother contacted us and it said to get in touch with them immediately. So Marilyn did call Margaret Hopkins and she said, "Marilyn this ideal job has come in." This was in October after the start of the school year. "This ideal job has come in and we want you to go over and apply for it." So Marilyn said to me, "I feel obligated because I didn't put my name in for employment there, they have asked me to do this." By then we had gone home and we drove up to Amherst.

JOHNSON: See, she has a much better memory than I.

PERSIS: I remember Marilyn went in for the interview and she came out all smiles. She said, "I won't get it. They've got men applicants and they want men now in high schools." We went home and I think in a day they called her and said, "Come immediately. The French teacher there was leaving unexpectedly to join her husband who'd gone somewhere. But she was only leaving temporarily," she said.

JOHNSON: Yes, for one year.

PERSIS: So Marilyn went up "temporarily."

Q: Temporarily for five years.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right. I went temporarily and then they said they wanted me to stay. Amherst is a lovely community. At that time there was an outstanding, exceptionally fine principal, Kingsley Perry. He was a man... I guess you would call him a renaissance man, in a way. He had gone to Harvard Law School and wasn't particularly good at making money, I think, but he had also acted in plays at Harvard and was in a group down on the Cape with Henry Fonda and Margaret Sullivan. So he had had some acting. He was very, very interested in the theater. In fact, we used to drive down to Boston. We joined the, he and his wife and I, joined the Theater Guild. They would drive down and I would be in Boston. We'd go to the theater down there. He was a gourmet at the time before it became fashionable.

Also I was interested in French cooking. That was when the $64,000 dollar question was on. There was a French meal somebody had to identify, the wine and all. He said, "Let's create this French meal, where we had to make quenelles, all fancy foods and get the right wines. Kingsley Perry and Justine and I did that and invited some of our friends for the $64,000 meal. He was a fine person.

PERSIS: He had been a successful lawyer but had given it up to go into education.

JOHNSON: He had also married a wealthy woman so he didn't need to make a lot of money. They had a fine family up there. He died, but we remained friends with the wife. There was a very good group of people teaching in Amherst at the time. There you had the advantage of Amherst college and Smith college. I took courses at Smith college in philosophy and French, I think. French philosophy. Did I take a Russian?

PERSIS: You had to take some education ones which you always felt was a waste of time.

JOHNSON: That's right. To be certified for the state board.

Q: Was it at Smith you did that?

JOHNSON: I did that at Smith. While I was at Radcliffe I went to the Harvard School of Education and took courses in educational psychology and the history of education and methods, I think. Or maybe I took the methodology up there. I had taken the education courses because I was thinking of going to Wellesley for the physical education part.

Q: So that put you ahead, sure.

JOHNSON: Well, it was so simple. I never believed in education courses because without doing any work I came out with As in them. But then I did take some education courses for the certification at Smith. But I took some French philosophy courses too. Then I taught at Amherst from '52 until 1960 and I had applied for a Fulbright. I received a teaching exchange.

PERSIS: It became a sister town to Orleans, remember? You became a sister town...

Q: Amherst was?

JOHNSON: No, it wasn't. Arcachon. Amherst was a sister town to Arcachon.

PERSIS: I see.

JOHNSON: But actually I was sent to Orleans.

PERSIS: But the other person came over here, Marilyn.

JOHNSON: Yes, but she didn't come from there. She came from Moulon. There was no connection.

PERSIS: But I mean you were exchanged, in a sense.

JOHNSON: Yes a French teacher came from Moulon to teach the year that I was at the Lycée Jeanne d'Arc in Orleans. She was teaching my course in Amherst. It was a Fulbright teacher's exchange.

Q: And this was what year?

JOHNSON: This was in 1957-'58.

PERSIS: What was strange was that she was still in Amherst. The teacher whose place she had taken wanted to come back and wrote to Marilyn that it was her job. So Marilyn said to

the people at the school, she's ready to come back. They said, We're the one who chooses the teacher here, not you."

Q: So Marilyn had done such a good job that she...

PERSIS: Yes, she worked with the young people there. She was the advisor to the class. She's very good with young people.

Q: And you skied in the winter and you tennised all summer?

JOHNSON: Then I played golf. At Amherst I played golf.

PERSIS: She exercised some horses there, too.

JOHNSON: There was a woman, a professor at Smith who had a horse that needed some exercise, so I'd go riding through the countryside.

Q: How did you enjoy your year at Orleans?

JOHNSON: Very much. It was very interesting and different school environment, of course. I lived at the beginning in the old, old part of town near the Cathedral and not too far from the school. It was called the Rue des Sept Dormants.

Q: The seven sleepers?

JOHNSON: Sleeping Men. Because I think in one of the Middle Ages wars there were seven people in little cachots there that were killed in their sleep, or something. But it was an area where Joan of Arc's chief lieutenant came from. Of course, everything is Joan of Arc in Orleans. It was a lovely experience living with a French couple that had a house. It was a very narrow one. The first floor was just like a kitchen and living room. Then I had the second floor which had been, evidently, the dining room. There was a lovely big fireplace. Next to it was a bedroom with another big fireplace. They would bring me breakfast in bed. There was a bakery across the street and I would have big fresh croissants. I enjoyed that. Then Persis wrote that she was coming over in spring, so I was fortunate. I had made friends with some French people. They told me of an apartment overlooking the Loire that was available. So I sublet that. I guess I rented it because there was no furniture. I had makeshift furniture. I had an apartment, a two-bedroom apartment overlooking the Loire when Persis came. It was beautiful. Then a friend of ours, the Austrian girl, the doctor, had had ulcers and she was ill, so she came to stay with us and we would take trips every weekend, going to the countryside. Thursday was the day off.

Q: "Vive jeudi." What were you teaching?

JOHNSON: I was teaching English. English as a foreign language. The French teacher who taught English in France was teaching French in my class. I taught French at Amherst. So I was teaching English as a foreign language there.

Q: Did you find that quite a change of pace to turn everything around that way?

JOHNSON: I didn't find much change really. It was interesting because I was teaching some beginners and then the baccalaureates, the most advanced, and to see how hard they studied for that baccalaureate. The students studied a lot harder in France than they did at Amherst.

Q: What method did you use? Was it the total immersion method?

JOHNSON: No, it can't be total immersion. We had to follow the French textbook. That was sacred. You follow their textbook. But I would bring in... I brought some Harry Belafonte records and got them to singing songs and making it a little bit more interesting for them.

Q: Do they lean pretty heavily on the grammar?

JOHNSON: Yes, and their traditional way is by rote and memorizing.

Q: Exactly, that's not the way it's taught as a second language in most places.

JOHNSON: No, that's right. I was teaching French by the French book actually. I mean English by the book that the French had for learning English. I had to make sure that they would pass a test, but also I was trying to teach them to be able to speak it and use it in everyday life.

Q: Were you teaching all through high school back in the States?

JOHNSON: Yes, the three grades, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth. Over there it was premiere, which is the last year before the baccalaureate, and deuxième, troisième. I guess quatrième. I had some beginners, some intermediate, and then the advanced ones preparing for the baccalaureate.

Q: You then got a feeling for the pressure that the French students face?

JOHNSON: Yes. I saw how they have to make it. If they don't study hard early on then they get off onto a track which will not lead them to the baccalaureate and to the university and to the grandes écoles. I could see the advantages of the French system of academic excellence and I could see the disadvantages in that their whole life is centered on passing an examination. You'd like to learn but the main thing is to pass that examination and to get accepted in the right schools, which is the same thing that is going on in Japan today. Right from kindergarten you're supposed to get into the right school that will take you to the right university.

PERSIS: They're starting here, too. They're starting pre-kindergarten.

Q: They're putting them in kindergarten.

PERSIS: Pre-kindergarten.

JOHNSON: It's so silly. You know there's a happy medium. I think we had become too lax in the United States with all of our extra-curricular activities, but they were too strict. They didn't have any extracurricular activities, and you should have some.
Q: You were very well established as a teacher. Did you think of making that your life's work?

JOHNSON: As you had said earlier, serendipity has been the motor for my life. I've gone from one thing to another, and I was enjoying it. As long as I enjoyed what I was doing, then I was happy to do that. But also I like to travel, so when I went back to Amherst... You promise that you will go back and teach for two years if you accept the Fulbright, so after the two years I wrote and asked for another Fulbright. We had a friend who was Finnish, was very impressive, a highly intelligent person, and he kept talking about Finland and how wonderful it was. I applied for a grant to Finland. I received word from the State Department - it was still the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs that ran it at the time - that there was no Fulbright in Finland that was open. However they had a Smith-Mundt grant for developing countries and there was an opportunity to go to Guinea, a French speaking country, and teach English as a foreign language at Lycée de Jeunes Filles in Guinea, in Conakry. I had had not followed the evolution of independence in Africa. I knew what it was because of the French connection and I knew de Gaulle's policy, and I knew what happened to Guinea when it voted "no" to join in the French union that de Gaulle was trying to organize. But I had never been interested in Africa, especially.

PERSIS: It wasn't particularly well-known at that time, was it?

Q: No. It wasn't.

PERSIS: I can remember her great aunt saying, "What does she want to go to Africa for?"

Q: It's true everybody just thought of it as that black jungly place.

JOHNSON: Yes, Tarzan type. So I went to Conakry and...

PERSIS: And Marilyn, in the meantime you had gotten into the Experiment, the International Experiment.

JOHNSON: That's right. When I was up in Amherst I was living in a... A woman had a house that she rented to teachers. We each had a room and we shared a kitchen. A group of teachers from Amherst, high school teachers, and elementary school teachers. One girl had been with the Experiment in International Living. I had as a child gone on a youth hostel bicycle trip through western Massachusetts and up into southern New Hampshire.

PERSIS: In fact you were going to go to Europe when the war broke out in '39.

JOHNSON: That's right.

PERSIS: It was going on a hostel trip.

JOHNSON: That had always been something that I was interested in also, and she said why don't you see... They need leaders for groups. So I guess I wrote to the Experiment and they said yes, they would like to have me and come up for an orientation session. I would lead a group to Switzerland first of all. Then we found when we got there that our host was in Schaffhausen. So the summer of 1960 I led a group of girls. We didn't bicycle but we took the ship across and then the train to Geneva and then to Schaffhausen where we were met by our families. Each girl lived with a different family. Of course there were some problems, but we ironed them out. A very fine man was the father of the co-leader, of the Swiss leader. We did some mountain climbing. Not too much, but I did some repelling.

Q: Did you really?
JOHNSON: On the sheer cliff of the rock hanging down.

Q: So you started mountain climbing and repelling?

JOHNSON: That's right. I just did one... When I looked up I saw the rope was going back and forth on this jagged rock. It wasn't very well positioned.

PERSIS: I remember her writing home that she'd always thought that mountain climbers were crazy and now she was one of them. [Laughter]

JOHNSON: When I was a camper at Sargent camp every year we had to climb Mount Monadnock, and that I thought was kind of silly. But no, I did some trekking in Pakistan and loved it.

Q: Did you camp every summer as a child?

JOHNSON: No, most of my summers were spent right on the water. The house was here and then there was a dirt road and across the street was the beach.

PERSIS: We left that and were going to Wollaston. We had to be there in the summer. We realized that this was going to be a big change for Marilyn, about 15 years old. We thought of her. The daughter of the man my father worked with was interested in Sargent summer camp.

JOHNSON: She worked at Boston University and they did the publicity for it. I think that was it.

PERSIS: The idea came why not go to Sargent summer camp? They'd have her outdoor activities and something to do during the summer, so that's how she went to Sargent. She went for two or three years as a camper and then they asked her to come as a counselor.

Q: I see, two or three years.

JOHNSON: That was where I started riding seriously. There was a man that became a friend, a Russian emigré, a White Russian. He had been a Cossack. Nicholas Yanoff, Colonel Yanoff, who had been from a very good family and then went out through China. I remember him telling the story of several of the emigrés who were in China. They had one decent pair of pants, so only one of them go out at a time and do shopping and get the things. But he made it here.

Q: So your horizons were broadening all the time? You were experiencing other countries, other people...

JOHNSON: That's right, and who knows that Colonel Yanoff being Russian may have had something to do with my interest in Russian as well as the Navy. I think the Navy wanted to train some people to have the Russian language.

Then under him I started the riding and then when he was not going to go up they asked if I would teach riding. I guess I taught under him one year and then replaced him. I ran the stables and the riding program for the college. The students from Sargent college would come in June and September and then the summer campers were there in July and August. I taught the college students as well as the summer campers. That's when I was in college.

Q: You had a lot of teaching experience, didn't you, one way or the other?

JOHNSON: One way or the other. By hook or by crook.

Q: Which you didn't want to do.

JOHNSON: No.

Q: Did you enjoy it? You must have enjoyed it, you know.

JOHNSON: I enjoyed it, yes. If there are just one or two students in a course that you can reach and feel that you're imparting something as well as the subject matter, then that's enough of a feeling of satisfaction. You get a wonderful feeling of flow back and forth when you teach.

PERSIS: In fact, there's this one person who writes to us. [Marilyn] never answers, but she writes these long letters.

JOHNSON: She had gone on to be in French, too.

Q: Is that so? She used you as a role model?

JOHNSON: Evidently.

PERSIS: But also Michelle from France, who said you changed her life.

Q: Tell me about that.

JOHNSON: Well, I don't know, but she was a student at the Lycée Jeanne d'Arc in Orléans. She came from a very fine family, her father was a general in the army. They had a large family. I remember they invited me to lunch and dinner. They wanted to know who their daughter's teacher was, I guess. Then she came to the United States and met a man and married and is now an American citizen.
Q: Oh, really? Yes, indeed it changed, didn't it?

JOHNSON: Then I went to Guinea in 1960. That's right, I had to come home early. I made arrangements for somebody else to come back with the group from Switzerland and then I flew home and got ready to go off to Guinea.

Q: That was 1960?

JOHNSON: Yes. The summer of 1960 I led the group for the Experiment in International Living and then in September went to Conakry, Guinea. While there they asked if I could help out USIS [United States Information Service]. We had a cultural center in Conakry. I helped teach the classes for adults that they had, as well as teaching a full load at the Lyceé de Jeunes Filles. You're part of the community, part of the American community.

PERSIS: As you well know.

JOHNSON: Met some friends there that have continued. One fellow will be coming up here next week. He was teaching under a different program out in the far-off district of N'Zerekore Whenever any of the English teachers that were there under another private program for providing English teachers would come in to Conakry - I had an apartment in Conakry - they would all stay at my apartment. Some of those friends have lasted. I've lost track of several, but this one fellow... Again it's like Perry, our careers have pretty much moved along in the same track from studying abroad, from teaching English, to USIA [United States Information Agency], and now to retirement.

Q: Again you were teaching...

JOHNSON: I was teaching English as a Foreign Language.
Q: And also at USIS.

JOHNSON: And at USIS, yes, to adults.

PERSIS: The Smith-Mundt grant.

JOHNSON: It's a form of Fulbright. A special one for developing countries. The person who was in charge of the English language programs at USIS was there under a private

company called English Language Services [ELS], Marie Gadston; I don't know if you ever met her.

Q: No, but I've had close connections to ELS.

JOHNSON: Then I realized they made a lot more money and were doing interesting things. After the year in Guinea though, Mother became ill, I think.

PERSIS: The year before you went to Guinea you had applied to go to the Russian Institute at the University of Illinois. You got a scholarship, a well-paid scholarship. Then you decided you preferred going to Guinea. Then you applied for it again. You had to go back and teach at Amherst, I think, didn't you?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't. After Guinea I didn't. Because I think I resigned in 1960. I resigned to take that. Because it wasn't an exchange, it wasn't a teaching exchange. I resigned from Amherst in 1960.

PERSIS: They were going to have a Russian department in Amherst so she applied for a scholarship and as I say she preferred going somewhere this year and applied again and got it. But I can't remember why she didn't go that time.

JOHNSON: I think I came home after one year. It was a one-year trip. Wasn't mother ill? Didn't I have to come back and stay at home in 1961? I was there from September '60. Then I met Birgit, our Austrian friend. Birgit and I traveled.

PERSIS: That was another time. That was the Cameroon family.

JOHNSON: Yes that was from the Cameroon. But this time I met her and we went to Yugoslavia. We drove down with Margaret to Yugoslavia.

Q: So that was the summer?

JOHNSON: That was the summer of '61. Then I came home. On my way home I stopped off and visited a friend from Austria and we went to Yugoslavia. Then I came home and I think mother was ill. There was some reason I had to stay at home.

PERSIS: She had the operation.

JOHNSON: She had another operation and was ill and I had to be there. So for the year '61 to '62 I was at home and I tell you one unpleasant teaching experience was as a substitute teacher in Quincy High School. They had me teaching Spanish. I'd taken some Spanish but I didn't really know it. And the discipline! The difference in the type of student that you had in Amherst. I was lucky because I was in French. They didn't have to take French. They took it because they wanted to and if somebody was in the class that wasn't interested in it I would just say, "Why don't you leave? We don't need you." But in Quincy, they were there because they have to be there and you're a substitute teacher so they're going to take

advantage of you. I would never want to be a teacher in a situation like that. But I did substitute teaching while I was at home that year. Then I had learned about English Language Services so I applied for a position with them and they had an opening. I know there was one I wanted to go to.
PERSIS: Mogadishu.

JOHNSON: No, no, it was Tananarive [Antananarivo], Madagascar. But my mother was still ill and I couldn't go at that time. But then they said they had another one in Cameroon. First I went to Yaounde because that's where the cultural center was. They were planning to open a center in Douala, which is the principal port city, it's not the capital, but it's a larger commercial city. They wanted me to do that. So I went with the cultural affairs officer from Yaounde down to Douala to see the building, and to negotiate for it, and look into the possibility of setting up courses.

PERSIS: Because she could speak French.

Q: This was to open up.

JOHNSON: This was to open up. But I wasn't with USIS, I was ELS. A PAO [public affairs officer] was coming in and a good man who has become a good friend, Mike Pister, came as branch public affairs officer in Douala. He was the big PAO. I was an English teacher, but again it was practically part of USIS. They had a consul and a vice consul. There were just four of us Americans. At the beginning a secretary and a vice consul. It was a nice little community. So for a year I taught, from '62. That was the fall of '62, it must have been. Yes, the fall of '62 until June of '63 I was in Cameroon. At that time USIA was asking for people who had been, I think, in English teaching to join. And also people were telling me I should join USIA. A State Department team came through and interviewed me and asked if I would like to work for the government.

Q: Did you have to take any tests?

PERSIS: At that time she didn't have to do anything about it.

JOHNSON: I didn't have to do anything about it.

PERSIS: After Mali.

JOHNSON: Wait a minute. This was during the year. This was the fall of '62 it would have been, spring or early winter maybe of '62. But I was interested in being interviewed. I just didn't do anything. They were having a summer seminar for English teachers in Mali, in Bamako, that summer of '63, and they asked me if I would go. It was an AID [U.S. Agency for International Development] supported one. I was still working for ELS. They asked if I would go up and teach at the summer seminar for Malian teachers of English. I did and then again met Ron that I had known in Guinea. We taught there for the summer term and the PAO asked if I could possibly stay on, because I had made friends, and he saw it was a very difficult political period for us. The Soviets were a heavy influence in Mali. They were

anti-American. They couldn't get anything going in the USIS programs. So they saw that English teaching was a way to make contact with the people, and I had made a lot of friends through the teaching. He asked if I would consider staying on to start up some English teaching for government officials and other groups. So I came back. I left and took a trip down the Niger river, and then joined the Austrian friend again to go through Egypt and the Sinai peninsula.

PERSIS: I can remember you writing and saying that they had offered you a cultural appointment in Mali and you said you thought you'd like to try that, wanting to, I think, broaden her horizons.

JOHNSON: But that was a little bit later. This is in the summer of '63. So they asked if I would come back and work for them. I said yes. So I returned in October, I think, and stayed from October, '63 through June, '64 working still for English Language Services under contract to USIA. I was working at getting the program going for them, and teaching. Then in '64, in June, when I was about to come back, they had some leader grantees - the International Visitor Program it is now. There was a woman who was one of the leaders of the independence movement in Guinea. She had been a communist and was very leftist and very anti-American but she was the head of the women's union and was also a member of the Chambre des Députés; she was a deputy. And the wife of the minister of education and a leader of the women's organization were coming on a trip. They wanted to stop in France to go to the doctor and something else. The PAO was afraid that once they got to France they might not continue on. So he asked if I would accompany them, make sure they got to Washington safely.

-Stopped off in Paris where, as I say, the ladies wanted to have a checkup, a medical checkup, and do some other things. It was there that I met our mutual friend, Perry Stieglitz, again. I had noticed his name in the USIA World. At that time it was the News, I guess. So I looked him up and we met again and then I saw him again when I was back in Washington in '71. I saw him in '64 when he was with USIA and I wasn't.
I shepherded the ladies to Washington and then took them into the State Department. The first day I told them “We have to ride a taxi because this is not the red carpet tour, this is for really professional reasons.” They were incensed. Every place they'd been to before... Awa Keita, who was the leader and was one of the revolutionaries for the independence of Mali, said that when she went to the Soviet Union they met them and took care of them, limousines all the time. So they complained about it at our first meeting at the State Department and after that they had limousine service from the airports in. But the first day we rode in a taxi. I guess there were some other times, too, that we did. But most of the time they wanted that treatment. At the end of the trip though, they were more down to earth. They weren't demanding and we were going around in taxis.

Q: Was it partially, do you think, because they thought “Coming from a small country, I'm being slighted?”
JOHNSON: I think so. I think that's it. They wanted to be treated as they thought other people were, and as I say, by the end of the trip we weren't in limousines and they were a lot more down to earth.

When I took them into the State Department they asked if I would be interested in accompanying them around the country. My mission was just to make sure they got here to Washington. So they had their language services give me a test as an interpreter and I passed the test and went along as their escort-interpreter around the country with them that summer, July of '64.

Q: That must have been interesting.

JOHNSON: That's right. Meanwhile as Persis told you a little bit out of sequence before, I had been thinking of joining USIA. People had been encouraging me and one person was very good and he said, "Don't take a certain grade. You deserve such and such a grade." I've forgotten what it was now, probably a four. He said, "Don't let them try to get you in on the cheap. You tell them that's what you want and you want the generalist and not the specialist." So I followed his advice and said, "This is what I would like to have and it's less money than I'm making now," so it wasn't financially advantageous to me. They gave me the grade that I asked for. I think it was a four. I went back to Mali as cultural affairs officer in Bamako. So my first post...

Q: This was all done that summer?

JOHNSON: I went back to Mali... I joined the agency in August of 1964, went through an area studies orientation course at FSI, then went off to Mali in September, I think it was.

Q: Did you have to take a test to come in laterally?
JOHNSON: At that time no; later I did. I had to take one when we went to FSO, but I came in as FSR, reserve. All USIA people were, if you weren't staff you were FSR, the reserve.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Then, as I say, I went back as cultural affairs officer in Mali and served there until December of '66, and transferred to Tunis as cultural affairs officer.

Q: And you were a CAO [cultural affairs officer] in Bamako, too?

JOHNSON: CAO in Bamako and in Tunis. In Tunis the following year, I think, or the year after, there was a panel, traveling panel, that was interviewing people for regular FSO status, and I went to Athens. They were meeting in Athens and I went to Athens to be paneled by them for entering...

PERSIS: But she was sort of pushed into it. I was there and you didn't know whether.

JOHNSON: I wanted to be. I had had the English teaching experience and I wanted more general experience as cultural affairs officer and then I wanted to be the generalist FSO.

Q: Then you were paneled as what?

JOHNSON: I was paneled for Foreign Service Officer. See, we were Foreign Service Reserve in USIA at the time. With the conversion that was coming I was.

Q: That was the FSIO [Foreign Service information officer], right?

JOHNSON: FSIO. That's right. That was to FSIO.

Q: You had to take a cut in pay, of course. Why did you want to come into the Foreign Service? Because of the interesting work?

JOHNSON: I think it's the work and to broaden the scope of my activities. I enjoyed the work, enjoyed being with them. As a matter of fact, one time I had toyed with the idea of Foreign Service. One time, I think it was when I was at home, I saw a notice in the paper that they were giving a Foreign Service examination at Harvard. I hadn't studied. I hadn't taken any of the courses. I remember bringing Crane Brinton's book, History of Mankind, up here to Bethlehem one summer. That was the only book that I looked into.

PERSIS: It was after you graduated from Middlebury and you read about it. There was going to be a test.

JOHNSON: They were giving a regular examination. It was in Memorial Hall, I remember, at Harvard.

Q: You did actually go in and take it?

JOHNSON: I did. I took it, but I think I failed by two points or something.

PERSIS: It was half a point.

Q: It was very close.

PERSIS: It was so close. But she wasn't depressed by it.

JOHNSON: No, it didn't bother me. They said, "Why don't you join as a secretary and then you can go up," and I said, "No."

Q: You already had a profession.

JOHNSON: I went on to something else.

Q: When you went to Africa the first time, it was to the Cameroon.

JOHNSON: No, the first place was Guinea. Under the Smith-Mundt grant, teaching at the Lycée de Jeunes Filles and with USIS.

PERSIS: But you also took a big cut in salary then. When she said earlier that ELS paid more money, I thought that's not typical of you, because money has never been a factor.

Q: Never been a factor.

JOHNSON: No, no, it's what I enjoy doing.

PERSIS: And when she took the Smith-Mundt it was much less money.

JOHNSON: It was less money but it was an opportunity to do something interesting and it was the independence for African countries. It was a whole new experience. A new era we were entering into, the post-colonial era.

Q: Now when you came in there, did you get much of a backwash where you were?

JOHNSON: No.

Q: I was going to ask you about something that affected the Foreign Service, but you weren't in there. How did it hit you, this clash of cultures, when you first went - your very first time?

JOHNSON: There really wasn't much of a clash, first of all because of anthropology. I was interested in the different cultures. I tried to get out. I bought a deux chevaux [French: two horsepower], an old deux chevaux, and drove all over Guinea. I made a friend there and we traveled throughout Guinea from one end to the other. From Youkounkoun to N'Zerekore whenever vacation time came when the school was on vacation. I suppose you do have somewhat of a culture shock. I never felt it myself.

Q: You didn't? Of course you already knew the language.

JOHNSON: Yes, I knew the French language and the people were very friendly. Then there were people at the embassy, of course, and USIS, so that you had... You weren't thrust alone out into the African milieu. But I did try to make as many African contacts as I could.

Q: Now, were you able to find living quarters in all of these places easily?

JOHNSON: Well, when you go as a Smith-Mundt, I think that was the responsibility of the government. I think the government of Guinea... There was an apartment building, two wings of an apartment building called Bourbinet that the French had built. It was ten stories high and was very nice in its day, but of course there had been no maintenance on it. When the French left, the Guinean government took it over and did nothing. There were two elevators but they never ran, and half the time the water didn't run. The first apartment they offered was on the ground floor and it was filthy. They looked like Rorschach splotches on the wall, but they were where somebody had killed a roach. There are huge cockroaches in Africa. Then I heard that there was an apartment in the other building on the tenth floor. I said, "I would like that." Went up and looked at it and went to the - you know you wait for

days to get to see somebody at the Ministry of Education - but I got the one on the tenth floor which was above the stench and although the roaches made it, they weren't that bad. It was above most of the mosquitoes. Only the hardy mosquitoes made it up that high. Of course, when you walked ten flights... And then when there was no water... I would do it usually four times a day. That was one time I learned not to forget something. You get out and you realize you've left something behind, it's a lot of flights. But it served me in good stead because later on when I went to Cameroon a group of diplomats decided to climb Mt. Cameroon, and I was in excellent shape. I hadn't done anything but I was able to go up and bring tea down to the others who were having a hard time. I attribute it to climbing ten flights of stairs four or five times a day.

Q: I would think so.

JOHNSON: They were government furnished quarters. They advised us to buy appliances, so I had bought an air conditioner, and a refrigerator, and I don't know whether I took a bed with me. I must have taken a bed because there wouldn't have been any decent beds over there. Once again, I just made do with whatever furniture was around. A packing case I would use as a table.

Q: You were never paid by ELS at this time?

JOHNSON: Not in Guinea. I was paid by ELS when I went to Cameroon and then for the summer seminar in Mali. That was the extent of my payment by ELS. When I was paid by ELS I probably received a housing allowance. I remember I went out and rented a new duplex. One half of a duplex.

Q: Did you always live alone?

JOHNSON: Yes, I did.

Q: You didn't share quarters?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't share quarters with anybody. I always had friends coming to stay, but I lived alone in each of these places.

Q: Did you have any trouble with intestinal bugs that so many people...?

JOHNSON: The only bug that I remember was when I got malaria on our trip down to N'Zerekore. I had malaria and at the same time something like dysentery, so I was miserable. Then I'd get better from the malaria and I'd want to eat something and then I'd be miserable after I ate a banana, but bananas became the mainstay of my life. I've been, knock on wood, fortunate.

PERSIS: She picks up things, however.

JOHNSON: When I was invited out to an African's home I would go and not insult their

hospitality by refusing to eat something, so I would eat whatever I was offered. If you take a little bit, if you lead a normal life without too much of the washing things in Clorox or Tide - I liked salads - and they would say, "You should soak the salad in potassium permanganate for 24 hours," or something. I just made sure that the things were well rinsed.

Q: What about water? Were you ever asked to drink water that you knew wasn't boiled?

JOHNSON: Of course. I think I didn't do it intentionally. I drank beer whenever we were out traveling. You get the big bottles of beer and I would drink beer. The soft drinks just made me thirstier. I can remember one missionary place we went to - I think they boiled the water - but just landing and drinking down a liter of water before you started to enjoy drinking, just to slake your thirst. I like rare beef and in Cameroon I picked up a tapeworm, but luckily the pharmacist had something that could get rid of it, so I just went to the local pharmacist, French trained Cameroonian, and took the pills for a while.

PERSIS: You had others besides a tapeworm. How do you say it?

JOHNSON: I had other parasites. There was one... what do you call it?

Q: Amoebic dysentery?

JOHNSON: No, luckily I haven't had amoebic dysentery. I had the dysentery at the time of the malaria, but not amoebic, that I know of. I had ascaria, I think in French, but they're a small parasite that most everybody has.

Q: And you took local medicine rather than the State Department's?

JOHNSON: No, when I was with the government I took Aralin for malaria. But I never regularly took any medicine. I picked up giardia in Togo and the Peace Corps doctor gave me Flagyl.

Q: What's that?

JOHNSON: It's a terrible thing that... Flagyl, I think it is... some people say the cure is worse than the disease. It's something that just makes you feel nauseated that evidently kills the giardia.

Q: I know some people say if you catch a local disease, take the local medicine, because they know their bugs better than the State Department [does].

JOHNSON: No, when I had the tapeworm I went and got that. I can't remember, the only two I remember are the malaria and than I was off on my own and just sweated it out until I got over it.

Q: Did you ever have feelings of homesickness?

JOHNSON: No, you look to home as a nice place to be, but I was never homesick. I don't think I ever had culture shock and I never felt homesick. I always would try to go out and see things that were different from our culture and if there was any monument or anything of special significance, I would be interested in doing that. I didn't stay home and think about being homesick. I was out trying to do things and see how the people live.

Q: And you were there because you wanted to be.

JOHNSON: That's right.

Q: Now, how did you feel at home having your sister go away to these strange places?

PERSIS: It seemed very normal. I was very happy for her.

Q: You didn't worry?

PERSIS: No, not particularly, no.

JOHNSON: But our mother did. As a matter of fact, Persis was going to come and visit me in Guinea and I was all set to fly up to Dakar to meet her and then go back with her and then...

PERSIS: Lumumba was assassinated. My bags were packed and ready to go to the airport and my mother said, "I wish you wouldn't go." I think because our parents were so good to us and allowed us to do whatever we wanted to do within reason - we weren't going to be wild or anything like that - when she said to me, "I will be very worried, and if for any reason Marilyn had to leave quickly it would be much harder for her to leave with you..."

Q: So you didn't go?

PERSIS: So we sent a telegram saying I wouldn't be on the plane.

Q: It must have been a big disappointment.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was, and it just caught me before I was headed up to Dakar to meet her.

PERSIS: I think we were a family who didn't feel disappointments. Maybe we're not too emotional.

Q: You accept what is?

PERSIS: That's right. Life is fine.

JOHNSON: If you can't do one thing then you try and do another. I know some people who were miserable. They couldn't get apples or peaches in Africa. I said, "Look at the

wonderful fruits, the citrus fruits, the bananas, the mangoes." but no, they wanted apples and peaches and pears.
Q: Or MacDonald's hamburgers. When you got to Tunis, did you feel that this was practically being back in the States? It's so westernized.

JOHNSON: It's westernized, but at first they said... I think I was the first woman, at least the first woman cultural affairs officer there, because they said, "It's an Arab world, but Tunis is different." They didn't know how it would be for me as a woman, dealing with the Arabs who prefer men, they say. I think the times have changed. I think a woman can negotiate with the Arabs and they look at her as a professional rather than as a woman in that case. I knew that there might be some problems. I had no problems. The Tunisians were... It was another culture, it was Mediterranean culture. I think that they have absorbed so many people from other countries. The Scandinavians were down there in the twelfth century or thirteenth century. There are blue-eyed Berbers and people in Cap Bon that are fair and blue eyed.

It's an international culture there, and I didn't feel that I was back in the American culture but it was the French culture. But the French culture you find in all of these countries in Africa, you know, good French bread, croissants. We didn't have any of the good things at the beginning in Guinea or in Mali because they were in the Soviet sphere and the French had turned their backs to Guinea. They were still a little bit in Mali. But normally you feel the French influence in the schools and in the culture.

Q: What were your living arrangements in Tunis?

JOHNSON: In Tunis I had an apartment right in the middle of town. At one time Henry Loomis was deputy director. He'd been Voice of America director and then deputy director of the agency. He evidently went out to Tunis and was at the PAOs home, which was a beautiful home out in La Massa on the sea. That was where most of the diplomats lived. He said no. We at USIA were catering to the people and we should be where they could get to us easily or by public transportation. So they gave me the apartment. It was actually the apartment of my predecessor, which was a beautiful old apartment in the downtown area right over a general store, the Magasin général, a department store that overlooked the entrance to the medina.

It was also opposite the British embassy. We were there in 1967. When I first went to Mali in the summer for that seminar for teachers of English I had asked for somebody to clean the house and cook and do the washing. The driver, the USIS driver, found a young boy about 16 years old that he said was a good person and would do all of that. I found that he was. He was intelligent. He had gone to a Catholic school for about six years so he knew how to read and write, which was of inestimable value when you want to leave a message for them. He didn't speak any English but I spoke French so it didn't matter.
When I was going to Tunis I took him along with me to Tunis. There I took some of the Voice of America tapes for learning English and he studied VOA tapes to learn English because we knew that Persis was coming to visit, and of course he wanted to come to the United States, also. So he learned English and Persis came to visit.

In 1967 one morning she wasn't feeling too good, I guess, and he came in to bring her tea and she said she didn't think she would get up. She didn't want to get up that early, and he said, "Madame, il y a une manifestation." It was the students and the rioters at the time of the 1967 war who had come to our center, and thrown a rock through the window.

PERSIS: Which was just up the street.

JOHNSON: It was on the corner right up the street. Then they were heading down to the British and Persis saw the whole thing. She saw how it started. They weren't a particularly mean group, but they were protesting American support for the Israelis.

PERSIS: Diagonally across the place from us.

JOHNSON: But she saw what sparked them off was a truck unloading wine across the street, and one person got a bottle and then they all went... It set off the spark.

Q: Yes, it does, doesn't it?

JOHNSON: Then they went and set fire to the British embassy. The ambassador had a beautiful Jaguar, I remember, that was parked there. It had burned up. But he was very philosophical about it. He told the story. As he was coming down to see if they had to get out - there was one staircase and they were escaping the fire up above - he was coming down the staircase and the rioters were going up and they made way and said, "Pardon, monsieur l'ambassadeur." [laughter]

Q: What had they done? They threw a rock through the window of the...

JOHNSON: They threw a rock through our library window and then went down the road. I was there and went down and we brought the people upstairs. We got people out of the library and brought the others upstairs. Then we were ready for when they came back, but by that time the police were on the scene, and they rocked a few cars that were out in front of the Center but they never did come in and destroy anything because the police were there to channel them. They went past USIS and then down toward the embassy and they did try to climb in there. The Marines fired tear gas. They burned cars in the American embassy.

Q: You were at the USIS building?

JOHNSON: I was at the USIS center, the American center, which was separate from the embassy.

Q: Now, is that the library?
JOHNSON: That is the library. The library was on the first floor and our offices were above, in a building downtown.

Q: Were you frightened?

JOHNSON: No, I wasn't. One time I remember, I was in Mali, they were having an affair, a women's meeting, and there was one of the BBC broadcasters who had come down to cover it. I had taken her home for lunch, I think. I was driving her back and we drove into a bunch of people demonstrating against the United States. "A bas les Etats- Unis" or something. I said "Vive l'Amitié Amèricaine-Malienne." This BBC reporter said, "You'd better be quiet. Don't let them know you're an American." Individually they were not harmful.

PERSIS: Marilyn doesn't say it aggressively. She says it.

JOHNSON: You try to be friendly with them.

PERSIS: And humorous.

JOHNSON: I wasn't afraid in either case. But you try to preserve people. You don't let them be down there in the library. You get them secure and then I think we said, "Everybody go home in a different direction."

Q: Did they burn papers at the embassy at that time?

JOHNSON: No, they didn't get in. They held them off, I think they burned cars. They got up on the balcony and that was about it. The Marines were ready to fire. They burned the door of a synagogue.

PERSIS: The Tunisians were fairly wonderful about it. In fact, as Marilyn said, I watched the whole thing. The whole place was filled. Then as the people came out, as the fire got started and they came out of the embassy, they came into the place and the people opened up the way for them. I said to Marilyn, "I wouldn't have been afraid." I was up on a little balcony about two stories up, I guess. I wouldn't have been afraid to go down in that group at all. I know that the embassy said that everybody should stay at home, so forth and so on. We did stay at home, but I think the Tunisians are different, too. But it was very interesting.

Q: Yes, I should think. Was this other experience that took place when you were in...

JOHNSON: Mali, in Bamako.

Q: That was because of the Vietnamese war?

JOHNSON: I can't remember what it was. It must have been, because it would have been in 1965, I think. Probably it was a pro-Vietnamese.. It was anti-American anyway.

PERSIS: But you know it's like when they say "Down with the Americans," Marilyn in a very humorous way would say... Her response would be friendly and humorous. It was not at all aggressive. So they accepted this.

Q: Did you have much trouble throughout these years because of the American position in Vietnam?

JOHNSON: No. It never interfered. Personally, I was against it. I happened to join, as I say, in August of '64. I was in Washington and I saw television with President Johnson saying, "They've sunk one of our boats in Tonkin Gulf," and I said, 'What in the heck was our boat doing in the Tonkin Gulf to be sunk?" This is something that some people wanted to get into and I didn't think it was a good idea. Having been in France you knew about Dien Bien Phu, you knew of the French experience in Indochina, and I just thought it was a lot of chutzpah. We were going to do what the French couldn't do, and we were going to test all of our ugly things that we wanted to test. Again, as I say, we have never really experienced what war is. We see it rather than as an experience, it's an idea. It's another form of world power. I did not approve of our getting into Vietnam in the first place on the basis of what I had known. I said if I were assigned to Vietnam I would resign from USIA. I told them that was a cause that I would not support. I wouldn't say anything against our policy, but I would not overtly defend it. I would keep quiet. I wouldn't talk against it but I would not try to espouse something I didn't believe in and did not think was right. I never got into any discussions about it.

I remember one time in Mali we had a group. I've forgotten what it is, not the Foreign Service Association, World Affairs Council, I think. There's one that has a topic that is discussed every three months or so, a world topic. They send out literature on it and then they have people lead groups and speak on it. There was a chapter in Bamako of Americans, mostly AID contractors. They were going to be discussing the Vietnam war and the ambassador said I was to go and present our side and I said, "You know I can't do it." "Well you have to do it." I said, "This is going to be very bad." But luckily I caught my second case of malaria. I became ill [Laughter] and I got out of it, not diplomatically.

PERSIS: You wouldn't do it. You said you made all the preparations for it but you would not be present.

JOHNSON: I didn't feel anything on the Vietnam because I could not really defend our policy, and I let everybody know, the bosses and all. I wasn't undermining it.

Q: Now tell me, how did you feel about the Foreign Service at this time? This was your second post.

JOHNSON: Yes. I liked the Foreign Service. I enjoyed the life very much and I felt that I had the best possible work because I was in cultural affairs and dealing with the people. I was in the people-to-people diplomacy. We had a very fine ambassador. Russell, Francis Russell, was the ambassador at the time, and he happened to be interested in the Battle of Zama, the great battle which made the southern part of Europe Latin rather than Carthaginian. That was where Hannibal was defeated, at the Battle of Zama. He was interested in cultural things and he asked me to go along with him to some of them.

I remember when we had an inspection, we had a little feisty [Robert McClintock]... He ended up in Venezuela, a small ambassador who was in the inspection corps at the time. He

said, "All right, you're the cultural one. Take me to some cultural sights and be sure to take your bathing suit because we'll go swimming." This was November. I said, "It's very cold. We don't swim in November here." He was a great swimmer. He wanted to go. We went to visit some of the old archeological Punic and pre-Punic excavations. Then we went to a restaurant at Cap Bon that I knew about that had fish and the sea was right there and if he wanted to swim he could. I didn't think he would want to but we got there and he said, "Okay, now we'll change and we'll go in to swim." So we got in and I remember shivering so I started swimming fast. I said, "Where do you want to swim? There's no sense in just getting in and paddling. If you're a swimmer, let's set a goal. Shall we go across to such and such a place?" He said, "All right." So we started out and we got maybe half-way there and he said, "I'm having trouble with my ear. I think it's time to turn around and go back." When we got in he said, "You ought to be the athletic as well as the cultural affairs officer."

I thought the cultural affairs was fascinating work. I liked that and when I was in Tunis and Persis was there they asked if I would like to go as PAO to Niger. I guess I was saying to Persis I had my doubts. I would like to try the PAO, again broaden, but also I liked the actual being out working with the people in the cultural. But I did, because I do like to try new things.

Q: Did you have much to do with the FSOs?

JOHNSON: Of course, as I say, the ambassador and I, always with the political officers, we were working with them. Not so much with the economic officers at the time. Now, of course, it's a very important thing. And the administrative. I remember the admin officer. My best friend in Tunis was the personnel officer, Velma Lewis. We played golf together at the Tunis Club. We got to know a lot of the diplomats from other embassies and a lot of the Tunisians that way. Yes, I did. I liked the Foreign Service life but I also thought that USIS work was a lot more interesting because we weren't doing the political reporting, but we were out knowing what was going on and working with the people.

Q: Never felt excluded?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't. I never felt that because I was a woman I was excluded. I think I came along at the right time for women and I probably got some breaks because I was a woman but I never felt discriminated against as a woman.

Q: There have been vestiges of the old feeling of Foreign Service which has upset some people.

JOHNSON: I guess so, but I never felt it and I had some very good friends. In Mali, of course, we were with the political officer and the economic officer and the ambassador. We all played bridge together, with the French ambassador and with the German ambassador.

PERSIS: And they still maintain the contact.

JOHNSON: Yes, we still maintain the contact.

PERSIS: Marilyn said it was a golden post. It was an unusual group of people. In fact from that little post there were about seven who went on to become ambassadors.

Q: Is that so? From Tunis.

JOHNSON: No, no from Bamako.

Q: Oh, from Bamako.

JOHNSON: The place many people think of as the pits.

Q: Is that right?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: That's amazing.

JOHNSON: As a matter of fact, the fellow who was my DCM [deputy chief of mission] in Togo - I selected him - and is now ambassador to the Seychelles, was, I think, General Services Officer in Bamako. So it was a small group and we got along very well, both places. He was a black and I was a woman and I guess we both profited from the Service.

Q: What was his name?

JOHNSON: Irvin Hicks.

Q: Oh, yes.

PERSIS: I remember his saying Marilyn was the one who gave him his chance. I'm sure David Anderson was very helpful, but Marilyn asked for him out of Admin to be a DCM because she knew he was a very good man.

JOHNSON: No, he was offered. He was on the slate. He was on the slate, but I picked him because I knew he was in the administrative cone at that time. Now he's ambassador to the Seychelles.

Q: Good. How did you enjoy Niger?

JOHNSON: Very much again. You know, I like every place I go.

Q: That's shows you're very adaptable.

JOHNSON: There are some places that are your favorites, and I think because of the group of people in Mali, and also it's odd, the harder the conditions are, the better the esprit de corps is. We had very difficult living conditions there in that you couldn't get the fresh

vegetables or meat. It was hard. You had to know when to go whenever there was "arrivage," [French: incoming shipment] as they say. But there was an exceptionally fine group of people and we were very close in Mali.

But in Niger it was again the African culture that I was familiar with. The Nigerians are not that different from the Malians and they were good, hard-working, honest people to work with. I enjoyed it. I guess we had some Peace Corps and they had asked for some Peace Corps to teach English to the people at the palace. I got to know perhaps an advisor to the president who was a Corsican. They had a whole Corsican mafia there that was advising the president at the time. He also had taught English. I was an English teacher and I got to know him and he suggested that I go up and teach President Diori. So I'd go up and have conversations with the president of Niger once or twice a week and then we went out to his farm and I got to know the president. In a small country like Niger you know the ministers, you know everything that's going on that you rarely get to know in a larger post.

Q: How did you like the scope of the work?

JOHNSON: Again I liked it very much because it was people to people. When I first arrived, Sam Adams was ambassador. I had known him. He was an AID man and I had known him in Bamako when he was head of AID there. He was just about to leave and I thought the PAO residence was not a very good site because everything was moving up to the other part of town. I gave up the lease on our PAO residence and they said, Why don't you move into the ambassador's residence?" Sam suggested that I move in there because they were building a new embassy and residence so the new ambassador would not be staying in this one.

You asked about housing once before, but now, of course, it's provided by the government. I know we were talking about getting along with the Foreign Service officers. Because I wanted to run an independent program I had some differences of opinion with the chargé d'affaires after Sam Adams left. He was an ill-fated fellow that was later sent off to, not São Tomé - where is that island? Fernando Po. He ended up killing somebody in the vault with a pair of scissors. Somebody told me he died.

PERSIS: The Morins [General Services Officer Emile Morin and Anne. No connection to the interviewer] I did because they were there.

Q: He went berserk, didn't he?

JOHNSON: Yes. I didn't get along too well with him. We got along fine, but when Ambassador [Roswell] McClelland came it was another ballgame. But I've always gotten along with my ambassadors. The last one I had wasn't so good. That's another story.
Q: Did you feel that you grew in this job? You took the job to broaden you.

JOHNSON: Yes, I took it because I was doing information work in the first place. I had only done cultural work before. I did everything. I did the information. I did the managerial. I was in charge of the whole staff, the building, the hiring, the working out with the

administrative officer, the FAS account. It was broadening in that sense in my program work but also in managerial and responsibility.

Q: And you had a CAO under you?

JOHNSON: No, it was a two-officer post. There was an assistant PAO there.

Q: Oh, I see.

JOHNSON: We split up the work, of course. Then we had a third country national as a secretary and then the Nigerians working for us.

Q: Did you have to do a lot of entertaining? I imagine you would have.

JOHNSON: Yes, I did, but I enjoy it. From very simple, then on occasion we had to have a formal French dinner. Persis was the one who ran the household. When she moved to be with me.

Q: Now, when did she join you?

JOHNSON: She joined me in Niger.

PERSIS: I just went to visit. I visited her twice in Tunis and then I visited her twice in Niger. I can remember, when we spoke about the 1967 war in Tunis, people were told not to leave their homes, to stay quiet. This was the first time that I really saw Marilyn after having come to visit her. It was my first time to visit her after her joining the Foreign Service. I was just amazed at the hours that are put in. People back in the States think it's a very glamorous life. It is glamorous, I'm not saying that. But that it's nothing but cocktails and dinner parties and so forth--as you know, it's a working life. You're right on your toes every minute. I can remember after we were there a while, I said to Marilyn, "Don't you ever have people to dinner just because you like them? Just a small group of friends?" She said, "There are so many people that have to be entertained." But I also remember that she slept for something like 36 hours after the 1967 uprising in Tunis. She was just that tired.

JOHNSON: I slept how many hours?

PERSIS: About 36 hours on the couch in the living room.

JOHNSON: Three days.

PERSIS: Thirty-six hours is a day and a half. When I went to visit her in Niger, I realized she was doing all this entertaining and it was costing a great deal of money. I said to her, "Isn't there any recompense for this?" She said, "I get a certain amount of money for representation." I said, "You have to keep track." "No, no." So I began to keep track of it. That's the first time.

Q: And she was going way beyond her allowance?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, and then the ambassadors would often give me from theirs. They would have an excess and most of my ambassadors turned over embassy funds to me for my official representational affairs.

PERSIS: She entertains very, very well.

Q: I'm sure she does.

PERSIS: She likes to do it.

JOHNSON: I like to have people in. It's nice when somebody else does the cooking and the cleaning up.

Q: When did Persis finally join you?

JOHNSON: She was with me, for what? Six months in Niger? When did you come? January and I left.

PERSIS: No, I lied, I didn't go in January.

JOHNSON: Anyway she was there...

PERSIS: Three months.

JOHNSON: Maybe three months. That was the longest time. Then I came back to the United States. They told me I had to have a Washington posting. So I came back as a... they were redoing the cultural section, the educational and cultural section. It was called ICS, Information Center Services at the time. We were starting the speakers programs and we had Hal Schneidman as the assistant director for ICS. He had a deputy for the exhibits and a deputy for this new speakers programs and then I was a deputy, I guess, for... we didn't have special areas cut out, but it worked out that I became the deputy in charge of all of the services for the cultural centers, the English teaching, the libraries, the information center programs, art exhibits, and everything that goes into center programming.

Q: Who was the director?

JOHNSON: His name was Harold Schneidman.

PERSIS: She was very fortunate.

JOHNSON: I was fortunate. Because I learned a lot. I'm an innocent abroad still and when I went back to Washington I thought everybody played by the rules. It's the same thing as open assignments, you think that things are done the way they're supposed to be done and you find that's not the way they are done. But I was fortunate, as I say. Hal knew a lot of

people and was a very genial person and he liked me and I liked him and we worked well together. As I say, Washington is always reorganizing. We reorganized that whole ICS into what is now the programs division of USIA and the centers division. So I was in charge of what was the centers division.

Q: Now when you were back here, this was early...

JOHNSON: This was 1971. I came back in July of '71.

PERSIS: She said to me, "We'll only be there a year and a half. I'll only be there a year and a half."

JOHNSON: That's what I was hoping, it would be the minimum, because I like the overseas work. But I was there from '71 to '74 and then I went to the Senior Seminar, '74 to '75 and from the Senior Seminar went to Garmisch-Partenkirchen for advanced Russian training.

Q: Oh, really? Now before we get to that, I want to ask you something about your time in the States. '71-'74 was just when the women's movement was beginning to hot up in the State Department. Did you get involved in that at all?

JOHNSON: No, we had an organization in USIA and one of the women that worked in ICS was interested in it and I joined it. I went to some of the meetings and also, I think, President Nixon was having women's meetings. I went to several of those, and, I guess, at the White House and then one at the State Department.

PERSIS: Through her work. She was deputy.

JOHNSON: I was deputy director but I was also a woman and that was why.

PERSIS: One of the few women in managerial positions.

JOHNSON: So I joined the organization of the women's... WAO, Women's Affairs Organization, I think it is, WAO.

Q: Were you very interested in this?

JOHNSON: I was interested to support them, but not as a prime mover. I was sympathetic but I was not an activist.

Q: But you yourself, looking back over your career, doesn't seem to me as if you have been a victim of discrimination?

JOHNSON: I don't think so.

Q: So therefore you would not have been...

JOHNSON: I didn't feel that I had to get up there and fight for it because I felt that I had been fortunate in having good assignments, and if anything I was discriminated for instead of against. But I recognize that there were others who were not as fortunate as I and, as I say, I contributed and went to meetings but I was not an activist.

Q: You were not all that involved with the one over at the State Department that Mary Olmsted was the president of?

JOHNSON: No. It was affiliated with the WAO. I went to meetings, you know.

PERSIS: It seems to me you had luncheon over there.

JOHNSON: I had luncheon over there.

PERSIS: But she was like her father. Her father was a charter member of the union, the picture operator's union in Boston, but he was not a unionist. I was much more union oriented.

Q: I'm getting the feeling that you're sort of in the middle. There are some women whom I've interviewed who have said, "No, I made it the hard way and everybody else can, too." Then there's another group that were passionately interested in this, and you seem to fall sort of in the middle.

JOHNSON: I was sympathetic. I know I was fortunate. But everybody isn't and those are things that need to be brought up.

Q: In the meantime, you had become an information officer?

JOHNSON: Yes, when I was in Tunis, as I said, I went over the Greece to be paneled and was then a Foreign Service Information Officer, a generalist. That must have been 1967, spring of '67.

PERSIS: You went while I was there. Because I remember, Marilyn, that you knew that you were going to be reassigned and you wanted to go quickly and not have any farewell parties. What they did was when she went to Greece they did all the work for the farewell party. They had a very big party for her.

Q: Your biographic register entry is wrong then because they have you as an R-3 as late as '70. That can't be right.

JOHNSON: No, I was paneled in '67.

Q: Then they have you as an IO in late '70.

JOHNSON: I don't know when it went through. Maybe personnel actions took a while.

Q: These things are very often inaccurate.

JOHNSON: It may have been just a delayed personnel action.

Q: I know that at that time, that was when there was all these big shifts. We were in Algiers at the time that you were in Tunis.

JOHNSON: I went to Algiers to go to Tamanrasset.

Q: Oh, did you?

JOHNSON: I went to the...
Q: Tassili.

JOHNSON: Les grottes de Tassili. It wasn't grottes, it wasn't cavernes, it was something else. Anyway, Tassili was fascinating.

Q: Well, tell me about that.

JOHNSON: A friend that I played tennis with in Tunis, Adele Simmons, whose husband was in Tunis with a Harvard group under AID on management, I think.

PERSIS: She's head of Hampshire college.

JOHNSON: She's now president of Hampshire College in Amherst, Adele Simmons. She was a graduate from Radcliffe, too, and we became friends there. And as I say tennis players, not partners because we played singles most of the time, but partners when she played with her husband and I played with a friend. She took the trip to Tassili and came back and talked about it. I thought, "Oh, I would love to see that, because when my mother came over to travel with Persis and me through Europe, we drove down through southern France in the Dordogne and we saw the paintings in Lascaux just before they were closed. I was interested in these gravures encastrées and wanted to see if it was the same chain. It was still maybe in the back of my head to go to Spain sometime because there's another one of that era in the mountains of Spain.

Q: They're all the same era, are they?

JOHNSON: They're all the same era, they think. I think Lascaux may have been a bit earlier. Tassili was very interesting. She had written about what a rigorous trip it was and how hard they had to walk and then they were on camel. No, they walked, I guess, and their belongings were on donkeys. I went along and there were some people from Europe that had come down. You went through the Algiers Touring Club. We flew in one plane to Tamanrasset and then took a smaller one to [Djanet]. Then you walk and your belongings are carried by mules, I think, or donkeys. So we saw the regular ones that the Touring Club organizes, the caves. But I had bought Henri Lhot's book about it and I had read about one painting called La Dame du Mali, which was an exceptionally fine one, but it was over on

the other side nearer the border with Libya. Having been in Mali I wanted to see this Dame du Mali and I wanted to do something a little more rigorous because I had found it very civilized, you know. You had little water. In the morning you were given a cup of water and you washed and brushed your teeth and everything in that cup. Water was restricted. but from my point of view it wasn't difficult.

There happened to be a young American on the trip who was a genius, evidently, in electronics and had made a lot of money forming a company that went on the stock market and then they bought up some gas wells in Algeria. He had come to see about the gas well. He was interested in anthropology too and he wanted to spend another week there. I thought, what a golden opportunity, so we toyed with the idea. Then the day before it was time to go back, we asked other people if they would like to go a little bit farther. Other people couldn't go, so the two of us set out with a guide and a donkey driver that carried sleeping bags. We took some food with us, whatever food we had, I guess. We set out from where we were, across. It wasn't the sandy desert but rocky and some sand. It was an incredible experience because you didn't know where the water was. You couldn't tell. You're in the middle of nowhere and you can see the sun but you can't even tell directions from the sun. This guide would get us to the guelta or the water hole. If he doesn't get you there then you're lost. It was the first time it was a living or dying experience and it's a wonderful cleansing experience because all of the nonessential things in life, you realize you can do without them, but you need the water to live. One was a beautiful guelta. It was in a rocky place. I remember getting in there. It was big enough so you could bathe. This was height of luxury to just take a bath out there. Then I remember a couple of others that were filled with animal droppings and there were fleas around, but it's water. That's when I tried to boil water with chlorine and everything else. It was terrible, you couldn't drink it, but we boiled it and put cocoa and coffee and everything into it, just to try to change the taste. A week we set out and we walked for a week across the desert.

Q: Is this on a plateau up high?

JOHNSON: It's on a plateau. It was the Tassili and we walked over practically to the Libyan border to see these other paintings where there was 'La Dame du Mali.' I saw some exceptional ones that are not on the ordinary tourist route. They've been documented.

Q: Are they actually caves? I thought they were sort of out in the open.

JOHNSON: They're overhanging. They're places that overhang where they did build shelters. It's an overhang. That's it. You never know when you're going to find it. There's one certain type that was possible to draw and carve on. Some of them are incisions, carvings, and then others are paintings.

Q: How did your guide react to all of this? Did he think you were mad westerners to do all of this just to look at pictures?

JOHNSON: I think it's a way of earning a living to him. He would take us and show us where they were, but it was just traveling across. They made bread. They carried the flour

and took the water and would build a fire in the sand and make the bread and we would all eat the bread. We would share our tuna fish with them. Wouldn't share anything that had pork because they were Muslims.

Q: How many guides did you have?

JOHNSON: We just had one guide and the donkey man and this other man and I. The four of us and a donkey or maybe two donkeys carrying our belongings.

PERSIS: I remember her writing home to me and saying it was the most telling experience to be out in the desert like that that she'd ever had in her life and that when she returned she felt cleansed of all dross.

JOHNSON: Sleeping under the stars.

Q: What time of year was this?

JOHNSON: I think they go in January because it would be too hot otherwise.

Q: January, February. It's very interesting to hear you say this because anybody who went from Algiers and did the Tamanrasset donkey bit all came back and said, "Oh, it was just exhausting, the most tiring...

JOHNSON: This is what Adele had written, how difficult it was, and I didn't find it difficult at all. I've played tennis and swum.

Q: Yes, you kept in good shape. How far did you walk in a day, do you suppose?

JOHNSON: We covered the distance from Tamanrasset over to the Libyan border in probably three days and... Djanet is the town we came back to. So we were walking probably from sunup and then we would rest probably in the heat of the day if we could... but there weren't any trees. I don't know what we did, come to think of it. I guess we just went on. But luckily it was cool. And at night you really needed that sleeping bag.

Q: This is well below the Great Ergs, of course.

JOHNSON: Yes, this was a plateau. We didn't run into that shifting sand. I found them later when I was in Niger. I went up north of Agadès. I drove to Agadès because I wanted to go to Tanit, which was the uranium mine area up there. We had named a young directeur du cercle from the Nigerian civil service as an leader grantee. So it was a good excuse for me to go up and interview him and talk to him and let him know what the trip would encompass and about the conditions. You know. That it isn't red carpet.

...but when we came back from that, we left Agadès to go across to Bilma, which is an oasis where there are salts - not mines, but salt flats. They pour water in and then just the dehydration leaves salt pans. That's across what we consider the real desert. This is Ténéré

desert and the shifting sands, and once again I was impressed by the skill of the Africans in knowing how to get from one place to another. There was one tree in this desert called l'arbre du Ténéré - until several years after I had been there - a Belgian was driving and he ran into the tree. One tree in the middle of the desert.

Q: Oh, no. (laughter)

JOHNSON: Probably he was trying to park close to it to get in the shade and he knocked it over. But there's a water hole there. You had to travel with two cars. We had two Land Rovers. I had a friend, an American, who was prospecting for oil. He was with an oil company and he thought that there would be some oil up there in the north, so we timed our trip to go together. I went out with him one day to see where there were cave paintings north of Bilma. Then we would drive along. I would drive the Land Rover and he would get out and make some testings every half a kilometer, I think.

I had a second desert experience in the sandy one. It's incredible. Every dune looks the same. The guide knows where there's a hard pan that you can drive on although there's no track (it gets swept away). Yet if you go on to another one, you either go on and never find water and dry up there, or you get caught in the sand and can't get out. But we made it across. We found the Ténéré oasis, the water hole there. Again it was filthy and ticks all over the place. Then we made it to Bilma where we had some Peace Corps volunteers and a former AID grantee. The governor of Bilma had been an AID grantee when he was a commissioner or something there.

PERSIS: I remember you telling how you were out with your friend and it got dark. They had to shine flashlights.

JOHNSON: That's right, to get back. The people we had left at camp at that point - I guess Emile was with me. No, the driver, it was Issa - they were worried about us. They got up on a high rock. We were sleeping right near to where some caves were. They had a flashlight and we were able to find them because there were no roads there.

Q: My word. You used the word before for a water hole.

JOHNSON: A guelta. G-U-E-L-T-A. I think that must be the Arab word. It was the word that the guides used. I forgot to say the reason I got onto this trip from Niger is that when we drove north prospecting we came to within 20 miles of Tamanrasset. We went up to near the Algerian border, so they must have been the same tribes. There were no rock paintings that we saw but lots of incisions, the gravures in northern Niger. Then we were right by the border of Chad. We were in that corner of Libya, Chad, Algeria, and Niger.

Q: Which became very dangerous.

JOHNSON: Yes, afterwards that's where they captured the French anthropologist, up in northern Chad.

Q: Now, discuss your experiences in the Senior Seminar.

JOHNSON: I was the only woman in the Senior Seminar. I know they had had a woman the year before, Sarah Jane Littlefield, who had been AID director in Niger when I was there. We had a wonderful consular officer. Then there was a very savvy black politician, Howard Robinson, who was with State Department. He had been instrumental in setting up the black caucus on Capitol Hill. We happened to go out to lunch the first day and I remember Kennedy [Charles Stuart] said, "Let's face it, I'm here because I'm the consular corps; you're here because you're a woman; and Robbie's here because he's a black." And it probably was. Maybe there was discrimination. As a consular officer he felt discriminated against, but as a diplomatic one I hadn't felt it. I said, "Well, maybe that's it, but let's enjoy it."

Q: You had not felt that?

JOHNSON: No.

Q: That's very interesting.

JOHNSON: I knew that probably I was named to the job in Washington because I was a woman. I was a woman that they knew could do a job. I'd been the PAO and CAO.

Q: And you had the rank.

JOHNSON: Yes. I had the grade. That was a wonderful experience. There were quite a few people from that seminar who have gone on. Alan Holmes was in that one and Nat Bellocchi and Jim Rentschler from USIA and Tom Boyatt.

Q: My understanding of the purpose for the Senior Seminar is to bring senior people who are going to be ambassadors and give them an overview of what's been going on in the United States. Isn't that right?

JOHNSON: That's right. They don't say ambassadors, they say to take middle grade or Foreign Service officers a little above, between middle and the senior Foreign Service officers who will be in policy-making roles. They should know what goes into the making of American foreign policy from the domestic side. There are issues, domestic issues. At that time cities was a big issue because they had had the burnings of the cities. There was a lot of urban unrest and urban deterioration. So we visited Detroit and Atlanta and Portland, Oregon.

PERSIS: I thought you went to every part of the United States?

JOHNSON: Yes, but that's to cities, to look at city governments. Then you also had to look at the manufacturing, the big business, and you went to Detroit.. This was at the beginning. This was 1974 and we knew that oil was short. I remember one lunch after we'd had the tour of the Ford factory, we were at lunch and we were saying. “Why aren't you people

making small cars? Look, the Japanese are making small cars. There's an oil shortage. You would be making something that the consumers would buy." They said, "Don't tell us. We know. We're in the automobile business and we have marketing and polling and don't tell us." The attitude was you wise guys from Washington coming out here. So I have not felt guilty about buying a Japanese car now because they rejected...

Q: They shot themselves in the feet.

Indeed oil was short. At this time, we're getting into a very dicey time in the US. This is Watergate.

JOHNSON: That's right. Watergate came just before we were there. We were in Senior Seminar when Ford was... I think we saw the oath of office of Gerald Ford.

Q: I see, so that was in summer.

JOHNSON: Watergate was just before. It was when I was still in ICS.

Q: Did you feel much of the effect of Watergate?

JOHNSON: I felt it... not in my work. I felt it in being there in Washington and seeing the possibility of an impeachment of a president, and the judicial system. To me, it was the best example of American democracy at work, that you had responsible people who were looking at something and saying, "It's not right." And you had a lot of politicians on both sides taking advantage of it. But this is something that I thought at the time would be of great value to us in our work overseas, talking about how a democracy really works. As you know, people overseas say, "Why did you make such a fuss about it, it happens all the time." But we say that we want a country of laws and nobody should be above the law and this was how the legislative and the executive and the judiciary all fit in. Each plays a role in the working of government. So to me Watergate was a great lesson for us in our work overseas in telling about the practice of democracy and that there were certain ideals. I'm afraid they've been forgotten, the lessons of Watergate have not been remembered.

Q: They don't seem to have been assimilated too well.

JOHNSON: No, what you can get away with is... I read the Russell Baker column about everybody wanting it all. Today you have to have it all, the people up there with their capped teeth and their big cars, and want it all. He was saying at the end of it, "Isn't that the way it is at least today in America?" It's a hard thing to see what's happening to a lot of the so-called smart people in the cities. I think there are still some values up here in the country. People work hard for a living and don't try to scam somebody. I'm sure there are ones who do, but you're down to the basics instead of the superficials. There's so much in American life today.

Q: Shoddy behavior has become acceptable.

JOHNSON: I thought they were waving a flag at this [Michael] Deaver, [assistant to President Reagan] but then it just disappeared.

Q: It just disappeared. It just melted away. Politics as usual.

JOHNSON: James Reston wrote a very hard-hitting column at onetime about the Deaver bit, and then who was the columnist in New York? Just plain greed. The basis of it all, is greed.

Q: I read that.

JOHNSON: Tom Braden, I think.

Q: I think it was.

JOHNSON: Anyway, that's a diversion. But we tell everybody that we are a nation of laws and no person is above the law and I thought that Watergate was a good example of that.

PERSIS: Speaking about examples, I can also remember going back to Niger and your writing a letter, Marilyn. At the time the Peace Corps was very active politically in the sense of having ideals and so forth. There was a day throughout the country where all people who were against the Vietnamese war protested and the Peace Corps was taking part of this in Niger. Marilyn had not been very long as a PAO and she wrote home and she said, "I may be coming home. I may not be a PAO much longer. This was the day for protest and the Peace Corps protested. They came into the center, she wrote, and put up all kinds of placards. I don't know what the placards said, I don't remember now. And Marilyn said, "I thought this is a perfect example of plurality in government."

JOHNSON: Freedom of speech.

PERSIS: Maybe they shouldn't be inside the center because that would seem as if we had put them up, but she said we put them up all over the outside of the center.

Q: Did you?

JOHNSON: Yes.

PERSIS: She said, I may be coming home very shortly."

Q: Good for you.

JOHNSON: Well, you know, I've always worked very closely with the Peace Corps. In Tunisia we were close to the director and the assistant director and with the teachers, the English teachers. In fact we started a program with a Peace Corps volunteer who was on about his third tour. His father had been an ambassador, Steve Thayer it was, and he had worked with the American Field Service. They had had an exchange program that didn't

work out over there. We organized with the students of English at the University of Tunis to go to home stays. I think we worked with the Experiment in International Living and brought them over here for the summer, to practice their English, and stayed with families, with American families.

PERSIS: That was a real battle to get the Experiment... to have the youngsters to come. Do you remember how long and hard you fought Washington to get that? They talk about how wonderful these exchanges are. She fought much of the time she was there and finally got it through.

JOHNSON: Yes, we got it through because they would pay part of their way and we worked with the Experiment...

PERSIS: Marilyn said we need to work with the youngsters who are coming up.

JOHNSON: So, Watergate happened when I was in the States.

Q: So, in other words, it served as a good example for you. But it wasn't something that demoralized the agency at all?

JOHNSON: I don't think so. We had one, the general counsel, was one of those indicted. He was a political appointee, a young man, but he sang pretty early on, I think. We didn't hear much of him afterwards.

Q: Sometimes things that happen at home can be very embarrassing overseas.

JOHNSON: I think I would have worked it to be an example of our government working.

Q: Very good point. Now what happened after Senior Seminar?

JOHNSON: Now I have to go back a little bit again. As I said before, I had studied Russian. I started in the Navy and then taken some courses, then I took it again at Middlebury. I went, I think, three summers to Middlebury, butt I had not done anything with it. When I was back in ICS, I did go to one of the early morning language classes in Russian because I still thought I would like to go there. It was way back come to think of it, when I was back in Mali in '65 or 6, I was still thinking of brushing up on Russian and being assigned to the Soviet Union.

Q: And this was when you were still in Mali?

JOHNSON: This was in Mali because a friend of mine was coming home on home leave. He had been in Yugoslavia before and was interested in a job back in the eastern bloc. I said, “While you're asking about yourself, ask if there's any possibility for me. What about somebody in cultural affairs going there?” He returned and he said, "Marilyn, you and I are out of it." I didn't know at the time, but he was splitting up with his wife. He said, "Ellen and I are separating and therefore they don't want to take me, and they won't take a woman

officer."

Q: Why wouldn't they take people who are splitting up?

JOHNSON: I don't know, because of compromise.

PERSIS: They were more liable to blackmail.

JOHNSON: But splitting up you wouldn't think so.

Q: Vulnerable perhaps.

JOHNSON: Vulnerable, yes. Ready to pick up quickly with somebody else and a good easy target for them. So that was in the back of my mind, and one day when Hal Schneidman was away and I was attending a meeting of the area directors with Frank Shakespeare before he was leaving as director of USIA, Frank Shakespeare said, "Now I'm leaving USIA." He had had a very strong ideological bent on the difference between the iron curtain and the free world. He said that everybody should see what it's like there. That although he was leaving and perhaps people coming in would not be as strong as he, he said, "I want you to know that this ideological battle is going to be going on for another ten years and anybody who wants to become anybody, a senior top-level officer in USIA, had better have served in a post behind the iron curtain." When he finished I raised my hand and said, "This is fine, Mr. Shakespeare, but do you know that there are two groups of people anyway who cannot serve, who would like to, but cannot." I told of this experience and he didn't know about this. He turned to Kempton Jenkins who was a State Department officer serving as USIA director for the USSR and Eastern Europe, said, "Is that true?" He answered, "Yes, you know. It's a very difficult life for women over there, so we haven't assigned women." I said, "Look I don't think it's a difficult life. You probably feel women are more susceptible to compromise. A woman who is my age, a single woman, I think would be less susceptible to compromise than a married man. First of all, I would know, I think, why somebody was being particularly nice, and secondly there would be nothing [to it] if I had an affair." I didn't say, if I had an affair. I would be less susceptible to blackmail."

Q: Of course you would.

JOHNSON: From the blackmail aspect of it. Frank said, "Well, Marilyn, we'll look into that and when we send somebody you'll go to the Soviet Union." And he didn't forget. When I went to the Senior Seminar I knew that I would have an assignment as CAO in Moscow after the Senior Seminar. It worked out.

PERSIS: You had said to Mr. Shakespeare that there were two categories of people here who could never get ahead. And so he said, You'll be the first woman to go, Marilyn."

Q: That's terrific. So you went to an unpronounceable place to study.
JOHNSON: Garmisch-Partenkirchen. In the army, it's the United States Army Russian

Institute, USARI.

Q: Is that the regular Garmisch that everybody goes to in Germany?

JOHNSON: Yes. It's a split city and Partenkirchen is on the other side of a main street, but Garmisch is where the US forces in Europe have a recreational center. It's a lovely, spot you know. I could do my skiing and my tennis. I took up cross country skiing there because I was going to Moscow.

Q: Now how long did you stay there?

JOHNSON: It's one year. It's a year course.

PERSIS: No, you stayed one year. It's a two- year course.

JOHNSON: For the military it's two years.

PERSIS: She was also taking Russian privately in Washington.

JOHNSON: I [was tutored during] the Senior Seminar.

PERSIS: They had said you cannot do anything other than the Senior Seminar. If you have to have your eyes examined or your teeth fixed, do it before you enter because it will be so rigorous. She said, "I can take the Russian."

JOHNSON: There was a Russian teacher that lived over in Arlington so I would go a couple times a week, I guess, before or after the Senior Seminar course just to brush up, because they wanted to have you be a 4-4. I didn't get to be 4-4 but I got the 3-3 there. That was a delightful year and also it happened to be right across the mountain pass from our friends in Innsbruck so we were like going home with our family there.

Q: One thing I wanted to clear up in my own mind. This business about ICS and USIA. Did they change the name of the whole bureau to ICS?

JOHNSON: No, ICS was the Information Center Service. Now that was one element of USIA. You have the area offices, you have TV-VOA, and then you have this Information Center Service. Now while I was still there, we had the Stanton report on education and culture. In fact, on the outside of our office, we had a phrase from the law creating the Fulbright act about "better understanding is essential to diplomacy." Then after the Stanton report they were talking about the reorganization, of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs coming over to USIA as one unified entity... because overseas as cultural affairs officers we were working for the State Department on the exchange program but we were USIA officers. In 1976 it came about, but it was about 1975 they transferred everybody from the Bureau of Education and Culture to USIA and then they mulled around for a year trying to find a new name. Instead of staying with USIA, they tried all sorts of things and they came out with CIA, then they ended up with ICA, the International

Communication Agency, because that was the buzz word of the time, Communications. We're the great communicators. In 1976, it was changed from USIA to ICA, International Communications Agency.

Q: That's 1976. So USIA then became...

JOHNSON: ICA. Then there was no longer an ICS within it. It was split up and we had a programs division and we had E, an educational and cultural affairs division.

Q: But the bureau of education and culture people...

JOHNSON: From State was incorporated into IC... it became part of USIA under the new name of ICA. They spent a long time trying to find a new name that would describe the entity that included educational and cultural affairs.

Q: Is it still ICA now?

JOHNSON: No, as I say, in Washington, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose [French: the more things change, the more they stay the same] - it reverted to USIA. There had been so much confusion that in 1980...

Q: The Foreign Service Act of 1980?

JOHNSON: That affected us. I think it was '84 it reverted to USIA. I think it was April '76 that it became ICA. Then someone said it sounded like RCA. It was probably '83 or '84 it reverted [The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was in the Department of State from 1961 to 1978, its functions were transferred to the International Communications Agency as USIA was then known. In 1982 ICA reverted to the name USIA].

Q: I knew it had done a lot of changing, but I'm afraid to say what it is now because I never know.

JOHNSON: And you know the difference in Foreign Service offices, USIS and USIA?

Q: Yes, it's overseas.

JOHNSON: The “agency in Washington and the “service” overseas.

Q: You have to be careful when you use the word “agency” though.
JOHNSON: That's right. We have people say “the other agency.”

Q: “The other agency.” [laughter]

PERSIS: Because they work so much people to people they're always being suspected of being with the CIA.

JOHNSON: Because I traveled all over Africa. They were sure I was CIA.

Q: Of course.

PERSIS: She travels wherever she is.

Q: The local sport in most countries is to decide who are the CIA. Then you went to Moscow?

JOHNSON: Then I went to Moscow as cultural affairs officer.

PERSIS: And we drove to Moscow.

JOHNSON: And we drove. We still had the Malian who had worked for me. He came to the States with us. I couldn't keep on a full-time job with Persis unless I had somebody to help.

Q: What year was this? Let me get this straight. 1976?

JOHNSON: '76 I finished Garmisch. It was one of those things where you can't leave until the new fiscal year. We were still in the July fiscal year and they had to have the money for transfer. The PAO said, "She has to be here by the fourth of July," because you meet people at the reception, you know. So we had a very short time, but I wanted to drive and he had a car and I had a car, so we drove through Austria and Czechoslovakia and Poland and went in over the Brest-Litovsk border crossing.

Q: Your Malian, what happened to him while you were stationed in Washington?

JOHNSON: He came to Washington with me. We brought him in under the H-2 visa. As I say, that was wonderful because he could take care of Persis at home and run the house. They ran the house and I went to work. He was with us in Moscow. It's a long story we won't get into, but he wanted to come in under another visa and stay here. I said, "No, I brought you in under the diplomatic [visa] and you must leave. Unless you can transfer the visa while you're here you must leave when we leave." He did and then tried to come back under another visa and he couldn't get in, so he came back to us in Garmisch. Then he went to Moscow with us. That was when I was in Moscow that the great surprise to everybody, including myself, was, would you like to be ambassador to Togo? And I knew Togo. I had happened to have driven down through what was then Dahomey and Togo going to a budget conference in Ivory Coast to pick up Persis. Persis joined me in Niger and we drove back from Abidjan.

Q: So you were in Russia two years?

JOHNSON: Yes, from '76 to '78.

PERSIS: In the fall of '78.

JOHNSON: It was September I left. I was July to July and then I was planning to be a third year there. It was a three year tour, two and a half to three years, and the cable came and took everybody [by surprise.]

Q: You heard by cable?

JOHNSON: By cable.

Q: Before we get to that, would you describe your life in Moscow? You're one of the few women officers to serve there.

JOHNSON: Yes. You had no problem there because there are a lot of women in the government and our chief contact in the ministry of culture was a woman - a very strong, severe Madame Butrova, who had served in Washington, so she spoke excellent English. She was in charge of all of the cultural exchanges. Then we had somebody else on the educational side. This was a very good time for us. Detente was dwindling but we still had the programs so we had good exchange programs with American students. There were problems all of the time because the Soviets would not grant them access to certain archives, or they couldn't travel, or they went to one city when they wanted to be in another. But there was an educational exchange program going on, a full-blown one. We also had an IV [International Visitor Program] program with many... we had individual grantees and then we had groups of educators. American educators would come to the Soviet Union and Soviets would go to the United States and we were arranging these. Also we had a couple of exhibits from the Met that came over, one exhibit from the Met and then they were preparing for another. Shortly after my arrival, Jackie Onassis turned up at the airport. Walter Stoessel was ambassador and he asked me to go out and meet her. Although she was coming to deal with the Soviets, he wanted her to know that the embassy was there if she needed anything. I went to pass the message on. I guess I saw her...

PERSIS: They had a luncheon.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, I arranged a luncheon at the residence for her.
Q: Why was she coming over?

JOHNSON: She was coming to research materials for the catalogue on the Russian costume exhibit. Remember when the Met had that wonderful Russian costume exhibit? Actually it was Diane Vreeland who did most of the work. But Jackie came over.

Q: She edited the book.

JOHNSON: Yes, she edited the book. Hoving [director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York] came with her.

Q: Did he?

JOHNSON: They went to Leningrad and she saw the sleigh there. I remember it was absolutely necessary that they have a sleigh for one of the exhibits.

Q: Yes, indeed they did. Did you see the exhibit?

JOHNSON: Yes. We got to know some of the people who came over, the curators, and also the man in charge of the shipping and all, the logistics. We've kept in contact with him and he arranged for us to go one day when it was closed to the public, I think. We happened to be in New York on that day so we did see it. Persis could go around in a wheel chair with not too many people.

Q: Did you feel much sense of restraint while you were in Russia?

JOHNSON: You know that you're limited for travel. You're limited to twenty-five miles outside of Moscow and certain cities are open cities and other cities are closed cities. But I never had the impression of being followed at the time. Persis and I went over there saying we know that it's a different system and we know that we will be watched and listened to but we're not going to have it influence us psychologically. Some people would talk to a chandelier, or something. We just assumed that there were listening devices and we never consciously said anything we didn't want to be heard. But we did not worry about it or make a game of it. We arrived in July and we traveled a bit. Was Phoebe there that year?

PERSIS: August, yes.

JOHNSON: In August we went to...

PERSIS: We had the experience in August of knowing they knew exactly where our car was every minute.

JOHNSON: You mean Zagorsk? That wasn't that year. Was that August? We drove to this monastery city in Zagorsk. As we were going up to the churches I noticed the flower stand on the left and it was on the wrong side of the street and I said, “We'll stop on the way back and buy some flowers there.” When we came back the stand wasn't there. We kept looking and we drove around and around trying to find it. Then I did spot some flowers and parked over by the station and went back to buy the flowers. When I came back there was a motorcycle cop by the car and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Obviously I'm buying some flowers."

PERSIS: “Where are you from?”

JOHNSON: "Where are you from," I guess. I said, "Moscow." "This isn't on your itinerary. Get up and get out of here."

PERSIS: The whole circumstances, too. We were not off the main road, just like the cars parked down there. But we were also blocked so that nobody could see us, really. There was a train going through and the traffic was stopped. But this cop came from the far side

and came right to us. He knew exactly where our car was. I mean he didn't see it because he couldn't see it. We figured that a bug was on our car. It had been put on and they knew were our car was. So we knew this was so, but it was all right. We weren't doing anything.

JOHNSON: We drove to Vladimir and Suzdal. There were two famous cities.

PERSIS: We also had the wonderful sense that if anything went wrong, or if we got lost, somebody would appear beside us.

Q: Yes, indeed.

PERSIS: And tell us we were on the wrong road.

JOHNSON: As I said, it didn't bother us. At Christmas time we flew to Austria to spend Christmas with our family, the Austrian family. When we landed in Frankfurt, it was amazing. It was as if a weight had been lifted off our shoulders. We were not conscious of this oppression that was hovering over us. But we got into Frankfurt and it's another world. It surprised us.

Q: You don't even know that you're experiencing this weight. I know exactly what you mean.

JOHNSON: Then, of course, when we went back, we got to know some of the people who were not out-and-out dissidents but had been friends of the Sakharovs and friends of Solzhenitsyn, the man that was supposedly the character of Rubin in Cancer Ward. A devoted communist who still believe in communism. We got to know him, Lev and his wife, Raisa, who had been the interpreter for Lillian Hellman when she had gone there a couple of times, and other writers and artists who were not members of the artists' union and couldn't exhibit. But some of them participated in the free - this was the time when they had those free exhibits that were not supported by the union but they allowed them to show some of their works. They came to the house. We were able to get films through USIA. I had a projector at home and they were avid for any information on the theater and the arts. I showed films and they came to our home for dinner and to read. They could borrow our books and things. The Soviets knew that. But as long as you didn't go too far, it's all right. One time a sculptor, a very fine sculptor, had a book about his sculpture written and published in West Germany. Several of his big sculptures are in cities in West Germany. But he couldn't get any copies of the book. We were going to Austria and his publisher said that he would send fifty copies and I would take them back when I went. Did I take them back or did I send them? I guess I had them sent to me.

PERSIS: We didn't have that many. We had just a few. We just brought them for his own use.

JOHNSON: Five or so. I don't know, anyway, some number.

Q: Did you bring them in the pouch?

JOHNSON: I don't think I did on the pouch because I didn't want to do that. We brought them ourselves. I guess they were in a suitcase and they didn't look through our suitcases. There was nothing subversive. It's just a book about his sculpture that he couldn't get. We were friends with some of the exchange students and one, doing his doctoral thesis in theater, was having a terrible time in the dormitory at the beginning and was going to have to leave because of the conditions. I went out to look at the dormitory and it didn't seem too bad by my standards. I guess he was a little bit more delicate than I. I said they'll get you some other dormitory, but he couldn't stand it, so I said come and stay with us until we get you relocated. So Sidney came and stayed in our apartment with us. He never did get relocated. He stayed with us. It was very good. He was very interesting.

We had made plans to go to the Kopelev's home together one evening but that day suddenly there was something wrong with my car. We assumed that somebody had tinkered with it. I know one time it was the tires. You can't use the telephone. We thought we were being discreet about our visit, but they knew that I was going to go out there and they fixed it so I couldn't have my car. This was a Sunday and I had some work to do in the embassy so I asked for an embassy car to come out and take me in to the office. On the way we were going to drop Sidney, who had the books we had brought from Germany, and he was going to give them to the sculptor. Then he and I would meet later on after I had done my work in the office. I would take the subway and we would meet at the subway stop near where our friends lived and go spend the evening with their literary friends. As I say, it was an embassy car. We didn't mention anything about the books and we dropped Sidney off and I said, "Bye, see you sometime." We didn't say anything about meeting in the metro. He was followed by somebody who came up and said, "What you doing? Where are you going?"

PERSIS: Also knew theater and...

JOHNSON: He knew theater and talked to him, so Sidney knew that this was somebody that they had set for him, and he said, "Come up to my place and we'll talk about theater." Sidney was trying to shake him. He couldn't shake him and Sidney got very shaken himself by then, because he knew that they were after him. And there was another time they sent him a letter and they used a middle name that he had never used except on his passport. They were trying to blackmail him. But this person obviously had been sent to waylay him and to frighten him. They like to let you know that you're being watched.

PERSIS: They know what you're doing. This shows the wonderfulness of the Russian people, too. When Sidney didn't show up at the sculptor's, the sculptor called our home. He would know that our phone was tapped and it would be known that he was calling. But he called me to ask where Sidney was. Then Sidney finally did get there, much later.

Q: With the books?

JOHNSON: With the books.

PERSIS: They called me again. In the meantime I guess you had called.

JOHNSON: I was at the subway station waiting for him and he hadn't come, so I called to know if there was a change in plans.

PERSIS: It's strange. You are very much aware that they know every single thing you're doing and thinking. They let you know. They call you on the phone... in ways you just know that they know.

Q: Is it a helpless feeling that you get?

PERSIS: I don't know. I don't think we reacted too much to it. You also have the security of knowing that nothing is going to happen to you that isn't planned.

Q: That's true.

PERSIS: You know that nothing could happen to you.

JOHNSON: Also there was nothing that was really wrong. We did help perhaps get a few manuscripts out and a few books in, but that was the extent. We were being friendly with these people and we were giving them the opportunity to talk with Americans, to see American films, to come to dinner and meet different people. I know I was there when they had the first international book exhibit when the Americans participated. I said, we should have a reception for them, the American publishers. But the chargé d'affaires said, no, that was their business. There was no reception. So I said, "I'll have something at my apartment for a few of them to meet." Because Nadezhda Mandelstam was still alive; she was a widow of a great poet, and [Robert] Bernstein and some others wanted to meet her, Bernstein, the Random House publisher. So I invited the different Soviets that these publishers said that they wanted to see. They were able to get together in my apartment. There was a good exchange then. It was good for us because we got to see a lot of the interesting people and talk with them.

Q: Did you find that as things waxed and waned between the Russians and the government of the United States, it affected you directly?

JOHNSON: As I say, it was beginning to affect our exchanges. They were not so friendly at the end. We worked on a renewal of the exchange agreement. And we did, I think it was '78, that we signed another exchange agreement. At that time we were still working but after I left, people told me that activities diminished tremendously because detente was...

Q: You left, of course, before Reagan was inaugurated but that must have made things really...

JOHNSON: It made it worse in the beginning, but meanwhile it was Afghanistan, you see, December of '77. Then Carter cut out things.

Q: Did you have Russian servants working in your home?

JOHNSON: No, I was fortunate.

Q: How were you able not to? I thought they insisted.

JOHNSON: I had my Malian. I didn't need one.

Q: They didn't insist that you have one?

JOHNSON: No, because I had one.

Q: I thought they planted one anyway.

JOHNSON: No. Some people didn't have any. They got so fed up with them. We had them come in for parties. When we had receptions and dinners, they would come in and work. But they were ones that worked for other people. Persis went to the hairdresser that was reputed to be a colonel in the KGB. They're nice people. I feel sorry for the employees in the embassy and USIS over this present culture, it's called, in the Soviet Union. But they must have some feelings about the United States and Americans and yet they are Russians. They know they are working for their government. It must be tearing them apart inside if they're sensitive people. I know that the cultural assistant we had, everybody said, "She's also a colonel in the KGB." But she was a nice person and she was very interested in showing art. They did an inspection of the Soviet Union last September. Bob Rockweiler said our CAO assistant was very nice to him, Took him around to museums, bought him a book. I have to feel sorry for them.

Q: But everything is done for a reason?

JOHNSON: I guess so, but they are genuinely warm people.

PERSIS: Very kind to me.

JOHNSON: They were very kind to Persis.

PERSIS: They have a great respect for age and for any infirmities.

JOHNSON: Whenever we traveled and were going up and down steps, the men and everybody would come over and ask, "Can't we help? They were very friendly. In fact often they were friendly and wanted to continue to know us and I had to tell them for their own good they should not.

PERSIS: Had to do it diplomatically.

Q: How was entertaining? Was the social life much less rigorous than in other countries?

JOHNSON: I tried to entertain because it was a good chance... For instance, we had some American students over there, university students. We were starting some courses in the Pushkin Institute and other places. I would have them for Thanksgiving dinner. I don't know whether I asked any Soviets or whether it was just all Americans for Thanksgiving, but we would have, whenever there were exchange groups, we would try to get the Russians to come along with the Americans. It's not as easy, perhaps, as elsewhere, and you know that they name certain people to go, a certain level will go to certain people's homes.

Q: If they said, "Yes," could you count on them being there?

JOHNSON: If they said yes... This is one thing we found, too. In dealing with them, if you're having a negotiating session or you have an exchange agreement, if there is something down in writing, then they will abide by that. But it takes a lot of hard work and patience to get them to come to the table and say, yes, this is the way it will be. My experience was they would live up to the letter of the agreement.

Q: Did you find it frustrating?

JOHNSON: It was frustrating only sometimes, in one thing negotiating for the Paul Taylor dance company, I think. The dance people want certain things and the Soviets say, "This is our hall and it's this way. We can't change it." Or we would say, "You're supposed to take care of the trucking," and they say, "No, it wasn't in the agreement. We didn't say we would do the trucking." Then you have to go back and say, "It's going to cost this much more to truck the things from one city to another." I don't think I felt frustrated because you have to keep chipping away.

Q: Did your style of operating change? You couldn't be too spontaneous, I would think.

PERSIS: Oh, she is.

Q: I know she is, and I wondered if it could be under those circumstances.

JOHNSON: I think you have to think ahead and you have to have different positions. You have to be ready to give but not give too much, and expect them to give on certain things. You become exasperated sometimes with the bureaucracy of it and that they will not answer a note for a long, long time. But that's not peculiar to the Soviets. A lot of other bureaucracies don't answer notes.

Q: How did your servant feel about living there?

JOHNSON: There was a Marine club at the embassy. People from the friendly embassies all went there. That was the center of activities. They showed films a couple of nights a week. He had a red mustang car, a new car. He became very popular. He didn't mind it at all. He knew all the Finnish nannies.

PERSIS: And the Africans.

JOHNSON: Africans, the students at Lumumba university, you know.

PERSIS: And the ambassador's son and cousin or something or other.

JOHNSON: Emile enjoyed it there, I think. He didn't mind too much.

PERSIS: He didn't feel the color bar.

JOHNSON: There were black Marines there, too, and he was treated more like an American. He dressed like an American, spoke English.

PERSIS: By this time he was more American than African.

JOHNSON: He didn't want to go back to Mali.

Q: I can imagine. Then one day you got a cable.

JOHNSON: A cable came in and I took it to the PAO and he said, "You'd better take it up to the ambassador." The ambassador was shocked, and so was everybody else. He said, "Oh, you arranged this. I happened to know John Rheinhart, who was the head of ICA at the time. I'd known him when he was the director for Africa. He had been out to visit. I had gone along with him and the PAO to the meeting with the minister of culture. So the immediate thought was that I had arranged this with John Rheinhart when he had been there. I said, "No, I didn't arrange it with anybody. This is a complete shock to me." I said, "There's only one possibility that a friend of mine, one of my colleagues from Bamako had come out when Secretary Vance came to a meeting. He had a few minutes and I drove him out to the house to see Persis. As I was driving out I said, I'm not particularly happy with what the internal - it had nothing to do with Soviet side - but inside the USIS operation" and I said, "I may retire or ask for reassignment or something." He said, "Would you like a DCM job in Africa? There are lots of DCM jobs." I said, "No, I don't want anything. This is my own thing. I'll make up my mind. Don't do anything. I'm not interested in that." So what came to my mind when I got this cable was, David has gone back and it was equal employment opportunity and he probably said, "There's a woman out there if you're looking for an ambassador. This was my assumption. Nobody ever told me anything. When I went back to the State Department, one of the first days back there when I was getting ready for the assignment, I met the former political officer from Moscow. He said, "I was just on the panel for you and was happy to approve you." He said my name was on a panel and that's how I got it. I know that many of the ambassadors in my OERs [officer evaluation report] would write, "She would be a fine ambassador to the country." She does this, that, or the other thing. But those are things you don't take seriously. I never had any ambition to be an ambassador. I was happy to just go along my own way. I don't know whether I ever even saw David after that, but I wrote to him and I said, It seems to me that you're behind this." He said, "Marilyn, I did inquire when I came back but I found your name on the list from USIA as a possible candidate for appointments to Africa." So he

inquired but my name was on a list that USIA had supplied to the State Department.

Q: That's because of Carter, of course.

JOHNSON: I think so.

Q: Carter demanded so many top women.
JOHNSON: Again it's where being a woman has worked for me.

Q: Definitely. Before we leave Russia, what lessons did you learn from your time there?

JOHNSON: Oh, gosh, Persis, what lessons did I learn from Russia? What I learned is that people are people. I'd always known this. We all had different political systems and different loyalties, but we should understand the other person's point of view. And certainly in negotiating you should know from what perspective that person is approaching the negotiations. You have to understand his position and background and his responsibilities to the people behind. We can't just say to a Russian, "Okay, now let's do this and let's do that." We saw with this walk in the woods in Geneva, it never came to anything because the powers that be are not ready to accept it. So we have to know their perspective and their limitations for negotiations. I think that if you understand more their premises and bases for thinking and for actions, then each person can do a better job.

I've always thought you have to find a mutuality of interests. We're trying to tell America's story, we're trying to have programs that will be of mutual benefit, or we're trying to get everything for our benefit, but I think the only way you can get something is to find an area in which both countries or both groups have an interest and want to get something. There is a point where you have a mutuality of interests, then you can agree there. We're not going to change their beliefs, they're not going to change our beliefs, but we can work together to get what each one wants, I believe.

I don't know that I learned any great lessons. You always do, but I'm not one to sit and question what I've learned from this experience.

I also did learn a lot about myself, that I had always been a very strong individualist person who said, "Any problems are your own," but I was having some problems within that made me unhappy. For the first time I was not happy in my work. I did not want to get up. I did not want to get up and go into the office. I liked the work but I did not want to go into that work atmosphere. I had some feelings that probably were like depression. It made me more understanding of people who have problems, nervous problems and depressions, and how people who are discriminated against can be cowed very easily. I think that probably the most important lesson was to myself. My own recognition of fallibility and how other people feel when they cannot cope. I've always been able to cope.

Q: This was your first feeling of...

JOHNSON: That was my first feeling of not liking where I was. And as I said, that was

why I said to David, ”I'm not happy and I'm going to do something,” and he tried to help and I said, “No, I'll do it myself.” Persis said it was the microwaves [It was believed by some that the microwave listening devices used against the embassy and the residences of embassy employees by the Soviet spy services were a source of cancer and other serious illnesses]. She thought that the microwaves were influential.”

PERSIS: She had all of the symptoms.

Q: Is that right?

PERSIS: Yes. She was completely unlike herself. She would say, “I can't think, I can't think, I can't think.” The symptoms were just there.

Q: Is it an unhappy post, generally speaking?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was a very unhappy post.

PERSIS: People were miserable there.

JOHNSON: Everybody was so ambitious. I've always worked where people worked together. Each one is doing his or her own thing. But there everybody was wanting to make his mark and this is what bothered me.

Q: All wanted to be George Kennans?

JOHNSON: That's right. They don't care whom them step on in order to go [first]. We had the ticker tape. They would rush in in the morning to see what was on the ticker tape and to read the traffic so they could report on it before the other officer could. That's a miserable way.

Q: Is this always true, do you think, of that post?

JOHNSON: I think it's known as that. It's known as an unhappy post.

PERSIS: It's ambitious people and they also think they're the elite. They think they're the bright ones that are chosen, and they're going to make their mark.

JOHNSON: There are some fine people. Now Bill Brown, who is now ambassador to Thailand, came in as political officer. It was his third term. He is a sweet man, very nice.

PERSIS: And Jack Matlock.

JOHNSON: Jack Matlock was a hard driver, but he was a fine honest man with integrity, too. He could see through a lot of the veneer of other people. There aren't many fine people but there are many people there that are ambitious and they only want to be known.
Q: Does it matter what cone they're in, or do we find most of them in the political?

JOHNSON: No, You found it in the political cone, you found it in the economic. I think I saw some of the science attachés out in...

PERSIS: Pakistan?

JOHNSON: No, China. We were talking about the consul general. He said it ruined his career there. As you mentioned, it was an unhappy post. People were always griping. And poor Mo Morin, who does everything for everybody and tries to make people happy, I guess he had a terrible time there.

Q: I can see where he might.

JOHNSON: He and Anne are people that are easy to get along with.

Q: Administrative work is a thankless job anyway.

PERSIS: And yet, I would love to go back.

Q: Really?

PERSIS: I would love to go back. I know we never would go back, but I would love to. People are just... and they have such courage. They did things for us that...

JOHNSON: That got them into trouble. There was one case of somebody that we knew that was convinced of the party [motives]. No question had ever come into her mind: Everything that they did was for the good of the people, and intelligent, and what you read from overseas were lies. Her party people were looking out for their best interests. She wanted to invite us to her home. We said, "No, because of my position." I knew what had happened to these friends who were up over last week with us. They had come to visit us in Moscow and met a girl on the subway. She said, "Come to the house." I went to deliver something and I could see that the girl in all innocence had invited them but the parents knew that there were problems, if it's somebody from the embassy, too. So we told this person, "No, we would love it, we appreciate the gesture but it's not good for you." But she went on and then they let it be known to her that they knew what she was doing and she'd better cease and desist.

PERSIS: She wasn't doing anything.

Q: It must have shocked her.

JOHNSON: Just becoming sympathetic to us. I was supposed to meet her and she had to call and say that she couldn't. We were going to go to a bookstore or something. Then she just couldn't. It's a very sad thing because it's breaking somebody's faith. It's almost like a religion to them, you see. Here has been the ultimate, like a god and, you're finding out that it's not what you believed.

PERSIS: It wasn't we who were trying to chase her in any way. It was her own system that showed her. I remember she wrote me a note right in the house. She had heard of these things but never believed them before. But never mind, they're marvelous people.

JOHNSON: They're very good people. Those who are not working for the KGB don't know what's going on. They hear only one side of the story.

Q: They're spoon fed, of course. Did you see people from other embassies much?

JOHNSON: I think probably less in Moscow than anyplace else. I did have to see the West German cultural attaché who lived in the same building and we became quite friendly with her. The DCM of the German embassy had been in Niger before. I had known him slightly through an artist there, so I was friendly with the West Germans in the cultural and some French, not too many. British and Australian, I knew some of the Australians through tennis. I played tennis with the Australians.

Q: Don't they have the usual national days?

PERSIS: Yes, they do.

JOHNSON: Yes, but I didn't go to them.

PERSIS: Life there at that time was so pressured with activity that you had no time. Even though Eva lived right below us we saw very little of her, much as we liked her and she liked us. It was a continual pressure...

JOHNSON: There was always some delegation coming. You have to prepare for them.

PERSIS: Everybody wants to come to Moscow.

Q: Oh, yes.

PERSIS: Which makes it very interesting. You meet all kinds of people.

Q: Were you able to go to the ballet?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Persis was, too. Persis loves ballet. That was magnificent. Then we went to the opera and Tchaikovsky Hall. They had marvelous contests at Tchaikovsky Hall. They had a ballet competition and there was a Japanese-American [who] won silver. For some reason she came to the house to telephone.

PERSIS: You see everybody wants to come to Moscow. They're always the top people in their field. Marilyn was in a very interesting position because of all these cultural people came through her. We met all tremendously interestingly people.

Q: So you had to get ready for them.

JOHNSON: Alex Katz came.

PERSIS: Larry Rivers.

JOHNSON: Larry Rivers and then George Segal. I traveled with George Segal to Tashkent and Samarkand. Then Louise Gore, who was opening an exhibit in Uzbekistan. I went up to Alma-Ata with her.

Q: So you were able to travel?

JOHNSON: Yes. We also had this large international exhibit program of exchanges, that went off the track after Afghanistan, I think. And now it's just opened up again. Just beginning again under the new cultural agreement.

Q: I wanted to check here. You were in Niger at the time of the walk on the moon?

JOHNSON: Actually, I wasn't.

PERSIS: No, we were at home.

JOHNSON: I was attending a conference. We were at home for the walk on the moon. They had an executive management seminar. This must have been '68. When was the moon walk?

Q: '68.

JOHNSON: '68. We were at a conference at the Eastern Shore Inn. This was the time we were studying with grids. They had teams, the red team and the blue team. We were the blue team and we were supposed to go and work on a problem and decide...
And we were supposed to go down to report to the rest of the group about how we had solved the problem. I remember [in] our group we said, This is a time of once in a lifetime. Why should we play Mickey Mouse games when we can watch the moon?

***

Q: Continuation of interview with Ambassador Marilyn Johnson, Bethlehem, New Hampshire, August 5, 1986.
What was your father's name?

JOHNSON: He was Curtis Clark Johnson. My great grandfather was Curtis Coe Clark. Curtis Clark Johnson.

Q: Curtis Clark Johnson, Clark being through his mother's side?

JOHNSON: His mother's side.

Q: And your mother's name was?

JOHNSON: Sarah S-A-R-A-H. Louise was her middle name. Allen. Sarah Louise Allen. A-L-L-E-N.
Q: Pretty name. And we didn't go into when your mother died.

JOHNSON: She died in 1966. I was going to go back to Mali. That was 1966. I went back to Mali in '64 then came home when she was ill. That summer of '66.

Q: You came home because she was ill?

JOHNSON: I think so, yes.

PERSIS: Again, she was ill but we would let her know how things were. "We will call you if it's necessary." The first thing I knew she was at the door.

Q: She knew you wanted support at that time.

JOHNSON: Needed me.

Q: And when did Persis come to live with you? Was that 1970?

PERSIS: No, I didn't come until...

JOHNSON: She visited in Niger. She visited me for lengthy times in Tunis in '67.

PERSIS: When mother died, Marilyn just expected that I was going to go with her then. I said, "No, I have my own life." I was able to maintain it. So I did. But the time comes when you realize that there's something else you that you wanted.

Q: Oh, absolutely. What a wonderful opportunity to see new places.

PERSIS: That's right.
JOHNSON: So she came to Tunis twice, I think. Then when I returned for my assignment in Washington, I bought a home in Washington and we went up after I bought the house and sold the...

PERSIS: We didn't sell until '74, Marilyn. I went back each year. Don't you remember, I used to say, "I'm like the man who came to dinner." I would come before Thanksgiving intending to go home maybe in January or February or something like that, and I invariable stayed well into the spring. I did that until we went up and sold the house in 1974.

JOHNSON: Gee, I didn't realize I was living alone in Washington.

PERSIS: You certainly were. [laughter]

Q: So you sort of slid in to living together?
Early seventies then?

JOHNSON: Yes. She started staying with me longer and longer and you'd probably come Thanksgiving and then we'd come up here to Bethlehem. Persis was very active in the Great Books movement.

Q: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: Yes, she starred it. Everybody says that. With a friend she started a Junior Great Books in the high school, in North Quincy High School.

Q: Is that so!

JOHNSON: She led groups and she would go in the summer to special summer seminars. It started out at the University of New Hampshire and Bard College. In recent years it has been at Colby College in Maine. She had a very active intellectual life and she was a member of the Symphony board.

PERSIS: Everything was in the cultural field.

JOHNSON: So she had her contacts back there with the symphony and with the Great Books.

PERSIS: That's nothing of importance.

Q: Oh, well, yes, it's very interesting. It's all part of the picture.

JOHNSON: That's what kept her. I suppose you would go back for those things.

PERSIS: I had my own life.

JOHNSON: She had her own life.

PERSIS: As I say, I think one of the nicest things in both Marilyn's and my life, one thing [for which] we've been fortunate. Things have evolved gradually so that there's no regret in leaving. I always feel life gives you the time to make the decisions. It will make the decisions for you and there will be no regrets.

Q: You two seem to have a gift for keeping friendships a good long time. Your friends keep reappearing ten or fifteen years later.

JOHNSON: Yes, that’s right, they do. An odd thing came up just recently. When I was in Cameroon there was a French woman who was secretary in the cultural center. I was

friendly with her and her husband. We'd take trips up to the Bamenda country. It was a small community and I was very friendly. They had a child, a second son, born there. I'm not Catholic. They are strong Catholics. They said there was nobody from their family in Africa at the time and they asked me if I would be godmother to the child. So at the christening I held the baby in my arms and all, and then I established a small bank account for him, but then did nothing from the time that I left and they later left, except write at Christmas time. I've always had a guilty conscience, that I have this French godchild and I've not done right by him.

At Christmas they wrote a regular Christmas card. Last year she said that he had become engaged to a nice girl.

PERSIS: He wrote to you, too.

JOHNSON: He wrote and told me about his engagement. He wrote when he was 21 and sent me a picture with a glass of champagne in his hand. But this Christmas they said that he was going to be married in July and she hoped that I could come to the wedding. Then he wrote and said he would really like it if I could come to his wedding in July. So I said to Persis I felt an obligation and I planned to go. I told them yes, I would. It was July fifth and at that time we were supposed to be finishing the inspection of Japan on the third. I said I think I can get a plane the night of the third that will get me in on the fourth and I will be there for the wedding on the fifth. It turned out that the government said, "Oh, no, you have to fly American, even though there was no American plane from Japan to Europe. They said, "Of course, you can do it but then you might be liable against the 'fly America' act. Then we had to cut off the inspection because of financial cutbacks in the agency." We reduced the number of people to be interviewed in the time we were there.

PERSIS: You also said, "I will pay my way."
JOHNSON: Oh, of course. I was going to pay this diversionary, but they said, Even though you pay the diversionary, you'll be liable." I came back from Japan Saturday night and then took off the following Thursday. Luckily it was over the Fourth of July weekend. So I went to the wedding.

Q: Good for you. You came all the way back and all the way out there?

JOHNSON: Yes, came all the way back here and then flew over there. What brings this up was that the friends wrote that I would stay with them. They met me at the station and it was just like old times, and she remarked that, "It's so natural." We hadn't seen each other for twenty years and yet you fall right back in on the same plane that your friendship was at that time.

Q: That's a difficult trip to accomplish. It speaks well for both sides.

JOHNSON: I was in their home and I felt completely at home. And they felt that I was part of their life. The boy was thrilled. Everybody was very happy. It was a delightful, marvelous wedding.

This morning I read about the opening of a new restaurant on the Potomac in Washington. They talked about the champagne fountain of Baccarat crystal. This was what impressed me at the wedding. We were drinking champagne all the time. They had the reception in an old chateau fort, one wing of it. In addition to the champagne on the tables and being passed around, after the wedding dinner the bride and groom got up there and they'd arranged the glasses, well you've probably seen it in France. They just poured champagne into the top layer and it goes over the fountain into layer after layer. I'd never seen that.

Q: I've never seen that.
JOHNSON: That was a delightful wedding and it all worked out perfectly.

Q: How nice.

PERSIS: I had said to her you really ought to offer to go to a hotel, Marilyn. It's a busy time. It's been a long time since you've seen them. It might not work well. You don't know.

JOHNSON: There are certain people you can pick up with.

Q: So often you have to go back to the first square and gradually build up again. What post did you enjoy overall the most?

JOHNSON: I told you yesterday, because of the people, I really enjoyed Bamako and it was my first post in USIA. I think the most pleasant post was Tunis. It was a lovely place to be. We had a good cultural program going.

Q: Did you travel a lot to Europe from Tunis?

JOHNSON: I went to Austria to visit my friend, and then she and her husband came to visit us. But I didn't go to Europe particularly. I went to Spain, that's right. I went from Niger to Spain and to Morocco to visit a friend. When I was in Tunis I took advantage of going down to Libya to look at the archeological, the Roman and the Greek - there are some beautiful archeological remains in Libya. I drove down with a friend, the personnel officer, Velma Lewis, to visit them. Then I went to the Tassili, and then we had a PAO conference in Tangier and Persis came along. We drove through Morocco. I took advantage of discovering the Maghreb, North Africa.

Q: Which is quite a fascinating part of the world.
PERSIS: As a student she spent a lot of time in Europe.

Q: Yes, of course.

JOHNSON: In '57-'58 we drove all though Europe, during my Fulbright year there.

Q: So you really know the areas very, very well. We haven't gotten at all on to the subject of your promotion record since you were in the Service. I don't imagine you were a person

who paid much attention to when you were promoted, but it is something that career people are concerned with. I wondered if you found it satisfactory?

JOHNSON: I think it was. I never worried. I came in probably as a four and I wasn't young. I must have been in my thirties.

PERSIS: I think you were a five when you joined.

Q: The record says five.

JOHNSON: Well, I was a five then.

Q: A five in '64.

PERSIS: As you say, she never paid attention.

Q: I can see that.

JOHNSON: That was it and my first post was Bamako. I remember Bill Weld, did you ever know him? William Weld.

Q: No.

JOHNSON: He was a top USIA officer. He had been PAO in London. His daughter lives on Cory Place with us. She's married to Jack Vaughan, second wife of Jack Vaughan. Bill Weld came down for some reason to visit the post. I remember I must have had a luncheon for him and the group that were there. We were sitting around with the coffee after lunch. He said, "Well Marilyn, you're a five and you're not young. We've got to get you promoted in a hurry." I was promoted the next year and I said maybe it was Bill Weld.

Q: I am not that familiar with USIS but I always thought it went along the way State did. I know you went from a three to a two in only two years. That's extremely fast for an FSO.

JOHNSON: That is, you know. And I never expected to even be made two because knowing that I came in late, I thought that a three was a perfectly respectable grade. Again, I thought that it was being a woman at that time.

Q: I wondered if you felt that that had... I'm not saying that it did.

JOHNSON: I assume my record was good and they were able to justify it, but I think they probably were trying to promote women officers.

Q: But you see, that's under Nixon. Under Lyndon Johnson I would say definitely, because Johnson very much wanted that. But 1972, we're talking Nixon.

JOHNSON: That's right.

Q: I'm just trying to pull these threads together.
JOHNSON: I don't know. That was when I was PAO.

PERSIS: It was after you came back.

JOHNSON: It was after, but I had been PAO so I had the record.

Q: You had been PAO in Niger and you were deputy director material.

JOHNSON: And then I was named deputy director and maybe they felt as deputy director I had to be... I don't know because the promotion panels normally look only at your record.

Q: That's right, absolutely right.

JOHNSON: I've never questioned. I've never gone back to look at it. I think once they said you should do it. I looked at my OERs but then I thought that's not a good thing to do.

Q: No, I wouldn't think it would be, either.

JOHNSON: In those days they had the confidential part that you didn't see.

Q: That's right.

JOHNSON: And they said you should do it. But I've not done that. I have, as I said, thought that because they were trying to have women in senior positions, and I was able to do the work, they could justify the promotion.

Q: That is quick. And yet it didn't fit in with the time slot when Lyndon Johnson was in [office] because he pushed women. And, of course, under Jimmy Carter. Ford and Nixon weren't known for that and I just wondered if you had any insights.

JOHNSON: I don't have any insights and I never questioned it.

Q: Then you'll just have to accept that you were good. [laughter]

JOHNSON: I was lucky. I was very happy when it was announced each time.

Q: Which, of course, immediately put you in the running to become an ambassador and then they put you in the Senior Seminar. Then your Russian training [then they] and sent you to Moscow. Am I correct in thinking you said you were the first woman CAO in Moscow?

JOHNSON: I don't think I was. There was a Diana Moxey who had been there under the State Department, but USIA had never sent anybody in a senior officer position.

Q: First USIA woman to...

JOHNSON: I think Diana Moxey had been there with State. I'm not sure.

Q: You don't know what she did?

JOHNSON: She was in the cultural [branch.] Then she joined USIA and most recently was PAO in Sierra Leone. I don't know her but I had heard the name and she may have come in with an exhibit. I know it was policy not to, and when I was fortunate to be in that meeting with Frank Shakespeare and brought it to his attention, he said, "Marilyn, you'll be the first one that's sent." He held good to his word. Frank Shakespeare.

Q: One doesn't forget that name. [laughter]

JOHNSON: He's just been named to the Vatican. He was named our ambassador to Portugal and a friend who stopped off there, who had been PAO in Portugal, said he was unhappy. He didn't speak Portuguese. [The] head of the British Council in Portugal was a good friend of Persis. He wrote that he understood that the American ambassador was unhappy. If we wanted he would go and try to invite him to things and make him feel welcome.

Q: He's the ambassador to...

JOHNSON: To the Vatican now. He's a very strong Catholic.

Q: What happened to the man who was there?

JOHNSON: He was the one that did the initiative. He was a special appointee of President Reagan's but then he talked with the Libyans. He went a little too far, remember?

Q: Oh, of course.

JOHNSON: I think he resigned because of pressure.

Q: Had to have his knuckles rapped. When we left off last night, you were talking about being over on the Eastern Shore at a conference and they were giving you Mickey Mouse courses.

JOHNSON: Well, it was one of these executive management courses that they wanted USIA mid-career officers to take. It was supposed to teach us to be better managers. So we had the teams and we had been studying a project and then each team was to report how they had dealt with a particular situation at an evening session. We had learned that there was going to be a telecast of the first man walking on the moon. We told them, "This is being telecast and we're all USIA officers. We think that you should postpone the session and watch this historic event." They said, "No, no." They had to go ahead, they had a schedule they had to meet. So we of the blue team said, We're sorry, but we consider this

more important than meeting a schedule of a routine seminar. We're going to stay in our room and watch the landing on the moon." So we stayed up there.

Q: So you were not overseas at that time but you did go overseas soon afterwards?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was a time when I came back for leave and then you were assigned to go to this course because it was for mid-level officers. That was '68, so it must have been when I was...

Q: From Tunis and you had been paneled before you went to Niamey.

JOHNSON: Because I went to Niamey in July of '67. So it must have been...

Q: '69.

JOHNSON: '69, that's right. So I must have been in Tunis at the time.

Q: What I was getting at was, what was the effect on the people of that moon shot?

JOHNSON: The effect on the world was in various ways. People in many countries, in the Muslim countries, thought that we had defaced the moon. Because of Ramadan everything is on the lunar calendar. In Europe many people thought that the reason for bad weather was that we had been on the moon. But I think that this reestablished America as a leader in scientific energy and space, scientific adventures in space. I recall that in 1957 when I was in France, I was eating at a pension with other professors. First of all... when did the Soviet sputnik [go] up?

Q: 1960 or '61.

JOHNSON: No, it must have been before because... it was '57.

Q: Oh, it was under Eisenhower, yes.

JOHNSON: We sent up what they called the "pamplemousse."

Q: Remember the "pamplemousse." It weighed two pounds.

JOHNSON: They were making fun. These French they were philosophy professors and they were pretty Communist and anti-American and they were kidding me about the "pamplemousse." I think that we ourselves felt that we had been outdone by the Soviets when they sent [Yuri] Gagarin up. This was a reassertion of America's leadership in science.

Q: I wondered if back in Niger you got a lot of feedback from the local people.

JOHNSON: It hit the newspapers, of course, and the local people... It was just the fact that

that there were two sides.

Q: Did they believe it?

JOHNSON: I saw it on television. It was televised, but of course, as I say, the religious leaders, the Muslims were decrying it as a desecration of the moon. I don't recall that that was of any great impact. We had two [opinions]. One was America is a leader in science and technology now and the other was we had done something we shouldn't do.

Q: Yes, now when you were in Tunis, did you have the piece of the moon rock that came around, and put on an exhibit?

JOHNSON: Not when we were there. But when I was in Niger

Q: Oh, it was back then?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, we arranged to have it. There's a fine museum in Niamey that is a combination of historic, geological, and contemporary folk ethnology of the different tribes. We arranged to have the piece of the moon rock exhibited in Niger. It drew a lot of attention.

Q: Did you have lines around the block?

JOHNSON: I don't recall because you see people could wander in. There were no terrific lines. We didn't have an astronaut come. I don't even think we had anybody lecture. Elthan Stepherson, Jr. came when I was in Mali in 1963 to talk about our space exploits and we programmed him in the high school science classes.

Q: Did you have the films that came around Apollo?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

Q: Were they popular?

JOHNSON: They were very popular. We showed those. You were saying, did the people believe it. We would go out into the bush in those days; we would take the all-terrain vehicle and go out and show films in small towns throughout the country as well as in Niamey. It was just a source of wonder to these people. But I think if they saw it they believed it.

Q: They believed it.

JOHNSON: They were very impressed by it.

Q: At the time you were there we were in Algiers. It was tremendously important there. And the lines around the [exhibit hall] to see these things! But of course a lot of them did not

believe that we really got there and it had all been staged and filmed for TV. "If you shot at the moon when it was there, by the time that vehicle got up to the moon the moon would be over here. You can see how [the moon] travels, and it wouldn't hit the moon." They just refused to believe it. It's interesting the impact on different parts of the world. Of course, perhaps you didn't have as much anti-American feeling as we did.

JOHNSON: I think we didn't. Niger wasn't that much anti-American. They were still pretty close to the French. We had an AID program in Niger and the people were not that concerned with politics anyway. I don't recall it making that much of an impact. Persis reminded me that we did have it. I remember now we placed it in the museum.

Q: Let's go on to when you had come back from Russia and you were getting ready to go to your new post. Did you happen to have a chance to see Nancy Rawls [Nancy V. Rawls, U.S. ambassador to Togo June 1974 to August 1976.], who had been at Lomé before you were?

JOHNSON: I think I did meet her once and spoke with her, yes. And I spoke with Chuck James [Charles A. James, U.S. ambassador to Niger, December 1976 to July 1979.]. She (Rawls) was undergoing treatment at the time. She had been in the hospital and was not available all the time because she was still pursuing her treatment. But I did speak with her very briefly. I spoke with Chuck James who had been ambassador to Niger. He had an office in the area.

Q: He had been ambassador to where?

JOHNSON: To Niger. That's right. I was going to Togo. I don't know what I'm talking about. I spoke to Chuck James about being an ambassador. He helped me because he was an AID person. I was USIA, and he would explain about doing the different things.

PERSIS: The man who preceded you as ambassador you talked with [Ronald D. Palmer, U.S. ambassador to Togo, October 1976 to July 1978.].

JOHNSON: Well, I talked with him... gosh... I can see his face, it will come to me in a minute.

Q: So yours was in the middle of an administration, and therefore it was not a question of one being a Republican and one being a Democrat. You were all career.

JOHNSON: Career, but I think because Carter was interested in promoting women that I was fortunate to get it.

PERSIS: Marilyn has always felt that anything that she got in life she was very fortunate.

Q: I noticed that. I noticed that. That's wonderful. Would you go over your preparations for the post? How does one prepare to become ambassador?

JOHNSON: You read a lot. I went down to Washington and was assigned to the Office of

West African Affairs. There was a very fine man, Tom Smith. I don't know if you ever knew him. He later became ambassador to Ghana while we were there. I saw him again. He was very helpful. The desk officer...

Q: Who was your desk officer, can you remember?

JOHNSON: At the beginning, it was Brian Fitzpatrick; then he went out as DCM. He had been named DCM before I was named ambassador.

Q: That's unusual. I thought an ambassador could always pick the DCM and secretary.

JOHNSON: I thought so, too, but he was named. I guess they asked if it was all right with me. It seemed to be a good preparation. He had been desk officer for two years or so and he knew a lot about Togo, so I learned from him, and had no objections to him. I didn't have anybody that I knew that I wanted. Then actually he went out about a month or two ahead of me, so he was there before me.

Q: Did you select a secretary at that time?

JOHNSON: No, there was a secretary, Katherine Ritter, was there. I accepted her. She was fine. She was excellent.

Q: She was at the post?

JOHNSON: She was at post. We continue to correspond. She is sharp. She had been a political appointee.

Q: And had come over into the [Foreign Service].

JOHNSON: Had come in under the Republicans, probably under Nixon, as a political appointee and she had stayed on. A very efficient and knowledgeable person. We didn't have one for a while and I chose the wife of a junior officer, USIA, a trainee. I asked if she would do it because she was very good. Then they assigned another girl, a daughter of a former ambassador to Mauritius, Frances Jones. She wasn't that good as a secretary and now she's an officer. She didn't know much about secretarial work. I remember one time I crossed out something and I wrote "stet" over it. She typed out stet.

Q: Tell me about the Senate hearings. What were they like?

JOHNSON: It was very uneventful. I went up with Thomas Pickering, who was going to be assistant secretary for oceans and environment or whatever it is.

Q: Yes, before Roz Ridgway.

JOHNSON: That's right. They just asked me a few questions about Togo and then about my background. I guess I answered them satisfactorily. So they had no bone to pick. There

were only a few people there. There were probably two members of the Foreign Relations Committee, because it was an unexceptional hearing.

Q: Can you recall who was there, by any chance?

JOHNSON: I can't.

Q: It's Senator Fulbright who used to ask [penetrating questions].

JOHNSON: Senator Fulbright wasn't there, unfortunately. I've always admired him because of the Fulbright program. I don't think Fulbright was there. Then some came in. He perhaps came in for a short time.
Q: You weren't asked any of those embarrassing questions?

JOHNSON: I was not asked any embarrassing questions. I was able to answer. This was what most of the preparatory work was for, to do the background on Togo and know enough about it to answer questions.

Q: So that's where the emphasis is at this time by the desk officer, on getting you ready?

JOHNSON: No, the emphasis was on just learning about the country. Reading, I read a lot of cables from the post. In fact they had started to send me information copies of cables that came from Togo, when I was in the Soviet Union.

Q: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: Yes, I remember Ron Palmer, the previous ambassador, had a farewell call with President Eyadema and he wrote up a cable on that and they sent that to me in Moscow.

Q: Was there an adjective you used before cables?

JOHNSON: Information. They sent me information copy. Info copy. An info copy of significant cables from Togo or to Togo, that would be of interest to me, to my knowledge.

Q: To put you in the picture.

PERSIS: Then you went up to New York to visit businesses.

JOHNSON: I didn't visit businesses but they have a committee of businessmen. It was supported by the government

Q: You mean Togolese?

JOHNSON: No, no this is the overseas organization to encourage American investment overseas.

Q: Is it connected to the World Bank?

JOHNSON: No, no, it was something that, I think, was supported by State or USIA money. They had records of American investments in the different countries and I went to talk about the American investment in Togo. Togo had one of the best-quality phosphate mines. At that time there was interest in some American companies setting up a plant for superphosphates to take the local phosphates and convert them into superphosphates for fertilizer, mostly for fertilizer. And also there had been some oil exploration off the coast of Togo. There had been a company that had found oil and I wanted to see about that. At that time, of course, OPEC was in force. The Togolese had invested in an oil refinery on the basis of the discovery of oil offshore. I wanted to see if there were American businesses that we could push some oil.

Q: Nothing has come of this, I guess?

JOHNSON: No. Because they said although they had found oil it was not of a high quality and the cost of extracting it would be exorbitant. If there were a terrific shortage in the world of oil, then it would be worth it.

Q: You've got to find a pretty big pocket.

JOHNSON: It wasn't worth exploiting. Unfortunately, the president, Eyadema, kept talking about it. He had a bottle... He showed me the bottle of the oil they had given him. He wanted it to be exploited because they had been taken in actually. These countries get taken in, by fast talkers to build a steel mill, to build an oil refinery, and then they go broke. He wanted his own oil for the refinery. In fact they used Nigerian oil.

Q: When you were getting ready to go out, at some point doesn't somebody tell you what you are to do out there? In other words, what your instructions are? Who tells you?

JOHNSON: Well, Tom Smith, the director of the office of West African affairs.

Q: I see. The director of the office of...

JOHNSON: Of West African affairs. Now I only saw Dick Moose when I went to a meeting, one of the weekly meetings, and was introduced as the one going out there. I never talked to Dick Moose about it. He was very busy. They were still at that point negotiating about Namibia. That was a big push to have the South Africans negotiate on the independence of Namibia. But it was Tom Smith who gave me any advice. I can't recall any specifics, do this, don't do this.

Q: That's what I wondered. They don't? You use your own judgment.

JOHNSON: You use your own judgement and they expect you to know what's important. But you do go to see different people. At that time, human rights was very important in the

Carter administration.

Q: Did you see Patt Derian?

JOHNSON: I saw Patt Derian and spoke with her and she told me about this terrible tyrannical regime. Because Sylvanus Olympio had been assassinated. President Eyadema was reputed to be the person who killed him.

Q: So you talked to Patt.?

JOHNSON: I talked to Patt. Darien and learned what their concerns were and if we could do anything to help the human rights picture out there.

Q: Were you told just to keep things on an even keel and try to push American interests wherever possible?

JOHNSON: I think you know when you're talking to business people that we're trying to push American [interests.]

Q: Of course.

JOHNSON: Then we were trying to keep them friendly with us so that we would have their vote in the United Nations.

Q: That's what I wondered. Because by this time, of course, they were in the UN.

JOHNSON: They were in the UN but they didn't have a seat on the Security Council at that time. After I left they had a seat on the Security Council.

Q: I see. So they did not have a seat on the Security Council.

JOHNSON: No.

Q: But you still wanted their vote.
JOHNSON: That's right, yes. Especially on the Namibian question.

Q: Are you ever told what <u>not</u> to do?

JOHNSON: I can't recall being told what not to do. I guess you know that you don't make policy, you follow policy.

Q: I just wondered if you were told to keep a low profile or to go after the people who are not in the government. Sometimes that's what we do.

JOHNSON: I think that we did want to have some contact with the people who weren't in government, but there was no opposition party. It's a one party government. It wasn't

important enough for us to risk having bad relations to go out and look for an opposition party. My predecessor, Ron Palmer, As I said before, Nancy had gone through a bad period because there had been attempted military coups against the president and one of the young officers had been a friend of her secretary, and they thought that some of the plotting had taken place in the residence. I don't think there was anything out in the open, but she was suspected by the government of having had a hand in this attempted coup. Of course they were discovered and were killed.

Q: The secretary, too?

JOHNSON: No, no, no. The other people. So Nancy was there at a time of bad relations. When Ron Palmer was there, the British discovered a mercenary plot. There's a book written by Frederick Forsythe who did *The Day of the Jackal*. Not *The Day of the Jackal*, that was Nigeria but there was another book, now I've forgotten the name of it, which could be likened to Togo. It was a mercenary plot and they had tried to buy some British mercenaries. It was an international group, but mainly two British mercenaries went down to Ghana and from Ghana were to stage a coup against Eyadema. The British intelligence services found this out. But they don't have an embassy in Togo. Their embassy is in Accra and the ambassador - well, he wasn't even an ambassador because Ghana was in the commonwealth, so he was the resident, and would come to pay a visit to Togo. When I was there I was very friendly with the resident commissioner, as he was called in Ghana. But evidently they wanted to get this information to President Eyadema that there were mercenaries planning a coup against him and since they had no British representative in Togo, they asked the American ambassador to go to the president and tell him of this impending coup attempt. So then they saw that America was not plotting against the regime.

Q: That changed relations.

JOHNSON: It changed relations about 180 degrees. Eyadema liked Ron Palmer very much. Also Ron Palmer is a big man. He's black and tall, an impressive person. And Eyadema himself is a very tall, big person. And so after that they had a very good relationship. America suddenly rose in the esteem of the administration.

Q: Why did Palmer come back, then?

JOHNSON: Well, I suppose his tour was up and then he had an assignment in personnel. He was director of Foreign Service. Harry Barnes was director of personnel, but Ron Palmer was an assistant. Then he subsequently had an appointment as ambassador to Kuala Lumpur. When I was there I was welcomed because this had happened the previous year. I think it had happened in September of '77. I arrived in November of '78.
I arrived and was told that I would probably have to wait a long time to present my letters of credentials because they liked to do it with several people, and it would probably take a week or so. So I would have a long time to learn about it but I wouldn't officially be there. I was told at that point to keep a low profile because I was not officially received by the government, but I was a chargé d'affaires until I presented my set of credentials. Then,

within 36 hours, the next day, they called and said “This is very exceptional. We would like you to come and present your letters the next morning, 10 o'clock in the morning. We'll come and pick you up. “Then you do this, that, and the other thing. When I did present the letters to the president he said, We’ve made an exception in your case. We rarely do any of this this quickly but we're happy to have you here.” You could see that there were good relations.

Q: It's curious the way it all comes back to people, doesn't it? One country wants to let another country know that things are good or bad or whatever, and they can do it by a little gesture like that.

JOHNSON: I remember when Malcolm Toon was named ambassador to Moscow when we were there. He came in December and the Soviets didn't accept him until mid-January. He was there a long time. They wanted to show their unhappiness with certain things. They just kept him waiting and waiting to present his credentials. But this was exceptionally fast and I was the only one.

Q: You went by yourself.

JOHNSON: Nobody else. I went by myself. After presenting the letters, I guess it's usual, but they said, You'll go and then it will be about 15 minutes. You’ll go over and sign and he’ll offer champagne. Then you’ll talk about 15 minutes and then you'll leave. Well, I presented the letters and he saw that I could speak French, so he sent his interpreter away and said, “We don't need you.”

Q: Did he? Now that's surprising, because they often hide behind that.

JOHNSON: They usually want to keep an interpreter. He had his counselor with him and I had the DCM.
Q: That would be Brian...

JOHNSON: Brian Kirkpatrick.

Q: He had been chargé, I suppose?

JOHNSON: He had been chargé until I came. So after presenting the letters at a huge desk, he invited me to come over and sit in a circle of chairs and they served Dom Perignon champagne. I think I didn't. I think I had a cup of coffee but you could have champagne or coffee or tea or soft drinks. We talked for about an hour.

Q: Did you really?

JOHNSON: It went on a lot longer than they had anticipated.

Q: Threw his schedule off, I'll bet.

JOHNSON: I guess so. They're pretty flexible, the Africans.

Q: What did you wear? Anything special?

JOHNSON: I couldn't think of it but when I was digging through for a picture to give you I found a picture in a yellow dress. I must have worn black.. I have a black dress that's an all-purpose one. It's a silk, black silk with a jacket. It's a dress black with a white band through here and it has white piping on the jacket. When Ross McClelland [Roswell D. McClelland, U.S. ambassador to Niger, July 1970 to July 1973] was presenting his letters in Niger I wore that to his ceremony.

PERSIS: You wore navy blue to that.
Q: She's fantastic on the details, isn't she? She can remember dates and cars. An encyclopedia.

JOHNSON: I never remember what I wear. I'm not conscious of clothes at all.

PERSIS: No she isn't. I remember the clothes because Phoebe buys her clothes for her.

JOHNSON: I hate to shop for clothes.

Q: Is that right?

JOHNSON: Phoebe buys or gives me her cast-offs. [laughter]

PERSIS: I pick out what she's going to wear.

Q: You decide what she's going to wear. That's lovely.

JOHNSON: It's lovely to have somebody make all the decisions.

PERSIS: Phoebe always says how lucky because when she's going on a trip I pick out what she's going to take.

JOHNSON: Come now, you ask me what I would like to take. I think on the last one to Japan I decided. [laughter] But anyway, Persis does. She knows clothes better than I.

Q: That's wonderful, all those decisions.

JOHNSON: So I wore my black dress because that's the ceremony.

Q: Then after that, a hat, did you wear a hat?

JOHNSON: No. Did I wear gloves? I wore gloves. I took white gloves. No hat.

Q: And a handbag like the Queen?

JOHNSON: Oh, gosh, did I... No, I think I had just had something for the letter. I can't remember.

PERSIS: You wouldn't need a bag. She was driven.

JOHNSON: I had an envelope with the letters.

Q: You went in the embassy car?

JOHNSON: No, the chief of protocol came to the residence, picked me up, and then I drove with the chief of protocol and Brian must have gone in the embassy car.

Q: What did you do afterwards?

JOHNSON: We were driven up to the palace, presidential palace they call it, that looks out on the sea with a nice garden. We drove in the ceremonial entrance, the front entrance. They had a guard of honor there and a band.

Q: Really?

JOHNSON: Ohm yes.

Q: You got the full nine yards, didn't you?
JOHNSON: The full treatment, yes. The band played the two national anthems. We stood at attention for the two national anthems. Then we were to review the honor guard but we walked by them. The honor guard was there, all sharp. I remember I was walking along. Normally I walk rather fast. The chief of protocol said "Slow down."

Q: He was with you?

JOHNSON: He was with me.

Q: The president hadn't met you yet?

JOHNSON: No, no, this was before I went in to meet the president. We drove in through the main gates. They opened the big gates and we drove up the ceremonial drive and stood while the two national anthems were played, and then walked by the honor guard.

PERSIS: Reviewed.

JOHNSON: A review is when they pass in review; I guess I reviewed the honor guard. But the chief of protocol was one step behind me. I walked by and they saluted of course. I can't remember, but I probably was met by the counselor, the president's counselor, and was escorted up the stairs to the president's office. He has a large office with, as I said, a big desk, a black marble desk. I was at the door. You bow to him. I was told to bow. Then take

a few steps. I think I said, “Good morning.” Then I went up to the desk and he came out to meet me. This picture I have I'm handing him something else, I guess, and somebody took a picture. He came to meet me. He came out from behind the desk to meet me, took the letters and I made my little speech about how happy I was to be there and that our relations were very good, thanks to my predecessor and I hoped that I would be able to carry on his good work and further the good relations between the United States and Togo.

Q: Did you work that all out ahead of time?

JOHNSON: Yes, when I got to the post, they said, “You’ll have a long time to think about your speech because it will be probably a week or so before you present them.” So I started and then Brian, the DCM, had given me some ideas. Suddenly they called up and said, “Get ready to go tomorrow.” I didn't have long, but I had long enough to make a little speech.

Q: You talked an hour. What did you talk about?

JOHNSON: As I say, I presented the credentials, he took them and put them on his desk and said, “Come over and sit down.” I talked, I think, about American foreign policy and what we were attempting to do there. He brought out a map of the world and he spoke about the Russian influence. At that time Brzezinski had been talking about the crescent, the Soviet influence. He showed me the map of the Horn of Africa. He's very anti-Soviet in speaking with me.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: I don't know how he was speaking with the Soviet ambassador, because there was a Soviet ambassador there. He was telling me about the threat of Soviet domination coming in to Africa. We spoke about that a lot. Since I had been in the Soviet Union, I was able to discuss with him some of the ways of Soviets and their history, the whole history of expansion through the central Asian area. Then I guess I told him that I was hoping that more American business could come to invest, and about my meetings, and about the oil. I asked him some questions. It just went on very evenly.

Q: Did he hold the map when he was showing you?

JOHNSON: He had somebody bring it in, then he stood up and pointed to different areas where there was Soviet influence.

Q: You remained seated?

JOHNSON: I remained seated.

Q: I'm just trying to get the picture.

JOHNSON: He was seated, I was to his right. It was very relaxed. Fortunately I had been in Africa through the sixties. Togo was like going home to me. It was a culture that I knew. I

liked the people and I felt at home with them and they felt at ease with me because they knew that I respected them. Perhaps I told him about my previous experience in Africa, too. I can't remember. I remember we talked about foreign policy and about American policy. He was supporting our policy on Soviet containment.

PERSIS: Also you were very happy at that time at the change in the policy that Carter had brought about towards Africa.

JOHNSON: Andrew Young was then at the UN. He had changed the attitudes of the African nations towards the United States. Andrew Young was a great influence. He made friends of African nations that hadn't liked the United States before. They didn't like our policies.

PERSIS: I remember when you made your speech when you were sworn in. You were very happy to be going back at this time. You said something to the effect that we who have been in Africa and have loved it and so forth...
This is going to be a new era. They were happy to come. They loved Africa. They as much as said they didn't like the other policy.

Q: It gave Africa a prominence it had never had.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right.

Q: Let's go back a bit. I did skip right over your swearing-in ceremony. Where did you have that?

JOHNSON: That was held in the regular room.

Q: Up on the eighth floor?

JOHNSON: On the eighth floor.

Q: The large room? The ballroom [The Benjamin Franklin room.]?

JOHNSON: The large room, yes.

PERSIS: There's a reception room. You first go in to a reception room.

JOHNSON: Yes, there's a lovely reception room.

Q: You had a large group, did you, of friends?

JOHNSON: Yes, I had friends and relatives.

Q: I understand an ambassador pays for that?
JOHNSON: Yes, you pay for the reception, yes. This is one of the things that you learn

while you're there, too. They give you the names of different caterers and you call them and you tell them what you want. I wanted champagne, of course, sandwiches, and cakes, I think. And you arrange for that.

Q: What part did your sister play in this? Did she help you choose these [refreshments].

PERSIS: No.

JOHNSON: I did that from the office.

Q: I see. About how many people did you have?

JOHNSON: I don't know, 150 to 200 people.

Q: That's a lot.

PERSIS: I don't think you had 200 people. It might have been 150. She asked all her old ambassadors.

JOHNSON: And the former ambassadors.

PERSIS: The ones who were around. People who were meaningful to her.

JOHNSON: My friends in the Senior Seminar. People I'd worked for in USIS and my secretaries in USIA.

Q: You had relatives come?

JOHNSON: Had relatives come down. Two cousins came from Boston. Did Curt Clark come?

PERSIS: Yes.

JOHNSON: And the father of this girl that came in yesterday. Was Suzie there too? Because she lives in Arlington. Curtis and Vera Clark came. Then the relatives of my mother who are still living in Wollaston, and Quincy came down. Then friends, personal friends, my godchild. Then as I say, associates and people from the office.

Q: Now who swore you in?

JOHNSON: He was the... was it Reed?

Q: Ben Reed?

JOHNSON: Ben Reed, who was the...

Q: Under Secretary for Management. Ron Spiers' job now.

JOHNSON: That's right, Ron Spiers' job.

Q: I like the way we call it "Ron Spiers' job."

JOHNSON: Well, I knew him in Pakistan.

Q: Yes, of course you did.

JOHNSON: He was a fine person. Boy, he's a bright man, and he's well-rounded. He has intellectual tastes. He knows history, music, literature.

Q: Is that so?

JOHNSON: Yes. He's a very intelligent, understanding man. He's having a bad reputation now. I read things about him.

Q: He has to play the heavy.

JOHNSON: That's right. Playing the heavy.

PERSIS: He's a fair man, a very fair man.

JOHNSON: His wife Patience is delightful. They have a summer place near Manchester, Vermont. She's a New Englander. They are fine people. I really enjoyed working for him. Good man.

Q: Who held the Bible?

JOHNSON: Persis did. She was in her wheelchair and she held the Bible.

Q: Was that a family Bible by any chance?

JOHNSON: No, I think it was one they provided. We have Bibles.

Q: Some people make a great point of bringing back grandmother's.

JOHNSON: Whoever was in Washington at the time from my other posts.

PERSIS: We just sent out a general invitation besides the individual ones.

Q: Now after you were sworn in, did you then have any sort of a little celebration.

JOHNSON: Yes, again one of the group from Bamako, he had been an architect with AID and his wife is a dietician and we've remained friends ever since Bamako. They said that

they would like to have a dinner afterwards at their home, and for me to invite the people that I wanted. We had mutual friends that came. So then we went from the State Department, I guess, to the Slaters for drinks and...

PERSIS: We went back to the apartment for a little while.

JOHNSON: That's right. I had an apartment at Columbia Plaza. We were staying at Columbia Plaza, at the Recreation Association apartments. We went back there, I guess. Oh, that's right, some of the relatives and some people who worked...

PERSIS: Yes, they all went.

Q: So you really had quite a nice celebration?

JOHNSON: Yes we did. It's a reunion with people. It was very nice.

Q: A nice sendoff.

JOHNSON: Dotty Slater is a gourmet cook, so we had a delicious dinner.

Q: Did anybody from the Togo embassy come and call on you?

JOHNSON: The chargé d'affaires and his wife were at the swearing-in and I went with Ron Palmer to a luncheon at the ambassador's before I went out. It must have been after the swearing-in but before I left for Togo. I went to a luncheon at the Togolese ambassador's. They were very friendly.

Q: He had come by then?

JOHNSON: Yes. I think it was the wife of the ambassador and the chargé d'affaires came to the swearing-in.

Q: Did anybody from the Togolese embassy come to see you off at the plane?

JOHNSON: I don't think so, no.

PERSIS: Her former ambassador wanted to take her to the plane.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right. I left early in the morning. Bob Moore [C. Robert Moore, U.S. ambassador to Mali, April 1965 to June 1968. Also, subsequently ambassador to Cameroon]. He is a wonderful person, Bob and Joanna Moore. You never knew them I guess?

Q: No.

JOHNSON: He wanted to drive us to the plane.

Q: He was your ambassador where?

JOHNSON: In Mali.

PERSIS: Everybody who was in Mali called it a golden time.
JOHNSON: He was a wonderful ambassador and it was an exceptionally fine group of people.

Q: Let me just see where I am here. Let's jump back over to your presentation of credentials. But before we do that I would like to ask Persis what was the effect on you when you heard your sister was going to be an ambassador?

PERSIS: I was very happy because I knew that she was under great stress in Moscow and for the first time...

Q: Was this because of working personalities? A conflict?

JOHNSON: Yes. Interior. It was within the embassy.

PERSIS: For the first time in her life she was finding that she didn't know whether she wanted [to stay on.] She loved her work, but I remember her saying, “If I knew anything else that I would really like to do as much as the work that I do, I would resign.” I never heard her say that before.

Q: Under too much stress.

PERSIS: Also knowing the situation that she was in, I was concerned about her health. As I say, I felt sure she was affected by the microwaves because she was not acting as she usually did. I would try to be as normal with her as possible and not showing the anxiety. She had done so well. We never expected anything from a career. She'd never been career oriented in the sense that. “I'm going to do this.”

JOHNSON: I was never going to be a career woman.

PERSIS: But I also knew that this was an unhappy time. She came home one day to me, and she said, "It's going to be all right, Persis." She didn't tell me any more, but she just said to me, ”It's going to be all right.” I remember Sidney was leaving at that time and he'd been living with us, this young man that we became very fond of and when he was leaving he was concerned about her too. She said to him, "It's going to be all right, Sidney." Because she knew then that she was being nominated.

JOHNSON: I knew I was being considered. They were doing the background investigation and all. The cable that comes out, “Do you know of any reasons that you should not accept the appointment?”

Q: Oh, is that what it says?

JOHNSON: Yes. The cable said, “You are being considered for appointment as ambassador to Togo. Are there any reasons that would prevent you from taking this on.” Something to that effect. It was for me to say whether there was anything that they didn't know about.

Q: They want to know if you have any skeletons.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right. I should tell the skeletons before they dig them out.

Q: Were you surprised, Persis?

PERSIS: Yes. Completely. Never had an inkling. When Marilyn was in Garmisch we became friendly with some of the military people. This was a wonderful experience for us too, because we have stereotypes when we don't know too much and this was a very broadening experience. One of the men, Denny, had said to you, “Is there any chance? ...Where do you go with USIA. Do you ever have a chance of becoming an ambassador?” I remember Marilyn said, “Theoretically there's a chance, but...”

Q: It’s pretty slim.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: And for a woman.

JOHNSON: That's right.

Q: There have only been two.

JOHNSON: From USIA?

Q: Yes, you and Frances Cook, and she's become an FSO now.

JOHNSON: Yes, she changed. She was in Dick Moose's office when I was being sworn in. She’d converted to State before...

Q: So you're the only one.

PERSIS: Also in Garmisch they have pictures of all the people who have been there who became generals. Marilyn’s is the only woman’s picture.

JOHNSON: I don't even know if there is a picture. They asked me for it and I didn't have a picture.

Q: To put up?

JOHNSON: You asked me for this. The State Department never gave me one. They gave me some small ones when I first went in, but I never had any big official ones.

Q: You should have had an official one.

JOHNSON: I should have, yes. I should have asked. I never did ask for it.

Q: Did you ever meet Carter, by the way?

JOHNSON: No, no, that was too bad.

Q: There was no picture taken in the Rose Garden?

JOHNSON: No, I never went to the White House.

PERSIS: Togo was too little a country.

Q: I think it's policy. I think Reagan has everybody.

JOHNSON: I think Reagan does now.

Q: And he has a picture taken. In a way it's a very good thing for an ambassador to have a picture of herself or himself with the president displayed prominently in the office or the home. I think it's a very good idea actually.

PERSIS: As I say it was something so unexpected.

Q: Your family was all surprised?

PERSIS: Yes, although I think they respected Marilyn a great deal and thought she had done very well.

Q: Unlike you, they wouldn't have known what the odds were against it, would they? Because you were in it so you would know.

PERSIS: As I say it was just out of the blue. It was nothing ever anticipated.

JOHNSON: No, it was unanticipated from my point of view too. I was completely taken aback.

Q: Now let's go back to when you finished talking to the president, now, and you presented your credentials.

JOHNSON: Then I stayed with the chief of protocol. He drove me back to the residence and I asked him if he would come in and have champagne.

PERSIS: We had arranged to have a small...

JOHNSON: We had something for people from the embassy there. All of the embassy and the country team. The country team came with me, I guess, that was it. They went with me but then they must have left when I sat down with the president because I don't remember the country team being there for our chat. Brian was there, but I think that the PAO, and the Peace Corps, and the AID...

PERSIS: And then you made a speech on television.

JOHNSON: That's right. They have national television.

PERSIS: Then that night we had a dinner at Brian's because I remember we were all watching the television, the news.

JOHNSON: That's right. They taped the presentation of the credentials.

Q: They do?

JOHNSON: And they taped the whole thing going by the honor guard and all coming in in the car.

Q: Who does that?

JOHNSON: The national television, the Togolese television.

Q: They taped the whole ceremony?

JOHNSON: They taped the whole ceremony and showed it on that evening's news.

PERSIS: They do that for everyone.

JOHNSON: They do it for everybody.

Q: That's nice all the same. So then you went back to the embassy and had a little party?

JOHNSON: Then we went back to the residence. I think the chief of protocol said he couldn't come in or he just came in, didn't stay long. He came in and probably met you. Then we had the people from the embassy and the country team and everybody. All the Americans were invited to have champagne and a snack or something.

JOHNSON: Then the DCM and his wife had us for dinner with a group, probably the country team too.

PERSIS: We hadn't been to their house.

JOHNSON: We hadn't been in the country long. It was soon, very soon. About a day and a half I guess.

Q: Fascinating. Now, did you see the president much after that?

JOHNSON: Yes, I did. I had the opportunity to go in. Afghanistan came up. I think I went in about that. I know, in November of... was it November of '78? The hostages. Or was that '79?

Q: That was later. It was just a year before the new election. It was one thing that defeated Carter.

JOHNSON: That's right. That was in '79. He would call up and want to talk about something and I would go in. I went in quite frequently. I would go in alone. I'd drive up and go in. I remember one morning I was listening to the news. I like to play tennis, so I would go play tennis about three or four times a week at six o'clock in the morning. I'd play from six to quarter of seven and then come back and shower and listen to the Voice of America, the seven o'clock broadcast. One morning about quarter past seven they called from the palace and said the president wanted to see me. That there was something on the news that he didn't understand about American policy. I've forgotten what it was now. Do you remember?

PERSIS: No, I don't. I remember the night he called you and bawled you out.

JOHNSON: What?

PERSIS: Because something had come in the newspaper and he was insulted or something like that.

JOHNSON: Oh, it was in an American newspaper.

PERSIS: Yes.

JOHNSON: That's right. It was a Jack Anderson column. One of the sons of the former president, Sylvanus Olympio, is a businessman in France and London, but he also went to Princeton with Bill Bradley. There are people interested in the case and there are people who still are trying to get even and to have the old regime, the Olympio family. Togo has two areas, distinct areas, the north and the south. The southern part had been the part that was developed by the French and the Portuguese. There were many British and Portuguese trading posts there, and German, of course, because it had been German. But many of the people had Portuguese names. They went from Brazil and Portugal. So you have the Olympios, de Andrade, Madeiros, many of these names. These were the people that were fairer skinned, were educated, and had run the country, and had looked down upon the northerners who were less educated, had not been in commerce, didn't have the contact with Europe that the southerners did. Sylvanus Olympio, of course, and Grunitzky, his

hand-picked successor, were in this Portuguese-type, almost mestizos. They were the light skinned, and looked down upon the north. Eyadema was from the Kabiyé tribe in the north. There was also a Ewe, E-W-E, tribe in the south that went over the border into Ghana. So you had the Portuguese-influenced ones, you had the Ewes, and you had the northern tribes, the largest of which was the Kabiyé. Eyadema had been an houseboy to an American missionary and so he went to a missionary school. He had an elementary school education, and then went into the army, was in the army under the French and was a sergeant. At the time of the coup against Olympio, he was a sergeant and was assumed to have led the coup and killed Olympio, but it's never been proven. You don't talk about that much. Except that Olympio's sons, one of whom is this businessman, they think it was he who was paying for the mercenary attempted coup against Eyadema, and periodic attacks upon him. They talked to Jack Anderson and there was a Jack Anderson column. I guess the president called me up one night and said what is this writing in the newspaper?

PERSIS: There was something else that came up just at that time. You thought he was trying to [express] one thing and he was going on and going on; he wanted to see you first thing in the morning. So you got all your papers together and went in there and it was entirely different.

JOHNSON: Entirely different, yes. I thought it was another article. It was the Jack Anderson column.

Q: I suppose you had to then explain that we have a first amendment?

JOHNSON: I explained it was a free press and we really can't influence it. I said what I would advise him to do would be to write or have his ambassador or somebody write a letter to rebut these things. I said that's the only way you can do it. I couldn't interfere. I told him that he had a right to write a rebuttal and take his chances to have it published.

Q: I suppose it's very difficult for people with these forms of government to understand how anybody with the power of the US ambassador or US president can't just muzzle everybody.

JOHNSON: That's right, because they can do it.

Q: They can do it and you're more powerful. It must be very strange.
JOHNSON: I know that when there was a lot going on with Chad, I frequently went to see the president because I was trying to do something, but the United States was not too interested in helping at the time. Although we had our communications. I think that maybe he went to a meeting down in Zaire and somehow we were able to send a message to our embassy for communication to the Togolese embassy there. So we were helpful in passing on messages.

Q: Yes. I see. What was your staff? You had the staff when you were there, but you mentioned yesterday that you had another DCM.

JOHNSON: Yes, when Brian's tour was up.

Q: He wasn't there very long then, was he?

JOHNSON: I guess he wasn't. It must have been only a year and a half. I didn't say anything about it. I didn't ask to have him removed.

PERSIS: You didn't ask to keep him.

JOHNSON: I didn't ask to keep him, either. He was very conscientious and was very thoughtful. He had not had that much experience in Africa, but he had been desk officer. I guess he had been in Zaire, I can't remember. He was not an outgoing personality. He was more what many people would think of a as a stereotype of a State Department [officer] who thought he was better. As chargé and as DCM he thought that he could tell the director of Peace Corps and the PAO - we had established a small AID mission when I was there - that they should report to him. Of course they are independent agencies and liked to run their own programs. They resented him. I know the Peace Corps director was an outstanding man and he complained to me about it. I just tried to explain. But, as I say, I didn't ask for him to leave, but I didn't say he should stay on.
Q: Did you have to speak to him about his [attitude]?

JOHNSON: I think I did. I asked that he should be a little more understanding and although we wanted to have it coordinated, I wanted to have everybody working together. Having been PAO before and a member of the country team, I knew how you feel as somebody outside. But I always felt that we should work closely with State Department and when I was in USIA I always wanted to have very good relations. I don't like to have antagonistic relations with them.

From the other point of view, I recognized that they had their own programs but I wanted to know about them, and if any problems came up I wanted them to feel free to come and consult, and that I would want to know of any potential embarrassing situations.

Q: Did you have the feeling that Brian, perhaps, felt that he, being an old-line FSO, should have had your job? Do you think he resented you?

JOHNSON: I don't think that. He was young. He wasn't that old. I don't think he resented [me]. I think he thought that he knew more about Togo because he had been desk officer, but I think he recognized that I knew Africa too, and I spoke French a lot better than he did. He spoke some French. But my French, when I joined the agency I had to take the FSI test and I got a 4+4+. Even though I had been in the Soviet Union I was able to pick it up when I came back. I had no problem with French. So I knew African culture better and I knew the French language better than Brian. But I think he was quite sure of his knowledge.

Q: Was he helpful to you in actual circumstances?

JOHNSON: He was very helpful in getting me going. His wife was a fine person. We got

along well. I wrote an honest OER. You're supposed to say where there can be improvement. I think I probably did say this [about] his personality in his dealings with other people. Then for his replacement they sent out some names. Then I learned that Irving Hicks was available. They sent his name out and there was no question that I knew him. I knew he was good with people. I knew he was excellent on administration and I knew that we would get along well together. We both shared the same viewpoint.

Q: And you had known him?

JOHNSON: I had known him in Bamako. He had been GSO [general services officer (administrative section) and then he was budget and fiscal officer in Bamako.

Q: A helpful man to have as a DCM.

JOHNSON: Very helpful. He knew all the administrative details. He also had been an administrative officer in Berlin, so he knew how things should be done.

Q: He was regular State Department Foreign Service.

JOHNSON: State Department Foreign Service officer.

PERSIS: We had a wonderful relationship.

JOHNSON: It was great.

PERSIS: But going back to where you were having everybody working on a team. One of the things I remember Marilyn saying [when] we were flying down to Togo. You arrive in the middle of the night. It's a strange experience to be coming in as an ambassador. She said, "If there's one thing I want to accomplish it's something that everybody speaks about but I've seldom seen, and that is to have every agency, every department work together and work with each other." She accomplished it.

JOHNSON: We had a very good team. Outstanding people. Very fine.

Q: If that's what you were after, I can see how Brian's mannerism might jar things.

JOHNSON: It did. There was an antagonism and they would come to me, as I say. And that's not right.

Q: You had country team meetings once a week?

JOHNSON: Yes, we did. Everybody came over to [the embassy.] We had them in my office.

Q: You held them on collegial lines?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. We all sat around in a circle and I don't think I had any one seat, but when people came, we would gather together. I would tell them anything that had come in on cables that they might not have seen and then asked them what was going on in their departments. If we had any reports to write, would ask for their input so that we would reflect everybody's viewpoint and not just mine and the DCMs.

Q: I suppose from the intimations that you let drop about Russia, having seen how negative it can be, the competition and so forth, that that was high on your list of things to eradicate.

JOHNSON: I suppose it was.

Q: Because this would be your next post.
JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: It can be very destructive.

JOHNSON: Oh, it could be. There is such a thing as creative tension, but I don't think you need sniping at one another. Each person, each member of the country team had his or her own agency or unit to work with. Each person respected that. We worked with USIS, helped Peace Corps, and I worked very closely with Peace Corps.

PERSIS: I remember the PAO there. We've remained friends, again. He said when he heard that a USIA person was coming to be ambassador, he was very apprehensive. He felt that she could possibly be taking over [his agency.]. She would know how it should be run and she might be very autocratic about it. But he has since more than once told us it was the high point of his career. Because he saw how an embassy should work. How they all can help each other, each area.

JOHNSON: He is an outstanding PAO. We were fortunate in having very good people. He is really a topnotch one. I was interested and would ask him about the programs, but they were his programs.

PERSIS: He's a great humanitarian. He said that Marilyn demonstrated to him that you could be a decent person and still be successful. Which I felt was an outstanding compliment.

Q: Absolutely.

JOHNSON: He wrote recently. Somebody wrote a slanderous letter accusing him of plotting against the government. I got a call from the foreign minister about this. I said he and I will come over. So we went to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and talked to the foreign minister and found out what it was. I just stood up for him. I said he has done everything to improve relations between Togo and the United States and he has been working assiduously at that and this allegation is completely out of line.

Q: You backed your people.

JOHNSON: I backed him up. He wrote in a letter this past year, “I remember a certain ambassador who saved a certain PAO's neck.”

Q: That's wonderful. It’s the way it should be.

PERSIS: He could have been run out of the country.

Q: Certainly he could have. It's happened before.

PERSIS: But he did do an awful lot. Everybody said what a difference there was in the programs.

Q: Of course that would be sort of a soft spot in your heart, wouldn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes. But also Peace Corps was a soft spot in my heart. I went to dedications of schools. Got extra money, the ambassador's self-help fund. We got extra money each year for them to build, have projects.

Q: Where did you get the extra money?

JOHNSON: At the end of year funds in State. We always had projects written up and defended, justified, in order to take any money that was available and then we could carry them out.
Q: What about leader grants?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, we had a lot of leader grants. When it was a minister I asked to be able to talk with the minister. I met all of the leader grantees, anybody on the exchange program. I asked to meet them before they left, to receive them in the office, and then to see them when they came for the debriefing.

PERSIS: Very often you had a dinner for them.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, we had dinners for them.

Q: Now who runs that in an embassy?

JOHNSON: USIA.

Q: That's what I thought. USIA runs it.

JOHNSON: But the ambassador signs the letters of invitation. USIA does all of the work. There's a mission committee, an IV [important visitors] committee and usually it's chaired by the DCM. But it’s the cultural affairs office, if you have one, and a large enough one, who runs the IV program and calls meetings. You have a couple of meetings a year with representatives from every agency and every unit within the embassy, the political, the

economic. You remind them about what the goals are and the type of person that you want to have. There are qualifications and the type of programs which are offered. Now we have group projects. They found it's more economical and sometimes professionally more effective to have a group project there. They can be regional or multi-regional projects. These are on themes that usually are repeated each year. For a while there were Women in Development. That was one of the themes. Usually there are projects for journalists. There are projects for press and television. And there are projects for legal experts, like supreme court. Well, they would be individual.

Q: So you bring over, say, legal experts of a country or of a set of countries?

JOHNSON: You have people or school administrators that fall within a certain category from different countries come to the United States to participate in a group project in the United States. As I say, they can be regional or multi-regional. These come under different rubrics. Usually it's something that we're interested in. We had some for human rights at that time.

PERSIS: I also remember the justice department, the judges and also parliamentary people.

JOHNSON: You have a parliamentary delegation. But that usually would be a one person. Then there are always programs in the making of American foreign policy showing the domestic, and projects for editors. Economics, we have projects in economics.

PERSIS: Ann, you must get this from each one... you must know all this?

Q: I do, but I don't ask everybody the same thing.

JOHNSON: No, because I'm USIA.

Q: Exactly. She's the only one I've had in USIA, you see. Other people, for example if somebody has been an economic officer, then I home in on that. If it's a political officer I home in on that. But I've been very anxious to meet you because you're the only USIA person I have, and that would be your emphasis.

JOHNSON: And I know these leader grants. We used to call them leader grants. It's called the International Visitor Program now and the leader grants. We do try to identify young people or mid-career people who have the potential for rising to policy-making positions in the government. If you can identify them when they're young and let them come to the United States to see the American system, then when they rise, you've made your contact. Your successor - usually it's not you who reaps the benefit, but a successor later on that does.

Q: It may be ten years down the road. The trick, though, is to pick out the comers.

PERSIS: Marilyn was very successful at that.

JOHNSON: You think so?

PERSIS: Yes, because I know in looking and seeing who rises to the top in countries, you'd say we saw him, we got him. It's been very interesting to see the percentage.

Q: Yes, indeed it is. How many would come from one country say, if you were?

JOHNSON: Each country has an allocation, an IV allocation within USIA. They will give you $100,000 from one country. Usually the average is about $5,000 for one, or $6,000 for an individual, paying everything. The international transportation and the fees, the domestic [costs.]. From Togo we probably had only about four or five a year. From Pakistan we had seventeen or eighteen. In China they have a hundred. In Japan they have about eighty or so. So it depends upon the importance of the country.

Q: If you have any money left over then you can perhaps get hold of some of it?

JOHNSON: At the end of the year also. In fact, when I was in Pakistan they called me up in the middle of the night. They called me up one time saying they had some money and do we have any projects? I scurried around and got a couple of very good ones.

PERSIS: Marilyn always has the programs written up and the justification for them in case there's any money left.

Q: Yes, because you have to spend that money before the end of the fiscal year.

JOHNSON: This year they're saying, "Don't spend it, turn it back. The government needs the money." Now we supplemented these through other programs. The agency gives money to say, Operations Crossroads Africa. This is mainly USIA that does this. I just met the people when they came. When people representing different groups would come to Togo, I would want to meet them.

Q: Now what's that program?

JOHNSON: Operations Crossroads. That takes young African leaders. Again it has a special summer program for young people that work mainly in youth and sports or they had some for working with fish culture, different programs, journalism, among the younger [people]. They wouldn't be perhaps up for the IV grant, but the younger youth groups.

Q: And you send them to the US for the summer?

JOHNSON: Yes they come under a program which is arranged by Operations Crossroads Africa. In other places you have the American Field Service, AFS, and we work with them.

Q: That's private.
JOHNSON: That's a private one, right. But it also probably receives some government money.

Q: Does it?

Were you able to participate in sports at your post?

JOHNSON: Yes, I played a lot of tennis.

Q: Which tennis courts did you use?

JOHNSON: There was a club, Cercle Sportif; it was the tennis club. Togolese tennis club. I played with the Togolese people. It turned out that the assistant librarian in our USIS library, the cultural center library, also was a tennis pro. He knew a lot of people in the sports world. We got to know a lot of the ministers who were interested in sports through him. I played with him. I took a lesson, what they call a "moniteur." You play every morning and try to improve your game.

I would play tennis from 6 to 6:45, come back and take a shower and listen to the VOA news at 7 while I was having breakfast. And would be in the office before 8 in the morning. The first thing you do is read the traffic, if any cables have come in earlier. You meet with the DCM very informally, you know, our offices are across the way, and talk about anything that is, any reports that are due. There's a human rights report. They have a CERP reporting program [Comprehensive Economic Reporting program] for different times of the year. You have to send in economic reports, and reports on communist activities, the political reporting anyway.

I would meet with certain key people in the embassy about what they were doing, their programs. Then there might be an American businessman who was coming, or a group of women leaders that was working with African women coming that I would want to meet with. Occasionally there were calls. When you first come in you make your calls on other ambassadors in the country and on the ministers in the government. Usually rather than a routine courtesy call, I would prefer to have some piece of business to talk about with a minister. So I would try to, before I called on the minister, so as not to waste his time and my time, I would have something to discuss that would be of bilateral interest. You have these calls to make occasionally. Or for instance, if there were going to be a meeting of the World Health Organization and they wanted to know who the Togolese delegates were, then I would talk to the minister of health, go over and chat with him and try to find this information.

A typical day would be perhaps a call on a minister about something, labor, we were working with ILO at the time and trying to have them see our point of view. If the Americans are supporting a certain candidate for a position, we would try to express the advantages of our candidate to the person who was going to be representing Togo at the international meeting. There might be another ambassador when you'd have a farewell call. Or, as I said, the British high commissioner in Ghana might be coming to pay calls on ministers in Togo. He would usually come to see me first to know what was going on and I would brief him on the political situation in Togo at the time. In a case like that I would

invite him and his wife to lunch, and perhaps another colleague from our embassy and somebody from the business community. There wasn't a large American business community there.

Q: You had a lot of luncheons, did you? Did you find that was a good working tool?

JOHNSON: Yes, it's a good working tool.

Q: How long would your luncheon period last?

JOHNSON: Usually we would have lunch from one, about an hour and a half. Then you'd get back to the office at 2:30 or 3 in the afternoon. Then again in the afternoon there might be the Peace Corps, planning a dedication of a school that they had built and they'd want me to go. Or I had an idea of a project. I was very interested trying to get them into solar energy, passive solar, because there was so much sun there and they needed hot water for their maternités. I worked very closely with a professor of physics at the University, l'Université du Benin, in Togo. He might come in to talk about a project or some materials that were needed on one of these solar... We got a grant for him from some energy community to build with local materials, to build water heating units for the dispensaries where maternités, where women give birth to children.

PERSIS: Also the vaccines to have refrigeration.

JOHNSON: That's right. We were working on that, but that was people from the Center for Disease Control, CDC, in Atlanta, Georgia. There would be visiting Americans, you know.

PERSIS: Sometimes the Togolese would come in. Remember Sister Catherine and Sister Rosalie?

JOHNSON: They were two nuns that were building a chapel. They didn't have a dispensary up there, did they?

Q: Yes. Missionary type?

JOHNSON: Yes. And American missionaries. I tried to get out and visit all of the American missionaries in the country.

PERSIS: And the Peace Corps.
JOHNSON: Of course Peace Corps. Then usually there would be cables to send during the day. Usually I was in the office until about 6 or 7 at night catching up on all the paperwork. Because I preferred to talk to people during the day when they're available, rather than spending my time reading and writing. I preferred meeting people, discussing projects with them.

Q: So you were very active out in the field. Catching up on paperwork and then a seven o'clock dinner?

JOHNSON: Then seven o'clock we'd go home. Usually if I were having dinner we would invite people at 7:30. Sometimes I came in with a guest. We would have something.

Q: Most of your evenings were taken up with representational stuff?

JOHNSON: I would say maybe four out of seven were representational.

PERSIS: Plus dinners that she had to go to.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: No, I don't think four out of seven representational, but they would be either at my place or at another ambassador's residence. When the PAO had things I would go. Whenever Peace Corps or AID or USIA had an event and invited me, then I would go to those.

Q: Now as far as running the house goes, did...

JOHNSON: Persis ran the household.
Q: Isn't that wonderful?

JOHNSON: She was marvelous.

***

Q: This fourth interview with Ambassador Johnson took place at her home in Washington, DC, on Sunday, December 7, 1986. Also present was her sister, Persis.

We were discussing events in Togo while you were there.

[During the discussion newspaper clippings are referred to.]

JOHNSON: Yes, in 1978. These cabinet changes occurred soon after I had arrived there, so I did not know any of the earlier ones, but I worked very closely with the minister of finance, Tibi Benisan, and I knew Anani Gassov in commerce and industry. But the fact of the cabinet changes was not important to us. Of course, we were aware of the security and exchange commission accusing Grumman of paying for the sale of some of the Gulfstream planes and we just tried to handle it as part of our democratic government. The government of Togo was upset about it. They didn't like to have it come out in the newspapers, but we told them that that was part of our democratic system and a free press, and we could not influence them at all. They often wanted us to cut stories. We said we couldn't do anything. This Moussa Baki Bari, appointed minister of mines and energy, I worked closely with him, trying to help with solar energy. You know they have no oil. The president kept thinking there was oil offshore. Some American company had found some at the height of the oil shortage and the OPEC rise in prices. He had a bottle of crude oil that he showed me [that]

proved that it was down there. We kept trying to get American companies to develop it because they needed oil and with the British they had built a refinery there, but they had to import oil from Nigeria for the refinery. So I was working with Moussa Baki Bari on energy projects. We had invited him to come as an International Visitor to the United States; I think he could not come. We worked very closely with Mr. Ahmed Denyato, minister of information, with him with all of our Peace Corps projects and with our USIS projects. I knew him well. With the arrest of the alleged plotters, there, I think, I did have something to do. I haven't read through the whole thing, but before I went to Togo... First of all, going back to Nancy Rawls' time, a secretary at the embassy had known a Togolese military officer, and he was then accused of plotting against the government and poor Nancy had a hard time because she was accused of supporting the plotters. There were not good relations between Togo and the United States because of this. What they believed was the United States...

Q: It was her secretary, was it?

JOHNSON: I don't know that it was her secretary, but it was a secretary in the embassy. Then the next ambassador who preceded me...

Q: Ron Palmer?

JOHNSON: Yes. What was the first name?

Q: Ronald.

JOHNSON: That's right, Palmer, was at a time when there was a dramatic change because this plot, that had been hatched partly in Great Britain and people training in Ghana to come and overthrow the government, took place when he was there. The British got word of the plot. They had no ambassador in Togo. The high commissioner in Ghana was also accredited to Togo. They asked if the American ambassador could let the president know about this plot that they had uncovered and that there might be a coup against him. So he was very grateful to the ambassador of the United States for warning him and they were able to thwart the attempted coup. Many of these people, the military and other people who were implicated in it were in prison and they had some trials and everybody was afraid that they were going to murder them as they had previously, some military people. Of course, President Carter's policy was for human rights. I spoke to President Eyadema and some of the others, saying that the American government was very interested in human rights and they thought that there should be a free trial and that justice should be carried out, but it would be done with the thought of human rights. They were condemned to death in absentia, many of them. Nobody was executed. I know that when I went to an inauguration of something, the president was going to be speaking in a town outside of Lomé, I went and several people from the lawyers... and I've forgotten now what it was called, it was like a council... a couple of the women came up and embraced me and thanked me. They thought that the United States' intervention had helped so that there were no killings.

Q: These were their relatives, I suppose.

JOHNSON: Yes, but just the thought that justice went through a court and there were more or less legitimate judicial proceedings. They allowed a lawyer from France to come and defend some of them.

PERSIS: Also it was an open trial, wasn't it?

JOHNSON: That's right. We were saying that it should be. We sent somebody to observe it.

Q: See the impact the United States has on the rest of the world?

JOHNSON: Oh, it certainly does. That's right. You can see it today. Togo protested a Ghanaian execution. We didn't have much to do with that. Later on there was one in Liberia, I think they protested that, too. [Pointing to a clipping] This was the trial. Condemned to death, but they were commuted. Then the election, we didn't have much to do with that. A new constitution, we worked with the ministry of justice. It was a woman who was the minister of justice, then she was later appointed as a representative to the United Nations. We worked on closely with her.

Q: On the new constitution?

JOHNSON: Yes, we tried to. We didn't have much influence, but we did try to use the American constitution as a model.

Q: I see. Were there any other events, that you can recall now from this distance of time, that stick in your mind, that you worked on?

JOHNSON: There was one. At the time of Chad we were trying to work with the Togolese in bringing about a reconciliation between Hissén Habré [Chadian Minister of Defense] and Goukouni Oueddei [President of Chad], the principal rivals in the Chadian revolution]. The president of Togo was on a commission that met in Nigeria, and he would call me frequently to tell me what had happened. We were not a direct player in it, but an intermediary. Of course we were urging that the two get together and it be settled peacefully and that the Libyans be out. At that time we were showing Libyan implication in the invasion in the north and that the Libyans were very active. Their role had not been known at the time. I remember going in to see the president about that and showing him that there was active Libyan support of Goukouni Oueddei We got him to speak out against the Libyan intervention there [A reconciliation accord was signed on August 21, 1979 calling for a transitional government and elections in 18 months, but fighting broke out again; and with the intervention of the Libyans the Habré forces were defeated].

The North Koreans were very influential, mainly in giving a lot... They were building a party headquarters and they had commissioned a lot of statues. It was about [three] generation[s], Stalin and then to Mao and then to North Korea. They had done many statues of the president all over Togo.

Here's the peace conference held at Togo. As I say we were trying to bring about a reconciliation between the two Chadian factions and had to keep the Libyans out of it. And May '81, a cabinet reshuffle. We just reported those, we had nothing to do with it.

Q: No part.

JOHNSON: The economy was catastrophic. That was after I left, no, no I was there in '81. No, I left in July and it was catastrophic. I can't think of... We were trying, as I say, to help with American investments. There was a time when there was a question of building a super phosphates plant there. There was an American company from Florida, and we were trying to get them to deal with reputable people, perhaps to have an American firm. They had a lot of intermediaries from other governments in the circle of the president. A lot of the ten- or fifteen-percenters that were trying to influence him. Unfortunately, they were active throughout Africa. And that is why you have a lot of steel mills and oil refineries and other industrial adventures that...

Q: That will never pay off. It just bleeds the country.

JOHNSON: Bleeding as in Ghana. We were just trying to say, "Deal with a reputable American company and don't pay any fees because if it's a good company you won't have to pay a fee to anybody to get to do business with them."

Q: Well, the thrust of your work, was it to help them economically, or was it perhaps to be a friend to them so that they would side with us at the UN?

JOHNSON: It's more that. We were not trying to help. We were trying to have regional security from our political and security point of view. We wanted them to be active in regional security, and also regional security depends upon economic strength. We were encouraging them. There was what they call ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States. The headquarters of the ECOWAS bank was in Togo, and then the political one was in Lagos. We were supporting their participation in these regional organizations and trying to have some type of a... They were hoping that they could have a military component to the ECOWAS group so that they could act against, I guess, adventurous people taking over other governments in the area. We were working in the economic field to have them try to build up their agriculture. The main thing was in the marketing. AID didn't do much at that time on the market roads, but we were building something on water, so that they could have water in the northern areas. The Peace Corps was doing a lot on roads in the cocoa region. A girl that we met when we went up to the inauguration of a road that she had done in the cocoa region was visiting us at the time of the 25th reunion of the Peace Corps. It was really Peace Corps that was helping.

Q: You mean she led the people to...

JOHNSON: Yes, she did. She got them organized along with an engineer from the government. But she mobilized. It was the human resources that she was mobilizing,

people to go and dig the gravel and pan it and clear the road.

Q: Really!

JOHNSON: That's right. Then when the heavy equipment was available they would have the manpower. Now she's working training the volunteers for the fish pond project.

Q: Still in Ghana?

JOHNSON: She's here in Oklahoma where they have many of the projects for Peace Corps. We were trying to help them help themselves, basically in agriculture, and to adopt a reasonable pricing policy based on market prices. At the beginning the African governments had adopted more or less of a socialistic system where they would buy, they would set the price, and if the price was low the farmers just wouldn't bother to cultivate the crop. We were telling them to let the market determine the prices and then the farmers would grow what they knew best to grow. We were in that way trying to help them economically.

PERSIS: What was the project that the former priest, the water project...

JOHNSON: That was a small one. We were working with small water projects.

Q: What sort of things? Do you mean wells or...

JOHNSON: No, for clean water for the villages. To capture the water and bring it down into an area where they could get it without passing through a lot of...

Q: Did they pipe it down?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was piping it from a clean spring down to a place where there would be a public fountain. Those were the natural ones that the Peace Corps were working with. The AID one was a million dollar project for digging deep wells, like artesian wells in the rocky strata. We worked with, as I say, mostly the Peace Corps, in building dispensaries and schools.

Q: Oh, dispensaries and schools, too?

JOHNSON: Yes.
Q: Now where were the people trained to work in the dispensaries?

JOHNSON: They had their own ministry of health and they trained the people.

Q: They have a medical school?

JOHNSON: Yes. They have a medical school at the university. They have a hospital. The French had established those. Ours were to make sure that Togo stayed pretty much in the

western camp, that the Soviets and the North Koreans didn't gain any more influence, and also Qadhafi, as I say, at that time was an adventurer in Africa. As you had mentioned, that it vote with us in the United Nations. Many of our demarches were about upcoming votes in the United Nations, and electing people. When I left, Togo became a member of the security council, one of the temporary movable seats, and so then they voted with us a lot. Jeane Kirkpatrick went out to visit Togo. They appreciated the good relations that we had.

Q: When you make a demarche like that, are you always instructed by the department before each one of them?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. That's right. They let us know what vote is coming up and then we talk with the foreign minister or somebody in the foreign ministry and at times with the president if it's important enough.

Q: Did you feel you had appropriate backstopping in the department?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. The department was very good. We always had very good desk officers. The office of West African affairs, they're very good people. Tom Smith was in there at the beginning, and then Parker Borg.

Q: What about the constitution you mentioned before? Did they in fact finish the constitution, and if so, how did it turn out?

JOHNSON: No, they put in a new constitution but actually... I'm beginning to mix it up with Pakistan because we were working on Pakistan with a constitution and they wanted the older one of 1971. They did put in a constitution. We were encouraging them to have open elections. Of course it's a one party system and we were saying there should be some opposition voices allowed and freedom of the press, but there wasn't too much freedom of the press. They controlled the newspaper and of course radio and television were government owned.

PERSIS: They were starting to have more than one candidate, Marilyn.

JOHNSON: They did, not for the presidency, but they had more candidates for the... They started a new house of delegates - I've forgotten now what it was - but they had a sort of bicameral legislature, but it was an advisory capacity rather than an action organization. But they were bringing people in and I knew some of the delegates from the north, and the women, of course. There were some women that came in. We invited some of them to come on international visitor grants. We were trying to have more representation from the people and open elections.

Q: Of course that takes a great deal of time.

PERSIS: That's right. But there seemed to be movement.

JOHNSON: There was some movement.

PERSIS: The words were there.

Q: That's good.

PERSIS: There was more than one candidate I remember that seemed to be quite a step.

JOHNSON: That was a breakthrough when they would have more than one candidate.

PERSIS: Although it wasn't from a different party, but nevertheless...

Q: Never mind, it was two people. It wasn't all cut and dried. I know what you mean. What other diplomatic colleagues did you see a great deal of?

JOHNSON: I saw a lot of the French. The French ambassador was, of course, the most influential because France was still controlling the commerce and just about everything else. Every year they had a meeting of their African ex-colonies and France was the most influential. I saw the French ambassador quite frequently. And the West German ambassador. We were all very good friends. And the Tunisian, since I had been in Tunisia before and had known it. We worked closely with the Tunisian ambassador. The Nigerian... they had no ambassador at the time, but a chargé d'affaires. They were always going to name an ambassador but they hadn't at the moment. And the Zairean, the dean of the diplomatic corps when I arrived was the ambassador from Zaire, so socially we saw him. We would talk about UN matters.

It was interesting because I arrived in November of '78 and at that time the Chinese was the dean of the diplomatic corps. I decided that I would like to pay a call on him as the dean. We didn't have relations and I wouldn't have visited because of that, but I thought things were beginning to change and it would be a good idea to call on him and see if we could work together. So I did. He was a little bit nonplused when I wanted to see him because we didn't have the relations. I explained that I was calling on him as dean of the diplomatic corps. He was very friendly, in a way protocol-wise took it in. We had the tea and all. It was interesting to see it, to get inside the compound in the first place and see how they ran. Then I was having a dinner in, it must have been January of '79, for the Tunisian ambassador who had just arrived. I sent an invitation to the Chinese and I didn't get any response, but when diplomatic relations were established between China and the United States on the first of January, they knew about it a little bit earlier, we all did. As I say, at first I had no answer to the invitation and then when we knew they were going to be established, immediately I had a call that yes, the ambassador was coming, and his wife and they would bring an interpreter.

PERSIS: They called the day before after no reply.

Q: And you rearranged your table, I suppose?

JOHNSON: It was always flexible. So they came and were very friendly and then they

came and wanted to borrow films. Told them about USIS and they went to the library and they borrowed a lot of films. I invited them to see some films at the residence when we had the showings for diplomats. Then they started to show films at their embassy and just took over from us. They were very friendly, and they invited us to their embassy.

Q: What about the Russians? Did you have anything to do with them?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, I did, because I spoke Russian. I had been in the Soviet Union, and there was a new ambassador who came just after I did so that we sat next to one another at the diplomatic functions. It was odd the North Korean was on one side and the Russian was on the other. The North Korean would not even smile, you know. We weren't supposed to talk with them. The Russian didn't speak much French so when he was there without an interpreter - he didn't speak any French - I would do the interpreting for him. He was an older Russian, diplomat. We got along fine and we exchanged visits and spoke Russian.
PERSIS: His wife was very friendly.

JOHNSON: His wife was very friendly. They were the old school. They had some very bright young ones there.

Q: Training them, I suppose.

JOHNSON: I think so. They had been in France, you see. They were well-dressed and spoke French. We had good relations with the local embassy there.

Q: You did, didn't you?

JOHNSON: And there were times when we had to work together on some things. There were some issues in the United Nations that the Soviets and the Americans were together on, the nuclear energy.

PERSIS: I think also it was very basic to Marilyn is to be friendly and human to all people.

Q: Exactly. Yes. It's coming through.

PERSIS: To try to make bridges.

JOHNSON: I feel that you have to talk with them in order to have any influence.

PERSIS: But I can remember with the North Korean, he wouldn't even look at Marilyn. They went to some church function, the president...

JOHNSON: Yes, he has something every year as an interdenominational thing, held in the party headquarters auditorium. Each one speaks, the Catholic, the Protestant, the Muslim.

Q: Is there a rabbi?

JOHNSON: No. There was no rabbi there. At the end the Catholics join hands and say everybody join hands and pray for peace or something. I offered my hand to him and he looked behind to the interpreter to see if he should take it or not. He didn't of course. You crossed hands.

Q: And he didn't take it?

JOHNSON: No. [Laughter]

Q: So there you were with your hand out clutching nothing. You mentioned the time [the Chinese] was coming with their interpreter. Are these formal seated dinners you're talking about?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: What do you do with the interpreter?

JOHNSON: You seat him. He has to sit next to the...

Q: At the table?

JOHNSON: I sat him at the table.

Q: Because sometimes they sit them behind.
JOHNSON: Yes, they sit them behind.

Q: And then they don't eat. Poor souls.

JOHNSON: We would put him at the table, yes.

PERSIS: He would always sit behind the ambassador. The ambassador was an older man, and his wife, they were very grandfatherly and grandmotherly.

Q: What about your relationships with the other members of the government? You had spoken of your good relations with Eyadema.

JOHNSON: I worked closely somehow with the minister of commerce and industry. We were working perhaps in our AID project and he just seemed like a very good honest one that was trying to do things with small industry. He wasn't in on any of these deals for the steel mill and the refinery. He was trying to build up the grass roots industries, and I think there was something. Yes, there was a project. He was a councilor from Lome II, an area just outside of Lomé. They built a chapel. I think Ron Palmer had something to do with building a chapel and he wanted it to be named for him or something. I went to talk with him about that. Then we were talking about the small projects the Peace Corps could help in.

Also there was, I remember now, too, an American businessman who seemed to me had an offer that would be good for this American businessman and for Togo because somebody had sold them an Italian cashew nut processing factory that was built and they didn't even have any cashew nuts industry. They grew cashews in Benin and they were planting them. [A factory that] this man, small businessman, said was very advanced, one of the most advanced factories for cracking and processing and roasting the cashew nuts. He had a lot of cashew holdings in Belize. They had some of the best cashews in the world. They didn't have the factories there for processing them. He thought that he could make money by getting barges and towing barges of raw cashew nuts across the Atlantic, have them processed inexpensively in Togo and packaged, and then re-exported for sale. It sounded to me like a very good deal. I didn't see how it could be so profitable for him, but that he could advise them on developing their own cashew production. I worked very closely as I say, the minister was honest but there were people underneath that always wanted a payoff, and we were saying "No. This is something good for you." I kept trying to work with the minister. He would say yes and then there would be some snag that came up. I don't think it ever came through. But I got to know him on that because it would have been - I was always looking for something that was mutually beneficial - this would have been beneficial to them.

Q: You mentioned the chapel they were building?

JOHNSON: It was a school or a chapel or something. It just never got done. It had been started before. I followed through on it and they wanted the inaugural thing with the name on it.

Q: For Palmer?

JOHNSON: For Palmer, yes, but I think it was a Peace Corps project and he wanted his name on it. It never was done when I was there and Ron came out and I arranged for him to go out to the place and meet with all of the people and try to push it through. Again, things go very slowly in Africa.

Q: Yes, a lot of things are aborted, I suppose. Just the weight of the bureaucracy, the red tape?

JOHNSON: I think it is, that's right, and then, of course, some of it is unless it's important to the person financially or for some power play, they're not interested in doing it. They'd rather do something else where they get a little bit of a payoff.

Q: Yes. Did you have many consular problems?

JOHNSON: We had a few. I think we had a sailor one time. We had very good relations with the police and the intelligence there.

Q: I suppose you didn't have a very active visa section?

JOHNSON: No, but we did work out something while we were there. We were trying to encourage businessmen to go in both directions. We worked out a protocol, a reciprocal visa thing for them, so that American businessmen and Togolese going back and forth did not need visas for stays of up to three months, I think. Businessmen would complain they couldn't get a visa in time. So we did work out this and we had a consular agreement so that tourists... They were also very interested in building up their tourism. They looked upon that as a money earner for them. So we said tourists and businessmen for up to three months didn't need a visa to enter Togo. Now everybody has to have a visa for the United States but we had something whereby it was routinely done.

Q: A routine thing. I see.

JOHNSON: Then we'd give them multiple entry visas.

Q: Did you have a two-man consular [office]?

JOHNSON: No, we had one consular [officer].

Q: What about treatment by the press, the local press, which of course it was government owned?

JOHNSON: We got excellent treatment. The United States was very important to them and any place I went, my picture would be in the paper. They'd report every time I went to see the president. We had identified a bright young man who had just come back from Paris. Actually it was the PAO, USIS, who had met him and said he seemed bright, and I met him, and he certainly did seem like a man who was on his way up. So we invited him for an international visitor grant. He went back and was later named minister of information. He was very friendly to us.

PERSIS: ...and it facilitated her ability to meet people and work well with them.

JOHNSON: I remember the first time I went in to see the president. He said to the interpreter, “We don't need you.” Often if I were talking with him about something bi-national, then it was just he and I together.

Q: Which is of course very important.

JOHNSON: With the press they were very good, very pro-American. I never had to protest. They were anti-Soviet, too.

Q: Were they?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. At that time Zbigniew Brzezinski [National Security Advisor to President Carter] was in and he had talked about the triangle from the Horn of Africa and all. The president picked that up right away, the president of Togo, Eyadema. He was conscious of the Soviet threat in Africa. I know the Soviets were joshing me all the time

about the good coverage I got and the bad coverage they got.

Q: You mentioned visitors before. Did you have very many visitors?

JOHNSON: Not too many. When I was there the only big one from our government that came through was Dick Moose, who was the assistant secretary for Africa. Afterwards, as I say, when the UN was there and Madame Keke had gotten to know Jeane Kirkpatrick...

Q: That was after your time?

JOHNSON: After my time, yes.

Q: How long did Dick stay?

JOHNSON: Dick stayed only overnight and a couple of days, that's right.

Q: Was he on an inspection tour?

JOHNSON: He was going down to Lagos, I think. He came to Togo first.
I accompanied him to Benin and then he went down to...

Q: You didn't have CODELs?

JOHNSON: No, we had one. Sensenbrenner came. He had had a Peace Corps volunteer as a roommate in college. He wanted to come out to see Togo. There are a very loyal alumni group of Peace Corps volunteers who had served in Togo and they like to go back and Sensenbrenner came with his wife early on when I was there. We met him and had a dinner for him, then he traveled up country. Togo is not that important to the congress and we didn't have any CODELs as such.

PERSIS: I remember President Eyadema wanted to come to the States and he would never get invited. When Marilyn left he thanked her and said he knew that she had worked hard to try to get him invited.

JOHNSON: But they have so many people that want to and he wasn't important at that time.

PERSIS: When they got on the right committee in the UN, then he came.

Q: Then he came, yes.

PERSIS: Which was nice.

Q: Exactly. Most of your entertaining was official entertaining. Mostly with the local people, was it?

JOHNSON: Yes, mostly, but also with the diplomats who were there. I tried to do it. We always had Thanksgiving and Fourth of July with everybody who was in the country, Peace Corps, and missionaries. I tried to go out and meet the missionaries, to know where they were throughout the country. Whenever somebody, a Peace Corps official, would come through, or AID official, or--there weren't that many from State, but we had people to come out on different subjects. Then we would have locals, but also the people from the embassy and Peace Corps.

PERSIS: Marilyn has always done a lot of entertaining. But with a purpose. If an eminent doctor friend of ours came out then she would invite medical people from around the area. There was always a point to her entertaining.

JOHNSON: There was a focus to it.
Q: A focus, so the guests were chosen.

PERSIS: That's right. And a lot of people came out, not officials, so that there was always a reason to be having a dinner.

Q: Tell me about the Fourth of July. What did you do on the Fourth of July?

JOHNSON: The Fourth of July was a big [affair]. I remember one time we were having hot dogs. I grew up in Wollaston where Howard Johnson had his first ice cream stand, so I wrote to Howard Johnson's and asked if we could have the napkins and the holders for the hot dogs, whatever they had that would give an American touch. They said...

PERSIS: Oh, that was a fair.

JOHNSON: That's right. That was a charity fair, that's right, where we had hot dogs. But for the Fourth of July we would order them specially. We'd have hamburgers and hot dogs. We would have it on the grounds of the residence and they would be decorated of course, very nicely done. I would make a small speech.

Q: This was for all Americans?

PERSIS: There were two.

JOHNSON: There were two. That’s right. We had one official one for the diplomatic corps and the government, where you invite just about everybody in the local government and the diplomats. That's right. That was when my speech was.

Q: Was that at noontime?

PERSIS: In the evening.

JOHNSON: It was in the evening because it was cooler.

Q: That was sort of a reception?

JOHNSON: A reception. An evening reception with food.

Q: Really?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, lots of good food. They always thought they got very good food.

Q: Is that right?

PERSIS: By the time we left, they said that we had the best food in the [diplomatic community].

JOHNSON: Then we would have the same thing, hamburgers and hot dogs for the American community. People would bring things, too. They would bring casseroles.

Q: Pot luck?

JOHNSON: Pot luck, but we would supply the basics, the salad, the hamburgers and hot dogs, and rolls, and drinks.

PERSIS: This was for the American community.

Q: This was for the American community. I gathered then you paid for that because if there were Americans you couldn't use official funds?

JOHNSON: Oh, no, we paid for it.

Q: You paid for that yourselves.

PERSIS: The community helped a lot.

JOHNSON: But everybody chipped in.

PERSIS: But with the big reception, mostly the residents provided. We had a few good American wives who would help.

JOHNSON: But no, we did it. That was representational, too.

Q: Then at Christmastime you had members of the staff?

JOHNSON: At Christmastime we were mostly in Austria. We had friends there. We would have a party before we went but we weren't there at Christmastime.

Q: But you mentioned Thanksgiving.

JOHNSON: Thanksgiving we had a big one for all Americans at Thanksgiving.

Q: I see.

JOHNSON: And then we had something at Easter. Easter egg roll for the families. They would come and hide eggs around the residence garden. That's for the American community and the children.

Q: It makes a big difference, a big difference if you have this kind of attention from the ambassador. Tremendous for morale.

PERSIS: That's right. I can tell you that everybody said the morale was high. She won't tell you that.

Q: I know it was.

JOHNSON: They had a good group. They had a very nice group.

Q: I've heard that from other sources. The last time we left off I had asked you about running the house and you said Persis ran it.

JOHNSON: Persis ran it, right.

Q: So I'm going to ask Persis. Tell me about that. What would you do, make out lists for the food and plan for the week? Or how did you run the house?

PERSIS: Just as you would run your house. You know that you're going to have a dinner and you make out your menu and cross-reference it so that you don't have the same food for the same people. You just have to be very flexible with menus because things wouldn't be in the market.

I think one of the driving forces for Marilyn is to be helpful. She tries to bring people together with mutual aims and to be helpful. And also in Togo, because it was a small country, she saw the waste of these huge steel mills. And that would be Americans who came over and try to sell them things. What do you do? You also know that some of these people are absolutely no good.

Q: I know.
PERSIS: You cannot come right out and say it. She worked very hard to get small grass roots things like clean water for the villages. To get small projects by AID. AID isn't very happy with the small projects. They spend millions.

Q: I know. They're great empire builders, too.

PERSIS: That's right. This was a continual battle. The only battle she had in the embassy was with the AID section.

Q: How much household staff did you have to help you?

PERSIS: We had two very good men in the house who had been there before. We had a cook who was no good.

JOHNSON: Nancy Rawls had tried to fire him.

PERSIS: He had threatened the embassy and nobody else had the courage to fire him. Marilyn finally fired him, very shortly, not too long. Then we had our own man who'd been with Marilyn for 18 years.

Q: Yes, he was with you.

PERSIS: We tried to keep him in a low... not a low place, but...

Q: Low profile.

PERSIS: They wouldn't think he was taking over or anything. But when she had to fire the cook, at the time that he went, Emile could step right in. But we also hired another Togolese man to be in the kitchen, to help with things, so there was no loss of work.
JOHNSON: For the Togolese. I still paid our man out of my own personal income.

PERSIS: Then we had gardeners to take care of the place. You know the good people working for various Americans who can come in to help you when you need extra help.

Q: Yes, of course. Chauffeurs, that sort of thing?

JOHNSON: Bartenders, waiters, extra waiters and bartenders.

Q: Did Emile do the shopping at the markets for you?

JOHNSON: Yes.

PERSIS: Yes. He was very...

JOHNSON: He had a bicycle and he'd go off and shop.

PERSIS: When it was important [unintelligible]

JOHNSON: We had a small commissary there. I would do it. And then I would shop on weekends, you know.

Q: What about sending away? Did you send away for food to Denmark?

JOHNSON: Not too much, because you could get just about everything there. The French

take care of their own people. I like to use American meals for entertaining, but I like to live off the economy myself for my own. We got frozen turkeys for the holidays. They came from America. Then we ordered the hamburger and the hot dogs for the Fourth of July from the States directly. There's a Puritan Meat Company, I think it is, that the embassies overseas order from.

Q: I see.

JOHNSON: There are several, but Puritan or Pilgrim, one of those sticks in my mind.

Q: And they're flown in obviously?

JOHNSON: No.

Q: Refrigerator ships?

JOHNSON: We'd order them in advance so that they could come in in refrigerator ships.

Q: You have to think so far ahead, don't you find?

JOHNSON: That's right.

PERSIS: But the embassy is very good. It has a memory sometimes and it would help you and say, "This is the time to order the turkeys." A notice would come out. I tried to work out schedules for when there were big affairs, when you have two or three hundred people or maybe more coming, to work out a schedule for the embassy, for the GSO to follow. A week beforehand you do certain things, and then each day what should be accomplished in order to have the thing run smoothly. I'm a firm believer that nobody is well dressed unless there's a lot of time and thought put into it. No affair goes well unless there's been a lot of time and thought put into it beforehand.

Q: Right.

PERSIS: And I would get very upset if things didn't go right, too.

JOHNSON: Ordering from abroad, the commissary did put in some special orders to Peter Justesen in Denmark occasionally for things.

PERSIS: But we really didn't do very much.

Q: But your liquor obviously came from...

JOHNSON: Yes, the commissary got that from... Previously there had been our own, what we called ECOWAS, but that was a large warehouse in Lagos that furnished all of the inland countries and along the coast. They had a big supply. They were closing out and so they were selling lots of wines and things. I stocked up a lot at the beginning. Bought cases

of French wines. We did have some American but the French was so much better and I got some very good buys.

Q: You had not been directed from Washington to use American wine?

JOHNSON: No, well they were trying to and we had them in the commissary, but they didn't have such good ones. They had the Paul Masson there at the time. Now we have some excellent American wines. When we could get a good one we would serve it. But they were usually inferior, the ones that we had in the commissary. It was from the American one in ECOWAS that I bought the B & G. It's a very good French concern.

PERSIS: The thing was that these people, the Togolese as well as the diplomatic community, you don't serve them inferior things if you can find good ones.

JOHNSON: When I went to the presidency they had Dom Perignon champagne. I think I served Paul Masson champagne. No, I guess I got Heidseck. And Chivas Regal whenever you would go to a thing there. The scotch would be Chivas Regal, and Dom Perignon [for the champagne].

Actually I think the liquor I bought locally. There was a department store and we could buy it tax free. We had a card and were allotted a certain amount. Each person in the embassy had it. So I bought the liquor in the local store.

Q: Did you go to the homes of your staff very often?

JOHNSON: Yes. I'd be invited as a guest; Persis and I. But also when they had things I often went to the PAO's house, the consul's house, and we would go as friends to the admin officer's, and the GSO, and Peace Corps people. We'd set up a regional Peace Corps office when I was there. He would have us over there. And the secretary, Bill's secretary's home, the English teaching officer. Close community.

PERSIS: Marilyn always had people, she's always had people from her office to dinner and luncheons and various things.

Q: You made certain that you included everybody at some point?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

PERSIS: A new person came, he would be invited to dinner with the rest of the staff, and a personal dinner.

Q: Really?

PERSIS: Always. So that we'd have a chance to get to know the person.

Q: And welcome.

JOHNSON: Make them feel part of the family.

PERSIS: Marilyn's secretary, in fact, said something about the door of the residence, when Marilyn was there, it was open door, which is typical.

Q: It makes a big difference. It makes a big difference to the staff whether or not they can feel close with their ambassador. Amazing the way people turn toward the office of the ambassador.

JOHNSON: They can set the tone, you know, one way or the other.

Q: They can set the tone.

JOHNSON: I see that now in my work as inspector. Also the PAO in a large office, you see how the PAO can influence the morale so greatly.

Q: How about the inspectors, did you have inspectors while you were there?

JOHNSON: No, it came for the USIS inspection. That was all. We didn't have an inspection... We were getting ready for it at the end, because we were starting to do some of the paperwork. I think there was an inspection planned for the following year.

Q: I suppose you were very interested in the USIS operation, weren't you?

JOHNSON: Yes, but we had a very good man there and I didn't put my nose into his business. But I was very interested, of course, in the program. Everybody said at the beginning they worried about a USIS person coming to be ambassador. There had been other experiences that they tried to run it, and they treated USIS as theirs. But I tried to respect him and the IV program, he ran it. It was a missionwide effort. We all would propose people but I tried and I think succeeded because I had very good relations. We had an excellent person, as I say. He let me know that it was his agency. I looked at the cables and sometimes I would suggest something, but they were his cables that went out.

PERSIS: In fact he has very often said, we have remained friends with him, very often said that it was the high point of his career. He saw how an embassy could work with the ambassador bringing all this to bear. I think she had a very good relationship. He said he worried about it

JOHNSON: He was very worried.

Q: You never know what you're getting.

JOHNSON: But also, as I say, I was very close to the Peace Corps program. I met the man who was Peace Corps director when I was there came to Pakistan and we saw him again, and then I just saw him in South Africa. We had very good relations with Peace Corps. I

think their program was so good in just people to people and in getting things done. I didn't have such good relations with the AID director because I wanted them to get going and do something. But it takes so long.

Q: An awful lot of bureaucracy there.

JOHNSON: And so many trips back and forth, people consultants. We had a self-help fund, you know. We always got extra money for it because we had very good programs for it. You can see, and the people can see, what America is doing for them so much more readily.

Q: What about the school? Was there a local school?

JOHNSON: Yes, there was a local school. I was an honorary something on the board. There were problems with the principal of the school and some of the people on the school committee, and I would have to mediate sometimes, but I never directly got into it. I would go to their graduation and speak if it was necessary. I would go to visit them and visit the classes. They'd invite me out. So I went and visited the classes and spoke with the students. Then I would go when they would have a fair or a game or something. I wasn't directly involved in the running of it, but I was aware of what was going on. We had some good people on the board and they made the change that I was worried about. But they wanted to do something. I guess they must have done it when we were on home leave or something. There were repercussions later on, but they were good people. I guess the principal came to me and was complaining about something. I would just try to mediate.

Q: Was the principal one of the wives?

JOHNSON: No, she was an American who had married a Togolese and was over there and had taught in the States and had a degree.

Q: It's been my experience that the two points of the greatest problems at any post are the school and the commissary.

JOHNSON: Yes, that’s right.

Q: How did you make out with the commissary? Did that run itself pretty well?

JOHNSON: We had a very small one. It grew while I was there, and it ran. The GSO was in charge of it. We had a CLO, we had a family liaison officer and they hired somebody to run the commissary. We didn't have any major problems. We didn't have any scandals, luckily, and no strikes because it was so small. It's when you get bigger and they want a certain brand instead of another one. I guess our markup wasn't that big. Most of us were able to shop on the economy. Just when you wanted American foods, and as I say you wanted those for entertaining. Children like American food.

Q: Did you have any problems with intra-mission rivalries at your post?

JOHNSON: No, luckily everybody got along. There was some problem when I first went in. The first DCM I had was a younger officer who was trying to tell the older officers, heads of AID, USIS, and Peace Corps, what they should do and this and that. But they came to me, and you know, I got him to back off a little bit.

Q: And you were able to keep the trouble down.

JOHNSON: No, I think we worked very well together. AID was a little bit the odd one out because he was alone there without his family and was an individualistic person. But everybody worked together and with the other AID people that came in subsequently, we all got along well. There were no rivalries, not that I was aware of.

Q: Good. That's fine.

JOHNSON: There was unhappiness about the DCM trying to tell them what to do but that was before I came and we straightened that out.

Q: Did you travel very much?

JOHNSON: I traveled whenever I got a chance for a Peace Corps project, or something when there was a festival like a yam festival that I would be invited to. I went to many of the dedications of the schools, and the dispensaries, and the road one, and the festivals, and went up when the president was in northern - his home was in Lama-Kara, northern Togo. Every year they have... Their national sport is wrestling. The president had been a former champion of wrestlers. He would go up and the whole entourage like the court, would go up there, and so I went to that.

PERSIS: She did a lot of traveling.

JOHNSON: I traveled around because I like to see the country. I wanted to see the missionaries, the Americans who were there. There were a few businessmen in town and I knew them in Lomé. Then I visited the missionaries throughout the country.

Q: Was there much cultural activity in the country?

JOHNSON: Not much. The singing and dancing, that was the main thing. The traditional dances.

Q: What about handicrafts and artwork?

JOHNSON: They had a handicraft shop in Palimé that had been established, I think [by] the Germans originally. We had the Peace Corps working with them where they did carving and pottery and batik. There was an excellent artist, Paul Ahyi, but he was an individual and a sculptor and I knew him well.

Q: Western?

JOHNSON: Western, no, African themes, but he had been trained in Paris. He had mastered all of the techniques, but he had his own shows and they had a show at the school of architecture where he taught art and architecture. There was art in that sense. A very good individual. Senegal really has outstanding artists. This was a very nice art center in Palimé but we were trying to encourage it and it needed a lot more encouragement. Peace Corps, as I say, started it.

PERSIS: What was the show we went to up in the circle there, all the artists displayed. Was it all Togolese?

JOHNSON: In what circle, right close to where we were? Where Paul Ahyi's sculpture was?

PERSIS: Yes, it was in one of the big buildings there.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, there must have been an opening of some African grouping. It wasn't when the IMF was there, was it? Maybe. There was an IMF meeting in Togo when I was there. We worked with the Togolese on that. We had some American delegates and I had a reception for them.

It was interesting. There were some South Koreans that were in the IMF, bankers that were coming. The North Koreans were very upset because they felt that Togo shouldn't let... Togo hadn't recognized South Korea. At the time I was working with the government, too, saying that they should recognize South Korea as well as North Korea. The president knew that I was urging recognition of South Korea. He told me that he was having a terrible problem because the North Koreans were after him to not let the South Koreans come to the International Monetary Fund. But he said, no, it's an international meeting and they'll come. The protocol people at the ministry of finance, seeing a Korean name, put the Koreans on the same floor where there were some North Koreans. No, Korea can't be a part of IMF. Anyway they had some there. The North Koreans were incensed about it and they sent their people to be like bodyguards at the elevators, they were watching them all the time There was an American Kim who was with Chase Manhattan Bank that came out and she was put on the floor with the South Koreans and all around them were the Americans. So they just went by name.

Q: If the name is Kim, the chances are you are [Korean]. What did you do for recreation?

JOHNSON: I played tennis. I would get up early in the morning. I told you about somebody who was a moniteur who would play with me, and then I played golf on the weekends.

Q: I remember your talking about the golf. So you were able to keep yourself in shape.

JOHNSON: That's what I miss here.

Q: You have mentioned before the illnesses you had abroad, but were any of them specifically in Togo?

JOHNSON: I had something that everybody gets there. It's a parasite.

PERSIS: Giardia.

JOHNSON: Giardia. I did have giardia there.

Q: How do you spell that?

JOHNSON: G-I-A-R-D-I-A. It's a waterborne infection. While traveling: the regional military defense attaché had a plane and he would come each year and we would get authorization to fly up. We visited the paratroopers' school and military. We would visit the military missions in the country. I went twice with the defense attaché. It's good for our mapping, to get to know the military, and also we started the IMET program, the International Military Education and Training Program. There was no military aid or security aid to Togo, but we did have a small military education and training program so that people would go to a command and staff college. We would invite outstanding ones. Then others would go to artillery school or something. We would have an opportunity to talk with the military afterwards.

Q: Did you have a military attaché?

JOHNSON: No, he was based in Monrovia, but he would come down. Then from Lagos one would come up. One was an air attaché. One time the military attaché was a naval man so he had a navy plane. The other time it was an air attaché, so we traveled. Then when I came back we were at Atakpamé, I think, and the governor had a reception and a lunch for us, and I foolishly drank a glass of water at the luncheon. They assured me that that water was very pure and all. You get a lot of good food with some spices in it and you need to drink something. After that I came down with giardia. I know where I got it. But normally I would drink beer or a soft drink rather than take the water when I was traveling.

Q: I suppose you had to see that all the water was boiled and the ice cubes...

PERSIS: They were well trained in the kitchen.

Q: What about lettuce? Were you able to use lettuce? Did you use permanganate?

JOHNSON: We did [use it.] We just washed it very thoroughly.

PERSIS: You had to wash it carefully. We had our own garden. Didn't we have a garden?
JOHNSON: I guess Prosper did start something. It was very good, the local produce. We'd go to the local market and get good vegetables.

PERSIS: We took precautions but were not...

JOHNSON: We didn't put it in permanganate. We just washed it.

Q: In parts of the middle east they wash it in the sewers, you see, before they bring it to market and you have to use something otherwise you would be very, very sick.

PERSIS: We were very fortunate that way.

JOHNSON: Then we had a ship come in while I was there. They wanted permission. The United States is always looking for places to have practice training sessions. We were able to get the Togolese to agree to have a landing session. We wanted a joint one. Because they have a military agreement with France, as came out recently when there was another attempted coup - the French sent in their paratroopers and military people - they have an annual joint session with the French, because they have French military training for them in the army and air force. And the navy, too. I knew all of the French attaches for army, navy, and air force. But we were able to get permission because we had good relations with the French. They sometimes decide whether you can do something or not. They let us have the ship come in and it had landing craft on it. It was a marine and amphibious assault. We had an exercise where they rolled out of the ship and went in amphibious vehicles and then up on the beach and took a strategic site.

Q: Did the Togolese take part in it?

JOHNSON: The Togolese agreed to it, but they were watching it. Because they have the French, the joint maneuvers with the French, we couldn't get that, but we were lucky to get them to have this. It was on some land that the military had secured near the port. They were watching it and we asked them to go along with them and then we invited them on the ship at the time that the amphibious vehicles were leaving the ship. Then we went around to be there when they landed. That was a very successful ship visit. When this happens the families take sailors into their homes. They had the Handclasp where they give things. It's Operation Handclasp. I think Handclasp sounds AID but I think it's where they bring materials from the United States. It can be food, it can be whatever people donate, buttons, some of them were a lot of buttons. The crews of the ship volunteer to help the Togolese community. They would go to an orphanage and paint, or they would send the Seabees out to do something. So we'd find activities for that. Then we arranged soccer matches and basketball between the crew and local sports organizations. We were able to bring in the Navy band at the same time the ship came. We arranged a big concert at the party headquarters auditorium, the largest and best hall in Togo. Then I had a reception that night for the upper ones. It was very successful. It filled every seat in the house.

Q: I can imagine.

JOHNSON: We got a lot of good will for the American Navy.

Q: What about the educators of the country? I suppose you got to know them?

JOHNSON: Yes, I knew the minister of education first, because we had a lot of Peace Corps with them. We had a lot of programs. We sent him on an IV grant to the United States, too. The rector of the university, I knew him very well. He was in an international group of college presidents and we worked with them through USIS to establish a linkage between the University of Benin, which was in Togo, and the University of South Carolina's education department. They signed a linkage. Then we arranged for some Americans to come over and study in Togo and Togolese to study in the United States.

Then I worked very closely with a young professor of physics on a passive solar project where using local materials and some American photoelectric cells they could heat water for the maternités, the dispensaries where women had their children because it's essential to have a lot of hot water at the time. We got a small AID grant for him to oversee this project. Also we were trying to get the compost pile to generate electricity to turn compost into energy and good clean fertilizer. We worked with him on that.

PERSIS: One of the big problems with the small dispensaries was the lack of electricity to keep their supplies refrigerated.

JOHNSON: For vaccines, actually. To use solar energy to run a refrigerator to keep the vaccines cold.

Q: Was there pasteurized milk in the country?

JOHNSON: There was pasteurized milk at a farm. The Germans had a dairy farm where there was some excellent milk. But generally people used powdered milk or they bought the French or German, and the Swedes put up a milk rehydration...

PERSIS: Reconstitution.

JOHNSON: Reconstituted milk plant while we were there. That was clean. But generally people used powdered milk or bought the French or the German milk that has been treated. It's not only pasteurized but treated to keep for a long time.

Q: Maybe sterilized.

JOHNSON: Sterilized, I guess. There was a German, started out as a butcher shop and ended up as selling just about everything. You could get good milk there, too.

Q: Did the local people understand the necessity for refrigeration?

JOHNSON: They don't have the means, most of them, and that's why they shop everyday. You don't keep meat, you cook it right away when you get it, and the fish. There was a big fish market. You cook that right away. So that usually they would consume everything. They would shop every day and then consume it that day. There was usually a big enough family that eats up whatever is left. They don't have leftovers to put in the refrigerator.

Q: I gather from the way you've been describing your life there that you never had any problems with chief-of-mission loneliness?

JOHNSON: Oh, I don't think so, no.

Q: That can be quite a problem to a single woman but of course you had Persis.

JOHNSON: I had Persis as a family, and then I was active socially.

PERSIS: Marilyn is very friendly and outgoing and meets people in the community very well. Even if I weren't with her, and I wasn't with her for a good many years, she never had any problems. I think one of the things was she had such a wide variety and depth of interests. This opens up many contacts.

Q: But I understand that there is a particular problem when one is chief of mission because one doesn't, in a sense, have any peers within the embassy. You can't discuss everything with the DCM, I'm sure.
JOHNSON: Well, I think you can, just about. Maybe there were one or two things I didn't discuss with him, but I was fortunate. The second DCM, who came after I'd been there less than a year, was somebody I had known before in Mali. We had the same outlook on American policy and how to operate in Africa. There was no loneliness, we were talking all the time and I respected his advice. He gave excellent counsel and we worked well together. Then everybody else, each person was a good professional in his field, the Peace Corps, the AID, the USIS, and the other agencies.

Q: This second DCM that is somebody you selected yourself?

JOHNSON: I had a choice and I selected him out of the choice that was offered to me.

Q: The first one was there when you came there?

JOHNSON: The first one was there. He had been the desk officer and he was selected. They asked me if it would be all right for him and he knew more about Togo than I did. He came with high credentials from the office of West African affairs, so I said yes. There was no reason to say no. He was there before I arrived. Then when his tour was over I selected the second.

Q: Who was with you until you left?

JOHNSON: Yes, and then after.

PERSIS: As Marilyn would say she felt very free in leaving Togo because she knew any decision that Irving made would be one that she would make. It was a very good relationship.

JOHNSON: No, I had no sense of isolation or loneliness. I had good friends among the

other ambassadors, the German ambassador, and the French, and the Tunisian. I played golf with the German ambassador and played tennis with the Tunisian and was with the French in many social things.

Q: And of course when you got home, if it had been a terrible day you could always take it out on Persis. [Laughter]

JOHNSON: That's right. I suppose.

Q: When you left the post did you feel you had accomplished what you had wanted to accomplish there?

JOHNSON: The only thing that I wanted to accomplish was maintain good, friendly relations with the country, and, as somebody who came from another agency, I wanted to have an integrated mission where we all worked together and we all had the same mission goals, each person trying to achieve them through his own programs, and I think I did. At least we had very good relations with the government when I left. And as I said they went on to become elected to the security council for one of the changing seats. I think that everybody was working very well together as a mission.

Q: You say that within the mission your DCM eventually became an ambassador himself?

JOHNSON: Yes, he did. Everybody else has gone up well. The Peace Corps went on to be an assistant director for a whole area. The PAO is now PAO in Senegal. He will move up to a major post I'm sure.

Q: When you left the post, then, you didn't feel you were leaving any loose ends?

JOHNSON: No, I don't think so. We had everything that was ongoing was up to date and there wasn't any unaccomplished project.

Q: Good.

JOHNSON: We had done our goals and set up everything for next year.

Q: Where did you go right after?

JOHNSON: I came back here and went back to USIA, and the position as PAO in Islamabad offered to me. Which was good because you have to have something within 90 days or you're out.

Q: That's right.

JOHNSON: I hadn't looked around for anything. Fortunately, I usually go along and take what crops up at the time, so this was very good. But also, unfortunately, the Malian, by that time we knew he was ill. I had come home with him just before and we knew he had

cancer. We knew he didn't want to go back to Mali and wanted to be here, so we wanted to make a home for him. They were very understanding in USIA and said that I didn't need to go out right away, that I could take... I said, first of all, I want to study Urdu, and also that would have given me the time. They said I could have the courtesy level Urdu. I pushed that in along with the area studies course at FSI, and a computer [course] because I wanted to get us onto computerization in Pakistan. So I took the computer course. I came back in August and they gave me some extra time. Usually you have two weeks statutory home leave when you come back from a post; you can only take two weeks. They let me have a month or so.

PERSIS: I don't think so, Marilyn. We came down from Albany.
JOHNSON: But I think they gave me an extra couple of weeks. I think I had a month, didn't I?

PERSIS: No, I don't think so.

JOHNSON: Didn't we go to New Hampshire?

PERSIS: We had to be down here by the fifteenth of August. We never went to New Hampshire.

JOHNSON: Sorry, it was the last time. That's right.

PERSIS: When you went down you had gotten an apartment for us and we came down.

JOHNSON: That's right. Because Persis and Emile - he was in the hospital up in Albany and she was with friends, family, so I came down and did get a temporary apartment. We brought over a Togolese to help with Persis and Emile. I had to get a place big enough for them.

Q: You were not in this house then?

JOHNSON: No, because this house was rented at the time.

PERSIS: She knew she was going to be going out again.

JOHNSON: I was going out again and we had good tenants and we wanted to keep them. So then we stayed until the end of January '82. The Malian man died in December. Then it took a long time to get the Malian - I went immediately after his death to the chargé d'affaires and asked him to send a cable and ask what his family wanted done, and they didn't... Finally, we had to handle everything for the funeral service and the burial and all.

Q: Did that take place here, or did you send...

JOHNSON: It took place here. They never did get anything from the family.

PERSIS: Marilyn said I know French law so I can't take any shortcuts.

JOHNSON: We had to get their permission. That was all cleared up by the end of January. We left at the end of January '82 to go to Pakistan.

Q: Tell me, when you were back here, of course you were in the midst of so much trouble, but did you have any problems readjusting to the kind of life one lives here, from having been a chief of mission?

JOHNSON: No, I don't think so. We're basically Americans and we're basically simple people. That was a very happy experience for me, but it didn't change at all. I was fortunate, we got a lovely apartment right downtown that by chance an acquaintance, Kay Clark Bourne's, sister had. It was down on the corner of 16th and L Streets, so that I could walk back and forth to the agency and to where I was studying Urdu. We had friends here who helped us out. It was a place where Persis was there, Emile was there, the hospice people could come. We could go to Georgetown University. I didn't have a car because my car was en route. Friends loaned me cars and we were able to...

PERSIS: We'd hire a car.

JOHNSON: I'd hire one on weekends.

Q: A lot of people have told me that the thing they missed the most was not having the chauffeur any more. [laughter] But that never bothered you?

JOHNSON: No, no, because I have always driven my own car. I only used the driver for official business. On weekends I would drive myself and, evenings, unless it was something where the flag had to fly, I would go to whatever dinner in my own car.

PERSIS: And I would sometimes get a little upset with her when she was going to be out very late at night, or something like that, or on a trip, that she didn't use the driver when it was perfectly legitimate to use him.

JOHNSON: But he had to sleep, too.

PERSIS: You had to. [Laughter] It can’t be any different.

JOHNSON: It didn't bother me at all. You go right back to the way you were before.

Q: You just shifted gears and went right back. Tell me about Islamabad and your work there.

JOHNSON: Islamabad was entirely different. It was a new culture for me. I had been in Tunis from '67 to '69, so I knew a little bit of the Mediterranean Arab but I had never been in south Asia. I knew Muslims and basic things about the religion but it was all new for us. Fortunately we had a wonderful... The residence in Pakistan, Islamabad, was probably

better than the one in Togo.

PERSIS: It was very nice. It was very different. We had a very nice residence in Togo. Islamabad was really outstanding, and the views...

JOHNSON: It was lovely. It was a new, it was a made city. It was designed by Doxiadis. It was a well designed modern city that was trying to find itself because the business capital was Karachi and it's the major city and Lahore is the academic and cultural capital, but this one was up in the Punjab and they wanted to create it. So it was a growing city and we saw it expand quite a bit while we were there.

I enjoyed it because it was a bigger program. First of all, we have three centers in Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar, as well as Islamabad. We were building. They had started many years before, a cultural center, and the main thing was for us to finish that American center. So that took up a lot of time and energy and thought during the first two years I was there. But we got it; we pushed it through and we inaugurated it. It was a very, very nice center and we got some excellent programming going in it. So it was a challenge and also I was able here rather than all the different elements of the mission I was trying to blend the Karachi, Lahore, and Peshawar operations into a country plan

Q: In other words, you were over all?

JOHNSON: I was all over all of them.

Q: That's a big job.

JOHNSON: All four. I had a lot more people working for me in Pakistan than I had in Togo. We had seventeen officers there and about a hundred locals.

Q: What were those offices again? Peshawar, Lahore...

JOHNSON: And Karachi. Then we had a reading room out of Karachi in Hyderabad. There had been a center there but it had closed down.

PERSIS: What about Quetta?

JOHNSON: We didn't have anything there but we were talking about it.

Q: And you had seventeen officers and how many locals?

JOHNSON: About 98 locals. About a hundred.

Q: That is a big program. Who was your ambassador?

JOHNSON: The first one was Ron Spiers, who was outstanding, and the second one was Hinton, Dean Hinton. He and I didn't get along too well. You know we had different

viewpoints. I certainly respect him as somebody who knows his business and he was a very successful ambassador there, building up American presence and influence in Pakistan. There's something you have to be a little wary about, I think. I thought we should reach out and meet the opposition, the young intellectuals. Well, he did, he also wanted to be in touch with everybody. But we were just two different personalities.

PERSIS: It was a very nice transition with Ron Spiers and seeing a new culture. It was very different. I had remembered the Arab culture of Tunis, visiting the second time with Marilyn there. This was a Muslim country but still not the same. Also coming from the open, happy, laughing, dancing culture in Africa, I found this a repressive culture in a sense.

Q: Are they very orthodox?

JOHNSON: Yes. There are a lot of fundamentalists there. Zia was trying to push Islamization. They had Islamic law and where women in the past, under the British, had come up, now they were trying to put them back in their place. The president was favoring the Jumiat-i-Islami, which was a religious party but it had political overtones. That was a hard thing. Human rights were being suppressed.

Q: It's difficult to live in a country like that, isn't it?

JOHNSON: Well, you know, it wasn't, because we knew a lot of the good people, too. There were bright ones and we worked with them.

PERSIS: Also for me it was the transition of household. Going from a household where you could trust everyone to one that was not like that. We had...

JOHNSON: ...a succession of cooks and bearers. At the beginning.

Q: It must have been rather difficult. You had lost Emile.

JOHNSON: That's right.

PERSIS: That was part of the problem because there was no one down in that service area who was in a sense a part of the household. And I couldn't get down there. But it's a different culture. It has a different feeling completely.

JOHNSON: And instead of everybody happy and laughing, they were always arguing. Persis had to mediate between. Everybody is jealous. They're all very... you know, if you've been in the Middle East. And revenge is the main thing. People killing all the time.

PERSIS: We were very fortunate in getting a head man in the house who took much of the load and straightened [things] out. I had to respect him.

JOHNSON: He was a very religious, good, good Muslim.

PERSIS: Truly religious, not just on the surface. So it became a very, very pleasant experience.

Q: How long did it take before you were able to get all this worked out and get the proper help?

PERSIS: It took about nine months to a year..

Q: Did it really?

PERSIS: Yes. But then it worked very well. And it will always be a very happy memory.

JOHNSON: Yes. Nice people there.

Q: I gather you ran the house there?

JOHNSON: She ran the household, yes.

PERSIS: Which was harder than in Togo because it was a larger household and not as easy to get the same attitude in the help.

JOHNSON: In fact the second bearer that we got is with us now. He was a very good person and we brought him back here and he runs the house for Persis.

PERSIS: He asked to come.

JOHNSON: He wanted to come. The driver wanted to come, but this one was very good. He's here. I'm just thinking I haven't heard him today. When I was out did you hear him get up? I ought to go down and see if he's all right.

PERSIS: He's probably gone out. He perhaps went out earlier.

JOHNSON: Luckily the first day I took him down to show him where the mosque was so that on Friday he could go. We paid for him to come here, of course, and since it was coming by in the area I asked if he wanted to go to Saudi Arabia to do the...

Q: Mecca?

JOHNSON: No, it wasn't... the Umra, but then it turned out it was the Haj season so with a lot of negotiation and some advance money he was able... we got him to get a place to go on the Haj. So he came back from Saudi Arabia as a Hajji. So he's very religious and the first day when he was going down he met somebody who was a driver for a Pakistani with the World Bank who lives right in the neighborhood. So it was marvelous. He's met friends through him.

PERSIS: He goes to the adult school.

JOHNSON: The same thing we did for Emile. We got him into the Americanization school down at Georgetown where he meets other foreign students who are studying English. So he has other friends too. An outlet for him to get out. So he gets out every day for about four hours.

Q: Were you able to find supplies easily in Islamabad?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. There was a big commissary there. And also on the market. Just about anything you want in the marketplace.

PERSIS: We had a very good garden and we had a lot of fresh vegetables. We never had to worry about that.

JOHNSON: We grew our own salads.

Q: I suppose you had a heavy entertaining schedule as always?

JOHNSON: As always.

PERSIS: That's good you know. At least you will see people.

JOHNSON: That's right, she didn't.

PERSIS: In Islamabad I didn't.

JOHNSON: She didn't go downstairs much.

PERSIS: I did when it was necessary when I could be helpful. I didn't feel the necessity there. No, what were we talking about?

Q: Nothing at all. We were talking about the entertaining.

PERSIS: But it was a beautiful house for entertaining. It was very well set up. We were very fortunate in being there. We were given the right kind of furniture.

JOHNSON: They refurnished it just before we got in. They went over it completely so it was very good.
JOHNSON: It was an FBO-owned house.

PERSIS: Marilyn believes in a lot of business over the dining room table. It was a small table, so they let us have furniture built. It was a huge room. It was just a beautiful. It was a modern house. It had spectacular views from all around. We were fortunate in having the good sense not to overpower the house with some of our own things. We used only a few things here and there so that the house showed up.

JOHNSON: It was nice architecture.

Q: How long were you there?

JOHNSON: Almost three and a half years at the most. We got there at the end of January of '82 and we left in July of '85.

Q: Are there any special memories you retained of Islamabad that you'd like to talk about?

JOHNSON: I don't think so. Perhaps the apex, at the end, and the high point was when I did go on a trek, you know you always hear about treks. They have a very good group of Europeans and Americans and Pakistanis who have formed something called the Asia studies group, for people who are there to learn about the culture of the country and the geography and society. They had arranged a trek to a place called Fairy Meadows, up in the northern Karakorams, up to one of the base camps of Nanga Parbat which is the westernmost peak in the Himalaya range.

At first I didn't apply because there was a lesser trek and they said this is only for the experienced people who are hard climbers and have done lots of training, so I said that's not for me. But they canceled the one the week before and this - I heard that somebody was going on this trip, and I thought my goodness if she could do it, I think I could. Luckily it was a night we were having a reception for some educational group and our Fulbright professor was there and he was a very avid mountain climber. When I had called the British woman to ask if I could get into the group. She said, "Well, I don't know." She knew how old I was because I'd played tennis with her. She said, "You ask Hall," Professor Hall who was at the house. So I talked with him and he said yes he thought I could do it.

He said we would go climb a nearby hill in the Margala hills and we'd check and see how my stamina was. So we went out. I had a pair of old boots and luckily I had a sleeping bag and everything else that was needed for it. We went out and climbed and I was able to keep up and move along so they let me go and that was really very good.

There's a doctor who was an outstanding ophthalmologist, who works in a missionary hospital in Taxila outside of Islamabad, who also was about my age, and he had been training, running up and down stairs for months, and he had done a lot of trekking. So the two old-timers were there. We were often at the head of the line. We made it up to the base camp. So that was a wonderful experience of just walking in the mountains of northern Pakistan.

Q: How long do you stay? Just overnight?

JOHNSON: Oh, no, no. We flew up to Gilgit, which is a northern part in the Karakorams, and then we went by car across the Indus river and we climbed for a day to our first camp. We slept out there next to a rushing river. Then we climbed the second day to the Fairy Meadows. We got there in time for lunch that day. So it didn't take too much. Then rested

for a day and the fourth day most of us, some of them didn't make it, but most of us went up to a base camp. It was an international group. There was an Austrian girl, there were British, Australians, and there were three Americans.
It was the base camp of Nanga Parbat. Then we came back and rested a day. We came down in one day. No we didn't, we stayed overnight. It took us two days to come down again. About a ten-day trek. Then we came back by bus and car.

PERSIS: You had other memorable trips in there.

JOHNSON: You know another thing about Pakistan that's lovely is - I spoke of Taxila - is the old Greek civilization that was there. Alexander the Greek came through and the marvelous Gandaran art, which is a combination of... it's like the Buddhist but they all have Greek features because of the Greek influence on art there. It's a very rich country. Then the whole Indus valley culture. They have Mohenjo-Daro, which people don't know much about, but Mohenjo-Daro was something like Babylon, one of the old cities of an ancient civilization.

Q: Is there much of it left?

JOHNSON: They're trying to restore it, but unfortunately the water table has risen and all of the salts have risen and it's just crumbling away the bricks. It's been recognized by UNESCO as one of the world monuments to save. Millions of dollars are going into it. We've given a couple of million, the United States, to preserve it. I visited there and also because while I was there the war in Afghanistan continued and we built up quite a program in Peshawar out of nothing working with the people, representatives of the organizations that are there to help.

Q: Aid to victims?

JOHNSON: Yes, and then that worked with the Afghan refugee groups. There was a lot going on. It was important from that point of view politically.

PERSIS: What about Quetta?

JOHNSON: And Quetta, I went there. It was lovely.

Q: Where is that?

JOHNSON: Quetta is over next to Iran in Baluchistan, which is a very unstable area. The Soviets would love to come down through Afghanistan and through Baluchistan, which is in Pakistan and then take over Iran from that side, too. They would have a pincer movement on Iran.

Q: You went up there?

JOHNSON: Yes, I went to Quetta because we have some programs. It's an important part

of the country. There's a military staff command college and we have an American military who is there, and through him we send up some films and brochures, and also when we have an American participant speakers come out, we arrange for them to go there. We had a Fulbright professor in the university of Quetta.

PERSIS: What about the English teacher from Quetta?

JOHNSON: I worked very closely with an American professor of biology in a seminar, getting a seminar going up there. We helped him.

Q: I suppose you had to travel to all of your different...

JOHNSON: Yes, I did. I wanted to see the country and I drove all through the country. I drove to Quetta and then down to Karachi. When I first came in I drove to Karachi and I drove to Lahore and then to Quetta.
Q: But you took someone with you?

JOHNSON: The driver.

Q: The driver?

JOHNSON: Yes. I didn't go alone. The driver and I and then we went up to Peshawar frequently.

PERSIS: What about the time you went on a trip to that place up there where there was a hospital?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. That was a private one with the Asia Studies group.

PERSIS: There were lots of trips and places to go.

JOHNSON: Oh, it's a fascinating country.

PERSIS: She got way up in the Karakorams.

JOHNSON: We flew up.

Q: Did you take advantage of the time to go over to India?

JOHNSON: Yes. There was a PAO conference, so I knew the Indian ambassador quite well and he gave us permission to drive, which we couldn't do at the time because of the problem with the Punjab. Also to take a Pakistani, they wouldn't let Pakistani drivers go in. They thought they were all spies. But I knew him and through that I got permission so that Persis could go down. Persis saw the Taj Mahal, by sunset, by moonlight, and by sunrise. We had a nice drive down and back. I flew back, I guess.

PERSIS: The last day foreigners were allowed to go. We couldn't go to the Golden Temple though.

JOHNSON: No, not in Amritsar because of the problems.

PERSIS: We had to start from the border of Pakistan and not stop on the way down.

JOHNSON: Had to go straight through to New Delhi.

Q: You say this is the last day that foreigners were permitted... They closed the border?

JOHNSON: They closed the border

PERSIS: The Punjab border.

Q: Oh, the Punjab. Always some trouble in that part of the world.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Now it's just increasing, of course.

Q: Yes, unfortunately.

PERSIS: But those mountains are just spectacular. We're quite used to the Alps of Germany and Austria. But this... what is it they say? There are...

JOHNSON: More mountains over 20,000 feet in Pakistan than...

PERSIS: Than there are in the Alps.
Q: Is K2 in Pakistan?

JOHNSON: Yes, K2 is. Pardon me. K2 is the second highest. It's in Pakistan, right.

PERSIS: I thought you went to K2.

JOHNSON: No.

Q: Were you happy, both of you, to come back to the States after that time?

JOHNSON: Yes. I had wanted to have another overseas assignment, but I only had two years before I became 65. So the chief of Foreign Service personnel said, really the only other positions, PAO positions, of my rank were in a country where I'd have to learn a foreign language, Indonesian.. It would take me a year to learn that and then I wouldn't have time to be out and I understood that. So he said what he proposed was the inspector job which would let me be out and traveling overseas but I would be able to go into it right away and would have a good final assignment.

Q: How long can you stay? What is the cutoff date now?

JOHNSON: I have to retire the third of July because I'll be 65 in June.

Q: Oh, I see. So 65 is the cutoff now.

JOHNSON: 65 is our cutoff date. So it's the first month after you're 65.

Q: The first month after, is it? It used to be 60 and they raised it to 65.

JOHNSON: Yes, in '81, the Foreign Service Act of '81, raised it to 65. At first I wanted to keep on working and I didn't want to retire, but now that I know I'm going to retire, I'm looking forward to it and will be very happy. I'll be very happy to continue the overseas inspections. I'm not too happy to sit in an office here, although there's always work writing the reports.

Q: Are you enjoying the job as an inspector?

JOHNSON: Yes, very much, and I'm learning a lot. I'm learning things I should have done, could have done when I was PAO. And I'm also learning things I did as a PAO that a lot of these people could be doing.

Q: Yes. My husband says everybody should be an inspector at some point, preferably early on.

JOHNSON: That's right. It's really very good, [as a] mid-career assignment it's excellent.

PERSIS: You were on an inspection tour.

JOHNSON: I was as a guest inspector to Iran when I was back here in the information center service program.

Q: Now, are you inspecting strictly for USIA.

JOHNSON: For USIA, that's right. We just do the USIS posts.

Q: Are you going to be affected by the proposal to bring in outside inspectors for the State Department, or are you going to continue to use your own people?

JOHNSON: We are now statutory, and USIA also, which means that they're bringing in more civil service. They want to have civil service. We also have lost a lot of people, Foreign Service officers who don't like the way it's going now that we have to be almost like GAO, and we have to go through so many quality controls that the reports never get out. We have lost three people, two who want to find other jobs and should have been there for another year or two, and one who was in his normal rotation, and nobody has volunteered, because it's not a very good atmosphere within Washington until it gets sorted out. So we're taking somebody from... the last one we had was a civil servant. They want to

bring civil servants in, but this is a young man who had had a tour in India and one that I had known in ICS. He's very bright, and very good. So we had two Foreign Service officers and one civil service who worked with the International Visitor Program on our last one to Nigeria and South Africa. And the next one will also have somebody from civil service. But we don't have outside of the government. Now, we did in the past. We had private sector people. Because when I went to Iran we had a banker from Philadelphia.

Q: But that's not...

JOHNSON: It's not in USIA. It's not that glamorous. We really work.

Q: I know you do.

JOHNSON: We have to write the report and you can't carry extra baggage.

Q: Eventually do they hope to have all civil service people?

JOHNSON: We're fighting to not, because we say you have to have somebody who knows the overseas atmosphere.

Q: I would think.

JOHNSON: Who knows how to work, how you have to work in a foreign culture and who is familiar with all of the programs, to know what a library program should encompass, what an exchange program should be, what an information program is, and the public affairs aspect.

Q: But you say there is a statute now...

JOHNSON: It's a statutory, in that congress has said that you must have a professional inspector general. It's not to be somebody from USIA who just does a tour as inspector general and then goes back overseas, because congress says there's too much cronyism if you do that. So you have to have somebody from the inspector general community who is responsible to both USIA and congress, and the office of inspector general has to send a report to congress twice a year on what it's doing and a summary of its activities, and congress can ask them to conduct any investigations. It's not only inspections but it's inspections, audits, and investigation. There are three phases.

Q: And this man would be permanently in the job?

JOHNSON: Yes, they have one who is, he thinks, permanent but I think it's just acting for the moment, who was the deputy inspector general in the Department of Agriculture. Then he brought somebody who had been with congress and had been in the inspector general's office at the Department of Defense. There are other people who have come from GAO and other agencies, auditing. So it's becoming more part of the inspector general grouping here among the different government departments.

Q: What chance do you think, USIA will have to keep some of its own people in it?

JOHNSON: I think we're working on it, and luckily we have some people in the management who see it. It's an excellent management tool. We go out and we're going not to find fault with them and say you're doing a bad job, but we're going out to see how improvements can be made to make the operation more efficient and cost effective. We look upon it as a good management tool. That's why we're stressing now because we have to wait so long to get a report out. We leave a memorandum to the PAO on what he can accomplish. Where we have seen some areas that need improvement, we give our findings and recommendations for what he can accomplish right there at the post. Then when we come back and we write the report, it's what the elements back here in Washington can do in working with the post.

Q: You also are sort of troubleshooters, aren't you?

JOHNSON: Yes. For instance, when morale is bad, this is something that we try to patch up to get them as a good team.

Q: You're sort of as an outside person, a court of last resort?

JOHNSON: That's right, and often we find people come in and say we're glad to have you here. We want to talk with you. They can tell us things that they don't tell their own bosses.

Q: Exactly, exactly. But you say it has to go through several levels, now?

JOHNSON: Back here to write the report, because when it goes to congress, you have to be sure of every fact. So everything we state we have to have different papers to back it up. They don't want to [have them] say, why did you say that and not know why. So we have to have all of the documentation. It takes a long time.

Q: Before the reports didn't go to Congress, I gather?

JOHNSON: No. I guess they could ask for it, but you could have held executive privilege and say this is the executive. Now congress is in on it. [Senator] Jesse Helms, you know, doesn't like the Foreign Service. I think he was very instrumental in getting this. He wanted to make sure that State Department had somebody, not State, as inspector general. The head of USIA had had some run-ins with congressional leaders and so USIA had to pay up.

Q: I see. Too bad.

JOHNSON: In a way it is. I think it's good. We should be able to document everything and we should look at it from the overall government point of view. Are USIA programs contributing to our overseas goals? I think we were doing it anyway. We were doing it more in a collegial manner, now we will be a little bit more distant, rather than collegial. This is what they don't want, that collegial approach. But also, I think people will not be so

free in talking with us now. They're going to hold things back, whereas before they would have told us everything. They knew we were trying to help. If they're afraid that we're looking at things with a different eye...

Q: And you have to have documentation for everything. You're eliminating

JOHNSON: I think they will be less communicative.

Q: You say that you're looking forward to your retirement. What do you plan to do?

JOHNSON: I plan to go up to New Hampshire. As you saw, we had started to redo the house in order to be able to spend more time. I would like to be up there the winter because I like to ski cross country.
PERSIS: I haven't said anything, have I?

JOHNSON: No, but everybody says, oh, you can't take Persis up there for the winter. You can't do that. But I'd like to try it, the first year anyway, to get back to the roots. As you know, we have a cousin up there, we have some very good friends who are helping to redo the house. We have a very, very close friend who is like part of the family and her family is our family. It would be nice to have them up there for Christmas, and old-fashioned Christmas.

Q: Is this Phoebe?

JOHNSON: Phoebe, yes, and her family. The whole family is coming here for Christmas, this year. They're coming from all directions. We're a central point. Phoebe and Jens will come up from Florida. The older son and his wife will come from Cleveland. The younger son will come down from Albany, and the daughter and her husband and child will come from New York. We'll all be here for Christmas.

Q: How nice. What part of Florida is Phoebe in?

JOHNSON: They're in Miami, Coral Gables.

Q: In looking back over your very eventful and very successful career, what are the high points to you?

JOHNSON: I don't really know. I think probably a high point... I wouldn't say it's very eventful and successful. I've been very fortunate. It's been a life that has been interesting to me. I like what I've done. I've been fortunate to always be able to do something that I like to do. As Persis said sometimes people have to do things in order to earn a living, they have responsibilities. I've been fortunate that I've always liked what I've been doing. I think one of my first... I enjoyed very much the year in France as a Fulbrighter and when I joined the agency in Bamako, that was probably the high point of the career because of all of the wonderful people who worked there. We just had an outstanding group of people. Life was difficult materially and physically, but we had a great esprit de corps. Then Tunisia was

also a very pleasant, that was my first introduction to the Mediterranean Muslim world. And Togo, of course, the experience of being ambassador was outstanding.

PERSIS: Moscow.

JOHNSON: Oh, Moscow, yes, that was, to be operating in a communist country.

Q: Although it was a strain on you, I gathered.

JOHNSON: No, it's a psychological strain on everybody.

Q: That's what I meant.

JOHNSON: Yes, and it was an unhappy period from the point of the interior work, but it was a very good experience and one that has stood me in good stead afterwards, because as we talk about communism and the Russian people, I can differentiate and say that I've been there and know what the system is, and can speak as someone with first-hand experience. So it's been very good. You're sympathetic with the people and you know that we should work with them, but you know you have to be wary of the system and its representatives.

PERSIS: We also have great respect for them.

JOHNSON: Yes, there are some hard-working, very bright people. Also, as we said, the experience in Togo was very good because also we had excellent people with us. I enjoyed the job, I enjoyed my associates very much.

Q: Was that particular assignment the high point for you, career-wise?

JOHNSON: No, I don't think so, well career-wise it would be, but actually in Pakistan, as I say, that was probably more responsible. There were more people and more programs going on there in Pakistan within USIS.

PERSIS: It was more important in the world scene.

JOHNSON: That's right.

PERSIS: The thing is probably both of us enjoy what we're doing at the moment, and particularly Marilyn, and can see the possibilities for enjoyment naturally without looking for them. Everything has seemed to be particularly good. Even Nigeria, I mean Niger, was an interesting.

JOHNSON: That was my first PAO job. I've been very fortunate, as I say, in an enjoyable career and now that it's over I can go right back to just sitting up on the hill in New Hampshire. I'll try to, perhaps, get involved in some community activities.

Q: What would you say was the most significant achievement in your life?

JOHNSON: I don't know that I've achieved anything. (Laughter) I don't know of any achievements, successful achievements.

Q: What would you say, Persis?

PERSIS: I think her ability to bring people together, to establish a community... praise for herself as a catalyst bringing people together who can profit from an exchange. But I think building harmony, perhaps. I don't know whether you consider character an achievement. It may be one is blessed with that.

JOHNSON: But I didn't have anything to do with that.

Q: They say character is destiny.

PERSIS: But the fact that she has always remained herself. I think when you ask what has she achieved, she doesn't feel particularly famous. Can she go back? Did she find it hard to go back to life after being an ambassador? She is what she is, it isn't the trappings around her that determine what she is or what she will do with the trappings.

Q: Would you have any advice for young women aspirants to a career in the Foreign Service, either USIA or State?

JOHNSON: Oh, I would say that there are opportunities there, and I have done it when I was in Niger. Somebody came up from Ouagadougou and I advised her to continue and she was doing very well. Unfortunately then she was caught up in the Iran hostage crisis. Now there was a JOT [junior officer trainee] who was in Pakistan with me that I encouraged to keep on, and she's now PAO in Bamako which is my first post. I think it's an area where you can work and be recognized on your own achievements. And a woman can compete with a man.

Q: You're specifically speaking of USIA now?

JOHNSON: Yes. I don't know about State Department, but I've known some very good women officers in State Department who have gotten ahead. Perhaps there is a little bit more tradition. I think, USIA is more activity oriented and it's what you do, and your views perhaps, are accepted more readily in USIA than in State.

Q: Do you think there would be many women to follow in your steps to become ambassador?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, I've seen them on their way up.

Q: From USIA?

JOHNSON: Yes. There was one very good one that I served with in Moscow, Barbara

Allen. I think that I may have unwittingly been instrumental in her going to Mombasa as consul general, because when I was having dinner with - I was having lunch, I'd arranged to have lunch with a man who was the DCM in Togo with me, and was at that time in the executive office in AF, in State, in AF State. I was having lunch with him, and Barbara Allen called me to say that I was in town and something about getting together. I said I was going to be over at State, I was having lunch with Irv that day, and if she wanted to join us, fine, we could talk that way. We did and she wanted to do something different. She had come back from Moscow. She had gone from Moscow to Leningrad, and had been the branch public affairs officer in Leningrad, and then came back and was working in the VOA Russian language service, but she had a disagreement with people on policies at VOA, and then was sent over to State and was in this Office of Reciprocity, I've forgotten what the title is, of dealing with foreign governments. She wanted to do something different. She met Irvin and he said they were looking for women DCMs in Africa. Then I never heard from her again but I noticed that she was named as consul general to Mombasa. But then, unfortunately, she contracted cerebral malaria and died last year. I read about it in the wireless file while I was in Morocco. But there was somebody who really was destined to become an ambassador. She was an outstanding woman. Of course there is Frances Cook, who probably will. She should go on up. She was USIA but converted to State. Within USIA there are some very good people. I'm trying to think now. There's one, an information officer that we met out in Japan, Carol Ludwig, who has a lot of potential. She knows policy, worked very closely with Ambassador Mansfield, and at the time of the summit economic conference in Tokyo last year she bore a heavy load. I think Carol Ludwig could really move ahead. Within USIA, very well known is Donna Oglesby, who is now the director of the Latin American area for USIA. She would be somebody who would be eminently qualified to be an ambassador to Latin America. I don't know, they haven't sent any women into Latin America, have they? Isn't that odd?

Q: Very odd. Are there any special preparations that you would advise?

JOHNSON: I think just to look... courses?

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Senior Seminar, everybody should go to the senior seminar. That's an outstanding...

Q: But I mean on before you reach that point, when they're back in college.

JOHNSON: In college I think that if you take international relations; I'm no one to tell because I was classics and anthropology, as you know, far removed from it. But I think a good liberal education with - you should know what the United States is all about.

Q: US history?

JOHNSON: Yes. I would say US history and international relations and just a general liberal arts with some sociology and anthropology to know what makes people tick, too.

Q: Do you have any final words?

JOHNSON: And economics in today's world. You should have economics. I didn't have any economics but it's a major area of our policy these days.

Q: Well, as we wind this up, have you any final...

JOHNSON: I don't think so. Thank you for talking with me for so long. You've brought out a lot of things that I had forgotten. I'm sure that I've neglected to mention many things but it's been a very pleasant experience talking with you, reminiscing.

Q: It's been very pleasant for me, and what about you Persis?

PERSIS: Oh, I've enjoyed it immensely.

Q: You have any more final things you'd like to say?

PERSIS: I think the main thing is to enjoy one's work in life and I think therefore you'll do a good job.

JOHNSON: But also to maintain your integrity. I think that you should have a sense of what is right and wrong, and know it within you, and if you feel that they're asking you to do something wrong and you cannot do it without knowing that it's wrong, then you should resign. I'm fortunate that there have been things that I would not have accepted. I would not have accepted to go to Vietnam. I wasn't asked to. I've always been able, in whatever position I was in, to say what I felt and have never been asked to do anything that I felt was morally or politically wrong. That's, I think, a very important thing, for people to maintain their integrity. Don't get swept along by saying the end justifies the means.

End of interview