

SWAZILAND

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RICHARD ST. F. POST **Consul** **Laos (1964-1966)**

Richard St. F. Post was born in Washington in 1929. He received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1951 and his master's from George Washington University in 1969. His career includes positions in Ethiopia, Hong Kong, Somalia, Swaziland, Lesotho, Angola, Portugal, Ottawa, and Karachi. Mr. Post was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in February 1990.

Q: I think we can get to that later, because I do want to hear it in full detail, but what about Mbabane, in Swaziland. You were there from 1964 to 1966. Could you describe the situation there and what you were up to?

POST: This was at a time when the South Africans, who had coveted what were then the British High Commission Territories, Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland, were jacking up the heat on the British to turn them over. There was some sentiment among the British to do that. I think the dominant feeling was no, these people have trusted us and we have to hang in there. But there was a growing tendency among the

British to give in to the South Africans. I was certainly given to understand that my being sent to Swaziland as Consul for Swaziland, Basutoland and Bechuanaland, was designed to facilitate, to put emphasis on our policy that these countries should remain free from South African influence and that they should eventually become independent.

Q: Were you the first to go there?

POST: I was the first diplomat of any country to be stationed in any of these three countries. After being there for about a year and a half, I was joined in Swaziland by a Portuguese Consul.

Q: That was your main function, to show the flag?

POST: I was showing the flag but I was also reporting on political developments, particularly reporting on what the South Africans were doing in that part of the world. I was reliving those moments last week with the release of Nelson Mandela, because I arrived just after he had been convicted and sent to Robbin Island. When I got to Swaziland there were quite a number of black South African refugees living there. One of the things that was going on for some time after I got there was every now and then an African, an ANC person or somebody like that, would be kidnapped by the South African authorities in Swaziland. I was reporting on that sort of thing and also about the political developments within the three British territories.

Q: What sort of developments were going on then?

POST: Well, they were all working towards independence. That is the Africans were anxious to have independence. The British officials that I dealt with, I think that they felt it was somewhat inevitable, that they should try to prepare the place as well as they could for that eventuality. Others seemed to have the attitude that the place really ought to go to South Africa or that we British ought to stay in here. There was a lot of resentment on the part of some at having an American peering over their shoulders. And some efforts on the part of the Chief Commissioner in Swaziland to curtail my activities. He seemed to feel that he should be the one to tell me who I should see. I told him in no uncertain terms that that wasn't our style. But there really wasn't an awful lot of politics, as we know it, in Swaziland. It was a question of personalities within the Swazi community. It was a kingdom. There wasn't that much of political interest there. It was more the South African angle, the Portuguese angle. On the other hand, particularly in Basutoland, the intern politics were very active. They had several parties, some that were alleged to be financed and influenced by the South Africans, some alleged by the South Africans

to be supported by the Communists. I must say I was rather annoyed at that period of time by the kind of reporting on individuals that the CIA was doing in my territory. For instance, there was one leader of the Basutoland Congress Party, BCP, who looked like he was a comer and I wanted to recommend him for our leader program, a free trip to the States, for exposure to the U.S. democratic process. I had great difficulty because there were reports filed by the CIA representatives that he was a Communist. If that were true he would be denied a visa to the United States. I had to challenge that and get down to the source of the report that this person was a Communist and sure enough it was the South African security reports.

RICHARD J. DOLS
Deputy Chief of Mission
Swaziland (1969-1971)

Richard J. Dols was born in Minnesota in 1932. In 1954 he received his bachelor's degree from St. Thomas College and his law degree at University of Minnesota. He served in the US Air Force from 1955-1958. During his career he held positions in France, Vietnam, Canada, Swaziland, and New Zealand. Mr. Dols was interviewed by Charles Stewart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: Then you moved to what was to become one of your two areas of specialization...the first being Southern Africa and then Micronesia. Your next assignment was in Swaziland from 1969-71. How did that assignment come about?

DOLS: I was supposed to go to Dakar but that assignment was cut because of the first BALPA which was a personnel cut across the board. Then I was assigned to Gaborone. In each case I was about two books into my preparation when it got changed again suddenly. My predecessor in Swaziland was about to get PNGed.

Q: Persona non grata. In other words, kicked out by the host government.

DOLS: Right. He was pulled out overnight and I was suddenly in his slot.

Q: What was his problem?

DOLS: He was very young, very idealistic. He went over to the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in Maseru over in the Lesotho and addressed a group of Swazi students in a Q & A session. One of the Swazi students asked what they should do about the confiscation of a passport of one of the opposition people in Swaziland...a young opposition type who is a friend of my predecessor. He made some injudicious remarks including things like "You know what to do" with a kind of meaningful tone to it. He obviously said or was reported to have said more than that by an informant of the special branch of the Swazi police who was in the group.

When I arrived at the post I found that the informant had been hired by my predecessor as an Embassy local employee. I knew his status, but there was a little problem getting rid of him, so we isolated him.

Q: What were you doing there? What was our post like? Was it a Consulate?

DOLS: It was recently upgraded to an Embassy. Swaziland became independent in September, 1968 and I arrived in early 1969. So the government was just getting itself sorted out after independence. The old British district commissioners and the like were all headed home. Things were in transit. We were just getting started. We had a Peace Corps program but we didn't even have a Peace Corps agreement. That was one of my first duties.

Q: What was your job there?

DOLS: Everything. We had a Chargé there. He had a heart attack and was in a Pretoria hospital when I arrived in Swaziland. So I was there four or five months on my own as the Chargé then. Then, you remember, all the Europe posts got closed in the 1967 war and there were Arabists everywhere. Well, what did we do but get an Arabist as a new Chargé.

Q: Who was that?

DOLS: Bob Chase. Bob came and was there about two weeks and left for home leave. So he was gone for six. This was all right with me because I was getting chargé pay. He came back and decided that I had things well in hand so he went about his personal business and that is about the last we saw of him.

Q: Could you describe the situation in Swaziland while you were there?

DOLS: Swaziland had a beloved old king, Sobhuza, who had been on the throne since the '20s. He and Sir Haile Selassie were about the same vintage. In fact, a funny story about them...When Chase came back from his home leave we arranged to call on the King. He had presented his credentials to the Prime Minister not the King. We went down to call on the King. What he had been doing was reading before we arrived. What was he reading? A book about kingship. He was very concerned about it. He was sort of like the Hapsburgs when faced with the collapse of the kingship in Europe. He was worried about the king in Lesotho, who at the time had gotten into political hot water and was likely to eventually find himself on the way out. In fact, the king of Lesotho was then exiled to Holland for a while. But he was concerned about that and tried to play a mediation role. He saw Haile Selassie as his model. And with the King of Morocco that was about all there was left of African kingship at the time. But it was so interesting to see him reading a book about kingship of all things.

He managed to hold the lid on everything. There were no opposition members of parliament until after he left. The opposition did finally win three seats and then the government suspended parliament and things went downhill. You could have democracy only as long as there was unanimous support for those, the Swazi traditional hierarchy. That hierarchy was very, very strong in every way. One really interesting example of that was our Peace Corps volunteers had

helped build an irrigation scheme along a river in the northeast part of the country. People who benefited from the scheme really profited. It was kind of semi-desert country. Suddenly they were really growing marvelous crops. People across the river saw this and decided if they could do it we could do it. So they began to build a similar irrigation system. But once they had it finished they had to get a water permit from the Swazi National Council, which was the traditional ruling body. There was quite a debate in the ruling body over this. The winning argument on the traditionalists side was: If they get money they won't be loyal to their chiefs. So they didn't get their water permit and their irrigation scheme and all the work went for naught.

Q: How did you deal with the government there?

DOLS: There was a kind of European overlay if you will. The real power rested with the traditionalists. You had Ministers of whatever, with Permanent Secretaries of each ministry, etc. but that was just an overlay for a much stronger traditional power system.

Q: What were American interests in Swaziland at the time?

DOLS: We had a number of interests there. We, of course, wanted a peaceful solution to the South African racial question. We saw the possibility of building up our relationships with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland in such a way that they became kind of prosperous, peaceful, models for change and also a possible neutral ground for talks not only on South Africa but Rhodesia, which was still alive in those days.

We certainly had in Botswana an outstanding example of a functioning democratic system in Africa. The one in Swaziland at least had the appearance thereof. Less so in Lesotho where there were more problems. We did see it as a vehicle for that kind of movement, pressure for change in a positive way.

A meeting ground it was indeed already because of a flow of South African tourists to Swaziland. They began to see on a very practical level that apartheid was not the only way. They would come over in droves on weekends to the spa and casino which is a fabulous place there. They didn't die because they sat at a table that was adjacent to a table of black people or an Indian from Natal. It was curious that when they were all heading back to Johannesburg on a Sunday evening, there were two lines at the border, of course, the black line and the white line. The white line would have 70 cars in a row lined up to get through. Of course, the blacks could return to South Africa through a much shorter line.

There were a number of leaders of high standing in Swaziland. There was a doctor who was the Minister of Health. I remember taking one of our Deputy Assistant Secretaries who was on a visit down to have a chat with him. Dr. _____ had been educated at _____ University in South Africa during the period before blacks were pushed out of white universities. He was a very educated type. He and people of his generation have an idea of confederation of states for Southern Africa. All in happy, harmonious union. And, of course, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland would be in that orbit. There were others like that. Unfortunately they tended to be the last of the last because it wasn't very long before they got older and left politics. They weren't able to exert the kind of influence that comparable

people in West Africa do. Like Leopold Senghor, etc. They missed the timing on that. But there was a category of people like that who were possible assets in promoting a peaceful resolution and unfortunately time just zipped too fast.

Q: What was the attitude towards Americans?

DOLS: It was interesting. We, of course, had already an established Peace Corps program, so there were quite a few volunteers. They had a major impact and were generally a well-selected group. At the lowest level of Swazi society they really went over like gangbusters.

Our problems mainly came with the expatriates, Brits and South Africans. Of course the British felt we were muscling into one of their spheres. Generally they were really tough and sometimes rather devious, I thought. For instance, maybe I am accusing the man of something he really wasn't doing, but here is an example of what I think shows the length they would go to. Perhaps I am being a little paranoid now. A customs agreement had been reached among South Africa and the BLS countries.

Q: BLS being?

DOLS: Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. It was a major agreement and largely supplanted the need for a British post independence subsidy to the Swazi budget. So naturally I was reporting on it. I went to see the Attorney General who was a Brit with kind of South African ties. We talked quite a while and he did tell me quite a bit about the agreement. Then he indicated there was a secret protocol to it. About that stage he excused himself saying he had to do something somewhere else in the building. He left me sitting like this, and I am next to a desk right now, with the secret protocol lying right there. I sat there a few moments. Of course I wanted to know what was in the secret protocol, but I thought, "Hey, am I being set up?" Later on I had some other run ins where he was very distinctly hostile to us. It kind of reinforced my judgment not to even cast an eye at things. But I must say I was very tempted.

Q: This was in the period when the African Bureau was still in the euphoria of independence, and the spirit of G. Mennen Williams, did you find that you had an activist bureau which was prodding you to do things?

DOLS: I don't think they were prodding us to do things, but they certainly were more supportive than in any bureau I had been in. Whatever you seemed to need they seemed to give you. And that isn't the usual way with the Department. So that was very good.

You remember in the time of G. Mennen Williams we had announced a policy of encouraging these new African states by opening a mission in each one as they became independent. That was how we got into places initially like Botswana, Swaziland. Only after the fact did we rationalize what we might do. For instance, promote them as models for peaceful change, as neutral meeting places, as avenues of intelligence of what was going on in that part of the world. Remember the Portuguese were just across the

border in Mozambique, so there was that interest as well.

Q: Did you have any feeling at that time that the Soviets were messing around in your area?

DOLS: Only very lightly. Some of the students had been solicited by Soviet agents over the years. Mainly when they were away at school in England, etc....offered scholarships and that sort of thing. But it was pretty light. The opposition while labeled often communist was clearly just a modernist opposition. They didn't really have any Marxist/Leninist ideology behind them.

ROY STACEY
Office of Southern Africa Regional Affairs, USAID
Mbabane (1971-1973)

Mr. Stacey was raised in Hawaii and educated at the University of California and George Washington University. Joining USAID in 1963, he served first on the Somali desk in Washington and was subsequently assigned to Mogadishu as Assistant Program Officer. Continuing as an Africa specialist, Mr. Stacey served with USAID in Nairobi, Mbabane, Abidjan, Paris and Harare. From 1986 to 1988, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Following retirement Mr. Stacey worked with the World Bank, also on Southern African Affairs. Mr. Stacey was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.

Q: At this point you were a trained Title IX Officer, were you not? Was there any idea that you would come back to be doing Title IX type of programming?

STACEY: It wasn't really Title IX programming but I think that some aspects of the training I had just had came in good stead, because the assignment that was proposed to me was to go out into the BLS countries in Southern Africa to start some of the early programs out there. We had really just opened up this office of OSARAC (Office of Southern Africa Regional Affairs). So I went down there as the Program Officer. This was in 1971. Some of the activities that we were beginning in Botswana we did draw on some of the Title IX work.

Q: Like what? Do you have any examples?

STACEY: We had a land settlement program in Swaziland, which involved rationalizing land use. It was land use planning so that the areas that were being farmed in a very irrational way where they had erosion problems, where they hadn't demarcated the grazing areas from the irrigated farming from the rain-fed agriculture. So we came in - this was a joint project with the British - but all of the land use planning was done through what they call in Southern Africa "congretla", where you sit down with the villagers and talk about what they want and their objectives. You have to talk about these things as long as it takes until there's a consensus, and it's a very horizontal type discussion with no time limits.

Q: Did you participate in that?

STACEY: Yes, we participated in that. We had also some regional activities there that we were trying to hang onto like preserving the University of Botswana as a Regional Center of Excellence. Despite all the talk over the years about Regional Centers of Excellence, there aren't any that... So that also failed, when the UBLS eventually split apart.

Q: You were based in Swaziland?

STACEY: Yes, I was based in Swaziland but we had responsibility for Lesotho, Botswana and Malawi. I think that what was important at this time, historically speaking, was that we had a unique regional model there of an office, where we had only one AID staff in Botswana, one in Lesotho and one in Malawi. They were an integral part of the embassy. They were listed as the Second Secretary for Development and they reported to the Ambassador but they got all of their authorities for funding, for contracts, through the regional AID office. And the regional AID office wrote their evaluations, but based on a letter from the Ambassador. These people had a full place at the table and the donor meetings; but it was a great model of a regional program with a bilateral dimension and yet without separate AID offices, the staff was part of the embassy. It's a model that I think AID should have reconsidered in the last few years when they began closing missions all over the place. In many cases I still feel horrified at some of the mission size that I saw over the years of my career, and yet there were so many examples that we had of implementing programs with small missions.

Q: This was supposed to be within a regional framework, except for the concentration countries. Were all your projects regional?

STACEY: No, in fact some of the activities that people were undertaking were national projects, but we were undertaking them through a regional umbrella.

Q: What kind of projects stood out in your mind that you found significant?

STACEY: I think that perhaps the most important contributions we made in those days were in Botswana frankly. Very quietly we began to work with Botswana on education, both in terms of secondary education and the University of Botswana - the Botswana campus of the UBLS. They organized, with some assistance we provided through the Ford Foundation in those days a civil service that really was based on merit. Looking back, I think that was one of the most important things Botswana did. They had outstanding civil servants all through their early independence, which has really helped them in managing their economy.

Q: Why do you think this came about there when it didn't elsewhere?

STACEY: Through the foresight of the president of Botswana in those days- he had enormous foresight and was probably one of the best leaders Africa's had in the post independence period. He felt that the two most essential things for Botswana was to have a competent, honest civil service, and secondly to make sure they invested the returns from the mineral resources into

education and into human capital. One of the few countries that didn't catch the Dutch disease in terms of the way they manage their mineral resources.

Q: But they had a very limited number of Botswanans, who had an education and advancement.

How did they staff the government?

STACEY: They staffed it rather slowly. You had a number of ex-patriots who were down there who were either British or South African citizens. They weren't thrown out of their posts immediately. It was the policy of the government to "Africanize" the civil service as people became competent to do so. There were people in the civil service who went on, for instance, to the World Bank, and then came back to the Botswana government because the terms of service were so attractive. I think that another important contribution that we made was a project, which we wouldn't do today. This was a water supply project for a new town that was going to grow up around a mining venture. This was a private sector mining venture, nickel and copper, and it required actually the creation of a small town at Selebi-Phikwe. That town couldn't be created without a water supply and AID undertook the project to bring water from the Selebi River to the town. I forget the distance. That was a turnkey project managed by Sam Rea who was the Botswana officer, and to this day Selebi-Phikwe is a thriving little town, and stayed a thriving little town because they took the returns from the copper and nickel and invested it wisely, unlike what other countries have done with their mineral resources. Again, this is the kind of project that could have been a failure had the government made subsequent poor policy decisions. But because they made wise policy decisions, the project I think was a success.

Q: Did we have an operating executives program at that time providing staff for government positions?

STACEY: Yes, we were providing people on a topped up basis. You just refreshed my memory. This was an issue because the government was very sensitive to the "topping up". They didn't want the kind of disequilibria in their compensation packages for staff. So they were very careful about bringing in ex-pats. But on the other hand, when the government did bring them in they didn't become just marginalized or advisors. In other words, they had a serious job to do.

Q: Were there a fair number of them, do you recall?

STACEY: A modest number, but given the size of Botswana, it was a relatively modest number.

Q: What was the political environment in which you were working there, given the South African situation then? Did you have a feel for that?

STACEY: The political situation was actually quite tense. I recall that we had great difficulty getting visas from the South African government even to do our regional work. In those days we either had to fly into Johannesburg and stay overnight, which was sometimes a little bit uncomfortable, or we could drive by the most direct route between Swaziland and Botswana, and we had to get there within twelve hours. So we frequently had to drive that route - I think I drove you once as a matter of fact - from Basutu to Botswana. I remember once you being on a visit out

there and we did that drive. South Africa saw the AID people very much as troublemakers. They monitored our activities pretty carefully.

Q: What about the impact of our program on the development in those three countries?

STACEY: Again, I think we did some important projects in the three countries, but without my going back there I don't know to what extent they've stood the test of time. We had a large focus on education which you'll find almost missing now from what we're doing in Africa. We were doing an important secondary school in Swaziland. We were doing a technical training institute as well. We had important programs with all of the three campuses of the UBLS. We were doing a little bit of infrastructure and road building. In Lesotho we had started an important effort in soil erosion. Lesotho has some of the most credible soil on this earth, and it used to be said that Lesotho's major export was soil to South Africa.

Q: Any other perspective on those countries? That was your first introduction to Southern Africa?

STACEY: That was my first introduction to Southern Africa, which I was to come back to again later in my career. I do recall feeling that ultimately these small former high commission countries, the BLS countries, especially Lesotho, didn't make a great deal of sense, especially in a longer term geo-political view of Southern Africa. Eventually these almost artificial borders would have to disappear as a result of economic forces.

Q: Anything else on that?

STACEY: No, I think that's about all.

Q: You were there for two years?

STACEY: Yes, I was there for two years, from 1971-1973.

CHARLES J. NELSON
Ambassador to Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland
Gaborone (1971-1974)

Ambassador Nelson was born and raised in Michigan, educated at New York University and Boston University and served in the US Army in World War II. Prior to his appointment at Ambassador, Mr. Nelson served in senior positions with the State Department, AID, International Cooperation Administration (ICA), the Mutual Security Agency and the Peace Corps. These appointments took him to the Philippines, Egypt and Iran. In 1971 he was appointed Ambassador to the nations of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, where he served from 1971 to 1974. Ambassador Nelson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: In 1971, you were appointed as the first ambassador to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, is that right?

NELSON: Yes.

Q: How did this appointment come about?

NELSON: John Hannah, former head of Michigan University, visited me in Tanzania and I had taken him around the country and showed him some of the things we were doing. I was suppose to go home on home leave and the Assistant Administrator at that particular point in time, who shall be nameless, said, "I don't think you should come home. You are serving under Executive appointment, Nixon is President and I don't know whether I can get you through the White House again to come back." I had been serving in Executive appointments ever since 1966. I didn't particularly like the sound of that. Dr. Hannah raised the subject and said, "Don't worry about anything."

I remember now that Ambassador Ross had asked me what I was going to do after I left Dar es Salaam. I had said that I hoped to come back to Dar es Salaam. Well, he was probing to find out if I knew what the story was, because shortly thereafter I had to go to Ethiopia for a meeting. Maury Williams came out from Washington and at the first coffee break of the meeting he called me and said that I was being proposed as ambassador for these three countries, and that I couldn't turn it down. I said that this sounded like nonsense to me because I had the Assistant Administrator for Africa saying I couldn't come home because as an Executive appointee I couldn't go through the White House again. What is going on here?

Anyhow I went back to Dar es Salaam and then to a chiefs of mission meeting in Madagascar after which I returned to Dar and then went on to Washington. There I went through the confirmation process and during that time people in the State Department, for example, were saying, "Aren't you sort of turned inside out, sort of beyond yourself?" I said, "Not really." So I said to my wife, "Aren't you excited?" She said, "I think AID has dealt with us very well." So there wasn't consternation, and displeasure is too strong a word also, but there was a puzzlement as to why we weren't walking on air. And we weren't walking on air, we continued walking on the ground.

Q: Was this a problem of AID versus State and the Foreign Service saying...?

NELSON: No, not really. I think it was the fact that for officers that stay in the State Department with one goal, one ambition...here comes a guy, his wife along, and he has realized that, and they are saying it is not the most wonderful thing since sliced bread. How can they, it is an affront to us.

Q: I notice that one gets a little bit removed from these things and when you take a look they seem quite different than at the time when you are going after just the title. Now what was the situation in these three countries, and what were American interests at that time?

NELSON: David Newsom made a deal with Senator Fulbright that because of this ambassadorship there would be only one for the three countries. There would be one USAID guy for the three countries. Except there were three AID people, one in each country. Botswana is the leader in this part of the world. So my Residence was in Gaborone.

Swaziland is a viable country, I think. I had a great fondness for King Sobhuza. But it was a little sleepy. Lesotho was sleepy, too. Botswana is dynamic and alive. It was well led. The president of Botswana was a great man, a great person. There is a country that has tremendous wealth: diamonds, coal, copper, cattle, etc.

What were the U.S. interests? I wish I knew. Botswana was a well-functioning, multi-party democracy.

Q: That is true of a lot of places. You want to keep a presence there. At that particular time you had all sorts of things going on in the area. I am thinking of Angola, Namibia, and the whole South African problem. These must have been reflected...did you get involved in these things?

NELSON: I was besieged by reporters every time I came through South Africa. But my answer to them always was, "I am not the ambassador to South Africa and will not comment on South African politics." We had meetings in South Africa - Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and the Portuguese territories. I am not particularly naive, but I almost dropped my teeth when the consul generals from those countries came forward to say they would never be free, always be colonies.

Ambassador Nelson was interviewed by Celestine Tutt in 1981.

Q: You talked a few minutes ago about the great differences between the peoples and the governments of those three countries. Could you elaborate on that a little before we proceed to the next main question? How were they different?

NELSON: Well, we had a monarchy in Lesotho; we had a monarchy in Swaziland; and there's an old saying the king should reign but not rule. That may have been more the case in Lesotho, but the opposite of that is the fact in Swaziland. And that determines, I guess you'd say, in the case of Swaziland, how people relate, how the government relates. Swaziland, you might say, functions in a kind of way as a national ... as a tribal nation with the king at the head, the apex of his tribe. And even though you at one time did have a parliament which ceased to function at one point in Swaziland ... what can I say ... let's see -- it gave a different characterization to the country.

Q: In what way?

NELSON: In terms of its modernity, in terms of how government related to people and how people in a sense functioned within a governmental context, because it was a tribal context. This was not the case in Lesotho. We had a parliament and a prime minister. And I think you would have to say that there the prime minister was a very strong force and his party was a relatively strong force, but there were difficulties as well.

In Botswana I think you had outstanding leadership. You had a functioning parliamentary body, you had functioning political parties, and it was a different atmosphere in the sense that there was ... even though it was a multi-party system ... there was a kind of oneness and quite possibly a sense of real momentum and progress in which government and people were participating fully and effectively. This is not to say that there isn't a good economy, or wasn't a good economy in Swaziland. It's a different kind of economy, not a ... In a tribal or family environment, there definitely is a head and you might say that when decisions are made, that decisions are made, or when actions are taken (or however you might wish to characterize it), they might be taken in a headlike or ... in other words, paternal ... and if the father says this is what we do then that's what is done and maybe you don't like it, or whatever the case may be, but you do it, and it's more edict and less participatory. Those kinds of differences.

Q: How were you perceived by the governments of Lesotho and Swaziland?

NELSON: I think for observance there was the fact that I was not a resident in either of the countries. There was ... the only terms I could think of is distance, but the distance was there geographically, but you did not have the continuing, almost daily, official and social association. Therefore ... I didn't want to say closeness, or whether it was even conceived that when you're an official from a government relating to the officials of another government that there should be closeness. I don't know -- but that ... it was not the same as it was in Botswana.

Swaziland ... King Sobhuza is the oldest reigning monarch in the world actually and whatever you might say, he is a tremendous presence and a person who I think sincerely wants the best for his people. I remember when I went to present my credentials to the king, and, of course, he was in his national dress, his ministers there in striped trousers and cutaway coats, and I walked in and I was presented to him and he said, "Oh, I thought you were just another Swazi," or something like that. I think he is a tremendous individual, a tremendous person and I think a wise person who has led Swaziland effectively and in the direction which in his terms is the best for Swaziland. Where outsiders are concerned, I think quite possibly the king is more remote than maybe King Moshoeshoe, who, of course, is a much younger person. The king's officials and his ministers, and so on, that I had contact with were receptive, understanding, and so on. I have a great admiration for the people of Lesotho and I think we have some very good friends there as well. It was a country that you could have nothing but admiration for and particularly in terms of their people. It's a country where you have very high literacy. Its university which then became part of the University for Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, was first called Pope Pius XII University, actually. And the people are very well trained and have high skills. Population ... the Lesotho women are fully participant and a very dominant factor in their society. I guess it's the way that countries are, in a sense, endowed. Lesotho's endowment is quite meager, but its endowment, in a sense, is in its people. And this strikes one. And, of course, the Lesothos are involved in this country and they say something about people who come out of a situation where they live on the hills and so on.

Swaziland is ... because of its ... as I've indicated before, kind of tribal situation where it's a large family and with the king as the head. The members of that tribal nation in a sense ... you

get a different ... another kind of relationship. I don't know how to characterize it quite frankly. And, of course, I've said enough about Botswana.

GEORGE M. LANE
Deputy Chief of Mission
Swaziland (1974-1976)

George M. Lane was born in Maryland in 1928. He received his bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 1951 and then served in the US Army until 1954. In 1957 he received his master's degree from Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. During his career he served positions in Swaziland, Beirut, Germany, Syria, Morocco, Libya, and an ambassadorship to Yemen. Ambassador Lane was interviewed by Richard Nethercut in August 1990

Q: I notice that after your tour in the Department, you were for a period Chargé at our Embassy in Mbabane, Swaziland in Southern Africa which would be your first Chargé experience. And then that was followed by a quick transfer to a similar position in our Embassy in Beirut. Could you explain how that came about?

LANE: Well, it may have been a similar position in name, but it was very, very different in fact. While I was in Swaziland, when I was first sent there, the so-called BLS countries--Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland--each had a resident Chargé. While I was there, the Department named an Ambassador who was resident in Botswana, but who was the Ambassador to all three posts, Dave Bolen. So my job there was sort of DCM for three-quarters of the time--no, DCM one-quarter of the time, and Chargé for three-quarters of the time. It was, again, a very small post, like Benghazi three or four officers. It was basically showing the flag. There were only about seven countries represented in Swaziland, a fascinating little country. I think Swaziland itself is smaller than the Krueger Park, the great game park in South Africa, and the population was about 500,000 people. But it was an experiment in multi-racialism, which was importance because there were some primarily British people, whites, who had lived there for a long, long time, and who had decided when Swaziland became independent to stay and become Swazis. So they were Swazi citizens, they were white Swazis, with very British background. All our children went to the Waterford School which was a dramatic example of trying to create a multi-racial co-educational school in Southern Africa where the land was given by King Sobhuza, and the school was designed free by a famous Portuguese architect, and various British philanthropic organizations put up the money. The student body was white South Africans, and black South Africans, and colored South Africans, and Swazis, and whites from various diplomatic groups and economic missions, and people from Malawi, and they were all mixed together in classes, and all studying a very rigorous program to prepare them for the British A- levels.

Then, again, while we were hoping for a third year in Swaziland--a pleasant place to live and work--there was the sudden assassination of Frank Meloy and Bob Waring in Beirut, and the Department sent me a telegram ordering me back to Washington on consultations. In fact, it was

a flash telegram. I claim to be the only Officer in the Foreign Service who ever got consultation orders by flash telegram.

DONALD R. NORLAND
Ambassador – Swaziland, Lesotho and Swaziland
Gaborone (1976-1979)

Ambassador Donald R. Norland was born in Laurens, Iowa in 1924. He joined the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included positions in Morocco, the Ivory Coast, France (NATO), the Netherlands, and Guinea, and ambassadorships to Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Chad. Ambassador Norland was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

NORLAND: If you want an explanation of how I got to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland (the BLS countries), in 1976, it lies in this experience.

Q: Well, how did it come about, then?

NORLAND: Well, four years in the Department is considered appropriate. Earl, my dear friend, was sensitized to the fact that I had been in Washington four years. And through his smooth workings, he would nudge Eagleburger and say, "You know, Don has been back here almost four years. I know he's only been here for a year and a half, but he's done his work here." And Larry was really very generous in his performance evaluations where he was the reviewing officer. He agreed with Earl that the time had come. And my name went up for one Embassy in the summer of 1976. I was close to getting a mission, but they decided, for reasons of balance within the Service, that an administrative officer should get that post. Meanwhile, I had talked with Bill Schaufele, then the assistant secretary in AF. Art Wortzel, who was prominent in the personnel system, was important in helping me. The BLS countries came up, Larry approved my nomination, and I got the assignment.

Q: You served there as ambassador from '76 to '79.

NORLAND: Three years.

Q: What were American interests there?

NORLAND: That's really the question. American interests at that time were much as they are now; but we were not attuned to what was going on in that part of the world. It is just amazing to think that just fifteen years ago we had no hesitation in sending out one person to three countries, all bordering on South Africa. All reflected, in one degree or another, what was going on in South Africa. And our contacts among South African blacks were not good. Contacts endangered blacks. I've had people tell me that Botswana reflected the most accurate source of black public opinion in Southern Africa. As a result of the Soweto riots of June 1976, we had probably a thousand hard-core black-nationalists in Botswana, which was only two hundred and fifty miles

northwest of Johannesburg. The riots in Johannesburg were such that it was very uncomfortable for many blacks to stay on. Schools were closed. So we were able to monitor what was going on there, to test reactions and attitudes of these black nationalists, black-liberation-movement representatives.

Q: You went out there in '76, which was still Kissinger and all. And then came the Carter administration. Now did you see a major change? Kissinger was renowned for having no real interest in Africa except to see it in an East-West context; you know, Angola or something like that, but only as a reflection of our antipathy towards the Soviet Union.

NORLAND: It was a position that he maintained until April of 1976. He was on a tour of the area and, from what I've heard from insiders, was getting ready to go to Lusaka, capital of Zambia, to give another speech reflecting the policy that South Africa's monopoly on modern, organized military force in this part of the world meant it would remain in charge for the foreseeable future. At least to the end of the century. So we had to work with South Africa; together we were going to confront the onslaught of Communism. I hope someday you'll get the people like Win Lord to give the background. I read the...biography very carefully on this, and it's not clear. But Win Lord apparently got to Henry and said, "You can't give this speech any longer. The forces represented by the black nationalist movements are forces we should be sympathetic to. They are taking much of their rhetoric and much of their philosophy from our own experience; that is to say, human rights, civil rights, the right of self-determination, and so forth." So in April of '76, Henry's speech changed a little bit. It was nuance, but he did change; he did say that South Africa was going to have to come to terms with events in the world. As I recall, that was the main thrust. But it wasn't more than a little opening.

At that time it was absolutely forbidden for our officials to have official contact with the ANC (African National Congress), the largest of those groups. And the non-ANC black groups were so small they were mere splinters.

We in Gaborone didn't know the refugees were ANC. We just knew that they were blacks from South Africa, and so we contacted them.

It was depressing to hear what they believed and what they thought were the major forces at work in the world, and specifically in South Africa. There was strong pro-Communist ideology. You'd look at the books these people had in their refugee quarters (and I visited some of them, in so-called refugee houses, on the outskirts of town). They'd have a half dozen books; three or four of them would be Lenin, Marx, Castro, or Guevara. We had a problem.

Q: But you were under tight reins then, is that right?

NORLAND: Yes. It was considered provocative to South Africa if we had meetings with the ANC. So people would meet informally, the ANC had a big office in Lusaka, for example. Mutual friends would invite ANC and Americans to the same party, and you'd interact. The CIA got special dispensation. I've never been impressed by their knowledge in this area. But some of

our people had made an effort to really get to know the languages and the people, and they would have sustained contacts--but never official.

This was only broken in January of 1987, when Secretary Shultz received Oliver Tambo in the Department of State. That's ten years later. Unbelievable.

Q: When you went out, did you get any instructions about what you were to do and what you weren't to do?

NORLAND: [chuckle] That's a fun question. The country director at the time was Frank Wisner. I put in a request, through Frank, to pay the customary call on Secretary Kissinger before going out. Frank came back and said that it was not necessary to make a call, and that the Secretary only had a couple of things he wanted me to keep in mind. The first was, we don't need any new ideas from the field. We have all the information and all the initiatives we need back here. Secondly, keep a low profile. We do not need any diversion. Maybe Frank extrapolated a bit, but the spirit of the Kissinger era was: There is one focus of public attention, and that is the Secretary. A couple of other things came up along the same line. I wrote them down at the time.

Q: If you ever find them, we can put it in. In a way, it may be true that you don't want too much initiative, but you don't tell people this too much, because it does things... Sometimes the situation can get dangerous, anywhere, and...

NORLAND: Well, that gives me a chance to say that, late in January 1977, after Carter took over, someone whom I had met, Dick Moose...no, he didn't take over immediately, somebody else was the Assistant Secretary. Maybe it was Schaufele still; maybe Schaufele continued. But, anyway, Moose was the person who was already starting to eye Africa. He was in M. He had not found a home there, and went into Africa affairs. The point was that within days after Carter's inauguration, I got a telegram in Botswana asking, "Please submit your ideas on what it is that you think the United States should be doing in Southern Africa at this time."

I've often used this in talking with junior Foreign Service officers, to make the point that they should always be prepared. You can have people like Henry Kissinger and other know-it-alls who are there temporarily. The most important thing one can do is to prepare for the day that you get an opportunity to say what you think should be said.

I had been thinking about this, knowing that Henry was not going to be there for long, the election having changed the leadership. So I was able to come in with some suggestions. In fact, I came in with some suggestions before the 20th of January 1977. And that rankled Henry greatly.

I'll tell you what it was. It was an attempt to contain the sudden interest of the government of Botswana, a Third World government, only eight hundred thousand people, in arms. They had a tremendously challenging social agenda; they needed to put people to work. But the pressures were mounting in the country, on the president, Sir Seretse Khama, from the three violent struggles going on its borders: the struggle in Zimbabwe, between the British regime and the nationalist forces, Nkomo and Mugabe; the struggle in South Africa, which was forcing refugees

over the border; and the struggle in Namibia. Poor Seretse Khama, one of the brilliant leaders of the Third World, an Oxford graduate, did not want to put the resources of the country into buying arms and aircraft. Yet he was being pressured by his own son, Ian Khama, then a brigadier general, to acquire this arsenal. Why? Because Botswana people were living on these borders, or close to the border--Gaborone itself is only ten miles from the South African border--and sensed the dangers of South African raids. Same thing in Zimbabwe (it was then Rhodesia), where the white military were raiding. So, to protect his population, Khama was being pressed to acquire arms.

When I got there, it was the first thing he raised in the presentation of credentials. We became good friends. He would take this up with me informally as well as formally. He didn't want to arm; we talked about ways of lessening the pressure. The most important pressure at the time was from Rhodesia.

My recommendation to the Department (the unsolicited one while Henry was still there) was to send a signal through South Africa to the authorities in Rhodesia that their actions in violating the border were forcing Seretse Khama to acquire an arsenal, that the United States might not be willing to provide that arsenal, and therefore where would he turn? To the other side.

I felt I had to say, "Let's prevent this arms race from expanding in this part of the world when there are so many other more important priorities of an economic and social nature that should be met. Let's preserve Seretse Khama's desire to keep Botswana from even having a Ministry of Defense." They had police force, but not a defense establishment.

The first thing I knew, a deputy assistant secretary traveling in the area came up to see me, and said, "Your initiative was not at all appreciated. You shouldn't have gotten involved. What are you trying to do?" Of course, it was perfectly obvious what I was trying to do.

Q: Sure.

NORLAND: And then, when the 20th of January '77 struck, the idea was welcomed and got consideration.

Unfortunately, we were slow to react one way or the other. We weren't going to give them the arms. We weren't going to facilitate the acquisition of arms. We tried to talk them out of it. But eventually we had to help out a little bit. The British helped out. And they did turn to the Soviet Union eventually.

Q: I take it we didn't have any particular commercial or business interests in Botswana.

NORLAND: We had an indirect interest. American Metals Climax of Connecticut had a partial interest in a copper/nickel operation near Selebi-Pikwe, which is halfway to Zambia. That was one investment. We'd actually helped to build a road, the Botzam Highway (Botswana-Zambia Highway), a gravel job. We had indirect interests even in the diamond business. But, of course, the monopoly on diamond mining was De Beers, which had its relationship with the government of Botswana. We had an interest in exploring possibilities, for example, of coal. Shell, which is

not U.S., but British and Dutch, was operating there. Some of our companies came out to take a look at the minerals potential. But, you're right, we didn't have much of an interest.

Q: Lesotho and Swaziland, I take it, were really too small to...

NORLAND: In Lesotho, there's almost nothing in the way of resources. Swaziland has got a lot of resources, but the U.S. was not in there; it was South African dominated.

Q: You had three countries, how did you play this?

NORLAND: I was under pressure from particularly Lesotho and Swaziland to spend more time there. My predecessor, David Bolen, did not like Lesotho and apparently did not conceal his lack of interest. He was not comfortable in Swaziland. So he spent most of his time in Botswana. When I got out there, it was in my interest--almost a duty--to try to level this relationship. So I established the practice of spending a week every month in Lesotho, one week a month in Swaziland, and two weeks a month in Gaborone. I'd vary it slightly. But when I was asked where I was resident, I always said, "In this country," because the Department had residences available in all three. While I was not there they served as housing for TDY communicators or others. But I regularly made the tour. I visited Lesotho some thirty-three times in thirty-six months.

Q: Well, the housekeeping, how did this work? Your main administrative stuff was in Botswana?

NORLAND: The main political activity was in Botswana. But in each of the countries, we had a resident mission; that is to say, there would be about an O-3 DCM, plus a communicator and an administrative officer. We also had AID missions and a USIS operation in all of the countries. When I first got out there, as a matter of fact, the AID mission was centralized in Swaziland as the most agreeable of the three places in which to live. And there was a kind of a division of labor that had been informally developed there. But each of the three posts had a basic infrastructure of personnel and of resources--vehicles and so forth. When I was not there, a chargé was.

You could call the bluff of these various countries, particularly Lesotho and Swaziland, by saying, "I am here for the week. But even if I'm not here, if you will simply inform the embassy of your interest, I will be glad to come back at any time, for any meeting of importance; don't worry about that. Stay in touch." And, of course, they didn't have much important business with us. Only on one occasion was I asked to go to Swaziland on short notice.

Incidentally, the Department also was kind in authorizing the use of light planes. The embassy in Pretoria had an air attaché aircraft. And they liked to fly over the region to get better acquainted, taking pictures. They eventually got into trouble, as you may remember, and the aircraft, the air attaché and all were thrown out.

The trip was two hours door to door. I would leave one embassy, hop in the plane, and I could be at work in another embassy in two hours. Each was almost exactly four hundred and fifteen miles apart, the three capitals--Gaborone, Mbabane, Maseru--you can see them on your map, almost a triangle crossing South Africa. My wife didn't particularly enjoy flying, and she'd often

want to do some shopping, so she would take the car and chauffeur, stop in some South African towns en route before rejoining me. Meanwhile, I'd already done a day's work.

Q: Did any initiatives come out of the Carter administration, from your perspective?

NORLAND: Yes, some of them important. One can hardly exaggerate the importance of the Botswana example in human rights and democratization, something the Carter administration pursued vigorously. At one point, Pat Derian, assistant secretary for human rights and humanitarian affairs, had in mind making a major speech in Gaborone to say just what I said; mainly, that Botswana had paved the way.

I'm proud of the fact that from the moment I arrived and tested the theory of Botswana as a democracy, Botswana stood apart. I tested it going to Parliament, talking with members of the opposition, and asking, "Do you have freedom to speak? Do you fear intimidation? Do you have an independent press? If you make a public speech that's contrary to what the president says, do you have any fear whatsoever?"

And the response was, "No."

I became confident that Botswana was a democracy--with freedom of expression, movement, religion, and so forth--and that their elections were meaningful, not perfect, but meaningful. And it was rooted in a traditional system called the Kgotla, which means "village council." Sir Seretse Khama insisted that his ministers campaign between elections, as well as at election time, and explain what the issues were. Even though the people might not always be literate, they had ideas. And there is a tradition in Botswana that says, "A chief is a chief by the will of the people." That's the foundation of democracy.

This tradition helped set Botswana apart. I couldn't say quite the same about Lesotho or Swaziland. The Botswana experience was the one I stressed, saying this is something we ought to build on.

And the Carter administration (you were asking about initiatives). They weren't inspired by just the Botswana example, but they did make something of human rights. I think they were encouraged by Botswana's success.

Q: What about the other two countries?

NORLAND: Both are monarchies.

During my time in Lesotho, the country was run by the prime minister, Leabua Jonathan. I often call him a Chicago ward politician. He kept saying, for example, how important it was that I spend more time in Lesotho. And I'd ask, "What for? We are giving you more aid than you can usefully use. What do you want me to do?" He came to power by annulling an election, in 1970, seizing power. He wouldn't let go until he was deposed by a military group in 1980.

In Swaziland, there are two separate governments. The monarchy (in my day, Sobhuza II), with a clique of advisors strongly traditional in their actions and attitudes. They hovered around the king down in the valley. Up in the capital, Mbabane, you had a Western government, people in dark suits, etc. The king wore leopard skins, very often. When I presented credentials, he had a feather in his hair, and was in leopard skin. That's where power resided. When you went to the capital, you had these men in three-piece suits but with little power.

We have some officers who can tell you in great detail about Swaziland, Jim Wachob, for example.

Do you know Jim?

Q: No, I don't.

NORLAND: I'll ask Jim to come in. No one made a more concerted effort to penetrate Swazi society than Jim Wachob. And yet he will tell you to this day that he had great difficulty.

I went regularly because we had work to do. There were missionaries. We had to reiterate the importance of treating refugees from South Africa correctly, through the UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) or bilaterally. The Swazis had special detention camps in the hills. Of course, it's a beautiful country. The economy is evenly divided between agriculture and industry--South African dominated, of course. They have, I think, one of the largest tree growing operations in the world, a great source of wood pulp. They have some mining: coal, asbestos, which is not very popular.

So I made the rounds as best I could, using a combination of activism and dialogue. I would always be seen calling on people, even if I knew I wasn't going to get much in the way of results. It was part of showing the flag, so they couldn't say, "Well, you're in Gaborone. You're spending all your time in Botswana."

But Botswana had these three wars requiring more attention, more reporting. But I had a good deputy in Botswana, too. Frank Alberti was there for much of the time. Do you know Frank?

Q: Yes, I know Frank.

NORLAND: He had this tragedy, during that time, when his wife, on her way back from Johannesburg for medical appointments, had an automobile accident and was killed.

Q: Oh, I didn't know.

NORLAND: She's buried there. And one son was seriously injured, but he apparently has returned to health.

Frank would do a great job of filling in for me while I was there, seeing the president if necessary. I didn't feel threatened if chargés were seeing the ranking people. It was all in a good cause.

Q: What about your relationship with the South African authorities in these various places?

NORLAND: Well, they were not welcome in these places. There was no official South African mission.

Q: Really? In none of them?

NORLAND: None. There were South African businessmen, South African spies, South African domination of the police force, as in Swaziland. They were functionaries behind the scenes. You'd have a sign that said: "Mr. Dlamini" (the most common name in Swaziland; almost everybody is a Dlamini); but behind the scenes was a South African.

Q: What were your relations with our embassy in Pretoria, Cape Town?

NORLAND: They were not always as smooth as could have been expected, they were naturally apprehensive that we might be having contact with ANC people. If the South African government found out about such contacts it would protest: "Why are your colleagues in Gaborone having contacts with these black terrorists?" So we were discreet, trying to minimize the problems for our colleagues.

We had our own interests. And we thought what we were doing was more in harmony with the overall U.S. policy objectives--namely, to encourage democratization, freedom of movement and expression, voting rights, that sort of thing. We didn't think we should be inhibited by always deferring to the South African government. After all, they were on the wrong side of these issues.

We had a lot of sentiment to overcome; for a long time, the American government was in bed with the South African government. We had various ambassadors out there, many of them political appointees, who felt that our future was with South Africa. Until very late, Kissinger felt that our future was with South Africa. He had such bad judgment on these issues. He really thought power was measured principally, if not exclusively, by force of arms, ignoring the ideas that have produced revolution around the world. And he still is a little slow to recognize those virtues.

Q: You were there three years, doing your rounds and all this. Then you moved to a real hot spot, didn't you?

NORLAND: Yes. For the record, I have to say that we had an inspection, in mid-'79. The head of the team was a friend of mine, who said, "Looking at this issue of whether we should have separate ambassadors to all three countries, rather than this multiple accreditation, what do you think?"

My reply was, "If those assignments will go to career people, so that we can, in effect, give the experience to younger officers at the O-3 level..." We had done this before; we had had O-3 ambassadors in Rwanda...

Q: In the Persian Gulf...

NORLAND: In various places. "If we can use these posts as a training ground for young ambassadors, give them a chance to show that they can manage, that they can direct and coordinate programs, it would on balance, be a good thing." Bernie Stokes was in Lesotho. Why not name Bernie or his successor as ambassador, give him the title? The same with Jim Wachob in Swaziland. They were mature people; they were in their fifties, experienced. They could have done it. "But," I said, "if this should turn out to be a training ground for political ambassadors, then it would be an unfortunate development."

I got assurances that said, "Don't worry. We think you're right; it's a good thing to show that these countries have come of age. Probably on balance, it wouldn't be any more expensive, and it may be even less expensive, to do it this way (name separate ambassadors)."

So I agreed. Two of the three countries were immediately given to political appointees, which cost the U.S. taxpayer enormously. Why? Because instead of having a relatively junior deputy--if Jim Wachob had been ambassador, for example, his deputy could have been a junior officer--we had to upgrade the deputy and move in somebody more experienced, at great expense to the U.S. government.

In the case of Swaziland, I'm pretty sure that this is true, a man came into the Department and asked where the Swiss Desk was. He thought he was going to Switzerland. He did not know the difference between Switzerland and Swaziland.

Q: Oh, God.

NORLAND: I suppose I couldn't have held out; after all, we're talking about only a little over a decade ago that you'd see an article on Southern Africa every two months in the U.S. press. And after Soweto, interest subsided again. Southern Africa was way off the scope of most Americans. That could have continued; on the other hand, I don't think it was fair not to prepare for the day that these countries were acknowledged as countries.

To be sure, Lesotho is surrounded by South Africa; whether that's a viable independent country is open to question. They've even begun to ask themselves whether they might not be integrated into a democratic South Africa, as probably will be the case in the next decade.

Swaziland, on the other hand, is likely to remain independent. I don't want to leave the impression that it will be easy in Swaziland, because they also have a monarchical tradition.

The king of Lesotho has his own ideas, but he's virtually exiled now. He exiled himself in some respects. Moshoeshe is his name, a younger man, probably forty-five.

The current king of Swaziland is Makhosetive Mswati III, born in 1968, represents a long tradition, and you can't obliterate monarchical tradition.

Having spent three years in the BLS countries, and having gotten the final year's extension on the strength that I'd been working hard and I'd made a lot of contacts and was building up programs, as the third year approached, they said, "You've had three good years, now we're going to put you through the mill." And I didn't protest when they assigned me to Chad.

RICHARD C. MATHERON
Ambassador
Swaziland (1979-1982)

Richard C. Matheron was born in California in 1927. He received his bachelor's degree at University of California in Berkley during 1948. His career has included positions in Cameroon, Zaire, Ethiopia, and ambassadorship to Swaziland. Ambassador Matheron was interviewed by Lee Cotetrman in Mark 1989.

Q: Great, Mr. Ambassador. About 1979, I understand you were appointed as U.S. Ambassador to the Kingdom of Swaziland. Could you briefly describe the geographic location and the surrounding political entities in talking about Swaziland?

MATHERON: Swaziland is a country about the size of New Jersey, which is sandwiched between the Republic of South Africa and Mozambique. It's a fascinating country in its own right, but from the regional point of view and from the point of view of broad U.S. interests, its geographic position was most important. Swaziland lies between Marxist Mozambique, which in those days was much more vehemently Marxist than it is today, and South Africa, which is ruled by the white minority and is an extremely conservative government, to say the least. Swaziland was a territory where there was quite a bit of movement back and forth between these two very different régimes, one in Mozambique and one in South Africa.

Swaziland was fascinating in its own right because it was one of the few kingdoms left in the world where the King had real power. Although he ruled with consensus of the people, and there was a Parliament, there was no doubt about the fact that he was number one in the country. In Lesotho, which is surrounded by South Africa, the King is an important person, but he is not the center of real power as he was in Swaziland.

From the time Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho gained independence in 1968, we had had one ambassador accredited to three countries. The ambassador used to live in Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, and visit Lesotho and Swaziland from time to time. In 1979, the Carter administration decided that these other countries were of sufficient importance that we ought to have a resident ambassador in both Lesotho and Swaziland. So I was the first one to spend full-time in Swaziland.

Q: Speaking of Swaziland, in my review of what I knew before, which was not very extensive at all, I picked up the idea that Swaziland and most of the neighboring African nations rely on South Africa for almost all basic needs, including railway transport routes, power, lots of foods, steel, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, machinery, construction materials, and even jobs for thousands of their people. If that were true in the time you were there, could you readily agree on the current sanctions that we have instituted towards South Africa today? How do you feel about that?

MATHERON: I have mixed feelings. I basically think sanctions are not a very effective way of trying to bring a change in internal affairs of countries. I believe that sanctions would not only be detrimental to neighboring countries, but also to the black population in South Africa itself. However, I subscribe to the position taken by Secretary [George] Shultz, or rather the commission he set up to study our relations at the time of sanctions. The point they made was that the United States' President should show real interest in changing the situation in South Africa. It is in the interest of the United States to bring about rapid social change towards majority rule in South Africa. If, in fact, the President of the United States really showed that he cared about it, was personally interested, that would be a lot more effective than sanctions.

But I can say now, quite frankly, that I believe that President Reagan paid only lip service to the anti-apartheid movement, but there was no indication that his heart and soul was in it. My perception is that he didn't care. The South Africans knew that. The South African whites knew it, the South African blacks knew it, that there was not a strong commitment on his part.

Q: During your time there, Mr. Ambassador, the dependence of other nations around South Africa probably did exist and probably still does today.

MATHERON: Oh, yes, very much so. In fact, the economies were very integrated between South Africa and the neighboring countries. Even many of Swaziland's products consumed in Swaziland would go out of Swaziland into South Africa for some processing and back into Swaziland. I remember one American family in Swaziland who really felt determined not to buy any products from South Africa. The mother, head of household, after a few weeks, threw up her arms and said, "There's no way that you can do this. The Swazis don't boycott South African products. I can't even get jam or jelly made from Swazi fruit that don't go across the border to be turned into jam." So she sort of gave up on the project.

Swaziland produces electricity, South Africa produces electricity, but the grids are tied together. So sometimes when we had a power outage, it was not because of a power failure in Swaziland, but a power failure in South Africa. The South Africans have enormous influence in the country. On the whole, South Africa has provided a great deal of development in the region.

Q: Were you in attendance at King Sobhuza's diamond jubilee celebration?

MATHERON: Yes. There was an American delegation which flew out. It was headed by Vern Orr, who was then Secretary of the Air Force, and Mrs. Ruppe, the Peace Corps director, was a member of the delegation, as were various people, including Don DeFore, who was a Hollywood

personality. We had one of the largest delegations to the diamond jubilee celebrations, and it turned out to be a marvelous event. Everybody had a good time, and things worked quite well. This group of Americans, many of whom had very little contact with Africa before, were really very impressed by the Swazis' ability to put on a first-rate international event.

Q: I noted, in reading some background, that King Sobhuza had some 70 wives and perhaps as many as 150 children, binding all the significant family groupings in his clan together. Do you feel, if this is true, that that's politically significant to his long reign of 60-some years that he was in power there?

MATHERON: I'm glad that you got your numbers so good, because generally people say, "Oh, he had 500 wives and 2,000 children." But your numbers are very close to those estimated by a very renowned anthropologist on the subject.

Part of the system is that the King have a wife from every one of the major clans of the Swazi people. Actually, the Swazi peoples occupy an area greater than Swaziland today. It's part of the political cohesiveness of the Swazi people. Of course, Swaziland is one of the very few countries in Africa which is primarily from one ethnic group. Ninety-eight percent of the population of Swaziland are Swazis, as compared to places like Zaire or Ethiopia or Nigeria or even smaller countries where there's a much greater ethnic diversity.

Also, Sobhuza was a very clever man, although he was a traditional chief. He had one foot in the past, but he certainly had one foot in the present and in the future. He's one of the few political leaders that I've known who had a real vision for his country. A lot of the Swazis made a great deal about tradition, and it was a fascinating country to live in, because there were so many events going on which were traditional African events. I think largely thanks to his personality, he was able to always be ahead of tradition and using tradition for political purposes. He was very much a man of the twentieth century.

Q: What do you feel was perhaps your most important accomplishment in U.S.-Swaziland affairs during your ambassadorship there?

MATHERON: I think probably the most concrete accomplishment was negotiating an agreement to establish an FBIS station there, as you know, Foreign Broadcast Information Service, which serves all of southern Africa. The only other FBIS post on the African continent is in Abidjan. It took the better part of a year and a half to negotiate the agreement, because in Swaziland, foreign diplomats are negotiating with the modern sector of government, which meant the prime minister and the deputy prime minister and the minister of communications. They had Cabinet meetings, and they made decisions, but then it went down to the royal court--I say "down" because it was at a lower altitude in the country--and there it would be mulled over among the King and the traditional advisors to the King, who would send messages back very subtly about some of the considerations. Sobhuza never made snap decisions. He was a very thoughtful person and really wanted to bring all the traditional people aboard.

So although I wouldn't say it was a difficult negotiation, it was one of those things that you had to know how to pace. You had to keep reminding them of U.S. interest, but not so often that it would annoy them. Eventually, we got a good answer and a good agreement to set up that station, which has turned out to be enormously valuable to the intelligence community.

Q: How many hours a day would a station like that broadcast normally?

MATHERON: They do not broadcast but listen to broadcasts from Mozambique and South Africa and Zambia. It's an overt intelligence operation; essentially what they do is listen to all of the public radio in the southern half of the continent, which is much broader than just the immediate area around South Africa, they then put together daily summaries of what's being said on the radio, which I know is a very important tool of analysis in Washington.

Q: That summary would go back to Washington, but was it also utilized in any other fashion or broadcast in any fashion at all to any area?

MATHERON: FBIS' job was to provide Washington with all of the material broadcast of any political, economic, or sociological interest within the whole area. Obviously, in Washington it was screened and not absolutely every word is reprinted, only the most important part. But there's a booklet that comes out that's half an inch thick every day on radio broadcasts just from that area. There are similar ones for the northern part of Africa, for the Middle East, for the Far East, less in Europe, because it's less important in Europe, because we have so much more direct access to information.

Usually in the Third World, when news breaks, it breaks on radio rather than in the press. I guess we can say that in our own world, too. But governments use the radio a great deal more. So that was a very useful asset that the United States has.

They were naturally a little bit uneasy about having such a station, although Swaziland has been closer to our position in the UN than many other African countries. They still are afraid of being tainted as being "lackeys of the imperialists" and so on. They want to keep up their credentials in the Non-Aligned Movement. I think this is less important now than it was ten years ago, but it certainly used to be terribly important, what the Non-Aligned Movement thought. They didn't want to be pariahs and outcasts for being too friendly to the Americans. At the same time, they wanted to be very helpful.

CHARLES LAHIGUERA
Deputy Chief of Mission
Mbabane, Swaziland (1983-1985)

Mr. Lahiguera was born and raised in New York. After graduating from Georgetown University and serving in the US Navy, he entered the Foreign Service in 1963. Though he served outside the South East Asia, his primary duties concerned the Vietnam War and its aftermath, particularly refugees. His overseas

posts include Germany, Curacao, Vietnam, France, Hong Kong, Thailand and Swaziland, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission. Mr. Lahiguera was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Q: So, you were in Swaziland from '83 to?

LAHIGUERA: To '85.

Q: In a way having dealt with Southeast Asia and all this would have been a little bit of a relaxation, rest or come down or what?

LAHIGUERA: It was going from one kingdom to another for starters, that was the similarity. In addition we had the African National Congress operating against the South Africans. We also had Mozambique next door. Swaziland borders Mozambique and South Africa. There were some stories; in fact our embassy staff expedited my getting there. Our embassy staff in Maputo had fled into Swaziland. Swaziland was an interesting place. It was a very prosperous island in the middle of Southern Africa. The Swazis fancy themselves as the Switzerland of Southern Africa. That's a bit of a stretch, but it is a lovely place. The capital of Mbabane is about 4,000 feet up. The country became independent in 1968 and its king was a gentleman by the name of Sobhuza, II. He had died just before I arrived, just a few weeks before I arrived. He had about 90 wives and he had over 100 children. He was really something of a semi-God to the people. He was a very cautious, wise, well-balanced man from what I could see and heard. He ruled after Swazi gained independence and they didn't go into promoting radical change. There were many British; it was originally a British protectorate. Many South Africans invested in the place and they had a fairly substantial tourist trade. It was very active and had some of the most modern sugar plantations in the world. They had the largest man made forest in the world until the Brazilians built a forest larger than Swaziland. The Swazis couldn't catch up. This is a country of a half a million people, a little bigger than Kuwait, but smaller than Massachusetts. I arrived when they were in mourning. I found the place very interesting. We had a FBIS (Foreign Broadcast Information Service) station there that was monitoring all the open broadcasts out of South Africa, Mozambique and Africa in general. I got some good political coverage from those events. It was an interesting window to see how things were developing both in South Africa and in Mozambique. I didn't do a lot of reporting on it, but found it quite interesting. The Swazis had a very traditional government. They had only this one leader and most of the population was very content under their system. They had a parliament during the British days. Then they were granted independence. They had a constitution and the king had suspended of parts of the constitution except the part dealing with the judiciary.

Q: This was a new king?

LAHIGUERA: No, the old king. So, when I arrived they were in this state; the political parties had been banned. The Swazi view of things was that they were a small community and they didn't want to have one side against the other. Their idea of settling problems was getting everybody involved in a room and talk it to death and then come up with some sort of consensus. They thought that was a much healthier way of resolving problems than slugging it out and voting on it. I must admit I had great reservations writing the human rights report. There is a

certain vocal arrogance in writing a human rights report. It just struck me that their society was relatively happy, punching away. But because they didn't run their government and conduct government the way we do, they were inferior, undemocratic. Their system of government is that the king and his mother ruled at the same time. When the mother dies, as Sobhuza's mother had already died, the king and his senior wife, the senior wife replaces the mother as co-sovereign. When the king dies which is what happened when I was there, the senior wife became the regent. Then royal family, the immediate family and the royal members meet and they discuss and discuss and discuss and they form a consensus of who should be the next king. There is no automatic selection of the king. So, they were in the process of trying to decide who of Sobhuza's children should be king. Their preference was to have an infant be the king and to raise an infant as king from the beginning from infancy. Sobhuza didn't have any infants, he was in his 80's, but he had some quite young children. They finally selected a young man. They first made him the crown prince and he eventually became king, Mswati III. In the meantime when he was selected his mother, Ntombi, became the regent in place of Sobhuza's senior wife. The whole apparatus is surrounded by counselors and the system is that the king makes a lot of the executive decisions with his prime minister, but there's always the traditional channels of appeal through his mother and through the wives.

Q: I can just see you're trying to puzzle this out and put it into a sort of check list off of a human rights or something, you know?

LAHIGUERA: Yes. Actually I got very much involved in this. The Swazis, the royal family is very secretive about how they go about business and the average Swazi doesn't really know how decisions are made. I'm talking about decisions impacting on the royal family, but the government is a different matter. The government was a blend of tradition and parliamentary government. There were white Swazis, Englishmen, who were members of the parliament and the government had white ministers. One of the speakers was a white Brit originally and they have made a great effort and have continued to make a great effort in balancing both sides. This is a country that is 95% black, 95% Swazi, but they welcomed white participation in the economy and in the government. Outside of South Africa they have one of the highest standards of living in Africa as well as having good health conditions. They had abundant food. Anything you wanted you can buy there. Their money was interchangeable with the South African Rand, and they had a proper relationship, correct relationship with South Africa. While I was there the South Africans set up a trade office and the head of the trade office was a Foreign Service Officer from the South African Foreign Ministry, so he was obviously in the sense their ambassador. It was a very interesting period. I could talk a long time about just the structure of the society and how it functioned. They have two different sets of laws. They have polygamy, which is permitted, and a woman can be married under the traditional system or could be married with a modern judge or priest or whatever. Some members of this parliament and the government had one wife and some had several. We had dinner with all these folks and had some of them over. Some of them always came with the same wife. I can remember one colonel who became head of the army. Every time he came to dinner at my house he had a different wife, so I just got used to it. I thought it was interesting, sort of starting all over to meet another one. But, you had this very interesting mixture of how I approached them. We had a large aid presence. We sent quite a few Swazis to be educated in the United States. In fact the present Prime Minister of

Swaziland, Barnabas, was educated in the United States. He's an accountant and he was a minister, finance minister when I was there.

Q: How did that work I mean sometimes the United States can spoil somebody, you know, coming back full of American piss and vinegar and wanting to change things around. How did, not just him, but other American educated people?

LAHIGUERA: I don't think it was a problem. Swazis are very conservative people. I used to say they were lovers, not fighters. The fire-eaters would be more likely to come from the South African University people who were influenced by the ANC. There was an ANC presence, which they went along with. What the Swazis didn't permit were any anti-South African activities. Activities on either side. They felt that they were a neutral area and they were in favor of a democratic rule in South Africa and they didn't want any operations against South Africa to be conducted from Swaziland. While I was there the South African government in fact attempted to cede to Swaziland the area between Swaziland and the ocean on the East Coast. The area south of Mozambique. The South African government had felt it needed to cede the property and the Swazis had accepted it and the Zulu tribe sued in court. The court found that the South African government hadn't followed the proper procedures and the Zulus claimed this territory was legitimately part of the Zulu area. As a result the land transfer didn't take place, but it was an interesting example of how business was done there and how their relationship was. They got along and when the senior Swazis became ill they were all evacuated to the hospitals in South Africa. It was just an interesting situation.

Q: Well, you had a political ambassador, his name was Phinny?

LAHIGUERA: Phinny, Robert Phinny.

Q: Where is he from, what was his background?

LAHIGUERA: He was a businessman and he was from Michigan. I think he fell within the lines of the Gerald Ford group. He was a contributor. He was very interested in Africa and he was an older gentleman and he related well with the personalities in government. His wife was an absolute angel who got along very well with the people there.

Q: During the time you were there, was the government of Mozambique fishing or trying to create troubled waters in Swaziland or were there any problems from that side?

LAHIGUERA: Mozambique had some sort of war going on and we were interested in it as well. They were much too tied up with their own internal problems to be worried about us. While I was there I was able to drive into Maputo. We had a chargé there who I stayed with in a beach house for a weekend. When you went to Mozambique you had to bring all your food with you because you couldn't buy anything. I can remember when I drove in I'd hit a pothole and the car bounced so much that the battery cracked. The embassy had a motor boat and I had to borrow their battery and try to get my car home. Then I sent them a new battery.

During my last year there I was the chargé. Bob Phinny left and the anti-government forces in Mozambique cut the roads into Swaziland and so we weren't able to go in there anymore. We did have some problems with refugees coming out of there. So, I was back in the refugee business and I had a lot of meetings with the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) representative. There were refugees from South Africa as well in Swaziland, but we got an influx of refugees from Mozambique at that time as well.

Q: Well, then in '85, did Swaziland find any part in what was it, the policy at that time called constructive engagement?

LAHIGUERA: Constructive engagement. Chet Crocker was our assistant secretary.

Q: Were we sort of looking at this through your Swazi contacts, were they telling you how this thing was going or not?

LAHIGUERA: Well, the Swazi government is very sympathetic to our approach. They themselves were trying to do the best they could to get along and to work with the South Africans. I think they would foster any meetings between the South Africans and ourselves and the rest of the African states. So, I viewed Swaziland as an opportunity to demonstrate what free market economy and investment could do in Southern Africa. I was hopeful that we could encourage more investments there. My own feeling was that if the economy grew the majority of the people would be drawn more and more into the economy and would take on more management roles. I thought this was a very constructive way to go through change. I'm not convinced that we were wrong.

HARVEY F. NELSON, JR.
Ambassador
Swaziland (1985-1988)

Ambassador Nelson was born and raised in California. He was educated at Occidental College, The University of Stockholm, Sweden and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. After serving in the US Navy and teaching at Bowdoin College, Ambassador Nelson joined the Foreign Service and served in Washington and abroad, primarily as a political officer dealing in Scandinavian and African affairs. In 1985 he was appointed Ambassador to Swaziland.

NELSON: At that time, I was asked whether I would go as ambassador to Swaziland. I was heart-broken that my wife could not have shared that with me. It was very hard. I told the Department that I needed a little time to consider the offer. I talked to my children and told them that I thought that I could not do the job without their mother. My daughter asked me what her mother might say. That was obvious, and I accepted the offer.

Q: You were in Swaziland from when to when?

NELSON: I went in the fall of 1985 and left in the fall of 1988.

Q: Tell us a little about 1985 Swaziland.

NELSON: Things were coming unglued in South Africa. Mozambique was in considerable disarray. The Portuguese had left, and a civil war had broken out. Those were Swaziland's neighbors. So Swaziland had to host a lot of refugees and some freedom fighter groups who used Swaziland as a base. They did not make the white South Africans very happy. Under pressure from their shareholders it became a haven for businessmen who had conducted their affairs in South Africa. For example, Coca Cola moved its South African regional headquarters to Mbabane. Swaziland at the time had a population of less than one million people. It gained a little from this business migration.

Swaziland is a country populated by only one tribe and, therefore, does not have tribal conflicts. The Swazi tribe is an off-shoot of the Zulus. They both speak the same language. It is a monarchy, a very tradition-bound society which is highly dependent on chiefs for leadership. The population is polygamous with a few exceptions. Its basic industry is farming with a large number of South African farmers managing the plantations of pineapples and other citrus fruits. It also had a large timber industry run by South African concerns. It had a very good reforestation program. They grow pine trees even though they are not indigenous to Swaziland. Swaziland produced paper pulp. There was some industry. In general, Swaziland did reasonably well economically even though the economy was totally dependent on South Africa.

Swaziland generally stayed out of trouble. It was a convenience to South Africa. It was a convenience to rebel groups as well. It was something akin to Switzerland in a way. It had good relationships with its neighbors. There was probably not an overriding reason for us to have representation there. But that was true for so many other countries as well. The only good reason I can think of is that it gave me an opportunity for an ambassadorship.

The people were very kind and very accessible. They were very secretive about their odd traditions. Swaziland had a parliament with elections of a sort. There were political groups which vied with each other in peaceful ways.

It was a pleasant experience. We had a small assistance program with which my current wife was involved. She was a contractor in the community radio business.

Q: Was it considered a front line state? Did the ANC or comparable groups use Swaziland as a base for raids into South Africa?

NELSON: Swaziland was considered a front-line state, but not aggressively so. It didn't like to be part of the South African problem. The South African government, probably with some justification, lodged protests on a couple of occasions that Swaziland was being used by raiders. But I don't think Swaziland was ever a major base of operations. We didn't have any South African raids in Swaziland to secure the border areas. There probably were agents of South Africa who did their job, but we didn't have any public interventions.

Q: What about the Mozambique conflict? Who was fighting whom in 1985?

NELSON: I am not sure that I remember. It was mostly a power struggle with very little ideology. There were people who wanted to overthrow the socialist government. Machel and Chissano were supported by South Africa and by Southern Rhodesia. So there was an external influence. Machel was not reluctant to accept aid from the Soviets or the Chinese. It was a messy, undefinable conflict. As a matter of fact, my wife and I were going to visit Mozambique to visit the great game park. But we canceled because the trip was considered a little too hazardous. It could have been done, but Mozambique was too unstable to take the risk. It got worse after 1988. Bill De Pree was our ambassador in Maputo. He survived without any damage. My wife and I did drive to Maputo to visit the De Prees. When we tried to get back to Swaziland, the Mozambique army stopped us at a road block they had just thrown up. With great glee, they forced us to empty our car. Everything had to be taken out. We had tennis racquets and balls. These soldiers forced us to show them how to use them. So we stood in the middle of the highway hitting the ball back and forth. We followed their orders without complaint. Finally, the officer in charge released us, and we had to repack all our goods which had been strewn on the highway. One of the soldiers finally couldn't stand it anymore, and he came to give us a helping hand. Mozambique at the time was not a very stable place. People had real trouble on the highways. We didn't, but others did and so traveling in Mozambique was somewhat of a risk.

The capital of Swaziland is Mbabane. It is about 5,000-6,000 feet high. The climate was very comfortable. The country has lowlands, which are tropical and hot. Some of that land was very good for citrus fruit planting. The higher elevations were very good for pineapple. The forests were also in the mountains.

Q: How did you deal with the government?

NELSON: Everybody was accessible, the foreign minister, the first private secretaries of the ministries. We probably knew all the ministers and their first secretaries as well as people at lower echelons who had some influence. We had good access to the prime minister's office. We did a lot of waiting. You would make an appointment for a certain hour and then wait and wait. To see the king was big deal with all sorts of ceremonial trappings. I think there was a lot of influence exercised by older hangers-on in the royal house. They may have been family members, but there were others as well. All of them had been at the court with the king's father - King Sobhuza - who had been put on the throne by the British. He had seventy wives and an untold number of children. So there were a lot of princes in Swaziland. King Mswati III was in a British boarding school when the British decided to put him on the throne. He was going to attend Sandhurst but never made it that far. He was very young when he assumed the throne and that I think made him quite receptive to the council of elders that his father had collected. These people were very conservative and traditionalist. They had no inclination to change society, even if they had known how.

But the king was accessible. It took some work, but it could be done. Seeing him was not necessarily useful. I think the more important objective was to find the person or persons who were advising him on the subject we wanted to discuss. I don't think I ever figured that power structure out. Perhaps my diplomatic colleagues were more skilled at this than I was, but it

always had me stumped. So seeing the king was really not of much use. On occasions, he would summon me when he wanted something. These were material things. He was building an enormous new palace. We had some reservations about that expenditure of public money. We had an assistance program. It didn't seem quite right that Swaziland should spend so much money on a palace when its basic needs were going unmet. That really bugged us. His majesty wanted to furnish the palace. He had gotten some quotes from an Italian manufacturer which he thought were outrageous. He asked me whether I could help. I suggested to Washington that a contract be arranged with some North Carolina furniture maker, but no one was interested. So I never gave the king an answer and he never followed up. There were a couple of requests like that.

When the king was crowned, Maureen Reagan came as the president's representative. That was an interesting time. She was very good. She may have been difficult in some ways, but she was an outstanding representative. The king got a big kick out of her. I think she enjoyed her trip. Of course she had her special aircraft and had a lot of staff with her. It was a big event for little Swaziland, not to mention our tiny embassy.

Q: I have heard that Maureen Regan was quite firm, but also very smart and well prepared. She was one that should not be crossed.

NELSON: That is right, but she wasn't bad. When things were going well, I was "Harvey;" when she wasn't happy, I was "Mr. Ambassador." So I knew right away when trouble was brewing. I think she enjoyed the trip, although I am not sure that she was convinced it was worth all the time and expense involved. I wasn't either. But it was a nice visit. We had a wonderful evening at the residence with all of the staff. She was very gracious. I had collected for some reason a number of cheap wind-up toys, kangaroos that jumped, cars that go around, etc. She asked that I bring them out and she put them on the coffee table, and she tried to get them moving all at one time. She stayed late into the night and the staff had to be there because none of them could leave before her. She was having a wonderful time. She was a very good sport. She did all of the official mandatory things that were expected. It was fun.

Q: We were still involved in "constructive engagement" at the time. We were quite active in southern Africa. Did Swaziland ever play any role in our efforts?

NELSON: No, I don't think so. I don't remember any contribution that Swaziland made to the process. They were pretty much in the pockets of South Africa. There was a railroad which cut through Swaziland on the way to Maputo, which was a port. It was essentially a South African enterprise. That was interesting because South Africa did not have very good relations with Mozambique. But business was business. We were not too happy about that development because the railroad was being built by South Africa and it had the potential of interfering with the sanctions we had imposed. That was just an example of the Swazis playing the South African game. On the other hand, they really didn't have much choice. The Swazis really couldn't afford to participate in the pressure that we and others were trying to apply to South Africa. They weren't really interested in our policies they were getting along fine. And we didn't really pressure them to change. I did encourage them to take certain steps, but we didn't insist. Some

time they would help, such as a vote in the UN. But they didn't help us in any significant way as far as South Africa was concerned.

While in Mbabane, I remarried. My new wife was an Australian. She was born and raised in Melbourne. Her mother was a radio drama script writer. She wrote for some Australian radio series. When my wife was about seven years old, she asked her mother whether she couldn't write her into one of her episodes. She liked to act and wanted to have the opportunity to try radio. Her mother did and that was her start into radio. She pursued that career both as an actress and a writer and as a producer. After that came television. But during all that work she pursued academic studies. Her first love was music, particularly opera. She joined a traveling university musical group who put on musicals around Australia. She has a gorgeous voice even today. She says that if she could live her life over again; she would have concentrated on opera. She was married and had two children; her husband deserted her leaving her to support the family. I should mention that she was not a good student in the usual subjects. In fact she failed high school. But she worked until she got into a university which opened all sorts of horizons. She became a teacher in a very good girls' private school. She applied for a scholarship to go to England or for a Fulbright scholarship to teach in the U.S. She was accepted in England and for the Fulbright program. She really didn't like what she had heard about the U.S. She wondered why that was since she had never been there. So she accepted the Fulbright scholarship.

She taught in a high school in Cincinnati. Her kids were with her, and she still had to support the whole family. She returned to Australia as was required by the Fulbright program for a couple of years. Then she returned to the U.S. I am not quite clear why she did that. She didn't think much of our education system. It was not nearly as demanding on the students as were the Australian schools. She did return to teach, but at one point she became fed up with our system because she was being paid 2/3 of the salary that male teachers were earning. She just couldn't accept that discrimination.

While teaching, she also did some part time work for radio and TV stations. When she became available for full time work, she was contacted by one of the Cincinnati TV stations. She became involved in their science program. That really started her career. Somewhere along the line, she was asked whether she would be interested in helping the assistance program in Kenya which was using radio to disseminate information. She accepted and then stuck with the assistance program, finally ending up in Swaziland.

Q: How much work did you do trying to get the Swazis to vote with us in the UN?

NELSON: Quite a bit. We always had one vote or another for which we wanted as much support as we could gather. As I said, they were very helpful when they could. If the vote would cause them trouble with South Africa, then they wouldn't play. They had to worry about their own situation first.

Q: Was there much of an American community in Swaziland?

NELSON: Very small. There were Britishers and South Africans and Southern Rhodesians. We still have friends in those communities, but these were people who came to Swaziland - or their

parents did - and just stayed even after they retired. One of our friends who was a South African lady and her husband started a weaving shop. We have some very fine drapes which came from her. They left South Africa because they just couldn't stand the apartheid policies of the government. They are now in their 80s and still living in Swaziland. They also manufactured some of the drapes in the Kennedy Center. Their son became a member of the Swazi parliament for a number of years. Then there were few other South Africans who followed that path because they couldn't stand the racist policies in their country. But the white community in Swaziland was not very large.

Q: What about the diplomatic community?

NELSON: Very small. The Israelis had a mission - they would establish missions wherever they could because they were not welcomed in a lot of countries. The French were there as were the British. The Dutch had representation as did the Mozambicans, the South Africans as well as one or two others. There was a tradition in the diplomatic community to have a weekly luncheon. They were very boring. When one of us would leave, we would be presented with a small silver plate signed by all of the other foreign ambassadors. There was plenty of room on the plate for all of the signatures.

Q: Were there any major issues during your tour?

NELSON: I don't remember any. There may have been some incidents, but nothing worth remembering. I think one of the problems was that we were too damn comfortable there and too well accepted. We could deal with any problem quite amicably and quickly. So I don't think we had any major issues while I was there.

MARY A. RYAN
Ambassador
Swaziland (1988-1990)

Mary A. Ryan was born in New York in 1940. She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from St. John's University. Her career in the Foreign Service include positions in Italy, Honduras, Mexico, Ivory Coast, Sudan, and an ambassadorship to Swaziland. She was also a member of the Kuwaiti Task Force during the Gulf War. Ambassador Ryan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in March 2003.

Q: You were in Swaziland from '88 to when?

RYAN: June of '90. It was 18 months.

Q: Can you describe Swaziland at that time?

RYAN: Well, Swaziland at that time was a beneficiary of the apartheid regime in South Africa, because companies that wanted a foothold in southern Africa would come to Swaziland because they were not allowed – American companies, that is – were not allowed to go to South Africa because of sanctions, economic sanctions that were in place at that time. Swaziland had a young population, a relatively well educated population, and an English-speaking population for the most part. And so we had, like a Coca-Cola bottling company and we had pineapple canning factories and we had interests in... I mean, we had a trade mission come. My DCM, Arma Jane Karaer, had spent a lot of time with the [indistinct] consulate and so she had done a lot of economic work and so she got us this group of people to come to explore Swaziland as a place for their operations, which was tremendous for the country. And so it was that way – more important than the very small size of the country would have led you to believe. The Swazis were completely oblivious to all of this in many ways, because I remember talking to some of the ministries and cautioning them about how if South Africa ever freed itself from the Afrikaner regime, that's where all of the trading and investment would go, and that Swaziland should be paying attention to this, paying much more attention to the investment that they had at that time. But then, of course, none of us imagined that the Afrikaner regime and the apartheid regime would disappear as quickly as it did from the scene. And so they didn't take it at all seriously. And so, of course, now it's very much, I'm afraid, a backwater. Well, it's always a backwater to South Africa; I'm not saying that. But the investment and everything has now gone to South Africa and has left Swaziland.

Q: What type of government did it have?

RYAN: Well, it's a monarchy. The king was very young at the time that I was there. He celebrated his 21st birthday while I was in the country. His father, King Sobhuza, had been the longest reigning monarch in the world, and was believed to be, and certainly had the reputation of being, a very wise leader. King Mswati had been sent to England to school, and had had no opportunity to observe his father's rule/reign. And so he came back when his father died, and he had a very tricky succession because King Sobhuza had 51 sons and innumerable daughters of many wives, but the rule of succession was that you could be the only son of your mother, so that you would not have full-blooded brothers competing with you. And so this young man was that, he was the only son of his mother. And so he was the one determined to be the successor, and brought back.

And he was very young and not well educated; he was still in high school or prep school in England when he was brought back. and surrounded by traditional leaders, old men, who had no experience of the world whatsoever, and who always talked about the Swazi way of doing things. And so we basically had an absolute monarchy. I mean, he was not a tyrant, or not, as he was named recently in Parade magazine, the 10th worst tyrant in the world, which he's really not. But political parties were banned by King Sobhuza when a couple of people of his party were defeated. When you look back on it, you have to laugh. But political parties were banned then. They have a parliament, but it's, you know, under the control of the king. And it's getting increasingly restive now. It was not very restive then. They had unions and all. It's not an effective government. It was not an effective government, in my judgment, at the time. [Indistinct] had two women at the top of the American Embassy in Mbabane, Swaziland.

Q: Who was your DCM?

RYAN: My DCM was Arma Jane Karaer.

Q: I remember her.

RYAN: They had a debate in parliament about whether it was acceptable to beat your wife. I mean, they actually had a debate about that. I remember talking to the Speaker of the House, as they called it, and asked him, “Do you think this is the right kind of debate to be having in the 20th century?” And he was all shame-faced and embarrassed and everything, but they actually had a debate. And the conclusion was, only if she deserved it.

Q: Well, that sounds reasonable [laughing]!

RYAN: So Arma Jane and I were like, “to the barricades.” It was absolutely incredible. A long time after I had left Swaziland and one of my colleagues was in Canada, and the Swazi high commissioner there was a woman, and Jim Walsh told me that she told him that men in government used to say that the American ambassador did that, and the American ambassador was a woman. And if the American ambassador can do that, then we can do it too. But I didn’t realize that at the time. This was not “heavy lifting,” this job, believe me. After you read the traffic that came in by 10 o’clock in the morning, I was sort of hard-pressed to know how I was going to occupy the other time of the day, without driving the staff completely insane.

And so what I did, I accepted every invitation I got. Every little women’s sewing class graduations I went to, every single thing that went on. Everything that AID wanted me to do. Anything that anyone wanted me to do, I did. And so I did that deliberately in terms of women’s activities; I wanted to show the chiefs of the area that women’s work was valued by the American ambassador and 2) to show the women that, you know, there was more to what they were doing, which was to keep the country afloat, God knows.

The women of Africa do everything, and it was no different in Swaziland. They do all the work in the homesteads, and they somehow did the little sewing things that make money to get the children the school uniforms they need and the books they need to have an education. The men used to sit around and drink beer. And the men thought that was perfectly acceptable. There was a missionary couple, an American missionary couple in the south – south as it was in Swaziland – who invited me to come to see their work, and this was a couple that belonged to some church (I can’t remember which denomination it was now), but they had just decided that they should be missionaries, and they decided that they should come to Swaziland – husband and wife – very, very good people. And it was a little homestead, and the women had to go to the stream, which was like one-half mile or a mile away from where this little collection of houses was, and carry the water back to the homestead. And this couple wanted to run pipes from the stream to the homestead, because water is very heavy. And so they would walk with their empty containers of water to get the water from the stream, and then they would bring it back carrying it on their heads – little kids, little girls, older women – and it’s heavy, and so this would relieve them of that burden. And the chiefs refused to allow it, because “what would the women do with all that free time?” And you just, you would just go insane with stuff like that. They would just get into

trouble. And they had to work all day, so the men could sit around and get drunk. And I remember how good this couple was, and how frustrated they were at this, such primitive type of thinking.

Q: Were there movements within the Swazi, was it pretty much on a tribal or village basis? Was there somebody at the top trying to...

RYAN: No, but they had the government structure, which was probably from the British. So they had ministers and they had parliament secretaries. They had a number of ministries. But the king ruled. The ministers were selected, I never really understood how. And, it was very cohesive. It's all Swazi, I mean, that's all there is in Swaziland, is the Swazi nationality. And so there's a Swazi way of doing things. And at that time, when the king chose anyone to be his next wife, nobody could say anything. I mean, it's just recently last year, that a mother objected to her daughter being taken by the king as a consequence of the reed dance. And that was a big scandal in Swaziland that she dared to do that. And in the end, she gave way, and her daughter is, as I understand it, one of the king's many wives. But at that time, it was not like that. At that time, there was just no objection to anything.

Q: Did the hand of the South African, Afrikaner South African government, rest at all within Swaziland?

RYAN: What we had frequently was cross-border raids. We would have people fleeing South Africa for one reason or another, and then South African police – military – who would come across and try to grab them, and often did bring them back – grab them and bring them across the border. But the Swazis, it wasn't really the Swazi way to really object to that. So they would always downplay it. You would never read about it, but you would hear around that this would happen. And when you tried to investigate, you'd find out, "Well, yes, it happened, but well." They didn't want any trouble with South Africa. There was a man who went to my church who was a relative of Alan Boesak – he was later discredited, not the man who was at the church (he was a young man), but his relative – who I helped him get refugee status in the United States, which took a very long time. And this fellow was in terrible fear that the South Africans were going to come and drag him back across the border. They didn't, fortunately, ever find out where he was. But that happened, that happened a lot. And, of course, at the same time we had the terrible problem in Mozambique with RENAMO [Mozambique National Resistance] faction, which was trying to overthrow the FRELIMO government, and horrible atrocities were taking place in Mozambique and people were fleeing Mozambique into Swaziland. And there was a refugee camp that I visited that a priest was running at that time, where the inhabitants were all Mozambican refugees fleeing a terrible, terrible problem in Mozambique at that time.

Q: Were there many Swazis who went to work in South Africa and came back?

RYAN: Not in the same number as, say, the people of Lesotho did. Some did, yes, of course. And there were some people who went to the mines. But Lesotho really staffed the mines in South Africa, much less so the Swazis.

Q: Were the ANC [African National Congress] or any of those organization playing a role in Swaziland?

RYAN: They were in Swaziland. They were there, but it wasn't like they had a headquarters there; they were there and people knew they were there, but it was all quiet, it was all very much under the radar, which is the way the Swazis wanted it. They didn't want to be in confrontation with the South Africa government.

Q: What is the history of the Swazis? One knows about the Zulus and some of the other tribes.

RYAN: As I understood it, as it was explained to me, the Swazis were a less militant part of the Zulu Nation, and had broken off from it – from the Zulu Nation – at some point, a long time ago, and were not as militant. They also said that the Swazis and the British got along so well because the Swazis were very conciliatory and that's the way the British were, too. Whereas the Zulus and the Afrikaners were always fighting, and that's the way both of them were.

Q: What was AID doing there?

RYAN: AID had various projects – some education, some water. But mostly education, and some water projects. It was small – \$20 million is what I remember – but it was popular with Swazis. AID was very popular with Swazis, as was the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps had been there from the time of independence in 1968. And we had visits by two Peace Corps directors, heads of Peace Corps. Loret Ruppe came and so did Paul Coverdale during my time, and that was only 18 months. I have a hilarious story about, I wonder if I should tell it to you.

Q: Oh, please do.

RYAN: Paul Coverdale came, and he tried to get an appointment with the king. And in typical Swazi fashion, he never answered. And so Paul Coverdale, and the Peace Corps director, and a Peace Corps volunteer were out in the country touring around. And I had been with them. They dropped me off, and they were going back down the hill to stay at their hotel. And when I walked in the house, there was a phone call – almost timed, almost as if people were watching – that the king could see Peace Corps Director Coverdale. So, there was much consternation by me, by the Peace Corps director, rushing back down the hill, trying to make sure that, “Yes, he can see you. Yes, come.” They had to get changed. We drove to one of the king's residences and so, there we are – this little delegation of Paul Coverdale, the Peace Corps director; Paul Coverdale's chief of staff; and myself – all four of us all dressed up. And so we knock at the door, and the door opens, and there's nobody at eye level.

We're looking at a door that just sort of swings open. And then you drop your eyes to see what's going on and there was a little boy. And they always had little boys around the king, because little boys, children, don't lie. And so if somebody did something that they weren't supposed to do, the children would see it, and if the children were asked, they would tell the truth. That was the story. And so, there was this very grubby little boy, who looked as if he only had on a rather dirty, ripped t-shirt and no other clothing. Okay, so that was fine. The carpet was very raised and so the door could not close properly, and so they had cut a piece out of the carpet. And rather

than just leave it bare linoleum, they had put down a Black Label beer carton, which they had flattened. So, you can imagine our state of mind going into this, okay? So we go in, and of course the king is not on time. And we wait, and finally the king comes.

And the king and Mr. Coverdale – later, Senator Coverdale – sit down on this sofa. My only impression was that it swallowed them. I mean, the cushions were so deep. I remember legs going up in the air. And the king was in traditional dress, which is a Swazi cloth and a little leopard skin around his waist, like a little apron – but real leopard skin. And so, what I remember about the king was a lot of leg showing as the two of them, sort of, fought their way out of this all-encompassing sofa. And so the three women – Coverdale’s chief of staff was a woman named Jodie, the Peace Corps director was Jeanette Robinson, and I – could not look at each other, because if we had looked at each other, all would have been lost. And so we just fixed our eyes on the coffee table in front of the sofa. On the coffee table was a rhinoceros horn which had simply been lopped off – not mounted in any way – and so there were all these little hairs that were coming off of it, all of these little curly hairs – so we were all staring at this rhinoceros horn as if we were fixated on it.

And Coverdale recovered himself and said to the king, you know, in a perfectly normal question, you know, after they exchanged pleasantries, “Are our volunteers doing what you need to have done in your country, your majesty?” And the king looked very embarrassed and had to speak to the chief of protocol in Siswati, their native language because he had no idea what the Peace Corps did (can you imagine?), and the director of protocol knew because his daughter had been educated by the Peace Corps, and so he said something to the king. And then the king said, “Yes, that they were doing well.” But the volunteers were really prized by the Swazis.

After I left and the Soviet Union collapsed and we were doing so much in the former Soviet Union, Peace Corps Washington closed the program unfortunately after 20-some years. It was such a terrible blow, because they taught math and science – the Peace Corps volunteers primarily – and I remember one man telling me that his daughter would never have been a scientist if she hadn’t been taught by the Peace Corps. They had no discrimination about teaching women science. The Peace Corps just taught whoever came to them. And he was very happy with his daughter’s career, because the Peace Corps had taught her.

And so, when we got out, finally after the audience, if you can call it an audience, was over and we got out into the parking lot, the Peace Corps driver in the van had fallen asleep, and he had locked all the doors. And we couldn’t wake him up; we’re knocking on the windows... and finally, all four of us lost it. And we were leaning against the car screaming with laughing. Finally the man woke up and we were able to get into the car and drive away. But I always wondered what the Swazi police and everybody around the palace – residence – thought with all these four Americans collapsing in the parking lot, laughing. And later, when I was in CA, Secretary Christopher had a reception for Congress one evening, early in the Clinton Administration, and Senator Coverdale was there. He was by then a senator.

Q: From where?

RYAN: From Georgia. And I went over and reintroduced myself, and I said, “I don’t think you’ll remember me, but I’m sure you’ll remember the visit to the king.” And he did, he called people up – other senators – “Come, let me tell you about this story.” And he remembered it exactly as I told you. We both got such a kick out of it. So typical Swazi. But it was like that. I mean, it was hard to sort of take it all seriously. But I learned a lot again there, how to run a post and manage people of various agencies, you know, and hold a mission program plan effort – which I always thought was just nonsense. I thought there was a very good way of building cohesion, you know, where you got everyone together and talked about what your goals were and what objectives you had --this thing called the “goals and objectives” exercise -- but it never meant anything, I mean, when it got back to Washington.

Q: It strikes me as you’re talking about this that in a rational system this would be a very good place to take people that the system had identified as going-to-be-ambassadors, as a training post.

RYAN: Yes, exactly. That was what it was.

Q: And moving it up. But we don’t see the hand of this. We sort of throw people at it and then say, “Well you made your ambassadorship” and then...

RYAN: Yes, it is exactly that. It is a good place to learn how to be an ambassador. And then, in an ideal world or in an ideal service, you would go on to a larger post, and then yet again a larger one. But now, it’s like, okay, now you’ve had your one shot at it and now you should retire.

ARMA JANE KARAER
Deputy Chief of Mission
Swaziland (1988-1991)

Arma Jane Karaer was born in Minnesota in 1941. She received her bachelor’s degree from University of Minnesota and during this time also attended Osmania University in India. During her career she had positions in Australia, Zaire, Turkey, Pakistan, Swaziland, Finland, and ambassadorships to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu. Ambassador Karaer was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: Today is July 7th, 2004. Arma Jane, Swaziland in 1988. What was it like? What was Swaziland and what was going on there?

KARAER: Swaziland is a tiny little country that no one else has ever heard of, but at the time it was a very interesting place to be because South Africa was an important place as far as American foreign policy was concerned and Swaziland is surrounded on three sides by South Africa. The fourth side is covered by Mozambique which was another important area of instability. Swaziland was a place from which to watch South Africa. It was also a unique place because it’s one of the very few genuine kingdoms left in the world. The concept of African

kingship was a very peculiar thing and I had to read up on it as fast as I could when I got there in order to understand how the monarchy affected the thinking of the people there and their reaction to the movement towards genuine democracy that was going on in South Africa.

Q: Well, tell me, what were you getting about the king and his subjects and all that at that time?

KARAER: At the time, the King Mswati III was a rather new king. He was just barely 20 years old. His father, King Sobhuza, was legendary, had ruled for many years and was much loved by his subjects. He had been quite clever in handling the relationship between the South Africans and the British, who had been the colonial power there. When King Sobhuza, who had 50-some wives and countless numbers of children, died, it was decided that this particular boy was the one that was best suited to be the next king. This is decided by the royal family and their advisors, the people that I call "the old men in skins" because they wore leopard skin loin cloths and feathers in their hair. They were truly something out of Rider Haggard. The boy had been sent to England to high school. The original idea, we were told, was that he would stay there until he had at least passed his O levels and was mature enough to take over as king, but when Sobhuza died, there was a lot of palace intrigue over the succession. Fearing that there might be some kind of palace coup in favor of another of the many many princes that were available to be king, they brought him back to Swaziland early. What they had here was a sweet-natured young boy who had just barely finished two years of high school. Swaziland, perhaps uniquely in Africa, has a well-educated population. The majority of the people below 35 had at least a high school education. Swaziland is not a wealthy country, but, until AIDs came along, it was a very comfortable little country. It has enough export crops to make a good income for the country, and most of the people at that time were still living in rural situations, but they had their own cattle, their own fields and everybody had enough to eat. Basic government services, like education, were available.

The royal traditions were fascinating. If you remember any Rider Haggard that you may have read....

Q: She and King Solomon's Mines.

KARAER: She. Remember She was a beautiful queen. In Rider Haggard's books, and in the movies they made out of those stories, she was a beautiful woman...

Q: Helen Gahagan Douglas I think was in the silent one.

KARAER: ... and not only beautiful, but white and beautiful for some weird reason.

Q: Of course.

KARAER: Well, those stories have a basis in African tradition, but none of the queens were white. According to southern African tradition, the kings' mothers have certain powers, particularly power over the rain, which in an agricultural society is extraordinarily important. There are a lot of ceremonies that are done every year around the king and around the queen mother, whose title in Siswati, their language, is "The Great She Elephant." Now you know that

in the United States some in the African-American community have created a celebration at the end of the year called Kwanza. This idea is taken from African tradition. Every year, at the time of the full moon that comes between Christmas and New Year, they have ceremonies that go on for several days. In Swaziland, at least, the purpose of the ceremonies is to renew the spiritual and temporal powers of the king. The fertility of the land, the fertility of the cattle, the fertility of the people depends on the success of these ceremonies. Most Swazis belong to some Christian sect or another and Mswati's mother is a practicing Methodist. However, when Mswati became king, the old men in skins decreed that he could not belong to any particular church or religion because that would be wrong for his people. He was the king of all his people who belonged to many different sects. He had to concentrate on the beliefs of the ancestors. One of the great things about serving in that place was to be able to see those ceremonies. The great ceremony at the end of the year is called the Mqwala.

Q: You gave a nice little click in there.

KARAER: Well, not so nice, but it's sort of like that.

Q: Is it a click language?

KARAER: There are some clicks in it. Their language has absorbed some of the ingredients of the other surrounding languages. At the Mqwala men come from all over the kingdom with the great cowhide shields. They tie cow tail decorations on their ankles and their wrists, wear tremendous feather headdresses, and carry spears. They dance in the king's cattle corral. The cattle corral is the focus of the nation's togetherness you might say, and also had been the focus of the economy of the Swazi community before they were introduced into the industrial economy of southern Africa. During the first days of the ceremony, the king is kept secluded in a special hut built for this purpose. He really gets to see no one during a great part of that time except the old men in the skins, who rub him with strange stuff and make him drink potions which apparently are something akin to "eye of newt, tongue of frog." In reading the history of Swaziland, I began to see that Mqwala was a time when the traditionalists in Swazi society had real control over the king. There was one point in the 19th Century when a young king, who had been quite brash and stupid and had allowed some people to be killed on his behalf, was in danger of being arraigned for murder by the British colonial authorities. The old men in skins got very worried that he was going to destroy the monarchy. No one will ever know what actually happened, but at the Mqwala that year this young, healthy man just dropped dead. Well, if I were in a position where I had to drink 20 mystery potions, I would be seriously concerned that they could and would poison me if I didn't do what they wanted me to do. That is always hanging over any king's head.

They also started marrying him. The kings of Swaziland are supposed to have a number of wives. In the past, southern African kings married many women for political alliances. By the late 20th century, this tradition had become pretty much just a way for these traditionalists to control a very young king. Here is a 20-something who gets the pick of all the pretty girls of the kingdom. Which one do you want? Well, the first one that he married was the daughter of an Episcopal priest. She appeared to be quite intelligent and strong minded. In the beginning, the young couple said they were not going to follow the tradition. The King was going to be

monogamous. After a while he was persuaded that that was not going to be good for the kingdom, and he needed to have more wives. Usually the wife is chosen at the Reed Dance. All the young, unmarried women gather at the queen mother's cattle corral and they dance. They're absolutely lovely. Swazi women particularly, when they're young and they haven't gone to fat yet, are truly beautiful women. They wear pretty feathers in their hair and for ceremonial occasions are always bare breasted. They dance, the king watches, and picks the one he likes best. Traditionally, his representatives then go to the girl's family, make an agreement and bring the girl to his mother's home. He then visits with the girl until she becomes pregnant, and then, and only then, does he marry her. Wherever the king goes for ceremonial purposes, his wives and pre-wives accompany him. The married women wear a particular headdress, and the ones who aren't married yet a little halo of red feathers, so you know which one is which.

Recently, according to newspaper articles, Mswati has been accused of taking girls whose parents weren't all that willing. They say that girls are just being snatched, kidnapped and taken away. In fact recently there were a couple of paragraphs in our newspapers about a girl who was taken right from her school and her mother said she had never agreed to this. In the end, the girl said she wanted to stay with the king.

As the years have passed, it appears that Mswati, who started out as a sweet, wide-eyed boy, just became fatter and was sucked into this wine, women and song thing. If this in fact is what has happened to him, it's really sad. Even in my time there, the educated people of his own generation in Swaziland, the university students for example, didn't respect him. They had much more education than he did. This too was a problem. However, during the time I was there I think things got much worse.

Q: How old was the king when you were there approximately?

KARAER: Well, we went to the big 21st birthday bash that they had for him.

Q: Oh, so he was young.

KARAER: Yes, he was about 20 when I got there. I think he was about 22 when I left. The Department's policy at that time was to foster stability in that part of the world. Well that's fine in theory, but the very existence of the United States of America and everything it stands for is in total contradiction to stability in a South African monarchy. Secondly, whatever the United States may say or do, once real democracy came to South Africa, and the black South Africans were truly free to choose their own government, the people in Swaziland were not going to be satisfied to be told what to do by an uneducated king and a bunch of old men in skins. We were already seeing signs of this bubbling up. However, even when we talked to some of the most radical leaders of those who wanted to have democracy in Swaziland, while they were critical of the king and the way that the country was being run, they didn't really want to get rid of the king. This was because the existence of the monarchy was the thing that made Swazis special, that differentiated them from the great mass of black African groups all around them. They were torn between wanting to keep this thing which made them special and wanting to have a true, democratic government.

Q: I must say looking at the neighborhood, irrespective of South Africa, Mozambique had a horrible civil war going. You had presidents for life up in Zambia and Zimbabwe was not great. These weren't any great examples of democracy at work.

KARAER: Yes, but there was this tremendous expectation in South Africa. While I was there, Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the reforms started in South Africa that led up to the elections that turned South Africa into a real democracy. That was a thrilling time to be there. I remember the speculation about whether or not they going to let Mandela out. The capital of Swaziland is Mbabane. It's a tiny little town with one modern shopping center. One Saturday morning I was walking through the shopping center and overheard two of the shopkeepers talking. One was a British South African lady who ran a gift shop and the other was a British South African man who ran a bookshop. His bookshop specialized in books about Southern Africa. Right in the front of her store was a table that had a selection of T-shirts that all had "Free Nelson Mandela" printed on them. I heard her say to him, half jokingly, "What are we going to do if they release Nelson Mandela?" because they'd made careers out of leading the campaign to set him free. The day that De Klerk, the president of South Africa, spoke to the parliament about his decision to release Nelson Mandela, I drove over to the FBIS office to watch the session on television. (FBIS is the US government agency that collects intelligence from open broadcasts and publications. The office in Mbabane covered all of southern Africa.) Until then, I didn't realize that speakers in the South African parliament would switch back and forth between English and Afrikaans as the mood struck them. I don't speak Afrikaans, so FBIS was the perfect place to go. During the broadcast, I'd watch De Klerk speak in English on the television set and then, when he switched to Afrikaans, I'd stand behind the translator who was typing out the translation as he heard it on the earphones and follow the speech that way. It was really thrilling. That was the same year that they were tearing down the wall in Berlin..

Q: '89.

KARAER: The world was full of people just wanting to be free. It was really exciting.

Q: What were we doing or what were you doing and we as a country doing in Swaziland?

KARAER: We had quite a substantial AID mission there, an AID mission that was really fun for everybody to work with, I think, because Swaziland was a pretty well run little country and so the aid programs that we were financing there were accomplishing something. The Ambassador would just go from the opening of one project to another, talking with the women who were the projects. She could just move all over the country seeing all this good stuff that was going on.

We had a small USIS operation. I had a chance to meet and hear some wonderful American choral groups perform because in Southern Africa, that's the favorite musical form for Southern Africans. Well, that and reggae. They have wonderful choral music of their own and we got to see Sweet Honey in the Rock when they came here under the USIS program. I mentioned last time that I ended up being the Charge there for quite a long time because around the end of the first year that I was there, Mary Ryan was asked to come back to Washington to be the senior deputy in the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Q: You were saying Mary Ryan was called back?

KARAER: Yes, they asked her to come back to be the senior deputy in consular affairs. She left around just the beginning of the year. She had to take at least two trips back to Washington for those consultations. It was during one of her trips that the Pan Am flight exploded over Lockerby.

Q: Scotland, yes.

KARAER: I always listened to the Voice of America while I was eating my breakfast. That morning, the day after Mary had left us, I turned on the radio and they were announcing this disaster. I thought, "Oh my God!" I didn't know what the number of her flight was. As it turned out, I think her flight was one or two just before the one that had been targeted. But I was sitting there crying over my cornflakes and trying to get the admin officer on the phone to see if he knew what her flight number was. Anyway, she agreed to go back, and the Department was not in a position to send a new ambassador out right away because this was very unexpected as far as the African Bureau was concerned. I ended up being the Charge there for about nine months until Steve Rogers, who had been the head of the economic section in Pretoria, came out to take over.

Q: At the time you were there, where did Swaziland fit into the confrontations business with South Africa, the bordering states of South Africa?

KARAER: The Swazis walked very cautiously in this regard. The three most important missions in Mbabane were the South African one, the British, who'd been the former colonial power, and the Americans, because of our big AID mission and Peace Corps mission. The Swazis followed the policy that King Sobhuza had followed. You don't knuckle under to the foreigners, but you didn't prod the sleeping lion either, so to speak. They knew what South Africa could do to them if they tried to make any trouble. There had been incidents of South African political activists who had tried to run away and hide in Swaziland and who were pushed back over the border. They said, no, you go fight your own fights. On the other hand, there was definitely resentment of South Africa in the Swazi population. This got poor Steve Rogers into a momentary pickle. He ran. That was his sport.

Q: Like jogging or running.

KARAER: Yes. The South African embassy sponsored a run shortly after he got there. He participated in it. A lot of people did, including Swazis, but the local newspaper criticized him for participating. The local newspaper being among those who were pro-democracy and pro-reform in South Africa. We had a very interesting diplomatic corps. In addition to the ones that I mentioned, there was an Israeli ambassador there, Swaziland being one of the few states in Africa that had recognized Israel. We had a Taiwanese ambassador there, so we had to be careful that we didn't go to the home of the Taiwanese ambassador, for example, and that we didn't accidentally accept invitations to some sort of Taiwanese national celebration.

Q: I imagine, how about relations in Mozambique?

KARAER: They were fine. They had an ambassador there and they also had a number of refugee camps. The Mozambiquan refugees were quite quiescent, well-behaved folks. Toward the end of my stay there were some people who came up from Natal, South Africa, who declared themselves refugees and this caused a lot of heartburn in the Swazi government. As I recall, these people moved on voluntarily up to Zambia before it came to the point where the Swazis had to tell them they had to go back to South Africa. The Swazis did not want them staying there. One of the places that I visited several times while I was doing political reporting was a camp in central Swaziland run by CARITAS. The Mozambiquans would come in with their families and settle down and be grateful for what they were given. But the minute that these young rebels from Natal showed up it was, "What, you expect me to eat this kind of food? Only peasants eat this kind of food." That kind of stuff. It was really touch and go. Of course the people running the camp had nothing to say about it, but they certainly didn't want to see these young people sent back to the arms of the police in Natal. On the other hand, the rebels right away tried to agitate among the Mozambicans.

Q: How were our relations at that time with South Africa as reflected in Swaziland?

KARAER: They were all right. I got on. I didn't have any problem with the South African high commissioner. We went to all of the ceremonial occasions and vice versa. Of course this was during the De Klerk regime. De Klerk was really loosening the place up, getting them ready for the idea that apartheid could not stand. In fact we and the Swazis needed the help of the South Africans. For example, a group of young people from an evangelical group in the United States had come to Swaziland during summer vacation to work with villagers and refugees. They had barely gotten there. I don't think they had been in town for a week, and they were taken on an excursion to see one of the beautiful waterfalls just below the mountains. One of these young men walked out to the edge of the waterfall, got swept over and was lost. I had my consular officer out with the police who were searching the banks of the river trying to find the body. A group of amateur scuba divers in Mbabane had offered to search the pool around the bottom of the waterfall, but they realized that, since it was a very high waterfall and the pressure of that water coming down is tremendous, they did not have the skill or the equipment that was necessary to search the very bottom of the waterfall where the body was probably still trapped. I called the South African High Commissioner and asked him whether rescue squads from South Africa might be able to help. I had checked this with the Swazi Foreign Ministry, and they had no problem with the South Africans coming to help. The South African divers came in and found the boy's body. It was that kind of cooperation.

Mbabane was a very pleasant place to live, not only because the Swazis are lovely people and it's a comfortably off little country, but also because their trade was almost totally with South Africa. They have no sea port of their own. In our little shopping center we had all the goodies that you could find in the cities of South Africa.

Q: What about you had the Peace Corps there?

KARAER: Yes we did.

Q: I would think this would be a great place to be a Peace Corps volunteer.

KARAER: Yes, I think the Peace Corps volunteers thought so too.

Q: What about did you get African Americans coming there as a?

KARAER: We had African Americans on our staff and on the Peace Corps and in the AID staff. I don't think USIS had any while I was there.

Q: I was wondering more of coming from the United States. It wasn't, it had not been a source of forced migration slavery to the United States, so there wasn't that kind of tie there. What about visitors? When you're in a nice place with beautiful scenery and all I would think you would get quite a few official visitors who just have to see.

KARAER: We didn't have that many. When the king had his 21st birthday, they invited the President to come and President Bush decided to send a friend of his who, as I recall, was a businessman and a very sweet man. I remember thinking that if the President's friends are all as nice as this man, President Bush must really be a nice man too. He stuck it out with Mary in the VIP section up there in the stadium when we had all the ceremonies for the king's birthday.

Q: When visitors would come, I mean with some official rank or something, would you take them to meet the king and all?

KARAER: Yes, those people met the king. We had some people from AID doing research on further projects that might be done there. We met with the king. The British had provided the king with the services of an aide de camp who was a young officer in the Gurkha Rifles. He had served in a couple of other exotic spots and he was sent to sort of be the voice of the modern world in the palace. I think he did a good job. He called me one day after Steve Rogers had had his hearing with the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee. The local newspaper had published the gist of the interview. Steve had been asked about the human rights situation in the country, and he had given a general and correct statement about how things were. You know, in short, not terrible, but could be improved. Well, the aide called me up and said, "Arma Jane, the king wants to know what this is all about. Why is the new ambassador appointee saying these things?" I said I'd be happy to explain.

The king has palaces, but they're just like big houses. I met with him at the main "palace." The only other person in the room was the aide. The king was sitting on his "throne", a nice chair on a slightly raised dais, and I had a chair next to him. I explained first of all why these senators are concerned about human rights all over the world, not just in Swaziland, and what the ambassador designate had meant by what he said. I explained to him that the idea of freedom of speech is extremely important to us. We think that's the core of our democratic freedom, and that freedom of speech is necessary everywhere where there's a democracy. "You should be very proud that you have such a high rate of literacy and level of education among your people, but one thing that we all have to remember is that if you teach a man to read you teach him to think. Once he starts thinking for himself he wants to be able to express his own thoughts about how he thinks things should be. That's why freedom of speech is so important, and that's why this has become

very important in Swaziland, too.” He said, “Well, I let my people say what they think. We have " the peoples" parliament." This is a public gathering held at the grace and pleasure of the king, to which every adult in the kingdom men and women, can come and say whatever is on their mind. The king, or his representatives, and its usually his representatives, the old men in skins, sit there and listen. The pledge on the king’s part is that nothing that you say there will cause you to have any problem with the government. You can say whatever you think. King Mswati already had a couple of them in the time I was there, which was unprecedented. Anyway, when he said, “I have the peoples parliament, ” I said, “Yes, you do, but we think that freedom of speech is so important that you can’t just save it for special occasions. It has to be all the time.” In the end we agreed to disagree, but it didn't affect Steve's appointment.

Q: Were there any other either incidents, visits or occurrences that happened while you were there? It sounds just too idyllic.

KARAER: Just before Mary left, the king had let the Embassies know that he was open to invitations from them to come to their homes for dinner. The first person to have entertained him that way was the British High Commissioner. One of Mary's last instructions to me before she left was, “Don’t forget to have the king to dinner.” We had a dinner at the ambassador’s residence. At first I thought, "Oh, dear, what am I going to serve this man?" Because the Swazis, Southern Africans in general, love meat. If all you do is serve them meat, that’s going to do it for them, but the British had already had the roast beef, so what were we going to do. My husband said, “Why don’t you have an American Thanksgiving dinner kind of menu?” So, we got a turkey and tarted up some mashed pumpkin. He loved it. He brought some of his brothers with him as well as the British aide. All the people at the table with us were used to eating with foreigners, but we’d been warned by the aide that the drivers, page boys and the police who came with him as his bodyguard would also have to be fed. We fixed them a big beef stew and served them on the porch behind the kitchen. We were also warned that they would ask for alcohol and that whatever else happened, there was to be no alcohol for them. I had told my servants, “I don’t care what they say, you don’t give it to them and if there’s more than you can handle, you come and see me, and I’ll talk to them.” They did, but the staff handled them well.

I had also warned the ambassador’s cook, a sweet man who, when he was sober, was a pretty decent cook. As soon as we knew the king was coming, I went over to tell him that we were going to entertain the king and that my cook would come to help. "However", I said, "While we're getting ready, you are to have nothing to drink. I don’t care what you do when the party is over, but nothing to at the party, do you understand me?" “Yes, madam..” His bad habit was that when the half-empty glasses were brought back into the kitchen he would drink what was in them.

Q: Well, of course.

KARAER: We had a good time that night with the king.

Q: Did he bring any wives?

KARAER: Not to that. He started sending his wives to the national day receptions, but the wives couldn't just mingle. They had to have a special place. The king, himself, didn't come to the national day receptions. He sent a representative. In my case, I had the reception in the garden, but the wives were entertained inside the house. Those poor young girls had very little chance to go out and see the world. Let's see what else did we do? Oh, the Peace Corps invited the king to a dance they arranged at the USIS director's house. It was well known that the king had dance parties at the palace where he and his wives and young people that they invited played CDs and danced. Then it became even further known that the old men in skins thought that it was unseemly for the king to do that kind of dancing. The poor king then became the first disc jockey of the nation, and he played the CDs while everybody else danced. Anyway, the king came with his entourage to the Peace Corps party. The Volunteers had assembled music that they had heard that he liked. Rap was pretty new at that time, and he liked rap.. I'm an old lady. I'm never going to get used to rap, but for three or four hours listened to this stuff, bang, bang, bang. I told the USIS director, "The things I do for my country!" Of course the king was accompanied by the old men in skins, who sat around in a semi-circle. When my husband asked one of the king's brothers what we could offer them to drink, they said, "Milk toddies." This is milk with whiskey in it. I'd never heard of this one before, but fine, we had milk, we had whiskey, so there they sat primly on the edge of their seats drinking their milk toddies.

Q: Did the young Peace Corps ladies get offered marriage?

KARAER: No, no. That was only the Swazi girls.

Q: How about the old men in skins. Did you see any change in them? In other words, were some educated people entering those ranks?

KARAER: Well, not the old men in skins per se, that is the ones who hung out at the palace and supposedly were his advisors, but the king was also advised by his brothers and uncles, some of whom were well-educated, fine men, and some of whom were awful crooks. Some of the chiefs were important too, in fact as well as in theory. In the Swazi feudal structure the king names the chiefs. Their positions are usually hereditary, but nevertheless, they have to have the blessing of the king. All the land in the country belongs to the king in theory. He can give it to others to use, but he can't sell it. He apportions the land to the chiefs to administer. So if a man comes tells a chief, "I will be your man," then the chief gives him a place to build his house and to make his vegetable gardens, and he has the right to graze his cattle on the common ground that belongs to the whole chiefdom. That's the traditional way things are supposed to work. I had read enough history of Southern Africa to know how these chiefdoms worked before the Western powers took over these countries. If you read the history of Shaka, the founder of the Zulu nation, one of the things that apparently made Shaka such a sociopath was the way he and his mother were treated because she bore a child out of wedlock to a prince of the nation that they belonged to at the time. This was a very uncommon thing, because, while men and women had sexual relations out of wedlock, and that was okay, they were supposed to take steps to make sure that there were no pregnancies, or, if there were, the man would marry the woman and take her in as part of his harem. Well, I don't remember the reasons why Shaka's father didn't do this, but anyway, she was thrown out of her community and they were looked down upon for this.

By the end of the 20th century there were a tremendous amount of children born out of wedlock all over Southern Africa. The men took the traditional attitude that the more children and women that I can show that I have, the greater man I am. On the other hand, the cultural pressures had dissolved that had made these men take care of their families in the past. Secondly, having a lot of kids in the 20th Century economy was a totally different story than it was in the 19th Century economy, because the more kids you had in the 19th Century economy, the more kids you had to take care of the cattle and to take care of the fields. The more women you had, the more working hands there were in the family. Now, in Swaziland, having a lot of kids had become a huge economic burden. You had to send those kids to school and you had to pay for their books and their shoes and their uniforms, and so, all of a sudden, having a lot of children was no longer an advantage. So, things were falling apart. They were finding abandoned newborn babies. There was a lot of dismay and preaching about the dissolution of our society, but not much else was being done about it. However, one of the chiefs tried to use his authority to bring some order to his community. When a girl was found to be pregnant, she and her parents, if they lived in his domain, were brought before him and he wanted to know who the father was and who was going to take care of this baby. He was making all of this public, using shame to try to force people to be responsible. In Mbabane modern Swazis said he was old fashioned and narrow minded., but I thought that he was a man who was trying to keep some responsibility in the community.

Of course the Swazis have a government and a parliament. The parliament got elected and met. The trouble was that nothing that they did stuck, unless the king agreed to it. The government included some very capable people. There was a wonderful prime minister that was chosen by the king while I was there. He had been active in the labor unions for a long time, which was something that was not approved of by the old men in skins or the foreign investors who had businesses in Swaziland, and he had dropped out of political activity for a while. Then one day they needed a new prime minister and this man was chosen. The embassies were all calling each other. Who is this guy? Nobody knew him. I went into my shabby little file room and thought, "well, we keep these darn files forever, let's see if anybody knew him. One of the things that made this task difficult is that about ¾ of the people in Swaziland have the same surname, Dlamini. So, I dug among the hundreds of Dlaminis in the bio-file and found out we had sent him to the United States on a USIS travel grant, but so long ago that nobody currently in the Embassy remembered him. Thanks to my farsighted former colleagues, I was able to tell the other embassies who he was. Following his appointment, we were all were invited to come and meet the new prime minister. When I walked into his office, this man who I'd never met before, said, "The United States. I love the United States!" One of the best things we have ever done to further our ability to do useful diplomacy around the world is that program. However Americans may be perceived when they're overseas, they're really good at home, and to have people see us at home doing our thing is the best advertising we could ever have for our country and our way of life.

Q: Absolutely. Well, then, having left this high pressure post, what happened?

KARAER: Oh, well, I had asked for my next to be in the United States, because my oldest daughter had finished two years of high school in Swaziland and now she really wanted to experience an American high school.

STEPHEN H. ROGERS
Ambassador
Swaziland (1990-1994)

Stephen H. Rogers was born in 1931. He attended both Princeton and Columbia and served three years in the US Navy. During his career he had positions in India, France, England, Mexico, South Africa, and an ambassadorship to Swaziland. He was interviewed by Raymond C. Ewing in August 1994.

Q: Could you say something about the embassy in Swaziland? You will have to tell me the name of the capital.

ROGERS: The capital is Mbabane.

Q: How big was the staff when you were there?

ROGERS: It depends how you count it because we had maybe a dozen State Department Americans there, but we had FSNs and other agencies. We had a substantial AID mission. We had USIS operation of about ten people, one American and the rest Swazis. We had a Peace Corps contingent of 70 volunteers with perhaps 20 staff. We have a Bureau of the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. Then with all the contract people and everyone like that, I think you could come up to 250 who were responsible to the embassy directly or indirectly.

Q: All those people were involved with US programs in Swaziland?

ROGERS: Well, essentially all, although we had some regional responsibilities. Several people in AID had regional responsibilities for aspects of AID operations in Mozambique, South Africa, and Lesotho and maybe one or two other countries, and the FBIS bureau covered several countries.

Q: What was the general climate of US relations with Swaziland?

ROGERS: I think the relationship was quite good. We had our ups and downs because of one or two things I will mention. The government is two parallel types: the king is very much the king of Swaziland. He and his mother, the queen mother, are the co-monarchs of Swaziland. This is serious. He has a structure of advisors and the royal family and chiefs and other traditional figures who remain important to the Swazis' sense of unity and of organization and to their ability to get things done. The king also appoints the prime minister. There is a two-house parliament with one house elected. There is a cabinet with the usual ministries.

Q: Are there political parties?

ROGERS: Officially there are no political parties at all in Swaziland and that is an issue. That is something they are going to have to deal with, but in due course that will come.

Q: And the population?

ROGERS: The population is something under a million.

Q: What sort of things were we doing?

ROGERS: They included agricultural, educational, and small business. The Peace Corps and AID were getting more into environmental issues. Peace Corps volunteers were mostly teachers in high schools. They were spread all over the country. One of the great things about being the ambassador there was that I had a reason to go visit these volunteers and that was the basis for seeing practically all corners of the country. That was great fun.

Q: They were teaching science, mathematics or...?

ROGERS: Yes, science and math and to some extent vocational subjects.

Q: You mention that relations were generally good but you had some ups and downs.

ROGERS: Well, the relationship was good. US national interests are not heavily involved in Swaziland. That is fairly obvious. Swaziland is important to us and we have a certain amount of investment and trade, but these are not very large figures. It is important to us that the Swazis understand our votes in international organizations where we both have seats, the UN organization for instance. So there are things like that that are important to us. Swaziland's position of being almost surrounded by South Africa, but also with a border with Mozambique, gives it a kind of strategic position which is important for watching what goes on around and for sharing views and information on relations with South Africa and Mozambique and elsewhere in the African continent, because Swaziland has had some leadership roles in African organizations.

Aside from these things, our principal concerns while I was there were the political development and economic development of Swaziland. The AID program and the Peace Corps, of course, were related mostly to the economic development of Swaziland. But we also felt that in accordance with US policy towards Africa we needed to pay a good deal of attention to the human rights and democratization aspects of political development in Swaziland. This was coming along. The king, when I presented my credentials, told me about his plan to set up a commission to consult with the people of Swaziland on what political changes they would like to have take place. And, indeed, this process did take place and the answer was, and I think it was legitimately determined, that the people wanted to elect at least the Lower House of parliament, the House of Assembly. And that election did take place a month or two before I left three years later. It happened in a Swazi way and at a Swazi pace, but that was all right, the progress was there.

On the human rights side I got rather a quick introduction to the problem. Two days after I arrived there was a demonstration on the campus of the University of Swaziland. I think it was

not much more than the thing that college students tend to do. They had some complaints and they demonstrated. But the response to this got out of hand and it became rather violent with both the police and the military involved. A number of students were injured, one seriously. I don't think anyone was killed, although there were claims of that happening. The government opted to try to crack down on the people they thought were the leaders of this group. Two of those leaders came to the embassy the next morning, three days after I had arrived, looking for asylum. Well, asylum wasn't appropriate and wasn't feasible. The terminology was wrong and there was no reason for us to give protection. Their lives were not in danger. So we didn't feel we could keep them, but it did take a couple of days to work this out, talking with the Swazi government, with Washington and the two fellows themselves. We ushered them out of the embassy early on a Saturday morning.

Q: But they did stay for a few days?

ROGERS: They stayed two days.

Q: All of this was before you presented credentials?

ROGERS: Well, they came in on Thursday morning and I presented my credentials on Thursday afternoon, having had a quick visit with the prime minister before then to discuss this issue. It was not an issue in my discussion with the king, but it was certainly on his mind and was on my mind. These two men left Swaziland and went to South Africa, but then South Africa returned them about two days later and they were immediately picked up by the police at that point and detained. Swaziland at that point had a provision that allowed the prime minister to issue an order of detention for 60 days without charges. We had made it known long before that we didn't think this was proper from a human rights standpoint, especially since the 60 days could be renewed for another 60 days continually.

Q: Did that happen?

ROGERS: Yes, that happened in this case. There were three or four other leaders who had not come to the embassy or left the country who were also detained.

Q: So the concern for us both in the context of our overall respect and human rights policy, but also the particular instance where they had actually come to the American embassy.

ROGERS: It was basically the principle, but having had the experience with these two young men added an edge, at least, to our policy on the subject and our expression of the policy.

Q: When you say the embassy in this case, do you mean the office building, the chancery or do you mean your residence?

ROGERS: No, it was the chancery. We had them for almost 48 hours in the anteroom outside the consular and administrative area and there were no facilities. This was not easy to handle. We allowed them to be fed by relatives who brought food for them. Otherwise it was pretty difficult.

Q: I gather that access to senior government people. The prime minister, ministers, was pretty easy for you, is that right? Were there other embassies in Mbabane?

ROGERS: Yes. The British have a high commission there. Mozambique has an embassy. I must say that the Mozambique ambassador became a good friend and a colleague with a very constructive role in Swaziland. The Mozambicans I think provided good counsel to Swaziland. The president met with the king and their conversations were good and encouraged the right kind of developments from our point of view in Swaziland and the right kind of relations with Mozambique.

Q: Did the king, or prime minister, or other Swazi leaders have an impact also the other way in terms of developments in Mozambique?

ROGERS: They were certainly very interested in what happened in Mozambique and until 1992, of course, there was a great deal of violence, the war was on. I don't recall the exact date of the agreement, but since that point it had been quite quiet. The Swazis recognize the importance of that to them. The shortest rail route to the sea is from Swaziland to Maputo. That has hardly been used because of the violence and the losses on the way and particularly in Maputo port.

Q: The rebel movement in Mozambique was Renamo and at one point it certainly had support from South Africa. Was Swaziland involved with that at all?

ROGERS: I think the Swazis tried to stay out of that. There may have been contacts on occasion, but basically the Swazis very wisely did not, at least in my knowledge, try to influence developments other than encouraging movements towards peace.

A couple of things I would like to go back to. One, just for the record, you asked about other embassies. It is an interesting small collection of diplomatic missions there. In addition to the British and the Mozambicans, the Taiwan Chinese have an embassy there. Korea had an embassy while I was there headed by a chargé d'affaires, but it has since been closed. Israel has an embassy in Swaziland. The European Community has a mission there. South Africa had a trade mission which has just in the last few months been upgraded to an embassy. And then there was a set of UN agencies, four or five, there. Those plus honorary consuls, about seven or eight, and a representative of the German embassy in Mozambique, constituted the diplomatic corps very broadly defined, perhaps 19 or 20 people.

Q: Suggestions are made some times that the United States, essentially for cost cutting reasons, ought to eliminate some of the resident embassies that we have in very small countries and handle relations on a regional basis where the ambassador would rove around. How would you feel about that after being ambassador in a small country like Swaziland?

ROGERS: Swaziland would be a candidate for that sort of thing, you can't deny that, if we decided to move significantly away from a policy of having permanent diplomatic resident representation in every African country. Mennen Williams, as Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, established that policy when Kennedy was President, at the time that so many of these countries were becoming independent. In fact, for the first several years the ambassador to

Swaziland was resident in Botswana. So we could return to something like that. Obviously, I would regret that. I think we have a role there. I think we have a role in every African country. Specifically in Swaziland? Well I can't cite fundamental US interests that would be seriously jeopardized, but I think we have an opportunity to, and I think we do, encourage what is an African country that works. I noticed the Washington Post used that term with Zimbabwe the other day--Zimbabwe works, and it does. We hear so much about African countries that don't work and

Swaziland works well. It works better than Zimbabwe, incidentally, but on a smaller scale. I think we can continue to encourage this economic and political development that we have been encouraging, and I think it is worthwhile in the overall context of Africa.

I might return to a point we were discussing--the detention without charges matter--that we raised as an example. Those five or six people, plus one prince who had gotten on the wrong side of things and had been in detention for a few years, finally were released a little over four months after the incident at the chancery. There were a lot of people in the government of Swaziland who didn't like that provision of detention and there were pressures...one of the fellows went on a hunger strike which had an effect. The Swazis also recognized that the United States, Britain and others felt that this was unsuitable for a country like Swaziland, or any country. So they were released. For the rest of my time in Swaziland and to date there have been no detainees without charges. In fact, last year the king abolished the provision that allowed detention without charges. Well, that kind of thing occurs because of internal pressures rather than external pressures, but we can encourage it by being there in a way that we couldn't otherwise.

There were other human rights and political issues which we took up in our human rights report, in our chapter of the report now on 179 countries which is sent to the Congress every year. We listed these and made a lot of use of that chapter--12 or 13 pages on Swaziland. We distributed it quite widely. One year the chapter on Swaziland was published in its entirety in the major daily paper in Swaziland. In fact, it was translated and also published in the Swazi edition of the same paper. People have shown

interest in these reports. Their interest is in how the world sees them.

After all that, I have to say that the human rights situation in Swaziland is quite good. The government, both traditional and modern forms, treats the people quite well. There are always complaints and complaints of oppression...I remember I was making a speech one time and in the question period one fellow, who became a good friend of mine, stood up and made a long speech as to how there was no freedom of speech in Swaziland. Well, obviously he was disproving his own point by making the speech and getting away with it. He was never detained. So the situation is quite good but there are things that need to be dealt with and we are in a position to encourage that process.

Q: How to conduct the human rights aspect of our foreign policy is always somewhat controversial. Obviously each situation differs somewhat. There is a suggestion that in some cases it may be counter productive by applying pressure and getting just the opposite of what we seek. Nationalism may take over and people dig in their heels and say, "It is none of your business, we are going to deal with it ourselves." And, in fact, the person may wind up being

detained longer than otherwise would have been the case. I assume that wasn't what happened in this case.

ROGERS: No, it wasn't. We tailored the policy according to the situation. The situation being that the instinct was there to move along both on human rights and on democratization. The king had discussed it in public and had set up these mechanisms to move in the direction of democratization. So it was only rarely that we were in a position of challenging or criticizing the government. We were clear in our positions, in the descriptions in the chapter on human rights, for instance. But for the most part, and particularly on the political change, I was very happy in public to say how pleased we were with certain steps that had been taken and how we were looking forward to the next steps which had been announced and promised and would be taking place. I continued that approach until the end of my time there, and I hope it was useful in encouraging the country to move in the right direction.

Q: You thoroughly enjoyed your period there?

ROGERS: Oh, absolutely. The Swazis are wonderful people. They are friendly, very nice, interesting and very African. Swaziland in some respects I think has respected the African traditions and philosophies in a way that I doubt that you find with the same kind of purity in most other African countries. It is a homogeneous country, they are all Swazis, they all feel like Swazis. There is no thought that anyone wants to break off or become part of South Africa, or anything like that. That just doesn't come up. Or that they shouldn't be a monarchy or shouldn't respect the king and queen mother and all. I mean these questions don't come up because this is a nation of Swazis. Perhaps five percent are not black, either white or mixed race. But the Swazi culture is very firm and they are proud of their traditions. They have long stories of their families and clans, etc.

Q: Certainly in economic matters they are dominated by South Africa, but they feel very independent.

ROGERS: They feel their Swaziness very strongly. There is no question about that. They feel their sovereignty. They recognize that being in a customs union with South Africa is a limitation on their freedom of action on economic matters. The Swazi currency, the lilangeni, is dependent on the rand. They are equal and flow back and forth very easily. The rand easily circulates within Swaziland, although the lilangeni does not circulate in South Africa. And that is a great benefit to Swaziland. So they know that they are dependent on South Africa for their prosperity. Incidentally, by sub-Saharan African standards, they are a prosperous country. But this is dependent on their relationship with South Africa to a significant extent.

End of Reader