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Q: Derek, why don't you lead off with a thumbnail sketch of your career with AID, then we will come back to your earlier years.

Overview of career

SINGER: Okay. My career with AID was in two major phases. One was in the 1950s and 1960s. Then I was out of government service for nearly 15 years, coming back to government work in 1980 when I rejoined AID. In my first incarnation, I went from a CARE job in South America (Bolivia) where I was CARE Country Director, straight to the Mutual Security Mission to China in Taiwan. That was my first assignment with AID, and subsequently I went from there for a few months work in Japan. We still had an AID Office in Tokyo then. In 1958, I was transferred Central America (Costa Rica) and, while in San Jose, I was asked to help open up the AID mission in the Congo, before Mobutu came in and re-named it Zaire. My TDY there lasted over five months. While there, I spent about half my time in Leopoldville (about to be renamed Kinshasa), and the other half in Brazzaville (twenty minutes by ferry across the Congo River). My time in the ex-Belgian Congo was largely spent ducking bullets, because of the civil war in that country. United Nations troops came in while I was there on their first-ever peace- keeping effort. I served as a liaison there to the United Nations in the "big Congo", and to the French military in the "small Congo". Opening up a new African AID mission had to take a back seat to the many excursions and alarms which were occurring all around!

Five and a half months later I returned to Washington via Costa Rica, picking up my family on the way. When I got back in early 1961, during my AID debriefing I was told there was a "strange new group in town called the Peace Corps". Somebody said ,"Why don't you go and see the President's brother-in-law, Sergeant Shriver?" While not crazy about foreign service professionals, I heard that Sarge was a real "pragmatic idealist" who seemed interested in having a few staff people with overseas background and experience. So, I talked with him. I was lucky - it was true that Sarge was not recruiting many career people to help run the Peace Corps in the early days. He definitely preferred a Bill Moyers, a Charlie Peters, a Frank Mankiewicz, or a Father Hesburgh in his inner, and even his outer, circles. But, I did join the Peace Corps, where I stayed for about six years - partly on loan from AID, and part of the time as a PC direct hire.

For my first 18 months, I worked out of Washington,. My principal job was to explore and negotiate the first Peace Corps programs in South America. Then, in 1962 Sarge sent me as the first Peace Corps Director in Bolivia. This was my second tour in the country where, several years before, I worked for CARE. Heading the PC, I was there for two and a half years or so, went back to Washington, and then went briefly to Indonesia during the last days of Sukarno, the former dictator of the country. Due to growing political problems, my tour of duty was curtailed after only six weeks in Jakarta. The Peace Corps program was closed down as Indonesia's big civil war loomed.

Next, I returned to Washington for some training in North Africa and Middle Eastern affairs. After getting to know a little about the area, I became the Peace Corps Director in Tunisia. I remained in Tunis for a year and a half, and then resigned from the Peace Corps (and the government) in 1966.

For nearly 15 years I worked outside the government. Later, I returned to AID as a direct hire in 1980. My first assignment was four years in Mobutu's Congo (Zaire), once again with substantial time spent across in the river in Congo/Brazza. After that, we went back to Washington for an eight month assignment. It was so short because unexpectedly, in 1985, Personnel invited foreign service people to curtail their Washington tours and go back to the field early. I stuck up my hand very quickly when they mentioned an opening in Kenya. Luckily, I got the assignment, and my family and I and went to Nairobi for four years. That was a wonderful period. After Nairobi, we were transferred to Quito, Ecuador, where we spent about two and a half years - also an excellent assignment. In 1991 my job there was eliminated . As a result, we went back to Africa for a final posting in Yaounde, Cameroon. Because foreign service people are not given any other choice, I took mandatory retirement in mid-1994 at the age of 65 years and one week.

Q: That is quite a variety of assignments over that time. Well let us go back to your early years. Where were you born? Where did you grow up? What kind of schooling did you have? What, in all of that period, whet your appetite for getting into international development work?

Early years and education

SINGER: Well, early years. I was born in New York City on Staten Island. My parents were immigrants. My mother was born in Australia of British parentage. My father was born in Austria-Hungary. He had one British and one French parent. So, I was born into quite an international background. Mostly, I grew up in and around the city, with a few detours. My mother took my sister and me to live in France for a year around Bordeaux, something I don't remember very much, since I was about two years old. Also, I lived in South Carolina, which had to do with family health reasons. So, those were the exceptions. I did grow up chiefly in Brooklyn and the Long Island area (Nassau County). I went to a private high school in Brooklyn called Adelphi Academy, where I found I had a taste for foreign languages. And, my interest grew in the rest of the world, largely because of my family's background.

In 1941, my sister, who was five years older than I and was born in London before my parents immigrated to the United States, decided to join the Royal Canadian Air Force, and work in the ferry command helping to guide the flight of warplanes for the British RAF. She was stationed in Newfoundland, now in the northeast corner of Canada. Again, a real lesson to a 12 year old that there really was a big, wide world out there!

I stayed in New York and attended New York University. Majoring in world history and foreign languages, I remained at NYU for four years and graduated in 1952. Right after graduation, I moved to Washington when I heard there was an opportunity for a graduate scholarship at SAIS, the tiny School of Advanced International Studies (now a noteworthy branch of Johns Hopkins University). SAIS was then a specialized school few people had heard of, and it was actually looking for graduate students who might be interested in this strange new field of studies (only Tufts' Fletcher School was similar)! But after an initial summer there I loved it, and happily I got the scholarship.

Q: What was the focus of the program at that time?

SINGER: Well, at that time they focused principally on regional studies, trying to get some of the more unusual areas of the world introduced to American students, as well as some of the more unusual languages. SAIS also taught such "exotic" languages as Indonesian, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, and so forth. I started by concentrating on Southeast Asian studies, simply because the summer I began the school brought in a group of specialists to teach seminars on Southeast Asian Affairs. The agreement was that if I got all "A's" that summer I would be given a full scholarship to pursue my MA. Fortunately, the professors were merciful, and gave me the A's. While I was interested in continuing my work on Southeast Asia, I also took African Studies, and also studied China. SAIS began to require two-years for a degree, but happily I had enrolled in the last semester when students could finish up in just one calendar year. (Note: I met my wife, the former Ruth Sorensen, at SAIS in '53. Starting a few months after I did, she was required to attend school for two full years). To fill in the time before Ruth graduated and we got married, I worked for a year for the Japanese Embassy in Washington.

Q: Doing what?

SINGER: Mainly, I showed tourism films to visitors, wrote a few press releases, ran the mimeo machine, swept the floor, and anything else the press office needed. Essentially, I was a "gopher". But it was a fun introduction, nevertheless, to a job in foreign affairs working in what was then a very small (and still controversial) Embassy on Massachusetts Avenue. I worked there for a year as I waited for Ruth to get her degree. Finally, she did, and we were married almost immediately. The next day we left for my first job overseas, with CARE, in Bogota, Colombia. So, even earlier than I expected, my international career had started.

Q: That was very substantial preparation for international work.

SINGER: Well, much of it was, I guess, just like with most people, due to accidents and luck. I certainly don't take a lot of credit for planning and executing it all neatly. But, I was always interested, certainly since high school days, in international affairs and, by the time I was in college, anyway, in an international career.

Q: Well, let us talk about your work with CARE. What was your position, what were you supposed to be doing?

Worked for CARE in Colombia and then Bolivia - 1954

SINGER: My first assignment with CARE came about because I was obviously looking for a job in the international field. I applied to CARE for a regional job on the west coast of the United States, as one of their public relations representatives, more or less, not thinking I had a chance directly out of graduate school to be sent overseas to a more responsible position. It turned out someone else had filled the Seattle job. But, somebody picked up on the fact that I had a somewhat different background, and they might be interested in me for overseas work even at that tender age. So, they offered me overseas work, either in Colombia or Bolivia. I had very little knowledge of Latin America at the time. Of course, this was before anyone had heard of drug problems in either country, much less a Civil War problem, and so forth, or even of Castro, for that matter. So, Colombia seemed like the best bet, and I was assigned to manage CARE programs in Western Colombia.

Q: This was what year?

SINGER: It was in 1954. I covered chiefly a mountainous area. Cali was the principal city, as well as the Pacific ports that received the large shipments of food CARE was then distributing (including some of the old CARE packages from World War II days). It was an interesting and enjoyable job and I really got to know the Andes mountains!

Q: Mostly relief type operation?

SINGER: Mostly relief and humanitarian. The country was, and still is, sad to say, susceptible to all kinds of natural disasters. Chiefly, these were avalanches, mudslides and floods that afflicted many of the countless farming valleys in the mountains. That was largely my work. It was interesting, as I say, and quite gratifying. However, within six months CARE had a personnel shakeup in their Colombia office. Fortunately, I was not affected directly, but "on general principles", (I was told) "we are going to re-staff the whole Colombia office. Since you have done a pretty good job for these six months, we are sending you to Bolivia, where you will become CARE country director." So, six months after arriving in Colombia, I was (literally) kicked upstairs to the CARE office in La Paz, Bolivia. This also turned out to be a fascinating assignment. If any country could use CARE assistance, both humanitarian and developmental, it was Bolivia. It is a really interesting place but it is a very poor country, indeed. It certainly was then. Nevertheless, there was a great need for our help, there was plenty to do, and our first child (Vicky) was born in La Paz at 12,000 feet-plus. Among other things, we have great memories of those

years in Bolivia for that reason.

Q: What kind of program were you administering there?

SINGER: Just about anything you can think of. It is a big country, a big program, and we were doing a substantial amount of food relief and "food for work". Remember, CARE was based on food, to begin with, almost exclusively. As a matter of fact, in the 1940s, 1950s, even up through the mid-1960s, food in large quantities was being brought in. Chiefly, surplus agricultural commodities, of course; powdered milk, butter, cheese, things that we had more of than we knew what to do with. In the price support program for American farmers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture was buying large quantities of these foods, which were stored at public expense. Fortunately, Title II program got going in such a way that CARE was one of the early organizations to take advantage of the availability of large quantities of food stuffs for distribution. So, the idea was just to find hospitals, orphanages, schools, public assistance groups and programs of many different sorts and kinds, women's groups and so forth, and set up distribution programs for our food in some sort of controlled programs. Since the country was "wild and wooly", one of our bigger problems was to try and reduce the frequent [transport] of the food across Bolivia's very porous borders. But, chiefly, we are talking about trying to get large quantities of nutritious foodstuffs distributed to people with serious and endemic malnutrition problems, for many different reasons, together with some tools and the wherewithal to encourage "food for work" efforts throughout the country.

Q: Any particular lessons from that experience? You must have been doing some quick learning about how to handle food supplies and services of that kind.

SINGER: I learned to always try to find at least a few dedicated and reliable host country people to work with; to emphasize your association with a trusted name like "CARE"; and identify an ally or two at the Embassy to help out in a pinch. Cultivating at least one high-ranking official at the national level can also really help! You can't do it all on your own in a place like Bolivia, especially dealing with the massive quantities of goods which are eminently "saleable" such as we had.

Q: When you say "massive," what scale are we talking about?

SINGER: Oh, I don't know. We are talking about hundreds of tons of food coming in there every few months, not into Bolivia, because it has no seacoast, of course. That was part of my job, to go down to Peru and Chile where ports were located, where the food was shipped in. The key problems we faced included transportation, monitoring, controls, and putting in place some sort of rational, honest, merit-based distribution systems for the large quantities of goods that we were bringing in. As I said, these were eminently saleable on the many black markets, and most could easily be smuggled across Bolivia's borders, especially to wealthier neighbors like Brazil and Argentina.

Q: Anything else on that you want to comment on about your experience?

SINGER: The experience was fascinating. As I said, I didn't expect to be sent, particularly so quickly, to a position of real responsibility with CARE. It shows what can happen if one is lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time! However, the end of my Bolivia tour was in sight, and I was ready for another challenge. Thus, when I got the opportunity to move on, I decided to switch over to AID. This was in the mid-1950's, before there was much formality in the recruitment process. There were no examinations. I was just told, "If you accept, we are going to nominate you to go to Taipei in Taiwan for a position in the Mission Program Office." I said, "Yes that would be great - go ahead and nominate me, and let's see what happens." So they did, and the Mission agreed.

Recruited by ICA for assignment in Taiwan - 1956

Q: Why did you want to make the switch?

SINGER: I wanted to make the switch largely because I saw the long-term overseas career opportunities as being a good deal better on the government side than they were with CARE. Things there seemed a bit hit-or-miss: if I could be picked up and quickly promoted in six months to a responsible CARE director's job, I could also be dropped just as quickly. As I later confirmed, CARE never developed a career system for its field officers. I don’t believe it has yet. There was not much of a career path available. And as a matter of fact, with the end of my two years in Bolivia coming up, CARE told me that I would probably be transferred elsewhere and be dropped down a couple of notches to drive the jeep for a European country director, an "old hand" for whom a slot had been arranged in Sri Lanka. Since I really wanted a career in international development, I concluded this system really wasn't for me.

Q: You had gotten acquainted with AID through your connection there in Bolivia?

SINGER: Right. From Bolivia, as I said, for some reason or another, they identified a position they thought I could fill in Taiwan, and so, off we went to Taiwan, briefly passing through the United States en route.

Q: What was the position in Taiwan?

SINGER: I was going to be a program officer, an assistant program officer, to begin with, which was something my SAIS MA and brief field experience seemed to qualify me for. I knew that this would be a challenge, but I was enthusiastic about it. Indeed, when I got off the plane in Taipei, a few weeks later, the person who met me said, "Oh, great, we are really happy to see our new Assistant Training Officer." I said, "No, I 'm supposed to be the new Assistant Program Officer. Here is the letter that identifies my new job." So my new boss said, "That is okay, but the training position is more important right now, since the man who had it before had to leave very suddenly, and Washington can't replace him immediately. As a result, we have decided to give you that job." When I heard that, I began to wonder about AID's comparative advantage in its staff planning and career development. However, I agreed, and it turned out to be an excellent job and a good introduction to the foreign service. I was working for an extremely good person career

officer named Cameron Bremseth who, at the time, was the Mission training officer. I don't know if you ever met him.

Q: No.

SINGER: Cam was a very good man, indeed. At that time, in the 1950s, in particular, AID was putting a lot of emphasis on human resources, training and education as a package that we had a significant number of senior as well as mid-level American staff, filling Mission positions in this area. Rather than today, where most, if not all, training positions are filled by nationals.

Q: This was when?

SINGER: This was in 1956.

Q: So, this is with ICA?

SINGER: Right.

Q: What was the situation in Taiwan at the time?

SINGER: A large, well-staffed American AID mission doing all kinds of things in fields such as civil engineering, construction, agriculture, a lot of health work, and even some food for peace work was underway. Taiwan was an ex-Japanese colony, recently liberated after World War II. But, the Japanese had occupied it and kept it pretty rural without economic development, much less industrial development, being on their minds at all over those decades. They didn't want competition with the home islands of Japan. They had, in fact, occupied Taiwan, calling it Formosa for 50 years, since 1895 when they took it over. Today, Taiwan is obviously a vastly different place - big, bustling, prosperous and definitely industrialized. We wouldn't think of having an AID Mission there today (not even considering the politics).

Q: The reason we had a big program there was?

SINGER: Because they needed it and after World War II, we wanted to show, of course, that we were perfectly capable of and interested in picking up and helping develop the ex-Japanese colonies around Southeast Asia. So, the Taiwan Experiment, as it was called, was a big one. It was an interesting one, certainly to cut my teeth on in terms of development work. They had a lot of American military there as well, a big American military presence. So, there were a lot of Americans all over the place. Nevertheless, much of the time, we would get around in rickety old taxis because we didn't have our own car for the first year or so, or even in pedicabs or rickshaws. As a matter of fact, they were quite prevalent in this rural little country, with a rural little town as its capital, where we lived for two years. Our second child was born there, by the way. So, we also have particularly fond memories of Taiwan. I mentioned Japan a couple of times. I was sent on TDY, temporary duty, to Japan for a four-month period during my two year assignment

to Taiwan. We actually had an operating AID mission in Tokyo, though a good deal smaller than Taiwan's. Partially, it was there for political purposes, but basically it was for training purposes. We were very interested in providing advanced, technical training to the Japanese and, as time went by, "third country training" in Japan to other Asians. Since I was, in fact, a training officer, I was sent on temporary duty to replace the regularly assigned American training officer in Tokyo. That was also very interesting.

Q: What did a training officer do in a place like Taiwan?

SINGER: Well, one of the big things I did was to run an English training program. I did that both on Taiwan and, in what turned out to be my next assignment, in Costa Rica, for much of my time. I also did a lot of screening, interviewing, selection, and placement of Taiwanese and Chinese participants. Of course, the Taiwanese were the people actually born there, while the Chinese were those who came over from the Mainland, escaping the Communists with General Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. Anyway, it was a very busy job. We also did follow-up studies to try and see what was happening and how well the participants had been doing after they came back.

Q: You sent them to the States?

SINGER: We sent them to the States and sometimes to third countries.

Q: Were there any particular fields that were prominent?

SINGER: Once again, the same field as I stated a moment ago, which reflected our Mission's country priorities. We were especially heavy in such technical areas as engineering, municipal construction, road building, dams, water supply, health and agriculture.

Q: Any people stand out in your mind that you were involved in sending for training?

SINGER: Well, there are several with whom we do keep up still on sort of a Christmas card basis. Perhaps, the most interesting thing there though, now that you bring it up, was that there was also something called the "Chinese Army Officers' Language School." I remember "China" was used, not the word "Taiwan" or "Taiwanese", since at that period the people in control insisted that this was the "real China" (and many still do). This was "Free China", represented by the legitimate Chinese leadership that had escaped with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949. These people were convinced they were really still running China, and they just happened to be temporarily in exile from the Mainland to which they would soon return. Generally, the Mainlanders ran the country. In any case, my wife became a teacher at this school. She spent a lot of time, four or five days a week, teaching, and she got to know a lot of young Chinese officers.

Q: Teaching English?

SINGER: Teaching English, yes. Though other subjects were being taught, of course, by

our own military mission, which was sizeable in Taiwan at the time. One day Ruth brought home an officer student. The young man took one look at our Taiwanese, I mean Taiwanese (not Chinese) maid, Skekko. She was about 16 or 17 at the time, he was about 21, and he asked her out. They fell in love, got married and we still keep up with them. They have several children. He rose through the ranks to become a top army general. My wife took a trip back to Taiwan a few years ago, while we were living in Kenya, as a matter of fact, and was wined and dined and shown all around the island there by our ex-maid, the General's wife, in a chauffeured car - basically treated like royalty. So, that was one of the unexpected pay-offs with people whom we got to know and meet on that beautiful island.

Q: What kind of numbers are you talking about, of the people we sent for training?

SINGER: Oh, well. As far as I can remember, we were into the hundreds on a yearly basis, several hundred a year, in different fields and areas. So, adding them all up, we are talking about trying to follow and setup records for several thousand people by the time I got there. The mission already had been operating for five or six years. We must have trained the majority of the future technical industrial, scientific and engineering leaders, in particular, that now run that country.

Q: You say, they are running it now?

SINGER: Right. They are running it now. We obviously tried to lean over as much as we could to train Taiwanese, native born Taiwanese, along with the mainlanders from China, and I think that strategy worked. It contributed, in an important way, towards an overall policy now, whereby the Taiwanese and the Mainland Chinese are now sharing power in Taiwan. I think the Mutual Security Mission to China did our best to help bring this about.

Q: Were there any particular issues that stood out in your mind that you had to address during that time?

SINGER: Well, let's just say that Taiwanese and Chinese, alike were very cooperative with us. I mean we had very few problems compared to some that I did have later on in the training and education field, in which I stayed for a number of years. But, we had very, very, few problems in Taiwan. They were all extremely eager to study abroad. They worked diligently to prepare themselves, particularly in acquiring the English they needed to have to gain acceptance at most American training institutions, especially the universities, which in the 1950s were not accustomed to many foreign students. They were not really welcoming, perhaps, of those who had language problems, in particular, when they sought to get into graduate study programs. We tried to stick to graduate students as much as we possibly could because, even then, in its sort of rural post-Japanese colonial state in the 1950s, there were a number of undergraduate institutions, colleges and universities that Taiwanese could go to. We are including Japan, by the way, where they were still welcomed. So, the mission tried to stick to graduate studies and, as I said, we were pretty successful.

Q: Do you think they were pretty well prepared before they went for training?

SINGER: They were quite well prepared. Their basic grounding in their professional fields was good. Most came from these national institutions, which had been founded by professionals during the 50 year Japanese occupation (1895-1945). So they had a pretty strong undergrad education, but mastering English sufficiently was the trick. Little or none was taught during the long Japanese occupation. That is why there was so much emphasis, not only in that Army Language school, but in our AID and USIA-run language schools, as well. The British Council had a big program as well, and there were many small private schools to teach English that were also springing up, too. Training students in the English language was extremely important, and they realized it was the key to getting into good graduate schools in the English-speaking world.

Q: Any particular views about the Taiwanese culture?

SINGER: Well, it was a tapestry of many cultural artifacts, rich local cultural traditions, with many changes also introduced from the Mainland when the hundreds of thousands of Chinese came who had escaped in the late 1940s (ending in 1949 with the evacuation), the Japanese heritage, and an interesting aboriginal culture native to the island. Overall, yes, there was plenty of "culture." There is also an indigenous Taiwanese culture, derived from the few thousand indigenous Taiwanese, fairly primitive people who lived in the mountains. I'm sure there still are. They had a certain amount of cultural, artistic tradition as well.

Q: What were the characteristics you saw in those days that might have suggested why Taiwan blossomed so rapidly and so successfully?

SINGER: Well, that is an excellent question. Frankly, I was not clever enough to foresee, although perhaps others did, what was going to happen. Our assistance programs, military and civilian, of course, helped a great deal to rebuild the infrastructure within that island that eventually gave it the chance to industrialize and to become strong and diversified.

Q: You're talking physical infrastructure?

SINGER: Yes, physical infrastructure. Training programs and those of many other countries and activities also helped to prepare the human infrastructure necessary, and investment capital was available.

Q: Were we involved in local education institutions, as well ?

SINGER: We were, particularly the missionary groups which were quite active in Taiwan, especially after they had been thrown out of the Mainland by the Communists when they took over. In the late 1940s, early 1950s, they threw them out. Many of them came to Taiwan, started school, most of which were subsidized by those who contributed

from American churches to their missions' operations overseas. Obviously, they were out to proselytize, but they also educated, provided health care, and imparted technical training as well to a lot of Taiwanese. That helped a lot. There was a big missionary infrastructure.

Q: Was our foreign assistance program supporting development of any indigenous educational institutions ?

SINGER: Well, now you are taking me pretty far back here. As I recall, yes, we were. I know that there was an active education office, but it was not the same as mine. We had such a big mission there. We must have had, I don't know, 40 or 50 direct hires, as such, at that mission, at the time. We were spread out and we were, to some degree, compartmentalized. Obviously, we all concentrated on our particular concerns. My concern was preparing people for international study of one kind or another through our well-staffed training office. It was not the same as the in- country education office. I didn't get that deeply into knowing what they were doing, but I do know there was support for building up local training and education organizations, teachers' colleges, etc.

Q: Anything else on that experience? That was quite a beginning.

SINGER: Well, towards the end of my first two year tour at MSA, our Mission Security Mission to China, specifically, MSM/C was the name of our mission. It may have been part of MSA, overall, but that is what we were called. Anyway, towards the end of that first two year tour I had with AID, I was asked whether I wanted to sign up for another tour, because four years at an AID post was not the standard it later became. Still, it was normally a question of an officer just saying "yes", if a mission wanted you to stay. That was they way the system worked at the time. Well, I preferred to go to the "real" Southeast Asia. Remember, I had studied places like Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, and so forth. I was particularly interested, intellectually at least, in Southeast Asia somewhere to the south of where we were in Taiwan. We had missions in all of those countries at the time. So, I said, "I would kind of like to find out whether there is anything open there." I had met a fellow named Lee St. Lawrence, I don't know whether that is a name you remember or not.

Q: Yes.

SINGER: He turned out to be the Director in Laos at the time. I wrote to him saying, "I am kind of interested, if you have a slot open there in Laos, to join you there after Taipei." He wrote back, "Sure, that would be fine. I am interested and we are building up our mission here." So, I told Ruth and the two children to get ready for Vientiane, and we sent sort of a courtesy message to AID Washington (or MSA Washington), to tell them, you know, "Singer is interested in a switch." The mission in Taipei said, "We would like him to stay, but we would release him." We figured that would be a quick turnaround, that Washington would come back and say, "Okay, fine." That is the way it had happened before: if everybody was happy, no problem. This time, though, Washington came back and said, "No, we want Singer to go to Costa Rica. We have looked up his record and

found that he speaks Spanish, and we need a Spanish speaker with some background in international training to go to Costa Rica now as the Training Officer." Again, remember training was a pretty important at AID missions, most of which had one or two American direct hire training officers. So, I looked up Costa Rica in the atlas and, as it looked like a pretty nice place, I said yes. My boss said, "This is the first time we ever heard of Washington interfering in a field-arranged transfer when everybody else had agreed. But, if you are happy with that, go ahead." So, we decided to go back to Latin America, and San Jose was certainly worth it!

Transfer to ICA in Costa Rica - 1958

Q: What year was this?

SINGER: That was in 1958.

Q: So, you were still with ICA?

SINGER: Right. I was in Costa Rica for a year and a half, doing my thing, helping to run an in-country English language training program. Also, I recruited, screened, and prepared people to go to the U.S. and, in some cases, to other Latin American countries for advanced technical training. I did a few TDY's to other nearby Central American countries. Low and behold, within about six months of getting ready to leave Costa Rica, the word went out from AID Washington that I was needed back in Africa.

Q: Before we go to Africa, let's talk a little more about Costa Rica. What was the situation there then? Costa Rica has done well.

SINGER: Costa Rica was a wonderful post, a wonderful place to live. It was an interesting program. We were very interested in preserving Costa Rica's reputation as being a democratic showcase country that, instead of the usual military dictator so prevalent then in Latin America, had a president and open, free, and fair elections. Also, it was the only country in Latin America without even a standing army. To my knowledge it still does not.

Q: Did you understand why they were doing so well compared with other places?

SINGER: Well, I think it had most to do with the national leadership of the country. The fact that the political parties, as such, for good reasons or bad, managed to get established early on, and not just around a macho kind of personality cult - something which seems to be the bane of politics in so much of the developing world today. But, in Latin America, I am not sure why Costa Rica was the one, or the earliest at least, along with Uruguay in South America, that began to develop a strong civilian tradition of free and fair elections and a democratic government. Probably their loved and highly respected leader, Pepe Figueras, had something to do with this. Anyway, working to identify and select people for advanced professional training, without having to be worried about politics and rank (something we often had to worry about elsewhere) - this was a real

treat, and my colleagues and I enjoyed it a lot.

Q: What was the training emphasis; any particular fields?

SINGER: Our diverse programs were done through "Servicios", that is to say AID operating through the frameworks established by the old Rockefeller Foundation institutions, principally in education, health and agriculture.

Q: What did you think about the servicio systems, how did they work?

SINGER: I never worked in one. Of the American technicians or AID officers, who worked in our missions, many were attached to Servicios, worked closely with their national counterparts, and seemed very pleased with the system. I recall they also liked the strong research aspect of the system, since it complemented the hands-on, field side of the system.

Q: Did you understand why we had Servicios, rather than use the ministries or government?

SINGER: Well, the Servicios were meant to bring in the local governments in ways that would minimize, if not eliminate, the substantial political influence that working exclusively or directly with central ministry staff would bring about. I think in many cases, that approach worked. There were exceptions, but the Servicios apparently did often keep politics at a distance and helped both U.S. and national scientists and technicians able to advance what they wanted to do, in particular, the areas of health and agriculture. Costa Rica seemed to have some of the best such programs. For my part, it clearly improved the quality of participants we could select for advanced training abroad.

Q: Somebody described Servicios as shadow governments that by-passed the existing ministries.

SINGER: That may have been the case elsewhere, but not from what I saw. It seemed to go well.

Q: All right, it was more institution building than trying to fill up local capacities?

SINGER: That's right, exactly.

Q: Any particular feature of the training program that you were promoting?

SINGER: Once again, training in the English language was a prerequisite to getting into graduate studies in the United States. We pushed pretty hard and worked very closely with the U.S. Information Service in a joint school that we ran in San Jose. AID and USIS (in the field) ran a successful joint English language training and orientation program there for people we were each preparing to send abroad. I spent a good deal of my time on that. In fact, the program there became so large that we actually had two

American direct hire training officers.

Q: What numbers are you talking about, roughly?

SINGER: Oh, I guess we went up to about 500 during the time that I was there, which was supposed to be two years, but turned out to be a year and a half .

Q: Sent to the United States for training?

SINGER: We sent most to the U.S., but also to third country training institutions in South America, Panama, and the West Indies.

Q: What was the concentration of the training?

SINGER: It was largely to try to build up the Servicio-connected and supported institutions, as such, so we were talking about agriculture, health and, to a certain extent, education.

Q: Any students stand out in your mind? I guess you call them participants.

SINGER: We did call them participants. We still have a number of friends some of whom went up in the government, and some of whom went up in their careers in various private fields, with whom we keep in contact. So, yes, we have a number of good people that came out of that program.

Q: The numbers might have suggested a fairly substantial investment and leadership, and technical leadership?

SINGER: Absolutely. Yes, it was substantial.

Q: Do you have any sense of how you might assess the impact of that? Apparently, it is kind of difficult, but . . .

SINGER: As a matter of fact, we conducted a training evaluation there. As I recall, I did develop a pretty good, and fairly detailed evaluation instrument questionnaire, and we did sample questionnaires, and what have you. In fact, that was largely what my assistant was hired to do - to run that evaluation on a national basis. It is a small country, so it wasn't all that difficult in terms of coverage. And it turned out to have good, strong, positive results. I remember that.

Q: Some people have said that evaluating training to determine development impact is very difficult.

SINGER: It is not easy.

Q: We will come back to that later.

SINGER: Okay.

Q: Anything else on Costa Rica before we move on?

SINGER: Well, no. I was just getting to the point where we thought this was going to be a full two year tour, and maybe coming back for a second one, because it is such a nice place to live, to work, when...

Q: You finished up in Costa Rica sooner than you thought?

Transferred to the ICA mission in Congo/Kinshasa (Leopoldville) - 1960

SINGER: Yes. A little over a year into our tour there, AID Washington announced, "We want to go into the new African countries, the new independent African countries, as soon as we can." The push started in 1960. So, they said, we need volunteers, people who speak French and people who would fit into a new sort of proto-AID mission that we want to set up in Kinshasa, ex-Belgian Congo. So, the word went around, world wide at the time, for volunteers. I decided I may as well volunteer. I was anxious to go to a continent I hadn't been to yet. Costa Rica was fun, but I wanted to do something perhaps a bit more exciting, a little more “cutting edge”. So, it seemed to me that helping to open up a new AID mission in a brand new country, where nobody knew what was going to happen as a reluctant Belgium was finally yielding to UN pressure to get out , that this would be a real challenge. So, my wife gave me a leave of absence, and I said, "okay." AID said "it won’t be more than 60 to 90 days, to get things organized”, so off I went to Kinshasa.

Q: It wasn't called Kinshasa in those days, was it?

SINGER: No, it was Leopoldville still. That's right. Leopoldville, of course, named after former Belgian King Leopold, whose personal fiefdom the whole country was for a number of years. This was before Belgian took it over as a colony, and ran it for 70 years or so before it became fully independent, or at least was given its nominal independence by Belgium in ‘60. Belgium was slow to backdown to the growing pressure for decolonization, and acted only under strong pressure from the freedom-minded UNSG, the famous Dag Hammerskjold. Finally, in effect the Belgians said they’d leave, but tacitly supported by the influential French President, Charles DeGaulle, they made clear their cynicism about the Congo’s ability to ever govern itself.

Q: So, this was an understanding between the Belgians and the United Nations?

SINGER: It was, but subsequently, the Belgians, to some extent, reneged on that. They tried to come back again to take over things when, under Patrice Lumumba, who was President of the country, and his Prime Minister, things began to go sour. Riots began to break out, travel and ethnic conflicts occurred, transportation and communications were curtailed. Perhaps most poignant of all, at the start of the unrest attending the Belgians’

departure, many American and European missionaries around the country, especially in what is called Bas Zaire (the Western or lower part of the Congo between Kinshasa and the Atlantic Ocean), found themselves at risk. Populous, close to the capital, and with many people living there, Bas Zaire was full of missionary groups of one kind or another, the Salvation Army, the Baptists, and the Catholics, most all the Christian groups had people there. The missionaries became a target of a number of unhappy and frustrated Congolese. A number of them were threatened, and, in some cases, they were robbed and otherwise attacked when local law and order broke down and panic broke out. The word quickly got out through their short wave radio systems, and contacts, that somebody had to come and save them. They were afraid for their lives.

Q: Do you know why they were taking after the missionaries?

SINGER: Well, most were Belgian and French, and they were taking after them, I guess, as symbolic to a number of the Congolese of their former colonial oppressors and overlords, and what have you. These were the people to target. They were there. They were targets of opportunity, if you will. So, in any case, all this began just as our little AID group moved into the country to see what we could do to help, just as we did with a number of newly-independent African countries in the early 1960's. When I got there, I guess in October or November of 1960, a lot of unrest was already brewing, with many rumors of worse to come. The Belgians decided to come back and save their missionaries, and save the situation. Against the wishes of the new government, they parachuted Belgian troops back into the country, despite the fact that they had just given the Congo its independence. Thereupon, for the first time the U.N., under Dag Hammerskjold, who was very much a decolonizer and somebody who believed in a strong United Nations peacemaking, as well as peacekeeping mission, voted for the very first time to send in its own forces to keep order, meaning to eject the Belgians, hopefully without bloodshed. But, the "casques bleus" also were to chase out the nasties from menacing the missionaries and other Western interests, many of which were commercial business interests, and professionals and what have you, who were living there. So, the U.N. sent in its troops, while the U.S. government, also for the first time ever, decided to fly in those U.N. troops because the U.N. had no airlift capability of its own. So we used our planes based in Germany, principally to pick up the troops seconded to the U.N. Congo force from countries all over the world.

Q: But, no Americans involved?

SINGER: No American troops. There were American airmen, including both aircraft and helicopters crews, which we did send in, but no American ground forces. The U.N. troops came from all over. Chiefly, they were from neutral countries, so-called neutral countries, at the time. Now, remember this was the Cold War, big time. Neutral countries such as Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, and Nigeria sent in their troops, with smaller numbers from other third world countries. Well, with all of that going on just as we were trying to set up an AID mission, it turned out that my own first job Training Officer, was to try to find 50 Congolese with college education, or at least some college credits. We wanted to send them for graduate studies in the United States, and hopefully

to set up an English language training program in the country, as well, to help get them ready. My job was to administer the 50 scholarships, in effect, that were a principal independence gift from America to the brand new Congo Republic. Well, it turned out that job had to go on the back burner because of what was transpiring elsewhere, as I mentioned earlier. So we, the core AID group, the six or eight of us AID found to set up the mission, we were dispersed and many of us assigned to other things while the emergency was taking place. Of course, everybody thought things would return to normal at most in a matter of a few weeks. As a matter of fact, my own “emergency assignment” turned out to be pretty interesting. I was sent across the river to work the French Air Force in Brazzaville. Brazzaville, of course, was the counterpart town to Leopoldville (Kinshasa), in the soon to be ex-French Congo. But, in ’60 and ’61, it was still the French Congo, and run as a French colony under direct French rule.

My assignment came about after it became clear that the US planes flying in the U.N. troops often could not land at the airport in Kinshasa, since the control of the airport in those tumultuous days was often unclear, and could rapidly change hands between government and rebel troops. Kinshasa Airport was simply unsuitable, the UN and the USAF believed. It was not safe enough, and in fact, things were happening so that there were riots and disturbances beginning to occur all around town. So, the decision was made to find a secure alternative airport, and the nearest one that could accept the large troop carrying planes was in Brazzaville, ten minutes by helicopter from Kinshasa. But, Charles De Gaulle was still the President of France, and he abhorred the idea of having an armed U.N. presence anywhere in the world - much less in his own back yard, across the Congo River, from Brazzaville, still a pearl in France’s colonial crown! He planned to hang onto this capital of French Equatorial Africa, if he possibly could, at any cost - which remained a key strategic French base. So, the French were very nervous about the UN operation in the former Belgian Congo. They didn't like the idea of the U.N. around there, didn't like it at all, especially armed U.N. troops getting into some kind of war with a former colonial power! And France certainly didn't like the idea of American military planes flying nearby, much less flying troops over sovereign French territory.

But the new young American president, John Kennedy, exerted an irresistible influence on the old French general, and France grudgingly accepted the idea and cooperated with Dag Hammerskjold’s unprecedented initiative in both Congo. Otherwise, De Gaulle became convinced, he might be held responsible for putting at risk a significant number - probably several thousand - of the missionaries in Bas Zaire and elsewhere - missionaries the UN forces were pledged to save and protect. Anyway, that argument prevailed and De Gaulle agreed that his military airport in Brazzaville could be used for a limited number of U.S. flights bringing in the U.N. troops. With the president himself playing a role in the agreement, the United States was sufficiently concerned that we wanted to monitor it to make sure it was really working. So, the decision was to assign one civilian (me), and several “military attaches”, to the Brazzaville airport as the planes came in with the U.N. troops. Many transports did indeed land in Brazzaville, and some of them also ferried in light planes and helicopters to fly into the lower Congo area to save the missionaries and any others they found at risk.

Q: What numbers or flights of troops were brought in?

SINGER: Not an awful lot of them - probably about 10,000 troops altogether were brought in and subsequently dispersed around Kinshasa.

Q: They had to be ferried across the river?

SINGER: They had to be ferried across the river, as well, either on boats or in the copters and light planes, which could land more easily at alternate airports and landing strips on the Zaire side. They could go where the larger planes could not. So, it turned out that for the five and a half months that I spent in my Congo assignments, if you will, I spent maybe two months on this emergency business with the U.N. troops coming in Brazzaville and so forth. I spent about three months, more or less, on AID business, "real" AID business, both before and after the immediate emergency we faced with the U.N. troops coming in and things settling down.

Q: How would you describe the situation among the Congolese people?

SINGER: Great confusion. Nobody knew what was going on. They had never been independent. They were never even told what independence was. The Belgians did, in my honest estimation, very little indeed to prepare the Congolese for independence, for national responsibility, for decision making, even for pulling the basic levers of government when they were catapulted into independence. My specific job of finding 50 Congolese or Zaireans to take on these scholarships only underscored the confusion and misunderstanding... . It turned out that we did some research and our Embassies in Europe were doing some research for us on this, particularly in Brussels. We learned there were 13 known college graduates in country among the entire population of 20, 30 million, I guess, at the time in Zaire. Thirteen known college graduates! We are talking about a number of unknowns who probably had been trained and stayed in Europe, blended into the populations of countries where they had received their education, and they certainly didn't want to ever go back during the colonial days, in any case, to Zaire. But, within all of Zaire in early 1961, we could identify only those 13 as the obvious candidates for our scholarships! That was an amazing figure, and it certainly made our ambitious program to hand out that well-meant Independence Day gift of 50 scholarships into rather a bad joke.

Q: These were just 13 known in the whole country?

SINGER: Yes, there were 13. It also turned out that there were people on the street corners of Kinshasa selling gaudily wrapped cardboard packages. They looked like Christmas boxes with ribbons, and what have you. Some were labeled "Independence", and others were labeled "Liberte" (liberty). As it turned out, the Belgians had done such an appallingly bad job of preparing the Congolese people for independence that it was possible to do a brisk business selling such boxes because so many Congolese, chiefly the poorest and worst educated, knew absolutely nothing about independence. They only knew it was said to be a "good thing" that had been given to them. Somehow or other,

they were not quite sure what it was, but maybe if they went out and bought a box labeled "Independence," they would have some... It was an incredible situation when you stop and think of it. A country that size, and at that time, relatively prosperous, certainly for Central Africa…. Economically speaking, it looked pretty good. Kinshasa was a major town compared to Brazzaville, having even a few ten-storey skyscrapers, and what have you. But, the Congo's population was so woefully unprepared and ignorant about freedom, and about what their role as free people should be, or even could be, in a newly independent country. . . no wonder Mobutu could come along a few years later and drive the country to ruin!

Q: Apart from the 13, what were the educational levels of the rest of the population?

SINGER: There were a fair amount of secondary school graduates, high school graduates, and more from the missionary (and some state) elementary schools. The colonial government did almost nothing except to hand pick a few to send abroad for higher education purposes, to be chief clerks, or veterinarians, or nurses, or what have you, relatively lower ranking, "non-threatening" professional jobs. They knew they needed to have some of those return to help run the country. But, as I said, they sent those people to Europe rather than build up national training and education institutions of a higher caliber, higher level, for them, in their new country. They didn't want to do that. They were afraid of the very idea. So, it was a rather frustrating situation, to say the least. We did manage to begin setting up a rudimentary English language training program. A lot of scholarships were also offered by other private American foundations, the African American Institute, Ford, Rockefeller, what have you, to try to get people into what might turn out to be, say, second or third year of American high schools. They recognized they couldn't do very much else to try to prepare them and keep them on, if possible, in sort of crash courses to get ready for at least undergraduate work at U.S. universities.

Q: I seem to recall that we had a special program for secondary education. Is that something you set up?

SINGER: We helped, but I think that was done by the African American Institute.

Q: Funded by AID, I believe.

SINGER: Yes, but I think Rockefeller and Ford money was in there as well, which was all to the good. Anyway, as it turned out, as I said, I stayed on for five and a half months in Zaire and the Congo. Finally, they sort of let me go and said, "Okay, you have done well, now we are going to, hopefully, set up a real AID mission." Mobutu was going to be coming to the fore pretty soon after that, although he wasn't there during the time I was. Once the initial peace-making effort seemed to work, AID also decided it was time to set up a permanent Mission with permanent staff stationed there.

Q: Is that the time when they brought in a large number of U.N. people to run the government?

SINGER: Yes, U.N. people came in the early 1960s.

Q: Funded by U.S.?

SINGER: Yes, the U.S. funded a number of them. The IREX program, or whatever it was called, I remember that . . . But, as for myself, I went back to Costa Rica. When I got there, I found, quite naturally, my deputy had pretty much taken over my job, after five and a half months. Somebody had to do it, because there was plenty going on there, too. So, I applied to go back to my old graduate school, my old University, SAIS, the School of Advanced International Studies of Hopkins, because AID had announced a new program to choose selected officers who wanted training in economics, so as to become program officers. AID had contracted with SAIS to do this. That was in mid-1961.

Q: AID was just being formed?

SINGER: Yes, under that name. So, I applied for the P.O. program from San Jose, and I thought that I had a good chance of getting it, but my tour turned out to end before we got a clear answer from AID, Washington. I wasn't sure whether I wanted to come back to Costa Rica, or whether I wanted to take this longer training, which I think was five or six months, at SAIS, under AID auspices, or whether perhaps, I might want to seek a permanent slot at one of the new Africa missions. Obviously, I really enjoyed my Congo experience a real challenge! In fact, I received a Meritorious Service Award for it. So, I went back to Washington to the Career Development Center, or whatever it was called at the time. I said, "You know, I would really like to get an answer on whether I can get into this special training program." So, they said, "Well, come back next week, we will look into it." I came back next week and they had looked into it. They said, "You know, you were hired as a Training Officer." I said, "No, actually I was hired as a program officer, and they switched me over to training when I got to Taiwan because they needed someone to do that more." They said, "Well that is very interesting. Nevertheless, you have been doing Training, and you have been doing it very well on three continents. So, we want you to continue as a Training Officer, regardless of what you were hired for originally, so we are turning down your application to go for additional training as a program officer." Well, I didn't think that was exactly fair, exactly the right thing. Perhaps it was, from their perspective. But just as I was leaving, one of the people who was working in this Career Transition Center (or whatever it was called then), a fellow named Jim Grant, whose name you may recall . . .

Q: Yes.

Joined the Peace Corps at its creation

SINGER: Anyway, Jim later became head of a major UN agency. Jim Grant was then one of the overseas debriefers for AID/W. He said to me , "You know, you might be interested... Right across the street from here (this is 17th Street, close to Lafayette Park) there is a building called the Rochambeau Building, and there is some intriguing group that is moving in there. They might be fun for somebody like you to get acquainted with,

and they might be interested in you. They're calling it the Peace Corps, and it is going to be run by a man named Sargent Shriver, who is the brother-in-law of the newly elected President." So, I went across the street. I found that I could get an appointment pretty easily with Shriver's deputy, a fellow by the name of Bill Moyers, a name you probably know. I talked with Bill, who told me they were not taking on many career government people. The Peace Corps was to be a 'non-career' volunteer-centered activity, and they were interested in staff people who were in it for the short run, people who had needed skills to immediately offer, people who could help get the program off the ground fast, and then go back to more prestigious and often more lucrative jobs in the professions and the private sector. They especially wanted staffers who could help sell the new idea to Congress, because it wasn't a sure thing, by any means that Congress was going to appropriate any money to keep the Peace Corps alive. Nevertheless, he told me he would "pass on my interest and my credentials to Sarge." He did so, and fortunately I became one of the few career government people, along with Warren Wiggins and John Alexander, and a handful of others, who were allowed to "infiltrate" the Peace Corps. Thus, I began my six years with the Peace Corps. This was real luck: I was in the right place at the right time to sign up with the original Peace Corps staff in Washington at the very moment when the brother-in-law of our brave young President was setting up what became the boldest, most successful government initiatives since the New Deal.

Q: That must have been an exciting time be there at the beginning of the creation?

SINGER: Oh, it was. It was the most exciting and creative thing I was ever involved in, and in many ways, the pinnacle of my career.

Q: What was your function?

SINGER: My first job was to find a desk to put my hat in Washington. Then it was to get out into the field, where I spent most of my first year traveling around South America, exploring, negotiating, and setting up the first Peace Corps programs for the continent. If the Peace Corps was an unknown quantity in the United States, it was an unbelievable kind of concept in most of the rest of the world where the volunteers were going to be sent if this thing ever got off the ground. No one was 100% sure it was going to, of course, in the first few months. So, along with Ambassador Bowles, President Kennedy's first salesman for his new "Alliance for Progress" in the Hemisphere, asked me to go to Latin America with him to help explain the Peace Corps' role in the new "Alianza." I teamed up with Ambassador Bowles for several trips to Latin America. He explained the Kennedy administration's new "open door" policy for the continent, while my job was to try to explain what this strange new beast, called the Peace Corps, was all about. So, we made several trips to different countries in Latin America to listen and to tell our stories. I sort of peeled off as he got busy and went onto other things, including becoming Ambassador to India a little later in the Kennedy administration. Then, I was on my own going from country to country talking about the Peace Corps. I went to every country in South America, several three or four times, getting people to hear our Peace Corps story and listening to their reactions and their questions.

Q: What kind of reception did you get?

SINGER: It was mixed, but on the whole, positive. Remember, I had enormously strong credentials backing me. Specifically, they were, the election of a bright, energetic, youthful, popular president, our first Catholic, and to many Latin Americans, this was a very important breakthrough, the first Catholic President that the United States had ever had. Also, someone who showed tremendous promise for liberalizing American policy towards the developing world in general, and towards Latin America in particular, where so many felt that they had been discriminated against, ignored, shunted aside by the "yanquis." In 1961, South Americans misunderstood and mistrusted American interests, American concerns, American policies, American assistance, and American motives. For many Latinos, this was particularly true over the last several years during the recent administrations of President Eisenhower and his VP, Richard Nixon. So, the idea of a comprehensive new approach to hemispheric relations, the Alliance for Progress, and the Peace Corps part of it (we were sort of subsumed under the Alliance, as one of its progressive new ideas) - generally, this was pretty appealing in Latin America. Hence, I didn't find too much opposition to overcome, perhaps less than if I had been trying to sell this program, explain it, and win acceptance and so forth, in the United States itself. In fact, there was a good deal of ignorance, even cynicism, in the early Peace Corps days. The concern was whether or not sending American youth, mostly fresh out of college, some not even having gone to college, mostly in their early twenties, to the developing world and have them live in "mud huts" of Africa and Latin America, and Asia, at first seemed like a ridiculous, far fetched, kind of a concept to many Americans. Skepticism, in fact, was very prevalent in the United States in spite of all the optimism that went along with Kennedy's election and his early years then. Latin America was looking for something to latch onto, to hope for, to look north and find some kind of promise of a reestablishment of knowledge, recognition, and appreciation of them. To many, the Peace Corps seemed it might be such a vehicle. That was the general attitude that I got from most people with whom I spoke. So, suffice it to say, even though conditions were not ideal in some countries, even though there was some certain questioning, certain skepticism, if not cynicism about the Peace Corps in others, nevertheless there was more demand than we knew we could fill with supply at the beginning.

Q: What was the message you were trying to convey regarding what these volunteers were about, what they were supposed to be doing, why they would find them useful?

SINGER: The basic message was for people to understand that most of them didn't have a lot of advanced technical skills and knowledge because of the fact we are talking about young college graduates, on the whole. Nevertheless, they had contacts and connections with their home communities, they could bring back home a better idea of what the favelas of Brazil, and the poor barrios of Bolivia, Paraguay, Venezuela, or Colombia were like. They could begin bringing home some information, some knowledge, some appreciation, and hopefully, explain sympathetically to their family and friends who the real Latinos were. That was one of the first big selling points, as far as I was concerned, in Latin America, we had for The Peace Corps. Many old resentments and grudges about the US began to fade as such unique and promising opportunities began to be understood.

Q: I see. That is interesting. Right from the beginning, it was understood that this was sort of a program that would benefit the volunteers and the U.S., more than, perhaps, it would the country itself?

SINGER: Yes, but over time, the Peace Corps Volunteers could also benefit their host countries, especially in providing community developers, road builders, civil engineers, practical nurses and teachers, particulary where their own staff was scarce or untrained.

Q: They weren't bothered by the lack of technical skills?

SINGER: That is right. On the whole, they were not, at least in the countries of Latin America. Subsequently, when I talk about other countries that I had some contact with in the Peace Corps, the story may be a little different. But in Latin America, particularly in the South American countries where I was working to establish our programs - places like Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Bolivia, and Brazil in particular, they really saw it the way I just tried to describe, in my opinion. I had an associate who was working the Central American and Caribbean areas to try and do exactly the same thing I was trying to do in South America. His name is Dick Ottinger, a name, again, you may have heard of. Dick was heir to a family fortune, and he later became a Congressman from New York. But he was working with the early Peace Corps with me on Latin American matters. He told me that he found a somewhat different kind of attitude, perhaps, than I did (especially in the Andean countries, and Brazil). In Central America and the West Indies, the thought was more that they wanted our people to help immediately with hands-on projects and activities. There, Americans were perhaps more easily understood because we have had more immigrants for a longer time from there who have come to the United States, more than from South America. So, a concern with the social or the political aspects was not as pronounced as it was in South America. In 1961, there were also still a number of military-dominated countries that weren't anxious to have a group of liberally-oriented young men and women coming in to "corrupt" their students and peasant farmers. But, in Brazil and in most of the Andean countries that I mentioned, yes, they definitely wanted dedicated and willing young Americans who could teach them English, do basic rural community development work, work in the clinics and hospitals as LPNs (Licensed Practical Nurses) and sometimes as RNs (Registered Nurses), elementary and high school teachers, motor mechanics and equipment operators, etc. We recruited many volunteers with such skills from trade and technical schools, and from the community colleges. As noted, such skills were very much in demand in the poorest of the South American countries, which is where we concentrated. For those very reasons, plus more political type reasons, as well, we concentrated early on in such countries. In fact, Colombia was the first country that we went into (though Ghana also claims that distinction). Happily, things got rolling long before drugs and Colombia's never-ending civil war began to occur.

Q: What were the fields of primary emphasis? Where were most of the volunteers working?

First Peace Corps Director in Bolivia - 1962 - 1964

SINGER: Well, let's put it this way. After my year of traveling around, setting things up, in South America, getting the volunteers recruited, trained and so forth, I was assigned as the first Peace Corps Director to Bolivia. This was from 1962 to 1964. Now, there, I will say the fields were quite diverse. Some English teaching in the schools, in the cities, in particular of the country, chiefly agricultural, and rural construction programs of one kind or another is what we were into. We had a number of nurses working at clinics, hospitals, orphanages, shelters, etc. A few with a higher level of education worked in nurse training schools and similar programs. We staffed a leper colony completely by a Peace Corps team in the lowlands of Bolivia. We helped build farm to market roads into some new rural colonization areas that the government was sponsoring to bring people down from the crowded highlands, the so-called Altiplano of the country, down into empty lowland areas in the Central and Eastern parts of Bolivia. We had a couple of economists who actually volunteered. We placed them with the faculty of Economy, at the University in La Paz. We had a great diversity of different people, interested, ready, willing and able to do different kinds of work there. They did just fine.

Q: How may volunteers were involved?

SINGER: About 150 at the most. For the first group of health workers I talked about, we worked with the University of Oklahoma (Norman). Then, we contracted with the Heifer Foundation, which is a private, non-governmental organization based in the Midwest. They came in and opened up a dairy cattle and small farm animal breeding program in the Cochabamba Valley, which is the Central Valley of Bolivia. Then, let's see, we also had a group that went far to the east, towards Brazil, to work with new immigrants who began rice farms in that area.

Q: You had the professional backstopping arrangements. I hadn't realized that.

SINGER: There were contracts with various groups that assisted us both in training and in-country supervision placement, as well.

Q: So, they got technical backstopping? They weren't just on their own.?

SINGER: They did. That is correct.

Q: Was that common throughout all Peace Corps work?

SINGER: I can't tell you how many. But I know they had a lot of contracts and I think they grew and grew, gradually as we got more and more into it. There were quite a lot of such programs, yes.

Q: With technical support like Heifer, Oklahoma, and so on.

SINGER: That's right.

Q: How did the volunteers work out?

SINGER: Well, I think that they worked out pretty well in Bolivia. My theory is generally that the greater the physical challenge was to Peace Corps Volunteers in their living and working situation, within tolerable limits, the happier they were. The more content they are personally, the happier they are professionally. Conversely, where they are not challenged, where they don't have enough to do, or they don't think they have, where in some countries they have been used as cheap technical or professional labor by a host country entity, well in such cases they were pretty unhappy!

Q: It is like a big fish in a small pond.

SINGER: Well, that was part of it for some people. There is no doubt about it. You do get a particular satisfaction out of it. In fact, I have a niece who finished serving two years last year in an isolated Moroccan village, working on family planning and other women-oriented programs and projects. She also had to learn basic professional Arabic, which the Peace Corps taught the Volunteers. She was a two hour drive from the nearest Peace Corps volunteer, in the next village... She was just delighted with this experience. She had a wonderful time. So, I believe, there is a real correlation between the extent of the challenge on the whole and the degree of satisfaction, both professional and personal, that Peace Corps volunteers tend to get in their work.

Q: What would be some of the problems or issues that you had to deal with, because it wasn't all just a smooth operation, I'm sure.

SINGER: No, we did have two American doctors assigned full-time on our staff in Bolivia. That was very useful, since finding doctors around who could and would be accessible and available to travel to many of the more remote areas in that country so hard to get around in, Bolivian doctors, was quite difficult to do. Most of them were in the cities and they liked to stay in the cities, rather than live in the rural areas. So, our doctors tended to help minimize many of the medical and even some of the morale problems that naturally and normally our Peace Corps volunteers had. We had some rather strong, and perhaps sometimes not too useful regulations and rules in the early Peace Corps days, that, as administrators, were expected to enforce. For example, the Volunteers weren't supposed to, at any time, travel back to the United States for visits, unless there was a compassionate reason that the Peace Corps country director had signed off on, if it was a close relative dying, or something like that. Other than that, they were strictly limited on vacations or anything like that. That hurt morale. No doubt about it. We had to try to enforce a rule that suggested the Peace Corps felt that the Volunteers might become contaminated or whatever, by going back to the U.S., or they might not want to go back overseas again and return to their posts, particularly in the more difficult areas. I don't know what their thinking was. It was not very good thinking and it really caused some morale problems. In a few cases, not very many, early resignations, or even early terminations resulted.

Q: My impression was that, in the early years, also, the Peace Corps leadership had very strong views about minimal living circumstances, to be living as much like the people as possible, which was pretty austere?

SINGER: There is no doubt about it. You are absolutely right. But, in a country like Bolivia, the answer to that is, so what? The fact of the matter is they were going to be living, with few exceptions, in pretty austere circumstances, anyway. It was hard not to, in a country that poor. In other countries, there is a whole different answer to your question, such as Tunisia, where I was assigned subsequently. But, we will get to that later.

Other problems in our program in Bolivia: again, this was very early on, nobody quite knew what to expect, or what should be expected. . . and that included our own Embassy in La Paz, the capital. To some degree, this was because we had Peace Corps Volunteers all over a wild and difficult country - one which had a real background of left-wing governments, unusual in the whole continent of South America. While we were there, Bolivia had a moderate to left-wing government in power, under a man named Paz Estenssoro, and then another President, Siles Zuazo, both of whom were pretty much to the left in terms of their politics, albeit very pro-American Peace Corps. To have American Peace Corps volunteers without the maturity and, in some cases, the testing in the field, the briefing, the advanced education, the exposure to the subtler points of both U.S. policy and local politics, and the diplomatic cautions about strictly limiting their involvement in the lives of Bolivians with whom they worked and lived - well, those "gaps" simply made many career diplomats quite nervous. This must have been true in other places besides Bolivia, but that was the place where I observed the birth of the Peace Corps program.

On one occasion, we had some Peace Corps volunteers who were invited to go to an ad hoc local political meeting. They are not supposed to take part in politics, per se, but to sit in on a local political meeting where they had been invited - well, it didn't appear there was anything wrong with that to me. But, it did seem wrong to a political officer in the Embassy that some Peace Corps Volunteers were observed coming out of some sort of perceived left-wing meeting, even though they were not accused of saying or doing anything there. So, I was asked to call these volunteers in, to read them the riot act, and to tell them to stay away from anything even remotely political. I thought, at the time, this was not the policy of my organization, and it didn't seem to me to make a lot of sense either. Our Volunteers were not career government servants. We obviously had to keep an eye on what was going on on the political front, in particular, in sensitive situations, but nevertheless we weren't there to keep them on the shortest possible leash.

Q: But, my understanding was that in the early days, also, Sargent Shriver's policy was to project a general attitude that Peace Corps was to be as remote from the Embassy, or even AID, as possible. In fact, didn't they have a somewhat contentious view of any association with U.S. officials?

SINGER: You are right, and that, in itself, caused a significant number of concerns and

problems, But, they were mitigated, at least in my case in Bolivia, by the fact that we had a Kennedy political appointee as our Ambassador. Believe it or not, I think the first and only time there has been a political appointee was the Ambassador to Bolivia, named Ben Stephansky. He just died this year, and I kept up with him pretty well. Ben came from a labor background and was a labor leader himself in the U.S. Bolivia was a very union-oriented kind of a country, and he being very interested in the politics of the developing world, in particular on the labor side, where labor played an important role. Very liberal-minded, he was named as President Kennedy's Ambassador to Bolivia. So, when Ben came down there, at about the same time we went there with the Peace Corps, he was very sympathetic and interested in, in fact, hoped for, more Peace Corps Volunteers to work with the national unions and union groups. As a result, when the problem described above came up between the Political Section of the Embassy and our Volunteers, as soon as Ben heard about it, he stepped in. He immediately made the nervous diplomats pull back, and said "No, these Peace Corps Volunteers are here as informal Ambassadors and they are under my general protection and tutelage here, and I want them to get to know as many different kinds of people, and attend as many different kinds of meetings, and so forth and so on, and to work with as many different kinds of organizations, including labor unions and other politically active groups, as possible." So, Ben Stephansky turned out to be a very strong ally and protector of the Peace Corps.

One thing I should add here. When I was sent to Bolivia as the first Peace Corps Director, I was told to establish my office in the second city of the country, which was Cochabamba at the time, rather than in La Paz. I had a deputy whose office was set up in La Paz. Now, that was directly in line with what you just said. That is to say that Sargent Shriver and his folks wanted The Peace Corps, administratively, at least, to be out of the purview as much as possible of the country team, the U.S. government's country team in the capital city of the country.

Q: You weren't on the country team?

SINGER: So, they experimented -- one Peace Corps office in each continent -- Africa, Asia, Latin America - was to have the office of the Peace Corps director established outside the capital city in order to see whether or not this would help to carry out the objective of keeping the Peace Corps at "arm's length". I did have my office next to the American Consulate in Cochabamba, but it was situated in a private office building there. I did not report to the Consul, and he certainly didn't report to me. So, we followed our own independent paths. I went up to La Paz, which was an hour's flight or so, every week or two to keep an eye on the La Paz office. I met from time to time with Embassy and AID and other U.S. Government people, but I was not part of the country team. I couldn't be, because I was based outside the capital.

Q: Did you have any ties with the AID people?

SINGER: Yes, very friendly ties. Alex Firfer, I believe, was the AID director at the time. We got to know him and his wife. But, that happened after we moved up to La Paz, shortly after President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. When that terrible event

occurred, a new Ambassador came in, named by President Lyndon Johnson. A new administration had come to power in Washington. New rules of the game were pretty quickly written. Sargent Shriver stayed on for a time as the Director in Washington. But Sarge's wings were clipped, for obvious reasons, because he was no longer the brother-in-law of the President. It is really that simple. It terms, particularly, of dealing at a top policy level with other agencies and organizations within our government. Okay, to make a long story short -- it was a matter of a month before I was given orders to move the Peace Corps central office up from Cochabamba to La Paz, and send my deputy down to Cochabamba, where he could run our newly-renamed branch office.

Q: This was an order from the Ambassador?

SINGER: Yes, well, it was an order from Washington through the Ambassador. But, Ambassador Henderson very much wanted the change. He wished the PC chief to be on the country team, but that did not happen while I was there. The Peace Corps director was not on the country team at that time. I think, subsequently it has happened. But, at that time, in the 1960s, it had not happened. Even the death of President Kennedy and the changeover of the administration, Johnson's administration, the new Ambassador, and so forth, were not enough to cause it to happen. So, I stayed off the country team, but I met, at his request, with the Ambassador and the DCM, and the other heads of mission, pretty regularly while I was based in La Paz.

Q: Did they try and influence you in any particular direction?

SINGER: Let's say, it got more political at that time. Suggestions were made, and what have you. Yes, I would say, there was some attempts at influence, although not very heavy-handed. There were suggestions that political considerations ought to be given more weight in deciding on programs, projects, and particularly the assignments of our Volunteers.

Q: Do you have examples?

SINGER: Yes, but, I don't think I would like to lay these out at this time . . . even though a number of years have transpired since this took place. But, the idea I was given on several occasions was that it would be "helpful" if we could have some American presence in town "x" or province "y". Now, I am not hinting that we were talking about intelligence operations or activities, or anything like that. As you know there was very much an arm's length relationship all along between the Peace Corps and intelligence activities and operations, in a whole number of different ways. That certainly was not an exception that I am speaking about. But, nevertheless, there were notable instances when I was asked to go along, perhaps, with a request from a Minister in the Bolivian government, who would like very much to see some Volunteer assigned to his home town or area, and at times Embassy people thought it would be a good idea politically to accede to such requests. It was that sort of political pressure that was brought more to my attention. Pressure, which obviously, existed before, as well. I am not implying it didn't, but nevertheless, perhaps I was in a stronger position, to resist since I reported basically

only to Washington.

Q: What were the particular program areas that you should or should not be in?

SINGER: Well, program areas that, I mean . . . there was very little that didn't need doing in the country. I mean we could have gone to programs and projects . . .

Q: Were some areas more sensitive than others?

SINGER: Yes, some were more sensitive than others. We did not want, to say, reorient any significant number of our volunteers to move into the cities, into urban situations. It subsequently came to be in many Peace Corps programs around the world, incidentally, where there are a lot of urban oriented programs or projects as such under way. We had very few, just a handful of people whose skills happen to qualify them to be university professors or teachers, at a particular institute, or perhaps, a high-ranking teaching nurse in a top hospital in Cochabamba or La Paz.

Q: What were the areas over there, any subject areas in which you specifically did not want volunteers?

SINGER: Well, to the degree that there would be a political overlap, let us say, I don't think the Embassy would have welcomed our sending people to a national majority political party's training schools as proctors or teachers or assistants, or something like that. Despite the fact we were asked constantly to send them to do exactly that kind of work. That was the sort of thing we wanted to stay away from and did.

Q: Anything else on your Bolivia experience?

SINGER: I have to mention the kidnappings of our PC Volunteer, Jon Perry, in 1963 or 1964. Jon, along with two other “official Americans”, was held by a dissident leftist union group in a mine near Oruro, the area where he was assigned as an engineer.. They were held for several days, and threatened by miners with dynamite sticks. Finally, we managed to negotiate the hostages out, but it was pretty dicey for a time. In any case, my Bolivia experience was a truly fascinating one. We were always conscious of the fact that we were pioneers. It was so new: the Peace Corps, government-backed volunteerism, living and working at the grassroots level in the country, and what have you. It was most gratifying because of the enthusiasm which was mutual on the part of both the Volunteers, almost without exception, and their beneficiaries, co-workers and hosts throughout the country. Especially in the really remote places, in regions like the Beni and the Pando, which were the northern jungle regions of Bolivia, up towards the Brazilian and Peruvian border areas. When we sent people up to those areas, to clinics, and to schools, to teach in health, agriculture, basic technology, and what have you, just tremendously popular. It was the first time they had ever seen an American anywhere, including films, because, basically, most didn't have electricity. We are talking about a real mud hut syndrome here at its apogee, if you will . . . People who lived really far beyond any areas where Westerners, if you will, or Americans had penetrated before,

with the exception of an occasional missionary. Peace Corps Volunteers, who, on the whole, living in such isolated, difficult conditions were just happy as clams. That made the administrators happy.

I guess the only other thing I want to mention is that one of the really gratifying parts of my experience was working with the mostly-young men and women, about 20 or 25 of them, at most, I guess, in the Heifer project. These were farm youngsters who worked in the populous Central Valley, which is chiefly the cattle and dairy cow raising area of the country. They were brought in to set up a program of breeding and caring for cattle, and improving the local strains of the dairy cows, and introducing productive new strains of goats and sheep. They worked happily with Bolivian youngsters on farms and cooperatives, chiefly Indian kids, because Bolivia is primarily an Indian and Mestizo country. We found how gratifying that experience was, and being able to report that back and get word out, which the Heifer project, of course, did as well, in the United States that people with very little, almost no knowledge of places as exotic as the Cochabamba Valley of Bolivia can come from small town farms in Kansas and Nebraska, Iowa, and Indiana, and so forth, and go very happily and live and work very effectively in those places doing what they do best, which was building on their 4H-type skills, farm bureau skills, and what have you, with the animals with which they worked, and the Bolivian Indians whom they were living and working with and training in their techniques. Artificial insemination had not even been heard of in any of those areas before they came. Getting that word back to the U.S., that, yes, the Peace Corps, even from the heartland of the so-called less sophisticated parts of our country, is successfully working in a place as remote and exotic as Bolivia's Cochabamba Valley with the Indians of that area - that was especially gratifying, as far as I was concerned.

Q: I want to come back to that point, but you had another Peace Corps experience. Let's get to that.

Transferred to Peace Corps in Indonesia - 1964

SINGER: I sure did. I had two others. Well, you could say, three. After finishing up my two years with the Peace Corps in Bolivia, I was offered the chance of going to Indonesia as director, based in Jakarta. This time, I wouldn't be the first one there - obviously, someone had preceded me. So, I would be inheriting a program. That was a little different. But, I would be going back to Southeast Asia, a place where, if you recall, some of my early education and training, and so forth had drawn me to. So, that was fine. I even spoke a little Indonesian, which I studied in graduate school as well. So, I went to Jakarta. Fortunately, as it turned out, I went alone. That is to say, I was going to get things set up and so forth, before my family came out to join me, my two small children and my wife. Well, when I got to Jakarta, I had not been given very much of a briefing. I was just sent sort of quickly, straight there with only a couple of days in Washington. I found that we had 24 Peace Corps volunteers in-country. Indonesia, of course, is an enormous archipelago, 3000 miles long with tens and tens of millions of people, close to a 100 million, I guess, living there. Twenty-four Peace Corps Volunteers after 150 in a tiny country, population-wise, like Bolivia, seemed a little anomalous, to say the least. It

didn't take long to learn what was going on. These are the last days of the dictator, Sukarno, before Soeharto came on the scene. There would be an excruciatingly bloody Civil War to come in a couple years later. But when there, things were still quite peaceful, but tense. Sukarno was ruling the country with an iron fist, a real nasty dictator. Nominally neutral, he seemed to be trying to cozy up to the Communist bloc. Again, we were still in the midst of the Cold War, and there were at least some political considerations in everything the United States did abroad.

Q: This was in 1963?

SINGER: Well, I think it was 1964. I reviewed the 24 Peace Corps volunteers who were there, soon to be replaced by another couple of dozen who were in training in Hawaii, by the way, or were about to go into training when I arrived . . . Out of those Volunteers, there were 18 or 20 who were sports coaches, physical education coaches of one kind or another, either for school kids, in "Sports Universities" and gym classes, or with sports teams around the country. All of these Volunteers had been medal winners in the Olympics. They had been hand picked after their Olympic experiences from various U.S. colleges and universities, and hand picked in a very unusual sense. They were all physical educators as well as accomplished athletes, and they went to Indonesia on Sukarno's personal request as trainers for his would-be Olympic teams. It turns out that Sukarno was "X'd out" and not allowed to participate in the International Olympics at the time, because he had used government funds to subsidize his athletes - something prohibited under IOC rules. So, he set up something called GANEFO, Games for the New Emerging Forces, which was to be his Third World (neutralist) group competitive with the International Olympics Committee and its games. He was going to try to organize GANEFO in Asia and Africa, with Jakarta as the center. He had built an enormous, expensive, and elaborate sports complex for that purpose in Jakarta. He had leant on and exerted great political pressure on a number of countries, including the United States, to send him athletes as coaches, trainers and physical educators to prepare his team to be the centerpiece of this new GANEFO ensemble. We went along with that. Talk about politics, we went along with that, we hand-picked, as I say, 18 or 20 American athletes to go there, and the other four to six Volunteers were all English teachers for Sukarno and his immediate family. So, that was the Peace Corps program I inherited when I went there in 1964!

Q: Very political?

SINGER: Extremely political. Now, that was questionable enough. But, beyond that, on a larger scale, things were getting worse and worse politically vis-a-vis our relations with Indonesia, and in particular, with Sukarno and his increasingly nasty approaches and policies. Relations were poor and they were getting worse. Bad relations between Indonesia and the United States were in store by the time Sukarno was finally overthrown in the bloody Civil War that transpired a year or so later. So, we are talking about the last few months of his power, when he was becoming very angry and frustrated, and a number of irrelevant political issues (irrelevant to the Peace Corps, anyway) were slowly poisoning his relations with the West. In any case, Sukarno ordered some of our Peace

Corps volunteers jailed on trumped up charges. He even had some of them beaten up on the streets by his own bully boys, when they were on leave or just walking around the streets of Jakarta and other towns in the country where they were assigned.

I thought these actions were just totally intolerable, but I couldn't get very far with our Embassy in terms of convincing them that there was at least some reason to question the viability and need for the American Peace Corps, given what I felt obviously should be our objectives, and the four goals of the Peace Corps, and so forth and so on. So, as I saw the situation getting nastier and nastier for our PCV's, I thought we should at least suspend the training of the replacements for the Volunteers who were now nearing the end of their assignments. The replacements being in training, of course, in Hawaii, as I mentioned. We should at least suspend that, pending clarification of whether or not the Peace Corps really belonged, at least doing these kinds of incidents in Indonesia. If worst came to worst, the trainees could be reassigned to other countries in the region. So, when I suggested to Washington that this ought to be looked at very carefully, I was invited to go back and consult in Washington six weeks after I got to Indonesia. I went back to Washington, I consulted, and somehow I found that it was not in the cards for me to go back to Indonesia. Things had been arranged that I would remain in Washington. I did, and then was reassigned to North African and Near East program.

Q: You didn't get a sympathetic ear in Washington?

SINGER: I did not get a sympathetic ear in Washington. Politics were such in the Peace Corps in 1964, the politics were such that we did not, repeat, not want a break with President Sukarno at that time. This was true even though it was becoming pretty clear that his days were numbered. Our own Cold War ideas and feelings about keeping Indonesia,, if not on our side, at least in the neutral camp and away from the dreaded Sino-Soviet Alliance. At that time, Washington felt that bete noir was ready, willing and able to gobble up the rest of Southeast Asia as fast as possible. The fear was so strong that Washington decided they would not make an issue of the invidious position of our Volunteers in Indonesia ; rather, we would keep a stiff upper lip and carry on as usual, perhaps trying quiet diplomacy to keep them out of harm's way, but certainly not allow the PC country staff to make an embarrassing public issue of pulling them out of the country, or their replacements out of training. So, in any case, it turned out to be a losing battle, this one. So, then, I was assigned to North Africa . . .

Q: Before we get to that, what were the Volunteers' view of the situation? It seemed kind of dangerous for them.

SINGER: Generally, the Volunteers' view was, okay this may have some risk, we certainly don't want to be involved where we are going to be in physical danger, but we are treated like sort of little Gods, and to the extent we're not the targets of serious attacks and retribution, the others, who were still assigned in these very prominent positions right around Sukarno's family, and working with the national sports teams as such, they were athletes. They enjoyed the prestige and they enjoyed even the challenge of the work, when they were allowed to work, and that was most of the time. In short, I don't mean to

say that they were all under duress on a continuing basis, because they weren't, but there were nasty incidents that had occurred and seemed to be increasing, and subsequently I think they recognized this was not the place for them. But, most of them, up to the time I left, still liked the idea of being assigned several grades, if you will, above where they would be in a professional athletic or coaching career, working with the national athletic teams of the country there, as sort of high level sports figures, even though, in most cases, they were not many years out of college themselves. So, it was an interesting and ambivalent kind of a situation for them, as so many situations are. It wasn't clear-cut: when I was saying, "this is getting worse, not better," the louder voice of the Ambassador and his staff were saying, “We can still control this, don’t rock the boat, let’s stick it out”. For political reasons in the long run, maybe things were going to get better. It was possible that Sukarno was going to be swayed and lead successfully, to be back "on our side" after things got calmer. But, be that as it may, that's the way it worked out. Now, the Peace Corps continued on then until Indonesia, at least, I guess it was 1965, when the big Civil War broke out and Soeharto and his military forces went against the Sukarno regime, something that brought about an enormous blood and lengthy war. But, before that happened, the establishment was still hopeful that things would work out, so it was decided to pull me, not the Volunteers, out. As I look back on that time, I guess I was just ahead of my time - but I still think I was right!

Q: So, then suddenly you were reassigned?

Back to Peace Corps Washington and then as Director, Peace Corps Tunisia - 1964-1966

SINGER: Back in Washington. Thank goodness my family hadn't gone out there because it would have been difficult to turn around and go back again with them a few weeks later. I was assigned to the Middle East and North Africa affairs. A man named George Carter was the director of that regional office in Peace Corps Washington. I stayed there for several months as a special assistant to Carter on Middle East and North Africa affairs. I traveled a lot in the region, did some troubleshooting, conducted a few evaluations, attended conferences, and so forth. Then, in about 10 or 11 months, just under a year, an opening came up in that region in Tunisia. I was assigned to Tunis as the Peace Corps Director in 1965. I had a fascinating experience there as well. I was inheriting, of course, a program that had been pretty well established. The Tunisians liked the Peace Corps, we were in good political shape there. The foreign minister was the President’s son,. He was very sympathetic, in particular, to the Peace Corps, and he wanted to continue it even after Kennedy had gone, because the foreign minister had been the Tunisian Ambassador to Washington at the time and was very close to the White House. In fact, he had come to know John Kennedy quite well. Anyway, it turned out that my stay in Tunisia was about a year and a half.

Now there, we also had a very different group of Peace Corps Volunteers. Tunisia is largely an urbanized country, a small sliver of a country, located between its larger neighbors, Libya and Algeria. Educated Tunisians are bilingual, French and Arabic. It sort of has one foot in the Mediterranean, European-dominated Mediterranean culture and

one foot, speaking metaphorically, in the Arab world, due to its location. Tunisia has been a “crossroads country” for many centuries as a matter of fact. The Carthaginians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Phoenicians, the French, the Arabs, and others all took a crack at infiltrating their culture and their political rule into that country. It was a fascinating place. They liked the Peace Corps, but, as I said, it was a predominately urban country, and most of our Volunteers were assigned in urban settings. They were English teachers on the one hand, in government subsidized, in some cases, government run higher language schools in Tunis, and the other large towns, Sousese, Sfax, and others, and they were architects and civil engineers chiefly assigned to road building, construction, and building design work for the Tunisian government. It was a very status conscious country. Let's just say much of what went on there was under government control, or at least strong government influence in many different sectors. Our Peace Corps Volunteers were well trained people. Most of them had undergraduate degrees in English, some graduate degrees in English, and in English teaching, or in Education. There were a few in ESL, English as a second language, and the architects were graduate architects, just out of architectural school but with architectural degrees. We had the American Institute of Architects as our contractor to supervise them and facilitate their work with the architects, civil engineers and draftsmen with whom they worked on a number of different projects around the country.

Our big problem in Tunisia was something I alluded to very briefly earlier. To a degree, our PCV’s were cheap labor - labor that the Tunisian government, if not by using Tunisian nationals, could very well afford (and had afforded in the past) to bring architects and civil engineers in, in particular, from countries like France and Italy, which were very close, physically and culturally, if you will, to Tunisia itself. But, instead, when they were offered basically “free Peace Corps Volunteers” from the United States, with respectable professional credentials, as well, and without the necessity of doing anything except basically patting them on the back from time to time, giving them some supervision, and being nice to them in their offices in Tunis and larger towns around the country where they were based, well, they just jumped at that chance. Now, remember what I said before - there seemed to be a kind of correlation between the people who live in mud huts (or close to it) in the Peace Corps Volunteer community and the degree of their happiness, versus those who “live well” whose lives were often laced with dissatisfaction, grumbling and unhappiness. That correlation came up loud and clear in Tunisia. There were many unhappy Peace Corps volunteers, despite the fact that their professional jobs were interesting. I believe they caught on before too long to the fact that they were filling in because they were cheap labor for people who the Tunisians were perfectly capable of staffing themselves. Both from their own ranks, as I said, and from several European countries which had, in the past, sent in professional staff to fill those particular jobs. When they discovered this, many of the architect Volunteers just didn't like it. They didn't like it because they knew they really weren't that much needed and wanted.

Q: They weren't doing interesting jobs?

SINGER: They weren't doing what they knew the Tunisians themselves couldn't do.

There is a big difference if you know that you are there because principally you are "cheap labor" and your employers, in this case the Government of Tunisia, didn't have to pay for them. It was just not very satisfying. That you are kind of being paid, not slave wages, but you are being paid a very modest allowance by the U.S. government through the Peace Corps Volunteer allowance. But they weren't really needed. They knew that.

Q: They couldn't provide anything that was different from what others did?

SINGER: That's right. Incidentally, our English teachers were a little bit happier because it wasn't that easy to get English teachers with a native born American or English accents and what have you, which is the kind of English they wanted to have taught in their professional schools. So, that was a little different story there. But, the problem with the professional architects and civil engineers was exacerbated by the fact that we were, as administrators of the Peace Corps, also told not to let our Volunteers travel to Europe on vacation, or for any other reason. Now that was a real problem, because on a clear day, from Tunis you can literally see the southern islands off Italy in the Mediterranean. We are talking about an hour's flight between Tunis and Rome, and not much longer to the south of France. The temptation was enormous to go to those countries and to get to see Europe at some point during their Volunteer service of two years. One of my jobs was to try to stop that. I mean monitoring airports and going to travel agents, and checking on ticket issuing, that kind of stuff. In addition, we also had a policy which I was told to enforce, my staff and I, and that was, "Thou shalt not drive a car." PCV's were simply not allowed to drive cars or trucks. There had been a spate of accidents for one thing, and also the image issue, which you have mentioned yourself on a couple of occasions was there in spades. So, ironically, we had to allow the Volunteers to be chauffeured back and forth to work when they weren't within walking distance of their work, or there wasn't public transportation to get them to their jobs. That was perfectly permissible. That probably was the least they could do, to send Government cars to pick them up and take them back and forth to work. We had a lot of that. We also had a lot of attempts to buy the most popularized motor vehicle in the country, certainly in the cities and towns of the country. That was the mobylette, the mini-motorcycle, which a very large number of Tunisians rode all over the place. At that point, our doctor took a look at the number of accidents that were occurring before anybody was seriously thinking of wearing crash helmets, by the way, mid-1960s, and he said "No." Our doctor sort of put the kibosh on using the mobylette, and Washington said "Thou shalt not drive vehicles, and besides, you are not allowed to go to Europe either." That plus the perceived exploitation of some of our people...

Q: Is it possible also that, particularly the architects and engineers, they were a little more sophisticated professionally, a little more advanced probably than some of the other Volunteers and, therefore, had a little different expectation of their status?

SINGER: It is certainly possible. It is absolutely possible. The AIA, American Institute of Architects staff there on site, to some extent, encouraged that feeling by building up professional self-esteem and appreciation as much as they could which is perfectly normal and rational for them to do, from their perspective. So, anyway, we are winding

up the story on Tunisia. I stayed in Tunisia only 18 months, rather than the full two year or more tour which the Peace Corps expected. That was largely because of two things: First, I got hepatitis while I was living Tunisia. Fortunately, not too serious or life-threatening, hepatitis Type A, and I was hospitalized for a time, and it is a very discouraging kind of disease to have, and I became very discouraged, perhaps more so than the situation warranted. Anyway, I came to believe it was time for me to do something else, and get out of my situation. Secondly, Sargent Shriver stepped down during this time and the second national PC Director, man named Jack Vaughan, stepped into his shoes. So for me, the excitement of being in on the ground floor and what have you began to wear off. In general, I was becoming disillusioned by a combination of the fact that I had this nasty sickness, and Sarge Shriver, my captain, was leaving the ship. I became convinced it was time for a change. So, 18 months after I got to Tunisia, I left and I left the Peace Corps. I had been on loan from AID for my first two years with the Peace Corps, and they asked me if I wanted to come back. I said "Not now, thanks - I just want to drop this whole government business entirely at this point in my career and go do something else for a while. I'll find something in the United States to do." So, that is what happened.

Q: Let's back up a little bit on the Peace Corps. Let's look back, apart from this last discouragement or weariness with it. How would you see the Peace Corps in terms of developmental contribution? We talked about that in the beginning; that maybe that wasn't a primary purpose, but, in fact, you talked about the Heifer project, and some of the others. Was it a developmental contribution of significance?

SINGER: Sure, I think so. But, again, as I said, I think it was best in the country that needed us most. For me that was obviously Bolivia. Yes, getting people to realize and understand that: A) We are Americans, and in some cases, they never heard of us before, in the more remote parts, a place like Bolivia - getting people to see and understand that they cared about them and they had some skills, knowledge, to bring that maybe would be useful to them. Also, getting some of those poor campesinos, or Indian peoples, for the first time, to begin understanding that they could control their own destinies a bit, maybe get a little more training, knowledge, and education. Maybe they could hold their own, at least, hold government people a little more accountable for providing the basic infrastructure needed for them to begin aspiring towards, if not, prosperity, at least a somewhat better life in the rural sense in particular. Those were the developmental contributions of greatest importance, I think, which you could argue, would be psychological, in some ways, or political.

Q: Opening people's eyes to the fact that there are other opportunities?

SINGER: Precisely, and that there can be a choice. To me, the key difference between a developed and an underdeveloped world is the assumption that there is no choice. In other words, fatalism as a way of life. There is no basic choice. The Peace Corps was just superb at doing that in a desperately poor country like Bolivia, where almost anything they did bore fruit, because everything was needed. Both the Volunteers and the people they connected with came to understand this.

Q: Are there any other effects that you recall?

SINGER: Sure. I mean, the cumulative effect of American Peace Corps Volunteers returning home to the United States and beginning to open the eyes of a huge number of people - that, yes, there is a big wide world of developing countries out there, and yes they matter, and yes, there are people like you and me living in them. That kind of impact on our own country, I think, is just tremendous. It served also as a sort of an impetus, I think, for other activities, for the universities to which many of the volunteers would return after they completed their service for graduate studies. They became great Ambassadors to America from the developing world, and they helped identify and recruit excellent new Volunteers at their own institutions. Those kinds of secondary effects also had a big impact. On the whole, I am a strong supporter of the Peace Corps. I think it fell into some problems, such as those I experienced in Indonesia and in Tunisia, and others but I believe these were the exception rather than the rule.

Q: What about the association of the Peace Corps with AID? Did that evolve more or change during your time there?

SINGER: I think it evolved a lot more because when I returned to AID work in 1980, which we will get into later on, after about 15 years out of government service, the cooperation and mutual assistance and support that AID and the Peace Corps showed each other in the countries where I found myself (Africa, principally, but also in Latin America), was just like night and day. It had evolved tremendously. We had learned. I think we have learned to not only live with each other but see each other's better points and to gain from working with each other on the basis of mutual understanding and respect.

Q: So some of the earliest ideas about the volunteer program, the Peace Corps, were tempered?

SINGER: Absolutely, including the "purist" ideas about staff, by the way. Now, remember I was one of the few to sneak in under the wire as a government employee.

Q: You had a five year limit, I suppose, didn't you?

SINGER: Sure, well yes and no. The five year limit came into effect on line three or four years into the Peace Corps's existence. So I could have stayed on for another two or three years beyond the time I decided to leave.

Q: You ended with the Peace Corps and you left government for a while. What did you do?

Worked in the private sector: domestic and international programs - 1966

SINGER: Well, what did I do? I did work for the private sector for the first time. My first

job, for a couple of years, was with HRD, a new branch of the International Correspondence School - the "matchbook cover" people that offered vocational training to adults and what have you. They decided they wanted to establish up some kind of an international development kind of project or program which might get government money, so they set it up in D.C. in the mid-1960s. I worked for them for a couple of years as Vice President. My chief accomplishment there, I guess, was to lead a team of people who went for this group called HRD Services, Inc., to Vietnam for a three-month period. I worked under an AID contract to assess and report on staff training activities and requirements for the AID mission in Vietnam in 1966, 1967. After I got back from that, it turned out, shortly thereafter, ICS decided not to go into the foreign development business after all.

So, I got myself another job, also Washington based. I did a great deal of traveling, all over the U.S., working with the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. My work was financed by a grant from the Carnegie Foundation, and its purpose was to help publicize the role of two-year colleges, and to recruit new instructors for them throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Q: What was the international dimension of that?

SINGER: Well, there wasn't so much an international dimension, except for a couple of articles I wrote about how two year colleges might be useful and interesting to developing countries.

Q: What was your idea on those?

SINGER: Well, the basic idea here was, many developing countries, particularly in Latin America, and certainly in Africa, could not afford to expand their higher education base into many new realms, particularly if we are talking about four year colleges, graduate. And professional schools. They just didn't have the wherewithal to do it. Perhaps, it wasn't as practical, particularly since so many were ex-colonies from Britain, France, Portugal, and so forth, that inherited the mother countries' academic approach. The idea of trade schools at a post-high school or a post-secondary level did seem to make a lot of sense for a number of countries. So, I did a little work, a little analysis along those lines. As I said, I wrote a couple of articles about it. But, chiefly, what I got into here, was helping to publicize two year college teaching opportunities around the country, because the two year colleges were really growing. Thus, we needed to recruit more teachers, and AACJC also wanted to convince more colleges and universities to attract and train more two year college teachers, people who would become such teachers. So, I did a lot of speaking around the country at colleges and universities about the attractions and the importance of two year colleges, and particularly becoming a two year college teacher. That was a two year grant from the Carnegie people.

Q: Were you trying to interest them in international work?

SINGER: In part, yes. But, to be honest with you, this was somewhat of a deviation, for

the most part, from the main international direction of my career. This was principally getting into higher education area. I did, however, return to international side of things shortly thereafter, in 1970, when my grant ended. I went with the Institute of Public Administration. That is New York based, but with a Washington office. It was a large professional group of people, covering many areas of the public administration profession, and my job, was to try and assess what was going on in public administration training and preparation, particularly, in the developing world. The highlight of my two years with IPA...

Q: What year was this?

SINGER: 1970 and 1971. The highlight was an assignment in Uganda, where I worked with the Ugandan Institute of Public Administration in Kampala. I headed up a small team from IPA, New York (and IPA Washington) of teacher and teacher trainers who worked within IPA Kampala, basically to prepare national faculty better to teach modern public administration to Ugandan civil servants.

Q: This was funded by AID, I suppose?

SINGER: Yes, it was AID-funded. So, I did get back, pretty quickly, to the international area.

Q: What was the reception in AID about public administration? You were approaching the time when it was sort of in disrepute.

SINGER: Yes, it didn't seem to be too popular. Fortunately, this didn't really affect me, and from what we could see in Kampala, basic and middle-level courses in the principles of public administration made a lot of sense.

Q: What was the focus of these courses mainly?

SINGER: Middle-level management training for government employees. Things like financial management, organization and methods, time management, some personnel work, a little auditing, and so forth. So, we are talking about middle-management here, for what was then, a pretty new government structure, where, yes, they had a few people at the top who had been given mostly British university training during the colonial days. They had a few clerks being recruited at the bottom, but what they lacked was a trained group of middle managers. At the time, for much of Africa, this was a field that AID was concentrating on. When I returned from my three months there, I decided I wanted to concentrate on pursuing my Ph.D. I did so when I returned to Washington, and I studied for my doctorate over a total period of five years. I had been taking my course work, but I decided to concentrate on it in 1971, and see if I could finish up the dissertation.

Q: This was at SAIS, or where was it?

SINGER: No, actually I went to the University of Maryland, College Park. It turned out

that was the only university in the area that would give me full credit for my Master's degree studies , as old as it was (at the time, about 20 years old). In other words, I could build on Master's degree from SAIS. Also, we were Maryland residents then, so it was affordable. Finally, U.MD was the only university that allowed students to study for their doctorates without taking residence, i.e., a minimum of six-months full time study. I simply couldn't afford to take off that much time from work. So, Maryland was obviously the clear choice.

Q: What was your concentration?

SINGER: It was in Public Administration and Political Science. It was a joint program - at the time they did not have two separate departments, so I could take courses in both areas.

Q: What was your thesis about?

SINGER: I did a comparison between UNDP and AID concerning popular participation in international development. Princeton Lyman was around and talking a lot about this as you may recall, about Title IX. I wanted to explore whether Third World countries believed the UNDP program, or USAID and its predecessor agencies, encouraged more an active public participation in the development process.

Q: What did you find out?

SINGER: Well, I had to restrict myself to Washington area research. Unfortunately, I couldn't get to the countries to actually ask those questions, so I had to restrict myself to foreign embassies, where I spoke to various officials (including Ambassadors, Economic and Development attaches, etc.) By a slight edge, at the time, UNDP nosed out AID in terms of perception, among maybe, 25 or 30 embassies whose people I did interview - people who were reasonably knowledgeable about this area.

Q: What do you mean by participation? How did you define the word and its application; it is a subject of great interest these days?

SINGER: It is, but this was a couple decades ago and it was certainly not as sophisticated a concept now as it has become, a kind of elaborate concept. It was more, "Do you really have anything to say about the conceptualization, planning and the implementation and the follow-up, the monitoring, and the evaluation of development programs in your country conducted by international donors? Do you feel you have enough to say about it, and which organization tends to encourage participation the most?" These are fairly simple questions, not all that sophisticated, that I was asking at the time, albeit in a pretty systematic way, since that's necessary for a dissertation. Anyway, as this was coming to an end, and I defended my dissertation and it was judged to be . . . Bill Siffin, by the way, was the chairperson of my committee. I don't know if you met Bill Siffin, from the University of Indiana, as it turned out, he kindly chaired my committee. When I was finally wrapping up my dissertation process, I was told, "Yes, okay except you have to

make a few changes here, there, and the other place, then we will go ahead and give you your degree."

An assignment with the United Nations in Senegal - 1972

Anyway, as this was happening I got a job with United Nations, my first and only job with them. I worked for a group in Senegal, called OTC, the Office of Technical Cooperation, which was a branch of the UN Secretariat. At the time, they operated under the general rubric of UNDP, but independently as an agency, dealing with public administration matters. That was their specialization. So, actually, when I went to Senegal, I was, for the first time, with a multinational team. The official language of the country and of the team was French. This was the first and only time in my international career I got to operate in French or a foreign language as my daily working language - the language not only of the country but of my office, too. Also, it was the first time I was a definite minority, as sort of a WASP or White Anglo Saxon (more or less) Protestant American male, this was kind of unusual, particularly in those days.

Q: Who were the other members of your group?

SINGER: They were French speakers, chiefly French nationality, some from French colonies, but they too, of course, had French nationality residually, a couple of Europeans - a Dutch person, and a young Japanese, were on the team. Let's see - maybe there was also one from Scandinavia, but fundamentally I was the only American. Correction: I WAS the only American there and the only Anglophone, basically, on that team, and that was a very interesting experience. We worked in the President's palace - Leopold Senghor was the President still, and the revered founding father of his country, of course. He literally had us working in his palace, a sort of internal advisory committee for the Office of the President. We did a variety of things, and I was the training officer for the team. So, I carried over, at least, those credentials from my previous life with AID. It was an interesting job. I was also assigned to teach a course at the University of Senegal, among other things, as part of my job, to which government officials were assigned by their offices . . .

Q: What was the subject of the course?

SINGER: Basically, public administration again, similar to the kind of the middle level course I was teaching in Kampala a few years before. I traveled a lot around the country and gave short courses to government civil servants in different provincial capitals of the country, and so forth. It was a very interesting experience. It was just a year's contract, though.

Q: What were the other team members doing?

SINGER: They were doing internal advisory work, basically, on organization and management, personnel, finances, evaluation and monitoring of programs, accounting, procurement, that kind of thing. It was partially training and partially hands-on direct

assistance to government workers, that we were doing. The biggest satisfaction I probably got out of my time there was the fact that UN policy, at least at the time, was to have a direct, immediate counterpart in the same office in which we worked. This was not as an assistant, but as a true counterpart, as such. We were supposed to be dealt with and treated by our superiors on a completely equal basis. Each one of the members of the international team, myself included, had then, a true Senegalese counterpart with whom we shared professional responsibilities.

Q: How did it work?

SINGER: I think it worked very well, certainly on my side it did, with the person I worked with most of the time. They did change in midstream, but with both people I worked with, it was a good relationship. In fact, we even kept up with . . .

Q: They were up to your speed, in terms of knowledge and capability?

SINGER: Pretty much. Part of the job was for me to try to help, where I could, to get them up to speed where I didn't think they were, and to do it, tactfully and diplomatically as well. So, that part of the job, I found to be very satisfactory. But I did not enjoy the UN bureaucracy. I found it worse than our own, worst than the American bureaucracy had been.

Q: In what way?

SINGER: Mostly the nationality angle. While I enjoyed working on a multinational team, the UN had national quotas, and I believe they still do, in some positions, and in some organizations where they work. I found that very hard to accept and adapt to: to be hired because you were an American or Japanese, or whatever it happened to be, to fill a quota - this does not make for the best morale in the world. If you think that you are really there because they hired you to do a job and they felt that you could do the job best, and to be frequently reminded of this, well, it was not a very good experience as far as I am concerned.

Q: Do you think the team had any impact on the government?

An assignment with U.S. public TV and education programs - 1973-1980

SINGER: It think it probably did. I think for some of us it did. It was best for those of us who managed to travel around and get out of the four walls of the palace (which was prestigious but confining). I found that being able to get out and travel around the country, giving short courses and giving a longer term course at the University in Dakar, I certainly found a real impact there. So, that was an interesting and a different kind of a year.

After my year in Senegal, I left and came back to the U.S. and finally picked up my doctorate (the amendments, changes, and improvements to my dissertation had been

accepted while I was in Senegal.) So, I could just pick up the degree when I got home. After I returned to Washington, somebody with whom I had worked in one of my DC consulting jobs had gone out to Chicago, and I was looking around for a job, and I wrote to him, among others. It turns out that there was a job at Channel 11, which was a public television station, a community station, a large producing community public TV station, in Chicago, WTTW. I got a job there, essentially, as a fund raiser, producer, and director of learning services - there was some connection there with training and education. For a seven year period, I worked at the TV station: fund-raising, producing some TV, and writing proposals for private and government funding. At the time, the Carter administration was in power in Washington, if you recall. They were funding a fair amount of public broadcasting in the 1970s and so we did get out several proposals, and we produced several programs, chiefly in the area of school desegregation, which was very important at the time. Radio and TV resources were being trained on this problem all over the country.

Q: What was the reception to your program?

SINGER: I think pretty good. Desegregation, as you know, had preceded apace, and while I obviously can't claim all the credit for the programs that we worked on, nevertheless, school desegregation was indeed a big problem in the 1960s and early 1970s, mid-1970s, for that matter, when I was happy to work on this crusade. So, it turned out that we produced some shows, particularly with high school students around the country. There was one major series 12 hour-long shows we did, which I am particularly happy with. It was called "As We See It." The kids themselves, at a number of high schools all over the country, talked about how they saw school segregation and how to get rid of it, or at least, how to chip away at it in the south, in the west, and in the north, and in the east. This was a national series, which we produced all over the country.

Q: Any distinctive viewpoints that stood out in your mind?

SINGER: The magnet schools that attracted a number of kids in places like Milwaukee, or Little Rock, as a matter of fact. I recall, they were very popular ways of breaking down the barriers, without hitting people over the head too hard against segregation, simply to say "if you got some real skills, motivation, some talent" in the case of performing arts, plastic arts, and so forth, "come to these kinds of schools." We managed to highlight some of those to show how those kinds of things worked. While I was doing this, I also did some private consulting work, both in Latin America and Africa, keeping my hand in the field. In Latin America, I went back to Bolivia, for my third time there, for a couple of months. There, I did an evaluation for a consulting firm of rural education programs that AID had been supporting in Bolivia.

Q: What did you find out?

SINGER: We found out that the noble idea of helping the poor (the Indians and mestizos) by splitting rural and urban education into two ministries, which was a traditional thing that had been going on for many years in Bolivia (to some degree encouraged by our old

AID Servicio system), that perhaps its time had come and gone. It was time to begin thinking about bringing back the rural and urban education systems together, which also turned out to be an important measure of national social unification.

Q: They were separate administrations?

SINGER: Yes, and social integration was also a very big issue in Bolivia, with its large groups of Indians and mestizos, and its small number of whites. So, yes, our recommendation was, while many of the rural schools have done really well, perhaps it is time to start breaking down the barriers and bringing them back together in some sort of coordinated, integrated, urban and rural school system. And before long, the government decided to do just that. A few other things I did in the international field while working in Chicago, from 1973 to 1980, included overseas assignments with USIA. I was called an "AMSPEC," an American Specialist, on three separate occasions, for three weeks to a month each, during my seven years in Chicago. I took off the time for this during various summers, and went to Africa twice, North Africa, once, and to West Africa, a second time, and to Central America, once. In effect, I built on my public administration interest and my interest in training, and I offered a series of public administration lectures, illustrated with Peter Drucker management films in French and Spanish. Fortunately, my French and Spanish were still pretty good. I think that is what attracted USIA to get somebody like me to do this kind of thing, even though I wasn't, by any means, the sort of eminent academic specialist they usually sent. But, I could deliver some lectures on middle-management training techniques in French and Spanish, and I was available and enthusiastic!

Q: What was your reception?

SINGER: I think pretty good. They liked this kind of thing. Again, the middle management idea, they hadn't had very many people on the USIA lecture circuit doing this kind of thing overseas. They had some excellent performing artists, and they had a lot of high-powered academics delivering lectures, but I gave them sort of hands-on training in middle management thing, and I think they liked that. Many of the countries where I went seemed to be ready for about that level of in-service training. So, that was an interesting series of breaks from my seven years with television. Maybe that whetted my appetite, in 1980, to go back to the real world of foreign service. So, fortunately, I made the right connections, lucky connections, and I was rehired by AID. I went back as the General Development Officer for Zaire and the Congo, based in Kinshasa, in 1980. It was fascinating work, just as it had been 20 years before.

Rehired by USAID and returned to Zaire - 1980

Q: Was it any different from before?

SINGER: Yes, it was quite different. There were a number of new skyscrapers, a modern hotel or two, and what have you. On the other hand, the road system and many of the utilities were crumbling then, and under Mobutu they got worse and worse all the time

we were there. In fact, our relations, politically speaking, were also crumbling away during the time we were there. Things got to the point where AID forbade its Kinshasa mission to deal directly with government officials. So, we had to find and work through nongovernmental organizations of one kind or another . . .

Q: Why?

SINGER: It was the Carter administration, and our relationships with Mobutu were really falling apart then.

Q: Political relations?

SINGER: Political relations.

Q: Not operational?

SINGER: No. It was not operational. As a matter of fact, we got along fine, operationally. But political relations were getting worse and worse.

Q: What kinds of programs were you pursuing?

SINGER: Well, my portfolio included training, Food for Peace, refugee programs, and general support of PVOs doing a variety of things all over that enormous country. There were quite a lot of refugees we were working with at that particular time, mostly from Angola. They were coming in during the height of Angola's never-ending Civil War, even in 1980, even though the opportunities in Zaire were very small. I worked on refugee feeding and other assistance programs to support the UNHCR, and I also worked on a national program of nutritional improvement, in addition to our Food for Peace activities. We supplied support for many PVOs, Private Volunteer Organizations, all over the place, non-governmental groups. We did international training programs, participant training, of course, as well, and with USIS, we also sponsored English (ESL) programs. I was a pretty busy GDO!

Q: Was there any progress?

SINGER: Yes, well, let me just finish the story. In addition to my work in Zaire, I was also assigned to work across the river in Brazzaville, the capital of the other Congo. Today, that little country has been ravaged and is still aflame from a terrible civil war that is probably even worse than what its bigger neighbor is suffering under Kabila. But, in the early '80's, it was still much better off, and enjoyed substantial Communist political and economic support. As a result, our relationships with that Congo, in Brazzaville, were even worse, politically speaking, than they were with Mobutu, on the other side of the river, which is, by the way, called the Zaire River in Zaire and the Congo River in the Congo. However, we did have a fair amount of AID-funded activities there, chiefly carried out through international organizations like WHO and WFP, and through CARE, the American PVO. CARE was our biggest partner in Congo/Brazza. We worked with

them on many things.

Q: What was CARE doing?

SINGER: CARE was working on a lot of things. They were doing public health; they were doing population family planning; they were doing some forestry improvement work; they were doing food distribution; actually, they were doing many different things. So, my job was liaison with the CARE folks in the Congo as well as with the international organizations. The latter were doing immunizations, food distribution, and what have you. Consequently, I probably spent a quarter to a third of my time in the "other Congo", monitoring our grantees' activities, with the rest of my time in Zaire. It was a very busy assignment, as a matter of fact, but it was also interesting, and a great post to get back into development after so many years away.

Q: Do you think the Zaire program was having an effect? You say that you were shifting it to NGOs. There were NGO operations to work with?

SINGER: Yes, including many U.S. and European missionaries, for whom Zaire has always been a favorite country. Some of them had long had developmental activities underway such as CARITAS, the Salvation Army, and other groups. We worked with a number of them. So, there was plenty to do. As to the impact - who knows? You look at it politically today, and you say "My God what a mess. It doesn't look like anybody did anybody any kind of good at all." I can't say at this point, frankly, in retrospect, whether or not we did much good with our aid. I don't think we did a lot of harm, although perhaps our politically-motivated Cold War-driven support for Mobutu (particularly from the mid-60's through the 70's), and our unwillingness to provide direct support to the left-wingers in Brazzaville (much less the "Communist" Angolan government nearby) may have skewed or even distorted the nature and amount of assistance we provided to central Africa in those years. If such political considerations had not guided our hand then, I think the impact of our programs very likely would have been more effective, although I can't prove it.

Q: Why were we on the outs with Mobutu? I thought we supported him.

SINGER: We weren't on the outs with him so much politically, although you can characterize the whole situation as being "politically driven". But, we were on the outs with him and his administration, essentially over corruption; their refusal to open the books and allow us to see how our money was being spent; and that sort of thing. Basically, Mobutu's fast-growing kleptocracy was the problem.

Q: You couldn't work through the government because they took all the money?

SINGER: That's right. At a certain point, while I was there, they actually prohibited AID officers to have any direct conversations with Zairean officials in their offices. In other words, no visits with government officials in their offices. We were not allowed to even talk with them for a period of time.

Q: What was the purpose of that? To make a point?

SINGER: I think so, yes. It was pretty silly but, nevertheless, I believe that is what it was all about.

Q: You were there, what?

SINGER: Four years, but for me it went fast. For my family it didn't go so fast, because there wasn't much to do nearby and with the serious shortage of surface and air transportation, it was difficult and expensive to travel outside the country. The saddest thing was that Zaire was (and is) a vast, beautiful country if only one could get into the interior and move around in it.

Q: Did you travel around it a lot?

SINGER: I made a few long-distance trips (very difficult, and very slow and expensive). Also, there were still a few passable roads in Western Zaire, between Kinshasa and the Atlantic (Bas Zaire), so we could travel there. And on the other side of the river, it was somewhat easier (though many of the roads there were also bad). I certainly didn't get around Zaire as much as I would have like to.

Q: Is this the time we had the Shaba projects; the rural development projects?

SINGER: We were responsible for building the large Inga-Shaba hydroelectric dam, and we did still have a Shaba rural development project in southwestern Zaire. It was very difficult, even then, to get back and forth, but we had agricultural people stationed there in the Lubumbashi region.

Q: How did it work?

SINGER: I was told by our agriculture people that the project largely escaped the political problems surrounding us further to the north, and that from a strictly agricultural viewpoint, it worked well.

Q: How was it working in agriculture? What was it that was being done?

SINGER: Basically, they were cultivating new seed varieties, enhancing crop fertility, trying new techniques of farm management , that kind of thing. Corn was the name of the game. They seemed to be doing pretty well.

Q: We were involved in that?

SINGER: Yes, we were involved in that.

Q: What were we doing?

SINGER: We were financing construction of the dam.

Q: I hadn't realized we were funding that.

SINGER: Not the whole thing. We did some and World Bank did some. Anyway, after my four years there, I was offered the opportunity to go to Burkina Faso as the GDO. But, my wife and I looked at the Post Report we found there was no international school available there for one child we still had with us. He would be going into his second year of high school, and we did not want to ship him off to boarding school, or put him into a French school.

Returned to USAID/Washington's staff training program - 1984

We decided that we would, instead, take an offer from Bill Ziegler, if you remember him, and come back to Washington. I worked in the AID Washington personnel office as the Chief of the Professional Core Training Branch, which I did for a matter of about nine months. We arranged for training and staff development of middle-level management . . .

Q: What was the professional core? What did that include?

SINGER: Well, it encompassed staff training courses and programs for mid-level, entry-level, administrative, secretarial, clerical, IDIs and DSPs (the Development Studies Program). I helped to plan and manage those activities for AID staff worldwide.

Q: What was AID's attitude about training? It seems to have fluctuated up and down.

SINGER: Yes, I think it was ambivalent. I was only there for nine months, but the Agency often seemed uncertain whether it wanted to invest any real time and effort into developing its career staff through serious training programs. The feel I got during that relatively brief time was that there was a certain ambivalence. For example, the career entry-level IDI program, and the professional in-service Development Studies Program never seemed to win a secure place as accepted tools for long-term career development by top Agency managers, perhaps because they never have been comfortable and secure with the idea of a permanent AID, anyway. “Ambivalent” probably is the best word one can use.

Q: Any understanding why we were ambivalent about it?

SINGER: People are ambivalent about professional training in almost all walks of life. Besides the AID organizational problem of ambivalence we have just mentioned, in various organizations where I have worked, both international and domestic, management may conclude that people are just trying to “goof off” and escape their professional responsibilities by attending a three month, a six month, or Heaven forbid - even a year-long training program. There is that kind of a feeling. It usually isn't articulated in such explicit terms, but I think that some of it is there. I think it was there, to a large extent,

with AID - maybe it still is.

Q: Can you compare that with the military's view of training?

SINGER: I can't really compare the military. I don't know enough about it.

Q: My impression of it is train, train, train, that is what you do all the time.

SINGER: You may be right. But, it certainly isn't my experience on the civilian side of government, in any case..

Q: Perhaps, they thought it was too much of a goof-off kind of situation.

SINGER: I think so, or at least, one that didn't contribute explicitly, directly and enough in a short enough time frame to the organization itself, to enhancing the performance of the employee for the immediate good of the organization.

Q: What was your impression of the Development Studies Program?

SINGER: I think it got better. Was it American University that finally took it over? I think so, from another contractor. It is a little hazy now. But, I think it was getting better at the time I left, but I'm not sure what happened to it after that. In any case, to a degree this work was a sort of a detour from foreign service work, because, as it turned out, I would say, about six or seven months, into the nine months that I ended up spending at this job, AID went through a peculiar metamorphosis, in a sense...

Q: What year was this in?

SINGER: This was approximately, when I left Kinshasa... This was in about 1985. When I left Kinshasa, I came to do this job 1984, 1985, in Washington, there was a feeling towards the end of that period, "we need to get our foreign service people back into the field; we need to cut down on the Washington assignments of our foreign service personnel." I think it had something to do with Congress or some other pressure, but whatever it was, it had nothing specifically to do with me. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time and, when they asked foreign service people assigned to Washington who might be willing to curtail their tours in Washington, my hand went up quickly when I learned there might be a post opening with an international school for our son.

Q: There were too many staff in Washington?

New assignment as Chief, Human Resources Development in USAID/Kenya - 1985-1989

SINGER: Right. As I said, I volunteered fast when it turned out that there was an opening in Nairobi, Kenya, as Chief of the Human Resources program (HRDO) at that mission.

Fortunately, I was selected for this job and it was a wonderful four years, 1985 - 1989 - probably the best four years I had with the Agency.

Q: What was your assignment then? What does Human Resources Development entail?

SINGER: It really was an expanded general development office (GDO) job. I was responsible for participant training, Food for Peace, private voluntary organizations, women's programs, some work in human rights and refugees. It was an interesting platter, and a truly fascinating country. The complex of AID offices in Nairobi was very large and quite complicated. There was a regional REDSO operation, there was a regional inspector general, a regional finance management office, a regional housing and urban development office, and I don't know what all else. We had a lot of people there doing a lot of interesting things, as a matter of fact. My own work centered on an extensive participant training activity, and on work with a more sophisticated group of nongovernmental organizations, or private volunteer organizations. There were literally hundreds of such groups. Throughout Kenya, PVOs were operating in all kinds of different areas, functionally and geographically speaking. To work with them and then to come up with a new umbrella PVO group, called our PVO Financing Project, as well as to expand and then consolidate a lot of our training programs (both public and private sector) under something we called “Training for Development”, those were sort of the accomplishments, if you will, . . .

Q: What is this PVO umbrella you were talking about?

SINGER: Well, we were given a generous line of credit by the mission, and then crafted criteria for applications, screening, and selection for competitive awards on a merit basis to local NGO’s, as well as mixed local-international PVO partnerships. In some cases, Kenyan and third country NGO’s formed new partnerships and submitted applications for our grants. We also awarded, in a slightly different, but related program, additional awards to American PVOs whose purposes and programs were compatible with the Mission’s development portfolio.

Q: Was there any development strategy or simply a funding mechanism?

SINGER: It was essentially a funding mechanism, but what we did was to develop criteria for excellence, or merit criteria, if you will, in terms of deciding which kinds of awards . . .

Q: What kind of criteria are you talking about?

SINGER: Largely what they have done, and what they seemed likely to do and capable of doing. We examined the impact already made by the group, and its reputation of each organizations before we decided to make a grant to them, and we decided if it would be best to help them expand, or to start up new activities that they wanted to get into. So, we did a lot of field work on this one to try to get a much better feel for...

Q: Were we pushing any private sectors?

SINGER: The sectors were the kind that the mission itself was interested in promoting. The private sector - small businesses, micro-enterprise, capital formation and women's programs, especially were especially popular. So, we gave some emphasis to them. But we tried not to be a complete tail to the mission's priority kite, in terms of the fields of activities. We worked to develop internally excellent criteria that we could use, regardless of what the particular field or fields of activity for which the applicants sought help.

Q: On the scale, what was your budget for this?

SINGER: Well, something like five million dollars to give out, but that was over a three year period. So, it was somewhere in the million and a half range on an annual basis.

Q: Individual grants were in what range?

SINGER: Individual grants could go up to $200,000, as I recall, but we had many more smaller ones. They were for five, ten, fifteen thousand, but we had quite a lot.

Q: Did they apply to you, or did you go out and find them?

SINGER: A little bit of both, actually. The word got around. Then, what we decided to do was to help start up a national umbrella group. The mission director became particularly interested in this. We had some problems later with it, but something called VADA, Volunteer Agency Development Assistance, evolved as a Kenyan counterpart umbrella group. It was meant to do the applicant pre-screening, and also to get funding from other international donors, besides USAID, that might get interested in this approach.

Q: How did it work?

SINGER: Unfortunately, it looked good on paper, but in practice it didn't work so well because the guy who was running it turned out to be somebody who was a little more interested in lining his own pockets than he was in filling the pocketbooks of anybody else. We had quite a bit of a scandal about that one, before we finally decided it was just too much of a mess to deal with. Conceptually, everybody thought the idea was fine, and I still think it is a good idea if you can do it. Unfortunately, the Kenyan umbrella group was managed by a businessman who ran it into the ground.

Q: This was the Kenyan people?

SINGER: Yes.

Q: But I suppose the selection process could get very political?

SINGER: It could indeed. We hoped very much to keep some of the politics out by developing and applying objective, merit-based standards for our awards. But, like most

African countries, Kenya is a tribal country and, sadly, unfortunately, some of our partners in the project often showed a preference for making grants for activities in certain regions where their favorite tribes were the strongest. We had to sort that out. That was a bit of a challenge to try to keep down open “tribalism” as a key influence.

Q: What was the government's attitude towards it?

SINGER: Their attitude was, "Yes, generally speaking, that is good, but we have some suggestions." We said, "Thank you very much for your suggestions. We would like to hear any ideas you have, but we are going to run this thing," Fortunately, we managed to keep the government at arm's length, because there we felt that the political and tribal influences combined would be something that would be extremely difficult to cope with. When we got into private enterprise, which we did, in a parallel program, subsequent to our PVO umbrella program, that was a different matter. Then we encouraged government and private enterprise to join together to help decide on assistance and grants, when they were made in the private enterprise area. But, as far as the more vulnerable world of nonprofit, non-governmental organizations was concerned, we wanted to keep that away from the government.

Q: How did you find the caliber of the indigenous institutions?

SINGER: Some were just great. Some were recommended to find a partnership with either the U.S. or an international Canadian, European, or whatever, PVO to work with to help strengthen them sufficiently so they could reapply after being turned down the first time for internal management weaknesses in their organizations. But some of them were ready to go and actually were operating - Wangari Maathai’s Women's Banking Organization, for example, which is still active in East Africa in that whole area; some of the coop and women’s groups that were assisted by outfits like Trickle Up, the American PVO that gives very small micro-enterprise loans . . . You may have heard about their $50 grants, that kind of thing. Some groups had recently become established by virtue of small grants from people like Trickle Up - we managed to help make some of those really become viable; some had connections with established American missionary organizations in the field and had been given seed money by them; small cooperatives; water supply groups; women's groups, in particular, handicraft groups; and so forth. There was a good deal of talent and a lot of enthusiasm to grow and branch out from their early beginnings. As I said, Kenya was relatively advanced in this whole area.

Q: Did you give a lot of attention to capacity building of these organizations?

SINGER: Yes, as much as we possibly could. In some cases, we, our Controller's office in particular, was very helpful. We did ask some of the Controller's staff go out to a number of these organizations, not only to assess their financial capacity, but also to make specific suggestions on training and hiring additional financial management staff, and in some cases, helping to find them.

Q: What do you think the significance of that program has been?

SINGER: Well, I think you can make a pretty strong case that we are talking about a mixed economy now, one that has a strength in the nongovernmental sector, economically speaking, that is at least partially attributable to programs of this kind. We put in a good deal of time and effort into this program, and I believe we still are expanding this work in Kenya. I think it is making a difference. It might even be making a bit of a political difference, in the sense that President Moi, even though he is pretty autocratic, at least is not a corrupt, bloody-minded military dictator, and the country does hold periodic elections for its parliament and president. Kenya does have serious problems; however, I believe that AID's help in strengthening the counterbalancing influence of non-governmental sectors (NGO's, private sector, etc.) has indeed helped to keep Kenya from being dragged down into the kind of hopeless morass that Mobutu led Zaire into.

Q: You must have had a large number of these various organizations you were working with?

SINGER: Yes, we sure did.

Q: Do you have any idea how many were involved?

SINGER: I would say, over the three years or so that we had this program going, maybe 100 all together. Some were pretty small.

Q: That is a lot to keep track of. I assume you had to keep pretty close tabs on each one?

SINGER: We did. We had people going out in the field all the time. We had reports coming in frequently. Some of the AID staff people who traveled around, not necessarily from my office, helped us keep an eye on these activities.

Q: It was fairly substantial.

SINGER: Yes, it was.

Q: There was no particular field that was predominant?

SINGER: No, I would say, as I said, maybe small business, micro-enterprise, coops, women's groups - probably these groups were predominant.

Q: That was only one of your responsibilities. What were some of the others?

SINGER: International training. As I said, we reorganized and expanded our "Training for Development" program. We took a look at whom we had trained, and we did a sample-based assessment of where our returnees were, and how well they were doing.

Q: What did you find out?

SINGER: I think, on the whole, we were gratified. Most of them did come back, and most were doing something constructive with the kind of training we had offered them. So, the training side of things was good.

Q: Did you rewrite the program at all, or change it in any way?

SINGER: Well, I guess, in taking a look at who had been trained, we did come up with a few areas where we felt there wasn't as much training as perhaps there should be. Those were more in the technical fields, rather than the more academic, liberal arts fields, which had predominated in years past.

Q: Like what? What are you talking about?

SINGER: We are talking about, in this particular case, privatization, banking, financial management, brokerage, insurance. Those kinds of things, in fields which Kenya had been making progressive steps, making real progress, but where advanced training hadn't caught up. So, we did manage to reorganize a little bit in that direction. The mission itself was also expanding its outreach towards private enterprise, private sector programs, so our new training efforts helped support that. We would offer scholarships to our participants, and many would enrol in national institutions, thus helping to strengthen them.

Q: You said one of the other areas was women and development. What were you trying to do in that?

SINGER: The women and development program, the Women's International Banking activities, women's handicraft organizations, women's coops and other rural-oriented programs - certainly including family planning and population - we stressed training in those key areas as well. Those were the kinds of things we were pressing for.

Q: Were these well received?

SINGER: I think so. Like most African societies, Kenya is patriarchal, but the country does have a pretty fair record of moving women up into positions of responsibility in both the public and private sectors (there are also a number of women MP’s.)

Q: Human Rights was one of your... What did you do there? How did you approach Human Rights, in a kind of situation like that?

SINGER: Since we were lucky enough to have an Ambassador like Elinor Constable, who is very strong on human rights and women’s rights, it was a lot easier. A retired admiral was our Ambassador when we arrived, and he left a few months later. Ambassador Constable took over right away. She was very supportive She stood up firmly and effectively to the most egregious attempts by President Moi and his “strongman” government, as did Mission Director Steve Sinding. Overall, it was a great

time to be working for Uncle Sam in an excellent post. We were very reluctant to leave this wonderful country, but I was fortunate enough to successfully bid on another great place - Quito, Ecuador.

Transferred to USAID/Ecuador - 1989-1991

Q: What was the situation in Ecuador when you were there?

SINGER: Not so bad. Today, I understand, the economy has dipped and the amenities aren't quite so nice. We were there from mid-1989 to the end of 1991. We left Kenya in 1989 and went directly to Ecuador after home leave. Anyway, I was again Chief of the General Development Office there. In Ecuador, we also had a whole potpourri of programs. Geographically, Ecuador is a small country tucked in between Colombia and Peru, two bigger countries in the Andean area and both deeply afflicted by the drug problem. Happily, Ecuador has not been badly affected by drugs. It is sort of a buffer state. The Mission did sponsor a drug program, actually a narcotics prevention and education effort which was aimed especially to stop young Ecuadorians from using drugs. We wanted to help this pretty sophisticated and developed little country improve and reinforce its anti-drug activities, both in school and out of school, through education and other prevention activities designed to turn young Ecuadorians away from drugs.

Q: Why are they more sophisticated than some of the others?

SINGER: That's hard to say. I think its education level was a good deal higher. A lot of people went for advanced educational degrees in the United States and Europe. I am contrasting this, to some extent, with Africa, especially the tropical African countries, the Sub-Sahara African countries, where the education levels were not that high. The opportunities to go for advanced degrees and training and what have you hadn't been very widespread in the African countries, and certainly not as they were in places like Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, or most of them, as a matter of fact. Bolivia is an exception; just as Haiti, Paraguay, the old Guyanas, and perhaps a few other places are. But Ecuador is a relatively developed and sophisticated country compared to what I had been used to. So there the programs I was involved in included participant training, some adult education work, small enterprise development, private sector assistance, tax reform, and as I said, narcotics prevention and education. My plate was pretty full there.

Q: What stood out among your programs in terms of your time and interest and what you thought worked?

SINGER: Probably the drug education activities and the fact that AID was beginning to get into democracy and governance work at this time. This is a field in which I had a long-term interest, given my educational background, my interest in political science, in public administration, and so forth. We began to get into improving both the courts and the legislature in Ecuador, and we were working with the national electoral commission to help Ecuador carry out free and fair national elections.

Q: What did you do there?

SINGER: Finding people to send for training was a first step, basically, to various court, legal education and legislative reform institutions and training organizations in the United States. Finally, we were reversing a policy in effect for many years and starting to surmount years of almost paranoid fears of appearing to "interfere in the domestic policies" of other countries. We were also beginning to talk about voting and elections. Today AID, as you know, has gotten into electoral reform and assistance in a fairly big way in many countries, and is monitoring many overseas elections and what have you through various groups like NDI and IRI, the Carter Center, IFES, and so forth. But, at the start of this decade, this was pretty radical stuff. We were just beginning to look into whether and how we could find an effective and useful role to play in the electoral process, to help it become more transparent, honest, effective and efficient. So, while we were just starting to explore this area while I was there, much more was done after I left. I sort of began gathering data in the field. I found that to be especially interesting.

Q: What was your strategy for the drug reduction program?

SINGER: There was a fairly big Ecuadorian group, a nongovernmental organization, actually, through which we worked on drug prevention and education. So, it was a question of giving them grants and then trying to follow how they were using our money. Basically, this was in drug education and prevention work, seminars they were holding, materials that they produced, arranging for skits and theatrical presentations at schools around the country, teacher education programs, and general "consciousness raising" among the young people about the evils of using drugs.

Q: This was mainly focused on drug use within the country rather than the smuggling of drugs out of the country?

SINGER: Yes, absolutely. Fortunately, they don't produce drugs in Ecuador, or if they do, it's very small scale, indeed, and they don't export it. It is a drug "pass through" country, if you will, - stuff comes out of Bolivia and Peru, goes up through there and then is refined in Colombia. In most cases, it then, in most cases, goes north from Colombia up through the Caribbean or Central America to the United States. But, Ecuador is not directly involved in the drug trade. Just about everybody wanted to keep it that way.

Q: We weren't trying to interdict the traffic?

SINGER: Well, we had a DEA office at the Quito Embassy, but its job seemed to be largely to keep an eye on things, and help out to see to that things didn't change for the worse. So, anyway, there was drug prevention and education, and also a tax reform program - we actually had IRS people come on secondment to us who worked with the Ministry of Finance's Tax Division on their tax collection procedures. That is one of the big pains, of course, of many Latin American countries; they are simply unable to collect the taxes that they budget for. Therefore, they have many budgetary shortfalls. Just as, ironically as we speak, Ecuador is at this very moment, having a terrible fiscal time

because it has an enormous shortfall in its projected budget.

Anyway, I stayed there in Quito just about two and a half years, from mid-1989 to the end of 1991, and then they did away with my job in a Washington-ordered cutback. At that point, I was given the choice of exploring a new job in Eastern Europe (which would have been a “first” for me), or of going back to Africa. The job in Eastern Europe was to open up the AID program in Slovakia. Slovakia was then still part of Czechoslovakia, but everyone knew it would soon become an independent country again. So the writing was on the wall, and AID decided to open an office In Bratislava, even before independence, which would later become USAID/Slovakia. So, they sent me over there to see whether or not I would like to take that job, which was offered me (subject to AID/W concurrence) while I was there. It was tempting, but the big problem I foresaw, of course, was that I didn't speak any Czech or Slovak (they are separate languages.) I would have had to work through an interpreter, at least for six months, probably closer to a year, year and a half, if not the whole time I was there. I had never had to do this before, and I didn’t really want to start now. Even more important, “Time’s winged chariot” was hovering in the background, and I was going to have to retire at age 65. That is to say, I was going to have to get out of AID and the foreign service, mandatory retirement in mid-1994. Now, that meant I had maybe two and a half years to go from the time we were beginning to think about the transfer out of Ecuador. I thought Ecuador would probably be my last post, but as it turned out, rather unexpectedly, they did away with my job. I decided I really didn't want to spend my last tour working through an interpreter in an Eastern European country about which I knew almost nothing. Also, I wasn't all that sure, because the emphasis was going to be almost all on privatization and economic reform, banking reforms, and the like that my skills were particularly suitable for what they needed there, in terms of somebody to run that office. So, I thought about it long and hard, and I turned down my chance to be an AID Rep.

Our alternative, not the most desirable in the world but still quite acceptable and a very interesting one, turned out to be Yaounde, Cameroon. So, I went to Yaounde as my last tour, from end of 1991 to middle of 1994.

The last USAID tour in USAID/Cameroon - 1991-1994

Q: What was the situation in Cameroon when you were there?

SINGER: Interesting country. Cameroon is one of three countries in the world where English and French are the legal, official languages. The Seychelles is one; Cameroon is one; and Canada is the third. So, it turns out that Cameroon used to be two Cameroons. There was a British Cameroon and then there was the larger, French-speaking Cameroon. French Cameroon was always about three times the size of the English-speaking area. When independence came in the early ‘60’s, Cameroonians had a plebiscite and apparently they voted to become one country. I say “apparently” because a number of the English speakers there say, "No, it never happened and they had a bad count when the votes were counted" . Most experts believe that indeed there may not have been the necessary number of “yes” voters to merge the two former colonies into one country. But

it happened, and the English speakers have never been happy about it.

Q: Were they essentially of the same ethnic background?

SINGER: Some were, but many were not. The different tribal groups tended to be in the different linguistic regions, as they once were. So, the fact was they had a doubly difficult time trying to blend. Languages always were and still remain the big problem of Cameroon.

Q: I was wondering why both places were called Cameroon .

SINGER: They both were called Cameroon because the British and French took it away from Germany after World War I. The whole place used to be a German colony, one of two in Africa, Tanganyika (n East Africa) as it used to be called, was the other one. Cameroon was Germany's only foothold in West Africa. So, when the British and French took it away after World War I, they split it up between them. Each country took one piece of it and made it their own colony; the French area was bigger. That history always made it tough for the two regions to get back together again. This linguistic split was exacerbated by the tribal difficulties and the old political split between the two colonies. They simply, in large part, don't get along with each other and the English speakers, in particular, have always been a resentful minority and continuously have pushed for autonomy or independence. A higher percentage of them are certainly more articulate and politically active than the francophones in the north. Now, that is kind of the background. We lived, of course, in Yaounde. Yaounde, and the larger commercial center, Douala (which is the port city of Cameroon), are both francophone, both French speaking, although everywhere in the country (supposedly) both languages are legal.

In Cameroon, we got into politics more than perhaps anywhere else, because AID's interest in democracy, governance and human rights really evolved during my tour. There were some real problems: Paul Biya, the President, had been reelected, I guess, twice, and, again, each time the elections took place, there were serious questions raised, both domestically and internationally, about whether these were honest elections. There is a good case to be made that if they had been conducted under the most honest conditions, the President might well not have been reelected, even though he got in, probably fairly, the first time. Be that as it may, Cameroon was a (fairly) benevolent dictatorship; hence, it was a pretty difficult place to work. There is no doubt about it. It reminded me more of Zaire under President Mobutu than anywhere else I was stationed.

Now, as Chief of Governance Training and Education, which was the title of my job there, I did design and manage AID activities in the areas of democratization, governance, human rights, education, participant training, and PVOs - Private Voluntary Organization liaison. Most of my work days were spent trying to work with Cameroonian nongovernmental organizations to strengthen them, especially on the civil society side of democracy and governance activities, as well as bringing in a variety of U.S. consultants to Cameroon to work with a number of Cameroonian and regional Human Rights and Democracy and Governance groups. We held in-country seminars for them, selecting

people and sending them overseas for training in the U.S., Europe, and, in one case, to Canada. Generally speaking, we were trying to build up the internal institutional capacities, once again, of these groups . . .

Q: May I ask, what was AID's strategy at that time in dealing with Governance and Democracy?

SINGER: Essentially, to finesse the arguments as much as we could with the government directly. We did have some arguments about that. We tried to finesse such issues as political pluralism and the need for a dynamic civil society with an unreceptive government. We also gave money, as you may recall, I have forgotten the name of the program, to the Embassy, basically, so that AID and the Embassy political officers, jointly, could administer grants which more directly benefitted local democratic political groups. In other words, we didn't get into the political game directly, but we certainly encouraged broader democratic and participative movements and groups.

Q: What do you mean by directly political? Supporting any particular party?

SINGER: Supporting even a political party or a group of political parties or a number of principles, as the case may be, that political parties, themselves, were supporting. The best explanation could well be the way the Germans run their activities in this area. What Germany does is to work in developing countries through its own political parties backed up by the central government. The parliament (Bundestag) actually appropriates money to German political parties, which then set up shop in the developing countries of their choice in areas where Germany has a particular interest. Cameroon was one of these, an ex-German colony. For many years, the Germans have been quite active in Cameroon. Several German political parties offer political training courses and provide advisory and consulting services to their “adopted” local political parties. They actually pick out local political groups and leaders that they like and find compatible with their own philosophy and objectives. We don't do it quite that obviously, but in terms of these political grants that we jointly made with the political officers at the embassies, we were pretty close. What we did was to find respectable national and regional political organizations, particularly those oriented towards “good government” agendas, hopefully as close to League of Women Voters model as we could find. These were groups that were interested in assistance to strengthen their staffing and operations, setting up permanent political election monitoring units, techniques for fund-raising, lobbying and so forth. We would help strengthen them by giving them grants to do that kind of thing, training their people, bringing in consultants to give in-country advice, assistance, seminars, and so forth.

Q: But this was not directly with the political parties?

SINGER: Not with them directly, but sometimes with affiliated “good government” groups. We didn't work as the Germans do, directly with the political parties.

Q: Any tendency on our part to take sides, to give any kind of preference?

SINGER: In the sense of openness, in the sense of pluralism, in the sense of inclusiveness, we would tend to favor groups that favored such principles. That is exactly what we did.

Q: What was the government's reaction to our doing this?

SINGER: Well, we had a number of calls, as a matter of fact. We largely shunted those off to the Embassy to handle because, frankly, the embassy was taking the lead, and it was pushing us in this direction quite vigorously. I guess the hope being that this could influence, perhaps, a number of promising leaders, and there were a number of promising political alternative leaders, to President Biya. Perhaps, they wanted to encourage the opposition parties to come together, in some sort of a coalition, sort of a new umbrella party kind of grouping to challenge Biya's one-man rule system through and his personal political party. As I said, we got more political in this program in Cameroon then I have ever seen us do, and we encouraged other groups to get involved in this area than I have ever seen us do before. And we did not boycott the government in our D/G efforts. We tried especially hard to work with the Parliament, the legislature there. We planned to send a number of people, librarians and other specialists working on documentation, reporting, library storage, and what have you, from their Parliament to the United States with training grants, hoping that they would come back and reform the system and thus strengthen a very weak legislature. I left post before most actually went. I am not sure whether they all actually did, since the decision was made in 1993 to close down the mission (largely because of Biya's undemocratic tendencies and his unrealistic economic policies). We tried to work with the courts as well, in terms of court strengthening. Once again, the plan was to select middle-level staff, career court personnel (rather than political people) and send them for practical training to the U.S. So, there was a good deal of work in the Democracy and Governance field.

Q: This is unusual for AID. These were the days when we were really getting involved in political interventions. How did you feel about it?

SINGER: I felt ambivalent. I have used the same word before, but it is appropriate here. As you sort of hinted, up to the early '90's, the AID motto (with some Cold War-generated exceptions) was pretty much "Thou shalt not interfere in internal political affairs of the host country". This was pretty much the received wisdom everywhere. But the fact of the matter was, I could see it, feel it, and experience it, and participate in the sea changes to that old philosophy that were then occurring. The jury is still out on the feasibility of this change, but I do think the time had certainly come when we should try.

Q: Did you get any sense of impact or effect?

SINGER: I got a sense, certainly, of beginning movement in a direction which, I thought if we followed through, could sometimes make a positive difference.

Q: What is this direction you are talking about?

SINGER: The direction basically being, I guess, that he who pays the piper does have a right at least, to call some of the tune. We were certainly paying the piper in Cameroon, up to the time the Administrator decided we should close down the mission shortly after I left. But, we were contributing substantially there, through our AID program, to the economic development of the country, and I do firmly believe that political development is fundamentally inseparable from economic. We cannot completely superimpose all our own democratic beliefs, processes and values on our recipients, but nor can we ignore or remain indifferent to whether we share at least the same basic values and beliefs about the role of the individual and the state in countries that we help. The more I realized got involved in this it, the more I became a believer in this.

Q: Did you understand why we were in Cameroon ? We seemed to have been in and out over the years.

SINGER: Well, I think there was a good case to be made that, especially, in the public health and family planning field, which was one of the least political, we had created an excellent record of accomplishment. I think it made good sense to try and build on that record and to expand this life-saving work. Public health is never out of date, despite the fact that it is one of the earliest areas that we got involved in in the development business. I think in Cameroon, as it turned out, health and family planning work was just extremely well received and very well reviewed in every evaluation that I saw. I think it would have made much better sense to keep our hand in there, even if political exigencies led the Administrator to close down the mission in Yaounde.

Q: Any more specifics about the impact of the health, family planning program?

SINGER: Just in terms of how the family planning people measure success, in terms of the people who accept or are "acceptors" of assistance, distribution of condoms and other birth control methods, the number of women, in particular, who would visit and participate in family planning, those kinds of measurements all seemed to be on the very high side, measured by the evaluations that occurred. The acceptance, in other words, was growing, and had been growing very fast and broadly throughout the country. So, those kinds of things, and in large part, I had friends who would insist the same was true for agriculture as well . . . those kinds of things in the agriculture and health fields perhaps should trump strictly political and economic performance criteria.

Q: Anything stand out in your mind?

SINGER: The word just came back to me. It is a rural town in central Cameroon where AID had a long-term involvement with an agricultural university. There, that University seemed to be doing a pretty good job of attracting and turning out agronomists and agriculture engineers, and planners and economists, as well, but especially, agronomists and engineers. I think that was one of our better involvements. We actually built that institution.

Q: Were we still active in the medical school when we were there, public health program?

SINGER: Yes, I think we were. The Ministry of Health ran the medical school. I supervised the HPN office for about the first year I was there. They didn't have a separate health office for a time; I don't know why. Later, it split off and became a separate office, when it grew very quickly. But, it was more on population, perhaps, than it was on traditional health, and inoculations. So, our work in that was good. The highlight of my time there, in Cameroon, was probably serving as an election observer for the Embassy. I was sort of borrowed by the Embassy to do this on two occasions; one was a Parliamentary election, and one was a Presidential election.

Q: What did you do as an election observer?

SINGER: Well, in one case, I went to an area in the far west of the country, and in the other, to an area far to the east. That was near the Central African Republic border, a very remote place. The latter was for Parliamentary or legislative elections, and the former was for Presidential elections. My job, literally, was going around to the polling places, observing, and then writing up reports on whether the elections were honest, free and fair.

Q: How do you judge what is free and fair?

SINGER: I guess, you see whether or not people have an opportunity to vote secretly, whether there is a secret ballot box, you see whether or not there is a voter registration system in place, checking off names, etc. - in other words, that they actually had applied some sort of objective criteria to decide who could vote. You talk to a sampling of people afterwards, and simply ask them "Were you allowed to vote freely and fairly, was any pressure put on you, was there any bribe offered to you?" - those kinds of things. I did that in both my observer assignments. In the far eastern area of the country, I almost got arrested for doing it. It was pretty close. They asked me to come down to the police station and explain what I was doing to the magistrate. Mine was the only strange face around town that particular day, because I was in a very remote kind of a place, indeed. But, there was a lot of electoral activity taking place. A couple of election rallies were being held which I attended, and followed a few small parades around town. Political parties other than the government's were active - something that was a good sign. As I said, the police, in plain clothes, came up to me at one of these places and asked me to go with them. I simply said I wouldn't do it because the election was supposed to be a free, fair, and open process, as advertised by the government, and I was just taking advantage of my presence in this area, freely observing and not doing anything else. I finally talked them out of picking me up. That was one interesting experience, but, serving as electoral observer, in both of these cases, for the Congressional or legislature, as well as Presidential election . . .

Q: But, having observed these, was this something that was blessed by the government?

SINGER: No, the government didn't like outside observers at all (particularly NDI, which

had already knocked heads with the government over earlier elections.) On the other hand, once again, they weren't about to make a big thing by refusing to allow any foreign election observers, especially those already in country. Most likely, this was because there was already some fear that AID and, perhaps, other western assistance organizations, were going to be closing down and pulling out of Cameroon. If it was only for that reason, they didn't want to rock the boat.

Q: So, the mission pretty well closed shortly after you left?

SINGER: It did, a few months after I left; maybe six months to close everything down, settle everything up, and what have you.

Q: What was your reaction to that?

SINGER: Well, it was a double blow for me. My reaction to having to retire at age 65, after I had returned to government service (following a lengthy absence) only 14 years before that - a return to foreign service work which I really loved - well, I thought (and still think) mandatory FS retirement for age is both unnecessary and unfair. At the same time, having a mission also closed down around me, as well, particularly during the last 10 months to a year that I was there, concentrating on those kinds of things, was also very discouraging. Perhaps the worst part was what happens to your local employees. Where do they go? Many of them had worked for years and years for us, and most of them were very loyal, wonderful people. There was nothing you could do to find jobs for them in a country where all jobs are excruciatingly scarce, even for trained and experienced professionals. So, I guess a few of them ended up with other international organizations, other embassies. Some were able to immigrate to the United States. There is a system whereby if you work 15 years, or something like that, I guess, or more, as a local employee for the U.S. government abroad, you have a right to preferential immigration status to the United States, if you get some endorsements, and so forth. I think a few of our FSN's benefitted from that rule.

Q: What was your understanding of why we closed the mission?

SINGER: Well, we were closing not only that mission, but others as well. Some people said that it was largely for political reasons, that we wanted to close down the places where, politically speaking, there seemed to be the least amount of receptivity and recognition and compatibility with the kind of political situation we were anxious to work create, and to ameliorate or improve, you know, work towards building up the democratic side. Some people have said that Brian Atwood was not very happy with Cameroon, in particular, since the NDI, which he used to head up, had been given a cold shoulder when they tried to conduct election work there. It was said the NDI people had been repulsed, and that he was particularly angry about that. Other people said that the shut-down was just a part of the general cutback that AID was doing in places where, in relative terms, it didn't seem enough economic progress had been made for the investment we had put in. Politically speaking, in the big picture of course, Cameroon is simply not as important as a Nigeria, a Kenya, or certainly as a South Africa would be considered.

Q: Were you involved in the process of closing down?

SINGER: Yes.

Q: What did you have to do?

SINGER: Well, we had to notify our many different partner organizations and grantees, of course, that we were leaving, and that their grants would be closed out. We had to see the extent to which any of them were adaptable and flexible enough so that we could actually complete grants earlier than we had planned to do. We had to be very concerned with participant trainees who were in long term training in the United States. We had some institutional grants, for example, to OIC, which is a Philadelphia-based, predominately black group, that works, as you probably know, in African countries on vocational training programs, principally. They had a large training school in Buea, which is part of English speaking southeastern Cameroon. This was under my office. We had to try to work with them. I spent a lot of time on that to try to sort of shut down our inflow of assistance to that as an institution; we were actually giving them a good deal of direct assistance there as an institutional grant, as well as training, consulting help, seminars, and so forth.

Q: How did OIC work? How well was it doing?

SINGER: I would give it a mixed review. The worst thing is when you get pretty good, and they did after a number of years; they got pretty good at graduating automobile mechanics and electricians and other skilled artisans, like carpenters, masons, building construction trade people, and plumbers, and so forth and so on. The problem is you get pretty good at that, and you really turn out people who are quite skilled, and even quite motivated at doing their jobs, and then you find you are in a country whose economy is totally in the doldrums. There isn't any work for your grads, especially in the English-speaking part of the country where most wanted to remain. Even if they were willing to move, their chances of finding a job in the French speaking three-quarters of the country were very poor. Why? Because the English speakers just didn't speak French if they could possibly help it, and most of them should not do so even if they were willing. Ironically, in their schools they were taught in English (a right guaranteed to English-speaking Cameroonians when they merged with the francophones). The people who graduated as skilled crafts and trades people from this vocational school in Buea run under OIC auspices, well, they had a terrible time getting jobs. This situation really hurt the project. In fact, in my experience AID has never been very good at tackling this issue. From Taiwan all the way up through Cameroon, over the years that I worked for AID the agency it has never been very good at tackling this crucial problem of employment. Oh, fine, you give them training or education, or perhaps both, and then what happens? How much assistance can we, should we, are we able to give in terms of placement and finding decent jobs?

Q: Do you think AID should be more active in that or should have been?

SINGER: If we are going to get into those kinds of fields, yes, otherwise, we are just setting people up in too many cases, not all of them, mind you, I am not condemning the university, nor do I really have a good analysis, say, of the percentage of good and bad. There is enough bad, though, to say, yes, if we are going to get into this training business in any serious way, commit ourselves to it, and try to stake, to some degree, our reputation on our success of that field, I don't think we can escape the responsibility of at least working in the area of job placement.

Q: Any case where you know that that happened?

SINGER: No. I can't think of a case where I know that that has happened, except where there are enough significant American-generated activities, in certain cases, in certain countries, where the market is there. In other words, American industry or American business, in some cases, American commerce, has established itself, and yes, sure, they will take such people. We might help play a midwife's role, in terms of placing them, but that is the exception, rather than the rule.

Retired from USAID and undertook consultancies: Burundi, Democracy Governance, Haiti - 1994-1997

Q: Well, you finished up and retired at that point?

SINGER: I retired, as I said, “under duress” from Cameroon. We took one last African Safari on the way home. We went back to East Africa, and drove around the game areas in northern Tanzania - places we hadn't seen before. Then we came back to the U.S. Shortly after returning, I did a little consulting work. First, I worked for OFDA, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance on the Dart Rwanda team in 1994 in Burundi and Rwanda, and then I worked a couple of times in Haiti with the mission’s democracy and governance projects. Then, I worked for a year as a WAE (“While Actually Employed”) consultant with the Global Bureau of AID/Washington in their Democracy Center. In DC I worked mostly on the elections and political processes team, and did a little traveling for them. Beyond that, to keep my hand in internationally (which I probably will until I die) I have been teaching English as a second language to immigrants and refugees in the Arlington area through an outreach program I supervise at our church. Also, I am teaching English for the Arlington County to new immigrants, doing some interpreter and translation work for various nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations, and working for Youth For Understanding - an international youth exchange program based in D.C. I have been doing screening work for them looking at applicants, high school age, who want to go overseas to complete their high school or to spend a semester abroad, as well as for young people who want to come from other countries abroad to go to school in the United States.

Q: What stands out during that period of consultancies, anything stand out in your mind that is particularly significant an issue?

SINGER: That is a good question. The Haiti work was fascinating. My daughter and her husband both happened to be stationed at the Embassy in Port-au-Prince, our Embassy, for part of one 10-week period that I spent working at the mission there.

Q: Did you make any headway on issues there?

SINGER: It was before the big standoff began. It was when Aristide had just come back into power under American sponsorship . Most everybody thought this was a redawning of democracy, and we certainly hoped this would be the case. American troops came in, peacefully I'm happy to say, but everybody believed they were going to land forcefully and fight if necessary. President Clinton visited Haiti while I was there. That is the only time I got to shake his hand, when he came in a helicopter and flew around the island. This is when everyone was so happy, and quite self-congratulatory, that we had managed to help out in Haiti without a major conflagration. We had engineered a program to peacefully get rid of General Cedras, the military dictator, and arrange for Aristide to return to his elected presidency. That was a really dynamic, yeasty time in the country's roller coaster history - a time when everything was kind of bubbling up, and the people were excited and optimistic and most hoped and believed that this was the real dawn of democracy for Haiti. So, it was really an exciting time to be there, and to be working on democracy . . .

Q: What was your view of the fundamental reason why it didn't work?

SINGER: I guess that the local institutions, and the concept of the rule of law, were just not strong enough to stand up yet, and are just not strong enough yet to stand up to the messianic kind of appeal of personalities that prevail in the Haiti's political leadership. Individual leaders weren't ready to take a back seat yet to the idea of rule of law. I am not sure when that is going to happen, but in 1995, 1996 everyone hoped against hope that the time had finally come for it to happen - but it didn't. I guess there weren't enough people used to exercising democratic rights and responsibilities, as such, to succeed in getting the country onto a non-personalistic track so that some kind of a participatory democratic system could evolve. It just hasn't yet happened.

Concluding observations

Q: Well, let's turn to some concluding observations about your career and your experience, and what you think about foreign assistance. Looking back over that period, are there some universal lessons that stand out in your mind about carrying out international development programs; you have been involved with so many of them in so many different places. Is there anything that stands out in your mind?

SINGER: Oh, I guess, there are a few things. Again, generalizations are never 100%, and obviously, what I have to say here would only be based on one person's experiences and the impact they had on me. But, that being said, a couple of things do stand out, I guess: (1) In the development business, in Third World Countries as they used to be called, in particular, it seems to me that if there is one single thing that we should be trying to

concentrate on more than anything else, it is to bring about in every way we can, a sense that people realize they have a choice. Most people in most developing countries, simply never stop to think that there is any choice in how their lives unfold. Fatalism, whether it is religiously based or secular doesn't make any difference, fatalism is the rule, it is almost the law. Most third world people think, "Things are as they are, and there is little or nothing I can do about it to change things, much less to improve my own lot in life. It is unfortunately just the way things are." Whether it is in Africa or Asia or Latin America, based on my experience, the single most important thing we could do to enhance development would be to effectively reduce this ubiquitous fatalism. It would be extremely hard and risky to do this, but it could be a profoundly life-changing experience for many millions of people in the poor countries of the world.

Q: Why is it risky?

SINGER: It is risky because if it "takes", it could be dangerous. People often don't understand how to act responsibility in the midst of change. Some may settle for minor, cosmetic changes, wrongly concluding that things should stop there - they don't continue progressive changes when they should, or else they don't know how to control change and use it for the general good. So, we are talking about responsible changes, followed by a qualitative assessment and understanding of what "good changes" can and should occur and mean in the lives of all the people.

Q: What are the particular means for bringing about such positive changes?

SINGER: There's no easy answer to that question, at least in my experience. I like the idea that finally, as we discussed a little earlier, finally we dropped this thing about "interfering in the domestic affairs" of other countries. We have replaced that, I hope in most circumstances, with a more responsible kind of approach, basically concluding "Yes, if we and host countries agree on a U.S. assistance program, we do have a role to play in democratic reforms and human rights." We should go beyond that and say also, "Yes, we have a legitimate role to play in the internal affairs of other countries", and our chief aim is to show people how their lives can change for the better, and how they can manage their own destiny, and why it is important that they constructively participate in bringing about change in their countries. Initially, they may not have understood or had much to say, about what their nation state was to be like. In so many ex-colonies that has obviously been true since the great powers of Europe divided up Africa, and to some extent Latin America, and Asia, but especially Africa, without asking them. Maybe that also contributed to the pervasive fatalism one finds there today. Nevertheless, these people are now citizens of independent nation states. For people today to become citizens, not only of their village, their tribal area, their province, or their state, but also of their country, their nation, they must realize they have some responsible choices they can and must make. That isn't easy to do but, I think, it is a necessary precursor to responsible development when people can really play a role in influencing the destiny of their own country. You have to feel you are a part of a country first, and in my experience, in most poor countries most citizens simply don't identify themselves personally or intimately with their own countries - so they rarely act as responsible national citizens.

Q: Any other observations? Those were good ones, very thoughtful.

SINGER: Well, maybe I should quit while I am ahead.

Q: Well, let me ask you another question. There is a lot of disillusionment with foreign assistance and thinking it hasn't had much impact. Has U.S. foreign assistance made a difference; has it made a difference in the world?

SINGER: Yes, I think in some parts of the world it has. Not all, not everything we have done. We don't have a big grand strategy. Maybe Americans don't like "grand strategies", so maybe that is not possible. But, I think where it has made the most difference for the good, where we have been able to sow the seeds of change, it's usually where we have been able to find and work with people who are not afraid of change. A few professionals, government leaders, civic leaders, patriotic private sector leaders - these can make all the difference when we work with respected and effective local partners. I think, to the extent where we have been able to do that, people already have some kind of idea, themselves, how to improve, and we have gone along with it and said "Okay, this is the right road to follow." I am thinking here, perhaps, of the first country in which I served with foreign AID program, and that was Taiwan. Now there, there are a lot of things you could say to explain why development took place, in an economic and technical sense at least, and even in a political sense, as much as it did. But, I do believe one reason was the contributions that we were able to make towards creating and strengthening together a strong human and physical infrastructure in that little country. Yes, admitted, we are in a political problem there, and, perhaps, we wouldn't have done as much as we did do, if it were not for the Cold War, and the politics of our early two-China policy, and so forth - policies that prevailed for much of the late 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, even up until the early 1970s. The fact is we did do a lot in terms of helping to create a basic, modern state in Taiwan, helping to create roads, helping to create dams, helping to create power system, water supply and distribution, a highly productive agricultural system - yes, we did heavily contribute to the island's impressive modernization and progress. I think we found the right people with whom to work when we launched that program. We were successful in finding good people with whom to work and in finessing the inevitable personality issues and concerns and problems which are intertwined so closely with political problems.

In a lot of other places, where we gulped and swallowed, and then allowed the tail of our anti-Communist political ideology to wag the development dog, things didn't work out as well. A good example is the demagogic kleptocrat we built up and supported in Zaire for so many years, Marshall Mobutu. We thought there were transcendently important geo-political reasons to go along with this terrible man, an awful dictator and human rights violator, and even to build him up as we were trying to build up the country he was tragically pillaging and destroying as we did. Here and elsewhere, our efforts failed basically because we found the wrong people with whom to work. We let "big picture" world politics subordinate and traduce what we wanted to do, what we probably would have been able to do, if as development people we had been allowed to follow our own

path, rather than a purely political one.

Q: So, do you think that U.S. political security interest is not compatible with good development work?

SINGER: I prefer to put it the other way 'round: I don't think good development work would have hurt our big picture, U.S. political and security interests, even in countries which we weren't too politically friendly with at times, if the basic conditions existed that allowed us to do a good job in the development side.

Q: What is your view of USAID as a development agency over the time that you worked with it, in the context of international development organizations?

SINGER: I like the post-Marshall plan enthusiasm and esprit de corps that I discerned in my early years with AID, in the mid-1950s and early 1960s. Also, after some initial questions, I think it was good that AID finally got into the democracy and governance field, albeit imperfectly, even when we had to take a few steps backward here and there, as we inched ahead in this new field. So, I think there is some good and some bad in all this. Institutionally, I think the fact that I worked for CARE, a nongovernmental organization; I worked for consulting organizations; and I worked for the United Nations (for a year) gave me some basis for comparison with how others try to do development work. I think we could learn a quite a lot from one another (something we haven't been doing a very good job of so far). I liked my experience, for example, in Senegal, where I worked directly with my host country counterpart in the same office, day-in and day-out, on an equal basis. There are also real benefits in working on an international team - something that had its frustrations, but nevertheless, can really help in development work. I often thought AID could do more, and do it more effectively, by working with international team members, rather than as a purely American operation. I think, maybe, we have tried it in a few places, but perhaps we should try it more.

Q: Do you think that the participant program has made a significant impact in certain sectors; are there certain areas that stand out in your mind?

SINGER: Yes, for example in the population program, particularly the one in Cameroon in which I was directly involved. But, in other countries, in Kenya, certainly, we were active in participant training with NGOs and the private sector, and we were active in Ecuador in tax and drug prevention and education training. So yes, I believe participant training has been one of the real stars in our crown!

Q: Any other comments?

SINGER: You have heard me talk about my prejudices in favor of democracy and governance, especially when we have gotten into the election field. I think that NDI, IRI, IFES and the Carter Center, all of which are supported by AID of course, have often done a very good job. Emblematic of this work at its best, I think that probably includes the recent crucial elections in Nigeria. We are keeping our fingers crossed, but they were all

in there, recently, taking a look at the really big one, as far as African elections are concerned. I think AID probably can claim some credit for what looks like a pretty free and fair election in that bellwether African country.

Q: Any other areas that come to mind?

SINGER: Sure, there are plenty of other things. But again, individually, I tend to go less towards the sweeping generalization about development than I do towards particular programs, particular times, and particular people. The building up of nongovernmental organizations, because I often focused on that, comes to mind. In a lot of the developing countries, for many years nobody paid very much attention to the NGOs, except perhaps, the missionary groups, until AID finally decided to get seriously involved in a number of countries. From what I hear, many other aid organizations, the international banks, and other bilateral western and Asian assistance organizations, still don't pay very much attention to local nongovernmental organizations. I think the idea of building up these groups often makes a lot of good sense and that's one thing we can be proud about.

Q: In many places, there has been an explosion in the number of these organizations, over the last five, ten years.

SINGER: That's right. They are messy to work with sometimes, and they are not always that easy in terms of being attractive development partners, since many of them do need a significant amount of internal strengthening before you can really say that we should commit our funding to them or that we can effectively trace the funding that we do commit to their programs. But patience pays off and, generally, it does make sense to work with the NGOs.

Q: Why do you think there is a sudden explosion of growth, rapid growth of these indigenous organizations, and their becoming more dominant in the development?

SINGER: Well, you know, the thing feeds on itself, to the extent that some become successful, others grow more slowly, and we should try to encourage and piggy-back on those that can lead. But, there are also the American PVOs, the Catholic Relief, the big Church World Service, the CAREs, and Save the Children, and what have you. Along with a changing list of smaller ones, many U.S. PVOs have also cultivated a number of local groups to work through. CARE, for example, where I worked for two years, has decentralized worldwide into CARE Canada, CARE Australia, CARE Poland, CARE U.S.A., CARE U.K., and so forth. They are all-but separate organizations which now have their own resources, and their own priorities and programs, and they tend now to spread the word more and more, and to make more and more decisions about the "whether, when and how" of CARE work in developing countries and in world crises.

Q: As a last thought, how would you size up your career in the foreign assistance business?

SINGER: Well, I always tell people I had a sort of a split kind of career view. If they ask,

I say it was "spotty." Obviously, it has been up and down and I have been in and out and around the barn several times. Overall, variety is the spice of life. I have enjoyed doing a lot of different things in a lot of different places. I once thought I'd really want to become a specialist in, initially, I guess it was Southeast Asia. But, retrospectively, I am glad that I did get to serve in many different areas of the world, live in and learn about interesting parts of the developing world, get to know other people in the world, get to live the foreign service life, and, hopefully, to pass on a love of this kind of work and lifestyle to my four kids. Today, all of them either are in it, or aspire to be back in foreign service work themselves. So, all the kids doing the same kind of thing . . . in three cases, their spouses, as well, doing foreign service-oriented work, at least sort of suggests that maybe there is something to it.

Q: Well, that is a good point to conclude on. Any last thoughts you want to add?

SINGER: No. I think that is it. Thank you very much. I have enjoyed it.

Q: It has been an excellent and very fruitful interview.

End of interview