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

ANN B. SIDES

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is 8 October 2010. This is an interview with Ann B. Sides. What does the B stand for?

SIDES: Bardsley, my maiden name.

Q: And it is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. I take it you are called Ann.

SIDES: I am called Ann.

Q: Ann, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

SIDES: 16 April 1946 in Massachusetts.

Q: Where in Massachusetts?

SIDES: I physically came into the world in Framingham, but I was registered in Milford, so I always give that as my place of birth. The hospital just happened to be in Framingham, but my mother was from Milford, my parents were living there.

Q: All right, so let's take on your father's side. What do you know about the Sides side of things?

SIDES: Well actually it would be the Bardsley side of the family if we are looking at my father. The Sides side is my husband's side.

Q: Right. Well let's do you father's side.

SIDES: My father was born in Dublin, Ireland, in 1919 during the troubled times. His father was a discharged soldier from the British army, half Irish, half British. He was very badly wounded on the Western Front so he was working in the post office in Dublin.

Q: The famous post office.

SIDES: That famous post office. The poor guy, he was shell-shocked as well as wounded, I think. It probably was not a good place to for him work. Even after the Easter Rising, which happened while he was still in the British Army, the center of Dublin where the post office was, was frequently the site of shooting. He had married an Irish lady during the war who was his nurse. His father—my great-grandfather—was also in the British Army, and granddad was born at the British army base in Aldershot, England. However, his father, who was a sergeant major, had retired to Dublin with his Irish wife, so Dublin was my grandfather's home and he and my grandmother settled there. That is where my father was born, in 1919. He emigrated to the United States as a boy with his parents in the 20's.

Q: What did he do when he came to the States?

SIDES: He lived in Uxbridge, a small town right next to Milford. Granddad worked in a textile mill; he was a foreman. My father grew up in Uxbridge and went to Holy Cross. He was a naval aviation cadet when Pearl Harbor was attacked. They discovered as he was about to be commissioned as an officer that he was not a U.S. citizen. He had derived naturalization when his father got citizenship in, I think, 1930, but under the law of the time Dad was supposed to take the oath himself when he reached adulthood in order to retain citizenship. So before he got his little gold bars as an ensign he had to renounce his British citizenship and swear to support and defend the United States, which he went on to do in World War II as a naval aviator. After the war he had a long career with Dun and Bradstreet as a financial reporter. However, he stayed in the Navy Reserve for another 25 years so and retired as a commander.

Q: Did he talk about to Holy Cross and all that?

SIDES: Oh yes, he often talked about it. He loved Holy Cross. He played in the college band and got a very good education from Jesuits. He had a great interest in current events, public affairs, politics, and history. He read a lot. He met my mother because they came from neighboring towns. I guess they met when they were in high school. But she was going to what is now Worcester University, which was Worcester State Teacher's College then. So they were dating, riding into Worcester together, and getting from just a fun relationship to a serious one. They married in 1943.

Q: What do you know about your mother's side?

SIDES: My mother's mother was Irish, but my mother's father was an old New England Yankee, literally descended from the Mayflower. I think I might be eligible to be in the DAR, which is a funny thing for an Irish gal. Grandpa was a member of the Congregational Church and at one time was a selectman of the town of Milford. He was a grocer, but not much of a businessman. He lost everything in the Depression. He loved poetry and could recite great long passages of "The Lady of the Lake."

Q: Did you have any contact with your grandparents when you were a kid or were they around?

SIDES: They were around until I guess I was 12 or 13 years old. I remember them very well. My grandfather, the former British soldier, had tattoos on his arms of snakes. I believe he got them serving in India before the war. He used to flex the muscles in his forearms to make the snakes wiggle.

Q: Speaking of your grandfather, how did the sort of troubles in Ireland translate into your family?

SIDES: You know my family didn't talk about it much; at least, not least on my father's side. I think having lived through all this turmoil they were very careful about stereotyping anybody or anything. My grandparents and my father witnessed a lot of shooting and violence. My father's earliest memory is of an armored car shooting a machine gun in the street below their bedroom. My paternal grandparents were Catholic, both of them, but because of their very British-sounding family name and the fact that my grandfather had been in the British army, I think that Ireland wasn't a very comfortable place for them when independence came. The British post office was pulling out and, as I recall the story, my grandfather was expecting to be transferred to Scotland. In the war he was a Royal Engineer signaler and served with the Seaforth Highlanders. He had a Seaforth Highlanders regimental tie. But he really didn't like Scots. I think maybe he believed they were anti-Catholic or something. Anyway, he didn't want to live among them. Sorry about that, Stu! I know you're a Scotsman.

Q: Well that is all right. It happens.

SIDES: Anyway, my grandmother had a sister working in America, in Uxbridge. They arrived in Boston on July 1, 1923; my grandparents, my dad, and his sister. Apparently it was sunny, warm, prosperous, peaceful, and everything else that Ireland wasn't. I don't think they had any regrets about emigrating. Later my grandfather sponsored his sister, her husband, and their kids. Most of his siblings also emigrated out of Ireland to Britain or Australia. We have only distant relatives left now in the old country; my grandmother's cousins.

Q: All right, let's talk about your family life. You grew up in Milford, was it?

SIDES: My parents moved to Connecticut when I was a baby. So I actually spent my childhood outside of Hartford. Then Dad was transferred to Florida when I was about 12

to the Miami office of Dun and Bradstreet. My mother was very sensitive to cold weather. They had been stationed in Florida during the war and they really liked it, so he wangled this transfer to Florida.

Q: Did he talk much about his experiences as a naval officer?

SIDES: Oh he enjoyed talking about it. He loved to fly. He was a disappointed man because he trained as a dive bomber, and the job of the dive bombers was to swoop down over the Japanese ships and zap them with torpedoes. As he would pull out of the dive, my father used to pass out in the cockpit. He thought this was normal, but apparently it wasn't. They discovered he had high blood pressure. That ended his career as a pilot. So he survived the war. Many of the guys he trained with were killed; particularly at Midway, very early in the war.

Q: Oh yes, there was the famous torpedo squadron 8 in which the entire squadron of torpedo bombers was shot down. The bombers sank four Japanese carriers.

SIDES: Yes. My father knew some of those people and was well aware that he was a lucky guy.

Q: Well I suppose probably the best place to start is in Connecticut. What sort of, where did you live in Connecticut?

SIDES: Well, early in my childhood we lived in a veterans' housing project. Nobody today would even know what those things were, but right after WWII according to my parents it was really hard to find a place to live.

Q: Oh God, yes.

SIDES: The reason they ended up in Connecticut and that he took the job that he did with Dun and Bradstreet had to do with housing. After the war they were expecting me, and they were crashing with Mom's parents. The government made available decommissioned barracks that local authorities could fix up and convert into housing for the young veterans and their families. I guess the demand really exceeded the supply. There was a possibility that they could get into one of these veterans housing projects in West Hartford, Connecticut because my mother's cousin was active in the Connecticut Democratic Party and had influence. He got my parents into the West Hartford project even though they weren't from Connecticut at all. So Dad got a job at Dun and Bradstreet in Hartford. My earliest memory is living in this barracksy thing. They used to put my baby buggy by the stove to keep me warm.

Q: Were they sort of square or were they the Quonset type?

SIDES: The Quonset ones were rounded and had a corrugated roof. No, these were the rectangular ones with clapboard.

Q: Sort of basically they were old barracks.

SIDES: They were old barracks that they carved up into little two bedroom apartments.

Q: I spent a good four years in a barracks, actually WWII barracks although I was Korean War. But I know those places intimately. Well how long were you in that?

SIDES: Oh, we were in the project until I was about 5 years old. My parents by then had saved up enough money to buy a small home in nearby Wethersfield. We lived there until I was 12.

Q: Well this might have been a good place, at the age of five.

SIDES: Well I was born in 1946 so I am sure our family's experience was very typical for the times. Did I mention that I was conceived on VJ day? Dad, although he wasn't a flier any more, was being trained for overseas service. I think he was supposed to help invade Japan; a nasty business. When the war ended, he and my mother were celebrating this happy event, and I was the result.

Q: While your parents were doing that, I was a school boy riding on a fire engine up and down the streets of Andover, Mass. Little did I know what was going on.

SIDES: You lost your Massachusetts accent, too. Like me.

Q: By the time you got into a regular house, how big was your family?

SIDES: My parents, and two children. My brother was born in 1950. My sister was born in '52. We had moved into the new house then.

Q: Was this sort of a picket fence type neighborhood?

SIDES: Oh yes. These new housing developments were springing up like mushrooms after the war. Ours wasn't a Levittown, but it was a smaller version of it, I suppose. We lived on Mapleside Drive, which had been farmland just a few years before. Our house was a little gray Cape Cod with clapboard and shingles and a little yellow picket fence around it, a quarter acre backyard. It only had one bathroom, as I recall. Nobody thought a thing about that then. People lived on a smaller scale.

Q: I can imagine. I mean this is one of the big things that plumbers did later on was to add on to these.

SIDES: I wonder how we did it!

Q: Do you recall sort of family life as a school kid?

SIDES: Oh yeah.

Q: What was it like?

SIDES: Well, I think we had a very typical American family. My mother was a teacher, but she didn't work when we were small. Dad would come home at night at 5:30. My mother would have dinner on the table almost as soon as he arrived. American life before television was very different than it is now. We kids all played in the streets until dusk. I spent a lot of time with my cousins; Mom's brother lived across the street with his family. All the parents on our street kept an eye on us kids. Neighbors were closer then. Also, the common experience of the war and early parenthood I think created a bond among the young couples raising families on Mapleside Drive. There were a lot of parties, as I remember. Somebody would play the piano and everyone would sing. People had backyard barbecues on Fourth of July. Our dads would shoot off fireworks, really big, noisy ones that now would probably be against the law. We didn't have air conditioning, but somehow we survived. People had screened porches, and we practically lived on them in the summer. It gets hot in New England, you know! Mosquitoes were bigger then, or so it seems.

Q: Also something I think parents today would understand, was essentially how the children were turned loose. You know be home at 6:30, we eat at 6:30 and you were on your own.

SIDES: Mid-century America was a very different place than it is now. Mid-century meaning the last century, the one that ended in 1999. Yeah, we were all out playing, as soon as we got out of school till our moms called us in to dinner. If you got into trouble, your parents found out about it soon enough. The other neighbors kept an eye out on things. Everybody was pretty much in the same situation with houses full of small children and the mothers stayed home and the dads worked. It was kind of a "Happy Days," Leave it to Beaver" kind of life, I suppose.

Q: How about school? You went to school…

SIDES: Yes. I went to John Chester elementary school in Wethersfield. Then my parents I think by fifth grade decided to send me to a Catholic school called St. Augustine in Hartford. I am not really sure what they had in mind. It must have cost them a lot of money. Because they were very religious, being Irish, perhaps they thought I would become more religious as a person. Also, my mother, being a teacher, wanted an education that challenged me, and the public schools back in the 50's were very crowded.

Q: Did religion dominate family life?

SIDES: I don't think I could say that it dominated it, but it certainly was a very important part of their lives, and therefore the lives of my siblings and me. This was the Catholic Church pre-Vatican II. We wore hats or head scarves to church and we fasted before we took communion and stuff like that.

Q: Fish on Friday.

SIDES: Fish on Friday, those horrible fish sticks. Ick. That is why I hate fish now. Yes, my parents were devout practicing Catholics. And I was certainly a sincere believer, as children are.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

SIDES: You know, that is a good story. When I first went to elementary school--we are talking about 1951 or something like that--the schools were packed to the walls with kids. The teachers could hardly handle us. My first-grade teacher apparently told my mother that I was a bit slow and maybe I needed some kind of special education or something, because I couldn't seem to catch on to reading. My mother was appalled, because she thought I was the most brilliant thing that ever walked the earth. I was her first child, the one they took all the pictures of. Also, she was a teacher. She started looking at my textbooks, and what I was supposed to be reading was stuff like, "Oh, look see, see Spot run. See Dick and Jane play." I did not give a damn about Dick and Jane, and had no motivation to read. Also, they were teaching us to sight-read, to recognize words, rather than sound them out syllable by syllable. My mother did not believe in the sight-reading method. So she got some old red cloth-covered readers from her aunt who was a school principal back at the turn of the century. The stories were these lurid Brothers Grimm sort of tales with lots of gore and horror, and Aesop's Fables.

Q: Probably an offshoot of the McGuffey readers.

SIDES: Probably. They were from that era. My mother would read the first half of the story to me, and then she made me sound out the rest by reading orally. Of course I wanted to know if Red Riding Hood got eaten by the Big Bad Wolf or not, so I started plugging away, sounding out the words. Mom was a very good teacher, and pretty soon I caught on. From then on, I read anything I could get my hands on. I read box tops. I read labels on baked bean cans. I read Ladies Home Journal and the Hartford Courant, and God knows what else. Pretty soon, Mom had to forbid me to read at the table. I have been a compulsive reader ever since. Unfortunately now as my eyesight makes it hard, I get tired reading after a couple of hours. But it is still my drug of choice.

Q: Was there a library near you?

SIDES: I don't believe there was a library near me, but I think my mother took me to the library.

Q: Growing up during the pre teens, do you recall any particular books or series of books you were interested in?

SIDES: I did read the sorts of things girls would read, but I also read the stuff that guys read because I liked the adventure. The "Trixie Belden" series—girl detective—that was a favorite of mine, and "The Red Badge of Courage", the "Jungle Book," "Treasure

Island," "Tom Sawyer," "The Swiss Family Robinson," "Robinson Crusoe," and many more. I was always drawn to books where people had adventures and did daring things, particularly in exotic settings. No doubt that's what led me to a career in the Foreign Service. I very early began to read some of my parents' books, some of which they didn't want me to read, and which I really did not understand. I reread them later as an adult, and was surprised to realize what I'd gotten hold of as a child. They would not have been considered particularly racy today, but they were definitely not written for young children.

Q: Well in school, elementary school, how did you take to school? I mean, once you stopped being slow by Dick and Jane standards.

SIDES: Yeah, thank God for my mother. I would probably have been put in an institution for what we called "backward" children if I hadn't overcome the reading problem. Once I copped on to reading, I liked school. I probably didn't work hard enough, and I was very inept at math. Still am. I wonder sometimes if I have numeric dyslexia. So, I wasn't very good at math, and not too great at the sciences, but anything to do with English or history or civics I really dug into, with enthusiasm. I was always in the top quarter of my class but I was never one of the brilliants.

Q: What was your world in Connecticut? I take it that it was pretty white.

SIDES: Yes, it was. I remember there was what we called a "colored," a black kid in our class, and I recall my mother asking me to be nice to Peter because he was the only one and he would be feeling kind of left out. My parents were very conventional in many ways, but God bless them, they were not bigots. They later in life refused to join a country club when they found out that it was "restricted." In other words it didn't take Jews. They had lots of friends of different backgrounds even though they were devout Catholics. But we lived in our white world, and "colored" people lived in theirs, and I hardly ever saw anybody black until I was my teens. America was different then, even New England.

Q: Did you get any feel for the politics of the area as a kid?

SIDES: Well I was always kind of interested in politics. I remember John Lodge, the Connecticut politician. I can still remember his political jingle; "Oh let's re-elect John Lodge for governor, the man who gets things done…" That was 1952.

Q: The year of Jubilo, I am putting this for the record.

SIDES: Yeah, and Prescott Bush was a Connecticut governor I remember as a child. For people who think George W. Bush is just a simple country boy, we New Englanders remember different. The Bush family were the aristocrats of the region. I always enjoyed hearing my parents talk and debate politics. My mother was rather liberal, my dad, conservative. However, I would like to mention at this point something that took place

for our generation that is worth getting on the record. Because I was a Polio Pioneer, do you know what that was?

Q: No.

SIDES: Polio was the thing that terrified us and our parents in the early 50's. So many kids would get it every summer and would end up dead or in iron lungs or their legs would be paralyzed and they would have to walk around with these clanky braces on their legs, terrible stuff. The disease mainly attacked children and teenagers and it came in epidemics during warm months. Our parents would try to keep us away from pools and away from each other. If we became ill during the summer they would be terrified that it was polio. Then, I guess around 1950, Salk and Sabin came up with this polio vaccine. They decided to mass test it out on first graders. They lined us up and shot us full of vaccine. I remember they had these huge long needles that really hurt. There were three shots we had to get and they observed us to see if we got polio. Nobody knew for sure if the vaccine would work, even though I suppose they'd tested it. I read that Dr. Salk vaccinated his own wife and kids first before trying it out on us. Anyway, we got the vaccinations and that was it, no more polio. Now they have oral vaccines and stuff that they didn't have then. This was an amazing revolution in our lives to be free of that.

Q: I know because I am 82 now. I was born in 1928 and I remember people in my generation caught it. There was an almost empty pool, do you go to the movies; it was a summer time disease. We had a president who had it.

SIDES: Yes, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Q: Then how did you find the move down to Florida?

SIDES: Well, we were kind of excited about it. My mother and father were really pleased about this assignment down to Florida because my mother had gotten pneumonia a couple of times and they thought it would be better if she moved someplace milder than Connecticut. So my dad went down there first and then I think my mother went to take a look at the house he had found, and then they came back and we packed up the car and all the neighbors gathered around. Dad's big Studebaker was packed up with stuff all and Lucky the cat and my grandmother and we three kids. The neighbors all came around and said goodbye. It took us three or four days to drive down, traveling through the Deep South. We took our time. We stayed in motels along the way, marvelous exotic adventure, that. Then we pulled up in front of the house that they had bought for, I think, $40,000. It had terrazzo floors and jalousie windows. It was like nothing we had ever seen. Florida was amazingly exotic to us. It was like moving to another planet.

Q: Where in Florida was that?

SIDES: It was a place that was then called West Hollywood. It was between Ft. Lauderdale and Miami. The area is now incorporated into Pembroke Pines. I lived there

in the family home until I went away to college. My parents lived in it until my father died on January 2, 2002.

Q: What was the neighborhood like in your time?

SIDES: Oh it was a typical suburban environment. People were much concerned about landscaping. It seemed to me a lot of them were older folks retired to Florida. Florida was a real Mecca for retired people then. We had a pool in the back. I remember we used to like to swim, and barbecued a lot. My parents were very busy with the church. My father ran for mayor of our community, Pembroke Pines, when it became incorporated, because he was a Republican and he felt there should be two parties running.

Q: Your father was a Democrat?

SIDES: No, he was a Republican, but then Florida was a predominantly Democratic state, and he thought that having two parties compete made better government. My father was more your traditional type of Republican than the kind we have now. The great men of the Republican party in that era were people like senators Everett Dirksen and Leverett Saltonstall. God knows what Dad would have thought of Sarah Palin!

Q: Well Dun and Bradstreet would seem to be…

SIDES: Yeah, Dun and Bradstreet, reserve officer, New England, conservative. And for someone who was a naturalized citizen from Ireland he didn't come across as Irish. He had lost his accent. He was very committed to America and very civic-minded.

Q: What was your neighborhood. Was it different than the Connecticut one?

SIDES: Well it seemed to me not to have very much character. Florida, to me, was a long term vacation spot, but I never really saw it as a home even though I lived there for much of my adolescence. There was a strange impermanence about the place—no real sense of history, which is not surprising since South Florida had no past; it was a reclaimed swamp. Everyone was from somewhere else, and nobody had anything in common with anyone else. We hardly knew many of our neighbors. Many of my schoolmates were eager to go off to college and escape our safe, boring, suburban lives. I know I was!

Q: So By this time you were starting high school.

SIDES: Yeah, when we arrived in Florida I was 12. I went to the parish Catholic school for I guess two years, and then to high school, McArthur High School, which was a public school.

Q: Let's talk about the Catholic school where you went first. Were they run by nuns at that time?

SIDES: Yes. Many of them were from Ireland. They were the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Q: How did you find them?

SIDES: They were all individuals. Some were very kind and gentle, and some were mean. I think that many of them were rather old to still be teaching, and they were probably overwhelmed by the large numbers of kids in their classes. Junior high is not an easy age to teach. They got my mother back in the classroom too; they needed teachers so badly. But I remember there was one in particular nun who taught my 8th grade class. She was mean and sadistic, as well as a lousy teacher, and I dreaded going to school. The nuns were mostly Irish countrywomen. They weren't very well educated. They did the best they could with us, and I would have to say that the Catholic school gave a decent education, in spite of the limitations of the situation

.

Q: You know, I am not Catholic, but something that struck in retrospect is that so much of the educational system on the Catholic side was taken by priests and nuns from Ireland. This was not the most intellectual place of the era. I mean it wasn't sort of the lively Italian or French spirit.

SIDES: No, we are not talking about the Jesuits here. Because there weren't enough priests and nuns in America to teach all these young baby-boomer Catholics, they imported them from Ireland. By and large they were kind and well intentioned people, but not very sophisticated. They were very nationalistic in terms of Irish politics. We were all taught the sad songs about Kevin Barry and many things were said about the British that would have grieved my grandfather, I suppose.

Q: Did you learn all the songs, "Rising of the Moon?"

SIDES: Oh yes, "The Rising of the Moon," and the "Ballad of Kevin Barry," "The Wearin' of the Green"… We had kids in our class who were of Italian, French Canadian, or Lebanese descent, and they also were taught these Irish rebel songs. I wonder what their parents thought?

Q: But ethnic politics, I mean if you are an ethnic Serb growing up in a Serb Orthodox neighborhood, you learn about cruel Turks.

SIDES: It is an interesting phenomenon. I suppose it is a way that immigrant communities make the transition; by clinging to parts of their culture or identity they particularly valued, while they absorb America. My parents really valued our Catholic religion and their Irish identity, even though they appeared to be typical middle-class Americans. When I lived in Ireland myself, later in life, I realized how much of their attitudes not just toward religion but education, politics, and morals generally reflected Irish values.

Q: Well now how did you weather high school?

SIDES: Oh it was the usual thing. You go through adolescence and find your way in life. I had friends. We liked Joan Baez; we ironed our hair to have it straight like hers, and played all those LPs of the Kingston Trio and Peter, Paul and Mary, and dreamed our dreams. I was in the drama club and had literary interests; didn't give a rat's ass about football. My friends and I used to read books that we hoped our parents never caught us with. I remember we got some grapes once and tried to brew some wine in the closet. I had various part-time jobs, working in a movie theater, working behind a lunch counter, making pizza, babysitting. I was proud to be making my own money, and bringing home free pizza was a nice fringe benefit. My regular boyfriend was a gawky guy in the school band. We used to go to the beach –it was called, "watching the submarine races" and make out to Elvis singing "I can't help falling in love with you…" "Making out" in the early Sixties did not involve removing one's clothes or exchanging any bodily fluid other than, perhaps, saliva. But I mean, it was kind of an innocent age.

Q: You would have been in junior high from what year?

SIDES: Oh, probably around 1960 maybe, '61-'62. I graduated in '64 from high school.

Q: Having this Irish background and all, were you and your family interested in the Kennedy-Nixon debates? You father must have been conflicted.

SIDES: Well, actually I guess he was conflicted, being a Republican and liking Kennedy. That must have been a tough one for him. I mean he supported Nixon initially but the fact was both my parents loved the Kennedys. Jack Kennedy was an Irish, Catholic, Navy man from Massachusetts; a perfect demographic as far as we were concerned. In my upbringing we always had dinner together as a family. It was time when we kids talked about what happened in school, and my father would tell what happened in the office and his on financial reporting rounds. Once he stumbled on a company that was a CIA cover, and gave it a very good credit rating. In 1960, we talked about politics and the election non-stop. The idea of a Catholic being elected president particularly pleased them because that would bring us as Catholics fully into the fold of American life. It is important to remember that at the time in Florida we were a distinct minority. A lot of people weren't used to being around Catholics and had strange ideas about us, and there were folks who actually thought we had horns and tails and things, and were slaves of the Pope.

Q: Well the interesting thing is that there is a generation gap here. As a kid I grew up in a sort of nominally Episcopalian, in fact I went to an Episcopalian prep school run by Episcopalian monks. But the general thing that was driven home was, it probably would not be a good idea to date Catholic girls. Because if you date a Catholic girl your children will be brought up as Catholics.

SIDES: It was all true! Mixed couples had to sign a promise to bring up the kids Catholic or they could not marry in the Church. I married "out" for that reason; didn't want to make the promise.

Q: There was a general fear that Catholics would be priest-dominated and all that.

SIDES: People were concerned, and I think reasonably legitimately so, that the Catholic politicians might take orders from the Vatican and not act fully in the interest of the American people. President Kennedy made it clear that he wasn't going to be like that, and effectively ended the suspicion that Catholics were not committed to non-sectarian government. It's ironic that some politicians are trying to re-insert religion into government—a very unhealthy development, in my opinion. But yeah, we loved Kennedy and it was very exciting. And remember there was a lot of other stuff going on in the world during the early Sixties…the Cold War and all that. My father was mobilized for the Cuban Missile Crisis. He belonged to a squadron based in Jacksonville that engaged in anti-submarine patrols along the Florida coast. Florida was really on the front lines for the Missile Crisis. I well remember the army trucks full of troops and towing weapons, going down U.S. 1, past our school. My parents were really scared, you could tell. One of our neighbors built a bomb shelter.

Q: How did the outside world intrude on you? Even in Connecticut were you aware of world events?

SIDES: Since my mother was a Democrat and my father a Republican, I think they used to go and cancel each other out at the polls. They were always interested in politics and were always aware of what was going on in the world and talked about it. So naturally we as children were aware of these things.

Q: How about TV; when did TV start?

SIDES: Oh golly, I guess in the early 50's. The first TV I ever saw would have been maybe '52-'53. One of the neighbors got one. It had a little bitty screen, black and white, of course. There was hardly anything on TV except boxing and variety shows, but we were fascinated by it. We would all go to the house of a neighbor who had the first one, and watch when it was on. It was only on for a few hours a day at first. Then, when it became more established, my parents got one. We used to have problems with reception even in Wethersfield, Connecticut. I remember my father used to crumple up little balls of tinfoil and put them on the rabbit ears. Remember rabbit ears? He was always monkeying with it to get it to receive better. But I don't think we really watched television obsessively until maybe later on in the 50's when there was a lot of good programming. I remember my folks used to like "Sing Along With Mitch." We used to sing along with Mitch too. They liked Ed Sullivan and his variety show. There was Alfred Hitchcock, and Ronald Reagan. We children used to enjoy the cartoons, and "Mickey Mouse Club." I can still remember every word of the Mickey Mouse theme song, even though I can hardly remember where I put my checkbook. We also used to go to the movies every Saturday morning.

Q: I was going to ask, were the movies a major thing?

SIDES: When we were relatively small it seems to me we used to go to the movies every Saturday morning. There would be cartoons and a double feature. I think it cost a quarter! The cartoons usually were accompanied by music—classical music. So even as a small child I was introduced to classical music, and sometimes, when I hear a particular piece on the radio, I remember the cartoon it used to accompany.

Q: Were serials on then?

SIDES: They would often run a serial. We could hardly wait for the next episode of "Hopalong Cassidy," or was it "The Lone Ranger?" Later on we stopped going to the movies, because of TV, and until I was in high school and got a job in a cinema, I didn't go much.

Q: Well then back to Florida again. In high school, McArthur High School, what was it like?

SIDES: Oh it was just a typical high school I suppose, of the south Florida type with open-air hallways and open jalousie windows and stuff like that. No aircon then! We had a football team and a drama club. It was just a regular high school.

Q: You say you were with the drama society.

SIDES: I was in the drama club. I helped out with the plays. I didn't act in them, but I was on the stage crew. I liked literature and I was on the year book and school newspaper and things like that. I had already begun to discover that I liked not only to read but to write. I had a good high school journalism teacher, John Gallagher, who was very encouraging to me.

Q: Well in literature, what sort of things were you reading?

SIDES: Anything I could get my hands on by then. I remember my mother subscribed to the Reader's Digest condensed books. I used to read them from cover to cover, so I read popular novels. I read anything about history I could get. I loved "Jane Eyre," and the novels by Charles Dickens, "To Kill a Mockingbird," "Catcher in the Rye," which my mother caught me with, and threatened to burn…and a lot of non-fiction, mostly history and biography. One in that category that made a really big impression on me was, "Black Like Me," by John Griffin. As I've said, black people, or "negroes," as we called them then, were practically invisible in my world, but the Civil Rights movement was beginning to catch on in the news. I particularly admired the stoic courage of the black college kids who sat in at that lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Griffin was a white writer who got some kind of treatment to make his skin look darker, and traveled through the south to see what life was really like on the other side of the color line that existed then, even in Florida. I suppose the book would be corny now, but it really opened my eyes. I had led such a sheltered, middle class life.

Q: You were in high school from when to when?

SIDES: I started high school in 1962 and finished in 1964.

Q: Did you get interested in foreign countries and all?

SIDES: Oh yes. We had a high school exchange student from Central America, and one summer I went on an exchange program to El Salvador, which was really neat. The first time I went abroad, however, was at the beginning of high school. I had a good friend whose father was a construction contractor and was building something on Grand Bahama Island. We flew from Fort Lauderdale to Grand Bahama which was a 20 minute flight on a little plane. I had never been in a foreign country before, and this was a foreign country, and boy was I excited, just seeing the Bahamian police in their white uniforms and all. I wanted to do more of that. Then I went on this three week sister city excursion to El Salvador. I guess the international bug had bitten me really by then.

Q: And you attained Spanish.

SIDES: Yes, I took Spanish in high school. I used to speak Spanish fairly well, but I have pretty much forgotten it by now. But you couldn't really grow up in South Florida in those days and not know some Spanish.

Q: The whole Cuban exodus, had that affected your area?

SIDES: Oh, very personally. We semi-adopted someone from Operation Peter Pan. My brother about that time went to a boarding school. It was a minor seminary to prepare him to become a priest. He didn't become a priest but that was the idea. My mother really missed having a boy in the house, and about that time, the Church was looking to find homes for these kids, these unaccompanied children who had been sent by their parents out of Cuba just before the door closed. These kids had been living refugee camps for a year or so and the Church, which had been running the camps for these Cuban children, saw the need to stabilize their lives. It was clear by then that their parents wouldn't be joining them immediately. So my parents applied to house one of these children. We used to call him George, but his name is Jorge Padron. So George came to live with us and he lived with us until his parents were able to join him about three years later. So he was part of our household.

Q: Was there a transfer of teaching? Did you teach him English and did he teach you Spanish? Was there any of that?

SIDES: There was a certain amount of that, yeah. My mother was a good teacher and she helped George, and he was quick and learned fast. He went to school and made many friends. He is a good guy. I last saw him at my father's funeral. He still lives in South Florida. He owns a business and has done very well.

Q: Yeah, of course young kids learn languages. We have the examples just in our area here of kids who at one point who were boat children from Vietnam where they only

spoke Vietnamese, high school age, and it maybe took them four years to become valedictorian of their class. It is remarkable. Did you get out and around much? How about the beach?

SIDES: Yes, indeed. Actually South Florida was really nice in those days. It was before they built all those tacky condos along the beach. Saturday mornings my parents and sibs and I would pile in the car and we would go to the beach. They had gas grills set up along the beach, and my father would cook bacon and eggs while we all went swimming. It was a blast. So we had a lot of fun in those days

Q: This was the era of the Civil Rights struggle, as you said. In your high school, had desegregation taken place?

SIDES: There were no black people in my high school at the time. The schools were segregated. There were American Indians, Seminole Indians. They were about as exotic as it got. It wasn't rural Alabama, but black people lived in another part of town. Their lives and ours rarely intersected. My mother had a cleaning lady named Precious. She was really the only black person who crossed my radar screen. Black people did lawn work and stuff, but you hardly ever saw them. Certainly none of them lived in our neighborhood. While my parents weren't themselves bigots, I doubt they'd have sold the house to a black in that era; to do so would have caused the property values in the rest of the neighborhood to crash, even if the new occupant was a black brain surgeon. There might have been one or two black people at church. But the first real impact of desegregation that I observed was that the buses were desegregated and a couple of stores hired black clerks. Before that, we rode in the front of the bus and the blacks in the back. There were water fountains and bathrooms labeled 'white" or "colored." My parents always told me segregation was wrong and God made us all, but they also warned me not to share this opinion with others because it was a very inflammatory subject and they did not want trouble with the neighbors. I didn't tell them, but I joined the NAACP. It was easy; I sent in the dues and a completed form and that was it. After they found out, my parents told me a neighbor reported to them that two men identifying themselves as employees of an insurance company had been asking questions about my family. They said it was because my father was applying for a life insurance policy; but he wasn't. I suppose it was the FBI. J. Edgar Hoover thought Martin Luther King was a commie, you know.

Q: How old were you then?

SIDES: Seventeen. I wanted some way to show solidarity with the amazing courage of black people of my age and just a little older who were doing the freedom rides and sit-ins at that time. I was so impressed with Dr. King and everything, and I wanted to be part of that struggle, and do something and become engaged in it.

Q: Well you graduated from high school when?

SIDES: 1964.

Q: I take it given the background of your mother and father that you were bound for college.

SIDES: Yes, I was, although I had a rather disquieting conversation with my mother, and I hope she wouldn't mind my repeating this. When we were starting to apply for colleges in the year 1963, she said that I should go to Broward Junior College, because it was much cheaper and I could live at home. I suppose if I'd worked harder I might have earned a scholarship, but I didn't. Mom said that they had to save up for my brother's education. I wasn't very pleased at the idea that his education took priority over mine—although he was a much better student and eventually got a PhD—but there wasn't much I could do about it. So I went to community college for a couple of years. My plan to escape South Florida was on hold. As it happened, I got a decent education, better than I'd have gotten in a big university, sitting in lectures with hundreds of others. At Broward, I was active in the student senate and took part in a various causes. I also participated in a civil rights march in Fort Lauderdale.

Q: Well let's talk about that. How did those work out?

SIDES: Well, Fort Lauderdale wasn't Selma, but there is a first time for everything and certainly that march was a first for Fort Lauderdale, which was segregated like the rest of Florida. The NAACP announced they would have one and I decided to take part in it. My parents were utterly appalled, but they didn't actually forbid me to do it. Remember, civil rights marches in those days often attracted a violent response from the white community. I am not sure what I would have done if they had forbidden me. They tried to talk me out of it, but I insisted I was only acting on the beliefs I'd gotten from them. To my surprise, my father decided to go the civil rights march with me; he said he wanted to protect me in case they attacked us. He didn't believe in segregation or any of that stuff, but he was just sort of a very law and orderly person who didn't take part in demonstrations and things. But he walked with me and went to the black church with me where the demo ended. He didn't sing "We Shall Overcome," but he stayed there with me the whole time. I hope he got extra credit for that at the gate of eternity, because it must have been a hard decision for him. He was a good father.

Q: How did the march go? Was there any…

SIDES: I think there were a few people on the street who flipped the finger at us, but no rock throwing or anything like that. It went peacefully, and Fort Lauderdale started to desegregate. People got used to the idea. It is hard to imagine now that South Florida had ever been segregated but it was.

Q: Well Broward County…

SIDES: Broward Community College is what it's called now.

Q: What was it like?

SIDES: Oh, it was brand new. The paint was hardly dry. It was a sprawling building out in the newly reclaimed Everglades in the community of Davie, which is just west of Fort Lauderdale. There are still lots of orange groves there. It was a commuter school without much school spirit or anything. I went conscientiously to classes and worked on the school newspaper, and was elected to the school senate and all that. But I was bored stiff and dying to get away. I wanted to live my real life, and I knew it wasn't there.

Q: Was the community college doing what they do today, which is often a very good transitional place?

SIDES: To be fair, I would say yes. Also, they had a very good program for people who weren't planning to go on to university; people going for higher technical qualifications, the licensed practical nurses and people who did not need a university qualification to do what they wanted to do. I got a perfectly reasonable education there and I went on to do pretty well at the University of Florida.

Q: Well were you able to sort of push the system as far as advanced literature, I mean to get into the traditional straight line college courses or not?

SIDES: We got a traditional, if I understand the question correctly, liberal arts foundation. My classes prepared me well for the University of Florida, where I subsequently went. In fact one of my teachers, Harry Crews, became a relatively well-known novelist.

Q: So you went to the University of Florida, this would have been from…

SIDES: '66 to '68.

Q: OK, was Florida, we are talking about the 60's. This is Vietnam, this is civil rights, this is free speech, this is screw you and anybody over 30 is not to be trusted, that whole business. Did the University of Florida have that going?

SIDES: The University of Florida wasn't Berkeley, but it did eventually have quite a lively scene. Everything that started at Berkeley happened about two years later in Gainesville, where UF—the University of Florida—was located. Gainesville was a small city in north Florida. It was much more like Georgia or Alabama than south Florida. There was a Confederate monument in the town square, and UF had a fraternity where the brothers dressed up like Confederate generals and rode around on horses. There certainly weren't any black people there, at least at the time I first enrolled. It was a rather conservative institution when I first went there, but everything changed in the next two or three years. I lived in dorms, and our dorms were at one end of the campus and the guys' dorms were at the other. We had a Dean of Women who was reputed to be a retired Marine colonel. She used to keep very close watch on us and on our activities. It had been a men's school, and there were still relatively few women there, and we had all the social life we wanted. There would be a curfew at 11:00 every night, and the guys would

have to take us back to the dorms. There would be much passion around the dorm entrances. I guess we'd think of it as foreplay now, but there it stopped; we girls and guys went to our separate dorms, all hot and frustrated. In 1966, "nice girls didn't," although that soon changed.

Q: Did you have shrubs around the house?

SIDES: Oh, yes.

Q: Because that is usually the place for passion; not the doorway but in the shrubs.

SIDES: There were the shrubs, the doorways, the trees. The big make-out place at UF was a grove of trees called Beta Woods. You had to be careful, though, of fire ant mounds, and the occasional alligator. There were quite a few real 'gators on campus, not just the school's iconic mascot, but big, man-eating reptiles that lived in water-filled sinkholes around the university grounds. Nobody "made out" too close to those places. A couple of times as I recall in 66 and 67 there were so-called "panty-raids." The guys would surround the dorm and chant and some of the girls would throw their underwear out at them. I never did that, but I remember the dean would come and break it all up and the campus police would shoo the horny guys back to their end of the campus. It was a ritual that a Freudian psychologist would find interesting. In addition to the dorms, there were buildings called "Flavets." They looked exactly like the veterans housing projects of my early childhood. Student veterans and their wives lived there.

Q: Did Florida politics intrude or not there, or were you…

SIDES: The Florida state government was very conservative compared with Gainesville, yes. We were considered I am sure, a nest of commie sympathizers and pinkos. The university presidents were usually very conservative people from rural southern backgrounds and very much out of tune with the students.

Q: I don't know Florida. You have got Florida State, University of Florida…is Florida a state university?

SIDES: Yes, it is the flagship for the state university system of Florida. In the past, the University of Florida was the men's school and Florida State University in Tallahassee was the women's school. FSU was a teacher training institution. But by the 60's that had changed and they had both become co-ed. But Tallahassee was still predominately female and Gainesville was still predominately male. Gainesville had a really great journalism school, and that is where I went to do my journalism studies.

Q: Was football important in those days?

SIDES: Football was a religion. People were really into it. I used to go to the games occasionally. A guy would invite me, and although I wasn't much interested in sports, the games were kind of fun. However, everybody dressed up in those days, believe it or not.

Even in the Florida heat! Guys wore coats and ties, and we girls wore dresses or two-piece suits. Steve Spurrier was the quarterback then, and he went on to glory in football.

Q: You graduated in '68. That was, in a way, a very difficult year.

SIDES: I thought it was lots of fun, frankly.

Q: But as a university student, especially in journalism, the Chicago convention, that sort of activity, must have engaged you.

SIDES: Oh yes, because I was passionately interested in these things, but also during the summer of '68 I was working as an intern at a small newspaper in North Florida, in Fort Walton Beach. In those days newsrooms had teletypes, and bells went off when something exciting happened. Between what we could see on the newsroom TV and teletype bells going off every two seconds, it seemed as if we were living in a perpetual whirlwind of events. At school I had a lot of friends who were very engaged in the peace movement, civil rights, and so forth and my boyfriend of the time—whom I later married—and I were, ourselves, active in demonstrations and teach-ins and sit-ins and things. It was very heady time to be young.

Q: Leading up to that you had the assassination of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

SIDES: Yeah, they both happened in the summer of '68. Martin Luther King was first, and Kennedy was the summer of '68.

Q: Did these affect the…

SIDES: The six day war had just happened, too, if I recall.

Q: Did these have any particular, I mean was the student body pretty attuned to this or was there enough of a group to stir things up?

SIDES: I would have to say the large majority of students at the University of Florida in the 60's were probably not very interested in politics or social change. They were more interested in preparing for their careers or football, or the activities of the fraternities and sororities, things like that. But the people I was friendly with were very keenly interested.

Q: Had blacks come into the university?

SIDES: I don't recall any blacks until, gee, it is possible that towards the end of the 60's we started to see black people on campus. There may have been a couple by that time.

Q: How about, what were you doing on the paper?

SIDES: Well I did some contributions to the school newspaper, the Alligator, but I wasn't on the regular staff at the time. I studied journalism, and it was very competitive to get on the Alligator. But I did some work for the Alligator, and I am trying to remember what else I did. I edited the dorm newspaper and things like that.

Q: Was this what you wanted to do?

SIDES: Oh yeah. I wanted to be a journalist. Journalists had a front row bleacher seat in the stadium of life, and I wanted to be there.

Q: Were you feeling any time as you moved up, I mean you mentioned your mother sort of saying you do this so your brother can move ahead. Did you feel limitations or concern about being a woman career-wise?

SIDES: Yeah. Journalism was more open to women than many professions; but the good jobs still went to men. Like most women of my time, I was concerned about what I was going to do with my life. I wanted more for myself than domesticity, but I really didn't know what.

Q: Was there, I won't say a women's movement, but I mean were there like minded young women talking about what are they going to do with themselves or were you each kind of on your own?

SIDES: Well, I suppose we had the kinds of conversations that girls had in dorms, but I can't say that they were particularly profound. We had them later, in the 70s, when the women's movement hit. Then we started to have those conversations a lot.

Q: So you graduated in '68 and whither? Did you go to grad school?

SIDES: I took some post graduate courses, waiting for the revolution, I suppose. I didn't know what I wanted to do with myself. I was hoping to get a newspaper job. I worked in the campus library for awhile. By then my future husband, Randy, and I had met. It was July 10, 1967; "the Summer of Love," it's called now. We were both very involved in the sort of vast, fragmented, youth movement of the time, which was seeking social and political change. Randy was going to law school, scraping by on his GI education benefits. We both lived off campus that summer, in some really cheap little studio apartments made out of old World War Two barracks from Camp Blanding. They were so shoddy the tenants called them the "Cardboard Castles." We met on the front porch, he invited me to a movie. We lived on tuna fish, canned peas, and love. In 1970 I finally found a job with the Palm Beach Times, an afternoon daily. So there I was, back in South Florida, covering local news.

Q: Were you interested in getting the hell out of Florida?

SIDES: I'd always dreamed of escape, of course. I wanted badly to be a foreign correspondent and go overseas, but I hadn't figured out how to make that happen. I covered local news at the Times, but I was happy to have a job.

Q: When did you get married?

SIDES: We got married on November 14, 1970. We've been married for 40 years.

Q: I take it being a housewife was not the sole occupation on your mind.

SIDES: No, it was never my intention to just finish school and get married. Now, to return to Gainesville for just a bit, keep in mind that the last few years of the 60's were pretty lively. We were involved in all sorts of movements on campus. I actually lost my job at the university because I refused to sign the State of Florida's new loyalty oath. The Florida legislature, in one of its paroxysms of anti-Redism, decided to change its normal state loyalty oath that everyone signed, similar to the one we signed when joining the Foreign Service, and replace it with one that said you weren't a communist, and had never been a communist and never would be a communist, or propagate communist ideas. The Florida legislators didn't get it that the 60's movements were anti-authoritarian, and therefore communism had absolutely no appeal to us. I had a clerical job in the library at the time, while taking post-grad courses. A couple of professors and I decided to formally refuse to sign the oath and permit ourselves to be fired so that we could test the law. It was a great sacrifice for them because they were tenured professors, whereas I was a poorly-paid clerk and planning to get another job and move on anyway. Having me as part of the case provided some representation for non-faculty employees of the university. So we allowed ourselves to be fired in the name of academic freedom. The director of the library formally fired me. The poor man, he was so embarrassed; he didn't want to do it. He said, "We all have to do this because we have to keep our jobs. It is just some weird thing the legislature has gotten into its head." I said, "Yeah, no hard feelings, sir." And he canned me. The case was eventually heard in a district or superior court. I am not really sure which. It went as far as the U.S. Supreme Court, which declined to overrule the lower court, which found the State of Florida to be entirely wrong and ordered us to be re-instated. But I, of course, didn't want my little library clerk job back. I had already moved on with my life.

Q: OK, so what happened after you showed your lack of patriotism?

SIDES: I went on to a job as a general assignments reporter for the Palm Beach Times in Palm Beach County, Florida. I worked there for a couple of years. It was a conservative newspaper, but it played the news straight and I learned a lot working there.

Q: What was Palm Beach like?

SIDES: Well there is a big difference between West Palm Beach and Palm Beach. Palm Beach was where the rich people lived, and there were draw bridges over the inlet that separated it from West Palm Beach which could be raised in times of need. I imagine the

rich folk in Palm Beach were pretty nervous in the early 70's, and feared the masses on the down-market side of the bridge—West Palm Beach residents—storming across and looting their castles. Palm Beach had a supermarket, but it was disguised outside to look like a library; no tacky neon signs or shopping carts. Inside, rich people would walk around with their servants pushing the cart and say, "I'll have this," and " I'll have that." The servants would take it off the shelf. I am not kidding; that is really the way it was. I lived in plebian West Palm Beach, covered the school board and the courts and also reported on accidents and fires. The most interesting part of my work, however, was when the schools were desegregating, and busing was introduced to achieve racial balance in the public schools. It was terribly contentious process. The schools were pretty much on the front lines of the social revolutions that took place in America at the time. So it was very interesting work for me as a reporter.

Q: How did the desegregation work? Did it seem to work? Was there a white flag?

SIDES: Well the court ordered it, and the schools reluctantly complied. It seemed to me that sometimes they complied in ways that seemed designed to cause as much anger and resentment as possible in the way they set up the busing zones and so forth. I realize, of course, that there was no easy way to do it. Black kids got bused out of their neighborhoods and got put into white schools, and white kids got bused out of their neighborhoods and put into black schools, and school traditions and friendships and so forth were affected, there were a lot of fights and tension. There wasn't a better way to desegregate American schools, but it was pretty rough sledding, and nobody was very happy about it.

Q: Did you have problems writing about it?

SIDES: I didn't have problems writing about it from an ideological standpoint. I did run into hostility from people who hated journalists, and believed that if we hadn't covered desegregation, it would somehow have vanished. I was once trapped in a phone booth by a mob of white high school students. Although my newspaper was relatively conservative politically, I was never asked to pull my punches. I was obviously very sympathetic to desegregation but I also understood how hard this was for people. I tried to report the story impartially.

Q: You did that for a couple of years and then what?

SIDES: I quit my job. Randy had decided he didn't want to be a lawyer. We had about $10,000 as I recall, and we decided the time had come to see the world before we actually settled into real adult life, whatever that was. We bought backpacks and round trip tickets, valid for a year, from Iceland Air, the cheapest carrier. We flew to Luxemburg, and stayed in the first of many youth hostels. From Luxemburg we started across Europe. We were part of this huge movement of young people who were doing the backpack adventure in those times. We are talking about 1972.

Q: I was consul in Athens at that time, and spent a good bit of my time dealing with the problems, visiting prisons where people who had too much hashish got to, but also there were just a lot of problems. You had kids out there who went off the deep end, but in a way it was a great period.

SIDES: It was a fascinating period. We moved from one hostel or no-star hotel to another, and one country to another. We spent some time in France because my husband had lived in France in his early teens. His father was in the Air Force and Randy had gone to a French school. We visited the town where he had lived and we met some of his teachers. We trekked onward till we reached Ireland, where my father had been born. I wanted to see what Ireland was all about. We ended up spending almost a year in Ireland. Along the way we worked at this and that to get a little money. We had quite an exciting time. We arrived in Dublin relatively soon after Bloody Sunday. The British embassy was still a ruin, because an Irish mob burned it in Dublin in retaliation for Bloody Sunday. We heard Bernadette Devlin speak. She autographed a copy of her book for me, actually.

Q: She was quite the firebrand.

SIDES: She was quite the firebrand.

Q: I think of her in a mini skirt being very pregnant at one time.

SIDES: This was right before she was elected to Parliament, as I recall. All kinds of stuff was going on in Northern Ireland, and it was nasty place to be. It happened that we went to Northern Ireland one day, for shopping. It wasn't possible in the Republic of Ireland at the time to purchase contraceptive products, the Republic being strongly influenced by the Catholic Church's position on contraception. You had to go to Northern Ireland for your product. So we took the train to Belfast one day. The British army got on the train and walked around looking at people's papers and so forth, weapons at ready. It was like those war films about Nazi-occupied Europe. We were asleep on the train and woke up with a soldier's gun practically sticking in Randy's ear. Then we got off at Victoria Station in Belfast, and there were these police vehicles and army vehicles, soldiers all over the place. Neighborhoods were all barricaded off. We wandered naively from the Catholic part to the Protestant part and back to the Catholic part. We were stopped by the British army and questioned about what we were doing there and what we wanted. They asked us if we were Republicans. They didn't mean Republicans like Richard Nixon. We assured them that we were Americans, supported whatever our government was for, and had no involvement in Irish politics. They were very suspicious, particularly of Randy, because he was wearing his old army jacket which wandering youth did at the time. The officer actually told us the Irish were recruiting Vietnam veterans from America. They let us go, thinking, I'm sure, that we were a pair of complete idiots to be wandering around on their battlefield. They were right. It was an awful lot of trouble to go through for a packet of rubbers. We got back to Dublin and said, "Don't think we will do that again."

Q: By the way this does bring up a question about how did you feel about our engagement in Vietnam?

SIDES: Like most young people of the time, I was dead set against it. I want to make it clear that, also, like most people of my time, I was not against the soldiers; I was against the war. Many of the guys I knew from school were in Vietnam. Most of them were drafted. My husband was drafted, although he didn't serve in Vietnam. I was in many demonstrations against the war. I was very relieved when it finally ended. So sad.

Q: Did this cause any rift between you and your father?

SIDES: Well that does kind of remind me that Randy and I took part in the March on Washington on November 14-15, 1969. We came up on the bus from Gainesville with other students. They gave us signs. We each had the name of a dead soldier on our sign. I, in fact, had the name of a boy from Gainesville who was killed. The TV cameras were on us when we passed the White House, chanting. I didn't tell my parents I was going to the demo, but they saw us on TV, me and Randy. As I recall, Randy was wearing a leather flight jacket I'd borrowed from Dad. My father was, of course, a World War II veteran, a reserve officer, and very loyal to the military. It must have troubled him, realizing the war was a costly mistake. My mother got there sooner than he did. He certainly wasn't very happy to see me marching in front of the White House. A lot of what I did then troubled my parents. Fortunately, there was a lot they didn't find out about…at least, I hope not. I like to believe I made it up to them by having a good career in the Foreign Service.

Q: Ok, well back to Europe. Did you run across the American embassy or consulate?

SIDES: Well, fortunately I never had any call to go to the embassy. I never lost my passport. Never went to jail. Never became destitute. Little did I know that one day I would be dealing with other people and their problems at the consular counter. We were very careful not to do anything illegal. We were stopped and asked for our papers from time to time in various places, so we must have looked kind of suspicious. But no, we were careful to stay out of trouble.

Q: Well the statute of limitations has run out. What about hashish and all that, because I spent most of my time when I was consul general worrying about Americans getting caught with drugs. When you talk about drugs you are really talking about hashish or pot.

SIDES: Oh I did pot, but never overseas.

Q: I was wondering, did you realize this would get you in trouble and so you didn't want to carry it around with you?

SIDES: I never did anything overseas that was illegal because I didn't want to get arrested. Back in Gainesville, sure; I did pot and those brownies with the hashish in them.

Neither of us did any drugs in Europe. By then I was in my mid 20's and I think we were sensible in that way.

Q: Ireland was kind of behind the times in those days. Wasn't it?

SIDES: Ireland was very behind the times. Yeah, there were a lot of horses and carts in the streets of Dublin still. People had bad teeth and were shabby and poor. My distant relatives and their neighbors down in the country where my grandmother's village was, they still lived by lamplight. They didn't have indoor plumbing. They lived off the land. Randy found a job as a laborer on a building site, and we got to know how life was for the average Irish working-class person. Kids left school at 15 or 16. They had to help their families. Irish families were huge. They seemed obsessed with religion. People drank an awful lot, it seemed to me. Ireland was the "arse end of Europe" as they would say then, and I could see why Dad had emigrated. So much for my rather romantic, idealized picture of Ireland!

Q: I can remember my wife and I finally got to Ireland in the late 80's. We spent some time in Dublin and I was really getting interested in the computers. I went around looking for computer stores, and you couldn't find any in Dublin, which was a shame. It was a different world.

SIDES: It was a different world. When I went back as a diplomat in 1993, Ireland had changed a great deal. It was just on the verge of taking off on the telecom revolution, and the social revolution that happened around the same time.

Q: So after about a year and a half…

SIDES: We were there about a year as I recall, and then our tickets were about to expire. Our parents wanted us home. We couldn't see any economic future in Ireland. So we decided it was time to go home, and we did, on the last possible day that we could use the tickets.

Q: So you came back to Palm Beach?

SIDES: We went back to Gainesville. It just seemed like the place to go. That was where our friends were. I was thinking about looking for a job there, or going back to school. And it was not south Florida, the place I disliked so much. We were in Gainesville until I joined the Foreign Service in 1983.

Q: Ok, I thought we might cover up to joining the Foreign Service and then we will stop this session. So what did you do coming back?

SIDES: The thing that struck us about coming back in 1973, was that, clearly, the 60's were over. The atmosphere of social and political change that was still very vibrant when we left seemed to have lost momentum. The Vietnam War had been a catalyst and the U.S. had withdrawn from the war while we were in Ireland. The draft had been abolished.

Martin Luther King's nonviolence was out of favor and Black Power was the new phase of the Civil Rights struggle. Drugs, for some people, had turned into one long bad trip, not just harmless recreational rebellion. Bad things happened to friends. Watergate was the new national soap opera. I remember my mother and father watched it compulsively on television. Although I'd despised Nixon for years, I was almost sorry for him at the end. After all, he did accomplish the China opening. Anyway, I spent the next decade trying to get a foothold in life. I actually got a job again at the University of Florida. I took the new, Supreme Court-approved loyalty oath without a qualm. I got some temporary editing and writing jobs, and then I worked for the agricultural extension service as a technical writer. I used to do press releases on new strains of tomato and the latest fertilizer research. It was pretty boring. I started thinking about going to school again, maybe taking a degree in international communication and trying again to become a foreign correspondent. I really wanted to live overseas. We both did. Finally, in 1979, I got accepted to graduate school. As it happened, Randy and I encountered a poster on campus saying the Foreign Service exam was about to be given. I had never really thought about the Foreign Service. I assumed it was for the Ivy League kind of people, not journalism grads from UF. But someone from the Foreign Service came around to the campus to give a recruiting talk. He was a guy who worked at USIS. He was Hispanic; we called them "Chicanos" at the time. He assured his listeners that the Foreign Service was open to all kinds of people; blacks, Hispanics, women and so forth. I thought well, it might be easier to get into the Foreign Service than become a foreign correspondent. Randy and I were pretty excited. We both signed up for the Foreign Service exam, and we took it December, 1979 in an ice-cold armory building in Gainesville, Florida. There were a lot of empty seats in the room, but keep in mind the hostages had just been taken in Teheran. The Foreign Service wasn't looking like cookies and tea at that time. To our pleasant surprise, we both passed our written examination. I subsequently passed the oral examination. As I continued graduate school, my security clearance was creaking along. I had been very honest on the forms, and I guess they couldn't have found too many people in my generation who would have denied using pot, for example. So in May, 1983, not long after I had gotten my MA in international communications, the phone rang. The State Department was calling. They offered me a job as a consular officer. I had no idea what a consular officer was. I wanted to go to USIS and become a press attaché. But the recruiter said, "Oh no, that is such a tiny little agency and they hardly ever have any classes, and we have got a class forming in two weeks and you could be in that class."

Q: They are good salesmen.

SIDES: Oh yes. Because later on we trained in parallel with the USIS class that was recruited about the same time I was. I thought perhaps I should wait and see if I could get into USIS. If I had any doubts, when I went to work the next day, my boss said, "You know the state legislature is cutting our funds. I am really worried about what is going to happen to our jobs." I thought, "Where is that phone number?" So I called the lady back at State and said, "Whatever it is, I will do it." She gave us two weeks to completely dismantle our lives and come to Washington. So Randy and I had a yard sale and sold a lot of our junk, and the rest of it got packed up and stored for 13 years, till I did a

Stateside tour. We used the money to buy some nice new clothes so we would look respectable, and off to Washington we went. State sent us plane tickets.

Q: OK, I will pick this up then but first one question. Do you recall any of the questions you had during the oral exam?

SIDES: I remember they asked me some questions about Africa and its strategic significance, and lucky little me, my minor was African studies. For my masters degree in international communications you had to minor in a region. Everybody wanted Europe and Asia, so I took Africa. I got very interested in Africa and actually knew the answers to the questions, both on the written exam, and when they started asking me about Africa in the oral. They also asked me a number of questions about what would you do if such – and-such should happen. I guess they liked my answers. I had read as much as I could about what diplomats did. I gave comparatively safe answers. I don't think the examiners were very impressed with any of us, because I heard two of them in the hall of the Federal Building in Miami saying, "They are not a very bright lot are they?" I and the other candidates were on our way to lunch and we heard this. Our hearts kind of sank. Apparently they had to pass somebody, so I did get in.

Q: Well I tell you, in'74-'75 I was with the board of examiners who gave the exam. You know we just didn't give grades. A 70 was passing. They kept pleading with us to get a little more strict, and I think 75 was the highest grade we gave. People weren't knocking our socks off.

SIDES: I can't remember very much about the oral because it required such intense concentration that we were utterly focused on the moment, and when we went out of it at the end of the day I could hardly tell my parents what happened. My brain was completely empty.

Q: I talked to some people who didn't realize. They just thought they were having a conversation, and they often passed because they were so relaxed. Well that was fun. This is an interesting topic. Well anyway we will pick this up the next time and when did you go into the Foreign Service.

SIDES: I joined the 16th class. I believe it was June 18, 1983.

Q: Ok, we will pick it up then.
Today is 1 November 2010 with Ann Sides. We moved to the point where you were joining the Foreign Service which was when?

SIDES: Right, which was in June, 1983.

Q: Ok, did you go into a regular Foreign Service class?

SIDES: Yeah. I joined the Foreign Service in the consular cone. We were coned in those days at the time of recruiting. Perhaps this is the time in my story to remark that being a

newspaper reporter, having traveled in Europe, and pursuing graduate work in communication and African Studies had matured my thinking a good deal from the rather dogmatic views I held in 1969. I'm glad I didn't compete for admission to the Foreign Service when I was 22.

Q: Well, what was your basic officer course like then, the A-100 course?

SIDES: Most of it was high-quality. One of the key things it did was to socialize us to the Foreign Service and its values as a culture. Randy took most of the classes with me, as did a couple of other spouses. We were delighted to discover the people in my A-100 class had interests and backgrounds broadly similar to our own. The average age was 33. One man in our class was in his 50s and had served in World War II. Quite a few were academics or lawyers. Kathy Peterson, who later became director of the FSI, and Jim Morton were our trainers. There were a few lectures about things like the function of the Foreign Agricultural Service that I certainly didn't appreciate until later in my career, but overall it was pretty relevant and we all realized we had to get as much out of the training as possible, since we'd soon be overseas. When it came time to list our choices for our first assignment, Randy and I–we always did the bid list together–made Niamey, Niger our first choice. Our A-100 classmates thought we were nuts to ask for Niamey; they were all hoping for London or Paris. However, Randy and I thought it would be a good idea to get a really difficult hardship assignment out of the way early in my career. Also, having studied about Africa, I was keen to actually go there. Not surprisingly, we got Niamey! We were sent to French training for six months. I already could speak it some, and my husband spoke it very well. French training was not difficult for us although the method of teaching was very authoritarian, shall we say. I was afraid the French teacher was going to come around and cuff us on the head if we didn't do our verbs right! All this training was done in a high rise office building in Rosslyn, across the river from Washington. The FSI campus didn't exist then. I was sworn into the Foreign Service in June of 1983, and in January of 1984 we were on the plane to Niamey. We flew business class, which was an experience I had never had before, and which indicated that being a diplomat was going to be a whole lot of fun. We flew Washington-Paris-Niamey.

Q: OK, let's take Niger. What was Niger like when you went out there in 1984?

SIDES: I don't think Niger has changed much since the Middle Ages. It is very isolated desert country where people mostly live traditionally in villages, herding livestock and tending small agricultural plots if they have enough water. At the time, it was a relatively benevolent military dictatorship. The ruler was President Seyni Kountche, a former general. Niger was terribly poor and they had been through years of deficit rainfall, so that many of the people who made their living herding camels and goats in the desert had been driven closer and closer to the cities. These people were in desperate poverty. There were severe food shortages. Our embassy was a platform for a very large USAID mission that provided assistance to these people displaced by drought. There was also a Peace Corps contingent in Niger. The Peace Corps kids lived rough lives, out in small desert communities teaching English or working on public health projects. I was assigned to the embassy as a General Services Officer –called "GSO" – and I was also backup consular

officer. There was very little consular work to do and lots of GSO work. Fortunately there were four GSOs. I had never been in charge of anything or anybody before. All of sudden I was in charge of five Nigerien employees, a pickup truck, and the shipping and housing portfolios. I had to learn very quickly how to manage all of this. I can't say I was a standout at the beginning. I was lucky that my colleagues were very helpful to me. I occasionally did consular work. Of course, the consular work in a place like that, you always remember everything you did because it was all so unusual. At the time, we used to witness marriages. If an American citizen got married, and there were a couple of such marriages, I had to go to the town hall and stand beside the mayor in his tri-colored sash while he married them. I had to sign their marriage certificate as the witness on behalf of the U.S. government, and issue an official Consular Report of Marriage. The political officer, who was the official consul, dealt with the really messy deaths and things like that, so that my part was peripheral. Nevertheless, it was interesting work. Being the housing officer, I made sure we got the lousiest house. "House envy" could get pretty ugly at small posts. We lived in a little two-bedroom bungalow with a tin roof. When the rainy season came, the desert wind would blow a cloud of thick dust into the city. The electricity, which was seldom reliable in the best of times, would flicker out. Randy and I would lie there in our bedroom in the stuffy heat, listening to the rain pound on the tin roof, wondering at the astonishing new life we'd embarked on.

Q: What was your husband doing?

SIDES: Randy found various jobs on the mission. There were never enough Americans to provide the level of oversight needed to keep the administrative wheels turning smoothly. He was a military brat and used to adapting. The State Department is a career, you know, but the Foreign Service is a way of life and we shared that fully. In Niamey he worked as a math teacher in the American school. They were always short of teachers. He also worked in the Admin section of the embassy as budget and fiscal assistant. It was his job every day to supervise the cash count. In very poor countries you can't let cashiers count the till and lock it up every night without an American overseeing the process. Africans are under compelling family obligations, and it was protection both for the embassy and the cashier to make sure the accountability practices were followed strictly.

Q: Did you travel much in Niger?

During my second year in Niger, I had the opportunity to accompany our ambassador and the British ambassador and their wives on a five-day road trip. We went up into the far reaches of the desert to see how our humanitarian aid was getting to the people. I handled the logistics of our two vehicles, paid the bills, and prepared a report on what we observed. I still have a copy of the report, which says, surprise, surprise, that some of the humanitarian aid was being sold in market places. A Peace Corps volunteer told us the aid food didn't resemble the normal food of the people, so they sold it for what they could get and used the money to buy few cups of millet, the grain that was their usual food. I also saw a woman holding a baby that was clearly dying of starvation. She was living in a pile of tires behind a gas station. She'd been left behind by her herding troupe. We gave her money. I hope the baby made it. Only twice did we pass through towns that

had anything resembling a hotel. Sometimes we all slept out in the desert. I hated camping. It was chilly at night and blazing hot in the daytime. You are supposed to be a trooper, so I had to act as if I was enjoying myself. I was too cold to sleep, even in my down sleeping bag, so I lay there in the profound darkness of the desert night, looking up at the stars. They seemed so close I could reach up and snatch them like fireflies. I felt tiny, insignificant, like a speck of dust in the great universe. Although I wouldn't want to do it again, it was an experience I've never forgotten.

Q: Who was the ambassador now?

SIDES: The ambassador's name was William Casey; no relation to the CIA director of the same name at the same time. Mr. Casey was a mining engineer from Colorado; a political appointee. Everybody wondered what on earth he was doing there, in a place like Niamey. He was reputed to have some sort of connection to the Coors family, who were prominent supporters of the Republican Party. Maybe he donated money to the president's campaign, but not enough.

Q: The Coors family is a big beer family in Colorado.

SIDES: Yeah, I am familiar with the product. Mr. Casey, for whatever reason, was given this ambassadorship. He didn't know squat about diplomacy and he didn't pretend that he did. He let Mike Southwick, the DCM, do the diplomatic work. But the fact that Mr. Casey was a mining engineer by profession was useful because our interest in Niger wasn't just helping the famine victims. Niger had uranium; lots of it. We were certainly concerned about neighboring countries, like Libya, getting their hands on the uranium. The Caseys were nice people. You know, they say that you love your first post the most, and in many ways I think that is true. It was very tough living there, and we were sick a lot. We got dengue fever, took malaria polls that gave me the heebie-jeebies, and we all had diarrhea so often everybody kept an extra pair of skivvies in the desk drawer. But it was a wonderful community. Some of our most lasting friendships began in Niamey. We used to get together and play Trivial Pursuit, or card games. A few people had those new fangled VCR players and they would get video tapes sent from home and invite friends over to watch. We'd go to the American Club early Sunday morning, before the temperature got above 90, and have bacon and eggs and share a month-old copy of the Sunday New York Times. Everybody made a grab for the book section. People would have dinner parties, which was easy because servants cost about $30 a month there. We rather reluctantly acquired our own little band of servants; a housekeeper, a gardener, a guard. I never employed a cook, however. The Nigeriens had not internalized the idea of germs and bacteria. I always boiled drinking water myself, and washed the fruits and veg with a bleach solution. Despite the hardships, I was actually rather sorry when my first tour came to an end and we were transferred to Oran, Algeria.

Q: What sorts of things in particular, just to get a picture, what were some of the things you would be doing, your major tasks as GSO?

SIDES: I was lucky that the GSO tasks were divided among four officers in Niger. There were so few locally-engaged staff who were educated enough to serve as mid management that the tasks that would be done by local staff at our embassies elsewhere in the world had to be done by direct-hire Americans. My portfolio was housing and shipping. I was in charge of leasing the houses for the embassy and making sure that the embassy's shipments and mail came and went as scheduled. You could ship by plane or truck. Planes flew in from Paris three times a week. Shipping by plane was very expensive. Trucks could bring goods shipped to by sea to a port on the coast, but the journey to Niamey took about a week and involved crossing borders. It wasn't very reliable. Trucks got plundered by bandits, police arrested drivers who didn't bribe enough; borders opened and closed unpredictably. The simplest tasks were enormously complicated. My colleagues would get really angry if their shipment of household effects was delayed. I'd be blamed, of course. But speeding up the shipment required making payoffs. At one point I spent $3,000 to lease a C-130 from the Niger Air Force complete with crew to fly to Lomé, Togo, and pick up some cars and other cargo that had been sitting in Lomé forever because we couldn't get it transported by land. I remember riding around the back of this cranky, vibrating old plane hoping that the Nigerien crew knew what they were doing. Lomé was like Paris to us. It had a French supermarket. Everybody had given us a long shopping list of what to get in Lomé. So during the four hours while the plane was on the ground being loaded by the GSO staff from Lomé, we were running around with everybody's shopping list. So was the Nigerien crew. One of them brought back a goat. Renting houses also was no easy task, because there were relatively few houses of the standard that was even marginally acceptable to Americans. Most of them were built for the French during the colonial era, and leased by canny African businessmen who were very good bargainers and probably took me to the cleaners. My locally engaged-staff used to sort of brief me before we would go into a bargaining session, the way you would brief an Assistant Secretary before a big negotiation. There was a lot of play-acting involved; feigned outrage, threats to withdraw, whining, and finally, a deal. I suppose the biggest event that happened in Niamey while I was there other than a colleague being shot, was that Vice President Bush, George Bush the elder, and his wife and a large entourage visited Niamey. Imagine what a visit like that was like to a small post like Niamey, with relatively few Americans and modest infrastructure. The Bushes were charming, gracious people, but the team who advanced for them were awful. They were former campaign people. They didn't understand where they were; nor did they care. They trampled over relationships that had taken us years to cultivate with the chief of police at the airport, the president's Chef de Protocol and other sensitive dignitaries of the Niger government. Before the Bush delegation's arrival the families at the embassy were assigned a quota of ice cubes. We expected our guests to be thirsty and hot, and using local ice was definitely hazardous to health. So we had to boil and filter and cube, and turn in our weekly quota to the ambassador's butler, who stored it in big freezers behind the residence. It was quite a project. When the support team and the advance for the VP arrived, they started dumping the ice in their wastebaskets and using it to cool their beer. They had no idea how precious "safe" ice was. When they ran out, they were mad because we could not instantly produce more cubes. Some of them, against advice, used local ice. I later saw some of them getting on planes after the visit with IV bags still attached to their wrists.

Q: I imagine you were back there chuckling away.

SIDES: Well, yes. You know the German word "schaedenfreude?" But we didn't have time to laugh until after the visit was really over. As I say, the Bushes were very nice. He had been Ambassador to China so he knew what a visit like that did to a small post. The Bushes did pictures and autographs with just about everybody. I was out at the airport with baggage so I did not get to the meet-and-greet. At the departure ceremony, the Niger Army band played the Star Spangled Banner and the Nigerien national hymn. The Nigerien anthem was really long, and I stood out there on the tarmac in the blistering sun, getting sunburned. Finally the Bushes took off, and I was so tired I could hardly think. I went back to my office and lay down on the sofa. Randy, equally exhausted because he'd been handling suitcases, joined me on the sofa. I was about to fall asleep, when the walkie-talkie radio scrambled us. They didn't have cell phones in those days. The "all call" sounded on everyone's Motorola radio telling us that there was a sand storm or something and the Bush planes were turning back to Niamey. Imagine our horror! People who had been drinking at the wheels-up party were trying to sober up real fast. But then apparently the storm cleared and they turned around again, thank God. That was probably the highlight of my time there. Another event I remember well was that I was the duty officer when our colleague was shot. I'd better not name him; he was a member of another agency and had intelligence responsibilities.

Q: What happened?

SIDES: Our "other agency" colleague was rather well known to the host government. He went by the Presidential Palace one day to distribute some invitations to a Memphis Slim concert. Memphis Slim was putting on performances all over Africa sponsored by USIA.

Q: He was a…

SIDES: Memphis Slim was an entertainer, a blues singer. Our colleague went out in his SUV to deliver tickets to the Memphis Slim concert. As he approached the Palace, some trigger happy guard who didn't recognize him opened fire, just sprayed the car. Poor "X" was hit several times. His car ended up with 18 holes in it. He threw it into gear and drove away with this guy firing furiously at him. Then the lieutenant who was responsible for the guard came running out, and slapped the guard around saying, "You idiot, you imbecile. Look what you have done." Meanwhile, "X," with motorcycles from the palace guard in pursuit, tried to get back to the embassy. As I recall, he crashed and was then taken to the French military hospital for treatment. Our nurse, who had just arrived at post, and the ambassador hurried to the hospital. She had to be there before "X" would agree to be anesthetized. She told me later it was really bizarre. He was operated on by some French army doctor who was stripped to the waist, blood spattered over his hairy chest, the window open and birds flying in and out. It was typical African hospital scene. Our nurse was just beginning her first Foreign Service tour; the whole thing was totally astonishing to her. The doctor picked as much lead out of "X" as he could. "X" was medevaced back to the United States, accompanied by our nurse. He eventually

came back to Niamey, to our surprise. Some of the bullet bits remained in his scalp, and at parties he used to let us feel the little lumps. We stayed away from the Presidential Palace for a long time after that. We had heard the guards were poorly educated and trained, and would get a little trigger happy, but we never expected that someone with diplomatic plates and everything, a well known foreign diplomat, would be shot. On another occasion one of the guards menaced me and my driver. He looked like he might have shot us, but he got tangled up in the sling of his rifle, and we sped away. Later on we heard the palace guards fired on a carload of Dutch tourists who came too close, and killed a parent and child.

Q: Was there an initial feeling that all hell was breaking loose at that time?

SIDES: No, we didn't think that. Niger in those days was a very quiet and orderly country where very little happened. The main problem was poverty. There were many other African countries where a few shots would have sent me under the bed, but that wasn't one of those places. The army had a pretty firm grip on it.

Q: Is Timbuktu in Niger?

SIDES: Timbuktu was in neighboring Mali, but many people posted to Niamey used to visit Timbuktu.

Q: Just because of the name.

SIDES: Yeah, everybody used to want to go to Timbuktu, just to say they'd been there. We took pirogue trips on the Niger River to see the hippos. We drove up to Agadez, which was a mud-walled city with a mosque tower, like Timbuktu, but not as extensive. The emir let us climb up the tower of the mosque and look out into the desert. It was really quite an experience. We used to travel to other posts in the region for the "WAIST"—the West African Regional Softball Tournament. I recall one trip where most of the officers at post, including Ambassador Casey, flew to Ouagadougou on "Air Volta." It was a very rough trip and if we'd gone down, that would have pretty well wiped out the embassy. On Easter, missionaries invited us to a sunrise ceremony on a bluff above the Niger River. We got there early and we were standing on the bluff looking down at this little village on the banks of the river, and the villagers were going around doing their dawn chores, lighting their fires, drawing water, tending to their camels and goats. They wore the traditional white robes. There was nothing modern in sight; no cars, no telecommunication wires, not even bicycles. It was like we were from another planet.

Q: Did we have any interest in Niger?

SIDES: Uranium. It was about the uranium, yeah.

Q: Was it more as you say to keep it…

SIDES: The Libyans had some rather nasty friends; we were concerned about them moving on the uranium.

Q: Well, were the Libyans doing anything such as they had from time to time with Chad, the Toyota wars?

SIDES: This was a little bit before that, although I know exactly what you are talking about. I got the impression that there was a lot of intrigue centered around the uranium. However, I thought it prudent to stick to my own portfolio and not ask about matters for which I had no direct responsibility. Then, of course as a GSO I was insanely busy.

Q: Well then how stood relations with the French?

SIDES: We had a pretty good relationship with the French in our day-to-day work. You know, we were on their turf, and they walked a little taller than we did. The Nigeriens didn't have a particularly anti-colonialist chip on their shoulders. The Nigerien elite had been educated by the French and many had served in the French army or administration. The French were very much involved in training and maintaining the Niger army, although we provided some support, particularly to their air force. As in much of West Africa, the French had a military presence that was intended to assure "stability," and protect French interests.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

SIDES: We left in 1985. I had been assigned to a small consulate in Oran, on the coast of Algeria. It is closed now. It was a two- officer post, housed in a beautiful little French colonial villa into which you could have gotten with a can opener. Barbara Schell was the consul, the Principal Officer, and I was her deputy. My title was vice consul. We were the only American direct-hires at post.

Q: You were there from when to when?

SIDES: 1985-1987.

Q: Probably the only time it came into American news was in WWII.
That was one of the places we landed troops.

SIDES: That's right, and in fact our consulate was in the villa that General Eisenhower used for his headquarters. Apparently during the colonial war between the French and the Algerians, it may have been used for other purposes by the colonists, because we found a couple of weapons hidden in the heating system pipes while I was there.

Q: What was the situation in Algeria, at least from the optic of Oran?

SIDES: Well, Oran was Algeria's commercial capital, a much more open, lively place it was said, than Algiers. I wouldn't describe it as "vibrant;" Algeria was a pretty grim,

buttoned up place. However, Oran had a big port, and there was a lot of oil and gas extraction going on in the area. Remember that the revolution in Algeria had taken place in the 60's and it was very fresh in people's minds. The ruling party, the FLN—which is still in power, by the way—was led by those who fought the French in the Algerian revolutionary movement. They were good fighters in their day, but by 1985 they'd pretty well run into a ditch the economic structure they'd inherited from the French. They had adopted all the worst socialist ideas. To be fair, though, the FLN government did raise the general level of basic education and medical care in the countryside. But there wasn't much of a future for young people, educated or not. It was a beautiful country, but tough to live in.

Q: Was this the time of Boumediène?

SIDES: Boumediène was no longer the president at that time, he'd been overthrown from within by the FLN party, which remained in power. Chadli Benjedid was the president. Now it's Abdulaziz Bouteflika, another long-time FLN figure. Everybody that we dealt with in the Algerian bureaucracy professed to hate the French, although most people spoke French, having been educated during the colonial era. French was the business language. This was before the "FIS," the Muslim fundamentalists, became as powerful and influential as they were to become. During my time there, most women in the city did not cover their heads. But that began to change; the FIS put pressure on women to conform. The thing that I remember particularly about Oran was that young men hung around the street corners all day because they had no work. You just knew that sooner or later the devil finds work for idle hands, and this would not turn out well for Algeria, or perhaps for us.

Q: Did Oran represent a particular tribal region?

SIDES: Well not in the specific sense, but it was very near the Kabile ethnic homeland. Many of the business and professional elite were Kabiles. Our landlord, the owner of our apartment, was a Kabile doctor. Dr. Taleb and his sons were all fair-haired and blue eyed. They looked like Vikings, not at all like Arabs. He sent them to France to be educated and they must have fit right in. Oran was considered much more progressive than Algiers. There were a lot of bright young people there, very keen to learn. We had an English language program; Randy helped with that. We did a lot of commercial work. I handled the GSO, consular and public affairs portfolios, and Barbara, the consul, did the political and economic work and the overall management of the post. Administering a small, two-officer post with two FSNs and a few contract guards took almost as much time as running a much bigger mission. We had to file all the same reports and have the same procedures and controls as Embassy Algiers. I would estimate we spent about 50% of our time administering each other!

Q: What was the relationship with the embassy?

SIDES: Well, like most constituent posts we considered that we were forgotten and neglected by the mother ship. The ambassador occasionally came out to see us, but mostly we were on our own.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

SIDES: Craig Johnstone was the ambassador. I only remember him coming once or twice, but I may be mistaken. We used to go to Algiers once a month, either Barbara or I did, to pick up the classified bag, and take it back so we could read the classified message traffic and shred it. If we had any classified traffic to send, we had to take it to Algiers. There were no Marine guards or security officers. I would say it was a "lock and leave" post at night, but the fact is that Barbara and her husband, John, lived in the upstairs part of the consulate. They had a couple of bedrooms and a living room up there. The kitchen was downstairs with the offices. We used to do a radio check with Algiers once a week. We had a teletype machine. I was the teletypist, and sent messages back and forth to Algiers, unclassified messages. Occasionally I used it for consular work. The consular work, such as it was, was pretty bizarre. We had 55 Americans in the consular district, which was the western half of Algeria. I knew all the Americans in my consular district by name. In those days we didn't have bullet-proof teller windows, the way consular officers do now. Oran had just an open counter, and the consular assistant and I received the public at that counter; no protection whatsoever. The Americans in the consular district, if they were in Oran, would come around the counter through a little wooden gate, walk into the kitchen, get a cup of coffee and sit around and chat. It was a completely different environment than would be possible now. The Algerian visa applicants could walk in anytime during business hours and submit their applications; no appointments or lines. I could interview them for as long as I wanted. We didn't do immigration, just nonimmigrant visas—about 500 a year— passports, and protection and welfare. There wasn't a lot of protection and welfare work, though, with so few Americans in the district. The Algerians seemed convinced that we were there for some intelligence purpose. Barbara warned me that they thought that she was just kind of a front, and that her husband, John Laylin, was an agent. I think they had the same idea about Randy and me. The idea that two women could be running the consulate, and our men were just accompanying spouses, was apparently a little too hard for the Algerians to accept. Barbara had worked in Iran until just before the November, 1979 takeover, and she knew how to handle herself in the Middle East. Sadly, she was killed in 1994 while on a mission to the Iraqi Kurds. She's on the Memorial Plaque in the lobby at Main State. God rest her feisty soul.

Q: She was killed in a helicopter shot down by our own…

SIDES: That's right. The Friendly Fire incident. She was in the Blackhawk that some Air Force throttle-jockey shot out of the sky. She was a very good mentor. She taught me a lot about nuts and bolts diplomatic work that I never would have learned in a larger post where I was one cog on the wheel. There is a picture of her in the corridor in the State Department, outside the NEA Bureau, I think. We stayed in touch with John, her husband, till he died a few years later.

Q: What was your impression of dealing with Algerian officials?

SIDES: Well, they were not easy to deal with because they found it difficult to take women seriously as professionals. It was surprising, because women fought in the revolution with the men. Also, they were pretty paranoid about us spying on them. Most Algerians, the ordinary people in the street, were afraid to socialize or be seen with us because then they would be questioned by the intelligence services. So for us it was a very lonely life. Barbara and John and Randy and I were thrown together a great deal, and although we got on well, we were different people, with different interests. We knew some people at the French and Spanish consulates, and sometimes saw them socially. Also, there was a small group of students from Third World countries who were studying in Algeria on scholarships. We got to know some of them. Eventually we became friendly with one of Randy's Algerian students and her family. They were strong FLN supporters—had fought in the war against the French—and I suppose the authorities sanctioned the friendship. They used to invite us over from time to time and we got to know them rather well. They were nice people. Of course, we were under surveillance by the intelligence service all the time. They listened to our telephone calls, and they used to interrupt when I was having a conversation with my mother. If I had been on the phone too long, this voice would come on the line saying, "It is time for you to hang up now."

"But I am talking to my mother."

"Eh bien, I will give you five more minutes."

They went through our trash. Things got back to us that told us they were reading our correspondence. Barbara would put some things out that she thought would amuse them. Randy started emptying kitty litter on top of our trash. We liked thinking of their gumshoes poking around in the cat litter looking for some tidbit from our discarded letters and bills. We occasionally said things designed to shock our presumed eavesdroppers, like suggesting we were into esoteric sex practices and such. I wonder if they realized we were messing with them? We also were very safe, because they never let anything happen to us. Police states have their uses. When it got nasty was when the U.S. government bombed Tripoli. That was in retaliation for…

Q: A Berlin nightclub.

SIDES: That's right, the Berlin nightclub thing. Qadhafi was on the radio all over North Africa telling people to take revenge for those killed by our air attack on Tripoli. When I walked to work that morning, I noticed there was something odd in the air. The streets around the consulate were practically empty, and there were people just standing around on the street corners watching it, police-y looking men plain clothes. I just had the feeling something wasn't right, and when I got into the office the consular assistant, who was a Christian Arab named Danielle, told me that Qadhafi was on the radio asking people to take revenge and attack us. There was a demonstration forming up at the Oran University, and it was on its way. This was serious; during the Six Day war, the Algerian government

allowed mobs to overrun our consulates and attack the embassy. Barbara was on the phone trying to get the police to make a commitment to protect us. She also called Algiers to let them know we were in trouble and ask them to see what they could do at the national level. She had good relations with the Oran police chief. He seemed kind of evasive, but finally promised to send us help. I was quite alarmed by the whole thing. Barbara was a pretty tough cookie, and she had a very dry sense of humor. However, she seemed uncharacteristically nervous. She said, "Ann, do you know how to use a weapon?" Me, a flower child. I said, "Oh my God, Barbara, no. Do we have any guns?" She said, "Yes we do. They are in my safe. We have a shotgun and two pistols. Do you know how to use them?" I said, "No, I am afraid I don't. I could try..." She said, "I'm not planning on using them unless we have to. I don't know about you, but after what we went through in Teheran," --she'd been there for the first take over-- "nobody is going to take my post without resistance." Barb normally didn't go in for dramatics, but then she said, "I don't know about you, but I plan to take one with me if I go." I thought, "Holy shit, this is like a movie." I was an untenured junior officer, and I wanted to seem steady and reliable, so I said nothing and just followed Barbara's lead. We went upstairs and she hauled in the American flag. This rather shocked me; as a naval officer's daughter, I felt we were, you know, "striking the colors." But she said, "Why make it easy for them to find the consulate if they don't know where it is," and of course she was right. So we pulled in the flag and sent home the FSN's and closed the shutters, and we destroyed any sensitive material we had around. Then she told me to get ready to destroy the visa printing equipment if we had to, and the passport blanks. We had a mallet for smashing up the visa machine. I was ready to do it. We peeped outside again and, to my infinite relief, the police had formed a cordon around the Consulate and the crowd never got close. So that was my big adventure in Oran, Algeria.

Q: Well did you get any news from the rather exotic international community in Tangiers?

SIDES: Oh, weren't they exotic! Oh yes. I knew the consul in Tangiers. She had some real stories. That was the go-to place for sex change operations at the time. Americans who'd undergone the transformation surgery then applied for passports in their new gender. She said she had a vice consul who was brought up in a strict religious family and was pretty shocked by the goings-on in Tangiers.

Q: Could you go out into the countryside much?

SIDES: We did, but we had to get permission from the Algerian government. We used to use my consular work as an excuse to go out into the country. The authorities didn't like us touring around. They had missile silos and stuff out in the desert. There was an American married to an Algerian man who lived near what they call the Great Western Erg. I used to visit her, using her children's passport applications as an excuse to go out and do some traveling in the desert region. Everywhere we went we were met by the local police, taken to the Prefecture to meet the police chief, and then to the local mayor. They were very interested in what I was doing. We stayed in small, very spartan hotels in

oasis towns. It was beautiful out there in the desert. It was such an immense emptiness, dunes and valleys of sand stretching to the horizon.

Q: Did you get any feel for the fundamentalists kind of thing?

SIDES: We began to see it, yes. The thing I think seemed to be the starting point was that the University of Oran had a reception in honor of International Women's Day. The FIS, the fundamentalists, crashed into the party, turned over all the tables, smashed all the glass and stuff and frightened the women away. That was the first real manifestation that these people were extremely violent, dangerous. Then I began to notice more and more women covering. We heard that the FIS were starting to throw acid into the faces of unveiled women. I was always very modest in the way I dressed, out of respect for cultural norms, but I certainly didn't veil up or anything. Modern women, as opposed to those who lived and dressed traditionally, began to worry. Our doctor, who was a Frenchwoman married to an Algerian, and other westernized women I knew began to talk about leaving. Foreigners were not targeted by the FIS at that time. Later, it got a lot uglier. The FIS murdered some monks in their monastery. They blew up our friend, Pierre Claverie, the bishop of Oran, in his car. The monks and the bishop were among the French people who stayed in Algeria and asked for Algerian citizenship after independence. They were committed to the country, and they were killed. The FLN party, with all its faults, encouraged women's education and permitted women to enter professions; the FIS used resentment against westernized women, foreigners, and Christians to attract followers. They were vicious, primitive types—Maghrebian Taliban.

Q: I take it those who left went to France.

SIDES: Yes, mostly, although our FSN, Danielle, a few years later emigrated to Canada with her Algerian husband. She was a Christian of mixed Moroccan-German parentage; a stateless person. A lot of Algerians went to Francophone Canada.

Q: Was there any migration to the United States?

SIDES: You know, at the time there was really very little. There is an Algerian community in the United States but it was very small at the time. Most of the visa applications we got were from business people or academics. I think they had to get permission from the party or something to travel. It was, in so many ways, like the USSR with palm trees. We had very austere life. It was difficult to get food or anything else. We usually would buy a lot at the commissary in Algiers. At the corner bakery we had to queue up for bread. A couple of times I went into what had once been a French department store, nationalized after independence. There would be nothing on the shelves but fly paper and matches. All around Algeria in those times there were reminders of the French era; upscale residences occupied by government functionaries who threw trash out in the street, elegant shops that were empty or filled with shoddy imported goods from the USSR. On my travels in the country I saw lots of run-down farms with irrigation systems falling apart because they weren't maintained after the Pieds-Noirs left.

Q: These were French settlers.

SIDES: These were French settlers. They called them "Pieds-Noirs." Most of them were against the Algerian revolution and when the French government left Algeria, they left also. They were despised by the Algerians, who considered them as occupiers and exploiters. However, by the mid-80's many Algerians told us privately that they were better off in the French era. The revolution had not turned out the way they expected. Because our social relations with Algerians were so circumscribed, we did a lot with third country nationals, and one of the places we would go to meet people was church. We would go to the Catholic Mass. There were a lot of Filipinos working as contractors for the Algerians in the oil and gas fields, and a few other foreigners, whom we could meet at Mass. There was a Methodist missionary couple from the United States who had a small Protestant congregation, mostly foreign students from Africa. Randy is Methodist, so we would go to the Methodist service too, and chat with the missionary couple. They led a very precarious life. They were absolutely forbidden to proselytize, and were restricted to ministering to the already persuaded. The Algerian police sometimes harassed Algerian Christians.

Q: The FIS, were they essentially country people?

SIDES: Yes, they were. The countryside in Algeria was, not surprisingly, far more religious than the city. I remember we went to a city called Ghardaia, deep in the desert, for New Years and stayed in a hotel. In the town of Ghardaia, on the buses, the women all had to ride in the back of the bus and the men rode in the front. The women were all fully veiled, only the foreigners were not. When I say veiled, I mean that they wore the long clothing, a head covering, and a niqab across the nose that looked like an embroidered doily. They also wore little lacy gloves. You could only see their eyes.

Q: Was there any residue of good feeling because of the role that Algerian diplomats played in the release of our diplomats from Tehran?

SIDES: There was. We hadn't forgotten their help. And the Algerians hadn't forgotten President Kennedy's support for their independence. We didn't expect a warm, cozy relationship with a militantly socialist country like Algeria, but we wanted a correct and mutually productive one, and that, for the most part, is what we had. They were, I understand, a useful line of communication to other parties in the world with whom we could not have open dealings. However, their relentless suspicion of us and surveillance of our activities certainly didn't make us feel at all comfortable.

Q: Well also too, they are putting an awful lot of money in to an intelligence service that has a life of its own.

SIDES: You have really got a point about that. Some of the things we heard about what happened to them in the independence struggle helped me to understand why they were the kind of people they were. But what was sad about Algeria in those times, I don't know about Algeria now; we have never been back, was the wasted potential. Morocco,

two hours away by road from Oran, was another world. The standard of living was so much better. You never saw bread lines. The shops were full of goods. People were out hustling, selling things, buying things. It had its problems, but the atmosphere was so different.

Q: Did the French play much of a role or were they more circumscribed?

SIDES: They had a huge consulate in Oran. The French needed Algeria and the Algerians needed the French. The French did a lot of commercial work, but they were very careful how they operated. We had a good friend who was a French commercial attaché. He was doing this job as an alternative to French military service. He had been born in Oran, and left as a baby with his parents at independence. They were supportive of independence; his father had even been jailed by the French authorities for helping the revolutionaries, but they had to leave like everybody else. Our friend was really interested in Algeria, but found it very difficult to establish relationships that went beyond the formal, business level. The Algerians did business with the French but without warmth or trust.

Q: I have been told that the Algerians as a race are quite dour.

SIDES: Yes, I found them so. I didn't know whether it was their national personality or whether it was the very sad and limited lives they had. Women and men couldn't mingle freely. Life for the young people was dull. We used to show movies at the consulate that were very popular because the kids told us it gave them an excuse to go someplace respectable to meet each other. Taking English lessons and watching movies was a way they could get out of the house. Large, extended families were crowded into these shabby apartment buildings because so many people had left the countryside during and after the revolution. I remember during Eid al Fitr they'd slaughter sheep on their balconies. You would hear the terrible baaing turning into a gurgle and see the blood running down the side of the building. The garbage in Oran didn't get collected regularly, and there were rats all over the place. Having read Camus' novel, "The Plague"—which is set in Oran, by the way—and looking out at the rats crawling over the garbage in the street really gave me the creeps.

Q: Well then you left there when?

SIDES: We left there in the summer of 1987.

Q: Well after Niamey and Oran where did you go?

SIDES: Dakar, Senegal.

Q: That must have been a delight.

SIDES: Dakar was great. Dakar was paradise compared to where we had been. It was a nice big bustling city with a well-managed, relatively large embassy. I was now regional consular officer and chief of the consular section in Dakar, with the title Consul. It was

quite a step up for me. I really had very little consular experience when I got the job. That soon changed. I had bid on this job without a clue about the regional aspect involved. Barbara warned me that I would probably be flying around West Africa in an itty-bitty airplane, which was true. However, it was a great adventure. I saw so much of West Africa. Randy and I had a good life in Dakar. I worked under two good ambassadors, Lannon Walker and George Moose. We had a spacious flat in a high rise downtown. Our colleagues at the mission, and the FSN's, were fun to work with. The work was very demanding and varied. It was in Dakar that I really learned how to be a good consular officer. So many of my consular stories—the ones I bore people with at dinner parties—come from Dakar.

Q: So you were there from when to when?

SIDES: We arrived in 1987 and left in the summer of 1990. It was a three year tour. We look back on it quite fondly. The Senegalese are very enterprising people, mostly Muslim but some Christians as well. They were very tolerant of each other. Everybody shared each other's holidays. The streets were always full of people hustling and selling. Scribes sat under baobab trees with their little manual typewriters on boxes. They filled out forms for people. Kids sold single cigarettes to car drivers. The beignet ladies peddled their greasy pastries from little wooden stands. Vendors yelled "bon prix, bon prix!" I was fascinated by Dakar.

Q: Dakar was basically a French city or was it…

SIDES: Very much so. It used to be the capital of the French West Africa. Many Senegalese of the older generation were trained to be bureaucrats for the French. So we met a lot of people who spoke, read and wrote French pretty well, who were well educated. Senegalese state administration was fairly good as African countries went. The Muslim Senegalese—about 80 per cent of the population—were affiliated with one of the several Sufi religious brotherhoods that played a very influential role in the political and economic life of the country. The Mourides were the biggest, but there were others. These brotherhoods were a stabilizing element in Senegalese society. Senegal has always had a civilian government; never a single coup.

Q: How were relations with the United States?

SIDES: They were really very positive. We had a large USAID mission there. We didn't do a lot of large-scale trade with them that I was aware of, but as a consular officer I got to be very familiar with the "petits commercants," small businessmen going back and forth from Senegal to the United States buying and selling. For example, much of the used clothes that Americans donate to charities get baled up and sold by the ton and shipped to West Africa where they are sold by the piece in open-air markets. The Senegalese ran this trade. They were very energetic and hard working people. The "commercants" would stuff their baggage with African artifacts, which were very popular in the United States after the "Roots" series on television. They would sell wholesale or retail in Times Square, and then they would buy cheap goods from the United States and

take them back to Senegal for sale; watches, shoes, small electronics. Young Senegalese saw America as a kind of "El Dorado" where they could make their fortunes. Our nonimmigrant visa refusal rate was very high. There was a lot of fraud.

Q: Why were they ineligible for non immigrant visas? I would think they sold and traveled back and forth they'd be eligible.

SIDES: Some of them stayed for long periods in the USA and supported themselves as street traders, in violation of the law. Also, it was difficult for someone whose business was basically run out of his pockets to establish that he had the ties to compel his return. A pattern of coming and going successfully without staying was what you needed to qualify for a visa. A little guy hustling around the marketplace didn't have that. We used to see a lot of fraudulent entry-exit stamps in the passports of people who'd never left Senegal. Most of the traders were members of the Mouride religious brotherhood. It had a particular ethos in which the believers demonstrated their virtue by their economic success, and donated back to the sect some of their wealth. The Mouride community established itself in the United States, and was and still is an anchor for Senegalese traders in the USA.

Q: Were there many Americans there, particularly African Americans?

SIDES: Well, yes, more than you'd expect. It was because of a book: "Roots," and the TV series that followed. We called these mostly-African-American visitors, and the economic activity surrounding them, the "Roots trade." What with the hotels, buses, souvenir sales and so forth it was quite a boost to Dakar's hospitality industry. There is an island in Dakar harbor called Goree, which has the ruins of a fort where slaves were kept before they were shipped to America The Senegalese had a storyteller –a "griot"–at the fort who would give talks, very moving talks in French and English about the slaves and how they sighed and suffered, and went through the door of no return, never to see their home continent again. The African-Americans would often cry when they heard this narrative. I'd get a bit choked up myself. The "griot" would show the chains that the captives supposedly had on them. In one sense it was like an African Williamsburg, more a re-creation of the past than absolute authenticity. But the fort was there, and the sea beyond it was there, and the story of slavery was well illustrated by that sad old ruin.

Q: You mentioned Roots. You're referring to a book called "Roots" by Alex Haley which was tracing his ancestry back to West Africa.

SIDES: That is right. The "Roots trade" visitors were inspired by the book or the very popular TV series made from the book.

Q: The TV series was a very powerful story, particularly in this area where it was still resonating.

SIDES: Yes, and visitors would come to Senegal and usually to Gambia, which is where Haley's African ancestor came from. They would visit them both, and go upriver and see

the typical communities where African people still lived more or less as they had in the 19th century. Sometimes American women married Senegalese guys; they were big, tall handsome fellas and were often already married. Polygamy was legal in Senegal, within the limit of four wives per husband. They couldn't immigrate to America because of the polygamy ineligibility. I remember one American lady who had a stroke and I had to arrange her medevac. Her Senegalese husband tenderly helped carry her stretcher onto the plane. Before her stroke, she used to bring tour groups every year of African-Americans who were interested in African voodoo. The Senegalese were mostly Muslims or Christians and didn't do voodoo the way Haitians do. However, the spiritual is very much a part of their intellectual horizon, and as real as the material world. The idea of charms and spells was in no way sacrilegious to them. Most African people wore a charm called a "grigri" on their bodies. It protected them from harm. Black Americans who came to Senegal were very interested in African religious and spiritual practices, the dance, the music, and grigri, all these things that they might have heard about from their grandparents or read about in Roots. The Senegalese enjoyed sharing their culture, which is very rich. Some of the black Americans loved it, and found the experience kind of transformative. Others totally hated it and couldn't wait to get home. We had requests to assist tourists who wanted to go home early and asked us to intervene with their travel companies, and people who got sick, and people who died or had accidents. So there was a lot of consular work from the "Roots trade." However there was also tourism of a rather more sinister kind. Nigerian drug mafias used to hire African-Americans to come to Senegal as tourists under cover of Roots tourism to be drug mules. I remember one woman who was caught with a kilo of heroin. She was a school teacher from a small town in the south. She badly needed money. She had the drugs taped around her body. She was in prison and I used to have to visit her. The drug mafia hired a lawyer to defend her. I don't know what exactly happened, although I can guess, but the arresting officer and the drugs didn't appear in court to give evidence. She told the judge she thought the packets she had taped around her thighs were a grigri charm that was supposed to fade her stretch marks. The only evidence she had of the truth of the story was the stretch marks, which she showed in court. She was released, and I was relieved. She was very high maintenance.

Q: How did you find the ambassadors?

SIDES: They were totally different personalities. Lannon Walker was a very old school Foreign Service type; very charming, sometimes demanding. He went on to be ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire. George Moose was a more reserved, reticent person. He became Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. I know you're interviewing George Moose. I hope you get Lannon Walker as well. He's a great storyteller and raconteur.

Q: I have tried to. He keeps bouncing around.

SIDES: He was tall and slim and tanned and had a little white mustache; very imposing. He spoke fluent French and Wolof. He also was very firm about what he wanted and how he wanted things done in the embassy. There was a worn spot in the carpet in front of his desk. I occasionally occupied it. When he gave you a chewing out, you knew you had

been chewed. But I liked working for him because he had a very interesting mind. His analyses of the personalities and motives behind Senegalese politics were always right on the button. He was great with CODELS—congressional delegations. He knew just how to engage them. Usually when they came to Senegal, it was at the end of a long trip and all they wanted to do was buy gold and leather goods in the marketplace. They really didn't come to Senegal to do business, but they had to do something other than shop so the trip didn't look like a junket. Most of us at the embassy saw these visits as a nuisance; we'd have to take them shopping and touring and put in a lot of uncompensated overtime. Ambassador Walker saw them as opportunities. He would take them to visit a presentable rural village with links to the Peace Corps or AID. Arrangements were made for them to be welcomed by children who sang and danced, and the village folk applauded and cheered the congressional visitors. The kids would hug the congressmen. Pictures would be taken, later to appear in constituent newsletters. All of this took quite a bit of prearranging, as you might imagine. The congressmen really lapped it up and were much more amenable to supporting our programs in Senegal. George Moose was a very good manager and took a real interest in the embassy families. He was very calm, decisive and very fair. He was particularly kind and welcoming to Americans visiting Senegal, and saw the economic potential in the Roots trade. It was a happy, cheerful, efficient mission. My tour ended before I got to know him really well, but I worked for him again, later on, when I was assigned to the Office of West African Affairs. His wife was also a Foreign Service officer.

Q: Judy.

SIDES: Yes, Judith Kaufman. Mr. Moose was more reserved as a personality, but he handled the Senegalese very well. I had occasion to visit the worn spot on his carpet too, as consular officers will when the ambassador wants something a consular officer can't do. But he was a little gentler.

Q: I understand one of the major problems in Africa is you get an awful lot of first tour officers at these small posts. What were the consular problems at the little posts on your regional circuit?

SIDES: My responsibilities as regional consular officer turned out to be very interesting. My circuit included Nouakchott, Bamako, Banjul, Praia, and Bissau.

Q: You better tell what countries these are in.

SIDES: Ok, Nouakchott, Mauritania and Bamako, Mali; Banjul, Gambia; Bissau, Guinea Bissau; Praia, Cape Verde; and Guinea was on there for awhile, Guinea, Conakry, but they took it away from me and placed it in another region. These were all utterly different places, and the consular officers were first and second tour officers who also did political or economic work. They didn't have much hands-on consular experience. They would get stuck trying to change the ribbon on the visa machine. That was back when we used to use a modified check-writing machine to stamp visas. On my regional rounds I used to change the visa ribbon, check their fee collection and passport inventory, and review their

day-to-day operating procedures. Those posts were very vulnerable to fraud. The most useful thing I did was talk through the unusual cases with the consular officers, either in person or on the phone. They were often unsure of their judgment. From time to time I would have to help them with a problem they were having with the embassy front office because they were being pressured to issue visas or perform visa courtesies that they had been told in consular training that they shouldn't be doing. Sometimes I helped them organize medivacs and psychovacs when U.S. citizens in their district needed to be gotten out. We did a lot more for Americans in those places than we do in developed countries where there is an infrastructure in place. In many of remote, undeveloped countries, the embassy is the only resource for Americans in trouble. We all did things for the Amcits that I'd never have to do in Ireland or Greece. So I ended up spending about a third of my time flying around West Africa dealing with things like that. Guinea Bissau was probably the toughest place to go. It was wretchedly poor and the town the Portuguese colonial regime had built was literally being devoured by the jungle. I mean, you could see the trees growing up through the buildings. The embassy was in a battered little storefront downtown. This was before they moved to the compound outside town. You had to bring your own food with you because there was so little there. It was quite an experience. Praia, on the Cape Verde Islands, involved a long flight over the Atlantic to get there. It was a stony little island with a huge consular work load.

Q: Why was that?

SIDES: The huge consular workload? Well as it happened I knew, because I was from Massachusetts and that is where so many of the Cape Verdeans go. They go to Taunton and they go to Fall River Massachusetts, and to Rhode Island, and I believe there are a few other enclaves. They went to America initially as fishermen and crewmen on ships, and they got a foothold there. So there was a lot of consular work, immigrant visa work, non- immigrant visa work, protection and welfare. We used to have very old Cape Verdean émigrés return to Cape Verde and marry a very young woman and start a family. Then they would be registering new babies as U.S. citizens. The guy is 70-80 years old and you are wondering if he is really the father; but before DNA testing you had to take his word for it.

Q: Did you find you had to intercede on behalf of the consular officer with the ambassador in some of these places?

SIDES: Oh yes, I certainly did. Not just the ambassador; sometimes the political officer, sometimes the USAID director. People who don't do consular work didn't understand the boundaries. They tended to think of the consular officer as being uncooperative and not being supportive of the mission if the consul refused a visa to some protégé of the political section's host-country contact. It is terrible to be marginalized at a little post like that, as often happened to conscientious consular officers. They needed somebody to get in the middle, and that is what I did.

Q: You mentioned the flying. Did you make out your will every time?

SIDES: I took my rosary beads in my pocket. I am not religious, but there were some times I could hear "Nearer My God to Thee" playing in my head. One of the airlines that flew up and down the coast of West Africa was run by the PLO as a business enterprise.

Q: Palestine Liberation Organization.

SIDES: Yeah, Palestine Liberation Organization. We weren't supposed to use it but sometimes we had no choice. It was the only alternative. The flight out to Cape Verde could be pretty scary, because if you went down in the Atlantic that was it. Goodbye. That was my job and I did it, but I was kind of glad when that episode in my life came to an end. I liked Senegal but I sure didn't like all that travel. Nouakchott was terrible for the sandstorms. Landing in them was really terrifying, even though the Air Mauritanie pilots knew what they were doing. When you got there you had to wrap a howli around your head, this big scarf thing, to keep the sand out of your eyes and ears. The embassy looked like a small maximum security prison. It was a very dodgy place to be. While I was in Senegal, Mauritania and Senegal went to war, which made it really interesting.

Q: What was the war over?

SIDES: It started, like so many wars, almost over nothing. It was a dispute over grazing rights along the border river between Mauritania and Senegal. Mauritanian border guards shot a couple of Senegalese herdsmen in April 1989. That sparked off rioting in Dakar, with the rioters targeting Mauritanians who lived in the city. Their businesses were attacked and they were hunted down in the streets and in some cases burned or beaten to death. The Mauritanians, or Maurs, are Berbers and they look quite different from Senegalese. They were well-established in Dakar, and many were silversmiths. It all happened very quickly. We went to work that day and all was normal. Around noon I went out on an errand, and all of a sudden the shopkeeper started lowering the metal shutters. We customers were shooed out the back. We could already hear mob sounds down the main street, and we hurried back to the chancery as fast as we could. We had a USIS librarian who was a Maur, married to a Senegalese. They hid her. A couple of the male FSN's had wives who were Maur or part-Maur and they rushed home to protect them. The town shut down, the police established a curfew. The government banned gasoline sales for a while to stop people using it for arson. However, some Senegalese showed compassion. They hid Maurs or the goods from the Maur shops until it was safe. In Mauritania, many of the laborers and clerical workers at our embassy in Nouakchott were Senegalese or other black West Africans. When the word got back to Nouakchott that the Senegalese were attacking the Maurs, a pogrom against black Africans began. To escape the mobs, our black FSN's took refuge on the GSO compound, along with their families. In the night, the Mauritanian military came and began rounding them up and shoving them into trucks. Picture the sight; kids crying, women screaming and trying to hide their babies in filing cabinets and broom closets. One of the FSNs got to a phone and called the Marine guard. Ambassador Bill Twaddell, who was a ballsy guy, went out in his car in the middle of the curfew and he and his officers managed to get these people back from the Mauritanians and protect them until they could be repatriated to their

countries. A lot of the FSNs were Senegalese and they came back to Senegal. We set up a system for paying them and taking care of them for awhile.

Q: Did you go to Gambia? It's a peculiar little country, surrounded by Senegal.

SIDES: It is like a finger stuck into the belly of Senegal, yes.

Q: Was there much support by Embassy Dakar for Embassy Banjul, or were they living their own life?

SIDES: They were living their own life. Gambia was an independent country, and unlike Senegal it was an English-speaking country. The atmosphere was quite different; very small, very insular. The embassy was located in a converted hotel, which was not well suited to its purpose. The consular officer there, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, was very capable. She's an ambassador now. I did the usual intercessions, but she had a good handle on things.

Q: Did you have Peace Corps in Senegal?

SIDES: Yes, there were Peace Corps volunteers in Senegal. They were good kids, working on education and health projects. At the time there was a lot of research on AIDS going on in Senegal. The CDC was involved in that. They thought they had identified a different strain of AIDS, HIV-2, in West Africa which was less virulent than the strain which was prevalent in East Africa and in the United States and elsewhere. I think the Peace Corps kids did some of the village-level support of AIDS research and prevention.

Q: Sometimes if you find a less virulent form you can develop that as an antidote to the virulent form.

SIDES: Yeah, that is what they were working on. Malaria, however, was the big killer in Senegal and Niger and everywhere else in West Africa. We took malaria preventive pills once a week; they were big pink things that gave me nightmares. It was better than getting malaria.

Q: How did you and your husband find social life in Senegal?

SIDES: It was great. It was a bigger post. It was less intimate than Niamey had been, and certainly less so than Oran, where we were so isolated. In Dakar, we had friends from many of the other diplomatic missions. By then, people all had VCRs so you could watch videos from the States, videotaped television programs and things like that. We used to have group dinners. There were amateur theatricals. The Aussies sponsored a "Hash" group, where the idea seemed to be to run hard and drink harder. I remember once going to the French supermarket in Dakar, and what did I see but a great big heap of Brussels sprouts. I hadn't seen Brussels sprouts in a year and a half. So I bought two kilos of them and hauled them home, called all my friends, and invited them to supper. I got out the

turkey that we had in the freezer for many months and were planning to serve on Thanksgiving, and did a turkey dinner with Brussels sprouts as the piece de resistance. The guests came over, we had the air conditioning turned up really high and they walked into the room and there was this steaming bowl of Brussels sprouts. Everybody dug in and ate the entire two kilos of sprouts. You had to live in Africa to appreciate a good Brussels sprout. It is hard to get good vegetables of any kind that wouldn't give you diarrhea. Dinner parties sometimes conflicted with my consular duties, however. I remember on Christmas Day I had to repatriate a mentally ill merchant seaman while my turkey was cooking. I had to type his passport myself. He'd lost the original one. I didn't want to call in my FSN on a holiday, and I'd seen her prepare passports so often I figured I could do one myself. I propped up the Foreign Affairs Manual on my counter and read the instructions, rolled the passport into the typewriter and pecked out the guy's name and information. After three tries I got it right. Then I went to the private psychiatric clinic where the sailor was being cared for. He was heavily sedated. He'd tried to kill the bosun on his ship, you see. He was really bonkers. They propped him up and I took a couple of pictures with a Polaroid camera. He was vacant-eyed and drooling; nobody home in his head. I took the pictures back to the office and tried to glue the best one on the passport page. I put Elmer's Glue-all over the back of the picture and then put a piece of toilet tissue on the picture and ran a steam iron over it, to bond it, just as my FSN usually did. Unfortunately, I had the steam iron on too high and I barbecued the picture. The other picture I had was kind of out of focus, but I thought, "We have got to get this guy on a plane." It wasn't just the sailor traveling; he was accompanied by a Senegalese psychiatrist to keep him medicated, and a translator. It hadn't been easy to get the airline to agree to transport the man. So I stuck on the blurry photo, made the passport valid for a very limited period of time, and got him off. I went home to my guests and my Christmas turkey. That was a typical day in the life of a consular officer in Africa!

This might be a good place to add that two big changes in the Immigration and Nationality Act took effect while I was in Dakar. One was the NP-5 Program—the first version of the immigrant visa lottery. It's now called Diversity Immigrant Visa program, I think. It was a rather bizarre program which gave those who wanted to immigrate to the USA, but had no job or family anchor there, a means to self-petition into the USA. The purpose was to diversify immigration. Fifty thousand admissions per year were authorized, and the immigrants were to be chosen by a lottery in which they had to be born in an underrepresented country to compete. Do you follow me? Our immigration law for generations has favored family reunification. The family migration chain often brings to America 10 to 20 people from a single anchor immigrant. For example, my grand-aunt sponsored my grandparents and their two children and my grandfather then sponsored his sister and her husband and kids. That's why you have so many Irish in the United States. To compete in the NP-5 lottery, you had to have been born in a country which was underrepresented in the mass of immigrants accepted into the USA. Filipinos, Mexicans, and so forth weren't eligible for the program because their numbers in the USA were already so great. Senegal was among the underrepresented countries. People entered the lottery simply by sending in a sheet of paper with their name and date of birth and such. The public scribes of Dakar were kept busy preparing these lottery entries. Some people entered hundreds of times. However, the lottery winners still had to qualify

under the Immigration Act—they had to have a financial sponsor, they had to be able to read and write, and not be polygamists. We had to turn down some of the applicants because they were illiterate or had too many wives. Everybody, it seemed, had a friend in America who could sponsor them financially. The other big change in the Immigration Act created a kind of amnesty for people who had been working in the USA illegally as agricultural workers before 1983. There were almost no standards of proof; all the applicants had to furnish was a tatty rent receipt or something else linking them to the USA. The fraud was so pervasive it got ridiculous. Most Senegalese in the USA work as street peddlers or taxi drivers. We had applicants coming in claiming they'd been apple-pickers in Florida. They'd in fact never been in America, spoke not a word of English, and didn't know apples don't grow in Florida, but had a scrap of hand-written paper claiming to be a pay stub from Joe's Apple Farm in Miami. CA—the Bureau of Consular Affairs—told us Congress wanted these visas issued. Jesus! It was by far the worst piece of immigration legislation ever passed.

Q: Well then you left there when?

SIDES: I left there in 1990. To our great delight, I had been assigned to Belgrade in Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia was in Europe, and that is where Randy and I wanted to go after all those years in Deepest Darkest.

Q: OK, we will pick it up when you are off to my old stamping ground.

SIDES: Oh, I have a lot to talk about with you on Yugoslavia.

Q: Today is 18 November 2010 with Ann Sides. Ann; you went to Belgrade, you were in Belgrade from when to when?

SIDES: We were in Belgrade twice. The first time I was assigned to Belgrade for a three year tour beginning in the summer of 1991, but it was curtailed after nine months because our relations with the rump Yugoslavia had been downgraded. The embassy was downsized.

Q: OK, let's talk about that period.

SIDES: Then I later went back again, in 2001. That was almost ten years after we left.

Q: OK, and what were you doing there?

SIDES: I was assigned as chief of the visa section, starting in July 1991.

Q: OK, for anybody reading this, this was my old stand. I had that job for five years from '62 to '67. Who were the ambassador and the DCM?

SIDES: The ambassador was Warren Zimmerman and the DCM was Bob Rackmales.

Q: I have interviewed both of those. Now what was the situation in Yugoslavia in terms of relations, but also just plain in Yugoslavia when you got there in '91?

SIDES: That is a difficult question for me to answer because policy wasn't what I did. But it appeared even to me that it was a rather confused situation that was deteriorating quickly, and it was becoming more and more difficult to figure out who we were actually accredited to, and who really had any real power in the country as opposed to symbolic power. By the time I arrived, Slovenia had just left Yugoslavia. The rest of the other republics were still formally part of Yugoslavia, but they were in the process of separating. It was probably analogous to the United States in early 1861 when some of the southern states had already seceded and more were about to. It must have been particularly difficult for the ambassador and the political section. Their normal interlocutors weren't the ones pulling the strings anymore. The Consulate General in Zagreb covered Croatia and Slovenia in terms of reporting on events and representing the U.S. They nominally reported to the ambassador in Belgrade, but were relatively autonomous. That autonomy became more pronounced as Yugoslavia split up. My Consular District was Serbia, Vojvodina, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia and Kosovo.

Q: What did it feel like when you arrived at the embassy?

SIDES: We never had a normal day. I don't know what a normal day was like there, because we were already on the downslide. Mr. Zimmerman compared it once to like being in a barrel heading toward Niagara Falls and not knowing exactly when you were going to go down or where, but knowing it wasn't going to be a happy ending. Everybody worked long hours. Even the relatively non-political work I did was very much affected by the accelerating collapse. Many prosperous, professional-level people who were applying for visas appeared to me to be basically taking out an insurance policy in case they had to leave the country. This was particularly true with ethnically-mixed couples. You could see the separation of the republics, for example Croatia from the rest of Yugoslavia, was placing great strain on Serb-Croat, Muslim-Croat, or Serb-Muslim couples. You could see the country breaking up, the families breaking up, society breaking up. Meanwhile, we were getting more and more visitors from Washington; more and more requests for reporting. There was a lot of strain on everybody, from the ambassador on down.

Q: What was going on sort of in the street?

SIDES: Well, what I remember most about those times were the news broadcasts, the radio and television; those, gloomy, doomy urgent voices on the airwaves. They stirred up fear and hatred constantly. It was like listening to Glenn Beck, 24-7. I acquired a whole new vocabulary in Serbo-Croatian, words I remember to this day; "ratni zlocinac" (war criminal), "facistichke snage" (fascist forces—they called the Croatian army that), "bombardiranje," "miniranje," "snajiperi," "ranjene" (wounded), "smrt" (death). Always "smrt." I have an MA in communications, and I was fascinated by the way the populace was being manipulated by the press. People will believe anything if you tell them one,

consistent message and nothing else. You can tell them the moon is made of green cheese, and absent a countervailing message, they will believe the moon is made of green cheese, especially if they are predisposed to. I found that sometimes even we, ourselves, who were much more politically sophisticated than the average Serb, were influenced to some degree by the relentless barrage of propaganda. As for demonstrations, there were student demonstrations. I remember one very well downtown, near the Moskva Hotel. I observed it from the crowd. The riot police were gathered around, very tense. It ended peacefully. The students were protesting the rule of Milosevic's Communist regime, but they had no clear program. There was another demonstration in which a student and a policeman were killed. I wasn't present at that one.

Q: Were any of the demonstrations against us, the Americans?

SIDES: No they weren't. The anti-Americanism came later, after the sanctions were imposed. In 1991, the students were concerned about their own issues in Serbia and the way they were being addressed. They wanted a more democratic system of governance, economic reform, and so forth. Their protests were a threat to Milosevic's regime—one he skillfully deflected by manipulating nationalist sentiments and provoking a war that kept him and his cronies in power.

Q: I am told by people I have talked to saying there were pictures shown on TV, this may be a little later than your time, of people massacred or killed or something, and it was used by both sides.

SIDES: That came a little bit later; spring 1992, when Bosnia went down.

Q: It was sort of one massacre site served all parties.

SIDES: Oh yeah, Serbian TV would show massacred villagers and say they were Serbs killed by Croats or Bosnians. On Bosnian or Croatian TV you'd see the same bodies, only this time they were Bosnian or Croat villagers, killed by Serbs. All the peoples of the old Yugoslavia were the same type of people physically, dressed pretty much the same, and their poor dead bodies were used as all-purpose propaganda for stirring up hatred by all sides. There were many decent people who managed to maintain their humanity in the circumstances, but it could not have been easy. And of course, the leaders lied without the slightest embarrassment or shame. They were mostly people who rose through the communist system; opportunists without morals or principles. I think we of the West assumed that they wanted a peaceful resolution and an orderly succession, that they were able to compromise and be reasonable. Silly us.

Q: I have to say, as a Yugoslavia hand from an earlier generation, that reports of the massacres, in a smaller scale but equivalent to what happened in Germany or the Soviet Union, seemed inconceivable.

SIDES: You just don't expect this to happen in the middle of Europe. We were incredibly naïve.

Q: Well, we were naive, but that was also the reaction of people in most of Western Europe. They couldn't believe that people would do this again, so soon WWII and its consequences. It might be something that could happen in the Middle East but not in Europe.

SIDES: I think the first time we began to realize how ugly this was going to be, was the autumn of 1991, when Vukovar went down. Vukovar was only 60 miles from Belgrade. People who lived in the western suburbs of Belgrade on the hill called Banovo Brdo, where a lot of diplomats lived, said they could see the glow on the horizon from the burning of Vukovar, and hear the artillery fire. I couldn't hear it from where we were. But the siege of Vukovar was where the mass deaths of civilians, both Croat and Serb, began. It was an ethnically mixed town. The bloodshed there was the first indicator of what we were really dealing with. The Serbs were the main aggressors, but all sides engaged in lies and cruelty.

Q: Let's talk about the consular side. In the first place, the protection of Americans was obviously a first priority, but did we have many, left, or had the Americans gotten the hell out?

SIDES: The expat Americans left, but not right away. A lot of the Americans who lived in Serbia were Serb-Americans, or Yugoslav-Americans as it might be, who identified with people they lived with. They had no real life in the USA to go back to. When we drew down the post and conducted an ordered departure in June of 1992, we invited the non-official Americans to leave with us. We were going out on a convoy by road. It was the second time I think, we invited Americans to evacuate from Yugoslavia. Later on I was involved with the evacuations of Americans from Bosnia but that was the following spring, 1992. It was in our consular district, although we worked closely with Zagreb on that.

Q: So most of your work was on visas, I think.

SIDES: Yes, because Consul General Bob Tynes had the American Citizen Services portfolio. I backed him up. I remember the biggest American citizen case we had was a woman, Shayna Lazarevich, whose children had been abducted by her Serbian ex-husband. The poor woman was unable to get the Serbian authorities to enforce her custody decree, or even arrange access to her children. Ambassador Zimmerman raised it at every level, including with Milosevic personally. The Serbs basically used the issue as a bargaining chip. While Bob Tynes was on leave, a visit was arranged between Mrs. Lazarevich and her children. We'd been working on it for quite some time. The mother was supposed to see both of the children, but as it happened, Mr. Lazarevich brought only the little boy. He insisted on inspecting the hotel room, checking in closets and behind curtains to see if "agents," as he called them, were hiding there to re-abduct the children. I had to sit with him outside the door while the visit took place. I wasn't very comfortable with him; I felt he was quite capable of violence. However, I noticed a lot of activity in the corridor; painters and electricians on ladders, room service people pushing carts,

cleaners. They were all fit-looking men who must certainly have been police. Whether they were there to protect us from Lazarevich, or prevent a re-abduction I'm still not sure. We also, during that period, got a lot of congressional visitors, particularly Bob Dole. We had to help with that. Dole was very interested in Kosovo, which certainly did not endear him the Serbian authorities.

Q: Well Bob Dole had a staff member…

SIDES: Who was believed to be ethnic Albanian or Croatian. I don't know which one.

Q: Bob Dole was a major figure at the time in the Senate, and she was the one who was credited with getting the administration involved on Kosovo.

SIDES: Yes. The Serbs saw this as part of the vast conspiracy against them. The story of Kosovo isn't over yet, although the region has declared independence. There has been a de-facto partition of the Serbian area of Kosovo and the Albanian-majority area. The Kosovars, the Albanian-ethnic Kosovars, saw this conflict throughout the rest of Yugoslavia as their opportunity to try and get out from under the Serbian government. Their leader, at the time, Ibrahim Rugova, was a professed disciple of Gandhi who was in favor of negotiation and passive resistance. His strategy was eventually overtaken by others who opted for a military solution.

Q: Was the Kosovo Liberation Army…

SIDES: Yeah, all of that began to grow at the same time. There was a lot going on.

Q: Well, when you reach a critical situation where people are trying to bail out, often the visa section of an embassy bears the brunt of it, and there is an inclination to be a little more lax, or tough in making visa decisions. What was your attitude?

SIDES: That is a question I can better address when we move on to Croatia, where I was the following year, when the Bosnian refugees in Croatia were seeking U.S. visas. We faced quote a moral dilemma. But in this particular circumstance, in 1991-92, our application rate in Belgrade went up 60 per cent. We saw a lot of people from the middle class or professional class, who would normally be very well qualified for visitor visas, applying for them clearly as an insurance policy, and an increasing number of displaced people, Serbs from Bosnia or Croatia. At first, we applied the same rules we always applied. People who had property and family to anchor them in their home country, and did not appear to be a risk for illegal immigration got visas. It's important to understand that family ties were deep and intense in the Yugoslav societies. Children lived with their parents till they married; then grandparents took care of their children's children while parents were working. However, we began to become more skeptical as time went by, particularly because the economy had already begun to collapse. Many middle and upper class people—to the extent that there were upper class people in Yugoslavia—had a lot of savings in foreign currency. One day the Serbian government just confiscated the hard currency, leaving these people almost destitute in their old age. You would see some very

respectable people who were applying for visas, giving all sorts of plausible reasons for their trip, but they had an air of desperation, not the usual happy tourists. I at first gave them the benefit of the doubt, but by the time we left in June, 1992, it was very difficult to distinguish the legitimate visitor from the potential refugee. Our refusal rate had gone up a lot.

Q: Oh, well, how did your Yugoslav staff react during this period?

SIDES: On the surface they were professional, but they became more and more anxious and nervous. I noticed that the staff members we called "Super Serbs," those who were very patriotic in the jingoistic sense, were becoming more strident, and I noticed a subtle marginalization of people in the office who were not purely Serbian. The male employees were very afraid that they'd be called up for military service as the fighting spread. I was of course aware that many employees, for reasons I can entirely understand, had to cooperate in some way with the secret police. Many of them were treated with suspicion by their own neighbors because they worked for us. Later on, many of the locally engaged staff, the FSNs as we called them then, were resettled in the United States under the refugee program. Some of them actually came back to Belgrade when democracy was restored, and resumed their old jobs.

Q: He is now no longer with us, but how did you find Ambassador Zimmerman?

SIDES: Ambassador Zimmerman was one of the finest people that I ever worked for. He was in an impossible situation. We all believed that the decision-makers in Washington didn't really understand what was going on; that their assessment of the situation reflected the reality they wanted, rather than what was actually happening. It's important to understand the context of the times, which led to a lot of wishful thinking. The Berlin Wall fell in late 1989, and that astonishing event was followed by a cataract of changes in Middle and Eastern Europe; all of which required focus and sensitive handling. The post-Communist Europe was still coalescing in 1991. It absorbed the European Bureau's resources, attention and energy. I hope I'm not being unfair in concluding, as I did then, that Washington just figured the Yugoslavia situation was one of these icky Balkan things and the best we could do was let the Yugos settle matters among themselves however they could, and recognize whatever the result was.

Q: Were you there when Secretary Baker came through?

SIDES: I arrived in early August and I think he had come and gone by that time.

Q: This was the period we had actually two people who knew Yugoslavia pretty well, Larry Eagleburger, who had been Ambassador, and he and I served together in Belgrade in the 60's. But also Brent Scowcroft who was National Security advisor, had been air attaché there. But I think they felt the same thing that most of us felt. It really is inconceivable that this would be as awful as it turned out.

SIDES: It was inconceivable to me too, Stu. Randy and I had traveled through Yugoslavia in the 80's when I was stationed in Algeria. There were a lot of Yugoslavs working in Algeria and there were flights back and forth. I had a college friend living in Belgrade that I used to like to visit. Socialist Yugoslavia—Tito's creation—seemed rock-solid. I think that your insight was a good one; that maybe the people who were most engaged with the problem were the most disbelieving.

Q: And also there was, at one point, Secretary Baker saying we don't have a dog in this fight. The European Union said this was a European problem, and we will take care of it. Well, it turned out that in the long run that they couldn't.

SIDES: European countries at the time did not have a coherent, agreed-upon foreign policy as a union. Even now they have trouble getting a consensus on foreign policy issues. In 1991-2, Yugoslavia's European neighbors had very different interests as regards the eventual outcome of the Yugoslavian breakup. And they all had patrons and pets among the Yugoslav republics. It was the damnedest thing, German recognition of Croatia, after everybody had agreed to wait until the Yugoslav successors had negotiated something. That's still to me one of the most amazingly irresponsible actions taken by a major power during that time.

Q: What about the German foreign minister, Genscher? He was a power in himself because he was the leader of the FDP, I think, in Germany, and it was almost a unilateral decision on his part. Then the Pope chimed in too, which didn't help. Of course if there is anything in Serbia that could sent people up like a skyrocket it is the Germans and the Pope.

SIDES: The German recognition supported the Serbian narrative that Croatia had not set aside its Fascist past. The Croatians themselves helped this along because they tended to embrace some of the symbols of the past. You'd see the big "U" for Ustasha painted on walls in Zagreb. There were people who were openly nostalgic for the Nazi era because there was an independent Croatian puppet state during World War II; the Ustasha regime. All these things played into the Serbian propaganda that Nazism had risen again, and the Croats were out to massacre the Serbs, as they'd done for real in WWII. Genscher helped that along by his recognition.

Q: And the Serbs, like the Irish and some other groups, relish being the underdog and being picked on.

SIDES: Oh, yes. They tend to define themselves by their victimization.

Q: They relish this type of role.

SIDES: Serbs often used to tell me, "Me smo nesretchni ludi." That means, "We are an unfortunate people."

Q: OK, well did you know you were going to be pulled out of there?

SIDES: No, it was a complete shock. Perhaps we should have seen it coming, but I was a naïve optimist. By the spring of '92 the atmosphere in Belgrade was starting to get really ugly. The tension in the embassy was intense. We had to take turns sitting up all night in the embassy in case Washington called and wanted to know what was going on. We would watch television and report on what little we could figure out. I remember I was the duty officer, it was in April 5, 1992, and I got a call at home that the Marine had put through to me. It was from a man in Bosnia and he was speaking a little bit of broken and bad English and I couldn't understand what he was saying very well. My Yugoslav friend, my college classmate, happened to be there, and we were having tea. I said, "Vesna, could you talk to this guy, I don't understand what he is saying. He has got this Bosnian accent and he is yelling. It is something about people being killed and shot and we are supposed to do something. I don't understand." So she talked to him and her face turned white. She turned to me and said, "He says that people were being shot down in the streets of Sarajevo by snipers during a demonstration. They want the U.S. government to intervene." I called the embassy and reported what I had heard, and soon it was on the news, and people started paying attention to it. That was the peace demonstration that was fired on by Karadzic's people from the windows of the Holiday Inn. That was when the Bosnian war started.

Q: Then what was the feeling? I mean actually Belgrade wasn't itself threatened by any military action.

SIDES: To back up a little bit, one of the first times we realized that the "govno," the shit, had really hit the fan was when my husband was taking a trolley bus to the embassy from where we lived, and it had to cross the Bratstvo i Jedinstvo Highway, the Brotherhood and Unity Highway. That highway—ironically named, as it turned out—led from Belgrade to Zagreb. He noticed a lot of talking and anxiety on the trolley. They were all leaning out looking as they crossed this overpass. It was, I recall, late August or early September, 1991. Randy looked out and saw below him on the highway tanks and armored cars as far as the eye could see, all heading west. He came into the embassy and told us what he'd seen. The JNA was moving west toward breakaway Croatia. This was a very, very bad sign.

Q: The JNA, the Yugoslav National Army.

SIDES: Yes. And siege and fall of Vukovar followed. Then we had a long ugly winter, after which there was a cease-fire between Croatia and the rump Yugoslavia, as we began to call it. After the ceasefire, which I think was in February of '92, the consulate in Zagreb, which had been evacuated, began to resume limited operations. Then, in April of '92, I got this phone call from Bosnia, on the day the Bosnian war started. One of the things I remember about this period although I can't place it exactly in time is that Ambassador Zimmerman invited all the officers into the bubble, which is the secure room we had in the embassy, a Plexiglas room. The discussion was about recognition of Bosnia and Croatia. The ambassador told us he wished to give the Administration in Washington his best advice, and invited his officers to state their views. There were no good choices.

Some colleagues thought recognition would protect Bosnia, others believed it would assure a bloody civil war—which in fact is what happened. There was a passionate discussion. We were well aware that lives were at stake. I didn't contribute, but I really respected Mr. Zimmerman, and appreciated that he gave each of us an opportunity to have his or her say, even though he probably already had decided what he'd do. The thing went on for so long that I think we sucked up all the oxygen in the room. When the meeting ended, we were actually getting bit woozy. I also remember from that period the medevac helicopters flying constantly over our house in Dedinje, and landing with their casualties on the roof of the nearby military hospital. Although the JNA was supposedly not involved and there was a Bosnian Serb army, JNA helicopters kept coming. We recognized Bosnia and Croatia in April, 1992. Slovenia, also, as I recall. In May of 92 I had applied for leave. We wanted to go to Paris for a couple of weeks. At that point the sanctions against Yugoslavia were agreed to by the international community. They took effect at noon, just as we were getting on the plane. Up to then, we were always treated very respectfully and courteously by the JAT airline staff. As a consular officer I worked very closely with the transportation industry to make sure their air crews got visas on time, so they were very nice to me. Randy and I and another friend that we were with were escorted to the plane and we took our seats. The plane sat on the ground for what seemed like a long time without taking off. Then the pilot announced that sanctions had been imposed against Serbia, and we couldn't land in Paris. Suddenly, the airline crew who had been so courteous and helpful to us suddenly turned mean and hostile, and said hateful things about the United States. It was as if somebody flipped a switch and turned them from nice to nasty. We were basically thrown off the airplane and sent home. They were pretty pissy about refunding our money, too. At that point, the only way we could fly internationally was by driving to Budapest. The embassy set up a shuttle service. It was a long ride to Budapest. We eventually got to go on leave to Paris. What a relief it was to get out, for a while, from that tense, hostile environment. We came back in mid-June, 1992 and got home, I guess it was on a Friday night, threw the luggage on the floor, took a shower, and crashed in bed. Then the phone rang. It was the embassy. They said we were to report to the chargés house the following morning at 11:00 A.M. for an important meeting. We thought, "Uh-oh, this doesn't sound good." So the next morning, not even having unpacked, Randy and I walked down the street to the Rackmales home, and there were folding chairs set up in the living room. Our colleagues were gathering, looking as apprehensive as we probably did. We all sat down and were handed our seating assignments for the evacuation buses. That is how we found out we were going to leave. According to the Emergency Action Plan, I was supposed to remain with the essential staff because I was visa unit chief, and Bob Tynes, the CG, would depart when the American citizens were evacuated. Randy, as a spouse, would also have to leave. I was appalled. From the time we began our Foreign Service lives, we were always aware that we could be separated by this kind of a situation, but we had been together almost all of our adult lives. We had hardly ever spent a night apart. We had no home in America and didn't know what we were going to do. Randy had some sort of vague plan that he would go to a neighboring country where we could visit each other. We were still recovering from the shock of hearing we'd be parted when the plan was changed, and it was decided that Bob Tynes would remain and would be the acting DCM, and I would leave. Ambassador Zimmerman had been recalled to Washington several weeks before in

connection with our deteriorating relationship with the rump Yugoslavia, so Bob Rackmales was the chargé and Bob became the acting DCM. The question then became what to do with me. Visas were not a high priority at the embassy by that point. I didn't want to go back to Washington and walk the corridors, looking for a new assignment. I made some calls, and as it happened, they were staffing up the Consulate General in Zagreb, which was to become our embassy to the newly independent nation of Croatia. So four days later we leased one of the embassy recreation association vans and hired one of their drivers to drive us to Croatia. We didn't have a car. We packed the cat and some of our essential belongings in the van. We also took some clothing for one of our colleagues, John Zerolis, who'd been sent to Zagreb on TDY, and had been unable to get back to Belgrade and retrieve his stuff when the Department decided to leave him in Zagreb. What normally would have been an easy two hour trip up the Bratstvo-Jedinstvo Highway took about six hours, because we had to detour through Hungary to get around the front lines. The Croatians at the new border post were really horrible to our Serbian driver. They held up his passport like it was a dead mouse, sneered at his Serbian name, and were rude to me and Randy. We arrived at the consulate and banged on the door. It was late in the evening. People were still working. The CG was really puzzled to see us—I don't think he was aware we were coming—but glad to get some help. The post had evacuated most of the staff that previous fall when the fighting started. Very few families were back. The CG told us there were lots of empty houses, still under lease by the mission, ".. just take one of the empty ones. See you in the morning." In those circumstances there was no fuss about sponsors or housing committees. There was no time for anything but essentials. So we took some house keys off a peg in the Admin office, and one of the drivers who worked at the consulate led us to the house. The furniture was still in place, the house had been maintained. So we unloaded our stuff from the van and began our new life at the Zagreb Consulate. Eventually, our personal belongings from Belgrade got packed up and shipped to Zagreb, God knows how. I thought we'd lost it all, including hundreds of books that I'd loved and carried around for years. We even got some of our Belgrade landlord's furniture and a single sneaker that did not belong to either of us.

Q: Who was in charge of the Consulate General?

SIDES: At the time it was Mike Einik. Shortly thereafter his replacement, Ron Neitzke arrived. I worked for Ron for most of my stay in Zagreb.

Q: I had a long interview with Ron.

SIDES: You know, I read Ron's interview because I thought it might help bring back to me some of the things that we are talking about here. Ron's responsibilities as the head of our little mission were of course different from mine. He had everything on his shoulders. We lived in more or less constant crisis. My job was to restore full consular services and get the visa section reestablished. Ron had the bigger picture. The post had been performing mostly emergency consular services since the evacuation in '91. The summer of '92 was more peaceful in Croatia, but things really went down the chute in Bosnia. The summer of '92 was the massacre summer.

Q: Srebrenica and all that.

SIDES: Yes, that's the idea. But Srebrenica came later, in 1995. The Serb forces started with the towns along Bosnian border, like Brcko, Foca, and Visegrad in '92. They'd round up the military-age Muslim or Croat men and kill them or put them in concentration camps improvised from schools or factories. Helpless old people were driven out of their villages or murdered. Some of the worst stuff happened to women. They gathered up the women and put them into camps where they were raped systematically. Tom Mittnacht and John Zerolis, our political officers, did a lot of the reporting. I hope through this oral history project they'll tell their stories. Propaganda on all sides was pervasive. The Serbs were the aggressors, no doubt about that, but there were some very bad actors among the Bosnians and particularly the Croats. Zagreb was kind of a creepy place to be because of the government's relentless, hyper-nationalistic propaganda. Actually it did have rather a Fascist tinge to it. Franjo Tudjman was the president of Croatia at the time. Although he should have known better, he revived and encouraged the use of language and symbols associated with the Fascist "Ustasha" government; the Nazi puppet regime. In the summer of 1992 the front line was about 30 miles outside of Zagreb. It was terribly sad to see these villages destroyed, houses wrecked and abandoned that people had scrimped and saved to build. You'd see people's clothes still folded on the shelves, kids' dresses all ironed. The school books, pictures, things people had gathered through life, who then had to leave it all in a few minutes. The visa work was very stressful. There were a lot of Bosnian visa applicants at that time who had been driven out of their home towns and had fled to Croatia at the time when Croatia was fighting the Serbs. Although some of the refugees from Bosnia were ethnic Croats, most were Bosniaks, which was the Muslim ethnic group. By late '92, the war had evolved into a three-way conflict between the Croats and the Bosniaks, the Serbs and the Bosniaks, and the Serb-Croat conflict. The Croatians were trying to establish power in the areas they dominated, and unite them with Croatia. The Bosniaks went from being allied with the Croats against the Serbs, to fighting each of them. The Bosniak refugees in Croatia therefore found themselves in a very vulnerable situation. They began showing up at the visa window, applying for visitor visas. The vice consul and I tried to apply the law impartially, but the law requires that the applicant demonstrate ties, like a home, job and so forth, that would compel departure from the USA after a visit. These poor souls weren't going to America to see Disneyland or attend an academic conference and go back to Bosnia. We refused most of them. We felt we had no choice. It was awful. I remember one old lady in a headscarf with bright blue eyes; she looked like my grandmother. I reached my hand under the window to get her passport and documents, and she seized my fingers and kissed them. I had to leave the window for a while. We were afraid the people we refused would soon be sent back by the Croatians to Bosnia, perhaps to their deaths. One day Rick Holtzapple, the vice consul on his first Foreign Service tour, said "I don't think I can do this anymore. I feel like those consular officers who refused visas to Jews and sent them to their deaths in WWII." We used to keep a bottle of whiskey in the bottom of the filing cabinet. As I recall it now, we were sipping whiskey out of some nice porcelain teacups I kept in my office. I said, "There has got to be a way to solve this." By then, Washington had seen quite a lot of reporting about what

was going on in Bosnia in these camps. I asked Ron Neitzke's advice, and we sent a cable to Washington laying out the situation with the Bosnians and the danger of their "refoulement" from Croatia back to Bosnia. We must have gotten somebody's attention, because within about two weeks, Terry Rusch, a refugee programs officer from the PRM Bureau, that's Population, Refugees and Migration, and some people from the Immigration and Naturalization Service showed up in Zagreb and said, "We are here to start a refugee program." I suppose it helped that Ambassador Zimmerman was at that time the head of the PRM Bureau. Anyway, Terry and her team and I went to Karlovac, where an old barracks from the Austro Hungarian times was being used as a refugee facility. As I recall, I got up on a bench and said in Serbo-Croatian, "Come here if you want to go to America as a refugee." People gathered around, but many said, "Oh I don't know, it is so far away. We are hoping the war will be over and we can go back to our homes." They were real refugees, not the phony kind. All they wanted to do was go home, but eventually many accepted the refugee visas. Terry's people set up the program. They got non-governmental organizations to interview people, and to set up places in America to receive the refugees. I felt that Rick and I were in a much better position morally to refuse visitor visas when we knew there was a legal alternative for people who were fleeing the war.

Q: Did you sense there was an exodus of people going to other parts of Western Europe?

SIDES: Oh yes, they were going wherever they could. They went to Austria; they went to Germany. They went to Slovenia and Italy and France. On leave in Frankfurt, on the trams, I heard the Bosnian-accented Serbo-Croatian all around me. When my husband was hospitalized in Vienna, the Bosnian mop ladies working in the ward translated Serbo-Croat into German for me so I could talk to the doctors and nurses. Most of the Bosnian displaced people didn't want to go to the United States, but eventually many did because they couldn't get into other countries. So if they had relatives or friends in the United States who would help, that's where they'd go. They were mostly simple folk, worked at farms and factories and stuff. They've done very well in America. Speaking of refugees, one of my responsibilities was to evacuate U.S. citizens and their families who still lived in Sarajevo. The EU would send flights to Sarajevo with crates of humanitarian aid, and take people out who were authorized to go. Military age men could not leave, so those we evacuated were women, kids, and the elderly.

We had very interesting problems with Social Security checks. In those days Social Security checks came to the embassy in Belgrade or the consulate in Zagreb and then they were addressed and mailed out to the "bennies,"—the beneficiaries. So many people were scattered by the war, particularly in Bosnia, that it was difficult to figure out where our bennies were, and get them the money they desperately needed. The old Yugoslav postal service had broken up, the successor states were just organizing postal services, and many areas were in the conflict zones and mail didn't get through. Belgrade's federal benefits assistant sorted the checks for bennies in Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia and sent them by diplomatic pouch to Zagreb. From there, we tried to figure out the safest way to get the checks to the bennies. Sometimes we were in contact with them by phone and could arrange a pickup in a safe place. We in Zagreb had checks for people who lived in

territory controlled by Serbs, and accessible to the postal system via Belgrade. We'd pouch them to Belgrade, and the federal benefits clerk at the embassy would somehow get them to their bennies. We got help also from the UN to get the checks to people who lived in Bosnia. I really admired and respected the professionalism of the federal benefits clerks—they were locally-employed Social Security Administration employees, working in the consular section—and the efforts they made to make sure all the bennies, regardless of politics or ethnicity, got their checks.

We had the widest range of consular problems, and they were all really challenging. I know I'm rattling on, but it was the most intense period of my life! I remember one of the consular problems I was given was that of a Serbian woman —a US citizen, but ethnic Serb—who lived in America but owned a home in Vinkovci. Vinkovci is the next town west of Vukovar. She learned that the Croatian army was using it as a command post, and she wanted her property back. She got a congressman involved. I was tasked to make an effort to get the Croatians to give this lady her house back. So I took a Croatian consular assistant and we drove through the snow, east from Zagreb toward the front lines. I remember this was the winter of 1992-'93, and Vinkovci was one smashed up, beat up, shelled-down town. It must have been pretty before the war, but a lot of it was in ruins then. There was a barricade in the middle of the main street and then there was a kind of a no-man's land, and then there was another barricade about 500 yards away, and that was the Serbian side of the front line, where the fighting stopped when the cease-fire was declared a less than a year earlier. You could see them, the Serbian troops, walking around. The deputy mayor of Vinkovci received me. As usual, before one could get any business done, one got the long historical lecture intended to put events into their perspective. Then I got the tour. We walked around in the snow, and he was showing me the destroyed buildings. "That was our hospital that we just finished, and the Serbians bombed it," and so on and so forth. I had to go through this whole thing before talking about the house. Then he said, "If the Americans really want to help, we need weapons." I knew what the policy was, and told him the United States was not going to help spread the conflict by supplying weapons. Later we did arm and train the Croatians, but at that time, that was our policy. He said, "Well maybe you could get us some detectors for land mines. We have land mines scattered all over the place. Some of our children in the town have stepped on them and been killed; some of the townspeople were killed. They could be anywhere under the snow." He was walking me around on snow! I noticed that my consular assistant and the drivers had gone back up on the road and they were standing on the pavement. So here I am walking around with this guy in a place where there are supposedly unexploded mines. I thought Holy Shit, this guy is trying to get me killed. Of course he could get himself killed too, but who knew what they might do? "American Diplomat Killed by Serb Mine"…I could see the headlines. I kind of fell behind him, and was walking where he walked and in his footsteps. Then he would fall back beside me and he would be trying to show me this or that. I have to tell you Stu, I was pretty damned scared. On the other hand, I was very focused. I had to keep this guy engaged and get the house back; it wouldn't do to act like a wimp. Finally the deputy mayor took me to the house. It was pretty well ruined, but the army had left it. They agreed the lady could have her house back. So I was able to go back to my office and report to Washington and that I got the house back for this lady. She eventually swapped it to a

family of Croatian refugees who had fled from their home on the Serbian side, and she got their house in Vukovar. A lot of house swapping went on at that time.

Everything, all the normal consular work, was made so much more complicated by the war. I had a child custody case on the Dalmatian coast near Split. A Croatian ex-husband had abducted his son and taken him back to Dalmatia, where he thought his American wife wouldn't be able to follow. The American wife was an ordinary working woman, a cocktail waitress. She wanted her child back, and was very determined. She hired a Croatian lawyer. Her lawyer, who was a woman and a mother, really worked all her legal techniques and personal connections, and got the American mom a court date. I went with them. We wanted to demonstrate that the U.S. government stood by its citizen, and try and use that to balance the hometown advantage the dad would have in a local court. The town was near Split, on the coast. The Serb militia forces—which were trying to break their territory away from the new Croatian state—held the high ridges above the town. They shelled it off and on, so the town was part of the conflict zone, and it certainly looked it. We went to the court house for the hearing. I was told that part of the hearing would be held en-camera because this is a children's court, a family issue. The senior judge explained this to me as we sat in her office. I could hardly help but notice that there was a big hole in the wall right behind her desk. She said she had gone home for lunch when an RPG…

Q: RPG is a rocket propelled grenade.

SIDES: Rocket propelled grenade, yeah. And so she had gone home for lunch, and missed being beheaded by the RPG. The office had sort of been put back together again, but it was pretty much of a wreck. So she left me with her assistants, and we were chatting. By then my language skills had gotten pretty good, and I asked how often this happened because the town looked pretty much the worse for wear. They explained to me that the Serbs tended to rocket the town two or three times a week, usually right after lunch. Then they let me into the court proceedings because they reached the point where the judge was going to render his decision, and you may remember from those times that when the judge spoke, there would be a typist in the corner racketing away with a typewriter taking down everything verbatim. So I am trying to listen to the judge speak and the typist is typing. I noticed that he would speed up faster and faster and faster. What I found out was they all wanted to finish the court before lunch because they were afraid the shelling would start. As it happened, the judge ruled that the child had to be returned to the mother. He suggested that the father and the mother and I and the lawyers go have coffee outside of the town and have a nice, civilized parting so the child and the father wouldn't find this too traumatic. He was trying to make it easy on everybody. The father was pretty angry and did not seem cooperative, but I took him aside and talked to him and said, "You must do the right thing as father. You can always come to the United States and get a lawyer and pursue your custody rights in the United States if you wish, but you don't want to traumatize your kid if you love him that much." He kind of accepted that he should man up and do the right thing. So we all went in a convoy of cars out of town and settled at a coffee shop by the seaside just outside of town. As we sat

down and ordered coffee we heard Bumph, Bumph, Bumph. The little boy pipes up and says, "Those are RPGs."

Q: Ron Neitzke made a great point when I interviewed him, very emotional about the fact that "Washington" was trying to pursue the policy of equivalency. That the Bosnians and Croats were as bad as the Serbs. Well I mean both of us know if you are in Serbia you get a history of what the Croats did during WWII and they were really very nasty. But the point was in the era you are talking about probably because they didn't have a chance because they were on the defensive, the Serbs were absolutely beastly, and I use the term in probably its correct form, because of the mass rapes the massacres and the whole thing. But anyway Ron said that he was under pressure to report nastiness on the Croatian Bosnian side to sort of balance of what was happening on the Serbian side. As a matter of fact it wasn't. He said it came out to about one in ten. Did you feel this?

SIDES: That they were morally equivalent? Initially, yes, I did. There were a couple of reasons for that. For one thing, all sides practiced propaganda, tried intensely to capture public opinion in the West. The Serbs weren't the only ones who lied and exaggerated. As a result, the claims made by the other parties to the conflict, the Bosniaks and the Croats, often lacked credibility. Of course, we didn't want to believe them. I mean rape camps, who would want to believe that? It was true about the camps, but because so many of the things they said weren't true and were demonstrably not true, we were skeptical of many atrocity claims that, when investigated, turned out to be true or partly true. It's also true that clientitis is the occupational disease of the Foreign Service. We all suffer from it, and the fact that we knew we were being propagandized and lied to didn't necessarily immunize us from the feelings of sympathy or understanding for the position of the people that surrounded us. I was as vulnerable to this as anybody. As I said, I have an MA in communications, and knew how propaganda works, but it didn't mean it didn't have an effect on me. Early in the conflict, we didn't always know what was happening, or the tendency of all sides to lie made the fog of war even thicker. It became clearer as time went on, but this was the period of 1992-'93. Accusations were made that were very difficult to verify. Let me give you an example. In, I think it was autumn of '92, when things were pretty nasty, a man came to the consular service window. He was an American named Harry Bader. He introduced himself as a professor at the University of Alaska. He was also kind of a free lance journalist who wrote on human rights for a law publication. He told me he needed to speak to an American official privately. Consular officers are always available, and I invited him to my office. Harry told me he had been trying to visit Brcko, a town in northeast Bosnia, just on the border with Croatia. There were rumors of atrocities there. He made it as far as Slavonski Brod, on the Croatian side of the Sava River, but Brcko was held by Serbian forces and he was not able to get into the town. Bosnian refugees on the Croatian side told him that on the other side of the river there was a large meat processing factory, and that people were being killed there and their bodies rendered. You know what I mean when I say "rendered." In meat processing they grind up the leftovers, the fat and stuff, and use them for whatever, or dump it. Harry said he tried to get over there and confirm the story but he was not successful in getting close to the place. He got statements on tape from the refugees, but he couldn't verify this very inflammatory story and, although he believed it, he felt he

could not publish it. He said the story haunted him, and he thought he should tell somebody. So he told me. I went up to Ron Neitzke and said, "Ron, I am about to ruin your lunch. Let me tell you what I just heard." He said, "Well write it down; do a cable and get it out now." I drafted up the cable, choosing my words very carefully because it was not verified and very evocative of the Holocaust. I found out later that Washington did get it and thus became aware of the allegations about the meat factory in Brcko. I suppose it was just another horror story among many. Later on, when I was assigned to Dublin, I happened to be watching a documentary on Irish television and it was about these thousands of missing people from Brcko and that nobody knows what happened to them. I started to cry. In 2009 some Serb policemen were tried for war crimes in the Brcko area, but I don't know if the "rendering" allegation was substantiated. A lot of what happened in the early days of the Yugo wars—the atrocities and so forth—which I just accepted at the time as part of the day's news, snuck up emotionally on me later, when I had moved on. My colleague Dubravka Maric, a Foreign Service officer whose mother tongue was Croatian, was assigned to interview women who were in the rape camps. Awful stuff; I don't know how Dubravka slept at night after listening to the stories of those poor women. You should talk to her for this oral history. Some of the atrocities happened under circumstances that made it difficult to determine who the perpetrator was. The opposing sides accused each other of fabricating incidents to secure international attention and sympathy. Even that was possible. You may remember the mortar shell that landed in the marketplace, it was called "Markale," in downtown Sarajevo and killed about a dozen shoppers. The Serbs said that was one of the Bosnians' own shells that landed there. Some of the press repeated this claim. A long time later the UN did a trajectory study and apparently it did come from the Serbs. There was a strange incident just before I arrived in Zagreb where there was an explosion at the Presidential Palace in Zagreb. The Croatians said the JNA air force dropped a bomb on the palace trying to kill Tudjman and Ante Markovic, the former Yugoslav prime minister, who happened to be there at the time, meeting with Tudjman. Some of the military attaches in Zagreb at the time suspected it was an internal explosion. Nobody saw a plane. I don't know whether the truth has ever been conclusively established. Why would the Croats blow up their own building? Strange things happened all the time in those days.

Q: There had been a series of SAMS, surface to air missiles or surface to surface missiles or something like. Had there been any air raids on Zagreb while you were there?

SIDES: I left in '93 and they happened after I left. In fact someone was killed in Zrinjevac Park, across the street from the Embassy, while waiting for a tram. There was a strange incident at the Zagreb embassy while I was there, however. It is important to understand that some of the people who fought for the various sides, Croatians, the Serbians and the Bosnians, were professional criminals who used the conflict and the disorder it created for their own ends. One day, a car drove by the embassy, and something dropped out from underneath it. Apparently it was a time bomb, a home-made bomb attached underneath the car by stereo magnets. Anyway, the car went over the tram tracks and the bomb fell on the street, just opposite my office window. We had no security officer at post at the time, and Ronna Pazdral, our management officer, was responsible for security matters. Ronna was a quick thinker. When she saw the bundle of

explosives, and the passers by running screaming away from it, she set off the external assault alarm. That alarm sent us all scurrying across the floor on our hands and knees into the interior corridors away from the windows. She had the security camera at the front door rotated to focus on the explosive, and we watched on the security monitor as the Zagreb police expert came and cut the wires on it and took it away in a dust pan. It had a little clock and sticks and everything, just like something out of a cartoon. Had it gone off when it fell, I could have been killed in my office by the flying glass. I'm embarrassed to admit that when I heard the noise in the street I actually opened the window with the Mylar film on it so I could see better what was going on.

Speaking of strange incidents, we had an arrest case in 1993 where an American of Hispanic origin who converted to Islam in his hometown jail was arrested in Zagreb airport for shoplifting jewelry. He was involved with some so-called Islamic relief organization. It had no significance for me at the time. He was put in the Zagreb jail for theft. Within a few days, a couple of Middle Eastern men in suits came to see me. They had a suitcase full of money, and they wanted to help him. I called Rick, the vice consul, into my office, because where there is money involved you don't want to be alone in the room. I explained to them how they could deposit it to his account at the jail and hire a lawyer for him. Eventually he got out. While he was still in jail the FBI attaché from Embassy Vienna came to interview him. Somehow, this jailbird Muslim convert had been recruited by what I now understand was an Islamic jihadist organization—probably he was used as a courier because of his U.S. passport. There were a lot of strange organizations supposedly helping the Bosnians, and a lot of money going around, and a lot of very odd people involved, people who had no obvious connection with the former Yugoslavs and their quarrels. I mean to answer your question yes, we know now that the Serbs were the worst aggressors, but there were scoundrels on all sides.

Q: Well I get it. The preponderance was on the Serb side because they were on top as opposed to WWII when the Croatians were on top.

SIDES: Well, perceiving all sides as equally bad relieved us from any moral responsibility to do anything about it, of course. Americans need good guys and bad guys, black hats and white hats. Eventually we decided the Bosnians were the good guys. We helped the Croatians militarily to defeat the Serb forces within Croatia, but that was much later in the conflict, and by then the Croatians had learned that flaunting their nostalgia for Fascism was self-defeating.

Q: How did you find, I mean all of a sudden you had a Croatian Foreign Service National staff. How did you find them, say, as opposed to the Serbian one?

SIDES: You know, it was pretty much the same. We had the Super Croats and we had those who were kind of liberal intellectual cosmopolitans in orientation. Remember that people who sought employment with our embassies tended to be more internationally-minded, and may have studied in the USA and learned fluent English. However, their primary loyalty was to their homeland and their people, as one might expect. Some of our local employees, of course, were cooperating with the host county intelligence services,

as happens everywhere. We understood the pressures that they were under. In terms of their work, they were professional, despite the anger, fear, and turmoil that the Yugoslav breakup and the wars brought to their lives.

Q: Oh yeah, when you are in Yugoslavia sometimes what you try to do is you know people are going to report to the police authorities, so you try to make it as easy for them to get that out of the way.

SIDES: Yes, the local staff gave us few problems, in comparison with the Americans I had to deal with as a consular officer. One strange phenomenon of the time was what I called the "baby snatchers." I suppose it is not a nice thing to say on tape. They were people who took advantage of the chaos to try and adopt cute little European children. Some of them were well-intentioned people who saw things on television and just decided to come and grab some kid from an orphanage and "save" him. Many were emotionally needy people who couldn't or didn't wish to adopt through the channels set up to screen out unfit adopters. They'd come to institutions for children called "detchki domovi," often mis-translated as "orphanages" rather than "children's homes." Many of the children who lived in the children's homes weren't orphans in the sense of being totally without family. They had parents or other close relatives who couldn't care for them for one reason or another, but continued to visit them and be concerned about them. The would-be adopters were eager to delude themselves into thinking the kids had no families, or if they did, the families had abandoned them, which was often not the case. Americans would fly into Croatia, determined to leave with a baby. They were pretty clueless and just assumed you could pick one off the shelf like a souvenir. Then they'd find out there were formalities like visas and passports that could not be avoided. They had made little or no attempt to get immigration authorization. I was usually able to talk people out of hare-brained adoption schemes, explaining the immigration procedures and how long it took and how there had to be a home study, and so forth. The case I remember particularly involved a woman who was a housekeeper for the mother of someone who was a prominent political figure in the United States at the time. He is now dead; I don't want to give his name. The housekeeper and her husband wanted to adopt a Bosnian baby. They had hired a lawyer who had actually taken them to a children's home and they held a baby, and they really wanted this baby. They had children of their own, grown children. I think they truly wanted to help. They were nice people. The Bosnian Red Cross formally objected to the adoption. The Bosnians established that the father was in Manjaca Concentration Camp. When I explained to this nice couple that the father had been identified and the child was not an orphan, they withdrew. Issues involving children were very emotionally-charged. Many people with good intentions—and sometimes a well-developed instinct for publicity—wanted to take Bosnian kids to the USA for medical treatment, or summer camp, or whatever. They had no understanding of visa requirements. They saw consular officers as being heartless and obstructive. I had a particular problem with a Member of Congress, Robert Torricelli.

Q: From New Jersey, and subsequently disgraced.

SIDES: That's the man. At the time, in 1993, he was involved with Bianca Jagger, whose claim to fame was that she was the former wife of Mick Jagger, of the Rolling Stones. She was jetting around the war zones, trying, it seemed to promote herself. UN people told me they considered her a nuisance; they had to deal with a lot of celebrity nuisances at the time. Bianca Jagger called me on the phone, saying she was in Tuzla, in Bosnia, and said that she had some children that she wanted to bring to the United States for medical treatment. She wanted to pick up their visas. You don't just tell a consular officer, " I am coming to pick up the visas." I mean there were no applications, no explanations, no evidence of nonimmigrant intent. The kids were not even in Croatia. I don't know what Bianca had in mind, but I explained to her there was a process for this and there have to be applications. They have to establish when the children were coming back, what arrangements were made for the medical care, what kind of medical care was needed. Who was paying for it. She said, "Well, hasn't Congressmen Torricelli told you to issue the visas?" I very unwisely told her that while congressmen made immigration laws, they couldn't order us to issue a visa. I discussed the application process and advised her to have the kids get their treatment in Zagreb or Vienna, where there were good children's hospitals; there was no need to transport them all the way to the USA. The next thing that happened, Torricelli wrote a letter to the Director General of the Foreign Service. Torricelli described me as a "heartless bureaucrat," and wanted me fired. Fortunately, under civil service rules, the letter could not be placed in my personnel file, nor could the congressman get me fired. However, the DG's office passed Torricelli's letter to Ron, my boss. He wasn't very happy about it. In retrospect, I should have been more careful; I was under a great deal of stress. For several years after, until Torricelli's career ended in disgrace, I'd sort of go into hiding whenever a CODEL including Torricelli came to a post where I was. I'd ask to be excused from any duties that would bring me into contact with him.

We had another species of "war tourist" in those times; Americans who enlisted in one of the warring armies. A couple of my problem children were Croatian-Americans who were in the Croatian army and were captured. Eventually they were exchanged for Serbian Americans who were in the Serb forces and were captured. I had to visit the prison camp once to see one of these guys.

Q: Well what was the prison camp like?

SIDES: It wasn't a camp as such. I refer to it as a prison camp, but it actually was an old prison. It was large rooms filled with guys. When I was brought into the room the guys all had to stand up and face the wall like this.

Q: Crossed hands.

SIDES: Yeah, some sort of prison stance. Then they called out the guy I wanted and they took him down the hall and I had a visit with him. He was a Croat prisoner in Serbia, a kid from Chicago. This happened before I left Serbia, but it just came to my mind. After I got to Croatia, Bob Tynes in Belgrade and I in Zagreb were trying to work an exchange where a Serbian-American POW and a Croatian-American POW would be exchanged.

We had another POW case, too, a fruitcake American who became a lieutenant in the Croatian army even though he couldn't speak Croatian, and was captured. He was a deserter from the French Foreign Legion. I think he read too much Hemingway.

Q: Well there is nothing like a war to bring out…

SIDES: The nut jobs.

Q: But also the confidence people. I was consul general in Saigon.

SIDES: Wow, you must have seen it.

Q: You had all of these guys going around who were basically sort of confidence men. They had been around the army back to WWII, been involved in the black market in Paris and all. They head for these places.

SIDES: The vacuum created in these situations, the vacuum of normal law and order, attracted these people like flies to a honey pot.

Q: Was there much contact with our Embassy in Belgrade by then?

SIDES: Very little. They were in another world by then. In fact, when we evacuated American citizens and their families from Sarajevo, we did it from Croatia even though Bosnia was in Belgrade's consular district. Belgrade had no reliable communications with Sarajevo.

Q: Was there an effort to officially transfer the…

SIDES: No. I don' t know whether Belgrade didn't want to do it or whether they felt that in so doing they would concede the reality of the situation somehow. That was a decision above my pay grade. But the practical effect was, and I had to discuss this with Ron, we had to get these people out, so we did.

Q: Did you get down to a place like Dubrovnik?

SIDES: Oh yeah. I have to say the Croats greatly exaggerated the damage to Dubrovnik. Dubrovnik withstood the cannon fire of 16th century ships so those big stone walls could handle some RPGs. There were a lot of broken roof tiles. There was some damaged stone work. Some places were more damaged than others, but the old town certainly was not destroyed. It shouldn't have been harmed at all; it is a cultural treasure. The area outside the town, the villas and the airport, were in much worse shape. The Montenegrin militia, which was allied with the Serbs, had gotten there. They looted the place. They took bathtubs and stuff like that. The Croatians made jokes about how the Montenegrins were so primitive they didn't know what toilets and bathtubs were for, or that you needed to connect them to plumbing. The Montenegrins tied the loot on their little Yugos and drove back to their villages.

Q: Well then, you left there when?

SIDES: It was a temporary assignment for me, to which I was paneled for a year and a half. I left there in the summer of 1993 so there was a lot of the war left to happen.

Q: During that time what you had been on both sides of the moon more or less. What did you bring away from this exposure to the Balkans?

SIDES: Well, it wasn't the end of my exposure to the Balkans, and I don't know that I could say anything profound about it other than that I had been a 60's person and all that; peace and love and rock and roll. I was really naïve about people and their motives, believing everyone to be basically good at heart. I finally, at the age of 40-something, grew up as a person and realized that the world was not the way I thought it was. People are sheep, and if they have good shepherds they will be good sheep, and if they have bad shepherds they will be very bad sheep. Even with all the propaganda and the exaggeration, the fact is that people in the Balkan conflict were horrid to each other. Even decent people sometimes succumbed to the cruelty around them. It is hard to even talk about it. I can't watch programs about it on TV. I will probably dream about it tonight. I don't know what else to say.

Q: One of the things that does come home is that you couldn't have had a worse combination than Tudjman in Croatia and Milosevic in Serbia.

SIDES: I was present at Ambassador Galbraith's credentials ceremony, and afterward I had to shake Tudjman's hand. I washed it really well afterwards.

Q: And yet they were willing to get together to carve up things.

SIDES: Yeah, they did it on a napkin. Tudjman and Milosevic had lunch together, and on a napkin they drew how they would partition Bosnia. Somebody found the napkin. They were utter scumbags, complete human trash.

Q: ____ they are both dead and we hope…

SIDES: Perfect products of the Communist system, in which unprincipled opportunists so often rose to the top.

Q: The other thing; I don't know much about the Catholic Church. I do know about the Catholic Church during WWII, which had a horrible record as far as its forced conversions, and there is the burning of the Orthodox Church in Galena and all that. But the Serb church down at the parish level also fostered this hatred. I mean it has a lot to answer for. The Islamic side in Bosnia was not very, it didn't cause a lot of trouble, I guess.

SIDES: During WWII, some Bosnian Muslims joined the Resistance; others joined a Bosnian Muslim legion the Nazis organized. But Bosnian Muslims were pretty secular. In fact, one of the outcomes of the 1992-95 war is that Wahabi Islam has gotten sort of a foothold in Bosnia that it never had before. The practicing Muslim Bosnians were Sufis in orientation. Some of them became extreme Islamists as a result of the war, but they weren't like that before. The claim that Izetbegovic was some kind of Islamist fanatic is ridiculous. The churches, both Serb Orthodox and Croatian Roman Catholic, play the role in their societies that the Catholic Church for a long time played in Ireland. The church promoted a nationalism that defined one's nationality—in the ethnic sense—by one's creed. It's easy to understand why it worked that way in Ireland because the British occupiers tried to suppress Catholicism. Although lots of Protestants live in Ireland and have for many generations, they're not regarded by the Catholic majority as truly Irish. In Balkan ethnic politics, if you're Catholic you're Croat, if you're Orthodox, you're Serb. You might be a Catholic living in Belgrade all your life, but people will consider you Croat, and therefore an outsider. It was in the interest of the churches to keep the faithful in these nationalist pockets. Interestingly enough, in my time some young Croatians converted to Evangelical Protestantism because they saw it as opting out of the nationalist thing. Some of the Evangelical Protestants did very effective relief work because they were seen as neutral parties.

Q: I went twice to Bosnia as an election observer. I was in Muslim-majority Tuzla and Orthodox churches were still there. But on the Croatian side, the mosques were blown up.

SIDES: Oh yeah, they destroyed the mosques. Beautiful mosques from the Turkish times, with elegant wooden minarets.

Q: Where did you go after there?

SIDES: The assignment gods smiled on me, and I am glad they did, because boy was I frazzled. I went to Dublin for three years. Back to the old city I lived in while I was young.

Q: Ok, do you have time? Shall we talk about that or do you want to…

SIDES: You know, talking about Bosnia was so hard that I think I would like to stop.

Q: I was thinking that. We will talk about the auld sod another time.

Q: OK, today is 1 December 2010. This is another interview with Ann Sides. Ann, when we had left you, you were getting out of the garden spot of Zagreb, and you were off to a rather difficult duty in Dublin. This was what, '96?

SIDES: This would be 1993. What had happened was that my assignment to Belgrade was curtailed in June of '92 when our relations with the old Yugoslavia were reduced. I was sent to Zagreb as a temporary assignment, but it ended up lasting a year and a half. It

was probably the most tumultuous year and a half in my life. So imagine my delight when I got my first bid, which was Dublin.

Q: You were there from when to when?

SIDES: I was there from 1993 to 1996.

Q: OK, before we get to where we are up to, let's talk about what were the state of relations-- I hate to say it; we did this with every country-- between Ireland, Southern Ireland and the United States.

SIDES: Our relationship with the Irish state goes back to its independence. We were one of the first countries to recognize the Irish Republic, the Irish state as opposed to Northern Ireland, which belongs to the United Kingdom. What surprised me about Ireland was that although we did have a good working relationship with Ireland, our interests and theirs were far from identical. I also found that there was a good deal of anti- Americanism among the Irish as people. It seemed to me perhaps more so than in the early 70's, when I lived in Ireland as a private citizen and worked there as a not-very-successful free lance correspondent. When I arrived in Dublin in September of '93, frankly I was expecting a pretty pleasant time. I was quite delighted to go back to the city I lived in as a younger woman and where my father was born. I saw it as a reward for the very difficult circumstances I was in while in Zagreb. My assignment was to be chief of the visa unit. Little did I know that I had stepped into the biggest cow pie in Western Europe. I don't want to exaggerate because there were awful things going on elsewhere, but it turned out to be much more difficult than I anticipated. It had a lot to do with visas. The ambassador, Jean Kennedy Smith, was a very difficult person to work for.

Q: Ok, in the first place, you were in Dublin from when to when?

SIDES: I arrived in September of 1993 and departed in August of 1996.

Q: When had Jean Kennedy Smith been nominated? When did she go to Ireland?

SIDES: As I recall, she took office in the early summer of 1993. So she had already been there for several months before I arrived. I was surprised to find myself at a really demoralized embassy.

Q: She was a sister…

SIDES: She was a sister of the late President Kennedy and the late Senator Robert Kennedy, and the very much alive Senator Edward Kennedy. Of course she was the daughter of the former ambassador to Great Britain, Joseph Kennedy.

Q: All right, well, let's talk about her. In the first place what had you heard about her before you went there?

SIDES: You know, I was completely absorbed by my work in Zagreb and I didn't pay much attention to what went on at other posts. However, I asked around, and had been cautioned that it was going to be difficult working with her; that she was a political appointee, that she had never been in charge of anything or anybody before other than her charitable work and her household staff, and wasn't good with handling people. I heard also that she appeared to be channeling Senator Kennedy and his views on what role the U.S. should play in the Irish peace process, which were not necessarily consistent with long-standing U.S. policy. So I was somewhat prepared. Political ambassadors come along in one's career. I figured that the President sent her for a reason, and I was pretty confident that I could work with whomever I was assigned to work for. I knew Ireland very well as a country, having lived there, and my family coming from there and so forth. I thought I had a lot to offer the post and I was a pretty good visa officer. I was kind of glad not to have the responsibility for the entire consular section, just doing visa work for awhile. I was still very burned out from my experience in Zagreb. We arrived quite happily in Dublin to find it looked pretty much as we had left it in 1973. However, we lived in much more comfortable circumstances than we had 20 years before, as we discovered when we were delivered to our embassy-assigned town house. It was way better than the bed-sitter we lived in during the 70's. So for me, it started out rather well. Jim Callahan was the consul general. Jim and his wife invited Randy and me to dinner. He was an experienced officer, very professional, but he seemed anxious about the ambassador and felt that she had an agenda that she wanted to fulfill very quickly, and which would not be possible for us to do, involving the extension of the visa waiver to the Irish, the granting of a visa to Gerry Adams, and somehow finding a way to grant immigrant visas to a large number of Irish people who were living and working illegally in the United States. All of these were very popular measures with the Irish, and must surely have been key objectives of the Irish government in terms of their relationship with us. It appeared to me from what Jim said that she saw no difference between the interests of Ireland and the interests of the United States. I don't recall what Dennis Sandberg, the DCM, told me when I reported for duty, but I saw immediately that he was in a very difficult situation. Many of the people at the post despised Dennis and thought of him as Mrs. Smith's toady. He did tell me that she was distrustful of the Foreign Service, so he was trying to create an atmosphere of confidence between him and Mrs. Smith. He gave me the impression that if I ran into difficulties with the ambassador over visa matters, I couldn't count on him to run interference, as DCM's normally do. It didn't take me long to realize I was in for a rough ride.

Q: Did you have a meeting with Ambassador Smith?

SIDES: No, I don't think she met with the new people. I may have been introduced to her briefly. I don't recall ever having any substantive conversation with Mrs. Smith about anything. My impressions of her were from meetings I attended and what she would say and do, and also on things other people said about her who were in a position to know. I learned very quickly to stay away from her for very good reasons, because she had all sorts of ideas about things she wanted done and she would kind of ambush you in the corridor and assign you to go out and have a thousand Christmas cards printed promoting

some charity or something like that. Many of the things she wanted to do couldn't reasonably be done under the State Department's regulations.

Q: What was your visa section like?

SIDES: At the time, we had a relatively large visa section because we were also doing lots of immigrant visas. Around the time I arrived, a new immigrant visa program went into effect which had been created uniquely for the Irish. It certainly demonstrated their political influence in the United States! The Irish had gained had gained the affections of a congressman called Bruce Morrison. He was neither Irish nor Catholic, but he wanted to do something nice for the Irish, I guess. He created something called the Morrison Visa, which was a lottery-based immigrant visa, only it was a lottery one couldn't lose. I recall that something like 25,000 immigrant visas annually were set aside for the Irish and nobody else. The take-up rate by those initially selected was much lower than the total number of Morrison immigrant visas available, so the Visa Office just kept drawing names until everybody who entered the lottery "won." All you had to do was apply for one, and then come in to the embassy and fulfill the normal visa requirements, and you got it. There was a generous waiver policy for those who'd been in the USA illegally. To get all these visas issued, we had a number of contract employees working for us as well as the regular immigrant and nonimmigrant visa staff. We also had a rather busy American Citizen Services section, for which I sometimes performed services on a backup basis. We had spacious offices across from the Chancery in a bank building. It was well suited to its purpose because it had teller windows. As I recall, we had six officers and probably 25-30 FSNs. The section greatly reduced in size when the immigration laws changed and the Morrison visa program ended. I was chief of the visa section, both immigrant and non immigrant, so it was quite a busy place in 1993.

Q: Well where was Congressman Morrison from?

SIDES: As I recall, he was from New Haven, Connecticut. I daresay he had a lot of Irish constituents. But it was an extraordinary thing to do for them. Ireland had really been in a stagnant state economically in the 70's and 80's. Lots of Irish people had gotten visitor visas and had gone to work in the United States illegally. Because of that, we were pretty careful who we issued visas to. There thousands of them in America, and the Morrison visa was supposed to legalize them. It was thinly-disguised amnesty, available only to Irish illegals and not others. The Irish had no shame about immigrating illegally. They used to say things to me like, "We built the United States. We created it. Why can't we stay?" Although I was an Irish-American, I was embarrassed by the degree to which the Irish community in the U.S. facilitated illegal immigration. The fact that the Irish are white and blue-eyed surely had something to do with getting the Morrison visa program past Congress. Can you imagine what would have happened if Morrison had tried to gain support for a similar program aimed at Mexicans or Haitians?

Q: You mentioned sort of the not overly friendly feelings towards the Irish to the United States. Describe that.

SIDES: Forget the leprechaun and shamrock stuff. The Irish are in many ways typical Western Europeans, except they don't belong to NATO. The Irish had a long standing supportive relationship with the Palestinians, and they saw the Palestinian situation as analogous to their own, a little helpless country occupied and oppressed by a powerful one. So they tended to buy in to the pan-Arab interpretation of world events and the U.S. role. The strongest factor likely was our long-standing alliance with Britain, which was engaged in Northern Ireland in a struggle to suppress the IRA. I'm not saying the Irish government supported the IRA, or that most Irish people did. But reunification of Ireland was a principal objective of the Irish government, and Irish people tended to have a reflexive dislike and suspicion of Britain. There were historical reasons for that, well-founded ones. The U.S. generally supported Britain, although we deplored some of the human rights abuses in Northern Ireland. The anti-Americanism among the Irish was about politics; it was never personal, in the sense of being directed toward individual Americans. Most Irish people had relatives in America.

Q: While you were there what were some of the big developments that were related to what you were doing? How about the Northern Ireland peace process? What was going on?

SIDES: The Northern Ireland peace process had begun to unfold over a period of years starting with the civil rights movement in the late 60's. But there had been a long period of really ugly conflict, a three way struggle between the Loyalists, who were the Protestants, the Nationalists who were the Catholics, and the British in Northern Ireland. Some of this had spilled over into the south of Ireland. People in the south of Ireland were, by 1993, not very sympathetic to the Nationalists in the north. Many of the combatants on both the Nationalist and the Loyalist sides had gotten into kidnapping, hijacking, drug dealing and other things made their causes look a little less than pure. Most of the IRA's material support came from the USA, where the second-generation Irish were living in the sentimental past and oblivious to the present reality.

Q: There was a strong Marxist element too.

SIDES: There were two IRAs. There was the Official IRA, which was Marxist, and then there was the Provisional IRA, which was Catholic nationalist in orientation. There had been a lot of attempts at a negotiated resolution, and some sporadic cease fires. Every time peace seemed about to break out, the conflict would be reignited. Many of the leaders of the hostile factions were making a lot of money out of it. The Irish Government was looking for a way out, a way to wind down the conflict without being seen as capitulating to Britain. The Brits also wanted out of Ireland, but didn't know how to do it without being seen as selling out the Loyalists, who were tied into the Conservative Party in Britain. At the time when I was there, the Irish Government was trying draw the Nationalists, the IRA, more deeply into the peace process and put in place a disarmament process. The Brits were working on the Loyalists to disarm. It was a very complex process, with many setbacks and disappointments, but slowly inching forward. State, as I understood it, considered it not necessarily in our interest to get deeply involved in this; it was Ireland's and Britain's problem. The NSC and the White House

wanted to engage much more deeply in the Irish peace process. Nancy Soderberg—whom the Irish rather cruelly called "Nancy Soda Bread" — and Tony Lake ran this account. Senator Edward Kennedy was also very much engaged with the Irish peace portfolio. The Irish authorities who were working on the peace process tended to deal with these three on substance, rather than the State Department. The Irish Government pushed the idea that the U.S. Government should grant a visa waiver to Gerry Adams, who was on our terrorist watch list and ineligible. The idea was that he'd promote the peace process to the Irish American community, which provided material support to the IRA. They were also trying to draw Gerry Adams and the Provisional IRA into legitimate politics. None of this was a bad thing, but to grant a known terrorist a visa waiver seemed—at least to me—to compromise a fundamental principle of our security policy, and without any gain to U.S. interests. Mrs. Smith, of course, really wanted this done.

Q: OK, well let's talk about some of the visa measures; you mentioned these Morrison visas.

SIDES: The Morrison visa program was, frankly, bizarre. Why the Irish and not others? Doris Meissner, who was the Immigration Service Commissioner at the time, and Senator Kennedy were said to be very close, but why Bruce Morrison got involved in this, how the United States benefited from it, it is still hard for me to figure that out. Perhaps Morrison was fronting for Senator Kennedy.

Q: When I came into the foreign service in 1955, one of my first jobs was doing the refugee relief program, which was designed to allow people who had fled because of WWII from Eastern Europe to camps in Western Europe, to get them out and give them visas. It sounds fine, but all of a sudden we found there were people who lived in the Netherlands and in Italy were getting refugee visas. Well when you think about it refugees from what? Well it so happened the two heads of the committee of the house that dealt with immigration matters in the house, one came from an Italian background and one came from Holland, Michigan. So I mean one learned that politics played a big hand in visa matters.

SIDES: That was certainly the case, and what was particularly stinky about it was that these applicants for the Morrison visas were often people who had lived in the United States illegally and in some cases had incurred ineligibilities. I had instructed the officers I supervised with that we would go by the book. That meant we were refusing a lot of applicants. Jim Callahan, the CG, called me into his office and said, "You know the INS wants us to issue these visas. They actually want us to use them all up. You need to show a little flexibility." So we backed off a little bit. One of the requirements of the Morrison visa was that you had to have a job offer in the United States. Well, for the people who had already been living and working in the United States illegally, of course that was possible. But many of the Irish who lived and worked in the United States never bothered to take up the Morrison visas at all, never bothered to go back to Ireland to apply. So what you were getting as the program went on were applicants who had never been to the United States before coming in with fraudulent job offer letters, something that was to later get me in a lot of trouble with the ambassador. The bogus job letters were on

European format paper and were signed "Yours Faithfully," the standard complimentary close used in Irish correspondence. The job offers were supposed to be from an American employer! We felt we had no choice but to refuse these applicants on grounds of material misrepresentation. We were soon instructed to give the applicant a chance to withdraw the letter and bring in a real one—a better forgery, I suppose. So for about a year we were issuing visas by the ladleful to anybody who applied.

Q: Were you getting any feedback from the Visa Office or were they keeping their head down?

SIDES: VO didn't contact me personally. I usually got my guidance from Jim Callahan, the CG. I did not know, because Jim didn't confide in me until pretty late in the game, that Jim was in the shithouse with the ambassador. That is not a nice thing to say on tape. He was really under a lot of pressure.

Q: But it is appropriate.

SIDES: Not long after I got there, Jim and the Public Affairs Officer, John Treacy, and two other officers, I think it was the political officer and the defense attaché, had written a dissent cable about the Gerry Adams visa question. Mr. Adams had applied for a visa several times in Belfast and had been refused. They expected him to apply again and try in Dublin. Their understanding was that Mrs. Smith wanted this visa issued, that she was looking for a way to do it. So they sent a dissent cable in. Dennis Sandberg was on vacation at the time and I think either Jim or John Treacy was the acting DCM. Anyway, they sent in a dissent cable, and when she found out about it, she hit the roof. She began from that point to marginalize Jim Callahan and John Treacy and to find ways to get rid of them. So this was all going around in the background. Jim was being extremely careful avoid conflict with her or Dennis Sandberg. She was very keen on the Morrison visa program. Maybe she saw them all as potential voters for Senator Kennedy, because it seemed to me that she saw much of what she did in Ireland in terms of U.S. domestic politics. In general I probably swam in the same stream that the Kennedy family did politically. President Kennedy was a great inspiration to me in my youth as he was to many of the other people you have interviewed. So I was really disappointed to find myself in such an invidious situation.

Q: Just in a context for somebody who doesn't understand, an ambassador cannot issue a visa.

SIDES: No. She was very disappointed to find out that she couldn't.

Q: This is a firm rule.

SIDES: Yes, and there is supposed to be a certain separation between the visa function, which is governed by statute and can be performed only by consular officers, and the pursuit of policy objectives. Which isn't to say political considerations never influence visa decisions, because exceptions can be made when the national interest is involved.

But when the national interest is invoked, which is rare, it's done in a very consultative way, and not in pursuit of any individual agenda. I followed Jim's guidance and tried to do the right thing. I never knowingly issued a visa that was clearly improper. However, overall it was not good practice to be going through pro-forma interviews en masse with people who were in many cases misrepresenting themselves.

Q: Well, did you have problems with the visa officers that you were supervising? You know visa officers are given a certain amount of instructions about what you can and can't do, and then…

SIDES: They all understood the position we were in. We really liked and respected Jim Callahan, our CG. We became aware of how vulnerable he was to Mrs. Smith, and tried to be as supportive of him as we could. My instructions to my vice consuls were that we wouldn't do anything that was clearly illegal, and pursue fraud and ineligibilities where we found them. However, we'd try to avoid unnecessary confrontations or conflicts.

Q: Well you know at a certain point, problems at the embassy and Ambassador Smith became public knowledge.

SIDES: Yes, they did. The newspapers got a hold of it.

Q: When did that happen and how did this…

SIDES: The Foreign Service Journal did a long article on the Dublin dissent cable in July, 1996, and the retaliation that Jim Callahan and John Treacy were subjected to. However, the dissent issue was part of a general problem caused by Ambassador Smith's leadership and managerial style. She was definitely used to getting her own way. I think she came to the job with a very negative image of Foreign Service people, and expected the worst from us from the very beginning. At the same time, she was extremely susceptible to what Irish people said. One of my staff told me that other Irish local employees would complain about their supervisors to the ambassador's chauffeur, and he'd badmouth them during long drives with her. Many officers, particularly in the management section of the embassy, curtailed their tours. And Dublin was a place where people used to try and extend their tours!

Anyway, she apparently decided to try and get rid of Jim Callahan and John Treacy. John's tour was nearly up and he managed to hang on until his scheduled departure. Jim Callahan had another year or two to go. He had children with specific education needs. Ireland had what his family needed. So he wanted to stick it out. He showed me his EER draft, the one Dennis and the Ambassador did. It was outrageously bad, not the subtle damn-with-faint-praise approach, but a total hatchet-job. I thought perhaps Dennis Sandberg drafted it deliberately that way to please Mrs. Smith, but also to signal the promotion panel that Jim was having difficulty with a vindictive political ambassador. The EER certainly didn't reflect the hard-working, very professional officer I knew. I think the same thing happened to John Treacy. They filed grievances, charging retaliation for the dissent cable. Jim curtailed and went to London as deputy section chief.

Subsequently, a team from the Inspector General's office appeared at the embassy. I think both John and Jim had been gone by the time they arrived. Also, Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Mary Ryan came out to try and smooth things over. She was very protective of her people. She tried to work with the ambassador a bit. I don't know how that went. Mrs. Smith was not an easy person to talk to, apparently. I don't mean trash Ambassador Smith. She worked very hard. She had functions in her house almost every night. Sometimes she'd have two, back to back, in one evening. We worked them in rotations. We would get one crowd out and another crowd would come in. She attracted really top-drawer guests. At her house I met Eric Holder, Warren Buffet, Bill Gates—who argued with me about visas for foreign workers—and the entire cast of "Riverdance." However, she sometimes invited people from Northern Ireland that were rather unsavory. We had to watch them very carefully because they would steal stuff. You know, souvenirs from the house and things like that, Kennedy family photos. She also got the admin officer to hire some handicapped people to work in the embassy; a guy in a wheel chair and a mentally handicapped woman, and so on. Some of them are still working there today. I really respect her for that. The State Department's a pretty cautious, change-averse environment; it has its checks and balances, and we work with our colleagues and contacts professionally, whether or not we have a personal affinity for them. She, I think, viewed us all as either with her or against her. Perhaps if she had been more willing or able to explain what she wanted and why, and was prepared to accept counsel from her diplomatic staff, we would have been able to help her find ways to do what she wanted that wouldn't get her or us into trouble. As it was, we did our jobs conscientiously, but it was a really scary place to work.

When Jim Callahan left, I ascended from visa unit chief to being chief of the consular section in Dublin. That exposed me much more to her. I heard from a good source in the Consular Affairs Bureau that she was inquiring about replacing me. I decided to try and curtail. I made some stabs at that with my career development officer, but at the time there really wasn't anything available that was appropriate to me. The OIG inspectors came to Dublin in response to grievances filed by John and Jim, and in connection with some administrative irregularities. From them, I found out why she was trying to get rid of me. I'd pursued a fraud investigation, which led to an employee of one of the Irish universities. The employee was misusing official stationery to provide false documents for immigrant visa applicants. John Treacy and I had gone to see senior officials of the university, laid out the evidence, and asked the official to put a stop to his employee's activities. The university officials had had no idea what was going on. We didn't ask that anyone be prosecuted; just that the activity be stopped, which it was. After we finished the meeting, John said to me, "You need to write this up as a memo and send it through Dennis Sandberg to the ambassador. She knows these people, and she has said that whenever we meet with somebody she knows, she wants a memo about it so she is aware about what has been said and done." The meeting took place on a Friday afternoon before a three day weekend, and I submitted the memo the following Tuesday, the next working day after the meeting. Then I forgot all about it. Neither she nor Dennis Sandberg every mentioned it to me. When the inspectors came, maybe six months later, they said she was really shocked I hadn't discussed the meeting with her first. She, or Dennis, claimed I'd

sent in the memo six weeks or two months later. She thought my conduct improper and wanted to replace me. Fortunately, I had a copy of the dated memo, my appointment book, the lot. And the inspectors understood that, except in unusual circumstances, the ambassador would not normally be advised in advance of a routine meeting to discuss a cheesy little fraud. I was pretty shocked. I always treated her with respect and tried to understand what she wanted from us, but it was a very uncomfortable relationship. As time went by I think it got a bit better. The administrative section, however, had the worst of it. She wanted to do many things for which there were no funds. The management officer curtailed, the GSO officer curtailed, and the DCM and incoming management officer got in trouble for authorizing projects she wanted. And then, of course, there was the nonimmigrant visa waiver.

Q: You might explain what a visa waiver was.

SIDES: OK, at that time, in 1993, Irish citizens required a visa to travel to the United States. They had to come to the embassy and apply and be interviewed, unlike the citizens of many of the other countries in the European Union, who benefited from our visa waiver program. Ireland had a weak economy, and there was a high rate of illegal immigration to the United States. Mrs. Smith, influenced, I expect by the Irish government, wanted the visa requirement for Irish citizens lifted. By the 90's Ireland's economy had begun to take off, but in 1993 Ireland did not meet the established criteria for participation in the waiver program. The visa refusal rate was well above the two per cent threshold for participation in the waiver program, and the overstay rate was also well above the legal legally-established threshold. The third criteria Ireland failed to meet involved what we used to call "border bounces." A border bounce was a denial of admission to the USA at an airport or land border. Even if a traveler has a visa, an immigration officer can deny entry if there's evidence that the traveler intends to immigrate illegally. Lots of Irish young people would arrive at JFK with huge heaps of luggage, cards in their handbags wishing them a happy life in America, letters offering jobs, and so forth. And they'd be bounced.

Through Senator Kennedy's efforts, Congress modified the criteria for the waiver in order to make it easier for Ireland to qualify. The threshold for refusal rates was re-set to 2.5%. We came under a lot of pressure to push down our nonimmigrant visa refusal rate to the 2.5% level. I reviewed the refusals and overturned some, but apparently not enough. The rate still hovered around, as I recall, five percent. And we were being very, very liberal. Eventually the Visa Office, also under pressure, decided to redefine the way they counted visa refusals and refusals overcome. They cooked the books—and I don't say that lightly— to make it appear that Ireland had met the new threshold for visa refusals. The immigration service, as part of this deal, agreed to set up pre-inspection stations, one in Dublin Airport and one in Shannon Airport. Instead of having the shame and humiliation of being bounced at John F. Kennedy airport, the Irish got stopped before they left Ireland. The pre-inspection stations, I think, are still there; very prized assignments for the ICE border officers. Eventually Ireland did get on the visa waiver, and my last year was spent downsizing the section. The Morrison visa craze was over.

We had given an immigrant visa to every Irishman who ever even thought they might like to go to America.

Q: Well now, as we speak today in 2010, Ireland is going through a devastating downturn, whereas not many people have been from Ireland, now it looks like there is going to be a steady flow outward again. Except the United States doesn't have much to offer.

SIDES: Well, the immigration controls in the United States are a lot stricter than they were then. A lot of things are beginning to box in illegal immigrants, like the inability to get driver's licenses, employer sanctions, and so forth.

Q: The Kennedys are out of business.

SIDES: The Kennedys are not engaged with this any longer. Bruce Morrison, heaven knows where he is. Because Irish people can live and work anywhere in the European Union, I think many of them are going elsewhere. During Ireland's gravy days when the Celtic tiger was roaring, there was a huge in-migration of people from Poland, Romania, and Latvia. A lot of Chinese and Nigerians also migrated to Ireland. Many Irish people sold their farms to developers and bought villas on the Costa del Sol. I've heard those housing estates now lie empty and abandoned in the wake of the economic downturn in Ireland, and the eastern European migrants have gone home. Poor Ireland!

Q: Well, tell me how did you find life in Ireland? Irrespective of your problems at the embassy, how was living there?

SIDES: Apart from the work, Randy and I really enjoyed our time in Ireland. We traveled around a lot, and also got re-acquainted with my relatives and their community. Apart from those extended family members, however, I was rather careful about letting people know I was Irish, since I was there as an American diplomat. One of my jobs as head of the visa section was going around to monitor the panel doctors. Panel doctors are physicians authorized by the embassy to conduct the medical examinations and administer vaccinations required for immigration to the U.S. During the Morrison visa era we had four doctors in different regions of Ireland. They did quite well out of the Morrison visa program. We would do a tour of their clinics, review their procedures, visit the labs where the analyses were done, go to lunch and perhaps tour the local hospital. I could use these trips also to call on local government officials, or meet with Americans living in the area. We also took some time off and traveled up to Northern Ireland with our pals Charles and Maria Jones. Charles was a General Services Officer at the embassy; a guy who had had a very colorful career in the Foreign Service and was up for anything. He was fed up with working for Mrs. Smith and planning to retire soon. We decided to check out Northern Ireland. At that time, there was a cease-fire in place, so it was less scary than when we went Belfast to buy the condoms in '72. We were able to travel around a bit in Britain and Scotland as well. My husband is of Scottish origin, so we also visited Scotland. We had such a nice time, outside of work. That's one of the reasons

why I was really reluctant to curtail; because my personal life was quite happy. I just hated my job.

Q: Let's get rid of your job. Where did you go in '96?

SIDES: I went back to Washington, and from '96 to '98 I was a desk officer in the Office of West African Affairs. My portfolio was Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Benin.

Q: Sort of the little states.

SIDES: Yeah. Well they weren't very important countries at the time, although let me finish my remarks about Ireland by saying my colleagues threw a discreet farewell party for me. Because so many people curtailed from Dublin, I was apparently the first officer to complete a three year tour under Jean Kennedy Smith. As I say, I had done it by being very careful indeed. At the party, my colleagues sang a parody of the disco song "I Will Survive", which was all about my efforts to escape Embassy Dublin with my integrity intact. I went on to be the desk officer in AFW—that's the Office of West African Affairs—for Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, and Benin. Nasty little dictatorship, Togo; struggling little impoverished democracy Benin; and large, rich, and troubled Cote D'Ivoire. They were all interesting in different ways.

Q: OK, well let's you were into this for two years.

SIDES: For two years, yes.

Q: Togo, what…

SIDES: Well the dictator Eyadema had been in charge of Togo for many years. There would be various elections that would not be by any definition free, fair, or transparent. It would always end up with him winning by impossible margins. Sometimes the number of votes cast for him exceeded the population of the country. What a guy! But we maintained our relationship with Togo. We don't break relationships with countries just because they are dictatorships, or we would have a lot fewer embassies. We mostly worked through the Peace Corps and USAID to encourage education and development, on the idea that eventually Eyadema would die and his people would be prepared for a democratic society. Instead, his son took over, and Togo remains politically and economically stagnant. We also provided a lot of aid and financial assistance to Benin, but with more to show for it. As African countries go, Benin is reasonably democratic and peaceful. As I recall, we financed the entire primary school education program for woman and girls in Benin. The idea is that women learn hygiene principles, learn to value education, learn small trades, and pass these things on to their kids. Cote d'Ivoire of course since Houphouet-Boigny's day had begun to fall apart. There was a cultural-political struggle between the native Ivorians and the people from many surrounding countries who settled in Cote d'Ivoire to work on the cocoa plantations. Many of them were Muslims. The country never really developed a political system that was generally accepted as legitimate after the death of the autocratic but competent Houphouet-Boigny.

So Cote d'Ivoire was on the slide downhill, even then, in 1996. It was in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, that I again encountered Ambassador Lannon Walker, my former boss in Dakar.

Q: Well with these three countries, certainly with Cote d'Ivoire the French had tremendous influence.

SIDES: Yes, they did.

Q: This was the Mitterrand era, I think, by that time?

SIDES: Mitterrand was the French President, yes. His son had a lot of business interests in West Africa.

Q: Did you have much contact with their embassies in Washington?

SIDES: With the French, no. With those three countries, yes, I worked very well with all three embassies. These were small embassies, some almost totally supported by the consular and visa fees they collected. I worked with their DCMs, mostly. Also I knew the ambassador to Benin very well. He was a very capable man.

Q: Were there any real issues?

SIDES: Big events were going on elsewhere in the world. My three countries were on maintenance. There were no extraordinary policy changes or crises; just an awful lot of day-to-day work dealing with routine issues like high-level visits, coordination with other agencies, preparing new ambassadors for their Senate hearings, guiding incoming ambassadors from my portfolio countries through their credential ceremonies, and so forth. I got to accompany the African ambassadors to the White House. That was rather fun. I would also substitute for colleagues who were out of the office, so from time to time I got to handle portfolios other than my own. And then there were the task forces. Whenever there was a coup or a war—which happened a lot in Africa—I and my colleagues would be drafted onto emergency task forces and spend long shifts on the phone in the Operations Center. Sierra Leone and Liberia were our perennial problem children. The fecal matter hit the fan very suddenly in Guinea Bissau in June, 1998; civil war broke out. The fighting around the embassy compound was quite heavy at times, and Ambassador Peggy Blackford and her staff were sheltering in the communications vault, eating Fourth of July canapés which had been prepared and frozen for a reception that never took place. How Ambassador Blackford and her staff finally escaped is one of the great Foreign Service adventure stories. I was on the other end of the phone, and heard them describing shells going right over the embassy.

Q: Didn't we keep sort of a ship with a ready force running back and forth across that whole area there?

SIDES: Ah, you mean for Liberia and Sierra Leone. We did have Navy ships deployed in that area. We used Navy SEALS, as I recall, in the Sierra Leone evacuation. My AFW

colleague Ann Wright was charge d'affaires in Freetown when the evacuation took place, under very dramatic circumstances.

Q: I have interviewed Ann Wright.

SIDES: Oh, I will have to read that. She was a very resourceful officer. She got the Secretary's Gold Medal for bravery.

Q: She retired as a colonel in the Army Reserve, a parachutist and the whole evacuation thing was a very difficult time.

SIDES: Yeah, Ann was a remarkable figure. However there weren't any navy ships available to evacuate the little embassy in Guinea Bissau in the summer of 1998. Evacuations aren't free. The Pentagon charges for its services. I understand that the DoD projected a hefty fee to evacuate the embassy people from Guinea Bissau. The Bureau of African Affairs instead chartered some stinky old rust bucket and it picked up the Ambassador and her staff from a pirogue and took them to Dakar. They lost everything except the clothes on their backs, and the Ambassador's cats.

Q: Where is she?

SIDES: I don't know. New York, I think.

Q: OK, well then after this time these two years we are getting up to '98. Where did you go?

SIDES: I went to Sarajevo. From the time the U.S. opened the embassy in, I think, 1994, we'd been doing only emergency consular services in Sarajevo. By the time I had finished my tour in AF/W, conditions in Bosnia were becoming more stable, there was more freedom of movement, greater security, and the infrastructure was beginning to recover. My mandate was to establish the full range of consular services, except for issuance of immigrant visas. When I arrived, the consular section was three desks in a small room of the very battered USAID building. I had two FSN consular assistants sharing this tiny room with me. We had no waiting room, service windows, or consular equipment, except for the official seals and stamps, a typewriter, and a few blank passports. A brand-new consular section was being built in what had been the garage of the embassy. Setting up and equipping the section, hiring and training the staff, and then launching a normal consular operation was a very interesting and challenging job. I really loved doing it.

Q: You were there from when to when?

SIDES: I was there from 1998 to 2001.

Q: OK, let's talk about what was the situation when you arrived?

SIDES: When I arrived, Sarajevo was like something out of Clockwork Orange. There was a strange atmosphere of edgy peace, people still stunned by the war, afraid to hope, living from day to day. There were armored cars full of peacekeeping troops, heavily armed, going around the streets. Many of the neighborhoods reminded me of the pictures you see of towns after WWII. In the areas near the old front lines the houses and buildings were basically destroyed. They were rubble. There were trench lines on the hills above the town. Most of the buildings had been damaged by shellfire. RPG's make these big round holes in the buildings. You saw the holes everywhere.

Q: RPG is…

SIDES: Rocket Propelled Grenade. After awhile I learned a lot about the different kinds of artillery and mortars and things like that. I was able to know what munitions had impacted a particular place by the damage that one could observe. At the time we first arrived in Sarajevo, the water and electricity was still pretty sporadic, but the barricades and stuff that existed during the war had been taken down. Although the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in early '96, things did not return immediately to normal. There was a carefully-paced process of removing barricades and implementing confidence building measures. These were often small steps that helped make other things possible. For example, the three territorial entities, Muslim, Serb, and Croat, issued different license plates bearing symbols of the ethnic group in control. As a result, people felt unsafe traveling outside of their own areas. One of the most successful measures imposed by the international community was the ethnically-neutral license plate. It was quite clever. The plates were white with combinations of black letters and numbers and nothing else. The only letters used were those seven that look the same in both the Latin alphabet that the Croats and Muslims used, and the Cyrillic script of the Serbs. That, the removal of check points run by the militias of the various ethnic groups, and the establishment of the international police force made travel around Bosnia--although always a little dodgy--much safer than it had been. People could trade, get goods to markets. We diplomats, however, didn't go into the Serb entity without our security officer clearing the trip. I traveled every chance I got, into all parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina. It was very interesting. I did election observing in some of the nastier towns in the Serb republic area, and in hardline Croat towns as well.

The variety and amounts of food available on the local markets was still limited, even in 1998, so we used to go to the SFOR peace-keeping base to buy food from the military commissaries. SFOR was the Stabilization Force set up by the Dayton Agreement. There were dozens of different national contingents; Moroccans, Turks, French, British, Hungarian. I got to know the combat fatigue patterns of all the different armies. There were also contingents of police officers from many nations. They were supposed to be training the Bosnian cops, investigating human rights violations, protecting polling places, and patrolling. This police body was called the IPTF. Some of my more interesting consular duties arose in connection with the American members of the IPTF. The other nations that contributed to the IPTF usually detailed members of their national police forces, for example; Caribinieri from Italy and the Garda Siochana from Ireland, Gendarmerie from France, and so forth. The United States, however, doesn't have a

national police force. DynCorp had the contract to recruit Americans to serve on the IPTF. Many of the police they brought over for the IPTF initially were retired American cops. A number of them were not in very good physical shape. They were older and kind of heavy and they didn't seem to have anything like the background you would need to participate in this high-profile international program. Some of them were good in spite of that, but many of them weren't. Later on they started recruiting police from the active police forces, which seemed to bring in better recruits; they'd get unpaid leave from the force they were on. The foreign police were not just from France and Italy and Ireland; they were also from India and Ghana and Bangladesh and other places. The Bosnian cops resented being "trained" by officers from countries the Bosnians considered primitive and backward. However, I thought the police from India, for example, had a lot of experience with communal violence and probably got a fairly good feel for what was going on in Bosnia.

We got a lot of visa applications from the IPTF police from high-fraud, high refusal countries. I remember one of the Ghanaian police who came in his policeman's uniform, his blue UN beret, and his armband, to apply for a visa. I asked him what he did with the Ghanaian police. He was a house painter. The police provided housing for their policemen and he painted the houses. He had somehow, through connections, gotten this marvelous assignment to Bosnia. The UN assignment was really prized by these cops because of the money they made. The appeal wasn't just financial; Bosnia was still a rather lawless place, with plenty of opportunity for misconduct. Did I mention that the IPTF members had diplomatic immunity? There was one IPTF cop, an American, who was involved with a Moldovan prostitute. There were a lot of Eastern European prostitutes that came into Bosnia. Many of them were trafficked, to service the international community. This particular cop and his Moldovan girlfriend were, I was told by another IPTF officer, running whore houses. One of the bent IPTF cops was recalled to the United States, but he had some kind of influence and he showed up again a year later. I'm sorry to say that there were well-documented instances of Americans— IPTF officers, Department of Defense contractors, and so forth— buying women from their traffickers for their own use. Guys of other nationalities were just as bad. Eventually the IPTF began expelling some of the sleazier members, but these activities certainly didn't serve as much of an integrity model for the Bosnian police.

Certain of the IPTF officers, however, worked very effectively on trafficking, despite the efforts of some of their superiors to downplay its importance. In one case, I helped an American IPTF officer get INS authorization to resettle in the USA a trafficked woman who testified against her pimp and his gang. It was pretty dramatic stuff; they were threatening her right there at the courthouse. The ambassador's wife also took an interest in that case. That same American officer blew the whistle on others in the IPTF and the international community who were using trafficked women. DynCorp fired her; afraid of the bad publicity, I suppose. She sued, and won.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

SIDES: Ambassador Miller. His wife was Bonnie. When we arrived in Sarajevo, Richard Kauzlarich was the ambassador. His tour ended and he was replaced by Tom Miller. So I worked for both of those gentlemen.

Q: What was the consular work like?

SIDES: The consular work was really interesting. I should say that one of the reasons I took the Bosnian assignment was because I had found my participation in the early part of the war really shocking and traumatic. I still think about it often, and dream of it sometimes. I wanted to return to the region when the war was over. I felt I needed some kind of closure, and to do something positive. The consular FSN's were great to work with. They had lived through all kinds of extraordinary experiences and hardships. They were desperate to get their lives back, to fix up their damaged homes, to get married, to have children, or finish their education. All the women in my office had worked in the UN in various areas and jobs during the war. The young man who worked in my office had been in the Bosnian army. They were very resourceful, and a great help to me in my work. We had Americans who appeared in our consular district trying to pursue adoptions, for example. The Bosnian government wouldn't permit any international adoptions at that point. They felt they had lost enough children in the war. They weren't about to give up any. We had a parental child abduction case, and went to court, invoking the Hague Convention for the first time in Bosnia, to get a very active little four year old boy back to his mother in New York. We had a fair number of CODELs. The Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, used to come quite a lot. There were a number of international conferences in Bosnia while I was there, which we were involved in supporting. We had the usual run of problematic visa cases involving students wanting to go to the United States on one of the many exchange programs that were set up by kind, well-intentioned organizations to bring Bosnian kids to the United States, let them experience international life and further their education. The idea was that the kids would return to Bosnia to help rebuild their country. However, the Bosnian children and their parents did not always share the goals of the exchange organizations. Many parents so desperately wanted their children to get a foothold overseas that they would sell the family land to pay the fees that these exchange organizations charged for matching children with exchange programs. The kids, and even their American sponsors, would try desperately to extend their stays beyond the one or two year limit authorized by the visa. I had to talk to many sponsors and several congressional representatives, explaining the terms and conditions of exchange programs. We had a big refugee program going on in Bosnia; the same one I initiated in Croatia in 1993. But by this point, the war was over. Our policy was to help people to return to their pre-war homes. We found out from people who worked in refugee processing organizations that there was vast fraud going on in these programs. Bosnians who were not displaced by war but wanted for various reasons to leave the country would pay facilitators to help them create a false cover story supporting a claim to refugee status. It was quite a lucrative business. There were taxi drivers who would drive them to the border, because one couldn't apply for refugee status in one's own country. People would pay for accommodation addresses in Croatia, at a friend's home or a bed and breakfast. The taxi driver who drove them would play in the taxi a taped narrative of a day in the life of a detention camp so people would have a

persuasive story; ex-detainees had priority for refugee resettlement. We found out about these methods from real ex-detainees, who were outraged. The refugee resettlement organizations knew they were dealing with fraud, but they were under pressure from their headquarters to keep the numbers of issuances up; otherwise they'd lose their funding and the program would close down. You know, the "rice bowl" syndrome. I did a series of cables on fraud in the program and it was closed down. However, it had served its purpose. The ordinary visa work went on. We saw a lot of people applying for nonimmigrant visas to go and visit relatives or friends whom we had already sent to the United States on the refugee program. It was very difficult to evaluate people's ties to Bosnia when they had been through a lot in the war and had not really gotten their lives back together. Our refusal rate was about 30%. It probably could have been higher.

Q: Did you have much of a problem with Americans getting into trouble?

SIDES: Fortunately, we had very few Americans there who were not official in one way or another. You didn't get much tourism in Bosnia in those days. The non-military Americans mostly worked for the UN as IPTF police, or as contractors doing things like military aircraft maintenance. As I've said, some were badly in need of adult supervision, but they seldom ended up in jail. We had one very serious case involving a mentally disturbed American citizen of Afghan origin who came to Bosnia looking to get involved with jihad. He had wild hair and a long beard. The Bosnian authorities arrested him for illegal entry. He was interviewed by the Bosnian police and also people from our side. It was apparent to us that the poor guy was mentally ill, probably schizophrenic. His sister came out from Arizona to help him. She brought his medication. We assisted her in hiring a Bosnian lawyer. The court released him to his sister. She was taking him back to the United States and he ran away from her at the Frankfurt airport. I don't know what ever happened to him.

Q: Did you have a normal social life in Bosnia at the time?

SIDES: We had a great embassy community. Our social life was mostly with them, although we also made many friends with other people in the international community. Randy taught English to adults, so we became very close to some of them and their friends. They were lovely people. Americans were very popular in Bosnia for obvious reasons. When we bombed Belgrade, I was distressed by the sight of our bombers overhead, flying east, because I dreaded the thought that my former colleagues or my college friend in Belgrade might be killed by our bombs. The Sarajevans, however, were delighted to see Serbia getting hit. Randy got a free taxi ride that day. A vendor in the marketplace gave me a nice, fat cabbage and wouldn't accept payment. Although life was hard for us in the first couple of years, in our last year at Sarajevo the conditions, particularly the water and the electricity supply, had really improved, and there was a lot more variety of food. We had lots of friends and had a happy embassy community. Ambassador Tom Miller was a very energetic guy who believed in the power of personal example. Our policy supported the right of people to return to the communities from which they'd been expelled during the war. Many brave people were, in fact, trying to return to their prewar homes, sometimes risking attack by hostile neighbors. The

ambassador invited his staff to join him and his wife in going to these communities, and spending a day with the returnees who were restoring their homes. We would accompany a Bosniak Muslim family to a Serbian-majority village and we would help them clean the rubble out of the house that the Serbs had destroyed or blown up, mixing cement or laying block or whatever. Our purpose was not just to lend moral support, but to underline the message that the international community was watching what was going on, that we weren't going to let these people be victimized again. We helped returnees of all three ethnic groups return to their homes. The most interesting village trip we did was when we went to Srebrenica, scene of a notorious massacre in 1995. Once majority Muslim, it was now in Serbian-controlled territory. By 2000, a number of Muslim families were trying to resettle in their old homes in Srebrenica. This one Muslim guy had been burned out twice trying to go back, but he wanted to try it again. The ambassador invited volunteers to join a working party to go and help this guy with his house. We went to Srebrenica with our work gloves and boots and tools. The atmosphere was very tense. The U.S. Army peacekeeping element in Bosnia sent a squad of soldiers with a military vehicle that had a machine gun on it. They parked it on the ridge above the town in case anybody should try to harm us. Nobody interfered with us, and the guy eventually rebuilt his home. I also volunteered to be an election monitor. I used to go to these little towns, some of which were really hostile to Americans, and watch the voting. They would bring busloads of displaced Muslims who used to live there back to vote. Meanwhile, the Serbians who were displaced from Muslim-held territory would be bused back to their home towns to vote. It was sad to see these people peering out the bus windows trying to see the town in which they'd spent most of their prewar lives. I had a couple of local embassy staff with me on one of my election monitoring projects. One of them, the translator, was a Muslim from Foca, and had volunteered for the monitoring mission so she could safely revisit the town from which she'd fled. She asked if we could go to the apartment she had occupied. It was over a shop. The Serb shopkeeper who now lived in her apartment courteously gave her some photograph albums and things she'd left behind when she left. The shopkeeper was displaced from Sarajevo, and sadly asked about cafes and shops he'd frequented when he lived there. There were so many things in Bosnia that would make you weep! We also monitored in Visegrad, and got to see the famous old Turkish bridge.

Q: The bridge over the Drina. There is a marvelous book by…

SIDES: …by Ivo Andric, I have read it. We actually went on the bridge, my driver, my translator, and I, and sat on the stone bench which they call the "sofa." We sat on the bench because we could. Terrible things happened in Visegrad and Foca during the war. People were thrown off the famous old bridge in Visegrad, and into the Drina. There was a seafood restaurant near the bridge. We ate at the restaurant but didn't order any fish. The food chain, you see.

Q: Could you go into the Republic of Serbska?

SIDES: Yes. We always told the RSO where we were going.

Q: The Regional Security Officer.

SIDES: The security officer at the embassy always knew where we were going. If they thought things were particularly tense we wouldn't go. I went to Banja Luka once or twice. It was the capital of the Serbian entity, Republika Srpska. Randy and I went on a business trip to Mostar. It was a tense town, badly damaged. The Croats lived on one side of the river, the Muslims on the other. The destruction of the lovely old Turkish bridge that had united the two halves of the town was a perfect metaphor, of course. Although the war had been over since 1996, it was certainly not a peaceful country. Many of the things we in the international community—we called ourselves the "IC" — tried to do had unexpected consequences. During the war, the old Ferhat Pasha mosque in Banja Luka was leveled. In 2001 the Muslims, with the support of the IC, got a permit to rebuild it. There was to be a ceremony for the cornerstone laying. A lot of dignitaries came, the Cardinal, the head mufti of the Muslim religion, all sorts of mayors, diplomats, and the High Representative of the UN and such. The local Serbs interpreted the reconstruction of the mosque as a provocation. Their leaders stirred up a drunken mob of mostly young people. Some of them were teenagers. They attacked the site. The dignitaries took refuge in the mufti's house next door. Ambassador Miller had arrived late. As he approached, he saw the riot going on. In fact, some of the crowd charged at him and pelted stones. So he hustled back to the embassy's representative office in Banja Luka and started calling around trying to get some police and secure the site. The riot finally was broken up by the Republika Srpska police, but somebody was killed.

On another occasion, a team of forensic auditors from an American company was investigating a bank that laundered money for a Croat extremist faction in Mostar. The Croats pulled together a flash mob, long before there was text mail, mind you, and attacked these auditors. They had to be rescued and evacuated out of the country very quickly. I did emergency passports for some of them. They were beat up and bruised, robbed and some had their glasses broken. Fortunately nobody was killed. That was Bosnia; one minute it was peaceful and the next minute the "govno" would hit the fan. You never knew what your day would be like. It was a fascinating tour.

Q: How did you feel about this? You left Sarajevo in 2001.

SIDES: Yeah.

Q: When you left, how did you feel?

SIDES: Oh, I felt a lot better than when I left Croatia in '93. I think I did my best work in those years, and particularly in Bosnia, building up and creating the consular section, training the local staff, serving as an election monitor, protecting American citizens and working on reversing ethnic cleansing. It was very fulfilling also for my husband as a teacher. His students were mostly adults whose personal and professional lives had been upended by the war. They were very motivated learners, and such nice people. Many of his students wanted to learn English because they hoped to go to abroad, but at least they

had a future, and an opportunity engage their minds after the struggle for survival during the war years.

I worked for two good ambassadors, particularly Mr. Miller, who was very dynamic. I left Bosnia with a great sense of satisfaction that I had been part of a great and largely successful effort to wind down the war, make it possible for people to return to their pre-war homes, and bring a measure of stability to Bosnia Herzegovina. Bosnia is still very fragile, but we did, as the song says, "give peace a chance."

Q: OK, well let's pick this up next time in 2001, what did you do?

SIDES: In July, 2001 I went to Belgrade.

Q: My god.

SIDES: Yes, as a result of my tour in Bosnia, I was offered an assignment to the War College. In fact, I was about to be paneled. That would have been the fast track for me, career-wise. I knew, however, that I'd never make the upper levels of the Service. Even in the unlikely event that the career stars were well-aligned, there was that loyalty oath business back in Florida. No way would I have been confirmed. Embassy Belgrade, which had been closed since 1999, was being reopened, consular services were being reestablished, and I couldn't resist the challenge. I was always drawn to adventure and challenge more than career advancement.

Q: All right, let's take a look at that. Today is 8 December 2010 with Ann Sides. Did I ask you about, I think we covered Sarajevo.

SIDES: We finished Sarajevo and I was just about to go to Belgrade.

Q: I wanted to ask one more question. I may have asked before because there were articles about how terribly corrupt the government was there. Did we cover that?

SIDES: I don't think we did.

Q: Was there a level of corruption that affected your work?

SIDES: There was a certain degree of corruption that existed all over the former Yugoslavia. It wasn't solely about money, but also the trading of influence and favors. It was actually quite difficult to get anything done in a normal, legal, transparent way. The war certainly made people worse and not better in that regard. Early in the war, many of Sarajevo's defenses were organized and manned by organized crime gangs, who had a chain of command and firepower. However, the defenders also engaged in extortion, kidnapping, theft, drug trafficking, prostitution and whatever else the war made possible for them. The Bosnian authorities had eventually had to surround the city and drive the criminals out. Quite a few were shot. That doesn't mean that corruption disappeared. For example, many of the Mujahideen types who came to Bosnia during the war ended up

with Bosnian passports and citizenship documents to which they were not entitled. Whether they got them through corruption, or the Bosnians gave them to them for political reasons I am not sure. Perhaps both. It was a mistake that caused the Bosnians serious problems later on. Some of the Muj were using Bosnia as a base to do mischief elsewhere in Europe.

Q: Did you observe Muslim fundamentalist freedom fighters or whatever you call them trying to slip into the United States?

SIDES: I daresay they tried. Mainly they used their Bosnian papers to get into other European countries. We never issued visas to people who were so-called naturalized Bosnian citizens from outside the old Yugoslavia. They seldom applied because they knew they'd be refused.

Q: All right well, you're not yet out of the Yugoslavian swamp.

SIDES. The whole region was under my consular jurisdiction at one time or another.

Q: So you are off to…

SIDES: …to Belgrade.

Q: From when to when?

SIDES: I arrived in August of 2001, and I remained there until August of 2004.

Q: OK, what was the situation? I mean I assume you asked for this.

SIDES: I did ask for it, fool that I was! I had learned the language relatively well. I couldn't speak it fluently but I certainly got along. It seemed like Serbia, post-Milosevic, post-Kosovo, was where the last chapter of the Yugoslavia collapse would play out. Having been in at the beginning of the breakup, I wanted to stay with it and see how it ended. Once I got the assignment to Belgrade, but before I completed my tour in Sarajevo, I went over to Belgrade on a consultation trip for a few days. At the time, the embassy was still set up on a floor of a hotel. I think it was the Intercontinental. The ambassador had an office at the end of the hall. The consular section was a couple of rooms and a copying machine that was balanced on boards over the bathtub. There were two FSN's handling emergency citizen services and things like that. The consul general who had served in Belgrade before the embassy closed was there on an interim assignment, but preparing to depart. The mission was getting ready to clean out the embassy compound, which had been abandoned in March, 1999, and move back into it. I'm referring to the building on Kneza Milosa Boulevard, which the mission had occupied since the end of World War II. The consular section was at the front of the building, facing the street.

Q: My old department.

SIDES: When I served there in 91-92, as in your era, the compound was a hollow square with housing—staff apartments—around the sides, and the chancery offices above the consulate, facing the boulevard. There was a restaurant at the back and motor pool garage below, as well as a nice commissary. Everything was quite shipshape in 1992; not so in 2001. Going back into an abandoned embassy is quite an experience. It had been empty for three years. When the decision was made to bomb Belgrade in March, 1999, the remaining embassy staff had to pull the plug pretty quickly. They destroyed the classified materials, and anything else remaining that couldn't be taken away with them, pulled down the flag, and they were gone. We didn't have a protecting power to take care of the place. So when we returned to the embassy, there were old yellow curling calendars from 1999 still on the walls. Pipes had burst and there was mold everywhere. The Serbian authorities had gotten in and painted slogans. I can read Serbian, and had no difficulty understanding what we were being requested to do with ourselves, an anatomically difficult act. They did relatively little damage to the consular section, which kind of intrigued me. It was my thought that even then they expected to restore consular relations first.

Q: The consulate was practically in the basement.

SIDES: Yes, it was in the lower part of the chancery. The Serbs had pried up the hard drives on the computers so their tops looked like clams that had been opened. People's food—the icky remains—was still in the refrigerators and stuff was still in their desk drawers. The manuals were torn and tossed on the floor. By the time I returned to Belgrade after finishing my tour in Sarajevo and taking home leave, the mission had just returned to the embassy. This was August, 2001. They had refurbished it enough that people could move in. They decided for security reasons not to reoccupy the front part of the building, facing Kneza Milosa Boulevard, because the setback was just the width of the sidewalk. The exception was the consular section. There was no place else to put us and the hardline walls and counters we needed for our work were still standing. So, we were there on the main avenue, in this particularly vulnerable spot as it turned out.

Q: The building, by the way, was considered somewhat dangerous because it had been weakened by the bombing in 1940.

SIDES: Yeah, well the bombing in 1999 didn't help either.

Q: In 1940, when the Germans bombed Belgrade, it had been an old apartment building and it had been somewhat damaged structurally during that. We were all very much aware of this.

SIDES: In 1999 we bombed the defense ministry, which was just about 100 yards up the boulevard from the embassy. In the process, we damaged the foreign ministry across the street from the defense building. The Serbian diplomats used to remind us of this; they weren't too happy about it, broken windows and stuff, and some damage to the heating system. Maybe that's why all our meetings there were in ice-cold offices. They were

lucky they got off with so little damage, considering how close they were to the targeted building.

Q: ...And considering what we did to the Chinese embassy.

SIDES: Yeah, that was a bad show. In Sarajevo I met the Chinese ambassador who had built that embassy in Belgrade. What can you say, it was an accident, but they didn't think so. Some of their staff were killed. Anyway, our consular section was in the front of the embassy building, and all the rest of the offices around us were vacant and abandoned. The chancery area, where the ambassador, DCM, political section, and so forth worked, had been relocated to the former staff apartments. In order to get the embassy going, some compromises were made with what would have been normal security procedures. For example, in the political section they had the FSN assistants and translators sitting in the same office area with the officers and the American secretary. It was not an ideal situation, but Ambassador Montgomery was keen to get us reopened and operating as normally as possible. It was important to show confidence in the new, democratic government led by Zoran Djindjic. Many of us in the embassy had served in the old Yugoslavia and we were eager reestablish good working relationships with a place and a people we really cared about.

Q: Excuse me, you came back there when?

SIDES: August of 2001.

Q: Go ahead.

SIDES: I knew the consular FSNs from my previous tour in Belgrade, and I was quite looking forward to working with them again. They'd been through a lot in the 10 years since I'd left them. Many of them had gone to the United States on refugee program and returned when the Milosevic government fell. Those who had stayed had often been harassed by the police and by their neighbors. Some of the guys had been on the run to avoid being conscripted into the Bosnian War or the conflict with Kosovo. Many of them had been laid off their jobs for years during the conflict period. I may have underestimated their level of anxiety in adjusting to the present. The war didn't just damage buildings. I think it damaged the Serbian staff psychologically. My staff was divided into factions and, although they did their jobs conscientiously, managing them presented many challenges. They tended to be very suspicious and distrustful, and to think the worst of others and their motives. I've been told that this is typical of Serbs even in good times. If so, the war certainly didn't make things better. Nevertheless, we were able to restore full consular services by October 1, 2001.

There was, however, an intervening event that was to change many of our procedures. On September 11, I was scheduled to have my new office furniture installed. I was waiting for it to be delivered and not getting much done, so I decided to catch up on my courtesy calls. I walked over to the German Consulate. It was located nearby, in what had been the DDR embassy. I chatted briefly with my counterpart, the CG. When I got back to my

office, the staff was gathered, looking very anxious and upset. I was used to a certain level of drama in the office, but this was different. The staff said they'd heard reports on the radio about a plane or planes crashing into the World Trade Center, relatives and friends were calling, giving them updates from television; it sounded almost apocalyptic. I tried to reassure them, telling them the press sometimes gets it wrong, and the whole thing, while a tragic accident, was probably exaggerated. I asked whether my furniture was set up yet. But the phones kept ringing, and the FSN's were so upset I told them I'd go find out what really happened. I went across the courtyard to the communications office. There was a TV there, in the outer area by the message lockers. CNN was on. I stood there alone watching it with my mouth hanging open. CNN was showing the second plane flying into the burning Trade Center. I thought, Holy Shit! How could that happen? Are we under attack? I grabbed a phone and called home. I very quickly told Randy "Turn on CNN," hung up, and ran upstairs to where the ambassador and DCM offices were. Everybody else, all the Americans in the embassy, were standing in the outer office watching this awful thing happening on TV. CNN was reporting the State Department had been evacuated, something about a car bomb. There was a lot of misinformation that flew around in the confusion. The ambassador was talking to the regional security officer. "What do you think we should do? Should we close the chancery? Have we had any threats?" He was concerned, and rightly so, that there might be coordinated attacks against our overseas missions. At that point, the TV announced a plane had hit the Pentagon. We sent the staff home. We really did not know what we were dealing with. The Department was not answering. We called neighboring U.S. embassies in the region to find out what they were doing and if they'd had any threats. The guard around the embassy was reinforced. We all felt very helpless; our country attacked, and we were far from home and not knowing what might happen next.

The following day we set up a condolence book in the consular lobby inside the front entrance of the embassy. A guy in the maintenance section had a framed poster of the World Trade Center in his office. It was perfect; a beautiful, somber photo in black and white with dramatic shadows falling on the angles of the Twin Towers. We put this poster on the wall in front of a table with the leather-bound condolence book we'd been saving for when Ronald Reagan died. We American staff took turns receiving visitors who came to sign the condolence book. They kept coming for about three days; members of the foreign diplomatic and business community, of course, but also, to our surprise, many Serbian people. Americans weren't exactly the flavor of the month in Belgrade since the bombing, but people came, and signed, and even left little bouquets.

Q: I remember November 22, 1963 when President Kennedy was killed.

SIDES: You were in Belgrade then?

Q: Well, actually I was in Austria on leave, and I returned home on hearing that. We had a condolence book and all that. Tito came and signed it.

SIDES: I was really touched by their sympathy.

Q: I would think there would be a bit of Schaedenfreude.

SIDES: The pleasure one takes in the misfortune of others? Well, yes, I suppose.

Q: Serves you right; you bombed us and you got it too.

SIDES: Well if that is what they thought, it is not what they said. As you remarked, they were good about death. Even people who really hated each other would treat the death in a family with respect. Everybody went to funerals; everybody was sympathetic. That was a precept of honorable behavior in their society. So even if their thought was, "It serves you right," certainly the Serbs didn't say that. They behaved with respect and decency towards us.

Q: How did this change your professional life?

SIDES: Well in consular work of course, the immediate effect was that the State Department and the immigration service began changing many of the procedures we had taken for granted as consular officials. For example, we'd been encouraged, for reasons of efficiency, only to interview visa applicants who appeared problematic or who might have an ineligibility. Post-9/11, efficiency took a back seat to security, and we had to start interviewing everybody, even if they'd had many visas before. Name checks were done much more thoroughly. All sorts of new technologies were introduced, like facial recognition software. Mary Ryan, the much-esteemed Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, was canned. Once she fingered the intelligence community for stove-piping information we might have used to refuse visas to the 9/11 hijackers, the knives were out. It was particularly sad because she had introduced so many of the technological advances that had made our borders safer. She recognized the potential of the information revolution of the early 90's and got smart people to adapt it to consular procedures. I much regretted her departure and felt it was a great injustice to one of the greater figures in the Foreign Service.

Q: I have to say, I think like a good number of us who had consular roots, you can't help but notice that the one public figure to be basically forced out was Mary Ryan, a consular officer and a woman. The same way they couldn't help but note that with the Iraq invasion of Kuwait, that April Glaspie, being a woman ambassador was sort of tagged with this.

SIDES: It is interesting to hear you, a man, say that because many of the women in the foreign service…

Q: Well the political types and the powers that be in Washington left, right or center, they can be mean and vicious, and particularly if it is woman, it makes it easier.

SIDES: Under its veneer of civility, the State Department is pretty cut-throat, and the farther you get up the greasy pole, the tougher you have to be. If you are a woman, you have to be a certain kind of woman to stay at the front of the pack. Mary was a rather

gentle person, kind, religious, but she was also smart and tough. She had a shit list; woe betide those who got on it. However, she was not prepared to scapegoat any of her consular people to satisfy the need to fix blame for 9/11. I don't know what April Glaspie was like, but the women who have done best in the service in my view were women who were extremely smooth and had appealingly feminine exteriors, but were very competitive, strong-willed individuals.

Q: Yeah, and anyway Colin Powell does not rank at the top of my list of Secretaries of State for two reasons. One, was he didn't stand up to the President and Cheney over the Iraq business and the other one was he fired Mary Ryan. Both of these signified caving in to the political realities. I think he was more of a political general than what you call a combat general. He had many great qualities but ____

SIDES: Well, I don't want to criticize Mr. Powell. He did some good things for the Department and its employees, but what happened to Mary Ryan was wrong. She was screwed. But beyond Mary Ryan's downfall, the big change that 9/11 brought about in consular work was that our concern in visa work pre 9/11 had always been determining whether the applicant was an intending immigrant. After 9/11 it was whether they were an intending terrorist. On the American citizen's services side, we also made some very significant changes in passport procedures, and security took priority over customer service. Pre 9/11, if your passport expired or was lost abroad you could go to the American Embassy and get it replaced the same day. After 9/11, passport issuance was centralized in the United States. You can still apply at the embassy, but the application is, in effect, e-mailed to the USA, and the completed passport sent back by courier. It takes about a week. The new passports have digitized photos that can't easily be substituted, and embedded microchips to deter identity fraud. You can't get a visa the same day, either. Even people who have had many visas before have to submit all ten fingers for scanning and a digitized photo for facial recognition, and pay a higher fee to cover the costs of these procedures. It takes one working day to get a visa, minimum; often it can take months. When I started consular work, we issued the visa the same day, sometimes the same hour as the applicant came in. Having to interview everybody, without exception, meant we then had to have bigger staffs and larger waiting areas. We had to contract with call centers to handle appointments and collect the fees. Some posts initially were backed up for months on appointment scheduling. It took a long time and a lot of careful thought and planning to make it all work. Fortunately, the new Assistant Secretary was Maura Harty, who had been Mary Ryan's deputy and knew consular work very well. The changes post 9/11 really made our borders safer and our working tools much more sophisticated. But for me personally it wasn't an easy transition. I am from the ballpoint pen generation. I do not have an instinctive grasp of the possibilities of automation, the way young folks do today. I learned to use it, but never truly understood it. The technology became so sophisticated that I found that while once I could do every single job in the consular section, from making a passport to printing a visa, I was supervising people whose jobs I couldn't actually do. I began to think about retirement.

Q: Was there, I mean we had the 9/11 and the threat of terrorism. But we had also been at war with Yugoslavia, with Serbia really. I mean we bombed the hell out of them. Were the Milosevic adherents put on our "don't issue" list or was that…

SIDES: We had many of those people on our lookout list. They weren't the only detritus left over from the Milosevic era, however. Milosevic's supporters included criminal gangs and syndicates. He was in The Hague awaiting trial by the time I got to Belgrade, but the criminal gangs were still active. They were like a cancer, eating away at Serbia and trying to gain dominance over the reform government that replaced the Milosevic regime. The danger these people posed was demonstrated very dramatically in March, 2002, when one of them assassinated Prime Minister Djindjic. On that particular day the weather was mild, the snow was melting, and I decided to go out for lunch. When I came out after eating, I noticed all of a sudden the streets started to empty. Shop owners were pulling down shutters, people were talking very anxiously, and there were a lot of sirens. I saw the police setting up roadblocks, never a good sign. I went back to the office and my FSN's were standing around shocked and pale, and they said that Prime Minister Djindjic had just been shot to death two blocks away at the entrance to a Serbian government building. It was an organized crime hit, because Djindjic was trying to shut down the criminal organizations that had flourished under the Milosevic era. A sniper shot him from the window of a nearby high rise. Djindjic's death led to a lot of public anger against organized crime figures, who had been really flaunting their wealth and power and their seeming impunity. A number of conspirators and the shooter himself were convicted of the crime. Some of the others were killed by the special police. They were connected to a notorious figure called "Legia" who ran a gang in a Belgrade suburb, Zemun.

Q: Were there any reflections or claims against us or anything like that because of the bombing?

SIDES: If there were, they didn't come to my attention. The claims I had to deal with had to do with property that had been confiscated by the communists right after WWII. After the fall of Milosevic and the end of communism in Yugoslavia, many of those people who had left Yugoslavia as children or as young adults or in some cases never left at all but were U.S. citizens, came to the consular section and asked the U.S. government to help them get back the confiscated property. Protection of U.S. citizens and their property is a consular responsibility, and I did all I could to help them. However, I know that some of my colleagues in the political and economic sections wished I'd knock it off. The restitution campaigners were somewhat successful in scaring off foreign investors by brandishing their pre-war ownership documents and threatening to tie up the projects in court. The restitution issue was particularly difficult to address because properties confiscated from our American claimants by the communists had sometimes been converted into public housing. The claimants had difficulty getting courts even to receive their cases. The Serbian government eventually offered our claimants some government bonds as compensation, but they weren't satisfied.

Q: Back in the 60's I was working on property damage done supposedly by the Germans and the Italians during WWII. There was a war claims tribunal that sent out people to go investigate property for so called damage and all that. So these things have long lives.

SIDES: The shadows of the past are very long. One of the American citizen claimants I came to know rather well was a retired banker who had left Yugoslavia as a teenager. He and his parents, well-off people, were thrown out of their house by ex-partisans right after the Second World War. The communists also confiscated a hotel the family owned in downtown Belgrade, the site of which now is worth a fortune. The Serbian government and Belgrade municipality were selling off the communist-era state property to private investors, something our economic section encouraged. My American citizens were trying to get back the property they claimed before the authorities sold it. The Israelis were particularly active in Belgrade buying up property from the Serbian state, and were making a lot of investments there. This kind of got us tangled up with the Israeli embassy which was trying to protect its citizens and their investments. I used to write talking points for every high level U.S. government visitor to use when talking to the Serbian authorities, trying to keep them from selling off the claimed properties until a fair settlement was made. It was a very difficult issue. Part of the embassy building was claimed by a Serbian gentleman who said he had been born in it before the communists took it and gave it to us.

Q: Did you observe through the visa process, your contacts, and all, a return to Serbia of young people who left during the Milosevic time or…

SIDES: You know there was. Certainly that was true of our FSN's. About half of our local staff left on refugee program. They were resettled in the USA because they were being harassed by the Milosevic government. A number of them returned to Belgrade after the regime was overthrown. Many of them still had apartments, family and property there. They were able in many cases to reclaim their jobs at the embassy. So yeah, people came back. Of course, some returned people were disappointed. They found that many of the weaknesses and impediments to progress in the new state called "Serbia and Montenegro" were the same ones that had existed under the old Yugoslavia. These impediments weren't just political; they were cultural, and they were deeply ingrained. But yes, people did come back. Also, young people who go abroad to the U.S. or elsewhere to study now tend to return, more and more, to their homes in Serbia. Family ties are strong, and the future is looking a lot better for them.

Q: You were there until 2004?

SIDES: Yes.

Q: What was the situation with Montenegro?

SIDES: Montenegro at the time was still in our consular district, but it had begun creating its own institutions and pulling itself away from Serbia. During the latter years of the Milosevic era we had assisted the Montenegrin government in establishing a strong, very

well armed police force to try and keep Serbia from just occupying it. Montenegrins who had been in the old foreign service of Yugoslavia slipped into jobs in the Montenegrin federal government and began creating the nucleus of a diplomatic service. So when I talked with them and dealt with them, we were dealing with each other as diplomats even though Montenegro did not at that time exist as a recognized nation separate from Serbia. They were beginning to print their own stamps, and they started using the Euro as currency rather than the Yugoslav dinar. So they had broken away monetarily, philatelically and many other ways. It was only a matter of time until they gained independence. Our tiny consulate there was an embassy-in-waiting.

Q: Their capital was Podgorica?

SIDES: Podgorica. In your time it was called Titograd. Podgorica was the historic, pre-communist name, and it was restored in 1992.

Q: Podgorica means under…

SIDES: Under the hill, under the mountain. Yeah, there were certainly a lot of hills in Montenegro. It is a very mountainous country, quite beautiful, and the people are remarkably tall. A lot of them play basketball, some for the NBA. But at the time, Podgorica was a kind of a tawdry little place with a lot of noisy bars and coffee shops and shabby high-rise apartments from the socialist era. There was a university, but I wouldn't consider it the intellectual capital of the Balkans by any means.

Q: What about social security and railroad retirement checks. Was this…

SIDES: It had been quite a problem during the time of the sanctions. We mailed out people's federal benefits checks from the embassy directly to their homes. But after the fall of Milosevic, foreign banks started coming in and setting up operations. Raiffeisen Bank, the Austrian bank for example, was very well represented in the region and the French bank, Société Générale as well. So people could establish hard currency accounts and get their social security checks directly deposited.

Q: One of the great pleasures there for me was going on trips out to little villages around and doing social security investigations.

SIDES: Making sure the bennies are still alive…

Q: Was this still going on?

SIDES: I didn't have much time to do that, because we were so busy, so I usually assigned other people to do it, but it was definitely being done. The vice consuls used to enjoy these village visits. We also had prisoners that had to be visited four times a year. Which reminds me, we did our first prisoner exchange, sending a convicted American murderer back to the USA to finish his sentence. The exchange procedure was new, but it was made possible by a consular treaty we'd made with the Kingdom of Serbia.

Q: 1882.

SIDES: Yes, I think that's right. The convicted guy was a U.S. citizen from Chicago, but Serbian-born, who came back to the homeland on some family matter. It was a typical Serbian thing, a dispute about land, and he shot and killed his ex-sister-in-law and her father and the bailiff who accompanied them to the disputed property. He was lucky he did it in Serbia; in the USA he'd have been executed. Two U.S. federal prison officials come out from the United States, collected him, and took him back on the airplane in chains. It was quite a sight.

Q: Were you having problems with American tourists, or was this pretty much off the tourist track?

SIDES: It was very off the tourist track. Tourists were just beginning to show some interest toward the end of my tour in Belgrade. Circle Lines, the river cruise company, began to cruise the Danube and make stops in Vukovar, so people could gawk at the war damage, and in Belgrade. The river cruisers were scholarly older people and caused us no difficulty. The Serbian-Americans seldom needed help from us, with the exception of the restitution campaigners and the prisoners. We did have some problems with U.S. citizens in Kosovo, which was in our consular district. One of the consular cases I remember very well involved three brothers who were from the United States. They were of Kosovar ethnic origin, and spoke Albanian. They were young and impetuous and decided to go to Kosovo to fight for the homeland. When the fighting with the Serbians ended, they hung around, and they made the mistake of going into Serbian territory, accompanying friends. They must have thought their American citizenship would protect them. You remember the case; the Bytici Brothers.

Q: Sremska Mitrovica or some place.

SIDES: It wasn't Sremska Mitrovica, I think it was Petrovo Selo where the bodies were found. They were arrested for a border violation. Right after they were released they were picked up and extra-judicially executed by Serbian police. They were found in a mass grave with their hands wired behind their backs. The officer primarily responsible for the crime fled to Russia. One of our projects, once the bodies were identified, was to press for the prosecution of those who did the crime. But the first problem was identifying the bodies and things like that and communicating with the families. It was sad; three lives wasted. The main perpetrator, Vlastimir Djordjevic, was eventually caught and convicted at The Hague, but that was long after I'd left Serbia.

Q: You had this Kosovo thing which must have set off on your staff all sorts of nationalistic feelings.

SIDES: I am sure they had feelings about it. However, they had learned to keep their feelings to themselves in the work place. They never said much to me about politics. My senior American Citizen Services FSN was very conscientious about pursuing the truth

about the Bytici brothers case. Many decent Serbian people—even if they shared the common antipathy for ethnic Albanians, and considered Kosovo the Serbian homeland—were ashamed of what was done there.

Q: What about American officers? Did you, I assume you had some rather junior officers there?

SIDES: Actually, at first it was only I and one other officer, who was the DCM's wife. Rather an awkward situation for all of us, but she was a competent consular officer and spoke the language fluently. Then we got a couple of junior officers once we got the visa operation up and running again. We were very busy all the time. I often had to work the window myself.

Q: Did you find that when you began to get the junior officers in they began to absorb, did they have problems working in that environment or not?

SIDES: I thought they were all very professional One in particular was a Serbian-American, spoke very fluent Serbian. Whatever his thoughts were or not he was very correct and professional in his work.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

SIDES: The ambassador was Bill Montgomery.

Q: There was a scandal connected with him, as I recall.

SIDES: There were some sensational newspaper stories and he curtailed his tour. I have no idea what was or was not true. One of the Serbian FSNs worked in the political section and acted as his translator. She was attractive. Supposedly there was an affair and she was reporting to the host government. He was unpopular within the embassy and had lots of enemies outside, as one might expect, given the times. People talked. Whatever the situation was or wasn't, I think the Serbians set it up or manipulated the story in some way to embarrass him. They were masters of disinformation. They trashed each other and they trashed us.

Q: How did you get along with him and the political section and all? Did you have problems with, "You have got to give a visa to so and so" and that sort of thing?

SIDES: Yeah, sometimes. I remember in one particular case where he leaned on me really hard to issue a visa to relative of a government official who was an important contact of the embassy. I don't want to get into specifics, but the applicant fell well outside the established criteria. It was not a borderline case. The vice consul had refused it, and I upheld the refusal. The ambassador urged me to reconsider, saying that the government official who was advocating the case personally guaranteed that this woman would visit relatives in the USA and be back in a month. I was really on the spot. Because the DCM's wife was my subordinate, I reported directly to the Ambassador and

he wrote my efficiency report. I said, "Well sir, if you want me to do this I have to have it in writing." I was asking him for a formal, written referral. Written referrals are standard operating procedure now, but in the context of the time, my asking for it in writing implied I considered the request pretty irregular. He was kind of pissed off at me for asking, but he did it, asserting his belief that this official was trustworthy. I cautioned him that if woman didn't come back this would create a very difficult situation between the mission and the government official she was related to, and did he want to take that risk. He did. I issued her a visa that was valid for one entry within the next three months. I told the ambassador that I would check and see whether she came back, and a month went by, and another, and she hadn't returned. So I asked him to speak the government official who had promised the lady would visit for one month and return. The official, of course, was embarrassed. Eventually, after six months, the lady finally came back. She had been admitted for six months by the immigration service and was determined to stay until the last minute. All's well that ends well. Mr. Montgomery never asked for a visa favor again. These things happen in consular work, and both the ambassador and I were doing our jobs.

Q: Well you know, you put a shot across the bows from time to time.

SIDES: His was not a bow I enjoyed shooting across.

Q: Where did you live, and how was life in Serbia at the time?

SIDES: Randy and I had returned to Belgrade after an absence of almost ten years. We had left in summer of 1992, as you recall, when we were evacuated. Frankly, I was shocked at the way Belgrade looked, it had deteriorated so much. It was not the prettiest of cities to begin with, and it had become terribly shabby and unkempt. A number of the public buildings had been bombed. The parks hadn't been mowed or tended to, whereas before they'd been well-maintained. The people looked rundown and demoralized. The trams were even more crowded than before the war. The stores were very poorly stocked. This would have been spring and summer of 2001. However, the sanctions ended, and we soon observed the beginnings of an improved living standard in Belgrade. With the end of the socialist era, foreign business began to come in. The Slovenian company, Merkator, set up a hyper-market, kind of like a Walmart, with merchandise from the West; they stocked things never available to consumers in Serbia before. People were astonished by it. They were agape. The aisles of Merkator were always packed, even though many people couldn't afford to buy much there. Meanwhile, the old socialist businesses like the "Beogradjanka" department store and the "C Market" grocery chain were really struggling. Beogradjanka closed, and the C Markets began to transform; improved lighting, better variety of produce, polite clerks. The new level of courtesy toward customers was a bigger surprise to me than the appearance of the first pineapple. The city transit system bought some more rolling stock for the trams, trolleys and buses. The parks began to be tended to again. Construction cranes went up. We lived very close to where we lived in 1991-92, and patronized the same neighborhood C Market. Every week some new product appeared. It wasn't like that at all back in 1992. We lived in a small house behind the ambassador's residence.

Q: This is in Dedinje.

SIDES: Yes, and Dedinje was where most of the diplomats used to live. There was a new diplomatic colony in an area called Banovo Brdo, which was like a suburban housing estate, far too suburban for me. We were happy in our little wooden house on Tolstoyeva—Tolstoy Street—on the lot behind the ambassador's residence.

Q: Across from the pool.

SIDES: Yes the ambassador's pool was right behind my house. Certain days and times were set aside for community use. It was very convenient for us.

Q: When I was there I think that was the house that Warren and Teenie Zimmerman lived in.

SIDES: Unfortunately, we were the last occupants. The house fell victim to woodworm.

Q: How did you find social contact? I mean we had been through a war with these people. We had been castigating the Serbs as war criminals and very nasty people, comparing them to the way the Nazis had acted.

SIDES: The Serbian people we associated with were liberal intellectuals who were appalled by what had happened. They loved their country of course, but they despised Milosevic and his toadies. Most of them were not communists, even though they would have benefited their careers during the socialist era by joining. However, they had grown up with this idea of Yugoslavs as one people, and many of them missed the old Yugoslavia. There is a word for it in Serbo-Croatian, "Yugonostalgia." There was a great deal of Yugonostalgia going around. Our friends did not engage in political discussions with Randy and me, or blame us for their sufferings during the decade of war and sanctions. We liked to talk about books, theatre, and films, and travel.

Q: Did you hear much about Macedonia and particularly Croatia?

SIDES: As I've said, people didn't talk much about politics with us, probably for very good reason they preferred not to have a contentious relationship with us. But also I think many of the people we knew were Yugoslav in their orientation and they didn't hate or despise Croatians. Many had lived or studied in Croatia. I did get the impression that they believed Croatia had been hijacked by extreme nationalists, but they didn't see the Croatian people as evil. However, it's important to remember that our friends were sophisticated and less susceptible to Milosevic's hate propaganda.

Q: Did Macedonia…

SIDES: People never talked about Macedonia. Macedonia quietly exited Yugoslavia. That was the end of it. Macedonia hardly existed for people in Belgrade anyway. Their

life was somewhat different, and it was way down there with Bulgaria and Greece, they spoke a different language, Macedonian.

Q: In my day, Macedonia was very high on our list because the consular…

SIDES: Ah, yes. It was the mother lode of all consular fraud.

Q: It was the mother lode of fraud and it was also lots of immigration or attempted immigration, and there was a little place called "Mala California" where they grew oranges and lots of plums to make slivovitz, I think. Anyway we had an awful lot of work in Macedonia.

SIDES: There was a town called Debar which was notorious for fraud. I don't think we ever got a legitimate immigrant visa or nonimmigrant visa applicant from Debar. As soon as we saw an applicant from Debar coming in we thought, "There has got to be something wrong with this." Happily, by the time we returned to Belgrade in 2001, they were safely out of my consular district and I didn't have to worry about them anymore. They're Embassy Skopje's problem now.

Q: Was there any reflection of, although it wasn't in your consular district, of Republika Srpska, the Serbian entity within Bosnia?

SIDES: It wanted to be part of Serbia of course. That was a political issue and it didn't have much to do with consular work. We usually insisted that visa applicants who came in with Bosnian passports apply in Sarajevo. The people from Republika Srpska didn't want to do that, as I knew from my experience in Sarajevo. It wasn't just political; after the war they were afraid to go into Sarajevo, in Muslim-controlled territory. Their leaders exploited their fears to in order to maintain the siege mentality. Many of them were able to qualify for Serbian citizenship and Serbian passports, but had no real ties to Serbia-Montenegro. So we tended to see such people as refugees or potential refugees. We were very careful with them.

Q: I suppose the Karadzic family, Radovan Karadzic, I mean did we use consular officers to ask, "Have you seen these people?"

SIDES: We put up posters about them in the consular lobby, which I am sure the Serbs must have talked about among themselves. There was quite a reward for Karadzic and Mladic. Neither of them ever showed up in my waiting room. Karadzic was caught some years later.

Q: He was sort of ….

SIDES: …Some sort of guru, living in Belgrade. Can you believe it? They say Mladic is still hiding on some military base. Despite the political reforms, a lot of the military were hard-line nationalists who were still loyal to the old regime. Speaking of the military, one of the more interesting experiences I had in Belgrade occurred when one of our

colleagues was arrested by Serbian military intelligence. I had to go and collect him from jail. On that day, we were extremely busy, the visa officer was away, I was alone working the visa line, and there was a waiting room full of people. The DCM, Bob Norman, came up to me as I stood at the window, and said, quietly, "I need you." I said, "I have got another hour's worth of work here, can I get back to you?" He said, "No, this is an emergency." It was almost noon, so I told the FSN's to tell all the applicants to go have lunch and come back in the afternoon. Bob told me that a colleague of ours had been arrested by the Serbian authorities while meeting with a contact who was a general in the Serbian army. As I recall, he was also the deputy minister of defense. We were going to go to the military prison, invoke the Vienna Convention, and demand our colleague's release. So we went to the military prison and were left waiting on a bench in the hallway for 30 minutes. Then we were shown into the office of a navy officer. He acknowledged that they had our man. We cited the Vienna convention and presented copies of our colleague's diplomatic visa. Then we were asked some curt questions and sent back to the corridor to wait on the bench again. We must have waited for an hour. Bob said, "If they don't cough him up in 15 minutes we are going to make a formal protest." We were just getting ready to walk out. In fact, I think Bob had just gotten up out of his seat when someone stepped out from behind a door and asked me to come with him. He led me down the hall and the door to the cellblock area opened, and out came our colleague, looking like he needed a shave and a shower. We took him back to his office. I never did hear the whole story, wasn't meant to, but did learn our colleague was meeting the general in a coffee shop when he was grabbed. He said they put a bag over his head and slammed his face into the table when they arrested him. They had him in the military prison all night, and then made him clean the cell before they let him go. Of course, he and his family left the country very quickly.

Q: It sounds like a set up.

SIDES: Could have been. His meeting with the general was in a relatively public place. It wasn't in the forest or something; no dead drops in pumpkins. Diplomats meet their contacts. I assume the military wanted to embarrass the civilian government, which was seen as friendly to the U.S., by creating an incident.

Q: How about relations with the other embassies' consular officers?

SIDES: Oh, we had a good bunch of consular officers in Belgrade. In fact, the head of the consular affairs department in the foreign ministry took me to lunch one day and asked me if I would organize a consular officers association. There had been one, but it had lapsed during the period of time that so many countries had broken relations with the Milosevic government. I spoke to the ambassador about it. He didn't think it was a good idea for the United States to be out front on that one, and his view made sense to me. Eventually our French colleague became the official organizer. We used to get together once a month for lunch. We had meetings from time to time where we would give fraud prevention presentations. The Austrians came around to our consular section once with officials from their national police and gave us a very useful briefing on fraud and their

techniques for addressing it. The Serbs targeted Austria for immigration fraud more than they did us. So altogether we had a really good relationship with our colleagues.

Q: So you left there in 2004.

SIDES: Yes, we did, summer of 2004.

Q: Are there any other incidents that come to mind?

SIDES: Perhaps this is the place to comment that conflict zones attract American "wannabees" like honey attracts flies. Someone should lecture novice consular officers about this phenomenon, which I'm sure you observed in your consular work. They often end up destitute, detained, or dead, and add to the consular workload. I'm referring to the wannabe warriors, who join up in armies or militias; the wannabe journalists, who take ridiculous risks the professionals avoid, trying to make a name for themselves; and of course there are the baby snatchers, wannabe parents who see conflict zones as the perfect place to acquire a child without going through the procedures set up to protect adoptive children. Most mean well, but some are loonies and predators. How do we keep these fools out of trouble? I wish I had a solution to that one!

Q: Well if you do, OK. When you get this draft transcript you can just insert it there.

SIDES: I'll ponder that in retirement. By the way, while I was working in Belgrade, Randy was teaching Professional English to diplomats at the Serbian diplomatic academy. Through him I got to meet some of the junior Serbian diplomats. They were nice, bright young people and it seemed to me that they were not sort of the party hacks you would find in the ministry in the past.

Q: You are talking about the old one in the communist time. At least Yugoslavia had quite a high standard of diplomatic training. They were well thought of. We used to have pretty good relations because often in places like the Soviet Union and Mao's China they were a principal source of information for us.

SIDES: Randy's students were nice, forward-looking young people who I thought were trained to a very high standard. They got special training in negotiation that, at least in my time, we junior officers in the U.S. Foreign Service never got. They followed a very specific playbook if they negotiated about anything. Serbia has been making a real effort to move on. They're keen to pursue their EU membership application. I think the new generation in Serbia will have much better lives than their parents did.

Q: Well then, what did you do in 2004?

SIDES: In 2004, we had the great pleasure of being transferred to Athens, Greece. My title was, once again, Consul General, and it was my final overseas assignment in the Foreign Service. Before reporting to Athens, I was sent back to Washington for the obligatory year of Greek training. I was supposed to start my new job in June, 2005.

However, the person whom I was to replace in Athens curtailed after the Olympics, or around that time, so after just about two months of Greek language training we were quite happily extracted from our studies in that difficult language, and sent to Athens. That would be December of 2004. We remained there until August of 2008. That was the longest we ever stayed at any of our overseas posts.

Q: We were sort of duplicating each other. I was chief of the consular section in Belgrade and consul general in Athens. You were there until 2005?

SIDES: I arrived in December 4, 2004 and left in August of 2008.

Q: Relations with Greece really weren't that great were they?

SIDES: Greece is a NATO ally and our formal relationship was, as we say, professional and productive. Ordinary Greek people, however, had a reflexive anti-Americanism that took me by surprise. I could see why the Serbs felt that way. We did bomb them, after all. But I couldn't see we had ever done the Greeks any harm. But that wasn't how they saw it. They had a national myth about the colonels and the dictatorship of the 70's in which we appeared to play a much more prominent part than history shows we did play.

Q: They also had the myth about Cyprus too. That the Turks invaded Cyprus without provocation.

SIDES: Yeah, well Greece is the land of myth. All in all, however, I enjoyed working with them. They reminded me in some ways of the Irish; religion as an expression of national identity, intense family loyalties, superstition, parochialism, and yes, like the Irish they loved to party and were a lot of fun. During my time, the Karamanlis government was in power; a conservative party. I arrived three months after the Olympic Games, which had been a massive undertaking for Greece and for the embassy, especially the consular section. There was pride at the success of the Games, but also a fair amount of burnout. Ambassador Miller told me…

Q: Is this Tom Miller?

SIDES: Yes. He had been my ambassador in Sarajevo and, I believe, had been helpful in my getting the assignment to Athens. We only overlapped by about nine months, however. He completed his assignment the following summer, and was replaced by Charlie Reis. Mr. Reis got tapped to run the economic reconstruction program in Iraq after he'd been in Athens for two years, so my final year I worked with Ambassador Daniel Speckhard.

Q: What was the focus of your time in the country?

SIDES: Well, for the first time in my career, I had very little hands-on consular work to do. I rather regretted that, because I had enjoyed the endless human parade one sees in consular work. It was a relatively big consular section. We had 40 FSNs and eight

officers, very capable people. There was a large regional federal benefits unit which was under my nominal supervision, but the Social Security Administration had one of its own officers there to run the day-to-day operation. Our SSA colleague had about a dozen local staff handling social security, VA, railroad retirement and OPM issues. We had a busy American Citizen Services unit— Athens seemed almost as much of a magnet for American kooks as Rome and Jerusalem are—and also provided the full range of visa services. Although Greece was a Western European country and a long-standing member of the EU, Greeks needed visas to visit the U.S. Ambassador Ries, immediately on arrival, told me he wanted to see Greece on the Visa Waiver Program. Greece had been provisionally approved for membership in the VWP in 1999 by our Department of Justice, subject to Greece reforming and modernizing its system for issuing passports. The Greeks considered it humiliating that they still needed tourist visas when all the other countries in the old European Union were on the VWP. Some of the new members, particularly Poland, were pushing every lever they had in order to be included in the visa waiver program, and the Karamanlis government understandably feared it would look pretty bad if Poland got into the visa waiver program while Greece still stood outside. I'm sure Mr. Ries saw the VWP issue as an unnecessary irritant in a delicate relationship. I had been in Dublin when Ireland got on the waiver and I knew how difficult a process it was to move along, even when, in Ireland's case, one had Senator Kennedy greasing the skids at every step. Post 9/11, I thought any relaxation in visa procedures would be a very hard sell, especially for Greece. I told the ambassador we would make progress on the issue and I thought it would happen eventually, but not while either of us was in Athens. That was, in fact, the way it turned out.

The problem with Greece getting into the waiver program was not illegal immigration, as was the case with Poland. It was primarily a security issue. For one thing, Greece had acquired a bad record for terrorist attacks against American officials. By the time I arrived in Greece, its main domestic terrorist organization had been rolled up. It was called November 17, and, as you'll remember from your days in Greece, N-17 specialized in popping off foreign diplomats and Greek business executives. They killed the Station Chief, Richard Welch in, I think, 1975, and went on to attack and sometimes kill a number of our military attaches and staff in the 25 years that followed. N-17's terrorism took place only in Greece. However, Greece also has a large population of foreigners, many of them completely undocumented, who entered Greece by sea; Iranians, Iraqis, Nigerians, Libyans, Yemenis, Palestinians, all kinds of people, from countries that produced terrorists. There were also many thousands of Albanians living in Greece, legally or otherwise, and working as laborers and cleaners and such. Greece's system for determining nationality and issuing passports was in the hands of local officials who were vulnerable to corruption. The passports themselves were sometimes hand-written, with minimal security features. At our visa window we encountered people who presented Greek passports but didn't look Greek, didn't speak fluent Greek. It's possible to be of Greek descent and not conform to the stereotypical image of a Greek, but you can see that there were risks. Nevertheless, Greece had provisionally been accepted for the VWP four years before, and they were in the process of reforming their passport system. They were expecting that the passport project would lead to swift

inclusion in the VWP. I spent much of my tour in Greece working on the visa waiver issue, and it turned out to be very interesting as well as frustrating.

Q: What do you mean working on the visa waiver?

SIDES: We were trying to move the issue along to the point where we could sign the final VWP agreement, but also in the meantime managing Greek expectations of immediate gratification. One of the major players was the Department of Homeland Security. The DHS had been created in only 2002. The authority for the VWP approval had passed from the Department of Justice to DHS. DHS, this huge, new, fragmented bureaucracy, had to get organized, staffed and briefed up before it could even begin to prioritize and address specific issues. Greece and the VWP weren't likely to be at the top of the agenda. The requirement for passport reform—the Greek passport had to meet internationally accepted standards—was a huge project for the Greeks. Not surprisingly, their resources had been focused for several years on the 2004 Olympic Games. Once they recovered from the games, however, the Greek authorities went at the passport project and came up with a very impressive solution that not only resulted in a passport that met or exceeded international standards, but also completely reformed the process by which one established eligibility for a passport. They made a good start by transferring passport services to the national police. They announced January 1, 2006 as the changeover to the new model passports. They set up passport centers all over Greece where trained police officers would accept applications. They also took what I thought was the politically courageous step of invalidating all the old passports. Everybody who needed a passport had to present their birth and citizenship evidence as if applying for the first time, and the cops checked birth documents and such against the original registry to deter identity fraud. The passport production facility was very well guarded. We got a tour and noted that the various functions, like data entry, printing, and so forth were done by sworn police officers on different floors of the passport center, floors that were sealed off from each other so that no one individual could perform all the functions needed to produce a passport. We were very impressed by it. In 2007, DHS was finally ready to engage in the VWP issue. In fact, they started moving the goal posts, articulating new criteria and so forth. These developments reflected the changed reality in Washington since 9/11; our security took priority over promoting travel and tourism. DHS was willing to talk about the VWP, I think, because it provided an opening to negotiate agreement on things we wanted, like HSPD-6, a data-sharing agreement. Greece and other European countries have laws that protect personal information, so the VWP was a lever to secure cooperation on that.

By spring of 2008 it looked as if we'd worked out most of the outstanding issues. HSPD-6 was unresolved, but the Greeks told us they thought it would be possible to amend their data protection law. DHS sent Assistant Secretary Richard Barth to lead what we expected to be the final discussions leading to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding necessary to launch Greece into the VWP as the first new member-state since 1999. Barth was prepared to sign the MOE during his visit if the talks went well. Unfortunately, the discussions tanked. Greece was under pressure from the European Union, which wanted the entire EU—including Poland, Romania, Slovakia and so

forth—to be treated as one entity and the VWP accorded to all. The U.S. policy required each VWP candidate nation to qualify individually, on its own merit. The Greeks, after getting so close to having what they wanted, stonewalled us at the Barth meeting, and the talks broke off. Mr. Barth departed, pen in pocket. Then, after we got past that, we ran into further problems within our own government. Greece had pissed off somebody in the NSC, and the deal was slow-rolled for a while. When I left Athens in 2008, the VWP was still on the back burner. The U.S. introduced some further changes in visa waiver procedures—I recall it was the Electronic System of Travel Authorization, or ESTA—and finally Greece entered the VWP in April 2010.

Q: This is one of the problems of the bureaucracy of the European Union. They want to create an equality that just isn't there. I mean Romania isn't….

SIDES: Yeah, it is like "let's pretend we are all the same" when we are not all the same. Poland was after us for a long time to get on the visa waiver. They exerted every known form of political pressure to my knowledge, even brought it up directly to the President, but they could not meet the criteria. They still can't. There are some countries like Ireland that were doing very well economically and now they are not so stable. Argentina was on the waiver for awhile and we kicked it off because of the economic collapse in Argentina. The same thing happened with Uruguay. That created huge administrative and political problems for our embassies in Buenos Aires and Montevideo. Overnight there were huge backlogs of visa applications. The consular sections had given up positions and offices; imagine having to set all that up again. Politics and the visa waiver are something we could talk about for a long time, but we won't.

Q: What about arrest cases?

SIDES: Oh, we had our share. Most Americans in Greece were well behaved, but some were not. We had people arrested for drugs fairly often. An American citizen stabbed somebody in a bar in a fight over a soccer game. Some of our fellow citizens got into financial trouble, and that led them to jail. I used to go and visit some of the prisoners myself. There was a big prison in Corfu and I liked going to Corfu. The nasty prisons up in the central part of Greece were assigned to the vice consuls, but I did Corfu myself. Rank has its privileges.

Q: It is a very nice little prison there. I used to drive up and take the ferry across and go to that whitewashed….

SIDES: The round one?

Q: Yes.

SIDES: It was quite a nice prison. That is where they put some of the foreigners. In fact, one of my prisoners there had been my prisoner in Serbia, a Serbian-American who was said to be connected with some organized crime family in America. He was a caught on the border with a lot of money. There was another guy there who was caught trafficking

in ecstasy, as I recall. He was one of ours. There was the Corfu Stabber. We had one very odd arrest case, which fell to Nick Greanias, the American Citizen Services officer. Nick was from an immigrant family and could speak fluent Greek, a great guy. He told me he got a call from the Athens police; an American had been arrested for prostitution. I said, "But Nick, I didn't think prostitution was even illegal in Greece." He said, "Well she was arrested for violating the labor laws because she didn't have a permit. She wasn't a registered prostitute." Nick told me he realized after talking to her for awhile that "she" was actually a "he." The Greeks segregated this prisoner, for his or her own good. We also had a woman in jail who was connected to one of those Nigerian 409 scams. As we understood the story, she had a Nigerian lover or husband and he sent her to meet his mark in Athens and collect the money. The victim, however, was actually a smart person who went to the Greek police when he got the "409" solicitation. Prisoners receive consular services whether or not they are guilty—I never had any illusions we were dealing with innocents—but I felt sorry for them and always tried to bring them some newspapers, candy or whatever. We sometimes got donations of warm clothing from the American community, as well as books, newspapers and magazines, and passed them on to our fellow citizens in the slammer. Like most consular officers, I often used my own money to buy comforts for the prisoners. We're not supposed to do it, but we all do.

We had two high profile consular cases involving cruise ships. One involved a man who disappeared on his honeymoon cruise. The circumstances suggested he'd been drinking with some shady guys who knew a lot more about his disappearance than they told. Our resident Legal Attaché—an FBI officer—went aboard and opened an investigation. The man's grieving parents came to Athens and wanted to go to the area where he disappeared and look for his remains. He was never found, and I guess without a body there's nothing further that can be done as regards suspects. It was a sad story. I often think of him. Perhaps someday his remains will be found. The other case involved a cruise ship that sank right off the coast of Santorini Island. It was called the Sea Diamond, a Louis Cruises vessel. Fortunately, no Americans died in the sinking, but they all had to be evacuated from the sinking ship and lost their possessions.

Q: Why did it sink?

SIDES: Struck a rock. Bad piloting, I suppose. You know how rugged those cliffs are at Santorini, and below water there are lots of volcanic outcroppings. It's astonishing, though. Louis Lines has cruise ships visiting Santorini almost daily. The area is as well known to cruise ships as Times Square is to New York taxis. The Sea Diamond began to founder within minutes of hitting the rock, but didn't actually sink till many hours later. Ferries, small boats, and other cruise ships all came to the rescue. Sadly, however, three members of a French family disappeared. They were below in their cabin and apparently didn't get out before the sea poured in. The Greek tourism agency and Louis Cruises provided lodging and some funds to the rescued passengers, and the ever-resourceful consular officer Nick Greanias assisted those who needed it. We were very lucky not to have lost any of our citizens. There were hundreds of them on the ship.

Q: How did you find social life there?

SIDES: My husband and I are rather quiet folks, but you could certainly have a nice social life there. Greeks tended to be very late night people. Their social life seemed to start about 10:00 P.M. Dinners were very late. People went out to clubs and things around midnight, and they crawled in at the crack of dawn. How they did it except for the siesta I really can't imagine. But our social life was pretty much within the international community because we just weren't night birds. We did make some friends in the Greek community, although we didn't get to know them nearly as well as the friends in Serbia or Bosnia. Of course, part of that was I didn't speak Greek hardly at all. We always had good relationships with our neighbors.

Q: Well did you pick up any elements of the Greek attitude towards the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia?

SIDES: Oh the FYROM? If you wanted to make Greek people go crazy, all you had to do was just refer to Greece's northern neighbor by its constitutional, internationally-recognized name, "Macedonia." We called it among ourselves the "M Country," because we didn't want any Greeks to overhear us talking about "Macedonia." You could get yourself thrown out of a taxi that way. This matter, of course, has deep historical roots. Greeks felt that the name Macedonia, which has been since ancient times the name of a region of northern Greece, was stolen by the Slavs of former Yugoslavia's southernmost province. It was a long story. In our dealings with the Greeks if you slipped and didn't call it FYROM, which is what the Greeks called it, they shut you down. It seemed silly to us, but these national identity things go deep and politicians skillfully manipulated it.

Q: How about demonstrations, terrorism, left wing stuff?

SIDES: We had thought the era of terrorism was over. N-17, the main domestic terrorist organization had been rolled up two years before I arrived in Greece. However, every year, there was an anniversary commemoration of the events of November 17, 1973. It was always a massive march past the U.S. embassy. There were parade stewards, but sometimes people would break off and try to throw things. The police would always be lining the road in front of the embassy. They would have police buses drawn up in front of the embassy so that the demonstrators who wanted to throw things at us couldn't do so. Our attractive Bauhaus chancery had this big fence around it, which undermined the open, welcoming look it was supposed to evoke. I was certainly aware there was a history of assassinations of foreign diplomats. People who had served in Greece in the past had all kinds of scary experiences. I didn't ever feel unsafe in Greece, but an incident took place that reminded me of how vulnerable we still were in spite of the heavy security the embassy had. Early in the morning of January 21, 2007, my phone rang. I was told that the embassy had been attacked, hit by an RPG, nobody hurt. I was ordered to report to the ambassador's residence. I have to admit, the first thing I thought after, "Thank God nobody's hurt," was, "There goes the visa waiver for Greece." When I got to the Residence, the rest of the ambassador's country team—the executive section heads of the mission—was assembling and the police and the Greek Foreign Ministry Americas Desk officer were there. The embassy was closed so the investigation could take place. I

worked with the DCM on a warden message—you have to tell people something or they start to fill in the blanks with wild rumors—and Kathryn Berck, the visa unit chief, came in to deal with problems created by the closure of the embassy. We had the usual heavy schedule of immigrant and nonimmigrant visa interviews, and all those people needed to be contacted and rescheduled. Before day's end the embassy reopened. There really was very little damage. The baddies were aiming for the big shield on the front façade of the embassy, the huge silver disk with the eagle emblem on it. However, the RPG went sailing over the shield and into the ambassador's bathroom. It lodged in the ceiling tiles above his toilet and started a small fire. It made quite an explosion, because the building maintenance officer, who was in an apartment building nearby, heard it. He was an old navy guy and he went running over to the chancery, and all the fire alarms went off and everything. There were only a small number of people in the chancery at the time because it was early in the morning; just Marines, the telephone operator, and I guess the Greek police in the booth outside. The Marines dealt with the fire. The investigators looked at tapes from our security cameras and were able to see that the people who shot it were down a side street that fed into the avenue in front of the embassy. They fired the rocket from this shadowy side street, breaking a few windows in the process. It was an old piece of Chinese-made weaponry that apparently last been seen in Albania. They probably bought it on the black market. I don't believe the attackers had any intention of hurting anybody because they could have chosen a time when there were more people around—although at greater risk to themselves. However, had the ambassador been at his office at six in the morning and decided to use his john, he'd have been killed. So even though we felt safe in Greece, we tended to keep a low profile and tried to avoid establishing habits or taking risks.

Q: We had a bomb go off about '72 or so, but it went off prematurely. There is a park near the front of the embassy. It went off in a van and killed a Frenchman and an Italian woman and a Cypriot. I am not sure why they were doing it.

SIDES: There were a lot of young Greek people even during my time in Athens who were completely irresponsible, just nihilists. I wouldn't even say they were anarchists, as the press did, because anarchists have more of an ideology. These thugs would hang around on the fringes of demonstrations and set things on fire and run around smashing windows and things like that. Last summer, when there were some demonstrations about austerity in Athens, the same types threw a fire bomb into a bank and killed four people, including a pregnant woman. The demonstrations in Greece stopped for awhile because of that. Demonstrations in Greece tend to ritualized violence, like in South Korea. It looks worse than it is. So Greeks were shocked when people were actually killed.

Q: Well then, you retired in 2008.

SIDES: I retired in November 30, 2010, actually. After I finished my tour in Greece, I came back to the Department for two years and worked in the Bureau of Human Resources. I was assigned to the Grievance Office. I had never done human resources before and Grievances was a real eye opener. There is not a lot specifically I can say about it because grievances are confidential. My title was Grievance Analyst, and I was

one of two FSO's in the office. The other eight colleagues were civil service employees, mostly with law degrees. We'd be given a file with all the documentation submitted by a grievant and we'd examine it to determine whether the grievance was procedurally correct, and whether it had merit. Often we'd have to interview other parties and examine evidence. If it did have merit we could draft up a proposed remedy. If it didn't, we'd draft up a decision letter for the Director General, telling the grievant his or her complaint didn't fly. If the grievant wasn't satisfied, he or she could appeal to the Foreign Service Grievance Board. Many of them did, and at that point we stopped being neutral analysts and were responsible for preparing the defense of the agency's decision. This often involved a lot of legal work, something my lawyer colleagues were far better qualified than I to handle. The other FSO and I were the last Foreign Service members to work in Grievances. We were replaced by lawyers. I understand why, but I do think our experience of the real-world situation in overseas missions added value to the Grievance Office.

Q: What was your overall impression? I mean, was it a lot of nonsense or a lot of very serious problems?

SIDES: Some of the grievances were perfectly reasonable complaints about administrative or procedural errors that had harmed people. We had cases in which the Department lost efficiency reports, or a supervisor neglected to write one and the employee missed a chance to get promoted. Employees for one reason or another did not receive financial compensation to which they were entitled. We encountered complaints about medical clearances. There were procedural complaints about denials by the Tenure Board. Fortunately, one can't grieve an assignment action or we'd have been inundated! Many grievances involved low-ranking statements. I thought the whole ranking system as one went farther up the pole in the Foreign Service made very little sense. The promotion board was required to low rank five percent of the candidates, and if someone was low ranked twice in a row, that employee would be identified for selection out of the Service. So even if you had 50 people who walked on water, the promotion panel would still have to identify five percent of them and low rank them. As a result, people with good, productive careers were low-ranked for what I thought were very trivial reasons. Although officers are not supposed to be low-ranked for reasons connected with assignments, very often that was the underlying reason. Employees are supposed to demonstrate their suitability for higher responsibility, which is what you'd expect in an up-or-out promotion system. However, there are many useful assignments in the Service that don't really have the kind of profile that allows someone to demonstrate their ability to manage people, resources and policy. People who took on details like the Sinai Field Force, Diplomat in Residence, or out-of-cone assignments seemed more likely to be low ranked. AFSA recently got that five per cent threshold lowered to two percent, which should reduce the workload in Grievances. Underlying many grievances was wounded vanity. You cannot grieve what a supervisor says about you on your EER, but you can grieve it on procedural grounds; you weren't counseled, for example. But the real core of the grievances often was a failure to communicate on the part of both the supervisor and the employee. There were also cases where I think the Department in its eagerness to get people to accept assignments to places like Iraq and Afghanistan promised more than it

could deliver, or at least the employee perceived that more had been promised than was in fact delivered. I think that will be an increasing problem as the years go by. The ones that surprised me the most were disciplinary cases. Many involved a brief lapse of attention or judgment in an otherwise good career. However, you'd be surprised indeed at what people who supposedly were hired because they had integrity and good judgment will do if they succumb to booze, lust or greed. If the walls of our neighboring office, Suitability and Discipline, could talk, they'd tell many a tale!

Q: OK, Well then Ann, this is a good place to stop.

SIDES: I'll conclude this interview, Stu, by saying that the Foreign Service was a great career for me, and if my phone rang again as it did on that spring day in 1983 in Gainesville, Florida, I would say "yes" again. It was an honor to serve my country. I truly loved consular work, the opportunity help people and fairly enforce the law. Randy and I had a rich and satisfying life, made many wonderful friends, had a few hair-raising adventures, and retired with a great sense of satisfaction.

End of interview