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

FRANKLIN E. HUFFMAN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Family

Entered the Foreign Service - USIA	1985
State Department; Acting Deputy Policy Office, European Affairs	1985-1986
London, England; Junior Officer Trainee	1986-1987
British Broadcasting Company	
Environment	
Rangoon, Burma; Assistant Public Affairs Officer	1987-1989
Environment	
US Publications	
Relations	
Media	
Government	
Demonstrations	
Security	
Economy	
Burmese army	
Tribes	
Marrakech, Morocco; Director, American Cultural Center	1989-1990
Environment	
Congressional delegations	
NASA facility	
Paris, France; Director of Programs (USIA)	1990-1993
Target of Opportunity Speakers	
Ambassador General Vernon Walters	
The French	
Gulf War	
NATO	
GATT	
Cultural differences	
Environment	
Family	
Washington, D.C.; USIA, Policy Officer	1994-1995
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs	
Waiver Review Board for the J Visa Program	
Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Public Affairs Officer	1995-1997
Political Turmoil	
Khmer Rouge	
Elections	

UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC)
US policy
Fulbright Program
Media
Vietnamese
Temples
Cambodian-American National Development Organization

Canberra, New Zealand; Counselor for Public Affairs 1997-1999
Environment
Relations
Anti-nuclear issue
Speech writing
Press relations

Retirement from State Department 1999

N'Djamena, Chad; USIA, Public Affairs Officer 1999-2000
Environment
Economy
Ambassador Christopher Goldthwait
Problems

Phnom Penh, Cambodia; USIA, Acting Public Affairs Officer 2002
Government
Economy
Environment
Democracy

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is January 26, 2006; this is an interview with Franklin E. Huffman, H-U-F-F-M-A-N. And you're known as Frank. And this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy.

CAREER SUMMARY

Frank, I understand that you came into the foreign service from academia, is that right?

HUFFMAN: Yes. It might be useful to give a bird's eye view of my career, or careers, at the beginning. During my first career, from 1967 to 1985, I was a Professor of Southeast Asian languages and linguistics at Yale and Cornell. My second career was as a Foreign Service Officer with USIA from 1985-1999, posted to London, Rangoon, Marrakech, Paris, Washington, Phnom Penh, and Wellington, with subsequent WAE tours to

N'Djamena (Chad) and Phnom Penh. For my third career, I tell people I'm a writer, but for some reason they don't take me seriously. My daughter says that you can't call it a career if you're not making any money, but I deny this vigorously – there are plenty of starving writers. However that may be, I've just published a book entitled *Monks and Motorcycles: From Laos to London by the Seat of my Pants, 1956-1958,* which is an account of my two years as a volunteer in Laos 1956-1958 and my trip by motorcycle, bus, thumb and elephant-back from Laos to London in 1958. The book can be ordered from Amazon, which unfortunately doesn't guarantee that it will be. Nevertheless, not easily discouraged, I am at work on a second book which no doubt will meet with the same success.

BACKGROUND

Q: Okay, I'll ask more about the experiences related in your book. For now, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

HUFFMAN: I was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia, down in the Shenandoah Valley, in 1934 – just as the country was coming out of the "Great Depression."

Q: Tell me something about your family background.

HUFFMAN: My family came over from Germany in about 1725. They were part of the Anabaptist movement, part of the Pennsylvania Dutch who came to eastern Pennsylvania. Then later on my branch of the family came down into the Shenandoah Valley and settled in Rockingham and Augusta counties, where they were small German farmers, in both senses of the word. They were small farmers and they were small Germans, or rather they were square Germans - they tended to be short, stocky and sort of square. So I grew up in a very German subculture. I didn't realize the extent to which I was German until I began to get out of my immediate community to other parts of the country and realized that other people in the United States weren't like us.

Q: Were your family all basically farmers in the Shenandoah, was this pretty much what the family did?

HUFFMAN: Yes, they were basically all in agriculture, had their own small farms. When some of them lost everything in the Depression they began to branch out into other kinds of work but basically we were all farmers.

Q: What were the memories of the war? I assume the war would be the Civil War, with Sheridan and all that? Was there much memory of the war?

HUFFMAN: Yes, we were German Baptists and like the Quakers and Mennonites we were a historic peace church and this was true during the Civil War as well. Some of our ancestors were put in jail for refusing to take part in the War Between the States. On the neighboring farm, the barn had a cannonball hole in it which they claimed was from the Civil War. So yes, our history of pacifism goes back quite a ways. But my strongest

recollection from growing up was that we believed in hard work. Hard work and industriousness were next to Godliness if not just a little bit better. And this instilled in me a Protestant work ethic that has been a tyranny all my life. I could give you a nice anecdote about that that would kind of put things in perspective.

Q: Sure.

HUFFMAN: We're jumping ahead of the story a bit, but I served in Laos from 1956 to 1958 as a volunteer French interpreter for International Voluntary Services, Inc. In Laos I came in contact with USIS (United States Information Service) in Vientiane, and I was very favorably impressed by the work they were doing. I mean, they were creating dictionaries and they were translating books into Lao and publishing them; they had mobile movie units that would travel about the country and show documentaries and health cartoons and that sort of thing and I thought, "Gee, you know, this would be fun." I'd also of course met some of the embassy people whom I considered not quite as colorful and more desk-bound than the USIS people were. I resolved to apply to the U.S. Information Agency when I got back.

So I went up to 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue - that's where USIA was located in 1958 - and I told them that I wanted eventually to join USIA, but that I had been offered a scholarship at Cornell to study Southeast Asian languages. They advised me to go on up to Cornell and get an MA in Asian languages, and apply to USIA later. I took their advice, but when I got up there I quickly discovered that Cornell wasn't much interested in terminal MAs; they wanted to turn out PhDs who would push back the frontiers of science and bring glory to their alma mater. When I realized that they thought I was there for a PhD, I thought "Well gee, if they think I can do a PhD, maybe I can." So once having started on the academic track, the expectations of other people took over. I spent seven years getting a PhD, which included two years of dissertation research in Southeast Asia. My first job was assistant professor at Yale University in the department of Far Eastern languages and literatures. When the program at Yale collapsed in the early seventies, I moved back to Cornell and finally made full professor at Cornell. The truth is, once having started on an academic path I couldn't turn back until I had made full professor; only then could I say, "Well, OK, now I'm going to do what I wanted to do all the time, join the Foreign Service." So I had taken a 25 year detour into academia before I finally, at the age of 51, was able to quit and join the U.S. Information Agency, as I had originally intended. This Protestant work ethic I used to consider a virtue; now I see it more properly as a curse.

Q: Oh boy. Well let's go back though now to your family. What about on your mother's side? Where did they come from?

HUFFMAN: Well, they were also German farmers. The name was Zigler. Z-I-G-L-E-R. Most everybody was a farmer in those days; it was considered a very respectable thing to do. But my mother's family also tended to be involved in the ministry. They were frequently itinerant preachers who would ride about on horseback and preach at several congregations in the area.

Q: Circuit rider preachers.

HUFFMAN: Circuit rider sort of thing, yes. My maternal grandfather had a farm which I visited as a child, but he was also widely known as a minister of the Church of the Brethren.

Q: I wonder, could you talk a bit about the Church of the Brethren? I mean, this is the church you belonged to?

HUFFMAN: Yes.

Q: Could you talk about, from your impression? I mean, was this hell and damnation or passive? Could you sort of give a feel for the church from your perspective?

HUFFMAN: Well it's a small denomination. In fact I think they don't have more than several hundred thousand members in the United States. On the other hand they have always been strong advocates of good education and as a result there are six colleges founded by the Church of the Brethren. And they are rather respectable institutions academically and are known, for example, for preparing people for the professions. They're also strong in music, of course -- the German tradition of singing. I remember sitting in church and the entire congregation was singing four part harmony, very different from the Episcopalians or the Catholics where everybody chants in unison. I remember sitting by my dad and he would be singing bass. Now my dad had never studied music at all, but he had simply learned that men in church sing bass or they sing tenor or something else. And so he had learned bass at his father's side and I learned bass at my father's side and so on.

These colleges, you may have heard of some of them. Bridgewater College in Virginia, which is where I went, seven miles south of Harrisonburg, is now a fairly big campus with something like 2,000 students, and is well known for its strong pre-med and teacher training programs. In Pennsylvania there are two of them, one is Elizabethtown and the other is Juniata. Then there's one in Ohio called Manchester and one in Kansas called McPherson College. And then in California outside of Los Angeles there's one called La Verne. The Church of the Brethren, as its name indicates, has always been interested in the brotherhood of all peoples. In spite of being what I suppose you would call a fairly fundamentalist sort of denomination they have always had a very international outlook -- all God's children are brothers, we're all "brethren."

The Church of the Brethren has always been identified, along with the Quakers and the Mennonites, as one of the historic pacifist denominations. This led to the formation of Brethren Volunteer Service, which was one of the organizations that was approved by the Selective Service Administration in World War II for alternative service for pacifists. They would train people to work in this country in various kinds of institutions, mental institutions, hospitals and so on and they would also send some volunteers abroad. The training school, located in New Windsor, Maryland, continues to train volunteers for

humanitarian and relief work. I remember that many of the volunteers in my unit went to Europe. This was 1955, and Europe was still recovering from World War II, so we sent volunteers abroad who helped with the reconstruction of schools, refugee centers and various social projects.

Another initiative of the Church of the Brethren, which has achieved a certain amount of international recognition, was something called Heifer Project International. This was a program in which various farmers would contribute young female cows.

Q: Heifers.

HUFFMAN: Heifers, exactly.

Q: I was wondering what heifer stood for, some acronym but it means actually a heifer.

HUFFMAN: A lot of people don't know what heifer means. There are a lot of agricultural terms that I knew as a farm boy that I notice most people don't know, for example, shoat. Who knows what a shoat is? A shoat is an adolescent pig, just like a poult is an adolescent chicken and so on. But anyway, I digress.

So they would send heifers to families in Europe. I remember a cousin of mine on the next farm volunteered to go along on a shipload of heifers to Greece – they called them "seagoing cowboys." I was too young to do it but I envied him that experience enormously. The organization later became an international NGO (Non-Governmental Organization), but it had been founded by the Church of the Brethren.

Q: So did you live near Harrisonburg?

HUFFMAN: Yes, in a little town with the very unlikely name of Weyers Cave. Have you ever heard of Weyers Cave?

Q: No. What's it called? I mean, how do you spell it?

HUFFMAN: W-E-Y-E-R-S. No apostrophe. Most people would think it must be Wire's but it isn't, it's Weyers Cave. Actually it has achieved a somewhat higher profile now as the site of the Shenandoah Valley Airport, which is the tri-city airport for Harrisonburg, Staunton and Waynesboro. It was an agricultural community and our church, the Pleasant Valley Church of the Brethren, had I would say 50 fairly prosperous farm families as members of the congregation. I can remember as a boy that they believed in "the simple life," like the Mennonites. The watchword was "Be in the world but not of it." I can remember when elders of the church would wear black coats with no tie, stiff collars and big wide brimmed black hats and the women would wear long dresses, high top shoes and prayer bonnets. Now, they don't do that anymore. If you go to a congregation of the Church of the Brethren these days they look like the Baptists or the Presbyterians or anybody else but in my youth such attire was quite common.

Q: Well, I wonder could you talk a little bit about growing up as a boy. I mean, was it all farm work or did you get into town?

HUFFMAN: Well, you were expected to make your contribution to farm work. Up until the age of 12, let us say, your work consisted of slopping the hogs, cleaning out the chicken houses, and working in the gardens. And there were many gardens; there were vegetable gardens, there were flower gardens, there were corn and bean patches, sweet potato patches. You were expected to work in those gardens, hill up those sweet potatoes, pick those beans, and work from morning to night when you weren't in school. And in fact, it was regarded as a bit of a concession perhaps to you to let you go to school. I remember that I wanted to go out for baseball like all my buddies but my elders said I'm sorry, you know, you don't have time, when school's over you come home and you clean out the chicken house and you pick apples and you help us can peaches and so on. I think it was only in my senior year in high school that I persuaded them to let me go out for the baseball team, by which time of course I had not developed much expertise in baseball and made only the second string. But the philosophy was that "idle hands are the devil's workshop," and if there was nothing else for a young boy to do then he might be instructed to move the woodpile from here to there. Then once you got old enough you could begin to lead the horses that were pulling the hay wagon or you could begin in a later day to begin to drive the tractor. Tractors were just coming in, I believe -- that will give away my age, I turn 72 in two days -- but boys of course looked forward to the time when they could graduate from these domestic chores, which might even include scrubbing floors and helping with the laundry, when they could graduate from this humiliating kind of activity to working in the fields with the men.

Q: Did you have sisters, brothers?

HUFFMAN: I had three brothers, no sisters. And later on a half-brother.

Q: So you got all the chores, you weren't able to parcel some of the women's chores over to the women then?

HUFFMAN: Well, the women were busy as well, but not having any sisters I was the one that had to seed the cherries and peel the peaches and whatever was needed.

Q: What about school? First of all, what kind of a school did you go to?

HUFFMAN: I attended one school from the third grade through junior high school; it was called Mount Sidney High School, but it had both elementary and high school. Each class would be perhaps no bigger than 15, 20 students. The teachers were usually very local -- they tended to live locally and teach locally. At about that time consolidated schools began to be built, and they would send the students from two or three of these small local schools to one centralized high school and what was left behind would typically become an elementary school. So when I finished my junior year I moved to a larger high school where I took pride in getting myself elected co-president of the student body and co-editor of the yearbook without knowing, or being known by, any of my fellow students.

Actually when I came along in Virginia we didn't have 12 grades, we had 11 – seven years of elementary and four years of high school. When my kids laugh at me for not having had a 12th grade, I tell them I needed only eleven years to finish.

Q: What about the black population, African American population in the Valley? Were there many there?

HUFFMAN: We had none. We were pretty homogeneous, although the people in my community were rather different from the more diverse population in the nearby city of Harrisonburg, which was the county seat. There they had people with names like Macalister and DeMarco and Gonzales, while our community had typical German names such as Klein, Garber, Huffman, Wampler and Miller. And we felt that anybody that was outside our little denomination and our culture, well, they might be nice people but you know, they were outsiders, they were the "other." We had almost no Blacks. There was one Black in our rural community named Sam Timberlake who went around and helped people with the threshing and making hay and things like that, and I remember that he was considered "a good worker." That's the only Black I ever came in contact with during my childhood. It was very much a European – i.e. German – community.

Q: Did you have much of a chance to develop a reading habit and that sort of thing?

HUFFMAN: Oh yes. You know, I came from a broken family and in fact was a quasi orphan. My three brothers and I were all sort of farmed out to different families, usually families in our small community. Some of us went to relatives, some didn't. Some families were willing to take a "boy" who would work for his keep. So from about the age of nine I felt that I didn't really belong in this family and I had to earn my keep, I had to earn my salt, which was not a very pleasant feeling for a young boy. But our diverse experiences are very interesting with regard to the "nature versus nurture" controversy. My oldest brother went to live with a farm family where he was expected to work with the poultry operation and with tractors and machinery. Well, he today raises a million turkeys a year down in the Shenandoah Valley and has a trucking company with 30 trailer trucks, so you can see how that experience determined what he did. A second brother went to live with a blacksmith family. He joined the Air Force after World War II and became an airplane mechanic and crew chief on Air force refueling flights to Morocco. He later became a motorcycle mechanic and today he has Harley-Davidson motorcycle dealerships in two cities in Florida. I had the good fortune, I suppose you might say, to be put with a family who were what you might call the landed gentry of the community. They went to college. One of the sons of the family was a professor of religion at Bridgewater College. Another son was the general secretary of the National Council of Churches with offices on Riverside Drive in New York. The patriarch of the family was both a farmer and an itinerant preacher. As I early on showed a certain aptitude for academic pursuits, it was decided that I would be permitted to go to the local college 10 miles away, Bridgewater College. It didn't mean that they were going to give me any money to go there; if I was going to go I had to work and support myself, which I did by working summers on a construction gang that was building concrete silos. I made about $1,000.00 a summer which was enough, in those days, to put myself through four

years of college and buy my own car. The youngest brother was quite young when we were split up and he went from pillar to post and never had any very consistent influence of any kind, and has not followed any particular career. He lives on a mountain-top in West Virginia in a log cabin he built with his own hands (I'm not kidding), raises much of his own food, drives a Porsche and winters in Florida. Two years ago he and I drove down to Costa Rica in his pick-up truck. In a sense he is the freest of us all, able to follow his impulses with no constraints. But the point of all this is that it's interesting that while all four of us are very similar, look alike and have similar personalities, our careers were determined by the environments in which we grew up.

Q: I'm most interested in, you know, sort of the reading or the interests that one develops at an early age. Were you able to develop those kinds of interests?

HUFFMAN: I think that since I was basically very unhappy I used reading as an escape. I read voraciously. Now this was facilitated, it must be admitted, by the fact that the spinster daughter who lived at home and who was essentially (though not legally) my foster aunt, had been a teacher of high school English for 40 years. She had a copious library of books, novels and plays, as she was also a drama coach. She was known throughout that part of the Shenandoah Valley because she had taught so many people and directed so many plays in the course of teaching at two different schools over 40 years. So I read hundreds of her books and plays. In addition I regularly checked out books from our church library.

Q: Were there any books that were particularly important to you or any aspects of writing that particularly grabbed you?

HUFFMAN: No, I was in it for the entertainment. Starting at about the age of 8, I devoured the entire series of Bobbsey Twin books, 22 of them or something like that. There were the Hardy Boys series and also books in my foster aunt's library that I was probably too young to fully understand such as Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Q: Well were you able in this community while you were going to high school to pick up much about the U.S. or the world beyond?

HUFFMAN: No. Not at all. I remember a 5th grade geography unit on the "Belgian Congo," but no. And, it must be admitted, even in college -- this was the '50s, the silent generation -- somehow I don't recall a single course on international affairs.

Q: Really?

HUFFMAN: No. We studied history, we studied world history, we studied American history, we studied English, we studied Shakespeare, we studied math and biology, all the other things but we didn't know much about what was going on in the rest of the world. We had very little international consciousness. I'm sure there were some schools in the

‘50s where you did learn those things; that is a reflection probably on the quality of that institution, but I was quite ignorant of the world when I graduated.

Q: Well did that community have a proclivity towards Republicans or Democrats?

HUFFMAN: Republicans. Oh yes. Conservative farmers. “If he ain’t got a job it’s his own fault.” That was the attitude. “If you want to work, there’s work.” Self-reliance; never give up. I’ll tell you a funny thing -- you had to have a vegetable garden. Even if you lived in town, you had to have a garden. If a person didn’t have a garden he was considered lazy and not worth much. I remember there was a family that lived across the street; the man drove a truck and they didn’t have a garden; they had a lot of children and it was insinuated that they might not even be married. I mean, they were totally beyond the pale. But that was really a litmus test of respectability. We had gardens and we raised so much stuff that we couldn’t eat it all, it was just tradition, that’s just what you do, so you canned it to keep it from spoiling and then you gave it away to all the neighbors. One of my jobs was to go down into the cellar during the winter and clean the sprouts off the potatoes and pick out the bad potatoes, because there were too many to eat before they spoiled. And to cull out the rotten apples. We had shelves lined with Mason jars of peaches and beans and sausage and whatever. We would always be going down there and one or two of the jars would begin to spoil and begin to spew a little bit, you know? I don’t know if you’ve ever seen home canned things. And my foster aunt would go down to the cellar, open the questionable ones, scrape away the mold on top, and to see if it was spoiled throughout. She’d taste it and say, “It’s *perfectly* alright!” And if the apples were partly rotten you’d take those and eat those. As a result you were constantly eating slightly spoiled food; if it wasn’t spoiled you left it for later, right? This is a joke that I share with my brothers these days – if there is some question as to whether something is spoiled or not, someone says “It’s *perfectly* alright,” and then we throw it away.

Q: In the garden did they have competitive gardening? In other words, my tomatoes are better than yours?

HUFFMAN: Not really. It was just such an accepted thing that it hadn’t got to the point where people competed at the county fair and that sort of thing, at least in our community, because we had big tomatoes anyway, you were expected to have big tomatoes. And the farm next door had big tomatoes too so it was no big deal.

Q: What about news? Radio, TV, newspapers, how were you getting your news?

HUFFMAN: You know, I can’t remember if we got a newspaper at all when I was a kid. I just can’t remember. I remember later on we got Harrisonburg *Daily News Record*. The competing paper was the *News Leader* from Staunton (about 15 miles to the south) which we read from time to time. This was, of course, before TV; I saw my first TV program (wrestling, I believe it was) in about 1950, when I was 16. There was radio, of course, and we used to listen to all the evening programs, such as “The Thin Man” and “The Lone Ranger” and “Lum and Abner.”

Q. Where were you in 1955?

HUFFMAN: In 1955 I was just graduating from Bridgewater College with majors in French and Spanish and minors in English and secondary education, and armed with the Virginia Collegiate Professional Secondary Education Certificate.

Q: Did the Cold War intrude at all?

HUFFMAN: Oh yes. This was the height of the Cold War and there was always talk about Armageddon, the Holocaust, the destruction of the world by nuclear weapons and so on. We were made very much aware of that both in school and in church.

Q: As you were brought up, was it expected that if the draft came around you would be a pacifist?

HUFFMAN: Yes, that was the expectation. And of course in those days you had to be a religious pacifist. It wasn't like now or during Vietnam when you could say well, philosophically I'm a pacifist. You had to be a religious pacifist. Now most people, I think, by the time they have a college education begin to ask questions about organized religion and so I couldn't claim that I was religiously a pacifist. But given the community that I came from and the church that I came from, draft boards were quite accustomed to granting conscientious objector status to people from my church. And since we were not at war -- Korea was over in '55, Vietnam we hadn't gotten involved in yet -- I got the opportunity quite early on to go to Laos. Now, I looked all over the map of North Africa and I couldn't find Laos. I don't know, I was thinking Lagos I guess. But anyway, when I discovered that Laos was as far away as you could get on this globe from my childhood experience in Weyers Cave, there was no question. I decided I would much rather do that than spend two years at Fort Dix or somewhere doing basic training, learning how to shoot a gun. I don't know what position I might have taken had we been at war because, as I say, I couldn't claim to be a religious pacifist, but I rather opportunistically took advantage of my background to get this marvelous experience of traveling all the way to Laos. The executive director of International Voluntary Services was a friend of the president of my college and he came and asked the president, "Hey, have you got anybody there who's a good, down to earth dirt farmer that speaks French?" And of course there weren't a whole lot of people that met those qualifications in rural Virginia in those days. So I applied for that and was accepted. I had to come up to the IVS offices here to Washington to interview in French to see if I could do interpreting in French and I must have passed the exam because I was accepted. But it soon became very clear when I got to Laos that I had only a very impractical academic grasp of French. I mean, I could discuss Descartes and Rousseau but I didn't know how to say "dig the hole here." But after two years in Laos I had a pretty good command of French.

Q: I'd like to go back just a bit, talk a little bit about life at Bridgewater. How did you find it? Was it an all male college or was it co-ed?

HUFFMAN: No, it was the first coeducational college in Virginia. Attendance at chapel was compulsory, but you still have that some places. Some courses in the bible as literature were mandatory; otherwise it was just a good liberal arts college that, as I say, had particularly strong pre-med program and teacher training programs. I have been interested in music all my life and so I had intended to go and major in music. I was taking voice lessons, I have a good baritone voice and I in fact used to be hired commercially as a soloist at weddings and so on. But it soon became clear that the theoretical underpinnings of music remained pretty much a mystery to me while I was making straight A's in French and Spanish and I thought "Hey, this is telling me something here," so I decided to go into languages.

Q: Let's talk about French. What sort of a French teacher did you have, because so much of language training for so long was basically written?

HUFFMAN: Okay, it was grammar translation, but I had the enormous good fortune to have a professor whose French pronunciation was marvelous. And while he did not really quite understand the audio-lingual approach to language teaching, nevertheless he modeled the pronunciation for us perfectly. But as I said, it was basically in Laos that the rubber hit the road and that I had to develop fluency in French.

Q: Okay. So you graduated from Bridgewater in 1955?

HUFFMAN: Yes, that's right.

EXPERIENCES AS VOLUNTEER IN LAOS 1956-68

Q: And you're on to IVS?

HUFFMAN: Well actually when I graduated in June, the contract between USAID (United States Agency for International Development) and the Royal Lao Government had not yet been finalized. (I now know that IVS was a USAID subcontractor.) So I went back to my usual summer job of building concrete silos to earn a bit of cash. When by September the agreement had still not been concluded, I had to do something. So I joined the Brethren Volunteer Service training unit at New Windsor, Maryland, and went through their service training period of two months, just sort of killing time until the thing could be finalized with Laos. When that two months came to an end, everybody went their various ways -- many of them went to Europe, some were assigned to projects in the U.S., and one other member of that unit and myself were destined to go to Laos. He was an animal husbandry MA from Texas A&M named Carl Coppock, also Church of the Brethren, and we had to find something to do in the meantime, so we were given various short-term assignments. One of them was to go and serve as "guinea pigs" (normal control patients) at NIH in cancer research. Aside from daily injections of radioactive tracer material and frequent blood-drawing, this duty was fairly pleasant, with plenty of time to read, study and play ping-pong, but Carl and I were impatient to head for Laos, so we persuaded the director of IVS to let us make our way to Modesto, California, where the Church of the Brethren had another relief clothing processing center. (I should

mention that the Brethren Service Center in New Windsor, in addition to training volunteers, has for years had a large interdenominational relief clothing processing operation. They played big role in Katrina relief.) So we said to Dr. John Noffsinger, Executive Director of IVS, "Let us get on out there and if and when the contract with Laos comes through we'll be 3,000 miles closer to Laos." Well, he wasn't very happy about that, which revealed how iffy the whole thing was. But anyhow, he agreed, and Carl and I made arrangements with a car transport company in Chicago to drive a new car to San Francisco for them in return for gas and a modest stipend paid upon delivery of the car. We picked up a new 1956 Chevrolet Power Glide (painted a cheerful two-tone yellow and green) and drove straight across the United States, Route 66, Grand Canyon, Las Vegas and all that. We worked out there for about two months before the contract finally came through, and on the 19th of February, 1956, we took off for Laos.

Q: How did you get there?

HUFFMAN: Commercial aircraft. Actually three of us, Carl the animal husbandry guy and myself and the wife of the chief of party, who was already out on the ground in Laos preparing for the project, locating the site for us to live and work and so on.

Q: So you got out there in February of '56 and you were there for how long?

HUFFMAN: Two years.

Q: Two years. Well. Can you give me a sketch of Laos when you got there in '56, what it was like, who was running things, what was going on?

HUFFMAN: Okay. In 1956 the Prime Minister was Prince Souvanna Phouma, a pipe-smoking gentleman whom I met several times when he came up to visit our project and I served as interpreter. I admired him enormously, but as a neutralist, he was not quite as anti-communist as his U.S. backers would have liked. Of course, there was a communist insurgency going on in Laos similar to the on-going war next door in Vietnam. Prince Souphanouvong, half-brother of the Prime Minister, disillusioned with the failure of the fight for Lao independence from France after World War II, had fled to Hanoi and founded a communist government in exile called the Pathet Lao (literally "Lao State"). With the aid of the Viet Minh, the Pathet Lao had occupied the two northern provinces of Houaphan and Phongsali which bordered North Vietnam, and were fighting the Royal Lao army. It was in the context of Vietnam and the Cold War that USAID was financing our relatively small-scale IVS project as part of the objective of "winning hearts and minds" and preventing Laos from falling into the hands of the communists. By the end of my tour in 1958 the Pathet Lao and the royal government had come to an agreement that their forces would be integrated, but that agreement fell apart and then of course in '75 the Pathet Lao achieved what they had been working toward the entire time, and that same communist regime is still in power today.

Q: Well, that whole area was considered important after the fall of the French at Dien Bien…

HUFFMAN: Dien Bien Phu, exactly. And as a matter of fact the town where we located, called Phon Savanh (which means "Heavenly Hill"), was a recently founded market village primarily made up of Vietnamese refugees who had come across from Dien Bien Phu. Our village was at about the latitude of Dien Bien Phu, and we were only about 50 miles from the Vietnamese border. And so the village had Vietnamese and Chinese; of course the mayor and all the officials were Lao -- had to be -- but there were also many minority groups such as the Hmong, who you know came to the U.S. in large numbers as refugees after the war. Most went to Minnesota, for some reason, as well as many other places. So there were many ethnic groups there in this little town which was basically two rows of shop houses and a muddy street and that was it. This was in Xieng Khouang Province. The reason we located there in Phon Savanh rather than in Xieng Khouang town itself was that they had an airstrip there on the Plain of Jars. They had just built a new post office – PTT (Poste, Téléphone et Télégraphe) – which was the nicest building in town, but since they weren't getting a whole lot of mail, they figured they'd let us live in it. So that was another factor in deciding to stay in Phon Savanh.

Q: Well what was your team like? What did it consist of?

HUFFMAN: Well, the chief of party was a retired Iowa farmer who had been quite prominent in Iowa. And his wife, who didn't have an official portfolio other than a kind of den mother. I was considered the interpreter and education specialist, although my skills as an interpreter were only needed when an official such as the governor came to visit, since the peasant villagers we worked with didn't speak French. My friend Carl was the animal husbandry guy from Texas A&M; the idea was that we were going to bring in improved breeds of livestock and poultry to upgrade the local stock. It was to be both an agricultural research station and a community development project. The team was augmented by the arrival about six months later of a public health nurse named Martha Rupel, along with Clyde Searl, an entomologist from the University of Redlands in California. An industrial arts specialist named Wally Brown joined the team a bit later, about six months after I got there. As you can imagine, with six people living in pretty close proximity there were some tensions, personality conflicts and so on, but basically we got on alright, played a lot of canasta on Sunday nights. And while IVS was interdenominational it just happened that all of the team members belonged to the Church of the Brethren except this one guy from California who was, to put it charitably, non-religious. So it annoyed him no end when people in the embassy would say, "Oh yeah, you're up there with that missionary group," since, with all of us being from the Church of the Brethren they assumed we were some kind of missionary group. That really infuriated him. But we carried on.

Q. What were some of your own duties day to day?

HUFFMAN: Well, I served as interpreter, jeep driver, and general assistant for our public health nurse in her child care clinics in a dozen surrounding villages. Our patients were typically Hmong women with their babies. While most Hmong men speak also Lao, most of the women speak only Hmong, so I had to learn a certain amount of Hmong medical

vocabulary to be effective. Since I would interview the patients about their symptoms and relay this to the nurse, who would then administer the required treatment, the villagers naturally assumed I was the doctor. I remember once we were invited for lunch in the house of the village chief. Now Hmong food is generally pretty good, consisting of fried meat and potatoes, but that day they had discovered a tree of yellow jacket larvae, and insisted that we, as the guests of honor, take the first bite of the deep-fried larvae. It wouldn't have been too bad if I had swallowed the thing whole, but I made the mistake of biting it in two, and it oozed a bit.

Q. Could you describe your other projects?

Well, as the "education specialist," I opened a library with materials primarily from USIS, I established a library with materials in six languages: Lao, Thai, Vietnamese, Chinese, French and English. Most of these materials were supplied by USIS Vientiane. And we taught English at night to various of the ethnic groups. It was clear early on that we had to segregate the English classes because the Lao were happy-go-lucky and laid back and never did any homework; the Vietnamese were bright and quick and worked hard and learned much faster than the Lao. This ties in of course with the whole history of Indochina, I'm afraid, with regard to the superiority complex of the Vietnamese vis-à-vis their Lao and Cambodian neighbors. The Chinese had their own reasons, which were commercial, for learning English. We had some Lao schoolteachers and some local government officials, but it didn't work out because the young people would put them to shame and of course that's a no-no in an Asian society. So they sort of fell away and we ended up with classes of Vietnamese, Lao and Hmong. The Hmong were bright and could learn quite quickly but they were also illiterate.

Q: I was going to say, they didn't have an alphabet.

HUFFMAN: They couldn't write any language at all. So we just taught them the spoken language and tried to teach them to read a little bit.

Xieng Khouang Province is the primary locus of the Hmong people in Laos. The French called them the Meo, which is a Chinese word meaning "cat." They wanted to be called Hmong. They are closely related to the Yao tribespeople, who are now called Mien. We used to call that language family Miao-Yao, but Hmong-Mien is considered more politically correct. There were also other ethnic minorities. Laos at that time had a population of only about two million, of whom a million were ethnic minorities. The Lao themselves typically lived in the plains and small valleys where they could farm wet rice. Government officials and administrators were drawn exclusively from the Lao so they were the elite of society, but then you had the Miao-Yao, Tibeto-Burman, and Mon-Khmer minorities scattered all around. This was where I got my first interest in Southeast Asian languages and linguistics as well as in ethno-linguistics, that is the ethnic groups and the languages they speak and the affiliations between them.

Q: Well, if you're teaching English and you've got these people speaking a language that you don't speak, at least at the time, were you playing catch up or learning the language while you were teaching another language?

HUFFMAN: Yes. But of course we didn't learn Lao fast enough to really serve as a medium of communication so we were starting at zero level and using, you know, gestures and mime and all the rest, just as I'm doing right now as a volunteer teaching English to Hispanic immigrants, many of whom are illiterate as well.

Q: Well, how did these various groups get along with each other?

HUFFMAN: Well, by and large the ethnic minorities lived separately and did not co-mingle. For example, the Hmong liked to live at elevations of 4,000 to 5,000 feet in the mountains where they raised pigs and grew potatoes and raised opium, which was the major crop of the Hmong. And of course the embassy was always talking about substituting other crops for the opium but that didn't work in Laos because there's no other crop where small amounts bring as high a return as opium. For example, they proposed corn. But how can you get the corn to market? There're no roads, there're no trucks. We had the only truck in the province. So, you know, corn was not going to make it as a substitute. A lot of the Hmong themselves were addicts because they took opium as a painkiller and then they would become addicted. The sale of opium was legal in that Xieng Khouang, and. sometimes when we were out on the road in the jeep we'd stop and pick up tribespeople carrying their opium to market. But they didn't get the major profit. The major profit went to the middlemen, Chinese merchants who would buy the opium from the Hmong farmers and then sell it to the French, who would fly it out to Saigon and Bangkok and so on. They'd get caught once in awhile but if they could get just one shipment through they were made for life, you see. There was an inn called "the bungalow" there in Phon Savanh run by the French. We were supposed to believe that they could operate a twin engine Beechcraft on the revenue from their inn and restaurant. The problem with that was that there weren't any tourists. Every morning about 5:00 o'clock you would hear their plane take off. We joked about going down there some morning and snapping a flash shot of them loading opium into the nose of the plane but they would have shot us without hesitation. These were international criminal types – Corsicans, most of them.

Q: Oh, you don't mess with that group.

HUFFMAN: No.

Q: Well, were the Vietnamese communists working on the area? I mean, you know, beginning to develop the Pathet Lao and all that? I mean, what was happening?

HUFFMAN: No. The Vietnamese who were there in the town and even those down in Vientiane were basically anti-communist refugees. At that time the Pathet Lao controlled only two provinces in the extreme north. The Pathet Lao were part of the Indochina

Communist Party and many of them had been trained in Vietnam but I don't think there were a lot of Vietnamese on the ground in Laos.

Q: Well did you feel the reach of the Pathet Lao particularly where you were or not?

HUFFMAN: Yes, more so where we were than in the capital. There was a military air strip right next to us on the Plain of Jars where they would bring the wounded troops back from the front. We would see them lying there in the hot sun with just a little bit of canvas as shelter until a military ambulance would come and take them over the 30 kilometers of bumpy road to the provincial hospital in Xieng Khouang. We didn't have much hope for them because that hospital was an incredibly dirty and ill-equipped place. I really pitied those soldiers. And all of the death and suffering, like most wars, was in the end all in vain.

Q: Was Kong Le at all a figure at that point?

HUFFMAN: Not at that point. He didn't stage his coup until 1960. All of this was in fact before the U.S. began to get involved in Vietnam in a big way.

Q: What about Vientiane and our embassy? Did you have much contact with them at all?

HUFFMAN: No, very little. We had most of our contact with USAID, which was our parent agency and which dwarfed the embassy in size, as was true in many third world countries at that time. Embassy officers would frequently come up to our project from Vientiane because it was at 3,600 feet elevation and much cooler than in Vientiane, so officials from USAID and the embassy would seize any occasion to come up there and make a pretext of touring our project.

Q: Did you run across, I mean, was the, did the ambassador ever make an appearance?

HUFFMAN: Yes. Yost, Ambassador Yost.

Q: Charlie Yost.

HUFFMAN: Yes, he and his wife came up to the project quite soon after our arrival. The U.S. was giving Laos about 40 million at that time in aid, there were approximately 150 American personnel in the U.S. mission. We were the only six who were out in the field, They were all beavering away there in Vientiane and so whenever any CODEL or any person who had anything to do with the appropriations would come over they'd shuttle them right up to us, saying "Look what these guys are doing up here -- this is a USAID project up here." I remember one such visitor was Senator Allen Ellender

Q: Ellender from Louisiana.

HUFFMAN: Louisiana.

Q: Of course he made a point of going everywhere and writing voluminous reports which he put into the Congressional Record, which were absolutely unreadable but anyway.

HUFFMAN: It was clear that he was looking for evidence to use against foreign aid. The word came up from Vientiane that Senator Ellender was on his way, and that we should put our best foot forward, show him the wonderful things we were accomplishing. Our little project up there, with a budget of a couple of hundred thousand dollars was a pittance compared to the 40 million in aid to Vientiane. I don't know what Ellender reported about it, but it certainly didn't make a good impression on me.

Q: How about the animal husbandry project? Was that going anywhere?

HUFFMAN: No. Well, it would have, but of course, you know, in the '60s and '70s Xieng Khouang became a total battleground.

Q: Oh yes. The Plain of Jars was the hot spot.

HUFFMAN: Yes. And our project was quite early on discontinued and the city of Xieng Khouang was totally blasted off the map by our bombers. It was rather humorous if it hadn't been so sad -- we were going to get some Brahma bulls from Texas. They had been brought to Texas from India originally, and they had been upgraded, upbred in Texas. We spent a year building miles and miles of three-strand barbed wire to keep them in. Finally, after almost two years, when our animal husbandry guy was almost due to leave, they finally arrived. When the boat arrived in the Bangkok harbor these Brahma bulls must have realized they were coming back home to Asia because they jumped off the boat and swam ashore and they had to round them up in the streets of Bangkok. When we finally got them up there to the project it turned out that they could easily leap over our miles and miles of three-strand barbed wire fence. But I'm sure that, you know, they made what contribution they could to upgrading the local stock.

Q: How well did you feel the writ of the government in Vientiane ran up in the Plain of Jars? Was there much government up there or were things pretty loose?

HUFFMAN: Well, the Lao government had a pretty well articulated administrative framework up there. Governors were appointed by the central government and the governor of the province was royalty, you know, had a royal connection. The province was divided into "muong," or districts, and the Chao Muong, or chief of the Muong, was appointed by the governor and he was always a Lao, so the Lao certainly from a superficial point of view pretty much controlled the administration. There were some French "coopérants" still up there advising the Lao military.

Q: They were a little bit like the Peace Corps, the "coopérants."

HUFFMAN: Yes, a little bit higher level than that, I suppose. But there was a kind of parallel administration up there. The king of the Meo lived between us and Xieng Khouang and he was given a certain amount of latitude to govern his own people. But he

certainly had to be subservient to the Lao government. His brother was the only Hmong deputy in the Chamber of Deputies in the capital. In other words it was considered that they were a significant enough part of the population of that province that they deserved to have a deputy in the chamber of deputies.

OVERLAND TRIP FROM LAOS TO LONDON 1958

Q. Today is the 8th of February, 2006. Frank, I understand you have written a book about your trip home from Laos. What was the name of it?

HUFFMAN: Yes, it's called *Monks and Motorcycles: from Laos to London by the Seat of my Pants, 1956-1958.*

Q. How did this motorcycle trip come about?

HUFFMAN: Well, when you're young you feel invulnerable and you want to have adventures so I thought well, here I am halfway around the world, I'd like to see some of the world going back. We had come across the Pacific by Tokyo and Hong Kong and Bangkok. Wally Brown, one of the IVS team members, and I had done quite a bit of traveling the mountain roads of Laos together and we both were excited by the idea of trying to return to Europe overland by jeep or motorcycle or some other conveyance. The problem was that he had arrived a year later than I had and consequently we were out of phase, so what I intended to do was try to get a job maybe somewhere in the U.S. mission in Vientiane for a year so that we would then be in phase and we would make the trip back together. I made several attempts to get a job and in fact a lot of IVS alumni went into USAID later on because of their experience in the various countries where IVS worked. And in fact there was some interest in hiring me as one of USAID's field service representatives, first in Pakse and then later in Luang Prabang, because Joel Halpern, who was the field rep in Luang Prabang had resigned and so they knew me in Vientiane and were interested in hiring me. But Washington was not too happy about hiring on the ground and they said it would take at least six months to get my clearance and so on and so forth. To make a short story long, as one of my Cornell colleagues used to say, all attempts to find employment were a failure so I decided to buy a motorcycle and start out on my own.

I didn't know much about the countries I was going to try to go through but I had a National Geographic map of Asia, which covered such a huge area that Europe, which was my destination, was up in the left hand corner of the map, which was mostly taken up by China, South Asia and the Middle East. So I bought a motorcycle there from a Lao-French guy in Vientiane. The motorcycle was a BMW, single cylinder, 250 cc, and it had a shaft drive, which people said would be preferable to a chain drive in crossing the deserts of the Middle East. USIS came and interviewed me before my departure from Vientiane and took pictures of me and my motorcycle and the duffel bag against the backdrop of the That Luang, Vientiane's most impressive monument. I headed out down to Bangkok, down part of the new U.S.-Thai Friendship Highway that was being built in

early 1958 by USAID. When I got to Bangkok and set about the business of getting visas for the countries I was going to go through, the snag was Burma.

The quickest route to Burma was via the Three Pagoda Pass on the Thai-Burma border, but I couldn't get permission from the Burmese to go overland. They suggested that I go down to Victoria Point at the southern tip of Burma and catch a boat up the Tenasserim Coast to Rangoon. So that's what I agreed to do but even then it took five or six weeks to get the Burmese visa because it had to be referred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Rangoon. Finally I got exasperated and pounded some desks. Of course, in the Asian context once you do that you've lost already. I mean, you've lost face, you've lost your cool because it's a positive value in Asia to maintain your composure and your cool. But anyway, the consul said to me, "Mr. Huffman, do you have any idea how hard it is to get a visa to your country?" And I had never thought about that because it had never been my problem. But he was exactly right, of course.

I finally got the visa and headed down the Thai Peninsula to a little town called Rayong which is opposite the southernmost point of Burma, called Victoria Point. I went across to Victoria Point and I asked them about this steamer that was supposed to run once a month from Penang to Calcutta, stopping along the Tenasserim Coast and Rangoon. They said "Yes, it runs." I said, "Well when will it come?" "It come tomorrow." I said "Oh really? Well, how do we…will it stop here?" "Not stop." I said, "How can we get it to stop?" "We have to go out and flag it down." So, early next morning we got on a sampan with the motorcycle and went out in the bay and waved at the 700-ton steamer, and finally it came to a halt. I have no idea whether it was going to stop anyhow. But it stopped and we indicated we wanted to get aboard so they put the ship's crane overboard, picked up me and my motorcycle, lifted us up onboard and we headed up the Tenasserim Coast, stopping off at Mergui and Tavoy and various little ports along the way. And finally, several days later, made it to Rangoon.

As I started to offload my motorcycle I ran into problems with Burmese customs. They said you don't have a customs document for this vehicle and you can't import it unless you have one or unless you pay a bond of 150 percent of the value of the motorcycle. Well, I of course didn't have that much money to post as bond so they seized the motorcycle, impounded it, and there I was stuck in Rangoon and the ship was sailing the next day for Calcutta -- so I was stranded there. I tried to appeal to our embassy in Rangoon for help and I must say, those were quieter days when Foreign Service officers had more time than they do these days because the very kind vice consul there actually wrote a letter to Burmese customs saying, "We know Mr. Franklin E. Huffman and we know that he's traveling across Burma and we assure you he has no intention of selling the motorcycle illegally in Burma," and so on and so forth. And I thought okay, good. Well, the Burmese saw through that. They said, "Well, they haven't promised to pay the bond; they haven't made any financial commitment here in this letter whatever." So I went back to the man and incredibly he agreed to write another letter and try to imply financial responsibility without actually saying it, but he said that Customs was perfectly right, and that the embassy was not authorized to make any financial commitment to U.S.

citizens. And that was my first lesson in just what a U.S. embassy could and could not do for travelers abroad.

The second letter didn't work either. So finally, I was staying at the YMCA, kind of a dormitory situation there, and one day I met the British advisor to the YMCA and told him my plight. He said "Sure, I'll sign a bond for you." I said, "Why would you do that when my own embassy won't?" "Well," he said, "I believe your story." Anyway, he signed a bond and that got my motorcycle out of hock. At that point I was left no alternative but to try to go overland to India, up the road to Mandalay. So I set out up the road to Mandalay. When I arrived in Mandalay two days later, they told me I would have to go in an armed train over to Monywa on the Chindwin River, because some of the ethnic minorities were in revolt in that area and it wasn't safe to go by road. So I put the motorcycle on a train, and when I got over to Monywa I asked, "Where is the road to India?" and they pointed to the Chindwin River. At this point I began to think, "Gee, there's not much point in having this motorcycle; I've had it on a steamer and I've had it on the train, now I'm going to put it on a riverboat."

I located the riverboat and they said I should put the motorcycle on there early in the morning. So I went down to the riverbank and there was this steamer and there were stevedores loading sacks of rice and jars of fish sauce and various other things onto the boat across a gangplank about two feet wide. Wanting to show off my skill as a motorcycle rider, I said, "Okay, stand back, guys, I'm going to ride across the gangplank." It would have worked if the gangplank hadn't bowed with the weight of the motorcycle. It bowed way down and I stalled going up into the boat and I fell over into the water. This provided a great deal of merriment for everybody. But they all jumped in the water and helped me get the bike back up out of the water and dry it off. It started up with apparently no damage done, and this time I agreed to let them walk it up onto the boat for me.

We went up that river for about four or five days. I remember I had time to read Tolstoy's *War and Peace* on the way. The water was low as this was in the dry season and the boat kept getting stranded on sandbars; it would take some time to jiggle back and forth and get it off the sandbar. Finally we got up to Kalewa, about 80 kilometers from the Indian border by what was basically an ox cart track. I crossed over a bridge to the Indian border and was stopped at the Indian customs police, and I thought "Oh boy, we're in for it again!"

They showed me into the customs shack in a very officious manner and had me sit and make a list of everything that I had, articles of clothing, books, money, whatever. There was no place on the form to indicate I had a vehicle so I didn't put anything and I handed it back to the man and he said, "Okay, veddy good." Well, I was kind of disappointed, so I said, rather stupidly, "But what about the motorcycle?" "Oh well, you're not going to sell it, are you? You're going across India to Pakistan, aren't you?" So he set me free and I went on into Imphal, the capital of Manipur State and made my way day by day across India, sleeping usually in government guest houses called Dak bungalows. When leaving from Imphal I wanted to head out toward Assam but they told me I'd have to go in an

armored convoy because the Naga headhunters take a head once in awhile just to keep their hand in. On that trip through the foothills of the Himalayas I met an Indian businessman who invited me to go along with his family to the Kaziranga Game Preserve where you can rent elephants and go out and see the wild game. I agreed to go with him, but when we got up there it turned out that the elephants had all been booked for that day. My host insisted that I take his spot on one of the elephants, since I might never get back there again and he could come again from Bombay. I accepted and got on the elephants about 5:00 in the morning, went out and between 5:00 and 10:00 o'clock we saw some rhinoceros and some wild boar and so on. I'm not particularly susceptible to motion sickness, but after five hours of swaying back and forth in that howdah, I was green when we got down. I thanked my Indian benefactor, jumped on the motorcycle, went down the road and was sick by the side of the road.

When I got to Siliguri I decided to go up to Darjeeling which was famous for Darjeeling tea, where an Australian guy I had met in Bangkok was a teacher at the Mount Hermon Boarding School where some children of the Thai royal family were attending school. And so I went up and visited with him and saw the tea plantations and then back down to Benares (these days spelled Varanasi) on the sacred Ganges river, then on to Agra and the Taj Mahal. In Agra I was besieged by people who wanted to buy my BMW motorcycle because India at that time was not importing Western motorcycles. As I had had so much trouble with the motorcycle, and had taken about two months getting only as far as India, I decided I would sell it to two fierce-looking Sikhs brothers who offered me roughly what I had paid for it. Turned out later I could have gotten much more than that. But also in India you had 150 percent import duty and I told Mr. Harlal Singh, who was buying the motorcycle, "Either you give me the customs duty and I'll pay it or else you give me an affidavit to the effect that you'll pay it." He dismissed this with "Oh, never mind, I have friends in customs, you know." He never did get the affidavit to me.

In New Delhi I met an Australian graduate student there who was traveling to the United States and he had heard about a bus that was supposed to go from Delhi to London for about 500 rupees or U.S. $100 and included room and board. Well, I should have been suspicious when I saw that 1948 Bedford bus with various parts of frame and bald tires roped on the roof that it wouldn't make it to London, but we couldn't afford to be pessimistic so, after considerable delay we set out with a party of about 10 Indians and 10 Westerners. But the bus constantly broke down, tires blew out, carburetor gave out, we had continuous problems with the bus. The Indians onboard were worried about getting across the Pakistani border because India and Pakistan, even in 1958, were already at war over Kashmir. We had with us a very colorful guy called the Swamiji Dev Murti who was a yogi who let steam rollers run over his chest; the Swamiji said he could facilitate things at the border, but he never did help push the bus when it was broken down. We managed to get over into Pakistan when the radiator sprang a leak. We had to change the radiator only to find that the replacement leaked too, just not as much. At one point there was a mutiny on the bus – the Europeans had taken over the bus because the Indian owner had spent all the money and was generally incompetent to run the trip. Finally we got over into southeastern Iran, and my Australian friend and I decided to jump ship -- abandon the bus. We got on some UNESCO trucks that came along and left the bus

stranded there in the desert. But later on we broke down and the bus passed us and we lost face. Then the bus got bogged down in the sand and asked the two trucks to help push it out so we got them out, but I don't know to this day if the bus ever got out of the Iranian desert.

When we had hitchhiked as far as Kerman we decided to catch a plane the 600 miles to Tehran. This was the only leg of the trip where we resorted to air travel. On that flight we met the FAO representative in Tehran, a Mr. Thomforde, who invited us to stay with him and his family when we got to Tehran. I asked him if his wife wouldn't be upset by his bringing strangers home unannounced, and he assured us she would not. And it turned out that she in fact seemed delighted to meet us. "It's a Quaker thing," she explained.

After a couple days in Tehran we got on another bus and headed toward Tabriz. That bus broke down, we got another bus that made it to the railhead of the great Orient Express at Erzurum in eastern Turkey. From Istanbul we took the Great Orient Express to Istanbul, and from there across Greece and Yugoslavia to Trieste, Italy and finally into Venice. We had been so cold for so long going through the Himalayas that getting to Venice on a sunny morning and having a continental breakfast of croissants and café-au-lait, it seemed like we were getting back home; it looked like our culture. I have often thought that it was unfortunate that my first trip around the world was East to West. Having gone directly to the exotic Orient, on my arrival in Venice, I was not as sensitive to the nuances of difference between U.S. and European culture as I would otherwise have been..

John Williams, the Australian I had traveled with from Delhi, was planning to go to graduate school in the States in architecture, and I was fortunate to have someone who could describe the great architecture of Rome and Florence and Paris. In Paris I said goodbye to John and met up with my brother Bill, who was in the Air Force in northeast France at Chaumont. It was a NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) base, as de Gaulle didn't kick NATO out of France until 1966. When I met Bill, he said, "Hey, I've got 40 days of accumulated leave and a new Simca. Why don't we see a bit of Europe before you go back.?" As I had no specific deadline except finding a teaching job before the fall, I agreed with this marvelous suggestion. Bill rounded up some C-rations and sleeping bags -- I didn't question him too closely where he got them -- and we set out and traveled around most of western Europe for about a month, going down through France into Spain, across to Italy, up through Austria to Holland, went to the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels and back down to Paris and on to the 24 hours of Le Mans automobile race down in southern France. Bill was already an enthusiast, but that was my first exposure to sports cars. I was so enamored that I ordered a brand new Triumph TR-3 sports car from a dealer in Paris. Bill loaned me the down payment and agreed to take delivery of the car for me and ship it over from France to New York.

I crossed from Southampton, England to New York on the last voyage of the liner Ile-de-France. When I got home to Virginia I walked down the street in my home town to the local school and said "Hi, I'm qualified to teach French, Spanish and English, and I need a job." The principal said, "Good, we need a social studies teacher; you're hired." So I

spent the next two years from ’58 to ’60, teaching French, history, geography, and 8th-grade civics in the local high school. To supplement the meager salary, which was $2,800.00 the first year, I also coached dramatics and drove a school bus, which upped my salary to a generous $4,200.

GRADUATE STUDY AT CORNELL 1960-67

Q: And you started graduate school after that stint at teaching?

HUFFMAN: Right. I was applying to various graduate schools and had in fact been accepted at the University of Wisconsin with a fellowship in French literature, but I had turned them down because I needed to work to pay for the TR-3. To cover my bases I applied to a number of schools in French, history, economics, and linguistics, which proves that I had no idea at that time what I wanted to do. I turned down a second offer from Wisconsin because I needed to teach another year, at which point they decided I was not a serious candidate, but I was accepted at Cornell the next year for the fall of 1960. It was clearly a matter of being in the right place at the right time, because the Russians had put up Sputnik I, and Congress had just appropriated a lot of money under the National Defense Education Act to bring us up to snuff with the Russians in math, science and language and area studies. At that time there were not many people who had already spent two years in one of the areas that were being targeted. So I managed to get in on the ground floor of these National Defense Education Act fellowships in Cornell’s Southeast Asian Studies Program, which really that put me through to the PhD at Cornell.

Q: In what field?

HUFFMAN: My major field was general linguistics, with minors in social anthropology and Southeast Asian Studies. As I said, I had no clear idea what I wanted to specialize in, but I explained to the professor I was corresponding with, who later became my thesis advisor, that I was interested in Southeast Asian languages and that I had learned spoken Lao and that I had majored in French and Spanish in college. He said, “It sounds to me as if you want linguistics.” Well of course that was his field. I said, “Well, okay.” If I had known what linguistics really was I might not have gone for it. But once I got into the academic rat race, I published nine books at Yale University Press, and went from graduate student at Cornell to full professor in 20 years. And only then could I resign and join the Foreign Service, which I had wanted to do from the beginning.

Q: Did you by any chance while you were at Cornell run into Jon Wiant?

HUFFMAN: Yes, I did.

Q: I’m interviewing Jon. I worked with him yesterday.

HUFFMAN: Is that right?

Q: And so we get quite a bit of Cornell there too.

HUFFMAN: Yes, I knew Jon at Cornell. You know, I have trouble remembering whether I knew people as a graduate student or as a professor -- but I think that I met Jon when I was teaching at Cornell in the early '70s.

Q: Well anyway, were you concentrating in Southeast Asian area studies or what?

HUFFMAN: Well Cornell, like most universities, does not offer a PhD in area studies. They say it's not a field, unlike European universities, where you can major in an area, take a PhD in South Asian geography or whatever. But at Cornell, you had to be first and foremost in one of the major disciplines. In other words you had to come out of your PhD as a specialist in general history or general linguistics or general anthropology or general something and then you could take cognate minors in an area. So what I did was major in general linguistics -- theoretical linguistics -- and then minored in anthropology -- social anthropology -- and Southeast Asian studies. But it was through the Southeast Asia Program that I was getting my financial support under the National Defense Education Act.

Q: Did you find yourself concentrating in any particular area at Cornell?

HUFFMAN: Well, my intention was to follow up on my Lao since that was the first Southeast Asian language I had learned, but they didn't teach Lao at Cornell. They taught Thai, of course. So it was considered that I should take Thai. You had to be studying a Southeast Asian language to justify your NDFL fellowship, so I studied Thai the entire first three years that I was doing course work at Cornell. I exhausted my eligibility in Thai after two years, and I needed another year so I began studying Burmese. I studied Burmese for two years as well, as it was considered that Burmese was structurally so different from Thai and Lao that it would broaden my expertise in Southeast Asian linguistics in general.

When it came time to do the dissertation I was going to do it on some aspect of Lao but my thesis advisor felt that Lao is not sufficiently different from Thai to justify a dissertation. He insisted that if you were going to get a PhD in general linguistics you needed to write a dissertation that dealt with a language that had not yet been adequately described, but the entire language, from the phonetics through the phonemics through the syntax. It turned out that the only major national language of Southeast Asia that had not yet been described from a modern structural linguistic point of view was Cambodian. So when he suggested I do Cambodian I said, "You know there is a grammar of Cambodian done by a Frenchman, Henri Maspero, called *Grammaire de la langue khmère."* He said. "That's not a grammar of Cambodian, that's a description of how Cambodian differs from French. It's not a description of Cambodian in its own right." The upshot of it was that I decided to do my dissertation on the Cambodian language, which of course is a fascinating language in its own right, but also because Cambodian is the major modern representative of what was probably the earliest linguistic stock in Southeast Asia, the Mon-Khmer or Austro-Asiatic language family. And this got me into the whole field Southeast Asian ethno-linguistics, since most of the *Montagnard* or hill tribe languages

of Southeast Asia – whether Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia or Burma -- belong to this family. They're not mutually intelligible but they all belong to this family. This is a family of languages that spreads all the way from Vietnam to eastern India and down to the Malay Peninsula and a little bit up in southern China. There are about 150 separate languages in this family, of which Cambodian is the only one that made it to national language status, unless you count Vietnamese, but that's still controversial.

Q: Well this must have gotten to be quite a hot subject, didn't it, because of the war that was going on? Or didn't it spill over to you field

HUFFMAN: It didn't really at that time. It was of course important in the sense that Cornell had a strong program of Southeast Asian studies, including Vietnamese studies, which was one reason that Cornell kept getting the grants from the Office of Education to run its Center for Southeast Asian Studies and to provide fellowships for graduate students in those fields. Our Indonesian program was probably the biggest and most important part of the program at Cornell, but we also prided ourselves on teaching the national languages of all the major countries of Southeast Asia -- Burmese, Cambodian, Indonesian, Malay, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese.

Q: Well, were you affected by the controversy over Indonesia -- of course that wasn't your area – but as I recall Cornell and the State Department didn't see eye to eye at all.

HUFFMAN: Well, here's where I should be a little diplomatic, I suppose, but of course universities, and especially Ivy League universities, tend to be rather anti-establishment, anti-government, not to say leftist.

Q: Yes.

HUFFMAN: When the professors were critics of our policy in Vietnam and of the Domino Theory and all the rest then of course the graduate students that they turned out tended to have the same points of view. Although not supporters of the Soviet Union, some of the faculty were avowedly Marxist, and would always take the position that there's nothing wrong with Marxism as a political philosophy but that it has never been practiced effectively. I certainly agree that communism is a very seductive ideal. It's easy to see why idealistic students, and their teachers, for that matter, are enamored of it; I would be myself if I thought it would work. As I at that time still had a fairly conservative point of view, I used to tease some of my colleagues that "It's not surprising that you're opposed to the government because that's the function of an academic institution -- to question and oppose the status quo," pointing out the fact that, consistent with this principle, in the Soviet Union the intellectual establishment was anti-communist. And of course there was this famous White Paper that some Cornellians wrote in 1965 which quarreled with the general consensus that what had happened in Indonesia in 1965 was a communist revolt, claiming that it was rather a case of settling scores with former enemies, that it was a quarrel between the liberal and traditional Muslims of Indonesia and so on. This White Paper got not only the professors concerned but Cornell's graduate students declared *persona non grata* in Indonesia, which was

really quite a disadvantage for students who wanted to do research in Indonesia. Cornell graduate students were expected to do one to two years at least of field research in the country of their specialization. I myself spent two years in the field -- the first six months at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London because Cambodian was not taught in any U.S. university at that time, and then 18 months in Southeast Asia collecting data for my dissertation on Cambodian grammar.

Q: This would have been when?

HUFFMAN: This was 1964 to 1966. Vietnam was heating up at this time, but I was rather isolated from it, working as I was in the Mon-Khmer languages of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

Q: How were the mountain folk looked upon in Cambodia? I was in Vietnam a little, slightly thereafter and I know the Montagnards were certainly second class citizens but how about in Cambodia?

HUFFMAN: I think it's very much the same attitude -- that these are uneducated, uncivilized mountaineer people, almost savages. Even Thailand, where you have maybe 8-10 million speakers of Lao up in northeastern Thailand along the border with Laos, the feeling is that these people speak a degenerate form of the standard language. But of course from a linguistic point of view no one language is more degenerate than the other, they are just two varieties that come from a common source. Likewise in Cambodia if you didn't speak the language of the capital then it was a degenerate form of the language. Perhaps I can illustrate it this way – if the Yorkshire dialect of English had become the standard language of the establishment and the Oxbridge dialect were confined to Yorkshire, the current Oxbridge dialect would be considered a degenerate form of the language.

Q: Were there any groups that didn't have a written language?

HUFFMAN: Oh yes. The majority do not have written languages. In Thailand there was a strong assimilationist policy on the part of the government and in this they were aided by the linguists of the Wickliffe Bible translators and the Summer Institute of Linguistics working in those countries. Generally they are quite good linguists who go out and live among the minority peoples and really learn their languages and do very important spade work in describing those languages, but they were accused by anthropologists of colluding with the Thai government by using Thai characters rather than roman phonetics to write these previously unwritten languages. But of course the logic of that from the standpoint of the Thais was that it familiarized them with the Thai alphabet and would provide a bridge to learning to read and write the Thai language, so it made eminently good sense to them.

ACADEMIC CAREER AT YALE (1967-72) AND CORNELL (1972-85)

Q: When did you finish at Cornell?

HUFFMAN: I returned to Cornell in 1966 and took a year to write the dissertation, until June of 1967. The late sixties were really halcyon days for Southeast Asianists because there was a lot of money for language and area studies at that time. I was offered jobs not only at Cornell but at Yale, Michigan, Hawaii, Washington (in Seattle), as well as at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and the Ford Foundation. And of course when I was offered the job at Yale, that kind of turned my head, I thought it would be cool to go to Yale. So I went to Yale as an assistant professor, a tenure track job.

Q: From when to when?

HUFFMAN: I was at Yale for five years, from ’67 to ’72. But Yale’s program collapsed in the early ‘70s when funding dried up. Yale was too clever by half – to meet the requirement of matching funds, they matched Office of Education funds against Ford Foundation funds to run their Southeast Asia program and they hired faculty on those funds. And when those two sources of funds dried up simultaneously, the program foundered and there were six of us untenured assistant professors who had to leave. I didn’t realize when I went to Yale that I had been hired on “soft money,” i.e. grant money. Of course, even if I had understood it, I probably would have gone anyhow, since Yale was a good place to move “from.” About a dozen Southeast Asian programs had been established in the sixties in response the availability of money. We didn’t really need that many programs of Southeast Asian studies, but government funding tends to distort the market. Most of these programs disappeared or were reduced in size, as at Yale. Cornell’s approach was financially much sounder, which is why their program survived and is probably the strongest program of Southeast Asian studies in the U.S. if not in the world. Their Southeast Asia program is not a department as such, it’s a consortium, it’s a program and the faculty are hired on hard money and on line items in the budgets of the various departments. The departments, such as anthropology, history, economics, linguistics, etc. hire faculty with a Southeast Asian specialty (with a little financial encouragement from the Program), and these positions are thus not affected by the vagaries of government funding or NGO support for language and area studies.

Q: Well while you were at Yale, this is the height of the student anti-war activity and all that, did that affect you much?

HUFFMAN: No, it didn’t. You know, Yale was one of those campuses that avoided some of the most violent student protests. The president was Kingman Brewster at the time and I always felt that he was largely responsible for Yale’s avoiding some of the turmoil that you had at Cornell, where you had students taking over the student union building with guns and so on, because Brewster had the ability, I think, to persuade the students that he was on their side. And at the same time I can imagine him saying to the Board of Trustees, “Okay guys, let me handle it.” And so he came out of it unscathed.

I met him again in ’86 when he was the Master of one of the colleges at Oxford and he came to a reception given by the ambassador in London. I introduced myself as having been one of his faculty members the late ‘60s, early ‘70s, and I told him I had always

admired the way he handled the Vietnam protests. By that time he had had a stroke and had difficulty speaking, but he just held up two crossed fingers, implying "I was lucky." Well, I don't think it was just luck.

Q: Well no, it took skill. And a good number of universities didn't handle it well. I mean, they either jumped on the side of the students or were so tough that they made no progress either.

HUFFMAN: Yes well, it caused tensions and divisions at Cornell that they didn't get over for years and years.

Q: Well, after Yale you went where?

HUFFMAN: After Yale I went back to Cornell. While at Yale I had published three books on the Cambodian language. I remember when I wrote the first one I went to Yale Press with it. The editor was a friend of my chairman, Roy Miller (a Japanese specialist), so she called him up and said, "Roy, what am I going to do with this manuscript? Who can read this? Who can referee it?" And my chairman said, "Well, if he's at Yale, he must be good." So Yale Press started publishing my books; they published three of them while I was still at Yale and five more after I moved to Cornell. But then, when I decided I needed to write a Vietnamese intermediate level textbook with the help of a Vietnamese graduate student, Yale turned me down with the argument it would make no sense for Yale to publish an intermediate level of a language without having also the beginning and advanced levels, so I had it published by Cornell's Southeast Asia Program.

In my third year at Yale, my chairman called me in one day and said, "You know Huffman, if you're going to think about promotion, you need to get your dissertation published, revise it for publication, or you ought to go over and do some more research in Southeast Asia." After getting over my initial euphoria that he had mentioned the word "promotion," I realized he was implying that three language textbooks were nice, but I should publish something academically a bit more solid. So I applied to all the various sources for grants – the Ford Foundation, the National Science Foundation, the Office of Education Faculty Grants, Fulbright, and so on. When the director of the Program asked me where I had applied, I said "You know, the usual suspects -- Ford Foundation, NSF, so on. I even applied for a Guggenheim." "Oh," he said, "you won't get that. Those are for senior people. I had one." But lo and behold I got a Guggenheim, which is probably the most prestigious academic grant that you could get. In retrospect, I think I got it for two reasons – first, I think my topic -- a study of Mon-Khmer languages in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia – sounded rather exotic among a sea of nuclear physicists and other geniuses, but also, it must be admitted, being at Yale was not without influence.

Q: Well how about, let's say around '75 and all, when Cambodia collapsed and you had the Khmer Rouge and the horrors of that, with all the refugees heading for the States, did that affect you in any way?

HUFFMAN: Up in Ithaca, New York, not much. We began to get some Indochinese refugees, some Hmong, some Vietnamese, even some Cambodians, but Cornell as an institution was not very much interested in welfare activities. They saw their business as turning out scholars who would push back the frontiers of science and make their contribution on a higher level. I remember that we had a coordinator of the Southeast Asia program who was non-faculty and who got very much involved with the local refugees, organizing sponsorship and training and English as a second language and so on, because she felt that, as a Southeast Asia program, we should be involved. But the Program took a dim view of that; the attitude was that we're not a welfare agency, we're a university.

But the refugee situation did have a certain effect on my research and publication. I had been working on an English-Khmer dictionary for years and years. I had a Cambodian assistant that I had hired at Yale and paid for under contracts from the Office of Education, and the dictionary was finally published by Yale University Press in 1978. Now the justification for Office of Education support for such projects was to provide materials for teaching exotic languages to American students, so the dictionary was not written with a Cambodian audience in mind, but with the influx of Cambodian refugees about 1979, 1980, the sale of the dictionary took off. The some 150,000 Cambodian refugees provided a hot market, and the dictionary was on the best seller list at Yale Press for 26 weeks running. Seeing this demand on the part of the Cambodian refugees for English language materials, I thought maybe the way I could make a contribution was to write a book specifically designed to teach English to Cambodians. So my assistant and I wrote a book called *English for Speakers of Khmer* based on a contrastive analysis of the two languages, which emphasizes those aspects of English phonology and grammar with which speakers of Cambodian would have trouble. When I submitted the book to Yale Press, they said, "How do we know this will sell?" And I said, "Well, the dictionary sold, didn't it? This book should be even better because it's designed specifically to teach English to them." It never sold. It's an excellent book. I mean, Yale agreed to publish it, and I think it's still in print, but it never sold and I think the reason is it's too technical. A famous linguist once said, in writing language materials don't take the students into the kitchen. They don't need that. Just give them the food. The book was not a great success. But all of my books have been pirated in Cambodia. You can go to the Central Market in Phnom Penh and find all my books there in a rainbow of colors -- pink and green and yellow -- different from the originals. Ironically, when I was Public Affairs Officer over in Phnom Penh one of the things I was supposed to do was to preach respect for intellectual property rights. But I wasn't really very upset that these books had been pirated. I was happy that they were being useful, and I wasn't getting much royalty from them in any case. They obviously didn't understand that they were violating copyright because they would Xerox the Yale copyright page along with the rest of it.

Q. How would you compare Yale and Cornell as places to work?

It's funny, the personalities of institutions. I had enjoyed Yale very much. It was a thrill to sit in faculty meetings with the very scholars I had studied as a graduate student. In the tradition of British amateurism, they resolutely refused to take themselves seriously –

they could laugh at themselves. In a kind of reverse snobbism, everyone was referred to as Mr. (never Professor or Doctor), from the president to the janitor. At our monthly departmental meetings at Morie's, the chairman would typically say, "Gentlemen (there were no women), I assume there's no business that can't be handled by the secretaries. Shall we have a drink?" By contrast, at Cornell weekly staff meetings concerned themselves with such issues as who pays for stamps and telephone calls.

Yale was quite decent to me – I had signed a four-year contract as an Assistant Professor, but when I got my own salary through the Guggenheim grant for the fourth year, Yale took the very generous position that they owed me a fifth year – at full salary, even though the program had collapsed by then and I had no teaching duties. So I had a full year to write my books. I also used the year to study Vietnamese intensively. At Yale I taught Thai and introduced Cambodian for the first time at a U.S. university, but at Cornell they had a man for Thai so they wanted me to take over Vietnamese as well. The Vietnamese instructor at Yale, whom I supervised, was not too happy that I required him to teach me intensive Vietnamese, since he was writing a book on Vietnamese poetry, and would not otherwise have had any students. Now, in normal times, after five years at Yale and three books, one could have moved anywhere else with tenure, but in the early 70s there was a mini-depression in academia, and Cornell said, "We'll take you on as an untenured Associate Professor, but we'll see how you do with Vietnamese before granting tenure." But apparently they were satisfied with the job I did because tenure came through at Cornell two years later, in 1974, and I was promoted to full professor in 1979.

Q. So you taught at Cornell until when?

HUFFMAN: I resigned from Cornell and joined USIA in the summer of 1985.

Q. What made you decide to make such a change? Were you getting a little bored with academia? I understand that academic politics can get pretty vicious.

HUFFMAN: Well no, let me defend academia a bit here. I think it's hard to beat the academic life. I mean, the freedom to get up in the morning and say to yourself, "What do I really want to do today and what do I really want to think about and what do I really want to pursue?" That's a luxury that you give up when you leave academia. It wasn't boredom with academia so much as frustration with the fact that I felt that I was over-specialized. I was in a field that was so specialized that only at Cornell did they have a tenured slot in my specialization. I had no mobility. On the other hand I had it made, I was a tenured full professor and I could have sat there the rest of my life. But my research was being read by maybe 40 people in the world. I felt that I had people skills that I wasn't using and that the world sort of was passing me by and that what I was doing was really kind of irrelevant to anything. In addition, I was disenchanted, along with a number of my colleagues, with what they called the Chomskyan Revolution in linguistics.

Q: Oh, yes. My wife has a Masters in linguistics from American U and I remember getting a lot of Chomsky.

HUFFMAN: Oh yes, indeed. Well you know, I was an anthropological linguist and was trained in the belief that language and culture were intimately related, and that you couldn't understand one without the other. Whereas Chomsky came along and most of his people -- we call it the "contemplate-your-navel" school of linguistics -- only speak English and so they formed a theory of linguistic structure based on English. But for some reason Chomsky became an academic fad. He became the great guru, and respectable departments of linguistics all over the country couldn't switch fast enough to the Chomskyan line. We scholars who were in language and area studies felt like fifth wheels, and that's an uncomfortable feeling. Plus the fact that if your department is dominated by the new vogue, the Chomskyan fashion, then a student could finish a PhD only by mastering that brand of theory. Students, while they might like me personally and might be more interested in my field, could not get their PhD with me as their chairman. So I could only serve as the minor member on PhD committees. A lot of us left. I had a colleague who was a full professor of Chinese. He resigned and became the head of Squibb Pharmaceuticals in Shanghai. He was already about 70 when they recruited him, and he said, "Look, I don't know anything about pharmaceuticals." They said, "Never mind. You know the culture, you know the language. The Chinese have great respect for age and for scholarship, so you're going to be the figurehead president. We'll send plenty of technicians over there to make the aspirin, don't worry about that."

So a lot of us were disenchanted with the so-called Chomskyan Revolution, which has now splintered into a hundred different schools. The real revolution in linguistics was when anthropologists and linguists, such as Boas and Sapir, around the turn of the century encountered the complexity American Indian languages in about 1910-20, and realized that these languages had complex features that could not be described in the terminology of European languages. I was at a party one night when the famous old scholar of American Indian languages at Berkeley, Mary Haas, remarked that it's so sad that foreign students from every country are writing English grammars of their languages. Chomsky's interest in grammar originally grew out of the attempts at MIT to develop machine translation. Since they were frustrated with the differences in grammar from one language to another, they wanted to claim that language ability was innate and therefore universal, so that the deep grammar of every language had to be the same. Then they could simply draw lines (rules) from the hypothesized deep grammar to the surface elements, and claim that each language had taken its own path from the deep to the surface grammar. For some reason they couldn't see the obvious circularity of such an argument.

Q. So basically it was dissatisfaction with academia, or your particular field in academia, that persuaded you to join the foreign service?

HUFFMAN: Well, having given you all those perfectly logical reasons why I had left academia, the main reason was that my wife made me do it. She had defected from Romania to Paris in1970, and had come over to Cornell to finish her PhD, where I met

her and married her in 1974. After her PhD she was teaching at Cornell when she got this offer from FSI to be head of the Balkan languages -- Romanian, Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian -- and she accepted the offer. I was horrified; I said, "What do you mean, you're going to FSI? You're the wife of a Cornell professor and I work in Ithaca, New York." I of course had the expectation that, like any good wife, her career was going to take a backseat to mine and besides, you know, there was no comparing a beginning job at FSI with a full professorship at Cornell. "Well," she said, "it's the best thing for my career," and she went ahead with it. Part of the explanation was her background in a communist society, where women were "liberated" and expected to follow their own careers. But of course Eastern European women were not really equal with men -- they had the right to pursue a career but they also had to do all the cooking and housework. And so, to facilitate her career we bought a house in Bethesda and I commuted between Ithaca and Washington for four years so she could follow her career here. I used the situation to justify buying an Alfa Romeo sports car, and I drove it back and forth between Ithaca and Bethesda every weekend. I could make it in six hours door to door.

Q. That can't have been much fun during the winter!

HUFFMAN: Right. I got tired of that, and in addition, my wife kept agitating for me to join the foreign service. At FSI she was teaching diplomats who were going off to exotic places such as Rome and Hong Kong and Beijing. And so, more to humor her than anything else, I came in to the State Department to explore the possibility of some kind of lateral entry, and they said, "Your background is certainly impressive, Professor Huffman, but confidentially you're the wrong color and the wrong sex to come in at mid-level." I went home and told me wife, "Ha ha, they're not seriously interested in me. They made the ridiculous suggestion that I should come in through the exam!" I said "They did say they were interested in you, though." During the latter years of the Carter administration they had a special emphasis on recruitment of women. My wife was intrigued, and went in and interviewed for mid-level entry and got on the roster, but then Reagan came in and there was a freeze on hiring so she never got called. But she passed the exam, she made lateral entry and I couldn't.

Q. You must have passed the exam with no difficulty.

HUFFMAN: By no means. I came through the written with flying colors; I made something like 90, I think, on the first one but I failed the orals twice.

Q. Do you remember what you found most difficult?

HUFFMAN: Oh, yes, the in-basket test. I couldn't seem to get past the in basket-test, I don't quite know why because as an academic, in my office, that was exactly what I was doing every day of the week. And then they changed the in-basket test the third time around and I made it. Not surprisingly, I did best in the cultural cone, but I had done remarkably well in the economic cone. They changed the exam from time to time and that particular year the economics part was made up of very practical questions about mortgages and bookkeeping that I had done all my life so I did brilliantly on the

economics part. I would not have done as well if they had asked me about theories and curves and things like that.

Q. Once you passed, were you called right away?

HUFFMAN: No, not for a long time. You know they tell you you shouldn't give up your day job just because you're taking the foreign service exam. In fact, I gave up on getting in, because I had a Senior Faculty Grant from the Office of Education to go to Thailand for a semester of research, so my family and I decided we'd go to Thailand together for the research grant and then go back up to Cornell. While I was in Bangkok I learned that I had passed the orals, but of course they still had to do the background check. But my wife and I had decided to go back to Cornell, and in fact we bought a house in Ithaca in early 1994. Then during the fall term I was invited to join USIA. This caused quite a quandary, as I had begun teaching courses in the fall term that continued in the spring term, and I didn't feel I could leave in the middle of the year, so I asked USIA to postpone my appointment until the summer of 1985, and they agreed.

As you can well understand, it was quite a traumatic decision to give up my position in academia to start over in another career. But my wife said, "You ought to give it as try. If you don't try it, you'll never forgive yourself." I said, "You mean, *you'll* never forgive me!" So I asked the Linguistics Department at Cornell to grant me a one-year leave of absence in order not to burn my bridges, put our house up for rent, and joined USIA for the June 1985 training unit.

USIA personnel had told me, "If you come in through the exam, we can match your salary." That's some indication of what salaries were like in the humanities, right? I was making about $40,000 in those days. And they said "We can match that under the new Foreign Service Act of 1980 where we can bring you in at the top of a four, but with your languages and background, you'll move up fast." And they were right; I made the Senior Foreign Service in 12 years. But it was quite a momentous decision at the time.

USIA WASHINGTON 1985-86

Q: So you began training in June 1985. What was your impression of the training program?

HUFFMAN: Well, I was a bit sensitive about being, at 51, the oldest member of the class, but they all assured me that it was more and more common for older people to come in. At that time, in 1985, USIA was doing its own training program. As I recall, we did some joint things with State's A-100 but we had nine weeks of training at USIA. They had an office of training, a director of training and I thought it was extremely well done. We were given training in all of USIA's programs of exchanges, the Fulbright program and International Visitors and all those good things as well as how to be a spokesman for an embassy and how to be a press attaché. The whole press thing I always found less congenial, of course, than the cultural part but nevertheless we had to prepare to do that and one of the things they did was to actually put us in front of a camera and

have somebody interview us aggressively to see how we would stand up under the pressure. We were taught something that I've never forgotten and I think every politician knows instinctively -- decide what points you want to make before the interview and that's what your answer is regardless of what the question is. It was a very enlightening experience for me. The whole thing had an air of novelty about it because I'd been in academia for 30 years, and this was new and novel and it was quite gratifying to sort of expand my horizons a bit. You know, it's said that in academia, you get so specialized that sooner or later you know everything about nothing, while in the Foreign Service, as a press attaché you need to know nothing about everything.

Q: Was there any reaching out to your particular talents or not when it came around to your first assignment?

HUFFMAN: I was quite put off when I first began to explore going into the Foreign Service by the fact that they did not seem to value my language and area expertise very much. But I later understood that they're right, I mean, they don't want people with an ax to grind or with an inflexible attachment to the countries of a certain area.

Q: There's a problem with area specialists – you get them in there and you can't get them out.

HUFFMAN: Yes. It was made very clear that you're going to sink or swim as a generalist. If you can't do that then we're not interested in you. And I think that's quite legitimate. Although I think, especially for cultural attachés, it's useful to have some expertise in the history and culture of a country or an area. I've always sort of admired and been a bit envious of the expertise that you found in the Goethe Institutes and the British Councils and the Alliance Françaises around the world, where those people were cultural experts, artists, professors in their own right and they would stay in a certain country or area for 20 years -- there's certain advantage to that.

But, as you know, USIA no longer exists as such. When I came in we were told that the press and cultural sides were a marriage made in heaven, and that you had to be able to be a good press officer and a good cultural attaché and you should serve in both jobs and then work your way up to being the public affairs officer who was in charge of both sides of the house. I never did quite believe that, and I still don't. I always felt that it was an unnatural marriage; it was a marriage of convenience. I always felt that it was not really a good match and that we were vulnerable, really, to attack and to division because many attempts had been made over the years to split us up. And of course we had been split originally with cultural (CU) at State and the Voice of America and the press side separate. So it was not too surprising to me when we were split up, perhaps for the wrong reasons, through the misguided efforts of Senator Jesse Helms, who felt that educational and cultural exchanges were fluff that didn't really contribute to our foreign policy goals. What he didn't understand was that the long-term impact of educational and cultural exchanges is much greater than the day-to-day preoccupations of the other sections of an embassy. Some 200 current and former heads of state and government leaders were

former participants in the International Visitor and Fulbright exchange programs – that pays incalculable dividends for U.S. foreign relations over the long term.

Q: Well what did they do with you? Nine weeks of training and then what?

HUFFMAN: Well, during training I was still working on a book. There's never a convenient time, you know, to switch careers. I was working on a book which was to be my magnum opus and which had been promised to Yale Press by a certain date, I forget whether it was the beginning or end of September. And so I made a special plea at the end of the training -- which would have put us at about the middle of August -- to let me take leave without pay and finish the manuscript before beginning an assignment. And they granted that – I think USIA, being a smaller agency, was always a bit more flexible really than State would have been in similar circumstances. So I sat there in our little apartment up there in Maryland, assiduously typing the final chapter to this book and managed to get it off to Yale Press. So then the pressure was off and I could turn my attention to the foreign service. There were about 25 countries up for bids, some of which would have involved a year of language study before going to post. I had tested at the 3/3 level or above in three languages -- Thai, Cambodian and French. I also tested in Spanish and Burmese but I didn't bother to test in Vietnamese because you were allowed to bring in only 10 language points when you join. So I didn't need to do any language.

Right at that time they needed an acting deputy policy officer in the Bureau of European Affairs. And the agreement was that if I would do a year in the Bureau of European Affairs the quid pro quo was a follow-on in London, which was of course considered a highly desirable posting. They used the argument that this will familiarize you with the workings of the agency and will be a great advantage to you later on in your career. Well, I'm not so sure that that was quite right, but nevertheless I agreed to do it and I became the deputy policy officer with responsibility for security and arms control issues in Europe.

Well, in 1985 under Reagan, the Cold War and all that, security issues were rather important. They were sort of the major thing on our plate and at that time we were engaged in a campaign to get our NATO allies to deploy intermediate range ballistic missiles and there was huge controversy about that in the capitals of Europe.

Q: This was in response to the SS-20s and that sort of thing.

HUFFMAN: Yes. And so not knowing any more about security issues other than the average layman, I had to become familiar with the alphabet soup of arms control talks, such as SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks), CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe), and MBFR (Mutual and Balanced Force Reduction) Talks. One of my jobs was to telephone the PAOs (Public Affairs Officers) of Europe, who were typically rather senior people, and get their views on what was happening and what progress they were making in the promotion of our security objectives in Europe to feed into our progress reports to the Director and the White House. This did give me an

acquaintance with many of the important movers and shakers in the agency and I have to admit that I made some contacts that were later very useful to me.

And then at the end of that, I suppose it was about 9 or 10 months in the European area office, I was sent to London as a JOT (Junior Officer Trainee). This was considered the plum assignment among the 25 or so posts that were up for bid. And so I think that was perhaps a nod to my background and experience, but of course the job did not have any relevance whatever to my background as a Southeast Asian specialist.

POSTING TO LONDON 1986-87

Q: Well, you would have been in London from 1986 until when?

HUFFMAN: '86 to '87 – one year.

Q: And what were you doing?

HUFFMAN: Well, the idea was that, as a trainee you rotate through the various sections of the embassy. I didn't, in a year, achieve universality there but they gave me a number of special assignments, some of which maybe the ordinary JOT would not have been able to do. In other words they saw me kind of as a resource and when a special project came up, they said, "Let Huffman do it." One of the most interesting things I did during my entire stay in London was to write a speech for President Reagan. The English Speaking Union had requested that the embassy send an invitation to President Reagan to come over and address the English Speaking Union in the Guildhall on the 40th anniversary of the Marshall Plan. And of course we didn't have much hope that he would do that if it didn't fit his plans or if he didn't already have a European trip planned, but anyway we had to submit the request to the White House. We suggested as an alternative that he might be willing to do a speech on video which could then be played in the Guildhall up on a huge screen. And lo and behold he agreed to do that. Well, who was going to write the speech? So they said, "Let Huffman do it. He's a former professor of linguistics; he ought to be able to write a bang-up speech." So I settled down to doing the research, the background and I must say I was learning a lot of new stuff. I think it's an advantage when you're learning new material because it's fresh and exciting, whereas if I'd been a specialist in arms control in Europe and the Marshall Plan and so on and so forth, I'm not sure I could have brought the same spontaneity to the project. But when I learned that the United States had given over 13 billion dollars, or 6 percent of our national budget, to Europe after World War II, this was impressive to me; it was a major event in world history.

An amusing anecdote -- while I was writing it we had a dinner party one night and had some of the embassy people and some of my contacts in the cultural community there and the phone rings, my wife said "Frank, it's for you; it's the White House calling." And my guests were highly impressed. I said I'd take it downstairs. It turned out it was some young speechwriter in the bowels of the old Executive Office Building calling me to verify some of my figures and where I got them and so on, but of course I didn't point

that out to the dinner guests when I came back up. I simply said, "Yes, well, I took care of that."

They sent a copy of the video to hand over to the English Speaking Union, and I must say it was an eerie experience to hear the President saying my words. At that point I realized why Reagan was considered such a great communicator -- he delivered the speech as if he were searching for the right terms and then he would come up, unfailingly, with my words, as if from the depths of his emotion.

Another highlight of my tour in London took place while I was doing a rotation in the political section. One of the political officers, Robin Raphel actually, had to take maternity leave and they needed somebody to replace her. Now she was the Asian area watcher in the political section in London and they said, "Well you know, there's Huffman down there in USIS, he has an Asian background, why not let him replace her?" So it wasn't really a training stint at all, I was replacing an actual high level officer and wrote the cables and everything else. Kim Pendleton was the head of the political section, Miles Pendleton, Jr. This was about the time that Irangate broke and Assistant Secretary of State for Near East and North Africa, Dick Murphy, decided that he would convene a conference in London with all the U.S. ambassadors to the Middle Eastern countries. Well, you would think that an event of that kind would call for the attention of at least the head of the political section but no, London was a busy embassy; Secretary Schultz was a regular. I recall that once we had three cabinet secretaries visiting at the same time, Secretary of State Schultz, Secretary of Labor Meese and another secretary whose name I don't recall. So they said, "We'll let Huffman handle Murphy's operation." And so here the assistant secretary of state came with eight ambassadors from the Middle East including Ambassador Pickering, who was ambassador to Israel at that time, and later became ambassador to the United Nations.

Q: Oh yes, Tom Pickering.

Others were Cutler and Kelley; I don't remember all of them. So there I was upstairs ensconced in the office of this senior political officer and looking very senior myself because in years I was, and they assumed that I was the legitimate political officer and they were very deferential -- ambassadors would come in and say "I'm sorry to disturb you, but could I use your phone for moment?," and I'd say, very magnanimously, "Go right ahead, Mr. Ambassador …yes please …no, no, never mind." I couldn't resist a bit of role-playing.

Q: Did you have any contact with the British press, the British foreign office or anything of that?

HUFFMAN: Yes we did, yes indeed.

Q: How did you find that? What were your experiences?

HUFFMAN: We had very good relations with the BBC as well as with the printed press; we would go to their offices to push various issues. I remember meeting the deputy director of BBC and we had a luncheon with him and the other members of our press section. We were comparing the BBC and the Voice of America. Now you know, on the Voice of America we had the practice, and still do, of carrying editorials, preceded by the statement, "The following is an editorial that represents the views of the U.S. government." And they read the editorial, maybe a page long, and then at the end of it they say again, "The preceding was an editorial which represents the views of the U.S. government." The deputy director of the BBC kidded us about that, saying "You know, you Americans, you're constantly throwing it in the face of your audience that you're putting things on there that represent the views of your government. So people think that you're biased. Now, at the BBC, we express our own views all the time but we just don't mention it. You should quit doing that." And in fact I have always argued that they should quit doing those editorials, because they hurt the credibility of VOA as an independent and autonomous news organization.

Q: Sure. Because when you hear that it's essentially a canned announcement, you tend to dismiss it.

HUFFMAN: Right. And we have to face the fact that the BBC is much more prestigious around the world than VOA. It's considered the last word, the most unbiased, independent voice and so on, but in fact I found in working with the BBC in various countries that they definitely had a liberal bias, and had the freedom to put their own spin on things, but I also found that they had more of a tendency to go off half cocked on stories than we did. They would sometimes report things that were not only a little bit to the left, but they hadn't done the necessary spade work to verify the story from various sources.

Q: Any other comments you'd care to make about London?

HUFFMAN: I look back on London very nostalgically – but I find that the further postings recede into the past the more I tend to see them through rose-tinted glasses. But my whole family had a good experience there. We had a very interesting 18th-century townhouse in Hampstead – sort of upscale artists' colony – only a few underground stops from the embassy in Grosvenor Square. All in all, London was an excellent entrée to the foreign service.

APAO RANGOON 1987-89

Q: Well then in '87 whither?

HUFFMAN: Well, it had been arranged before I left Washington that my follow-on post was to be Burma. Ideally a junior officer would go to a post for his year's training and then have a follow-on at that same post. But there was no opening in London, and whoever went to London was going to be there just for the training year, so it was arranged in advance that I would go on to a regular tour in Rangoon. When I joined the

Foreign Service it was not with the express intention of trading on my background in Southeast Asian studies; my purpose was to broaden my horizons and go and live and work areas of the world that I would not have if I had stayed at Cornell. And although Burma was not my specialty in academia, I had studied about Burma and in fact had studied Burmese for two years, so it just seemed like an interesting and appropriate first post for me. Furthermore, the post had a reputation of being extremely family friendly. And it seems to be true that anybody who has served in Burma has a soft spot in his/her heart for Burma. We look back nostalgically on Burma even though the country is in a sad situation.

Q: How would you describe the situation there?

HUFFMAN: Well, the poor Burmese people have been in jail for 50 years. They haven't had the freedom to travel. They've been under this disastrous "Burmese way to socialism," basically a military socialism -- if that's not a contradiction -- certainly a nationalist socialism kind of thing. And the government has been a disaster; as it was essentially a police state, we were limited in the number and nature of public affairs activities we could engage in. For example, they didn't want to let students go to the United States in the Fulbright program because they were pretty sure they wouldn't come back. Of course, they'd be crazy to come back if they could avoid it because they had absolutely no opportunities in that society and that economy. We were severely limited as to what U.S. speakers we could bring over. I remember we did manage to bring over one or two but they were not permitted to have any contact with the students. They would give a talk at the university but students were not allowed to attend, only the staff of the university and pre-approved people were allowed to have contact with these dangerous Western ideas.

But one of the things that we did do with considerable success was put out publications. We had four different publications that we put out. We had a large staff of about 50 FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) in the USIS section. We had a big printing press. Not many people could come to our library; it was rather risky to be seen going into the USIS library. But we did put out all these publications – actually some 10,000 copies a month.. One was a weekly news summary; another one was a collection of stories in special English. But our most important publishing enterprise was a monthly glossy magazine -- probably the highest quality periodical published in Burma -- called *Lin Yaung Chi,* or "Dawn" in Burmese. It contained glossy pictures and feature stories that we would take from various U.S. magazines like Time magazine or National Geographic or Smithsonian or whatever -- in other words, Americana in Burmese. The idea was that as long as we did not overtly criticize the Burmese government, we could put out any information we wanted to about the United States. The only concession that we had to make was that we had to cart all of these copies over to the customs department, the censorship department, and have them stamped, indicating that they had been approved by the censors. Of course they didn't read them, it was just an exercise we had to go through. The Burmese people, as a result of the British colonial experience, by and large were English speakers and had one of the highest levels of literacy in all of Asia. But when this benighted government came into power under Ne Win back in about 1958, at one point they banned the teaching

of English for about 20 years and so there was a generation of Burmese who were mid-level officials and so on who did not speak English. This ban was lifted later on and they began teaching English again in the schools but there was this generation gap, so you could speak English to the old hands and to the young kids but those in the middle didn't know English.

One important aspect of the post was that, although we could not have close contact with the Burmese, nevertheless it's quite a comfortable post for families. There was a nice American club that had all kinds of sports and in fact the PAO was the commissioner of the International Softball League. We would invite teams from all the various embassies to come and play softball at the American club. There were two Burmese teams, a British-Australian team, a Japanese team, and the U.S. embassy fielded a team from the marine guard and two from other sections of the embassy. This was a means of mixing a little bit with the Burmese under the guise of sports.

Another strategy that we used was tennis. When the British were there they built a lot of old, sort of colonial mansion type places and each one had its own tennis court. I had for the first and only time in my life my own tennis court. We were able to invite Burmese over to play tennis and we would have tennis tournaments with the Burmese community. So tennis was a prominent feature of life in Rangoon, more prominent in Rangoon than in any subsequent post in which I served. I had a pro who came and used my court to teach his students; he made money that way and the quid pro quo was that he would give lessons to my family so we all got tennis lessons from a pro. As a matter of fact he had been the Burmese national champion for 11 years, so he was quite good.

Q: Did you have much contact with the government there? You were there, by the way, from '87 to when?

HUFFMAN: I was there August '87 to August '89. No, we didn't. As I say, our contact with the government was circumscribed. We had some contact with some of the university personnel, the head of the library and we tried to send him to the United States on an international visitor tour, but that didn't work out. One thing that we could do was to bring coaches over because the Burmese loved sports. And historically they were really the champions of Asia in soccer and various sports of that kind. Ne Win apparently was a great lover of golf so he had his military commanders build golf courses all over the country. Burma probably has more golf courses per capita than any other Third World country.

Q: I'm told he had people like Arnold Palmer and others over there from time to time.

HUFFMAN: Yes, leading sports figures could come over and conduct training sessions and seminars and give demonstrations. But we weren't able to have much effective contact with the government. Of course, the ambassador could go and make representations to the government, but we had very little impact. One of our interests in Burma of course was interdiction of drugs from the Golden Triangle up there in the north where Burma and Laos and Thailand come together. And so we had a sizeable contingent

of personnel from DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration) in the embassy who were somewhat at loggerheads with the State Department because the ambassador's position was that we had so little at stake in Burma that we could "afford the courage of our convictions," as he put it.

Q: Well did the Burmese media have much to do with you or not?

HUFFMAN: Well yes indeed. As a matter of fact journalists were more, what shall I say, bold and forthcoming and willing to meet with the Americans and with the PAO and so on than were other people. Of course they were punished for it because any time they would publish anything that was the least bit critical of the government they would be slapped in jail. The PAO and I would from time to time meet with the small brave band of journalists up in the second floor of a dingy restaurant somewhere and they would all regale each other with their quarrels and contretemps with the government and how many times they had been jailed and so on. So it was a bit of a dangerous profession to be in but journalists traditionally are more aggressive people and more willing to take risks than the ordinary.

Q: Were you able to travel around the country at all?

HUFFMAN: We had to request permission from the government if we wanted to travel more than 25 kilometers outside of Rangoon. Burma's major tourist attraction is the old 10th century city of Pagan up on the Irrawaddy River and that's one of the things that everybody tries to go see and it was one of the areas of Burma that tourists were allowed to go to, that and Mandalay, the old royal capital, and then later on you were able to go up to Taunggyi in the Shan states. But this left the great majority of the country off limits, especially the more remote northern areas. Burma is a very wealthy country in terms of natural resources and it should logically have been one of the most prosperous countries in Southeast Asia but for the extremely repressive economic and political policies of their government. Of course, this all came to a head in my second year there.

Q: What do you mean by that?

HUFFMAN: In the summer of 1988 there were the pro-democracy demonstrations where students and hundreds of thousands of Burmese were demonstrating in the streets for democracy. The soothsayers had predicted that on 8/8/88, in other words August the 8th, 1988, drastic events would take place. My family and I had been on a train trip – several families had rented a train car, complete with cook, to go up to Mandalay and to Pagan. While we were up there riots broke out in Rangoon and in Mandalay and the other towns we passed through. We came back to Rangoon as soon as we could and rebels were blowing up train tracks, some times just right after we had passed. We finally got back to Rangoon at 8:00 on the fateful morning of 8/8/88. The streets were deserted so we managed to get to our house, but later on an estimated 10,000 people took to the streets in what was just the beginning of massive demonstrations that were to take place over the next few weeks. Government radio reported 31 killed and 37 wounded in "restoring

security." The next day, August 9, the Army, acting under marital law, killed between 40 and 200 demonstrators (estimates varied widely in those days) and arrested 1500.

Foreign journalists were not being allowed in by the regime; a lone TIME photographer had made it in earlier, but was arrested for photographing demonstrations at the Shwedagon Pagoda. As a result, I was being bombarded with calls from journalists representing AP, AFP, Reuters, Washington Post, Daily Telegraph, BBC, etc. from Bangkok, Hong Kong, London and even Sydney. They would typically ask, "What is your estimate of the number of demonstrators today?" I would look out my window and make a rough estimate of the numbers of demonstrators in Mahabandoola Square in front of the embassy. On one day later in August somewhere between 100,000 and 200,000 demonstrators marched through downtown Rangoon between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., ending with speechmaking in front of the embassy.

This was one of the rare times when a mob in front of the U.S. Embassy was not anti-American; in fact when the Ambassador's car left the embassy, the crowd would cheer him, chanting "We want democracy!" and "Freedom now!" The demonstrators congregated in front of the U.S. embassy in the hope that it would provide them both publicity and some security. They were mistaken on both counts. On September 18, the military took over the government (overtly), forming the brutal State Law and Order Council. The soldiers, who had been ordered not to fire on the demonstrators in the hope that they would vent their anger harmlessly, were ordered to shoot to kill, and over the next week killed an estimated 1,000 people in the process of "restoring peace and order."

In my opinion, two events precipitated the crackdown by the government: a group of demonstrators surprised and disarmed a group of soldiers on top of the bank building adjacent to the embassy, and as they had orders not to shoot, they had been drinking, which no doubt made it easier to capture them. The demonstrators, enraged by rumors that soldiers had been poisoning the people's water supply, wanted to kill the soldiers, but Buddhist monks persuaded them to turn the soldiers back over to their commanders. This humiliation, coupled with the fact that the demonstrators were for the first time marching on the Ministry of Defense, led to the crackdown. The generals probably reasoned that if they lost control of the situation, they would lose not only their jobs but their heads as well.

A colleague and I filmed the massacre from the top of the embassy, and I think my video, which we sent out in the pouch to Bangkok and was put onto NBC, was the first footage of the massacres that was seen by the outside world. More people were killed that day than were killed in Tiananmen Square in Beijing a year later, but for some reason the world didn't pay much attention.

Q: What was the security situation for the embassy through all this?

HUFFMAN: After the massacres we broke off relations with the government and in fact families were evacuated out to Bangkok, and later non-essential personnel were evacuated out. I was evacuated out and worked TDY in the Bangkok embassy for a

month before we came back in. But in fact there had been more danger from general anarchy before the crackdown; after the crackdown the military was firmly in control.

But it is rather interesting to me that, after we were forbidden to have any contact with the host government, we were just as busy as before. Rangoon was a mid-size embassy, with about 60 American officers. It makes you wonder what we were doing before. It's a rather sad commentary on our efficiency, but I've come to realize that it takes a lot of effort and resources to maintain a diplomatic mission in a foreign country. That experience reveals that you can be awfully busy in a mission abroad but a great deal of your work is just self-preservation, or bureaucratic wheel-spinning.

Q: Did you in the embassy get any feel for the Burmese military? Was this an educated group or what? Where were they coming from?

HUFFMAN: I think there's general agreement that the military government was a bunch of uneducated clowns. I mean, after Ne Win stepped down then they called themselves the SLORC, which somehow sounds very appropriate, but it stood for the State Law and Order Restoration Council, and they've had various other permutations of that as one general is overthrown and another one takes his place and they give themselves another acronym. The current one is Burmese Council for Peace and Cooperation, which is of course complete Orwellian double-speak. Speaking of Orwell, you know, he wrote quite a good book about Burma called "Burmese Days." And the most ridiculous thing that has come out of Rangoon is that they're going to abandon Rangoon and move the capital to the interior of the country.

Q: Yes, well they have.

HUFFMAN: They're moving the capital to the village of Pyinmana, and they're requiring all of the government civil servants to move 200 miles up there where they will not have access to the moonlighting jobs that are necessary for maintaining their families. They've been told that it's compulsory that they move up there. This is typical of the Burmese repressive police state.

We visited Burma fairly recently, in August 2002, on the way back from a WAE tour in Cambodia, and Rangoon looked very nice and cosmetically cleaned up and whitewashed and everything. And I thought, why does it seem so calm? And finally one of the FSNs at the embassy said, "Well it's because you don't have any motorcycles in Rangoon." I said, "Why is that?" "Because the government forbids." Then we went to Mandalay and the place sounds like any busy Asian city because it's full of motorcycles. The other thing is that nobody is allowed access to the Internet. The government just by fiat says you do this or do that. During our tour there they would constantly re-monetize the currency. There was a huge difference between the official and black market rates for currency exchange so when black marketing got too rampant the government would suddenly announce that the money you have is now worthless. And then they would issue new bills in weird amounts such as 35 kyat denominations and 75 kyat denominations just to

inhibit black market operations, but people who held large amounts of the previous currency were wiped out.

Q: I remember the resistance was led by a woman who later won the Nobel Peace Prize – what was her name?

HUFFMAN: Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of General Aung San. She was just back for a visit to her sick mother and was caught in the uproar. She was sort of drafted by happenstance as the symbol and the spokesman for the democracy movement and her speeches would attract huge crowds that eventually led to the crackdown.

Q: Well while you were there what was the estimation on the part of the embassy on Aung San Suu Kyi? Did she just appear on the scene at that point?

HUFFMAN: Nobody knew much about her. She had never been politically active. She was back there on a visit to her sick mother from London, where her husband was a professor of Tibetan Studies at Oxford. When the demonstrations broke she was sort of put on a pedestal by the people because she is the daughter of the national hero, General Aung San, who was the hero of the resistance against the Japanese in fighting for independence from the British, and who had been assassinated in 1948. She accepted the mantle of the democratic movement and became enormously popular and of course in the elections of 1990 her party, the National League for Democracy, won over 80 percent of the seats in the parliament, but she was not permitted to take power; on the contrary, she was put under house arrest. She was unable to leave Burma to visit her sick husband, who later died, because she knew the regime would not let her back in, and she felt she had an obligation to accept the role that had fallen on her shoulders. We met her once in the airport seeing off her husband and two teenage sons. As you know, she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her efforts on behalf of democracy. But she, and the Burmese people, are still in jail.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

HUFFMAN: Burton Levin was the ambassador and he was an extremely likeable ambassador. I've served in seven posts, and I have never seen an ambassador who was more popular among the staff than Burt Levin. This was due in part because of the battle he fought during the evacuation of embassy dependents. Even though the military by that time seemed to be in control of the situation, the ambassador and the department had made the decision that, after you've just had hundreds of thousands of people in the streets, that could happen again; you could run out of drinking water. There were all kinds of rumors that the military was poisoning the water, and it was a wild time. The safe haven in such situations was supposed to be CONUS (the continental United States), but our families wanted to stay in Bangkok in the hope that they would soon be able to return to post. They all were living in one apartment building for solidarity; teachers from the American school had also been evacuated out, and they were holding classes for the children in various families' apartments. But Ambassador O'Donohue, who was then ambassador in Bangkok and had previously been ambassador to Rangoon, did not

welcome having 100 extra people using the facilities of the U.S. embassy in Bangkok, such as the commissary and the APO and all the rest, and he, along with the undersecretary for administration, Spires, were trying to force the Burmese embassy personnel to go back to Washington. The families were supported in their desire to stay in Bangkok by Burton Levin. So this put Burton Levin up against City Hall, and he lost, of course. As it turned out Levin was perfectly right because there was in the end no reason not to go back to Rangoon, and we did go, so that it would have been enormously expensive and disruptive to have relocated everybody back to the U.S. State argued, of course, that whenever you have evacuations people typically don't want to return to the States. They claimed to have enough experience to know that the average evacuation lasts from six months to a year if not more. But Burton Levin supported our using Bangkok as safe haven. He won the battle but lost the war, but he won the undying loyalty of his staff.

Q: What became of Levin?

HUFFMAN: Well, having antagonized the Department, his career was essentially over, and he left the Foreign Service. Actually became head of the Asia Society in Hong Kong. So he landed on his feet.

Q: Well now, you were talking about these publications we put out, were they having any effect? I mean, obviously you had to be very careful what you were putting out.

HUFFMAN: Well, I think they were extremely influential, extremely popular, even so much so that the glossy that we put out in Burmese, which was sort of the equivalent of Smithsonian Magazine in quality, had a secondary market -- they'd be on sale in the market and were highly sought after. No, I think that that was a very effective program. But of course one of the things that USIS always tried to do was to pick and choose those arrows from our quiver of programs – whether educational and cultural exchanges, International Visitors, English teaching, U.S. speakers, the Fulbright program, book translation programs, small grants to NGOs, etc. – that would be most effective in the particular host country. If you're blocked in one area then you compensate in another where you are able to operate. So while we were limited in the area of the cultural exchanges we expanded in the area of publications.

Q: Did you get many foreign reporters? Could they get in or not?

HUFFMAN: No, it was difficult for them to get in and every once in awhile you'd have some coming in, but usually they wouldn't come in more than once; they couldn't get a journalist visa so they'd come in on a fictitious visa, and once that was discovered then of course they could never get in again. So you had a lot of one-timers.

Q: Well you had built your academic career on being an anthropological linguist -- ethnic groups and tribal languages. Burma is full of tribes up in the hills. What was the tribal situation while you were there?

HUFFMAN: Well, Burma has been at war with the major minorities forever. We had no access to those parts of the country; they were totally off limits. The government was at war officially with the Karen and the Shan and the Kachins and so on. These rebel armies over the years became pretty powerful, and they were also fairly wealthy because of the drug trade because they controlled the areas where drugs were being raised. But the central Burmese government has never been able to bring them to heel. From time to time they go up and burn a bunch of villages, take prisoners and push refugees over the border into Thailand but they're not able to permanently hold those areas. It's understandable that the tribal people in those areas are intensely loyal to their own tribes and they're quite happy as they are; they have no interest in a truce whereby they would come under the heavy-handed control of the Rangoon government – they don't want to be part of the Burmese nation. You see, when the British left, they turned administrative control over to the Burmese, which was simply the largest ethnic group but by no means the only one. They have large Karen and Mon and Shan and Chin and Kachin minorities, each with its own areas and its own armies. The SLORC managed to force ceasefire agreements on many of the ethnic groups, after thousands of minority refugees fled across the Thai border, but the Karen, Shan and Chin armies continue to hold out, along with the All-Burma Student Democratic Front operating on the Thai-Burma border.

Q: Were you getting any information from the tribes while you were there at the embassy?

HUFFMAN: Well, there were of course personnel in the embassy whose business it was to find out what was happening. The stories that you got in the official Burmese press -- and that's about the only press there was -- was that the valiant Burmese army was making great gains against the rebel armies, and the embassy was naturally interested in getting the truth, which was that frequently, not to say always, the Burmese army was routed, and never succeeded really in wiping out the rebels. As I mentioned before, the DEA, whose mission is to inhibit the drug trade, had made planes and helicopters available to the army and in a sense could be seen in certain quarters as collaborating with this repressive government. But of course one reason the government wanted to control the drug areas was so that they too could benefit from the drug trade. So there was a certain conflict of interest between the ambassador and DEA. USAID closed down its operation in Burma as a result of the massacres, but DEA did not. The ambassador wanted them to close down as well but they persisted and they apparently had sufficient influence in Washington that they could win the struggle with State.

Q: One final question before we leave Burma. Did you find you were able to put to use your academic background, either with contacts in Burma or within the embassy?

HUFFMAN: Well yes, in sort of tangential ways. I knew who the academic experts on Burma were and who would be good contacts as speakers or as Fulbrighters. When we were sent Fulbright applications from various scholars in the United States I could pretty well evaluate them, I knew their strengths and weaknesses and that sort of thing. I was also able to advise not only the PAO but the ambassador as well on the most important

scholarly sources on Burma and where they might find information on this and that. But as far as interacting with ethnic minorities was concerned, I wasn't able to do that at all.

DIRECTOR AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER MARRAKECH 1989-90

Q: Okay. Well then you went to Morocco. This sounds like at last you were getting out of the Southeast Asia box you had been in for many years. You were there from when to when?

HUFFMAN: Well, I was there from 1989 to 1990. As it turned out I was there only one year because I curtailed. During my second year in Rangoon I began the bidding process and I bid on Kinshasa, where they needed an IO (Information Officer). Of course, in those days Kinshasa was a more desirable place than it is now, plus it had a number of things going for it from my point of view. It would have been a two grade stretch for me so career-wise it would have been good. There was plenty of opportunity for spousal employment in the Embassy. It was a Francophone post and I had French. It suited me from many points of view and in fact the director of the Africa bureau called me up and encouraged me to bid, and said "I'd like to have you in that job." But Personnel didn't go along with it. They objected that it would be a two grade stretch, even though it was clear they had no other bidders at the time. Then I tried for Lima until my career counselor pointed out that it was a danger post.

Q: Because of the Shining Path rebels?

HUFFMAN: Yes, the Sendero Luminoso. Then one morning I had a call at three a.m. (Washington never quite figured out what time it was in Asia) and they said, "How would you like Marrakech?" It was totally unknown to me and, as you say, out of my field of experience, but my wife was delighted because it sounded quite romantic and exotic. And interestingly, as I look back on all my posts, which were London, Rangoon, Marrakech, Paris, Phnom Penh, and Wellington, Marrakech stands out as the most exotic. Now if you'd asked most people which they consider more exotic, Morocco or Burma, they'd certainly say Burma, but for me Morocco, being in North Africa, and being a Muslim country, was very different from the laidback Buddhist cultures I was familiar with in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Burma. The job was to be director of the American Cultural Center in Marrakech. We no longer had a consulate in Marrakech. We had a consulate in Casablanca, but former consulates in Tangier, Marrakech and Fez had been closed.

So I agreed to go down there as BPAO (Branch Public Affairs Officer). What this entailed was putting both of our kids in the French lycée because there was no American school. My wife, being European and Francophone, was all for this. My daughter was seven years old, my son was 13. My son had been in the French nursery school here in Washington, Lycée Rochambeau in Bethesda, but he had been in an English-speaking school in London and the American school in Burma. My daughter, who was seven years old, took to French language like a duck to water because she didn't know any better. It was as if she thought, "So that's what you do in school, you talk in this funny language."

So she did quite well, but my son did not adapt well at all to the French system. For example, in math class he might get the correct answer but if he didn't go through the steps prescribed by the French system or if he didn't put his name at the right place in the upper right hand corner of the page he'd get zero. Age 13 was the worst age to take a kid to into a new system, and he just couldn't deal with it. He became very upset and withdrawn and was doing things like breaking out windows with a baseball bat. I wrote to Washington and I said, "You know, it's not working here. After our first year I want to curtail." This was not looked on favorably by NEA (Near Eastern Affairs). The area office said, "Look, you bid on it knowing you would have to put your children in the French school, so now why are you complaining?" I wrote back and said "Well, you know, I made a mistake. And intelligent people, when they make a mistake, take steps to correct it." I pulled what few strings I had and got a job in Paris. But the director of NEA, who was an old Middle Eastern hand, the son of missionaries and a bit puritanical, was reported to have remarked that it sends the wrong signal when an officer can bail out of a job and land in Paris.

Q: Well let's talk a bit about Marrakech at the time.

HUFFMAN: Yes. Whenever you mention Marrakech people say, "Oh, my favorite city in Morocco!" Well, yes, it is a fascinating place to go visit. With its souk (market), its desert, pink palaces and all the rest, it's very mysterious – where North Africa blends into Sub-Saharan Africa. We had a nice house set in a "palmeraie" (a grove of palm trees, but rather pitiful compared to the lush tropical vegetation we were used to in Southeast Asia). Marrakech had about 30 tourist-class hotels, and received flights of tourists directly from Paris, Madrid and other cities in Europe. We were about an hour from skiing in the Atlas mountains to the south and an hour and a half from the beach at Agadir.

Q: What did the job involve?

HUFFMAN: As Director of the American Cultural Center, I was the only official American in the city. Dar America (America House) was located on a palm-lined boulevard in an area of hotels, and was a quite pleasant place to work. We had a marvelous USIS library with 8,000 members. Students and teachers from the universities relied on it heavily. We had programs, we had speakers, we showed American films. It should have been an ideal post. One problem, however, was that since we didn't have a consulate I was the embassy's man in Marrakech and the king, Hassan II, would spend three to four months a year in his palace in Marrakech (he had 16 palaces but was partial to Marrakech), so when he was in Marrakech, the capital of Morocco was Marrakech so that visitors to the embassy, CODELs, everybody else came to Marrakech and I was in a sense the control officer for the embassy in Marrakech.

Among the visitors I received were Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and his party – I helped brief him on Moroccan culture in the luxurious Mamounia Hotel before his visit to the palace. I received Senator Daniel Moynihan and his delegation as well, and served as interpreter for Mrs. Moynihan during their visit to the royal palace. I organized a reception for Moynihan and the American ambassador with all the movers

and shakers of Marrakech, and about two hours before the reception Moynihan's chief of staff called to say that Moynihan was too tired to attend the reception. I pointed out that the most prominent people from Marrakech and the palace had been invited, and it would have serious repercussions for U.S.-Moroccan relations if the Senator were not to attend. Finally Senator Moynihan did attend, was quite gracious to the guests, and the evening was saved. Frequent congressional delegations included Congressman Charles Rangel of New York and a party of 37 – their primary interest in Marrakech was shopping in the souk. But the other thing was that almost every weekend, along about 5:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon, I'd wait for it, the call from the ambassador, who would say something like, "Frank, you know, my mother's in town and we want to come down to Marrakech and I wonder if you could arrange a tour for us like you arranged when my cousin was over here, and make reservations at that restaurant there in the souk where they have the performance of the belly dancers, and get a guide for us to go into the souk." And he'd say, "Of course I'd like to invite you and your wife to come along." Well, you couldn't use representational funds to accompany the ambassador and his American guests to an expensive restaurant. We did it two or three times and then decided we couldn't afford it any more. So the job was kind of half USIS work and half tour guide, and I wasn't terribly happy about that.

Q: Well, you say 8,000 people belonged to your center, but where did Marrakech fit in the scheme of things, looking at it as a Foreign Service officer? Were we reaching the movers and shakers or did this seem to be kind of a localized thing where the commercial and political people would be in Rabat or up in Casablanca?

HUFFMAN: Yes, that's true except for the three or four months of the year when Marrakech was essentially the royal capital and the movers and shakers came to Marrakech. But you're right; the clientele for the USIS center were primarily university students and faculty. They had a major university in Marrakech as well as several lycées. In addition we had a number of Peace Corps volunteers in Marrakech and surrounding towns and villages where we worked, and they liked to rendezvous at the American Center. The French, who of course for historic reasons had a heavy presence in Morocco, had built one of the largest Alliance Française installations in all of North Africa in Marrakech. But they charged a membership fee and they didn't have as many members as we did so it turned out we could collaborate very effectively. All we had was a small colonial-style house painted pastel pink (as most everything is there) with a library and offices upstairs and with a very small program area, so I would arrange with the French to hold programs in their magnificent auditorium and they would that way have access to our membership and get them into the French cultural center.

The other thing about Marrakech was that just north of there was an alternative back up landing site for the launching of space shuttles from Cape Canaveral. So whenever there was a launch, about 60 NASA people arrived in town, and in case of an emergency landing, my office would become the press center for the event. That never in fact happened during my tenure there, but during the Atlantic space shot to Jupiter, the astronaut Dick Covey came over and we had him to dinner. My son Christopher was

thrilled to meet an actual astronaut, and was even more pleased when Covey gave him an autographed picture.

Q: Did we have much of an exchange program? Were many students going to the United States as opposed to heading for Paris?

HUFFMAN: Yes. Of course the major operation was in Rabat but it was my job to identify and nominate promising candidates for Fulbright exchanges from the southern Morocco region. And whenever Rabat would have a U.S. speaker he would come down to Marrakech if it was relevant to our audiences. And I had the option of asking for specific kinds of speakers and specialists that I thought would be useful in Marrakech. We had a number of commercial interests that I had to deal with. Marrakech was a popular center for conventions and conferences, and I was frequently asked to represent the embassy at conventions concerning tourism, the environment, or trade relations and things that USIS officers didn't normally get involved in. So as I say I was kind of a general factotum down there and that was sort of interesting as well.

Q: Well did you find yourself having to do the equivalent of consular work, protection and welfare?

HUFFMAN: I didn't get into that very much, other than helping the occasion tourist report a stolen passport to the police. But we were kind of a rallying point and a refuge for the Peace Corps who were there. They would come to our library and our programs, and we gave them the privilege of checking out books and videos. As a matter of fact, there was an older couple in the Peace Corps who became our good friends. They lived in a colorful traditional Moroccan house in the souk. The husband had been a professor of German literature, a music teacher, a mutual fund administrator, and was in addition an excellent tennis player and bridge player and was teaching American studies at the university. I used him as a speaker. He would give marvelous lectures about the controversy over Christopher Columbus (hero or villain?) and American studies in general. I would send him around to our American Cultural Week presentations in outposts over in Agadir and other towns in the area. In addition, he was performing a marvelous service to us by directing a chorus made up of Moroccan university students who practiced at Dar America, and who would sing American show tunes. They'd go around and perform in various venues, including Dar America.. Thus they became an arm of our public diplomacy.

Q: Did the king ever reach out to you? Did you ever have any contact with the king?

HUFFMAN: Well, yes, when I would accompany CODELs to the palace, I would come in contact with the king and I shook his hand and so on. But not a great deal.

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS, USIS PARIS, 1990-93

Q: So after Marrakech you were assigned to Paris, right? When were you there?

HUFFMAN: Three years, from the summer of 1990 to the summer of 1993. But Paris, as a non-hardship post, was a four-year assignment for USIS officers. I stayed three. I curtailed out of Paris. I curtailed three times in the course of my career. My mentor at USIA said, "Huffman, never extend because they'll forget about you, move often, and every time you move, you move up."

Q: Okay, Frank, what were you doing in Paris and how did you get there?

HUFFMAN: Well, I had served in London for Bud Korngold, who's one of the legendary super PAOs of USIA – former Newsweek bureau chief in Moscow, that sort of thing -- and by the time I was leaving Morocco he was PAO Paris. So I contacted him and of course he knew me and knew my work and was eager to have me come to Paris and he managed to pull a few strings and get me there.

My job in Paris was Director of Programs. Now, Paris was unusual in that it had a tripartite organization of the USIS post. Most USIS posts, have a press section headed by an IO and a cultural section headed by the CAO (Cultural Affairs Officer), both supervised by the PAO. In Paris they had press, cultural and programs. I was head of programs, which meant primarily speakers and seminars. The U.S. Speaker Program used to be called the AMPART Program, or American Participant Program. I programmed about 50 speakers a year in Paris. These speakers came from three different sources. Primarily they came from our office back at USIA that recruited U.S. experts in various fields -- academics, government officials, professionals -- and supplied them to posts in response to posts' demands for particular kinds of speakers to meet the public diplomacy challenges of that particular country. Only about one third of my speakers came from this office. A second one-third came from what we call TOOs, Target of Opportunity speakers. And being Paris, of course, this was a rich source of expertise because you have a lot of prominent people going through Paris, and we would prevail on them to come and give a couple of talks for the U.S. Embassy. And the third source, not quite as prominent as the other two, was embassy officers themselves. Whenever I got a request from a university or a think-tank for somebody to discuss trade issues or security issues or the Chinese-American relationship or arms control in the post-Cold War world, I would go to the political section or the economic section and I'd say "Look, could you go out on Thursday night and talk to such and such an academic group?" Those Foreign Service Officers who could lecture in French were particularly useful. Finally, I myself would go on occasion; I think I gave maybe half a dozen lectures in French while I was there. Having been trained as an anthropologist, my topic was usually a comparison of U.S. and French culture and cross cultural communication, or as is so often the case, miscommunication.

So I was able to field about 50 speakers a year. Some of the speakers we programmed were Ambassador Vernon Walters, Librarian of Congress James Billington, Barry Bosworth and William Chace of the Brookings Institution, Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor (USIS of course played a subsidiary role in her visit), Ambassadors John Maresca, Joseph Greenwald, Maynard Glitman, and John Kornblum. Several of the embassy officers I programmed later became ambassadors, such as Alexander Vershbow

and Neils Marquardt. And of course I had a very professional staff. I had three French Foreign Service Nationals working for me, each of whom was a specialist in her particular field. One was a PhD in political and military security affairs and was a member of the Institut Français des Relations Internationales, the French Institute of International Relations, and she was a professional in her own right. Another one was a PhD in economics and she was a member of the various economic organizations, well-known to her academic and governmental colleagues. The third one was a specialist in American studies. Whenever we recruited a particular speaker from Washington, one of them would go to their counterparts in the French government or in academia, at the Sorbonne, or the Ecole Polytechnique or Science Po and say, "Would you like to have such and such a speaker?" The French are extremely knowledgeable about who are the prominent people in their fields and there was great demand for Ambassador Walters as a speaker because in addition to a half a dozen other languages he spoke fluent French.

Q: Translated for Eisenhower. As a matter of fact I think it was General de Gaulle at the time when they were both making speeches and Walters translated, de Gaulle looked at him and said, "Tres bien, Walters."

HUFFMAN: I had an interesting contretemps with Ambassador Walters. I was his handler, and he was going to be available over several days. He had an apartment of his own on the Champs-Elysées; he was in Paris often enough that he had his own pied-a-terre there. And when he had finished his program at the French Institute of International Relations and the various venues where he was speaking, he was to catch a flight out of town the next day so I sent one of the USIS drivers to pick him up at his apartment and deliver him to Charles de Gaulle airport. Well, about a half hour later I had a call from General Walters, saying "Where's that driver?" I said, "Well, I sent him a half hour ago; I don't know what happened." "Well you better get somebody here pretty soon or I'm going to miss my plane." I said, "Yes sir, I'll certainly locate him or if I can't find him I'll send another car." So I got another car and went up to General Walter's apartment where he was supposed to meet my driver and my driver had apparently misunderstood exactly where he was supposed to meet the General, but to make a long story short they hadn't gotten together. And General Walters was fuming. I got them together and apologized profusely, and as he was getting in the car the driver decided he would put the window up on the passenger side. But General Walters had his hand on the window so the window went up and mashed his fingers. By that time General Walters, who does not suffer fools gladly, was turning the air blue. "Huffman, who do you work for? I'm going to give him an earful!" I was devastated, but I learned an important lesson. When I discussed this with my colleagues, they said, "Huffman, you know, a man like General Walters, you don't send a driver to take him to the airport, you accompany him to the airport." And I realized, "Yes, well, okay, that was a mistake."

Q: Oh boy. Well, with all these lectures, what worked, what didn't work from your impression? How did they go over with the French?

HUFFMAN: Well, you know, I don't think a lot of French were persuaded against their will. They tended to have a lively question and answer period but the French were very

polite and very civil and you'd have an academic discussion. I think they served an important purpose in sort of reassuring certain audiences that we were not totally crazy and in modifying some of the more virulent anti-Americanism that we encountered there. Paris of course is a highly desirable post and everybody wants to go there, but from the standpoint of my function, which was to "tell America's story to the world," this was one of the most difficult of all my assignments in the Foreign Service because the French didn't want to hear America's story. In fact they felt that America could use a "mission civilisatrice" from the French.

I'll give you an example. As I said, my staff was highly professional, but we had just had a speaker from the U.S. Trade Representative's Office discussing the Uruguay round of trade negotiations of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) and we were discussing agricultural supports and so on, which of course are still being debated 20 years later. But I overheard my program assistant, the economist, sort of agreeing with one of her French colleagues that the reductions of tariffs on agricultural was not a good thing for France. And I took her aside afterwards and I said "Sylvie, how are we going to be effective if even my own staff doesn't support American foreign policy objectives with our French public?" And so we argued and I said "Look, don't you think that the French would be happy if they could pay less for their groceries at the supermarket?" She said, "Listen, I've lived in the United States and I've tasted your supermarket tomatoes and we French don't want any of them." She had a pretty good point as a matter of fact. For the French, eating, I think, plays a far more important role in their daily life than it does in the United States. You might say we eat to live, they live to eat. But cuisine is one of the very important aspects of French culture, and they would rather pay more for a good tomato than to pay less for a tasteless tomato.

Q: What about the Gulf War? Did that involve you at all?

HUFFMAN: Yes, the press section was heavily involved in responding to the local and international media concerning the war. And there were increased numbers of terrorist incidents around the world at the time of the Gulf War, so the embassy was on high alert and we had to take all kinds of precautions. The French, after a period of fence-sitting, turned out to be pretty hard-nosed in the Gulf, and the French military wanted to go on into Baghdad at the end. Who knows, maybe they were right.

Q: Did you find any particular subjects particularly contentious?

HUFFMAN: Well yes, I would say the trade issues were the most contentious really. Political issues not so much. We were pretty much in sync on security issues. Whenever we had a specialist in military affairs who came and talked to the French military, they were in remarkable agreement on our position. And while France was not in NATO nevertheless they were supportive of NATO.

Q: They weren't in the military but they were in the political side.

HUFFMAN: Yes, exactly. They withdrew from the military side in 1966. The NATO headquarters at that time were in the building now occupied by one of the branches of the University of Paris, University of Paris Nine, also called Dauphine. One of the most interesting things I did while in Paris was to lead a delegation of French mid-level politicians on a NATO tour where we visited NATO and SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe) in Brussels, various arms control negotiation groups in Geneva, and a joint NATO military base in Oslo. I had led a similar tour for British academics while posted to London. These tours were co-sponsored by USIA and the U.S. Mission to NATO, in the interest of building support among young politicians, academics and journalists for NATO and U.S. defense policies.

But I'd say the most contentious issues were in the field of trade and economics and negotiating the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. We were always sort of in contention with them on that and as a result we brought over many speakers and specialists in trade from academia and from the U.S. Trade Representative's Office, most of whom were quite rational and credible people who didn't advocate extreme positions or anything like that and we were able to have civilized discussions with the French over these trade issues.

Q: Did you get any feel for the university system there? As you'd been a professor in the American system, how would you compare the two systems?

HUFFMAN: Well, the French system is much more elitist than ours. Entrance to university is much more competitive, as a result of which only about 30 percent of secondary school graduates go on to higher education, vs. about 60 percent in the U.S. The French like to believe that they have the best schools in the world, but that can be said only of their Grandes Ecoles – the Ecole Polytechnique, Sciences Politiques, Hautes Etudes Commerciales, Ecole Nationale d'Administration, etc. – which are highly competitive and are typically attended only by the elite of France. That's one of the things that came to a head in the recent ethnic riots in France; the students were saying that only French, white, elite can get into these schools and as a result the country is run by this revolving elite at the top regardless of which party is in power. I used to compare the two systems in my talks on cross-cultural communication. I would point out that American believe that everybody should have access to higher education, but that some educators go too far in claiming that everybody *should* have a higher education. The problem with this is that if everybody gets a higher education, then it is no longer higher. But in spite of our problems, foreign students still flock to our universities. We must be doing something right, since 30 percent of all Nobel prizes since the founding of the prizes have been awarded to American scholars.

In my speeches I would talk about cultural differences between the Americans and the French in a humorous vein. The French usually describe Americans as open and friendly and practical and so on but they also see us as loud and aggressive and naïve. Conversely, Americans tend to think the French as artistic and stylish and sophisticated, but at the same time think of them as rude, chauvinistic and cynical. And I would point out that there's always some truth to stereotypes. Charles de Gaulle is famously known for having

said that the Germans are all talent but no genius, while the French, alas, are all genius but no talent. As examples of cultural differences I would talk about the fact that the French shake hands a lot. If a Frenchman meets a friend in the morning he shakes hands. If he meets him again in the afternoon he shakes hands again. If he meets him that night he shakes hands again. I said that in the United States we don't feel the need to shake hands with each other more than about once every week and that's usually when you see somebody at church. Also the French custom of kissing a lady on both cheeks, twice, sometimes three times, sometimes four -- four is becoming more and more popular now. I pointed out that most Americans are uncomfortable with that. To me it seems insincere, but if we had a French couple to my home for dinner and he kissed my wife on both cheeks I have to sort of do as the Romans do, because if I don't he'll think I don't find his wife attractive. These are all trivial little differences that don't really affect the essentially common background of the two countries.

Q: Well then, as an anthropologist, how did you see the French political system? You know, from my perspective and not a close one, there seems to be a sort of divide but they call themselves right and left. I mean, did you see French society changing to meet the demands of the future?

HUFFMAN: Yes, there tend to be two distinct camps in French society, but perhaps less radical at the extremes than in Great Britain. But in France, yes, there were definitely changes going on every day. For example I think they have had to adapt to some American business practices to try to help improve French competitiveness, which is hampered by very strong labor unions. Of course, the French are a rather volatile people. If the government does something they don't like they go out in the streets. If you reduce farm subsidies they're going to dump rotten tomatoes at the door of the prime minister. I think it was de Gaulle that said "How do you rule a country that makes 328 kinds of cheese?" But of course the divide that is opening up is between the traditional French people and the immigrants, mostly from North Africa.

Q: And they hadn't really arrived in the great numbers when you were there.

HUFFMAN: No but they had become a significant minority even by the early '90s.

There's another difference that I used to talk about in my contrast of the United States and France and that is ethnicity. There's something unique about the United States in that we all came from somewhere else, and to say you're an American doesn't mean anything ethnically or racially. To give a personal anecdote, when my wife defected from the communist regime in Romania in 1970, she headed straight for Paris, because the Romanians are great Francophiles -- educated people in Romania typically speak French. She got a job at UNESCO, but after six months she realized that she would never be French; she would forever be a Romanian living in France, whereas in the United States she could be an American. She could be one of the 30 million people in this country who were born abroad. So the designation "American" does not have the same ethnic significance as do the words "French" or "German" or "English." Those words have a clear ethnic connotation whereas American does not. I have always thought that's one of

the most interesting differences between the U.S. and France, and most other countries, for that matter.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

HUFFMAN: Ambassador Walter Curley.

Q: How was he as ambassador?

HUFFMAN: He was quite good. As you know, traditionally the big posts like Paris and London and Rome are patronage posts, they're usually given to wealthy supporters of the administration, and Walter Curley was no exception – he was an investment banker who had supported the Bush administration. But he was quite likeable and he had an uncanny ability to remember people's names and who they were. He had maybe 1,000 employees in the embassy but he'd meet one of them on the steps and call them by their first name. He'd meet me on the steps, and say, "Good morning, professor, how are you?" He knew the story. He was also quite a joker. When I was first introduced to him by the PAO, he said, "Huffman, you gave up a job as a full professor at an Ivy League university to do this? I don't think you're smart enough to serve in my embassy." I hope he was joking. But I think he did not have a great deal of access to or impact on the host government. He fulfilled all his duties as ambassador and represented the country perfectly well but he did not have the profile that I think the French would have liked. By contrast, his successor, Pamela Harriman, was extremely well known and had known socially the major players in French politics and called them by their first names. She spoke quite good French and was, I think, a very effective ambassador. But she arrived just shortly before I left post.

POLICY OFFICER, USIA WASHINGTON, 1993-95

Q: Well then, you left there in '94?

HUFFMAN: '93. Should have left in '94 but I curtailed by one year because my wife and I both had parents who were seriously in need of medical care and we just felt that we had to come back to Washington for awhile and take care of those things. My request to curtail out of Paris after three years rather than the normal four years that USIS officers typically served in a non-hardship post was accepted fairly easily because it's very easy to find somebody to replace you in Paris. So we came back to Washington for what was to be a Washington tour at USIA.

Q: What did you do back here in Washington?

HUFFMAN: I was appointed policy officer in the Office of Policy and Evaluation for the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs. This was considered a "thinking" rather than an "operational" position. Basically the job was to evaluate the effectiveness of various educational and cultural exchange programs and make recommendations for how they could be improved. One of the more interesting things that I did was to serve on the Waiver Review Board for the J Visa Program, which was administered by the E Bureau

(Educational and Cultural Exchange). J visas were given to official visitors, that is foreigners who come to this country through some official government exchange program, such as the Fulbright program, the International Visitor Program, and various other short-term training programs. One of the requirements of the J visa was that they return to their own country for at least two years following their training or study in the United States. The rationale for this rule was that the purpose in bringing them over here for training was so that they could go back and help their own countries, but of course there was tremendous desire on the part of many of these people to stay here once they got here. Holders of the J visa could petition to have the two year return-to-country rule waived on several grounds, such as the threat of political persecution or danger if they returned to their country, or that they could contribute to the needs of the U.S. government in some capacity that could not be filled by a U.S. citizen. We were directed to be extremely tough in the application of the rules. Some of them had managed to stay here for 20 years. They might have a family and children and so on but sometimes we had to apply the law and send them back because, after all, they had not observed the requirements of the visa.

But I found working in Washington very unfulfilling, not to say boring. I didn't resign from Cornell to work in Washington. So when the job of PAO in Cambodia came open, I thought "Ah ha, here's my ticket out of Washington!" (I should mention that my wife's father had passed away in the meantime and so that was no longer a pressing issue.) I served only 18 months in Washington, so you could claim that I had curtailed out of a job for the third time (after Marrakech and Paris) because normally a Washington tour was two to three years before you could get back out to the field. As I said before, when I joined the Foreign Service I did not intend really to try to maintain any expertise in Southeast Asia; in fact, I wanted to go and live and work in parts of the world other than Southeast Asia, but I saw this as an opportune moment to trade on my background in Cambodia, which had been my specialty in academia.

PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICER, CAMBODIA, 1995-97

Q: So you were in Cambodia from when to when?

HUFFMAN: From January 1995 to January 1997. A January start was off cycle, but they wanted to fill the vacant position.

Q: What was the situation like in Cambodia when you got there?

HUFFMAN: Well, there was a great deal of political turmoil. You have to go back a little while to explain what the situation was. The Khmer Rouge, from 1975 to 1979, led one of the most extreme agrarian revolutions in history; they had emptied the cities and destroyed money and murdered all those people who were educated, or who were in any way associated with the elite of society. Just how many people lost their lives under the Khmer Rouge continues to be debated but estimates range between one and two million, which would have been roughly about 30 percent of the population of the country at that time. It was a revolution that got out of control. The intensity of the reform differed from one part of the country to another, depending to a certain extent who was in charge. There was a lot of getting even taking place, a lot of the poor people rising up and saying okay, it's really okay to kill these wealthy people and these white shirts and these urbanites

who have always oppressed us. Some experts on the situation feel that it was not so much that Pol Pot personally ordered all of the executions, it's just that things got out of control and he wasn't able to control the situation. Ironically, of course, Pol Pot and Ieng Sary and Khieu Samphan and all of the leaders of that revolution had acquired their revolutionary ideals studying in Paris, but they took it to a much greater extreme than even the Maoist agrarian revolution in China. Then the Vietnamese came in after the Khmer Rouge had been in power for almost four years. The Vietnamese invaded in 1979 and basically pushed the Khmer Rouge out westward toward Thailand, and many of them escaped over the border into Thailand. The Vietnamese installed a puppet government, made up of people who had been in exile in Hanoi. The U.S. government supported the three Cambodian opposition groups along the Thai border – basically the royalists, the democrats, and the Khmer Rouge. For political reasons we supported the Khmer Rouge for the Cambodian seat at the United Nations rather than that of the Vietnamese puppet government installed in Phnom Penh, which is one of the darker periods of U.S. policy.

Q: Yes.

HUFFMAN: Basically we were still piqued about Vietnam; the rationale was that Vietnam had invaded a sovereign country and their puppet government should not be recognized. But some contrarian historians think that the Vietnamese should have been thanked for what they did. But the Vietnamese were not able to completely expel the Khmer Rouge and finally it became such an economic and military burden to them to run the country that they withdrew a decade later, in 1989, leaving in power the people they had installed. Of course a major reason for their withdrawal was the collapse in the mid to late eighties of monetary support from the Soviet bloc.

So when I got there, you had had an election following the Paris Peace Conference in 1991 (which took place actually while I was in Paris and I was involved in that to a certain extent). The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia, usually referred to as UNTAC, from '92 to '93, mounted one of the largest UN operations in history, with 20,000 personnel and at an estimated cost of $2 billion. They succeeded in administering an election in May of 1993. There were three major parties, one being the Cambodian People's Party, represented by Hun Sen, head of the former communist regime installed by the Vietnamese, another was the royalist party headed by Ranariddh, son of Prince Sihanouk, and the third was the Buddhist democratic party headed by Son Sann, which was perhaps the party favored by the U.S.. In the elections, it turned out that the Royalists actually won and the CPP (Cambodian People's Party, Hun Sen's party) came in second. But the CPP refused to accept the result and in fact there was a movement of six provinces in the east to secede from the country. Finally with the help of the king they compromised, with the king saying, "Look, we'll have two prime ministers and you can share power; let's just overlook the fact that the Royalists won; you boys be good now and Ranariddh will be the first prime minister and Hun Sen will be the second prime minister." They also had two Ministers of Defense and two Ministers of the Interior. Sihanouk was made King as a symbol of the unity of the country, but he was pretty much a figurehead. So the situation when I got there was that the two main parties were

competing for power and not much was getting done in terms of the efficient running of the country.

Things were pretty tense, given the fact that the struggle against the Khmer Rouge was still going on. The Khmer Rouge were still holding out in the mountains of the north and west, the Royal government troops were unable to definitively wipe them out. And they would kidnap some Westerners from time to time. There was a notorious case where they kidnapped -- I think it was a Frenchman, a Brit and an Australian -- off of a train heading down to Sihanoukville and finally they murdered them. So it was a time when things were pretty dangerous. Plus of course there was a terrible problem in Cambodia with landmines where 200-300 people a month were getting legs blown off from landmines that had been left behind from the various wars. It was estimated that there were roughly 10 million landmines in a country of only nine million people, and there are as a result some 30,000 amputees in Cambodia.

Our objectives in Cambodia were basically to support the idea of transition to democracy, an independent judiciary, transparency in government and in business dealings and so on. We had a speaker one time who came over and said that there's a inverse relationship between foreign direct investment and the amount of corruption in a country, and that if all the fundamentals were in place, foreign direct investment would flow in and would dwarf any aid the USAID was giving the country. But if the fundamentals were not right then any aid that USAID might give was money down the rat hole. This did not make the USAID people too happy because he worked for one of their grantees. But this was the kind of thing that the Cambodians needed to hear, because corruption was rampant, judges were for sale, and there was democracy in name only.

There was quite a bit of violence, intimidation of opposing parties and there would be some bombs thrown; in one instance a bomb was thrown in one party's political rally and about 18 people were killed. Opposition journalists were intimidated or arrested, so it was pretty ugly. But progressively, during my two years there, Hun Sen, the former communist and the one who had refused to accede to the Royalists victory in the elections, gradually consolidated his power until finally in 1997 he engineered a coup against the Royalist prime minister Ranariddh and sent him into exile. In the next election in 1998, five years after the UNTAC election, the CCP won again, basically by intimidation, and the Royalist party, which had won the first election, was now in a subservient position to the CCP and that's basically what is continuing today -- Hun Sen is continuing to consolidate his power. And what used to be referred to as one of the UN's few success stories has turned out to be less than successful in establishing a democracy in Cambodia.

I was sent back to Cambodia on TDY from New Zealand to cover the 1998 national elections, five years after the UNTAC elections. Scores of international observers came in and they looked and watched the voting in the various districts and provinces, and they decided that, "Well, you know, it seemed like it was basically a free and fair election." But what they didn't understand was that the fix was already in before they got there. Dictators become very proficient in learning the jargon that they're supposed to use to

satisfy the international community and get the donors to give them money. Meanwhile, under the table, they've got the fix in already, and they do whatever is necessary to perpetuate their power.

The State Department has never given credence to the excuse of "Asian values" by dictators such as Lee Kuan Yuu in Singapore to justify authoritarian rule, but in fact authoritarianism and patronage are seen as the proper way to run a government, not only in Cambodia but in Asia in general. The problem for U.S. diplomacy in touting Western-style democracy is that in Asia, harmony between the peasants and the power elite (who are after all powerful because of good deeds in past lives) is more important than the right of individuals to challenge the power structure; in fact to do so is considered somewhat improper in Asian cultures.

Q: Well what were you doing? I mean, can you talk about your work in that environment?

HUFFMAN: Well, we had just resumed diplomatic relations about two years before I got there and we were still in the process of really establishing an embassy there. We didn't have proper embassy facilities or grounds, we just had a collection of residences that were kind of tied together with a fence around them, and that was the embassy and it wasn't very secure. We didn't even have any Marine guard contingent at all because the first ambassador, Charles Twining, was opposed to that. He said it sends the wrong message and sets a bad example. But anybody could lob a grenade over the fence. I was in the process of trying to establish a U.S. Information Service, American Studies Center and Library and so on, so I was pretty busy getting all that set up and recruiting Fulbright students and trying to get some educational and cultural exchanges going. A major problem was finding Fulbright students who spoke enough English to study in the U.S. Language was a problem in recruiting U.S. speakers, because you had almost no speakers who spoke Khmer, so that limited the kind of audiences that you could send speakers to, unless you resorted to a very cumbersome process of consecutive translation (nobody could do simultaneous translation between English and Khmer). There was the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace that was made up mostly of ex-patriots who had studied in the United States and some people like that who knew English well enough that we could place some speakers there, but you were limited in how many venues you had. You couldn't go to the university and have somebody speak in English unless you were going to go specifically to the English department and talk to those students of English. We placed an English teaching specialist at the University every year through USIA's program of English Teaching Fellows. And of course we had programs of donation of books to the university library and to the National Library, which during the Khmer Rouge had been used as a military barracks, with the books just thrown all over the place and pigs rooting about like a pigsty. The needs were so great and in so many areas that we just couldn't do everything that needed to be done in terms of educational and cultural exchanges and English teaching. Add to this the fact that as the USIS post was just getting established, the staff were not as experienced as you would find in a normal post, where the American officers can come and go while the local staff provide the continuity.

Q: How did you find the media there?

HUFFMAN: Well, there was a clear division between the international media on the one hand and the local press on the other. Because of the large UNTAC operation and the international involvement in the country at that time, there was a lot of interest on the part of the international press in Cambodia. I had frequent requests for interviews with the Ambassador from prominent journalists, such as Ron Moreau of Newsweek, Keith Richburg of the Washington Post, Peter Arnett of CNN, and Seth Mydans of the New York Times. All of the major news services – AP and Reuters and AFP (Agence France Press) and the BBC -- had bureaus in Phnom Penh and they tended to be rather antagonistic toward the policies of the U.S. government. I never understood quite why that was the case, but it was, I think, mainly because they knew the kind of corruption that was going on and the attitude of the press frequently is highly moral, and they have the luxury of saying to us that we should not have dealings with these people at all, while of course we're there to have dealings with them and, if possible, to influence them in the right direction. So it was a rather tough job from the standpoint of press relations. We arranged press conferences for visiting U.S. officials, such as Under Secretary of State Strobe Talbot, or Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Winston Lord, who had not yet been appointed ambassador to China, asked me to participate in a murder board for his press conference, and I said here's what they're going to say and they're going to ask why we are dealing with this thug government, who have subverted the elections? It turned out that he was asked exactly the questions I had anticipated. But there were some more pleasant duties, such as taking Senator and Mrs. John McCain to dinner one night when the Ambassador (Kenneth Quinn, who succeeded Charles Twining as Ambassador) had a conflict, and lunching with Sam Waterston of "Law and Order" fame, who was visiting Cambodia with a delegation looking into charitable ventures.

Now, the local press, of course, was the focus of much of our work in supporting freedom of the press and journalistic ethics and all that, but there weren't really any genuinely independent local media. There were usually 30 to 40 local newspapers -- some would start up and others would close -- but every one was the mouthpiece of a particular political party or interest. There wasn't anything like an independent newspaper that presented the unbiased news. There were two local English language newspapers which were relatively independent. One, the biweekly *Phnom Penh Post*, was started as a commercial venture by an American named Michael Hayes, and it was a quite good newspaper, but he had to struggle to make ends meet, as he had to have it printed in Bangkok, and as there were not enough English speakers to buy it. And then there was a daily, *The Cambodia Daily*, which had been started by an NGO, supported by the Japanese. Michael Hayes, the editor of the *Phnom Penh Post,* used to complain, "They don't have to make a profit, they're supported by an NGO and here I am trying to run a newspaper and make enough money to stay in business." But these two English language papers did provide excellent training for young journalists, both Cambodian and American. There was a modicum of freedom of the press if you didn't go too far – I think the Cambodian press was freer in those days than it had ever been in the past. But they didn't understand that freedom of the press entailed the responsibility to print only the

truth, to check your sources, and not engage in libel. There were incidents of editors having grenades thrown into their offices or shot by "unknown" assailants if they got too outspoken.

Q: How about the role of Vietnamese? Was that the big menace on the border there all the time?

HUFFMAN: Well, there has historically been a great deal of enmity between the Cambodians and the Vietnamese and there's a tendency on the part of the Cambodians to ascribe all kinds of skullduggery to the Vietnamese. This is compounded by the fact that Hun Sen himself had gone into exile in Vietnam. He was a former Khmer Rouge but in the early days defected and went to Hanoi and was part of the regime installed by the Vietnamese, so there's a lot of suspicion that the Vietnamese are really pulling the strings in the government and that there are a lot of government officials who are really Vietnamese and they've taken Cambodian names, and there are a lot of such conspiracy theories. The joke is that whenever you have two Cambodians you'll have three political parties. So yes, there is this conflict between the Khmer and the Vietnamese, and during the UNTAC period there were stories of Vietnamese bodies floating down the Mekong River – Vietnamese who had been killed in local conflicts or by the Khmer Rouge.

Q: Did you get out into the countryside much or was it pretty unsafe?

HUFFMAN: It was pretty much unsafe in those days. There were certain places you could go. Usually you had to fly to Siem Reap to visit Angkor Wat. Some people went by road but you were in danger of being killed or kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge who still operated in the mountain areas, not to mention the danger of landmines. USAID helped rebuild the highway from Phnom Penh down to the beach area at Sihanoukville, but even then you were encouraged to drive only in the daytime and not get off the road because of the danger of landmines. So we were pretty circumscribed as to where we could travel, but we did get out to some of the closer provinces that were relatively safe.

Q: So were able to visit Angkor Wat?

HUFFMAN: Yes, we got up there several times during that tour; all in all I've visited Angkor about a dozen times. Angkor Wat itself is the largest religious building in the world, but is only one of some 25 major temples in the Angkor area of some 100 square miles. I've seen Borobudur and the pyramids and Machu Picchu, but Angkor is certainly the most impressive ruins in Southeast Asia, maybe the world, both in terms of its size and of the artistic quality. The temples were built between the 9th and 15 centuries, when the Angkor Empire was the Rome of Southeast Asia, covering what is now Cambodia, south Vietnam, southern Laos and eastern Thailand. It is ironic that Southeast Asia's major attraction is in little, poor, war-torn Cambodia, but it is an important source of foreign exchange for the country. I heard somebody just the other night who had just come back from Angkor, and who was decrying the fact that it was so crowded with tourists from Japan and China and Thailand and Malaysia. I said well, you know, I'm

very happy for the country because this provides jobs and foreign currency, and makes some contribution to the development of the country.

Q: Well, in your contacts with the Cambodians, both professionally and socially, did you find that there was a real gap, since the Khmer Rouge basically tried to wipe out the intellectual class?

HUFFMAN: Oh yes indeed. One of the most serious obstacles to development of the country is the lack of expertise. There were no doctors, there were no teachers, there were no technicians -- they had all either been killed or exiled. And curiously, as we've seen in several countries where you've had expatriates come back to try to help develop the country, it doesn't work. The attitude is, "Well, we stayed here and we suffered under the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese regime and we didn't run away and now it's our turn. You ran away and had a better life, now don't come back and tell us what to do and how to run the country."

I'll give you an example. There was an organization set up called CANDO, which stood for Cambodian American National Development Organization, a very nice acronym. They brought all these 20-somethings back from the United States, from California and from Michigan and Arlington and wherever they had been and they had degrees in health and education and this and that. So they were going to come back and be a Cambodian Peace Corps. Well, they weren't accepted. Here were these young people, they weren't making much but they were making maybe $700 a month, which was about 20 times what a government minister was making (officially, at least). Furthermore in Asian culture you can't have young people coming in and telling the elders what to do. After about two years they gave up and left. This was the case of many expatriates who came back and tried to help. They were not accepted. There's one in particular who has just stayed, trying desperately to find a niche where he could be useful and the poor guy has been pushed from this job to that and basically humiliated; he used to come to my office and complain, but what could I do? It's unfortunate because the country desperately needs the expertise of the expatriates.

Q: How sad. Well, then you left there in '97

HUFFMAN: Yes, January '97.

COUNSELOR FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS, NEW ZEALAND, 1997-99

Q: Where did you go then?

HUFFMAN: I went to New Zealand.

Q: Now that's a cultural change.

HUFFMAN: Yes it was. And interestingly, it was not high on my list of priorities to go to New Zealand. The reason I went to New Zealand, I was 63 so I had two years before I

would have to quit. You have to resign at the end of the month in which you turn 65; there are no exceptions. From a personnel point of view they should not send a guy to a four-year post who has to quit in two years. But the director of the Bureau of East Asian Affairs was being pressured by budget cuts to close a certain number of posts, and he felt that to have someone in New Zealand who had to leave at the end of two years might provide him the rationale for closing the post if he had to. So I was fortunate that, even though I couldn't serve a full term they were still willing to send me to New Zealand, because I didn't want to serve out my last two years in Washington.

Q: Well, what were you doing in New Zealand? This would be '97 to '99?

HUFFMAN: Yes. Well, I was the Counselor for Public Affairs. (That's "Counselor," not "Consular." It's disgraceful that even some diplomats don't understand the difference; they say "Consular" when they mean "Counselor" and vice versa; that works OK until you have to say "Counselor for Consular Affairs." But I digress.) I had an excellent staff there. They were just, you know, tip top. My Kiwi cultural assistant was the equivalent of an American CAO. We had a library that was state-of-the-art and we had an administrative assistant who was so good that the agency in Washington kept sending him here and there around the world to participate in training seminars, training other Foreign Service Nationals. I had worked 12 hours a day seven days a week in Phnom Penh, and was determined to avoid that in New Zealand, and in fact my staff told me that if I was in the office after 5:00 o'clock, it was my own fault, as they were perfectly capable of running the program, and had done so in the gap before my arrival.

Actually I was pretty stressed at that time about my wife and daughter, who had remained in Phnom Penh for an additional six months so my daughter could finish the school year and my wife could finish her contract as director of a University of San Francisco training project. They were still there when heavy fighting broke out in July 1997 between the supporters of co-Prime Ministers Hun Sen and Ranariddh, in which Ranariddh had to flee the country. Thousands of expatriates were trying to get out of the country, and hundreds had taken refuge in one of the large hotels. I didn't know if my family had gotten out before the airport was closed down by the CPP. When I called the hotel she was scheduled to stay in in Bangkok, they simple told me that they had no such guest, so that was inconclusive; I finally woke up friends in Paris where she was supposed to stay, and they told me my wife and daughter were there and were sleeping. I broke down and cried with relief in front of all my staff.

The thing about New Zealand was that, while New Zealand of course is an extremely beautiful country and a pleasant place to be, I didn't join the Foreign Service to go serve in a country that was very much like our own in terms of its Western cultural heritage. Both countries have a colonial history, both are immigrant societies with English as a unifying language, and both are democracies based on the rule of law and human rights. While New Zealand has historically taken an anti-nuclear stand, they have fought alongside the U.S. in every major war. At least half of the some 24 cabinet members, and one-third of the members of Parliament have participated in our International Visitor Program. But in spite of this rosy picture, there is an undercurrent of anti-Americanism,

concern about American pop culture, and opposition to what they see as American military hegemony and support for globalization. It can be argued that the job of USIS is more challenging in New Zealand than in less similar countries, since public diplomacy must be quite nuanced and sophisticated to be effective.

But the truth is that it was just not terribly exotic, and my family, interestingly, really liked Cambodia much better. My daughter had been in her early teens and she had found Cambodia fascinating, with people from all countries and cultures. Her class of 14 students in the French Lycee had students from 12 different countries.

Q: Oh how wonderful.

HUFFMAN: And of course she spoke French and a bit of Cambodian. Another thing that appealed to her was that there were no rules except those imposed by her parents and she and her friends were able to go out to clubs and dancing and so forth at night and ride around on motor scooters, which the Embassy frowned on as a security matter, but everybody did it. In fact, there were no taxis in Phnom Penh so the only way to get anywhere if you didn't have your own transportation was to hail a motor scooter – they called it "moto-dup" -- no trip cost more than a dollar. By contrast with all this, in New Zealand my daughter had to then go to an all girls' school where she had to wear a uniform and where they had never heard of Phnom Penh, and I think she found all of these rosy-cheeked, blonde shepherdesses a little bit boring. So my family, and I most admit I as well, found New Zealand much less exciting than places like Cambodia and Morocco and Burma.

Q: Yes, I understand. But New Zealand is considered quite a desirable post, isn't it?

HUFFMAN: Yes, of course it is. It was a lovely place to be. On a clear day the bay around Wellington just sparkled in the sun, the pastel colored houses stood out against the green mountains, and the sky was like an inverted blue bowl. You've got the attractions of the charming English look-alike city of Christchurch, and Queenstown on the South Island, and the marvelous glaciers and mountains and valleys and outdoor sports and all the rest. I was surprised to learn that the country is slightly bigger in area than Great Britain but it only has three-and-one-half million people – maybe five percent of the population of Great Britain. There are more people in Auckland – about a million -- than on the entire South Island. So when we'd drive down to Queenstown, the roads were quite good but you'd have one-lane bridges. An indication of how few people there are is the fact that a one-lane bridge on a main highway causes no backup at all. You can drive for hours and you don't pass a car. It was extraordinary.

But of course there were some public diplomacy challenges too. Our biggest issue was the anti-nuclear stance that New Zealand took in the mid 1980's prohibiting nuclear-powered ships from coming to New Zealand, which pretty much torpedoed the ANZUS (Australia-New Zealand-U.S.) Defense Treaty.

Q: I thought that in a way it almost disappeared because we didn't challenge it. Or was it still around?

HUFFMAN: Well, it was very much a sub-current all the time, more so among the general population than on the part of the New Zealand military, who would really like to have had closer security cooperation with the Americans. The ambassador liked to tease the Prime Minister Jim Bolger; he would say "Would you like to have a visit by the president?" When they would answer, "Oh yes indeed," he'd say, "Well what if he comes on a nuclear powered ship?" We thought their position was rather head-in-the-sand, since New Zealand after all enjoyed the protection of the U.S. nuclear umbrella in the Pacific.

About the only unpleasant aspect of my tour in New Zealand was the imminent merging of State and USIA. This actually took place after my departure, at the beginning of the fiscal year 2000, that is October 1, 1999. But we were having to make all kinds of changes in preparation for this merger which we all felt was a shotgun marriage. The idea of course was that you'd get efficiencies from combining your admin staff and information technology staff and your drivers and all the rest. But we all felt that USIA had been a very efficient operation because it was small and because it didn't have all the levels of hierarchy that you had in the Department of State. So there was a good deal of resistance to the change but we knew that it was coming and we had to accommodate. But the conflict was of course in the personnel. You had highly qualified local personnel who had been with USIS for 20 years who were going to be required to change jobs; they were going to have to go work in admin and BNF and the other sections of the Embassy, and they didn't want to. On the other hand I had my marching orders to cut down my staff and the result was that they tended to feel that I was not being supportive enough of them if I failed to protect their positions. If you could claim that this person or that was essential to our programs then we could keep him or her in the USIS section. I made the case for a number of employees in certain areas where I knew we could operate more efficiently with people who were familiar with our operation. I ultimately failed to prevent some people from being cross-walked, as they called it, but my attempts to salvage what I considered to be the more sensible parts of our programs put me at loggerheads with the DCM who had recently arrived and didn't really know where the bodies were buried, so to speak. But he got so furious with me that he said, "Huffman, if you keep opposing me on this thing I'm going to ruin you." And I laughed and said, "Well, you know, I'm almost 65, and if I'm not ruined by now it's a bit late." But the whole thing was very unpleasant.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

HUFFMAN: The ambassador was Josiah Beeman. He was a political appointee and I enjoyed working with him. He had a good sense of humor and a realistic understanding of the importance of his job in the overall scheme of things. But I think he was extremely effective. He was indefatigable in attending social events and entertaining. He was busy almost every night either entertaining at the residence or attending some other function, such as government reception or a wedding of the cousin of some minister, and he knew them by name -- their cousins and sons and children. My predecessor apparently had

been a speechwriter for him so I inherited that job and I was extremely busy writing speeches. I must have written dozens of speeches for the ambassador while I was there. I remember once writing four versions of a Fourth of July speech for four different venues. So that was one of the major activities that I was responsible for there.

Q: How did you find dealing with the press there?

HUFFMAN: Basically we had very good relations with the press. They were very friendly and relatively pro-American and we sent a lot of them to the States on journalistic exchange programs. I can't say that that was a strenuous part of my job in New Zealand. There was mild anti-Americanism there over the nuclear thing and so on and so forth. But you know, New Zealand had changed enormously from the early days when they opposed the nuclear ships and when they were a quasi-socialist government with a cradle-to-grave welfare system. When they realized they couldn't afford it, they had to go through a major revision of their policies in the 1990s where they slimmed down and cut out benefits and became much more committed to free trade. In other words, they had to make many of the same reforms that other countries, especially in Europe, had to make to become more competitive in the world market. But there was still this feeling, a kind of moral superiority over the nuclear issue and opposition to genetically modified foods, because they could afford to be. Some of our State Department colleagues like to retire there, but you know the place is really isolated. When I first went to New Zealand to attend a CAO conference a few years earlier, I thought it was an island off the coast of Australia. But no. When you get to Australia you're already way down under and you still have 1,500 miles to go to get to New Zealand, so you don't get many people stopping through. Although, surprisingly, two of my brothers and their wives decided that if they were ever going to visit Frank abroad before he retired they'd better get on the ball and do it so they came all the way out to New Zealand and visited us. It would have made much more sense to have visited us in Paris or Morocco or even Cambodia, but they just never got around to it.

ACTING PAO, CHAD, 1999-2000

Q: Well then you left there in '99?

HUFFMAN: Yes, January of '99.

Q: And retired?

HUFFMAN: Yes, had to. Retirement is mandatory at the end of month in which you turn 65, which I think is unfortunate, since it seems to me that an FSO is at the peak of his effectiveness, and therefore of his value to the Department, at the age of 65. But I came back and took the retirement seminar here, which I found very interesting, a pleasant two months. Then after about six months I began to get wanderlust again so I went into USIA and said, "Look, have you got any PAO jobs that you can't fill?" I went to the Africa Bureau because I had heard that they needed people, you know. So they said well, yes, we'd like to send you either to Niger or Chad. It happened that my wife was serving as

interpreter for a group of Francophone African women from these very countries. There was nobody from Chad, but there were participants from Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire and Cameroon and Niger and so on. And they all said, "Hey, you know, Niamey is a nice place, that's real sleeper, but don't go to Chad." So I went back in to USIA and told them that I might be willing to go to Niamey. They said, "Well, we've assigned that job but we'd still like you to go to Chad." So I agreed to go to Chad because I had never been to Sub-Saharan Africa. Of course I'd been to Morocco but I had never been to Sub-Saharan Africa and even though I was too senior for the job (I had been promoted to OC in 1996 in Cambodia), I just thought it would an interesting experience. But this was right about the time the two agencies were consolidating and I had had an unpleasant experience with that in New Zealand, but I thought well, you know, I want to see Sub-Saharan Africa, it will be interesting and I will do whatever they tell me.

Well, I found out that didn't work. You still have to feel that you are doing something useful. Chad is the poorest country I've ever seen in my life but it was still interesting and exotic. The problem was not Chad; my problems were with my own embassy. I was no longer the head of an agency at post. I was under the thumb of various layers of bureaucracy that I wasn't accustomed to and my staff was all unhappy and saying well, the previous PAO promised this and that and fought for us, but of course she had left the problems for me to resolve. It was quite traumatic, actually – before the consolidation, as the head of agency I had had my own budget, I had had my own cars and drivers and my own computer specialists and so on, and here suddenly my status had been revised downward and my autonomy shackled. There was this young brash admin officer who took great pleasure, I think, in telling me at one point that I no longer had "procurement authority," which is bureaucratese for "you can't buy anything." I couldn't go out and buy a pencil. He had to do it for me; I had to put in a requisition for it, which he might or might not approve.

The best example of it was when the 4th of July came along and USIS would traditionally take the pictures for official events, and we would have our own shops where we would get pictures developed in two hours and have them back. But I wasn't allowed to do that so I said to the admin officer, "Okay, look, how am I going to get these pictures?" He said, "Well here's what you do. You fill out a requisition and send that to me and then I'll send that to GSO (General Services Organization) and then GSO (which was not co-located with the embassy) will assign somebody to come back to the embassy and pick up that film and then they will take it to a shop with whom we have negotiated a vendor agreement and then in three days, when they notify us they are done, GSO will send someone to pick them up and deliver them to me. At that point I will call you and you can come get them. I went to the ambassador and said, "Mr. Ambassador, you know those pictures you wanted from the Fourth of July celebration? I'm not going to be able to get those to you for about three days." He said, "Oh? Why is that?" I was prepared. I said, "Here, Mr. Ambassador, is a list of the 14 steps I'm required to go through to get this film developed." "Well this is unacceptable. Get me the admin officer in here." Well, we get the admin officer in and he cites multiple regulations from the Foreign Affair Manual, such as FAM 632, section 3, subparagraph 6 which specifies thus and so, and this, when added to State cables 21376 and 42723 dealing with the consolidation, we have to jump

through this hoop and that, and he snowed the ambassador, who was too inexperienced to know that he had the authority to cut through such nonsense. Another example, at the risk of belaboring the point: When they made the changeover, we were no longer to use the terminology USIS in our correspondence; we were supposed to use something like "Public Affairs Section." Okay, the USIS office had reams and reams of stationery with the USIS letterhead on it; I told my staff to just go ahead and use it up, and we would put the new designation on the next order. I based this decision on the obvious fact that even if our Chadian audience knew anything about the consolidation, the change in terminology would be meaningless to them. My mistake was to mention to the DCM what I had done; he was horrified, and said I should have solicited guidance from the Department before making such a crucial decision. I found the whole thing just extremely frustrating.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

HUFFMAN: Christopher Goldthwait. He was the first member of the Foreign Agricultural Service to ever be named an ambassador. He was way over qualified to be ambassador to Chad because he was a career minister. He had been in charge of all trade with Russia in the Department of Agriculture. But anyway, he was a nice gentleman and his hobby was archaeology, which is perfect because Chad is rich in archaeological remains. At the same time he was writing a novel about archeological exploration that was set in Chad.

Another problem that I had was that I was taking mefloquine for malaria. Now this is something that the State Department was recommending but a lot of people had unfortunate reactions to that drug. Have you heard of that?

Q: No I haven't.

HUFFMAN: Mefloquine. It affects some people very badly, you become paranoid, you have nightmares, you can't sleep. I began to have emotions that I'd never had before in my life. I was extremely irascible, I'd get angry, I would throw furniture, I had anxiety attacks, depression – all the classic symptoms of culture shock. But I had never had culture shock in other 3rd world countries, such as Laos and Burma and Cambodia, so why now? I wondered if it was just the frustrations of dealing with the State Department. And finally I realized no, this is not me, there's something wrong. And so when the medical officer came to post he said look, we're going to take you off Mefloquine and put you on this other drug that doesn't cause the reactions, but you'll have to take one every day instead of once a week. When I got off of Mefloquine then things were better.

I had such a series of disasters in Chad it was almost comical. First of all, they didn't have a house ready for me. Well, I could have gone into my predecessor's house, which was a huge thing, because a PAO has representational duties. But I didn't particularly like the house, plus the fact that there was a family coming with two children who could make much better use of the house, which was in the housing compound with the school. They said well, we'll put you in GSO House #36 until we get another house ready. So I moved

into #36, which they were going to relinquish because it was too old and ratty and too hard to maintain. I didn't care much, because I was to be there for only a year, and the house didn't seem to be much worse than the other choices in the housing pool. After several months, they got my official house ready – a nice airy house with high ceilings and an abandoned swimming pool. I had been in it I think about six weeks when it caught fire and burned out the interior, including my books and pictures and personal effects. It was determined that a short in an air conditioner had caused the fire. Okay, so I moved into a hotel again and then finally they said well, we think we'll try to renovate that house but it will take several months. In the meantime we'll put you in a TDY apartment. So I moved into a TDY apartment. And then I went over to Bamako in Mali to help out with the visit of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to several African countries. I was eager to do that because I was interested in seeing as much of Africa as I could, plus the Secretary was scheduled to visit Timbuktu, which I had always wanted to see. But Timbuktu was cancelled at the last minute because of the death of Julius Nyerere over in Tanzania, and it was decided that she should attend his funeral.

When I got back to post they said, "We have bad news, there was a fire in your office." So my office had caught fire too. Another disaster: not knowing I was going to go to Chad I had just bought a new Honda Accord. The post report said you should take a four-wheel drive vehicle in Chad. And I thought well, it'd be nice but I don't have a four-wheel drive vehicle, I have this car; this is my car so I'll take it. Big mistake. When I got there I realized that they didn't mean that you "should" have a four-wheel drive, they meant you "must" have one. You couldn't get to the office without a four-wheel drive because when it rained the streets became a slough of mud that you could disappear into. In fact, when you were trying to go somewhere you had better wait until somebody tries to go through, and if they make it, follow their trajectory exactly. So it was the wrong vehicle to have in Chad, but one day, as I was going out of the housing compound, the guard opened the left side of the double gates, then went around to open the right one. Just as I started to go through the left gate swung shut on my car and before I could stop I had torn off the rear view mirror. Seeing that, the guard left the right gate to run around to the left, and the right gate blew shut against the right side of the car. New car. When I shipped the car home I waited and waited for it to come and finally I got a call from our dispatcher in Baltimore. "Mr. Huffman, there's been considerable damage to your car." Well, it turned out that the train car it was shipped in from Cameroon had derailed and the car had rolled around inside the container. It cost $8,000 to restore it, which my private insurance paid, minus a $250 deductible. But even though it was restored to new condition, the fact was that it had been wrecked, which caused it to lose $4,000 more in market value. Now, the State Department will pay you the deductible on your private car insurance, which was $250. I said you really need to pay me $4,250. Made no progress there at all. I don't think they ever even paid the $250. So the whole thing was a comedy of errors.

But there was one adventure I had there that made the whole trip worthwhile. We had ordered seven new Toyota Land Cruisers from the Toyota dealer in Cameroon, for donation to the Chadian demining operation, which our military was supporting. They were to come into Douala in Cameroon and come up by train to the railhead at

Ngaoundere in northern Cameroon and then be driven across the border to N'Djamena, Chad. But the train tracks had been blown up and some trains had derailed, so the embassy decided we'd just send seven or eight drivers down there and drive the all the way across Cameroon to Chad. I volunteered immediately. Of course, they wanted volunteers from FSNs in admin and GSO; they didn't expect senior American officers to volunteer, but I have always loved driving adventures. I rode a motorcycle and other conveyances overland from Laos to Europe in 1958. I drove from New Haven to Guatemala City in 1970. Just two years ago my brother and I drove from DC to San Jose, Costa Rica. So I jumped at the chance to drive all the way across the country of Cameroon, and it was a fascinating experience to see the condition of the country and the roads. And since we had neglected to get diplomatic plates, we were stopped at innumerable roadblocks and shaken down for money, maybe 20 times in the course of five days getting across the country. It was fortunate that I was along, because the GSO, who was in charge of the expedition, didn't speak French, and I had to negotiate with the police. Sometimes we'd get hauled back to nearest police station, but usually we would get out our diplomatic passports and point out that we were diplomats and the cars were for donation to the Chadian government. We only paid at two or three places where our passports didn't impress them. And in the course of the trip one of the trucks rolled; the driver was okay, but we had to tow the truck back to the nearest town and get it back in drivable condition, although with the windshield broken out. The GSO was a former Marine sergeant who was rather impatient with diplomatic niceties, and he later said, "Frank, if you hadn't been along to smooth the way, we'd still be in a Cameroonian jail somewhere." But it was fascinating to see, for the first time really, what it is like in these corrupt countries for ordinary citizens, who don't have any diplomatic privileges.

The other highlight of the tour was the ability to go over to the Waza Game Reserve in northern Cameroon, just an hour away from N'Djamena, where you could see lions, giraffe, elephants, wild boar and other wildlife. The first time I saw a family of giraffes stalking across the road in front of our land cruiser was a great thrill for me. And I played a lot of tennis, which was good for my mental health. We had a clay court – or rather a mud court, as it got a bit slippery in the rainy season -- behind the embassy, and I in fact got the Ambassador and the DCM to take up tennis again to supplement my matches with various Chadian contacts. I even partnered with the French Ambassador in a tournament at the French club, where we lost in the second round.

Q: In retrospect, do you feel that the tour in Chad was worthwhile, in spite of all the problems you had?

Huffman: Oh, yes; no question about it. It enabled me to understand the problems of Africa in a way that I could never have done had I not spent a year there. Chad has all of the problems common to most of the countries of sub-Saharan Africa – the tension between the nomadic Arab Muslim herdsmen of the north and the black African Christian farmers of the south. The history of Chad, like other countries in the region, is the competition for power between the two factions, with the southern Christians, who were typically supported by the former French colonists, in general losing out to the northern Arabs, as desertification and the nomadic life encroaches on the south. But the more

serious problem is that most of the leaders are more concerned with lining their own pockets and those of their immediate tribe than with the welfare of the country as a whole, which in any case is usually an unnatural construct carved out by the Europeans. President Idriss Deby is no exception – he stormed out of Sudan and overthrew the French-supported President Habre, and is using the revenues from the country's recently-exploited oil resources to maintain himself and his Zaghawa tribe in power rather than to relieve the desperate poverty of his people.

ACTING PAO, CAMBODIA, 2002

Q: Was this your last overseas assignment?

HUFFMAN: No, actually, I did a six-month WAE as PAO Phnom Penh in 2002, two years later. The previous PAO had curtailed for medical reasons several months earlier, and they needed somebody to fill the gap while the PAO-designee finished Khmer language training. As I had already served in Phnom Penh and knew the language, I was the logical person for the area to send. The fact that I was well known in Khmer academic circles also worked to my advantage. My English-Khmer Dictionary, published at Yale Press in 1978, was on the desk of every minister. This gave me unique access to many of my contacts. When I first visited the Minister of Culture in 1995, during my first tour, he bowed to me, and said, "So you are *the* Professor Huffman! You have saved our language!" This was a bit of an exaggeration, of course, but it was true that my dictionary, appearing after the destruction of so many scholarly works by the Khmer Rouge, became the standard authority for translating abstract English vocabulary on such topics as democracy building and economic development into Khmer.

Q: Did you find significant differences from your earlier tour in, what was it, 1995?

HUFFMAN: Yes, the situation was both better and worse. Prime Minister Hun Sen had consolidated his power over the country, as a result of which security was much better than it had been in the 90's. The Khmer Rouge movement had totally collapsed, partially as a result of Hun Sen's offer of amnesty, through which several thousand Khmer Rouge troops had defected to the government side, and several high-ranking officials had been given monetary inducements to defect. Pol Pot himself had died in isolation in the mountains in 1997; some people think maybe his own people turned against him but it's not terribly clear. You could travel freely throughout the country, with the result that tourism had increased, especially to Angkor, and more remote provinces had been opened up to tourism. On the other hand, democracy and human rights were in retreat, as Hun Sen had cowed the opposition through intimidation and threats of violence, local human rights organizations were weakened, and the press was more restrained. Foreign investment from Western sources had dried up, replaced by those countries and businesses willing to pay kickbacks to corrupt officials. Companies from China, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand accounted for the majority of investment in the country. Corruption was rampant, with government officials, especially military officers, claiming land traditionally owned by the peasants for their own purposes, engaging in illegal logging and smuggling. Extravagant mansions and expensive cars had multiplied

in Phnom Penh, while the countryside, as had been true for centuries, benefited very little from development. So, as you can see, it was a mixed bag.

Q: Did you feel that you were able to accomplish anything in six months?

HUFFMAN: Yes, actually I felt pretty good about the tour. Knowing the country and the terrain as I did, I felt that I was at the top of my game. I managed to get the educational and cultural exchange programs in shape, recruited all the candidates for the following year's Fulbright and International Visitor programs, allocated all of our budget for grants to various human rights, educational and civic society organizations, organized a performing arts visit by an American jazz group, dealt with the press, and gave four or five outreach speeches myself.

On the other hand, I was less successful in completing the three main assignments I had been given in Washington. The first was to persuade the Ambassador, who was considered a bit of a loose cannon, to clear any speeches or statements to the press with Public Affairs at State – in other words, go out there and whip the ambassador in shape. I smiled. When I got to post, the Ambassador said to me, "I know what they told you in Washington, but I know the situation better than they do in Washington, and I'll say whatever I please. If they don't like it, they can fire me." In fact, he was eventually fired, or called home early. He stood up for what he believed, and I admired him for it. A conservative cabal in Congress had instructed USAID to support only the Sam Rainsy Party, which they were convinced was the only democratic party in the country. Now Sam Rainsy was not inherently any more democratic than his opponents, but even if he had been, the Ambassador argued that to support one party constituted unwarranted interference in the country's internal affairs, and that the U.S. should be even-handed in supporting democracy among all the parties. I believe he was right, but you can't fight city hall.

My second "mission impossible" was to reclaim space for the Public Affairs Section (as USIS was now called) that had been usurped by the Embassy. The problem was that the Ambassador had requisitioned the USIS building, containing the USIS library and offices, for his own use while another building was being hard-walled by OBO, and had shoehorned the PAS offices into a tight space in the admin building, and had relegated the library essentially to a stairwell. I was unable to correct the situation at that time, but I did manage to secure the promise of generous space for the PAS offices, library, and auditorium in the plans for the new embassy which was being built, and which was in fact just completed and dedicated in early 2006.

My third mission was to improve the morale of the public affairs staff, which was of course demoralized by the confiscation of their physical space, the downgrading of the library, and the vacancy in the PAO slot. I feel that I achieved a certain measure of success in this third assignment, by involving the staff in the planning for space in the new embassy, getting stalled programs in shape, and raising the profile of our programs both within the embassy and in the Phnom Penh community. So I did complete about one and a half out of three assignments – not bad for government work.

Q: Do you maintain contacts with your friends and colleagues in Cambodia?

HUFFMAN: Yes. My wife and I went back to Cambodia in December of 2004. I had offered to donate my collection of Cambodian books to the Buddhist Institute Library, and I was invited to give a lecture at the Buddhist Institute on that occasion. The event was attended by our Ambassador, Charles Ray, and by the Cambodian Minister for Religions and Cults, and it was quite a nice affair. On the same trip we visited the Consul General and her husband in Chiang Mai, and also stopped off to see friends in the embassy in Rangoon and take another trip up Mandalay and the ancient capital of Pagan, which for some reason they now spell "Bagan." So Southeast Asia continues to hold great appeal for me and my family. In fact we are thinking rather vaguely that when my wife and I both retire, we might like to spend our winters in Thailand or Cambodia.

Q: In retrospect, do you feel it was a good decision to leave academia and join the foreign service?

HUFFMAN: Oh, yes; no doubt about it. It's hard to beat the academic life, but I'm glad I did it. If I had stayed at Cornell, I would have returned over and over to the same research sites in Southeast Asia, whereas the foreign service provided the opportunity to live and work in other countries and areas that I would not otherwise have done. In a career of only about 15 years, I managed to serve on all the continents of the world except Latin America. The foreign service has provided a much more varied, exciting and challenging experience than I would have had in academia.

End of interview