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

DOLORES BROWN

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
Initial interview date: September 13, 2018
Copyright 2021 ADST

INTERVIEW

Q: So, today is September 13. This is our first interview with Dolores Brown.

So, Dolores, where and when were you born?

BROWN: I was born in a small town in central New Jersey called Kenilworth. I was born in 1954.

Q: Okay. Now, did you stay there throughout your youth, or did your family move?

BROWN: I stayed there throughout my entire youth. My family is very close knit. Grandparents lived next door. Other set of grandparents lived in the next town. We literally would have dinner at my house and then we would go to dinner again at my Italian grandmother's house. This was not good for any of our waistlines. No one had any intention of moving anywhere. And in fact, my father bought the house next door after that set of grandparents died with the idea that I would move into it.

Q: Wow. You're right.

BROWN: So, I wasn't supposed to go anywhere very far.

Q: Now, New Jersey is a small state, but where is the nearest sort of metropolitan area to Kenilworth?

BROWN: Well, it's Newark, but Kenilworth was in a different universe. And what's kind of fun about New Jersey and why I still love it very much is it has all these little individual towns, and they have such character. You had everything from Jackie Onassis with her horses to down-home working class places, and some very blighted parts, but every place has its own unique character.

Q: I also come from New Jersey.

BROWN: Oh.

Q: Long Branch.

BROWN: Oh, yes.

Q: So, I know exactly what you're saying.

BROWN: Yes, you know exactly what I'm talking about. New Jersey isn't homogenized and, even better, has a sassy attitude.

So, the biggest metropolitan area was Newark, but New York City was close enough to be a tantalizing other universe, because the town that I grew up in was somewhat limited, mostly second generation immigrants and pizza parlors. It billed itself as a residential community with industrial strength. And what that meant is small industrial factories were next to our houses, and that's where people worked. So, people weren't commuting to New York; this was not a bedroom community for New York City. We could still jump on a bus and go into New York if our parents let us do that.

Q: So, now you said second generation; were your parents immigrants, your grandparents? Have you looked into that?

BROWN: I didn't do the fact checking that you would have done if you worked for "The New Yorker," but my grandparents on my father's side were born in Italy.

Q: Do you know whereabouts?

BROWN: They were born in the southern part of Italy. My grandmother and grandfather were born in the province of Potenza, which is the instep of the boot, and one of the wild and wooly parts of Italy. And they had an arranged marriage.

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: They had an arranged marriage, and it wasn't very pretty, frankly. And then my other grandparents were of German, Polish, and Danish descent. They were not born in the United States, and they settled first in the north, in Wisconsin. My grandfather on that side's name was Fred, his surname was Sandusky, and he owned a saloon with his brothers, Otto and Rudolf. They were pretty inventive. Family lore has it that they were running liquor during Prohibition. At one stage Fred and Otto tried prizefighting, but failed spectacularly. They were an adventurous bunch. Except for fighting in wars – Fred left Germany to avoid the draft.

Q: Fun. How did your parents meet then?

BROWN: I'm not exactly sure, but they were from the same small town. I think my mother espied my father while he was working in the post office.

Q: And in your family, brothers and sisters?

BROWN: No. I'm an only child.

Q: Okay. What sort of work did your father do, and did your mother work?

BROWN: My father started out as a mail carrier in the post office, and he worked himself up to be the postmaster of our little town. And he was quite well known in the town. He was the head of the Lions Club, he was in the VFW, he often headed the parades. He was a good citizen.

My mother didn't start working until I went to college, and she took part-time jobs to help get me through college.

Q: Wow. Nice. Okay.

Now, take a minute to--you mentioned that Kenilworth is, you know, a small community but with industrial strength. About large would you say?

BROWN: Maybe 7,000.

Q: Okay, yes. So, did you go to a public school, private school; how did that work?

BROWN: I went to a public school. It was a very strong Roman Catholic community. My father was Roman Catholic and my mother was Methodist. I was brought up a Roman Catholic, but my mother drew the line against me going to a Catholic school. All the little kids around my neighborhood went to Catholic school, but I was not going to Catholic school. I did, however, go to Sunday school.

Q: And so, in other words for Kenilworth there was just one set of public schools?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Okay. So, how would you describe your elementary school and middle school experiences? Were there-- were you doing anything besides the regular curriculum, Girl Scouting or band or anything like that?

BROWN: Right. I would-- how would I describe it? Everybody knew everybody, so it was in a sense comfortable, and I was pretty cosseted as a kid. I was an only child, and my parents poured a lot of love and attention on me. So, they gave me piano lessons, they gave me ballet lessons. I bought little outfits and would appear in dance concerts. Tap dancing with frilly skirts and the whole deal. I was in the Girl Scouts. I had a very traditional and very supportive and safe upbringing. I feel that the basis that my parents provided for me allowed me to feel the security in myself in the world to do what I ultimately did. I'm painting a very bucolic picture. In middle school, it got a little rougher.

Q: Sure.

BROWN: There were some girls who would scare the heck out of me and maybe throw the ball at me real hard during gym. One carved the initials of my then boyfriend in her arm because she liked him, and you can imagine she didn't like me too much. There were mean girls. You had that kind of contingent of kids that could make your life a little difficult.

Q: Was it a very diverse high school?

BROWN: No, it wasn't diverse at all. There were a few black families in the town, no Latinos.

In my grammar school, I was doing fairly well academically, but I would continue to get Cs in gym. It wasn't only because the girls were picking on me once in a while - it was just because I was really bad at gym. I was scared of jumping over the horses and I couldn't climb a rope. I couldn't do the cartwheels, although somersaults were my specialty. I was just not that great at it. So, I would get Cs in gym. And this would keep me off the honor roll. Well, my father did not like this, so he appealed to the Principal, Mr. Ritchell, and yes indeed, I got on the honor roll and didn't have to pray for B's in gym anymore., I remember that was a big deal for me and it's only recently that I really came to appreciate my father for so thoroughly having my back.

Q: Yes. And, you know, realistically honor roll is supposed to be for how good a student you are and how well you are learning what school's supposed to teach you. I'm not sure gym should even-- a gym grade should be included.

BROWN: Well, yes. He had a point.

Q: Yes, exactly.

BROWN: He did have a realistic point. And you know, I would say that as I neared high school I was transformed from somewhat of a goody two shoes into a kid that was feeling her oats a bit, and I could have gone to the other side.

Q: Hmm.

BROWN: I had those tendencies. But in eighth grade I had a teacher who made all the difference. She taught world cultures. There were tracks at that time in school, and I was not on the fast track, I was probably in the middle track. And this world cultures teacher, Mrs. Spingler, saw something in me. She looked up my records and decided I belonged in the fast track classes. She got me going and I was fascinated with the subject. One of the things that I remember her saying is that historians believe the crucifix was shaped like an X, not like we all learned it was shaped in church. This was a shock to me because I had gone to Catholic Sunday School and we were taught to take matters literally. I got in trouble in church once for chewing the communion wafer, and there's nothing more frightening than an angry nun. This Mrs. Spingler was throwing historical information at us, and getting in trouble with the parents for doing it.

Q: Yes, of course.

BROWN: And so, she really influenced and inspired me, and got me on the right track. All of a sudden, my academic career took a turn for the better because she helped me.

Q: The fascinating thing about what you're describing is, it sounds like what you saw was like an early- that you had the capacity to do critical thinking and she wanted to develop that. Because obviously, you know, she's throwing things at you that are not consistent with whatever the orthodoxy was and she's expecting you to be able to absorb that and ask questions and think it through and that kind of thing. And so, she wants to put you in a more challenging environment.

BROWN: Right. Right, right. Oh, absolutely. She made me think well, maybe there is something inside my head. Because, when you are surrounded by a certain milieu, it's hard to see past where you are and have the imagination about your potential.

Q: Sure.

BROWN: You're not introduced to anything else. And so, what people aspire to in your hometown, that shapes your universe and the way you think about your own life. She was the first one that shook me up and lit a fire that made me think maybe there could be something a little different that I could be reaching for. My parents were very much enablers too. When I think of my high school career, I had a wonderful time. It was fun. We didn't have to kill ourselves to get good grades. I had friends. I was one of the so-called popular kids. My boyfriend was the football team captain. My grades were good and everything was happy.

Q: Now, were you-- you mentioned that, you know, your family, your parents also encouraged you, were they also encouraging you to read? Were you reading for pleasure or did that not happen until later?

BROWN: Hmm, that's interesting. They did encourage me to read and I was an incredible reader and I did my best reading when I was 13, 14. I was already reading Russian novels and books that got dusty in our local library. I was reading all the time. I was an only child so I had time. And I had powers of concentration then that I don't have now.

Q: And so, this was ninth grade when you took world cultures?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Did you continue, you know, with some interest in international affairs, like take a foreign language or you know, that sort of thing?

BROWN: Yes. I took Spanish. I wasn't incredibly serious about it, but I developed a fascination for the Soviet Union, and I read a lot of Russian authors. I particularly developed a fascination for heroic Russian cultural figures who stood up to power in my youth. And also, I think this goes back to what you had picked up on in terms of the critical thinking, there was another component to it. I would read the newspaper, "The New York Times," and there were always articles about how bad it was in the Soviet Union. I thought, yes, it's not free, it's this, it's that, it's a terrible place, but I couldn't help asking myself how can it be so terrible? There are so many people who live there. Is it really as terrible as they say? So, it's not that I liked it, but I was simply curious; how can one thing be so good and one thing be so terrible? So, that basic idea was revolutionary in my intellectual development. I wanted to understand this great other behind the Iron Curtain. It was my first step towards relativism.

Q: You know, there were plenty of opportunities to read about how bad things were.

BROWN: Oh, yes. I read much of that. But it was at that point a sideline. I was a typical happy go lucky high school girl and did not bore my friends with discussions of Russian intellectuals. But by the time I knew I wanted to go to college I knew I wanted to study Russian.

Q: Did the proximity of New York give you opportunities?

BROWN: Not particularly in international affairs, but I was gripped by New York's cultural and intellectual ferment. I remember the first time I went to a museum, the Guggenheim, my eyes were like saucers. I understood that there was this other incredible world out there. I wasn't quite ready for it, but that this exists and I yearned to be part of it. While at Barnard, I ended up having an internship at the Guggenheim with the curators, an incredible experience. I saw the "extra" Kandinsky's in the Guggenheim's basement.

Q: Oh, yes.

BROWN: You know, you went to St. Mark's Place in the Village, you walked around, you saw individualistic and eccentric people. It was energizing and gave me a new perspective on what life could be like.

Q: People reading poetry and drummers and all sorts of things.

BROWN: Right, right.

Q: For a kid or from high school, it was like an open air circus.

BROWN: Well, it was a circus. You'd go to Washington Square and it was a total circus.

Q: Oh, yes. And that was a day's entertainment.

BROWN: Yes, and still is.

Q: Okay, so, also while you were in high school, did you travel, even, say, even within the U.S.?

BROWN: Well, I traveled, but mostly my family's idea of traveling was going to visit our relatives.

Q: Yes, okay.

BROWN: But we also went to the beach. We would rent a beach house in a place called Long Beach Island in New Jersey, and we would go there. My Uncle Richie also bought property there for a song after a bad nor'easter and we often would visit him. And that was fun. But we would also go and visit my uncle, my father's brother, Uncle Anthony, who was a Marine, at Quantico. So, we just packed up the car and we went to Quantico, and then we would hang around together.

Q: Right, okay.

BROWN: We got to see some places, but our visits revolved around family. My Uncle Anthony and his family would come and visit my grandma, who lived in the next town in a two family home with my Aunt Emily and her family. So, we would all go there and hang around every night. Actually, I ran away from home once because of that when I was in eighth grade, which is not something I'm proud of. My father cried when I was brought home by the police and got into a fight with my Uncle, his brother, who rightly berated my actions. I did this because I was tired of being around family all of the time. But now I look back on it and the family was charming and warm. There were five of us girls, all near in age. We were plopped on a wooden bench on one side of the table, all crowded together with hardly room for our elbows, a typical boisterous Italian table.

Q: You went visiting – anything more?

BROWN: The excitement was going to the candy store on the corner. And you know what's funny? About a month ago many of my cousins came to visit me for a few days, and we did pretty much the same thing.. We sat around my house. We didn't need outside entertainment. It was very comforting and warm.

Q: Great. Okay. So, all of your experience up through high school is, you know, pretty much in that, you know, East Coast, New York area kind of thing.

BROWN: Right.

Q: Were there other-- Am I missing anything else in high school? Were there other experiences that sort of opened your eyes to the wider world? Because, you know, some kids go as far as American Field Service and, you know, go live with families overseas, or that kind of thing.

BROWN: No, I did none of that. I can say, though, that there were international issues that concerned me from a very young age, even before high school. I remember being in grammar school, and bringing a note home to my parents to sign, and the note said in the event of a nuclear war, do you want Dolores to stay at school or to go home? I'm not kidding. I remember this like it was yesterday and I was in kindergarten. So, my mom answers of course you're coming home in the event of a nuclear war. And so, I was thinking how am I going to get home? I retraced the route home in my mind and thought, yes, I guess I can get home. And. I remember shopping with my parents for a bomb shelter. I remember going down the steps into the bomb shelter. And then my father said no, I don't think so, it's probably too expensive. And I can even remember -- this is going to sound bizarre, but I remember in that crystallized way memories of childhood are preserved in your mind, like a vivid snapshot --of being in a stroller and hearing loud sirens and everybody had to go home quickly because it was a test of the town's emergency system. So, as strange as this may be, from a very early age I had an existential worry about nuclear war.

And then, that concern got fused with my fascination with Russian authors from Tolstoy to Dostoevsky. And this existential fear of nuclear war made understanding the Soviet Union even more important. So, all that was circulating in my young girl's mind in suburban New Jersey, with not a lot of outlets and totally unexpressed. In the end, I knew that I wanted to travel. In fact, I knew I absolutely had to travel. That was where to start.

And so my aspiration when I was in ninth grade was to be- at that time they called them airline stewardesses, so I went to my guidance counselor and he said what do you want to be when you grow up? And I said well, I want to be an airline stewardess. But I was so worried because I was short. You had to be five foot six, and I'm only five foot three. But he said, to his credit-- you're a little intellectual for that. I'm not so sure that that's what you want to do. He was one of the first people who ever said that to me.

I was pretty much left to my own devices in terms of figuring all of this out because it was out of the realm of experience of my family, and the people around me.

Q: Right. There is one more question for the high school era that I want to ask before we go on, which is you're also growing up in the period of all of this cultural change, and you know, relatively small town; did any of the cultural, you know, roiling cultural things come to your town or your high school?

BROWN: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: What was your experience?

BROWN: Yes. Well, people were concerned about the Vietnam War. I can remember, I think I might have been-- when was the Tet Offensive?

Q: 1968

BROWN: '68. So, I was 14. I remember one of my classmates was literally running around, going door-to-door, screaming about the Tet Offensive, oh my god, what will happen now? But it was a very small fraction of people who were involved in the anti-war movement. In fact, many of the young men in town went off to fight, Kenilworth did not have the crowd that was burning draft cards! And, then, Newark was nearby and there were significant race riots there. And, of course, I heard about Woodstock and I would have liked to have been there, but I was 14 and this was purely aspirational. My father would hardly let me out the door, much less go to Woodstock. But yes, and I remember we had a tape of the music from Woodstock and I would play it in the car when travelling with my family and they were always saying shut that off. But they actually were pretty tolerant considering! And my father freaked out about Manson and "Jesus Christ Superstar." Not to equate the two! That was a big fight in our house over whether I could see "Jesus Christ Superstar." My father saw danger in these cultural crosscurrents, and we would get into some arguments about it.

Q: Oh, wow.

BROWN: But he also was very tolerant and my mother gave me lots of space. For instance, we were in the car, again going to visit my parents' friends, and I was in the back, and I had John Lennon round granny glasses with different color lenses that you could pop in and out. I drove my parents crazy as I kept changing the lenses in these glasses from yellow to pink to green ad nauseam. I knew they weren't happy about my getting out of the car with those glasses on. But as we pulled up in the driveway of my mother's friends' house in rural New Hampshire, the sons of my parents' friends emerged and many had long hair. My father just sighed and said alright, just put your glasses back on, it's okay. We watched the moon walk in a cottage on the side of a lake near the Old Man in the Mountain in New Hampshire. I took my glasses off for that one. It was unforgettable.

Q: No summer of love.

BROWN: No, no, no, no, not for me. Ultimately, though, after I graduated from high school, a high school friend and I took a Greyhound bus across the country and back. We used an Ameripass; it was only $150 for unlimited travel for one month. This was my first independent foray into the outer world. And I asked my parents' permission, of course. I said I was going with Karen and we were visiting her sister and we didn't discuss the details. So, when I came down to my living room at home to depart--I had a backpack and a sleeping bag. My father was none too happy about that but we said bye, and we ran out of the house. Our destination was Karen's older sister's house, and she lived in Haight-Ashbury. So, we wanted to see what the heart of the counterculture was like.

Q: Whoa.

BROWN: Yes. So we got on this bus, I think it was called a “Cruiseliner” and we literally are on the bus for three days and three nights. Literally. I mean, we’d get out, we would wash our hair in bus terminal bathroom sinks and use the hand dryers to dry our hair. We got to Haight-Ashbury, and you know, I was an innocent person, and I still am to a certain degree. So, we arrived at her apartment and encountered nearly every stereotype of the late sixties – there was a woman painting a mandala, a guy sitting in the yogi position meditating and a bean casserole with no meat for dinner. I found it all kind of fascinating, I didn’t see the dark side at all. And then, we went down the coast. We camped out a lot. We were in San Diego, we were in Arizona; we were all over the place.

Q: Wow. So, you really busted out; you busted loose.

BROWN: But the craziest place was Laguna Beach, California.

Q: Oh, yes.

BROWN: Laguna Beach was filled with kids, magic buses, Hare Krishnas, snake charmers. Anything went. We were exposed to a lot, but always evaded getting pulled into real nonsense-- I mean, we had basic common sense. I was not the type to get sucked in by nuts. But I liked the freedom, and I liked the idea of people being able to experiment. I found the world was friendly; no one attempted to hurt us or take advantage of us.

Q: Now, you went all the way down through California, all the nuttiness, and then back sort of through the South? Or how did you come back? What was your route of return?

BROWN: We took a more southerly route back. What I remember most is Colorado and Arizona. One morning we arrived at the bus station in Durango, about 5 am, and I remember a stream of Native American men with worn hats, who looked tired, downtrodden and dusty, shuffling along railroad tracks away from the city. Then we ended up in Arizona – we had met two guys in California who gave us a map where supposedly their parents lived, and then when we got there, and of course, that place didn’t exist.

Q: Right.

BROWN: So, anyway, we end up staying with a homesteader/hippie family out in the woods, no running water and limited food. We did that for a day or two and then we got back on the bus and went home.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: And I can't believe it. I mean, now with cell phones, I don't think I called my parents really at all.

Q: Isn't that wild? Yes. It's a very interesting post-high school journey.

BROWN: Yes. And the idea that you must get out and see what is happening in society – not stay in your safe office or home – is something that I brought with me when I eventually entered the foreign service.

Q: To go back now to a completely different topic, as you're approaching the end of high school, you're thinking about college; I imagine your family's thinking about you going to college. What were the general directions you were thinking about?

BROWN: I wanted to study Russian. And history.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: I thought I should go to a smaller school. Our high school was oriented towards little colleges in Pennsylvania. The boyfriend I mentioned had gone to Gettysburg College, so I was looking at schools in Pennsylvania, so I ended up with my eyeball on this place called Dickinson College, which had a Russian studies major, had a story-book campus, and was reasonably well-regarded academically. So, I set my sights on that place. My parents planned to pay. I was lucky. But it was wrenching for them to let me go. So, I went to Dickinson College, and I was thrilled.

Q: And how long a trip from home is it?

BROWN: About three-and-a-half hours.

Q: Okay. So, it's not, you know, impossible for you to have a visit home now and then, or for your parents to come out and kind of look around and be sure nothing's too strange.

BROWN: Right, right, right. And they did visit and I was very glad to go home during breaks.

Q: And, alright, so you get to Dickinson College. It's, I guess, I can't recall, but it's one of the smaller liberal arts colleges.

BROWN: Right.

Q: About how big is it?

BROWN: 1,800 students.

Q: Okay, yes, so not much bigger than your high school, I gather.

BROWN: Right. My high school was only 1,000, but yes, it was small. I was thrilled to be there, but I soon didn't quite feel like this was the place for me, but I didn't know what the place for me was. I was heading towards an identity crisis.

Q: Okay. Well, the first year you're there you're probably fulfilling requirements.

BROWN: Right.

Q: And were you able to start Russian language?

BROWN: Yes. I started Russian language and I loved it – even the cases. I also had a fascinating philosophy course with an archetypal philosophy professor, Professor Israel. I'll never forget having to read Immanuel Kant for a homework assignment. I had to read the same paragraphs over and over and I still had a hard time understanding it. So, Dickinson was a big leap from my little high school, and having to face everyone's stereotype of a true intellectual –like Professor Israel– was intimidating.

Q: I think most people getting to college the first semester is pretty intimidating.

BROWN: I'm sure. I was not one of these kids who went to a private school and was used to this kind of intellectual stimulation. So, academically I had a great awakening.. I had a religion course that I loved, where I could talk about my struggles with Catholicism. I started writing essays that wove together our readings and my own personal experiences. To my shock, my professors really liked my writing, and also to my shock I loved writing. I found this new way that I could help me sort out some of my internal conflicts. But socially, it was a strange experience for me because I instinctively did not like sororities and fraternities. I just felt like I wanted college to be the start of my becoming an individual. So, it ended up that I was in the back of the cafeteria with all the other outliers. I wouldn't say we were misfits, but we were people who didn't want to be in the system. Most of the socializing revolved around this frat-sorority scene, and I was not into it, so eventually Dickinson did not turn out to be the right fit for me.

Q: And, okay. What are you doing to figure out the right place to be?

BROWN: I didn't know what the right path was for me. I had no idea. I met a professor there, she was an English professor, and was a graduate of one of the Seven Sisters schools. She had a long braid and a long serious face, and when I think of her now, I realize she was not particularly happy at Dickinson either. She encouraged me to transfer and I decided that I wanted a place where the kids seemed to be more academically engaged. But, I just didn't know exactly where to look so I decided I was going to drop out of college.

Q: Oh. Wow. Okay.

BROWN: Yes, In the middle of my sophomore year. I really didn't want to stay there anymore. So, I had a friend at Dickinson; her name was Leslie Kushner. She was from Louisiana and I said Leslie, can I come and visit you, because I'm dropping out of college, and can I visit you in January for a bit? And my parents said okay, and didn't really question me about why I wanted to drop out of college. So, I got on a bus again, for Louisiana this time. And on the bus, I sat next to this young man with whom I hit it off and who was a student at Columbia College. So, we're having this great conversation and he's going to New Orleans and I felt - he's as lost as I am, but he seems to inhabit my kind of universe. Then I went to Lake Charles, Louisiana, to visit this family, and I was there for two weeks. The father was a conductor. And the mother was a musician, and they were a very cultivated family. They had lots of art around a beautiful old big southern style rambling house with high ceilings. And the younger brother happened to be Tony Kushner, who now is an accomplished playwright and who has won the Pulitzer Prize.

Q: Oh, for heaven's sakes.

BROWN So, here I am hanging around with Leslie and Tony and we're in the middle of Cajun country. So, we toured Cajun country. We went to a skinning contest, where the Cajuns would compete to skin nutria in record time. They did this in a ring, it looked like a prizefighting ring, and people would get up and skin the animals. We listened to music, and ate lots of ice cream. But as this interlude was coming to an end, it dawned on me that I was facing a blank slate and I was not going to devote myself to the piano or writing, as I had fantasized, so I had better go back to college. The laugh is I dropped out of college for a sum total of two-and-a-half weeks. My parents called up Dickinson; they said sure, she can come back. At the same time, I decided I was going to apply to Barnard and Wellesley.

Q: Actually, this is exactly the right moment to make that decision, in your sophomore year, and you were in your sophomore year. You know, you can finish up your sophomore year and transfer, so you'll have your sophomore slump.

BROWN: I ended up going to Barnard. And then, the guy I met on the bus was there, too, so, that was kind of nice. I remember showing up, and I was so nervous that I had a tic in my eye. I was thinking if it's not right for me here, where am I going to go after this? What am I going to do? And New York in the '70s was bankrupt and gritty. I remember going in the corner store, and the lady behind the cash register had eyebrows like John Water's Divine; they were painted on her face, straight up. I bought something really quickly and I ran out, back to my room. My roommate wasn't there yet. I had a gerbil as a pet, so I had my gerbil there, and I was waiting for my roommate to show up. When she did it was really great because she had a three-legged cat named Clementine. Fate has a way of helping things work out.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: We complimented each other - I had my Grateful Dead and Iron Butterfly records, and she had Mahler. She came from a very distinguished publishing family – the Knopfs.

Q: Yes, right.

BROWN: She taught me and I taught her.

Q: So, you continued Russian area studies.

BROWN: Yes, yes, yes.

Q: How good did your Russian get or-- well. Let's take a step back. In Barnard, were there any opportunities for you to go to Russia? Did you think about that?

BROWN: I went to Russia in 1976.

Q: Okay.

And '76 was where in your college?

BROWN: It was the summer after I graduated.

Q: Alright. But before we go to summer of '76, so the two years you're at Barnard, you know, it's a new eye opening experience and so on; where did you envision yourself after?

BROWN: In the short term, New York. The best way I could describe how I felt about how much I loved New York is that on 115th and Broadway there was a dilapidated bookshop, and inside there was a counter that was made out of planks of raw wood. And there were disheveled guys behind the counter, and you could go up to the plank and ask for any book, such as the second edition of Mark Twain and they'll say sure, and they'll go back in this morass of books and they'll find it. You could find anything you want, and there's rich worlds you could find everywhere if you just looked.

Q: Oh, sure.

BROWN: I ended up working in the Barnard admissions office and the job entailed talking about New York. What I would say to people is you have this safe, manageable place at Barnard, which is the inner concentric circle. Then there is Columbia University, which is a great university, that's your second concentric circle. Then the Upper West Side is the third and then Manhattan, and it keeps going out and out and out, and you can take it all at your own pace. And there are fascinating people at this University, people who have a love of learning and very specific areas of interest and people who you are proud to measure yourself against.

In the meantime, and before I graduated, I spent a summer in London. I got a work permit through the Council of International Educational Exchange, and they set me up with a job on Buckingham Palace Road, in a travel agency. I lived with a British nurse. The travel agency hired foreigners because they really wanted to work us and we had to stay until 7:00 or 8:00 at night. I talked to my British friend about this and she said just go to an employment agency and find a better situation. So, I went to an employment agency and they said they need someone to work at the British Museum as a telex operator! So, I quit the travel agency precipitously and they were not pleased; they wrote a letter to my professor that I should never be allowed to do anything again in my life. Working at the British Museum was wonderful – I had a big ring of skeleton keys around my neck that gave me access to all the recesses of the British Library. And after that temporary position, I later went on an organized truck/camping trip through Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: And then I went back to school. So, that's how I managed to sow some of my wild oats and my curiosity. I first worked and then I found organized tours with a dash of adventure.

Q: Well, already, I mean, it didn't get you to Russia, but it did get you behind the Iron Curtain.

BROWN: Right, right.

Q: And you know, so you got to see what it was like to be able to trade a pair of jeans or a box of Marlboros or Kents for just about anything.

BROWN: Right. The trip to Russia was really interesting–I was there for two months, and it was with a language program through the American Institute for Foreign Studies. There were about 40 Americans. We were first supposed to divide our time between Moscow and St. Petersburg. But I got a letter not long before departure that the authorities couldn't accommodate us in St. Petersburg, and instead they were sending us to Krasnodar. Like, what? I'd never even heard of Krasnodar. So, I ran to my Russian professor; Professor Field, and asked where's Krasnodar? And he laughs. He said, well, Gorbachev was born near there, and it's near the Iranian border.

Q: Yes, right.

BROWN: It actually turned out to be much more interesting than staying in the big cities. It was as if we were dropped from Mars. I mean, this was 1976, 40 students, American students. Poor Krasnodar. I'm sure the local government was thinking - what are we going to do with these kids to keep them out of trouble?

Q: Right, right.

You can quit when you see that I can find you Krasnodar on the map. Soviet Union. Well, okay.

BROWN: Here it is.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: Wow it's not that far from Chechnya and Grozny. My goodness, little did I know. Anyway. We arrived in Krasnodar on July 4, 1976, on the U.S. Bicentennial. They matched each of us up with a young Komsomol (ie, a member of the youth Communist party), who was basically pinned to us the entire time we were in Krasnodar. I had Olga. We stayed in a large, crappy hotel. The only other people were some mostly inebriated Japanese businessmen who were there to look at the local sunflower industry. No other foreigners were there. The Soviets arranged a banquet for us. They had Soviet and American flags arranged down a long table These young Komsomoli were more fun than you might think. Their English was pretty good; it was better than our Russian in some cases. They were just normal kids like us. They brought out their guitars, we had parties, but they never brought us to their homes. They would show up at the hotel in the morning and have breakfast with us. Then we would be herded into a bus. The bus had curtains covering the windows. We went to our Russian language class, and after the class they would try to get us back in the bus. A lot of times we escaped from the bus as we wanted to explore Krasnodar ourselves.

Q: They were roughly your age, you know, they're, you know, regardless of the system they have sort of the same outlook, you know, what am I going to be doing, will I have a family, you know, all these sorts of things.

BROWN: I don't remember very many deep conversations with them, to tell you the truth. But I saw the rough edges in Soviet society, because Krasnodar was not prettied up. There were real hooligani (hooligans) hanging around in a park outside of our hotel. We were advised to avoid the park at night. They sported heavy chains and I saw many a broken windshield in the morning from those guys The whole city was the dull gray that you associate with socialist countries. I saw a lot of public drunkenness. There was a "drunk truck" that would pull up in front of the discotheque at our hotel 11:00 every night, to take out of control people away. I was not enamored of what I saw there – it seemed so desperate. In fact, I started to feel very psychologically hemmed in. I got a gastro disorder, and had distressing dreams and my first experience with sleep paralysis. Our Komsomolis were not asking us anything about the youth culture of the West. Those guys were too well indoctrinated. But as soon as we got to Moscow and I was just walking around, I had people approaching me all the time and asking me about music, trying to buy stuff from me and I bled, really, inside, to think these are people my age. I couldn't help but be so sorry for them, as they couldn't do what I was doing.

Q: Right.

BROWN: I will never lose that feeling,. In fact, in Moscow we went out and we were approached by some young people and we ended up going to where one of the Russians lived. There were maybe three or four of us Americans and we ended up at an apartment that was nice, with young people, and there was lots of vodka and joking and dancing and so forth. And then, the young person's mother came home, and she was entirely horrified to find Americans in her apartment. We got kicked out,with lots of yelling and screaming. I also remember meeting other young Russians and we went with them to a very spare, dilapidated apartment. This was the real thing: they put newspaper on the table and brought out dried fish and vodka, and I'm thinking oh, my god, how am I going to stomach any of this stuff. I remember there was this little porcelain mask on the wall and I asked about it and they pushed it on me: take this, you take this. It was unbelievable, an unbelievable experience to be in that kind of environment, and to see people reaching out to you in these ways. I had people asking me about race relations in the United States, about how can there be poor people, and all the difficulties in our society. It made me think. And I felt as if I had a fair amount in common with my Muscovite acquaintances.

Q: Interesting. Wow. Only two months and you know, it was like, you know, a life changing experience.

BROWN: I saw what ideology does and how it warps society and peoples' lives. In the case of the Russians what I couldn't abide was the fact that they couldn't travel, they couldn't read a full assortment of books, and they couldn't say what they wanted to say. That really, really got me.

Q: Yes. In two months, you got sort of a dose of–

BROWN: Yes and I came to understand that most people grow up and don't necessarily question what has been handed down to them. And that's human and unsurprising. In my case, however, my mind just didn't work like that and I would have had a rough time of it surviving in a society like that.

Q: Yes, sure.

So, now, so the Barnard experience, you got Russian and then a little bit of immersion at the end, but you graduate Barnard with a bachelor's in Russian studies?

BROWN: Russian area studies and art history.

Q: Oh, okay.

BROWN: I did a double major and in two things that were of questionable usefulness in terms of a career. Seriously. I have to thank my parents. I mean, you would think my father, the postmaster, he's going to wonder what the heck is she doing. But no, when I went to Russia, I brought him back a big black furry Russian hat, and he proudly wore that hat around the post office, on his round little Italian head.

Q: That's great.

BROWN: At Barnard we had to do a thesis in our senior year - mine bridged my interests in Russia and art history. I was fascinated by these artists of the Silver Age who were active around the time of the Russian Revolution. Even though they weren't rooted in Western artistic traditions, many of them all of a sudden went abstract, earlier than artists in the West. I focused most of all on Kasimir Malevich, who was one of those painters who is known for his square on square paintings. He gave a spiritual reason for this: he didn't want his art to be rooted in something that's concrete, that it had to be beyond that, it had to be abstract because god is abstract and not tied to temporal representations.

Q: Interesting. Interesting.

BROWN: So, he didn't tie his art to the temporal. I thought of him as the spiritual and artistic successor to iconographers. My thesis revolved around that idea.

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: My Russian history professor said you know, Dolores, I really don't know what you're talking about, but I talked to your art history professor, and he thinks it's quite good, so I'll pass you.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: I remember enjoying the intimate Russian library at Columbia, and they had really great source documents.

Q: And were you able to read Russian for your paper?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Okay. You had gotten that far.

BROWN: I could easily read newspapers, and once you know the art history vocabulary you can read about it fairly easily. If you told me to read "War and Peace," no, I'd say, I'll try that in another lifetime.

Q: Yes, yes, sure. Because also it uses all sorts of cultural touchstones and remarks that average Russians would immediately get but that you might not know out of Russian history or something like that,

Okay. So, you've now had your summer in Russia, but you were thinking, obviously, about graduate school even before that.

BROWN: Yes, I was. I think the main reason I was thinking of graduate school is because wasn't quite sure how to position myself to do something in international affairs.

When I was at Barnard I worked as a tour guide at the admissions office, and when I graduated, they offered me a job. That was certainly a respectable job and I loved my college, it did a lot for me, so I started working at the Barnard admissions office as one of their admissions counselors. I was able to travel around the country to talk about Barnard. I fell into the job, and it suited me, but it wasn't what I wanted to do in the long run. When you were in high school, do you remember having admissions officers visit and talk about their colleges?

Q: I wish. No, we didn't have that. I went to high school just a few years later than you did, but we had no real resources for college other than the books on college. Or whoever you might be able to grab who you know went to a certain school and you could ask them about it. But otherwise, no.

Okay, so you liked Barnard enough; how long did you work without going back to school? Or were you working and then applying immediately?

BROWN: Only a year-and-a-half, but what was nice is that they allowed me to continue to work part-time at the admissions office while I was in graduate school. I worked at Barnard a bit after graduate school too, but at that stage to help me progress professionally they carved out a position so that I could do international admissions. I learned about different educational systems, and they sent me to Paris and other places in Europe to recruit for Barnard.

Q: Wow.

Let's go back a second, though, before we get quite there. In Columbia graduate school, what–you were going to continue with the Russian area studies?

BROWN: That's right. Columbia has the Russian Institute. But I remember the first day I got there they sat us down, and they said we can't really guarantee that you're going to get much of a job unless you start taking some classes in the graduate school of business.

Q: Actually, that make sense because it was still- the Soviet Union was still communist, and how much relations did we have in any way with Russia?

BROWN: Well, it was a message for everybody. It was for everybody who was getting a master's of international affairs from Columbia.

Q: Oh, I see.

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: This was the School of International Affairs. Now it's the School of International and Public Affairs, SIPA. It offered an interdisciplinary approach. So, you weren't going for your master's in history or geography; you were getting a higher-level liberal arts degree. It didn't really enter my mind that that might be problematic. I just felt glad to study at the Russian Institute, I had a little job on the side, I liked living in New York, and I thought that this would be a good degree for me to have. So, in a sense it wasn't that different from going to Barnard except it took me to the next level. I took arms control classes, micro and macro economics, accounting, all of which were quite a departure for me and a challenge.

Q: Ooh.

BROWN: There was a very famous professor who was teaching the demographics course at Columbia, Murray Fischbach, who was known as Mr. Russian Demographics. I have to admit, sometimes when you think back on your college courses, there are maybe two or three basic things that you really remember from each one. I remember Paul Tillich from my religion classes, Montaigne from literature, etc. And in this particular case, what I remember Professor Fischbach emphasizing is the importance of the declining birthrate in Russia as opposed to many of the other Soviet Republics, and how the Russians were concerned about that. The birthrate in the Muslim areas was very high, and he catalogues how that was affecting the decision-making in the USSR. I had another professor named Professor Robert Legvold, who taught the arms control class.

To me, arms control was the pressing issue of the time. The basic thrust of the course was that Russia had bigger and more weapons than we had, but that their weapons weren't as dependable or accurate as ours. Small comfort, huh?

When I was in that class and I saw how dispassionate people were when they were discussing the subject, I felt a disconcerting air of removal and unreality and reacted against it. I was convinced in my own mind that any weapon that has been developed ultimately is used. I'm glad to be proved wrong.

Q: Ahh.

BROWN: I didn't really trust any kind of system to avoid that.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

Yes, because people were talking about megadeath and, you know, first strike and on and on and on.

BROWN: Right, Mutual Assured Destruction, MAD. You may remember my story about a letter I brought home from kindergarten that asked – in the event of a nuclear attack do you want Dolores to stay at school or head for home. You know, when you're going through your life you don't necessarily see the patterns and what really is propelling you. I feel like my path has been crooked, but when I think about it, I intuitively knew what I was doing and my being in that class harkened back to that pivotal experience.

Q: Yes, interesting, interesting.

BROWN: It's strange – maybe I have a stronger will than I think. In any event, I was lucky that my life allowed me to pursue these esoteric areas.

Q: Okay, so you're in graduate school and you're taking, really, much, much higher-level courses, examining in an interdisciplinary way Russia. What are you imagining you're going to do?

BROWN: Well, I wanted to be in the Foreign Service.

Q: Oh, okay.

BROWN: Or I wanted to be in a non-governmental organization (NGO) that provided humanitarian assistance or supported freedom of thought or artistic freedoms. I was not interested in being a banker.

Q: Okay.

When I got out of graduate school, I worked at a place called the International Center in New York. It was an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization). But before I started that job I visited Beirut, during the civil war. I had a friend who was there for the Catholic Relief Services. In the meantime, my father had passed away.

Q: Oh, my. So, you're relatively, right? He was relatively young.

BROWN: Yes. He was only 57 and died of complications after having suffered an aortic aneurysm. I was still in graduate school. After he died, I took my mother to England because she needed a change of scenery . And then I went on to visit Beirut.

Q: So, today is September 17, and we are resuming our interview with Dolores Brown, still before she- quite- get you to the Foreign Service.

BROWN: As we had left off, I was about to embark on visiting a friend, Richard Thoms, who was working for the Catholic Relief Services in Lebanon. This was in 1979. And he was a friend who I met at Columbia and had determined that he wanted to do relief work. He had been in the Peace Corps and wanted to continue doing that kind of work. He assured me that the place was relatively calm and that it wasn't a problem to come, and I thought okay, well, that will be interesting, I'll go. But I really didn't know what I was in for. This is previewing the moral of the story, but to actually see a society or a country in complete collapse with no overweening law and order is something that I think most Americans can't really fathom. I certainly didn't. We come from such a stable society where we worry about whether our kids are going to get hurt in the playground, whereas I would say a majority of the countries in the world are more wobbly.

So, I landed in Beirut Airport. I see my friend, on the other side of customs, wildly waving a Red Cross flag. The airport is absolute pandemonium. I had never been in the

Middle East and suddenly we emerged on the dusty and teeming streets. We're on the main but small road leading from the airport and there is a roadblock manned by men with guns and so you have to stop of course, sort of like paying a toll on the Garden State Parkway in New Jersey. There were many of these roadblocks as we entered Beirut–each militia controlled a different part of the various neighborhoods in the city. My friend Richard waved this puny little Red Cross flag around and they seemed to be alright about us. Many of the militia members were extremely young. They weren't hostile. I wasn't frightened of them, but perhaps I should have been. If you got shot, nothing would have happened. People got killed every day in Beirut, some innocent, some not.

I socialized with people from the Catholic Relief Services and also with Richard's local friends. I met young people who essentially were living their life inside their homes due to the civil conflict. They didn't go out very much, and they were my age. But there was still life in this city, believe it or not. We went to a beautifully appointed nightclub situated on the beach. Beirut has a famous nightlife and a wonderful French/Mediterranean cuisine and it's a beautiful city, actually. So, we made our way to this club and we were sitting outside under the stars and there was a shimmering swimming pool and yet, you could hear artillery maybe two miles down the road. And see flash-bangs occasionally. And when you drove through the city there wasn't any trash pickup and there were roving bands of wild dogs rummaging through heaping 15 foot garbage piles. People just lived around all that and somehow survived.

Richard lived in West Beirut. That was the Muslim side of the city, but he specifically lived in the Druze section of Beirut, a distinct Muslim sect.

One day, Richard went to work, and I was sleeping, and I felt a presence in my room. And I opened my eyes and there was a woman, a veiled woman maybe a foot away from my face, just studying it. It was really strange. People were watching everywhere. One evening we were on his balcony enjoying drinks, listening to Steely Dan, it was dark out, and all of a sudden someone struck a match to light a cigarette on the roof of the next building, very close, and you could see the outline of a long gun emerging from the shadows. He was a sniper, protecting the neighborhood and being entertained by us, I would suspect. And in fact, a lot of the buildings were unfinished around the area, and you could see men with guns running around on the open floors.

The American University was still functioning at that time, and there was a watering hole near the University where a lot of young people hung around . We joined the crowd there and one of our friends borrowed our car for an errand. Then the bartender got a call and I saw the expression on his face hardening and he said you have to get out, we have to close up now, there's going to be problems in the streets. Well, we couldn't leave because our car was gone, and the bartender was getting more and more nervous, and I could see outside the windows that there were guys with guns in open Jeeps passing by, shooting in the air. Apparently, a notable Palestinian was assassinated in France, and so the city lit up, people were burning tires and some militias were spoiling for a fight. Ten minutes later, our friend and our car returned, and we started to head back to where Richard lives. As we're driving down a street that cascaded down towards the beach, a car comes wildly speeding up the road towards us and its windshield was shot out, and the guy is gesticulating and shouting go back, go back! At this stage, I decided it was best for me to be on the floor of the car, curled up in the fetal position. And count the days until my flight.

We managed to get home but then things got even more serious and Richard decided that we had to leave Beirut. Whether we should have just hunkered down is a good question. Now that I think back on it, to try to get out of there was probably more risky. Nonetheless, we headed to the Lebanese countryside, passing the Holiday Inn (which was a sandbagged bunker), making our way through various blockades with very nervous looking men.

Now, I'm just explaining the atmospherics. I didn't fully understand all of the political players back then, but of course, there was the gulf between Christian East Beirut and Muslim West Beirut. There were the Palestinian camps in West Beirut and a lot of different Arab splinter groups that were not necessarily in concord with each other. It was a toxic mix, and also a place where larger political divisions between Israel, Syria, and other international players were played out on the street. Once you got out in the countryside it was a bit more pacific as long as you didn't go near the border with Israel, where hostilities flared up often.

So, we got outside of the city and hunkered down. Then, being young and resilient, we decided that it might be interesting to go to Damascus. So, we drove overland to Damascus.

Q: Now, you'd need, I imagine you'd need a visa for that, so you must have gotten one or did they have, you know?

BROWN: I don't remember any hassle or even having to pay for a visa. We were only going for a day, so that might have been why it was so easy. It was dusty on the road to Damascus, with flattish sand dunes speckled with pictures of Assad, Soviet style. Damascus was so exotic. I was used to being heckled and harassed when I went to Morocco as a foreigner. In Syria it was different – our presence was unusual and we were left alone. The gigantic and impressive antiquity museum was closed, but a knock on the door brought out a caretaker who guided us through the rooms. And, you know, of course, St. Paul was in Damascus, and you could go into the now-mosque where St. Paul walked. And it was absolutely majestic. I like the open aesthetics of mosques and the fact that God is not pictured.

We then went to a Western hotel to have something to eat, and they had a paper placemat, like a placement you would see in an American diner.

Q: Oh, yes.

BROWN: Well, this one had a few drawings on it, and I remember one well. It was a drawing of a plate with two partially-clothed women kneeling on top of two fried eggs. I saved that thing; it was so bizarre. This hotel was near a part of the city where they were meting out Sharia justice, but we avoided that.

We managed to drive back to Beirut from Damascus and then I went home.

Q: Altogether, how long would you say you were there?

BROWN: Two weeks.

Q: Oh, that's it?

BROWN: Yes, but it was a very long two weeks! It was my first glimpse of a country that became dismembered because of larger political tectonic movements. I didn't see any specific way out of what was happening in Lebanon without there being some kind of a solution to the problem between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Beirut was tragic and beautiful.

Q: Wow. Alright, to return to the larger story now, you go back to the UK? That was where you were sort of based when you went to Lebanon?

BROWN: No, I think at that stage I just went back to the United States, and this was after I had graduated from Columbia and was looking for a job. And so, I found a job, and one of the reasons I got this job is because there was a very adventurous person, Peter Foley, who was the head of the organization, and when he heard that I had the nerve–or stupidity–to go to Beirut he immediately hired me. He didn't care that I went to Columbia; he was more interested in the fact that I went to Beirut. It was a place called the International Center in New York, and it was a non-profit organization. The sole benefactor was an elderly woman from New York, Mrs. Seligman. It was on the top floor of the Abbey Hotel. We called it the Shabby Abbey; it was on the corner of 7th Avenue and 51st Street. The mission was to provide a place to acclimate new arrivals to New York City. It was run on a shoestring and had two departments: English language and Programs. I was hired as the Program Director, which meant that I was to, with no money and with some volunteers, figure out ways to help foreigners and make them feel comfortable in the United States.

Now, we had the most motley band of people you could imagine at the Center – Japanese, Russians, Palestinians, Syrians, Koreans, you name it. People could come and hang around: it had sofas and a ping pong table and a foosball. The people who gave the English lessons were volunteers, and it was a home to them, as well. This was a warm and wacky place.

We had a group of intense Russians there all the time, playing chess, and I knew they had to be good, although I didn't know how good. So, I thought eh, I'm going to call up the geniuses over there at Rockefeller University and see if they want to play us. They said, who are you? I said we're the International Center of New York; we want to play your chess club. Who are you, they said again? Well, they came over and we whooped them so badly, they ended up having to play ping pong. That was so great.

And we did really corny things, too, particularly our famous talent show. I remember being asked to write a letter on behalf of one of the Japanese gentlemen who wanted to participate in the show on a Friday night, so that his company would excuse him from whatever duties he might have at 8 pm!. This is a stereotype, but it seemed those companies really owned their people at that time, day and night. And the Japanese gentleman came, and with the utmost seriousness, did a very shaky rendition of "The Sound of Music." And the volunteer-made stage almost cracked underneath the amateur flamenco dancers! In the meantime, Wolf Pasmanik, a regular, was stuffing his pockets with snacks from the table. I loved this place.

Q: Oh, my goodness.

BROWN: I was working there when the hostages were taken in Iran.

Q: Yes, because, yes, when you had mentioned that you went to Beirut in '79, I was thinking wow, as the world historic events are going on in Iran, you're in Lebanon, and I sort of wondered if there was any, like, overlap of what was going on in Iran hitting you in some way in Beirut or Syria.

BROWN: Not really. People in Lebanon were more interested in talking to me about Israel and Israel's role in what was going on in their country, which was kind of an eye opener for me, because I had come from New York, where most people took for granted that you're going to support Israel, period, end of story. And so, when I went to Lebanon and met people there, I was introduced to an entirely different point of view.

This leads me to our big Thanksgiving dinner at the Center. I'd say at least 100 people showed up for this event, which the volunteers put together. But a local network news station found out that we were feeding Iranians on Thanksgiving (amongst many others, of course) so they crashed into our Center and started interviewing people and looking for our Iranian members. They were trying to make us look bad. Our credo was that wherever you came from you were in the United States with us, so we didn't assume that you were representing the views of your particular government

Q: Right, right. And that was not an unreasonable view to take.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: I mean, people who come to the U.S. typically are capable of leaving behind their homes, the culture they grew up in, and really focus on making it in the U.S.

BROWN: That's right. And that's what people wanted to do.. And New York was so challenging particularly at that time. It's a complicated cultural landscape. Even for an American it's a complicated cultural landscape.

Q: Absolutely. Sure, sure.

BROWN: For our members, any kind of support that we could give them through learning English, through having an inexpensive place to come and socialize, through having a sympathetic, empathetic ear, was really valuable. What I saw was an eagerness to fit in and the great hope that American society held for so many.

I had a soft spot for people who fled the Soviet Union, there is no doubt about that, and the Russians members of the Center knew that. So, one day they convinced me into allowing their Russian cultural club to meet at the Center on a Sunday. I asked my boss and he said sure, that's okay, but little did I know that they were blasting out flyers all over Brighton Beach. The Center didn't open until noon and I remember getting a hysterical call at 10:00 a.m. from the hotel lobby saying that there were 50 Russians with musical instruments and bottles of vodka streaming into the Abbey Hotel and what was I going to do about this. I thought the club had 20 members and would sit quietly in one of the corners discussing business!

Q: Beautiful.

BROWN: We opened up the Center and let them in. But we never offered the facility again to such a large and obstreperous group!

Q: Oh, my god.

BROWN: So, this job, as charming as it was, didn't pay very much. In fact, I was getting paid less than before I went to graduate school. And also, the working hours weren't ideal – they were between 2:00 and 10:00 p.m. New York is a late city, but that was a bit ridiculous. Then Barnard called me and offered me a position again and I decided to return there. They specifically said that I could do foreign student admissions, so I was very flattered by that, and it was a nice job and it was home for me. I was at the International Center for only a little over a year, but have so many wonderful memories of that place.

When I returned to Barnard, I was one of two Associate Directors of Admissions, in charge of foreign and transfer students, so I was one rung under the Director. I had made progress. when the Foreign Service called after two years or so, I was ready to go.

Q: Now, what year is this when they–?

BROWN: 1985.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: Unfortunately the Foreign Service didn't call until about two weeks before they wanted me to show up in Washington. I went running around like Chicken Little trying to determine whether it was feasible to make such an abrupt change in my life. One of the the first people I went to for advice was the Dean at Barnard, Dorothy Denburg, pouring out all of my fears and misgivings. What am I going to do, they want me to be there in two weeks! My father hadn't died that long ago and my mother was alone and I'm an only child. Dorothy was very calm, and she said this is something you've always wanted to do; you have to look back at your original motivation. She told me to stop worrying about all of the other things, and know that if it doesn't work out you can come back. The United States isn't going to disappear. That made sense, and she gave me the boost that allowed me to plunge forward.

I had two weeks to get myself to Washington. In fact, it turned out I was two days late for my A-100 class. Everyone was thinking, who is this person who's two days late?. . I showed up at the old FSI (Foreign Service Institute) in Rosslyn, which is where I think the Intake Office must have been at that particular time . One kind soul loaded me into a convertible and we zipped up in front of the 21st Street entrance of the State Department and he pointed to the door.

Q: Now, to get yourself down there, you would have needed at least to get into a hotel, or you know, rent something. Were you able to do all that in the short time you had?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Okay. And now, your first day in A-100, what is your class like? How big, you know, was it diverse? How would you describe it?

BROWN: It was about 40 students. I think that's a nice size, not too big, not too small. I wouldn't say it was that diverse; in terms of race, not at all. It was certainly diverse geographically. I wasn't sure how I would feel about moving to Washington. I had the typical New Yorker's view of Washington as a bit of a backwater and I had never met anyone who had been in the State Department, so I didn't have the familiarity to know what to expect. But I could see immediately that this was my tribe.

Q: Okay. What made you feel that way?

BROWN: Because they had a serious intellectual side, a sense of wonder about the world, and most people had a sense of adventure. We also believed in the basic idea of the goodness of American values. I really felt that people shared my interests, and some shared my disposition. I didn't look back.

Q: Okay. Now, as you're going through A-100 and you're talking to all the people, what are you beginning to think about in terms of a career in the Foreign Service? Because certainly, you know, I'm sure that you thought about the kinds of things you might do before you entered, but now as you're getting the real thing, were you hired in a cone?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: I was hired as a management officer. But I hadn't ever been tested in terms of organizational talent.

Q: Interesting, yes.

BROWN: But when I took that test, I apparently slam dunked the management portion. I was skeptical about how as a management officer I would be involved in foreign policy issues, but I thought I would just take one step at a time and do the best job I can. I didn't have a grand plan.

So, the A-100 class was a great introduction to this new career and life. A lot of what you hear, however, goes right over your head because you don't have the context. But what worked wonderfully was the bonding. The Foreign Service is unique. And I believe strongly in the mission and in the people of the FS. That's why I work at AFSA (American Foreign Service Association) today.

Q: Right, I agree.

BROWN: So, they allow you, of course, to devise a list of where you would prefer to be assigned from a list of all available postings. First on my list was Kuala Lumpur. I wrote five choices; none of them were South Africa. And this was a time when South Africa was on the front pages of the newspaper.

Q: Sure. It was the end–well, no; it was the Reagan Administration, so we were in constructive engagement.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: And there were all kinds of–

BROWN: Violence, violence.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: The lid was blowing. So, then, all of a sudden, from the stage they said South Africa, Dolores Capece. Uh-oh, I thought: from the Upper West Side of Manhattan to apartheid South Africa. I must have looked like a deer in headlights. I wasn't unhappy, however. For me it was a bit of a crap shoot. I resolved to make the best of it. So, South Africa it was.

It was undoubtedly exciting to go to a country in transition. I didn't have strong feelings one way or another about constructive engagement. I felt it made sense for us to be engaged in the discussion regarding the transition to democratic rule in that country. And I was going to be the GSO, so I would be focusing on bread and butter issues such as housing and the motor pool. I had the greatest, most supportive bosses there. I know a few of my colleagues, especially GSOs who went out to Africa, got eaten alive. People sometimes took their frustrations out on the poor GSOs!. My immediate boss was a GSO specialist, Paul Bofinger, with the greatest sense of humor and proportion, and the Management Counselor was Jerry Rose. They both taught me and gave me cover when I needed it.

Q: As the junior GSO, did you have contract authority?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: And then, so I imagine they also told you to get personal liability insurance then. Because when you sign, you could, you know, if there's a mistake you could theoretically go to jail. You would need, you know–

BROWN: That wasn't really a focus. I got personal liability insurance later in my career, but it was mostly because one is exposed because supervising people.

Q: Oh, interesting.

BROWN: What was interesting about being a contracting officer at that time was the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, which required the U.S.G. to give preference to emerging, black-owned companies. They were not particularly easy to find, by the way.

Q: Right, right, right.

BROWN: There were a few expos, ie, trade shows comprised of small entrepreneurs in black townships. It was there that we could more readily locate these companies.

Q: And the very interesting thing about that is the fact that there's a GSO, you know, you went in thinking oh, all I'm going to do is, you know, count the number of cars in the motor pool and make sure nobody's stealing. But it turns out you're actually carrying out U.S. policy-

BROWN: Absolutely.

Q: –and people often don't give credit to GSO for that.

BROWN: Or management.

Q: Right, exactly.

BROWN: No, that's one of the things that I think throughout my career has been a strength –I like the jobs most that combine the two worlds of practice and policy. They should never be divorced. Anybody who works in an embassy, whatever your job, you need to understand and model U.S. policy.

Q: So, I didn't mean to interrupt you. Were you able to find many of those minority-owned businesses or black-owned businesses?

BROWN: Yes. You had to put more into it to work with them, and you had to be willing to sometimes take it on the chin from your customers because there was an understandable lack of capacity at times.

Another thing about being a GSO–I worked very closely on a day to day basis with South Africans from every ethnic and economic group, i.e., the people who were living through the political turmoil.

What was the most striking characteristic of apartheid was its utter effectiveness. Apartheid literally means separate. So, what that meant in practice is that different races lived separately. White people in South Africa were completely divorced from the reality that black people lived with. They didn't know what the townships looked like; most at that time didn't want to know. People would go home at night: black people to black townships, so-called colored people to colored townships, and very rarely would the twain meet.

Pretoria was the Afrikaner stronghold and the seat of government, and it tended to be conservative. There were parts of Johannesburg where black people and white people could be in the same, say, theater together. But in Pretoria, where I lived, generally not. Social engineering, such as highways separating black areas from white areas, passes that didn't allow blacks in white areas after working hours, different facilities down to barber shops for blacks and those for whites, all of those and other measures defined peoples' realities. It was incredibly rigid and on a belief that God wanted the races separated in this manner. That rigid mindset was not easily penetrable.

Think about it. You had 20 million black people, maybe five million whites and three million so-called coloreds. They built a society where people didn't meet except under very controlled situations. That system was working until the South African Defense Force put down a demonstration in Sharpeville in 1960, killing young black people who were protesting the imposition of Afrikaans in their classrooms. After that, the pressure slowly built until by the 80's, it was at a boiling point.

An unforgettable experience was when the Congressional Black Caucus came to South Africa in 1985. Bill Gray, an African-American congressman, headed the delegation, which was composed of many prominent members of the Black Caucus. This was at the height of international focus and pressure on the apartheid regime, so you can imagine how sensitive this delegation was for the South African government. I couldn't have been in the country for more than three months. I was surprised that the Embassy tapped me to accompany the delegation and to arrange the logistics. I found myself telephoning South African bus companies, saying, I have a group of U.S. congressmen coming and I need transportation for them, and oh, by the way, we are going to go into the townships and visit Winnie Mandela and we want you to take us there, They are – huh, there is a State of

Emergency, no one can go in the townships! What kind of insurance do you have? Well, we managed to cut through all of that and to get a bus, along with a follow-on bus for redundancy to ferry us around. And of course, journalists were very interested in what this delegation was doing, and they tailed us throughout the trip.

Q: These are South African journalists.

BROWN: Well, yes, but there also were journalists from the international press because this was a big story. We met with the full pantheon of anti-apartheid activists. We visited the Headquarters of COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), At the end of the visit, I was herding all of the Congressmen back into the bus, counting heads, and our next stop was Soweto. Journalists were swarming everywhere, but they weren't allowed in the townships due to the State of Emergency. All of a sudden Congressman Gray shouts from inside of the bus, "CAPECE LET "EM ON." That caused a melee and a rush for the door of the bus, and all of a sudden, we had at least ten journalists join the group.

Q: Holy cow.

BROWN: This is the moment when I met my husband-to-be; because he was one of those journalists.

Q: Very interesting.

Oh, now wait; a journalist from South Africa?

BROWN: Well, he was South African, but he worked for Agence France-Presse.

Q: Oh, okay.

BROWN: He worked for Agence France-Presse. He had worked for South African publications, including a newspaper that the apartheid government closed down, called "The Rand Daily Mail." He decided for a whole constellation of reasons both personal and political that he was going to leave South Africa and live in France. He picked up a job with Agence France Presse and they sent him back to report in Johannesburg.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

BROWN: Yes. So, those were the days when the journalists were instrumental in getting news out on what was happening in the townships.

Q: Wait, excuse me. Did you marry in South Africa? Oh, I see. Okay. Okay.

BROWN: Yes. And our marriage presented difficulties for the South African government and some heartburn for our Embassy, as being a journalist in South Africa at that time was politically sensitive and presented a challenge to the government.

I'll tell you the story of Graham's detention, which illustrates how dangerous it was to be reporting in southern Africa at that time. There had been a coup attempt in Ciskei, a tiny "country" within the borders of South Africa that only South Africa and a handful of countries recognized. It was a dumping ground for the South Africans so that they could wash their hands of responsibility for the people who lived there. Graham went to interview Colonel Ron Reid-Daly, a Rhodesian who was head of the Selous Scouts, and now the head of Security for the Transkei, about the coup, as there were rumors Transkei, another "country" was behind the action. I should add that the Selous Scouts were a tough bunch who fought and lost to the guerrillas in Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, and Reid-Daly was one of the toughest.

So Graham first went to the Colonel's office and he wasn't there. Undaunted, he got the man's address and showed up at his front door. The staff let him in to wait for Daly, but all of a sudden, a phone call came telling him to get the hell out of the house. Apparently, a French national was behind the coup attempt in Ciskei, and Graham, working for Agence France-Presse, a possible participant in a counter plot. A roadblock had been set up not far from Daly's house to snare him, and they stopped Graham and he was taken away.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: The way I found out is that I got a call early on a Sunday morning from one of his journalist pals, Peter. These guys also were tough–they worked in conflict situations every day. So Peter tells me–Dolores, we got a call from Avis and Graham's rental car is at the police station in Transkei so he must be in jail. Don't worry too much, though – he said in a bluff manner - it's Sunday and they don't normally interrogate people on Sundays. They're too busy barbecuing, so probably he'll be alright for now.

So, I have to call up my boss, the Management Counselor, Jerry Rose, and tell him that Graham's in jail. WHAT? This is not a thing that the Embassy wants.

Q: Oh, good god, no. Oh, this is a disaster, yes.

BROWN: About five minutes later Jerry calls me back and it's apparent he's notified the Embassy and took measures to take care of me. My immediate boss, Jack Ferguson, picked me up and brought me to his home so I'm wasn't all alone. I went home that night, and I actually slept, I'm surprised to say. And then I had the surreal experience the next morning of going to the local newsstand before I showed my face at the Embassy and this story was all over the newspapers. Arriving at the Embassy, I got the call every first tour officer dreads. I got called up to the Front Office.

Q: Sure, I mean, you know, there's no way to know initially.

BROWN: Right. So, they had to ask me some hard questions. They asked me had Graham ever smuggled drugs or been involved in any crimes and I said no, no. So, then they said okay, we'll take it from here. I settled into my office and I started to get calls from all sorts of people, people I didn't know, with Graham sightings. One said she saw him being roughed up by soldiers on the side of the road in Transkei.

Then the Embassy approached the South African government, and asked them to intervene, as the U.S. did not have diplomatic relations with the Transkei. After three days, Graham was released. There was a press conference at the airport when he arrived. The story even made the "New York Daily News." He had lice. He was in a cell with ordinary criminals, packed in like sardines. They all were sympathetic towards him because he was a political, which in their eyes was worse than being hauled in for burglary. He made friends with a man named Desert Fox, a car thief. I will spare you and not give you the toilet details.

Q: Oh my god. What a mess. Yes. You know, this is the kind of thing that could go very, very wrong for you, not so much in the sense that your husband never gets released, but in the negative publicity that the ambassador does not like and sends you home.

BROWN: It could have gone a lot of different ways, but I always felt supported by the people at the Embassy. I think there was a feeling that Graham and journalists were on the side of the angels. But yes, the South Africans could have declared me persona non grata or the Embassy could just have decided let's get her out of here, there's too many down sides.

Q: Right. So, this leads me to just ask the general question that, you know, you get married, is your husband's citizenship expedited the way it is typically done for people who marry U.S. citizens, or what happened?

BROWN: Yes. He first became a permanent resident, but only became a U.S. citizen after we left South Africa.

Q: Oh, okay, okay.

BROWN: It could have been complicated for him to get a visa to work in South Africa as an American citizen, and he wanted to continue to work.. And the issue of diplomatic immunity! For a foreign journalist? That's the last thing the South Africans would have wanted. Our situation was unique, of course, but the entire issue of spouses working in any environment is complicated. At times, both governments have to turn a blind eye to the legal issues. In our particular case, the South African government could have made a big issue out of it, because they were at loggerheads with most foreign journalists, let's face it. We got married mid-stream, so they were presented with a fait accompli. Maybe they just didn't feel it was worth making an issue of it. I should mention, though, that mysterious things did happen. In one case, our home was burglarized and not a single item of mine was touched. But Graham's office was ransacked.

Q: And the other question about–because naturally this happens with anybody who marries–any Foreign Service officer who marries a foreigner, was your marriage delayed *for quite a while as, you know, security issues were, you know, ground through? Or did you–*

BROWN: It didn't– it seemed to go pretty smoothly.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: In Brussels we were faced with the same issue of Graham working as a journalist but at the same time having diplomatic immunity. But the story in Brussels wasn't politically sensitive at all – Graham reported on the EU, so no one batted an eyelash.

Q: Right. Okay. But now, to finish with–go ahead to finish with South Africa, you had, you know, incredible experiences just in your first tour.

BROWN: Yes. Graham wanted to stay in South Africa as his father was ailing. My wonderful bosses and the Embassy supported me and I was able to do my second tour, as a consular officer, in Johannesburg. I owe everything to the people who helped us.

Q: Oh, of course, of course.

Because you bring to the job, unlike a first-tour junior officer who just arrives and goes on the visa line, you've already had significant experience with all kinds of people at all levels of society, and that kind of experience that you can bring to making visa decisions must have made you, you know, a pretty valuable commodity for consular or–

BROWN: Yes, I was an acceptable candidate. There were good, humane reasons for allowing it to happen. The people around me also supported me because they thought I was a valuable employee with good prospects for the future.

Q: I'm sure there were a few magic words, but.

BROWN: Yes, I suppose. And so, I became a visa officer in Johannesburg. And that was during the whole desperate white flight from South Africa.

It was the first time that I wore that kind of bureaucratic authority. People would batter you with their stories and it can be trying to separate out who is telling you the truth and who isn't. I found it challenging.

Q: What was the demographic, in general the demographic breakdown of your applicants? Did you have a lot of black applicants, colored applicants, or were they mostly white or how did they–?

BROWN: Mostly white. Most black people would not have had the wherewithal to travel, especially as far as to the United States. And because South Africa was going through such political paroxysms, you really had to look at peoples' applications with a heavy dose of skepticism.

I should add, though, that there were a fair number of black applicants for the H-1 visa for nursing, for instance, and also for education visas. U.S. charitable organizations wanted to help black South Africans, so there were a fair number of tertiary and secondary schools that would offer scholarships to talented, young South Africans. I mean, what a jump, going from a South African township to some little private school in Massachusetts.

Q: Yes, sure, oh my god.

Yes. Were you finding that the white applicants would, you know, apply for a visitor visa and end up adjusting status somehow when they got to the U.S.? Was that a major issue?

BROWN: I don't have the feedback, but I would suspect so. In fact, I was just in Cambodia a year ago, and I met someone who may fit that bill. There's a 50 percent chance I gave him his visa to the United States and he's no longer a South African citizen. I asked–when did you get your visa? What year? And now he owns an AirBNB near Angkor Wat.

Q: I imagine. Yes, I bet. Cambodia by way of South Africa and the U.S.

BROWN: Yes. Well, he met a woman in the U.S. who was Australian, and they decided to get married and now they're back in Cambodia.

Q: Interesting, yes.

BROWN: There were many, many people, idealistic and principled people who stayed in South Africa to build a just post-apartheid society.

Q: Have you gone back since you were there originally?

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Okay, because I guess your husband has family and so on.

BROWN: I should tell you, my husband passed away very young.

Q: Oh, my god.

BROWN: I still have relatives who are there. But he was an only child like me, so the relatives I have are far removed and distance didn't help us to remain close. But I did go back with our children around 2007 because I wanted them to see South Africa and I wanted them to meet the family. I had a friend who was the DCM in Pretoria at that time, Gillian Milovanovic, and she welcomed us to stay with her and her family.

Q: Wow.

But alright, through your period of time in the consular section were there other kind of noteworthy or, you know, consequential things that went on? Because you know, obviously hundreds of decisions on visas, each one is unique, but on the other hand, you know, you have to do quantity and things kind of run on a day-to-day basis, but were there particular moments?

BROWN: There was one thing that I think bears mentioning now. I wasn't so personally involved because I was on maternity leave, but this was an historic event.. One day three South African black political prisoners were at Johannesburg Hospital for routine visits. They managed to escape and ran to the Consulate and asked for asylum. One of them is Murphy Morobe, who eventually became a cabinet member in an ANC government. The Consulate checked with State and ultimately we let them stay, which is a rare occurrence. Overnight,the consulate in Johannesburg became a political hotspot Bishop Tutu speaking in the front of the building. A police cordon. Copycats trying to gain entrance. We had to man the consulate 24 hours a day because we couldn't leave them in the building alone, of course.

Q: Of course, right, yes.

BROWN: I think you can count on two hands how often the U.S. has granted asylum because it's going to put you at loggerheads with the local government, obviously. I was having a child so I couldn't help my colleagues at that time.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: I mean, that is what is so interesting about all of this is the fact that we need as diplomats to be able to think through situations with a multidimensional lens, and often on an immediate basis and with good judgment. What are the policy implications? Are there the consequences of any decision, intended and not?

Q: The interesting word that you used was judgment. The president's confirmation says we place special trust and confidence in your integrity, prudence, and ability. And the kind of prudence that they're talking about there is being able to make a decision that takes into account all of those things.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: And so, it's like basic to a successful Foreign Service career is that judgment that you're talking about.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: Being able to decide what is the best thing to do from many different angles.

BROWN: That's right. And you have to be dispassionate. You have to take the time to step back. And there's no playbook. You need to deliberate. And, finally, the best leaders I've seen in the Foreign Service have a strong moral compass, too, that pivots on American values.

Q: Yes, yes.

BROWN: You have to walk the walk. When I first moved into my house in Pretoria, there were servants' quarters, and I had a squatter living in them.

Q: Holy cow.

BROWN: I treated her gently. I gave her food and talked with her. Finally, the embassy said enough, you know, we have to think of a nice way to send her on her way.

There was a diplomat at the embassy and he got into a fight with his locally-hired maid and threw her out in the middle of the night. You know where she went? To the local trade union, COSATU, and complained about the employment practices of this American diplomat. And he was out on his ear.

Q: Wow. And COSATU is the trade union?

BROWN: Yes. She was smart enough to go to COSATU. It was so hair trigger there, you really had to have a sense of the context and how to behave in ways consonant with American values, not local practices. We stood for something.

The American government also played a critical role in providing a place where people of all colors could get together and talk through issues because they didn't have many venues of this kind in their own society.

Q: Right.

BROWN: Peter Chaves, the CG in Johannesburg and his wife, Lucille, did wonderful work in that regard. I nominated Lucille for an AFSA award , because she did so much outside of the norm.

She established a safe place for people of different communities to come together and talk. She had a healing influence. And she tended to people who sacrificed for their beliefs, sometimes to the detriment of their health, and supported them, by bringing food and her empathetic ear.

And one last thing, I was in, thank god, a bombing that didn't really work. The ANC was active at that time with a terror campaign.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: I was in a shopping center in Johannesburg, Hyde Park Corner. I was burstingly pregnant with Richard, my eldest son. I was buying new pyjamas for my imminent trip to the hospital. And then, all of a sudden, I saw a big puff of smoke in the mall's stairwell and heard a boom. I saw two women throw themselves into each others' arms. All of a sudden everybody's running towards the exits. The shopkeeper takes me by the arm, and we start running (me waddling) out of the place. Everybody got in their car, but no one can go anywhere because everybody's in their car trying to exit through one driveway. And then, I saw a crowd of people just exiting from the mall screaming "there's another bomb, there's another bomb." So, we all abandoned our cars where they were and started running as far away from the mall as possible. I remembered that one of Graham's friends, Glen, lived near the mall so I ran to his house.

Q: Whoa.

BROWN: Turns out an Israeli woman recognized that the bomb was a bomb. It was in the supermarket. And a black man put a suppression blanket on the bomb, so that's why a lot of people didn't get hurt. What an act of bravery.

Q: Holy cow.

BROWN: He got a handsome reward after that!

Q: Oh, yes. My god, that's wild.

BROWN: Yes. Yes. He deserved it.

Q: You know, you couldn't have been more than six weeks away from delivery and you're running. Oh, my god, what a mess.

When do you leave, what year?

BROWN: I left in 1989.

Q: Okay. So, quite close to the beginning of change.

BROWN: Right. I was there when things were peaking, and it was obvious that something had to give

I knew what I wanted to do next–I wanted to work at the Operations Center. I felt that that would be the one way that I could see what goes on at the State Department at the top policy level, and that I would learn the skills necessary to compete for larger opportunities. At Ops, the officers learn how to write for the State Department, learn how to brief for the State Department, and have a bird's eye view on how decisions are made.

Q: Okay. And you weren't too concerned about the fact, you know, that you have a very small child now and you'd be on the 24-hour?

BROWN: Yes, I of course thought about that. My husband would be with me and was willing to help. He was fine with coming back to the United States. Unfortunately, his father passed away while we were in our last years in South Africa, so he was free to leave and he was hopeful that he could get a job at the AFP office in Washington. And the Watch was only for a year anyway, so it wasn't a big time commitment. My mother, Gladys, also was very eager to help, so I had loads of support.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: I've been running around the earth, and now Gladys is more than happy to come and be with her grandson. And I miss her. So, this was a good arrangement. It may be counterintuitive, but being at Ops can be fine for family life – it worked for me.

Q: Interesting. Okay. How so?

BROWN: Well, because you go into the department and you work an eight hour shift. That's it. Finito. You are eligible for a parking pass and so you can drive, which makes it a quicker commute, especially when you work the odd shifts. So, you're not away from home for twelve to fourteen hours a day, as is possible with other Department jobs. And whatever's happening, you leave on time; someone else takes it on.

Q: True. Fair enough.

BROWN: So you're free, psychologically.. You don't have much of a social life because no one knows when you're sleeping or off. So, it's kind of like you work and you're with your family. So, if your family is willing to put up with the odd hours, they have you around a fair amount and at unexpected times, and you could do things at unexpected times. I could go to the playground on a Wednesday afternoon. Go to the doctor's with my son on Tuesday morning. So, I didn't find it difficult, but it's only because I had my husband and my mother to help me.

Q: Yes, yes.

BROWN: I didn't have anything hanging over my head.

Q: And your husband was able to get a job?

BROWN: Unfortunately, AFP didn't have a way to fit him in. He got a part-time copy-editing job with "The Post" and did delivery work. It was a hard year for him, however, because he went from being a recognized journalist doing very important work in South Africa and all of a sudden he's in Washington and on the sidelines. But we knew all this was temporary–we were working on our next move. He knew that he was going to go back to France, to AFP headquarters, so my focus was to try and get a job in Paris.

Q: Wow. That is not an easy-

BROWN: Well, I didn't. I didn't get a job in Paris. But I did get a job in Brussels.

And in the meantime, Ops was a great experience. I was in the peanut gallery for some very important interagency meetings so I saw first hand what goes into policy deliberations.

Q: And so, you were in the Ops Center from '90 to '91?

BROWN: I left–it must have been '89 to '90.

Q: '89 to '90. Okay. Okay.

BROWN: '89 to '90. Yes. Yes.

Q: So, there were a couple–it wasn't–we weren't quite yet at the first Desert Storm– first Iraq war.

BROWN: No.

Q: But there were things like Noriega–

BROWN: Yes, yes. I was actually there during Noriega getting blasted out – was it Led Zeppelin? And when Shirley Temple Black was in Czechoslovakia.

Q: Yes, yes. Oh. Yes. They were beginning the divorce–

BROWN: Right. She was running around the main square during the protests in her sneakers, reporting back to Ops, on developments there.

Q: Yes, the fall of the Wall and then the end of the communist parties and the-

BROWN: Right.

Q:–transformation.

BROWN: All of that. And we were witnessing exciting, positive news for the United States and for democracy.

Q: Sure. Were you tempted to go from the Operations Center to the secretariat to, you know, be one of the people who advances the trips and, you know, goes through the documents before they go to the secretary and so on?

BROWN: Yes, I was tempted as it is such a dynamic place. I ended up going back to the Operations Center, but that was later. As I mentioned, I got a job in Brussels, as a Finance officer.

Q: Well, before you go, do you get training for the finance officer job?

BROWN: Yes, yes.

Q: Because it is, you know-

BROWN: It's, yes, you have to know what you're doing.

Q: And it's, you know, a very particular kind of accounting system, and you know, you have to not only learn the basics but then see how they're applied in the particular place _____.

BROWN: That's right, that's right.

Q: You were in the embassy in Belgium?

BROWN: Well, as you know, there are three different Missions in Belgium – the bilateral, to the EU, and to NATO and there is one management platform, the Joint Administrative Services, that provides support to all of these Missions. My job wasn't to do the accounting but to understand the budget and to offer advice on how to best use it for the stated goals of the Mission. I also was in charge of allowances for employees. I could ensure that allowances were being fairly dispensed and also that they were dispensed according to law. I did catch some weaknesses in the system that I was able to correct because I'm a bit of a digger.

Q: And of course, one of the tricky things about allowances is you make decisions, people get their allowances, and then two years later they could hear from, you know, the central office of allowances saying oh, for two periods you got too much allowance, you have to pay back.

BROWN: Right. And you don't want that either. And most people don't want that.

Q: Sure.

BROWN: Some of us received a relatively complicated allowance called the living quarters allowance to pay for our housing and utility costs. The rent portion was clear, but you had to estimate what your utilities would be. And in a place like Belgium or France or anywhere in Europe, utilities are extremely expensive. So, let's say an employee estimated that utilities would be $2,000 a month, and they turned out to be only $1,000. So, we instituted a yearly process to make sure people would refund the balance to the Embassy or if their expenses were higher, to get that money back.

I also put into place a way to recapture medical payments that the Embassy paid upfront overseas from employees' insurance plans. This caught the attention of the Department and I think was instituted at other posts. Why should State be paying for what Blue Cross/Blue Shield should pay?

Q: Now this, is this your first full tour? In other words, was it two years, three years?

BROWN: Yes, it was. But I ended up being in Brussels for four years. In the meantime, my husband was transferred from Paris to Brussels.

Q: Oh, very good.

BROWN: He was only in Paris for maybe six months while I was in Brussels, and I had Richard with me and Richard was rambunctious. And so, it was hard to handle work and Richard simultaneously. He was especially naughty on those trains to Paris to see Daddy when he was so excited.

Q: And your mother couldn't come?

BROWN: She did come often, but not on a permanent basis. In the long run we didn't want to impose upon her, nor did she want to impose upon us. It was really nice that AFP then assigned Graham to Brussels, so we were reunited. At that stage, of course, I wanted to stay as long as I could. So, I went from one job in the finance section to another job in GSO, where I was in charge of contracting for Brussels

Q: Wow. For all three of the missions?

BROWN: Yes, yes. Although NATO had its own unique administrative structure because it was a hybrid serving both diplomatic and military personnel.

Q: What was that like in a city like Brussels with, you know, so much- so many international organizations located there and, I don't know.

BROWN: Well, foreigners in Brussels are a dime a dozen since they have major supranational structures there. The Belgians kept to themselves. Nonetheless, we had a lot of international friends, mostly because of Graham's affiliation with AFP. It was a lot different from South Africa. We had a young child and settled down. We lived in an enchanting little village called Tervueren, outside of Brussels with a fantastic park and a museum. We took a little red trolley to work that winded through the woods.

Brussels was a demanding management job because you had three Missions and so many people there with many high-level people and political appointees. I saw how my boss, Janet Buechel, dealt with the political appointment Ambassador and she provided a good example.

Q: For sure, that's a very important lesson, because yes, you will be able to deploy those skills again and again later.

BROWN: Right. She did a great job. She explained what they could do to the house and what they couldn't and that the only changes that they can make are temporary ones that aren't going to cost the government money.

That's not necessarily what people want to hear. But she was quite imaginative and worked with the Ambassador and his wife to find solutions. Slipcovers, for instance, aren't permanent. They could purchase those and make an impactful change without it being permanent. You always have to try to find a way to make people happy with their housing situation. Housing gets people where they hurt. If they're not happy in their housing, it's a problem. And that goes for the Ambassador on down.

Q: Yes, yes.

Were there any- Once again, were there any major events that you ended up being involved in that were unique or different?

BROWN: President Clinton came, but that's kind of par for the course if you're posted in a country with NATO and the EU.. I saw the EU become the EU. I saw how important the United States was to at least the older generations in Belgium and France. I marched as the U.S. representative in a parade with WWI vets in a tiny Flemish town, and that was a moment.

Q: Yes. Now, the last question that I want to ask about your time in Belgium is, looking back now, did it provide you with a lot of the background, a lot of the practice you needed for subsequent tours?

BROWN: I would say that it was less important than South Africa and the Watch, but it was still important as far as my maturation process. I worked with some old hands there, like Tony Wayne and when you see accomplished people like that in action, you learn. And I also saw people who illustrated to me what you don't want to do. There was a management supervisor who I worked with who always had a clean desk. Always. You know why? Because no one came to him because he wasn't responsive. His successor came and she never had a clean desk. Her phone was ringing all the time. I also had my second child in Belgium, little Will.

Q: Wow. Wow.

Now, alright, so you did get, and it was a time in the Foreign Service when you could sort of extend to four years and stay in one place, it was still open enough for that. What were you thinking about in terms of a follow-on from there?

BROWN: Russia.

Q: Ah.

BROWN: USSR, yes.

Q: Right. Alright, so why don't we then pick up with that at the next session, because this sounds like a really good place to break.

BROWN: Right, I think so.

Q: Today is October 18, and we are resuming our interview with Dolores Brown as she is preparing to go to Russia.

BROWN: Right.

Q: But does she in fact go or not?

BROWN: I did get a posting to be a Management Officer in Moscow. Graham managed to get a job with AFP in Moscow. This was challenging for him, because he hadn't ever studied Russian. And on top of the normal challenges, AFP was the only wire service that was rotating their reporters in and out of Chechnya to cover that brutal war there. Each journalist went for three weeks, taking a torturous overland route through Ingushetia. AFP paid a local for a commo setup in a local house. I bought him a tiny little Russian pocket icon from WWI times in Paris as a symbolic gesture of protection – obviously he wouldn't take that with him into Chechen territory. I felt like a woman whose husband went off to war.

Q: Now, remind me, what year is this?

BROWN: This was 1995.

Q: So, the Chechnya war is in full sway?

BROWN: Yes, it was a perilous time. I was in Russian language training at the time, and I was enjoying it tremendously because I love studying languages and I think it's a stupendous gift, to be paid to learn a language, I was living in Oakwood. My mother was helping me while Graham was away. I was terribly worried about him. When he was attempting to get into Chechnya, security people in Ingushetia threw him in jail for a while because they thought he was a Russian spy but then they realized his Russian was really as rudimentary as it was, so they let him go! He witnessed Chechen rebels shoot down a Russian plane and then dance around the plane; the plane was on fire, the pilot was on fire. He was in a place called Argun where he holed up in a cellar for like three days with women and children and wrote a very moving story about that called "The Children of Argun," which was featured in many international newspapers, including some in Asia. So, he did a lot of good work there. And he was able to come home to Washington occasionally.

On one such trip he said he didn't feel very well, and so he went to a doctor and got a checkup, and before you know it, he was already back in Moscow. But then the doctor called me, I'll never forget it, on a Friday afternoon, and told me there was something wrong with his liver enzymes. Does he drink a lot? No. This call precipitated Graham having to go to a clinic in Moscow to get an Xray of his liver and they sent him home immediately. He then went to a doctor here and we were told he had cancer and that it had spread. And that he was terminally ill.

Q: Oh, my god.

BROWN: Yes.

Q: So, it was originally liver cancer, but it had–

BROWN: No, we found out later that it was colon cancer that had metastasized. By the way he had gotten a Department of State full medical clearance six months before that diagnosis. This was like vivisection. I broke my assignment to Moscow, I got a job teaching at FSI, and we just had to try to live through that period. My mom came to live with us. Poor Graham was very ill, they tried to do everything that they could for him, but he was diagnosed in April and he died in January.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: Yes. It was awful. And the boys were six and two.

Q: Oh.

BROWN: Before Graham died we bought a house because I knew we would be in the U.S. for some time and I wanted to give Rich and Will a sense of stability. And it was good for Graham to see that we were set up and would be okay. Gladys helped me a lot. In that way, I was lucky.

Q: Yes, thank god.

BROWN: Yes. And all of his colleagues rallied around him, visiting and holding his hand. AFP came through financially as best they could. People were very supportive of us. As for me, I just put one foot in front of the other. That's all I could do.

After FSI, I worked in INR, and was the country officer for Belarus, Moldova, and the Baltics. This was a great change of pace for me, as INR is one of the few places in the Department that produces analysis and thought pieces. And because it's not a reactive bureau, the working hours were standard, which was really important for me at that time. Louis Sell hired me and I worked every day with Wayne Limberg, who is a brilliant editor and a stitch.

Q: I'm sorry; Louis Sell was the director of sort of the–

BROWN: INR, Russia.

Q: Of the Russia office.

BROWN: Yes, Russia/Soviet Union.

Q: The reason I ask is I did work with Louis later or perhaps right before when he had been working for ACTA in Vienna at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe).

BROWN: Oh, yes, yes.

Yes, he was quite the brain. I loved being in this environment where I was with people who really knew Russia and the USSR and were experts in their fields, a mixture of civil servants and Foreign Service.

This was an exciting time when U.S. policy in Europe was, put simply, "One Europe, Whole and Free:" and every fiber of my being was behind the idea of spreading democracy and the freedoms I enjoyed to the USSR and Warsaw Pact countries. I really enjoyed writing and thinking about this political evolution. And who else but my friends in INR would understand Lukashenka jokes?

Q: From this position in INR, did you do a lot of sort of research activities out of the building, going to their embassies, you know, going to think tank meetings or consulting people outside who might be experts in various fields?

BROWN: Somewhat. I traveled to all of the countries on my beat. I knew the Moldovan Embassy staff. I kept abreast of what the think tanks were thinking. But the real meat of the job was having access to the intelligence information and weaving it into my analysis.

Q: And so, in terms of process, this is a process question I want to ask you, you would get the embassy reporting, much of which would not be particularly secret, it might be confidential, might be unclassified, you would see embassy reporting.

BROWN: Right.

Q: But you would also see the classified reporting from the intelligence community.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: Okay. When you did get materials that were from the embassies, that wouldn't be very heavily classified, were you able on your own dime to contact them if you had questions? Or, let's say, you know, I'm seeing a particular trend in Belarus right now.

BROWN: Oh, yes, we worked closely with the Embassies and the Embassy looked very carefully at everything that we wrote. INR reporting was one important element that our policy-makers would consider. I visited Belarus and Moldova and went to the Baltics with a Department of Defense delegation.

My most striking meetings were with members of the Belarusian opposition, which unfortunately at that time was fractured, and I met with officials in the Belarusian government. A segment of the political and educated class wanted to meld into Western structures like the EU and NATO, but their President was a Soviet throwback and had close ties with Russia, so prospects were not particularly bright at that time for them. Belarusians would say quite plaintively, we're not different from the Lithuanians. Support us. This message resonated for me, but alas the Belarusians are still fighting this battle as I speak today.

Belarus looked fairly prosperous compared to a lot of the other countries in that area of the world at that time. It had wide boulevards. Its buildings were comparatively well-kept. Social services at a basic level worked. Lukashenka capitalized on how orderly and prosperous Belarus was, pointing his fingers to other countries in the region that were going through their "wild capitalism" phase at the expense of the man in the street.

I also visited Moldova and I visited the Baltics with a Department of Defense delegation in 1995 to discuss possible NATO membership with the three Baltics, and you can imagine the red carpet that came out for that.

Q: Oh, yes.

BROWN: Because that was pretty early. I can remember being in Estonia and one of the members of our delegation was extremely tall, maybe six foot-six. And he was in his U.S. military uniform, and we were walking down a street in Tallinn. A hippie-ish looking guy was collapsed and dozing against a stone wall with long hair and John Lennon glasses on. He opens his dozy eyes and he sees a very tall man in an American military uniform, and his eyes almost pop out of his head. He starts walking with us, not in an aggressive way, but just staring up at the tall officer totally gobsmacked. There was a Rip Van Winkle quality to all of this–he woke and just couldn't believe his eyes–in a good way.

The emphasis at that time was to help these countries establish the necessary political framework to be serious candidates for accession in western bilateral institutions, which included everything from redrawing constitutions to establishing the necessary legal bases. We also wanted them to identify how their militaries could contribute to NATO's capacity. Each Baltic country put their best foot forward – in Estonia's case, it emphasized its ability to help the alliance with Cyber Security, as it has significant expertise in that area. Commentators took to calling this whole process a "talent show," trying to game which countries were in the best position. In the end, of course, it was a political decision and the only thing that made sense strategically was to have all the Baltics accede simultaneously.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: INR was a happy experience for me. The thankfulness I feel about my career in the Foreign Service includes this opportunity to switch gears and do widely different things at different times.

And a wonderful result is that I was able to parlay this INR experience, my graduate degree, and Russian language skills, and the fact that I had a background in management to compete successfully for Deputy Chief of Mission in Estonia.

Q: Was it a tour–were you into a stretch position?

BROWN: No, it was a two position and I was a two.

Q: Oh, okay.

And this is 1997 now?

BROWN: I started language training in 1998 and was posted to Estonia between 1999 and 2002.

Q: So, you spent a good three years in INR.

BROWN: Not quite one year at FSI and two years at INR.

Q: Now, since Estonian is such a rare language, how did they do the training?

BROWN: Many of us assigned to Tallinn were required to take a year's worth of Estonian. I think the Department made that decision because the Estonians managed to preserve their language, andculture against all odds and the U.S. wanted to demonstrate respect for that. There were four of us, me, and the political, economic, and consular officers and you can bet we got to know each other quite well. There's nothing like a language class to do that. We had a wonderful language teacher, Anu Grabbi, who married an American, and she not only taught us the language but taught us an enormous amount about the culture. We nominated her for the language teacher of the year for putting up with the four of us and she got it! By the way, Estonian is a very difficult language. It has many cases and no cognates.

Q: Is it Indo-European?

BROWN: No, it's Finno-Ugric.

Q: But do they at least use the Roman alphabet?

BROWN: Yes. But that's not as important as some people may think. The Cyrillic alphabet is the least of your worries when you are tackling Russian. It doesn't take that long to learn it. But in the case of Estonian, I would say it was even more difficult than Russian, and one of the reasons I think it was more difficult to use in practice is because Estonians are not used to hearing anybody speak Estonian as a second language. They tend to look at you and screw up their faces because they are trying to figure out what you're saying. We're used to listening to English with a lot of different accents. Russians are used to people speaking Russian as a second language. After all, the Soviet Union was composed of many nationalities. But the Estonians–who attempts to speak Estonian?

I spoke street Estonian and the Estonians were thrilled because most Russians never tried. The lingua franca for the diplomatic corps, though, was English. Nordic people tend to speak to each other in English, and they were the heavy-hitters up there, along with the U.S. and Germany.

We all were sweating that language year because we were supposed to get a three. I remember I drank lots of mocha frappes to get me through.

Q: It has a distant relationship to Finnish, but obviously not–whatever relationship it had to Finnish they parted ways a long time ago because they're not mutually intelligible.

BROWN: No? They're not?

Q: I don't think so.

BROWN: I think they are close from what I understand.

Q: Oh, really?

BROWN: The Estonians I knew were able to go to Finland and communicate with Finns.

Q: That's interesting. Okay.

BROWN: The Estonians look at their incorporation into the USSR as an accident of history. It could have happened to the Finns, actually, just as it did to the Estonians. And the Estonians, through their period in the USSR, watched Finnish TV, listened to Finnish radio, so they psychologically identified with that country and its place in the world and in the west. It gave them a leg up and they knew what they wanted and had a plan to proceed as soon as they became independent.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

So, now you get there as DCM. About how many Americans are there in the embassy?

BROWN: About 30.

Q: And then, roughly how many local hires?

BROWN: Also around 30..

Q: Okay. Alright, so now you get there and what are the principle goals of the mission? You know, obviously Estonia is interested in joining NATO, probably the EU, and it's trying to organize itself in a way that it makes itself able to accede to these things, but what were we doing in those years?

BROWN: Yes, you're right. The overriding idea was to support Estonian aspirations to join Western multilateral institutions. That was the main goal. Also, a subsidiary but critical goal was to ensure that Estonia was not used as a transit point for loose nukes coming out of Russia given the collapse of the Soviet Union. There was not a policy consensus at that time as to whether Estonia was going to be able to accede to NATO or the EU, but there was consensus that we must support them in their goals because that will be a positive thing no matter what transpires. It was the most rewarding mission in which I personally was able to participate in my career.

The Estonian people are admirable people. They were like rabbits at the starting line of a race; as soon as the Russians left they were sprinting with all their might to build their society as they had long and collectively envisioned it. The people were ready to make sacrifices to achieve this goal. They had inspiring leaders, like President Lennart Meri, who was cerebral and strategic, and led his people well.

The whole issue of whether the Baltics should accede to NATO and the EU was a hot topic that generated a lot of disagreement. Some scholars and political analysts said the U.S. should not support NATO enlargement to the Baltics, as such a move would irritate the Russians too much and establish indefensible borders. The major European powers were supportive, particularly the Nords. But the U.S. was always the most bullish on the Balts. We never recognized the Baltics' incorporation into the Soviet Union and they loved us for that. The Europeans were not as forthcoming.

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: So, in those early days it wasn't clear what was going to happen.

Q: Now, you arrive; what is sort of- what is Estonia at the moment you arrive? Is it principally agricultural or was it a mixed kind of economy? How did people make a living?

BROWN: It was a mixed economy. Yes, it had an agricultural base, but not long after independence the Estonians had a little Silicon Valley going over there, plus a growing tourist scene.

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: They capitalized on their brain trust, which was impressive. They were extremely innovative.. In 2000, you could buy a Coca-Cola out of a soda machine with your cell phone. You could pay for parking with your cell phone. That wasn't happening in the U.S. Today you could vote online if you lived in Estonia. They really were and are way ahead. This mightily impressed our members of Congress who visited. I remember Senator McCain marveling about Estonian progress. I accompanied McCain and other Senators to the Estonian Cabinet room and it was modern perfection: a beautiful room with beautiful bones and beautiful computers and no paper. They were able to simply skip over many developmental stages. They went from being a Soviet Republic to inventing Skype.

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: Their one significant infrastructure was an oil shale energy complex, near the Russian border.

Q: Ah, okay.

So, that, when you were there, what were they talking to you about in terms of major accomplishment? What were they looking for from the U.S.?

BROWN: Certainly they were looking for support from us to ward off any continued political pressure from Russia. That was number one. Number two, they were looking to us for a prescription, i.e.,specific things that they needed to do in order to accede to NATO. NATO had a mechanism called Partnership for Peace, where we were conducting military exercises together and setting up the building blocks for cooperation. But the Estonians pressed, saying this is too vague for us; what specifically can we do?.

They knew there were certain things that they had to accomplish politically before they could be considered viable candidates. One of them was to get the legislative framework of the country in line with Western norms, and that included minority rights. The OSCE had a mission in Estonia to oversee how they were dealing with the Russian minority. They managed to accomplish enough to allow the OSCE to decide that they could close the mission in 2001 and didn't need to monitor the situation anymore.

Q: Did they actually make Russian the second official language or an official language

BROWN: No. And after independence the Estonian government required that every person who was going to become an Estonian citizen illustrate that they can speak Estonian up to a certain level. That was critical, because a lot of the Russians didn't know a word of Estonian. And also, there were Russian schools, so the Russian kids weren't learning Estonian. The Russians tended to be clustered. The eastern portion of the country around the Russian border had towns that were 99 percent Russian-speaking.. This was disconcerting to Estonians, as well, because if they got in a car accident in the eastern part of the country and went to a hospital, they would not be understood in their native language in their own country.

So, how do you learn Estonian when you're sitting in Narva, and you're growing up in an entirely Russian environment? That's the problem the Estonians needed to tackle.. These were the really young years. I know now from having kept up contacts that there are Estonians who are going to places like Narva to teach Estonian to help integrate the country, but in those early days that wasn't done. Both the US and the EU collaborated to support the Estonians in developing these language programs..

Another key issue for integrating the Russian-speaking population was to develop a Russian-language media in Estonia, so that the Russian speakers weren't getting all of their information – or misinformation – from Russia.

The second thing is, and it was very difficult, was bringing to light any Nazi collaboration during World War II.

Q: Of course, right.

BROWN: That was something we pressed them about.

Q: What did they do, exactly? I mean, was there a truth and reconciliation commission or–?

BROWN: No, the Wiesenthal Center brought specific cases to the Estonians' attention, which the Estonians dealt with. There weren't many.

Q: And I imagine there wasn't much in the way of repatriation of assets or restitution.

BROWN: For the Estonians who were forced to leave?

Q: Either Estonians or if there were Jewish communities that, you know could still demonstrate–

BROWN: There was a very small number of Jews in Estonia, and I'm sure the Estonian government would have done whatever they could if they had claims. I wasn't aware of cases of Jews returning. But there were a fair number of Estonians who returned to Estonia from Canada, the United States, and other countries. They reclaimed the property their families left when the Soviets came in. I knew an Estonian-Canadian woman who reclaimed an entire apartment building on one of the major thoroughfares in Tallinn, and who established an art gallery, a salon of sorts on the ground floor where the literati would gather. Sounds wonderful, and it was for her, but at the same time she inherited renters who were used to paying a Soviet pittance for rent and utilities. She – and her tenants – struggled through the transition from the Soviet system to a free market system. It's amazing to be in a country on the cusp of so much change and to see people my own age who are forced to adjust to a new reality. The Estonians were remarkably motivated–the vast majority bit the bullet gladly.

President Lennart Meri coined a metaphor that reflects the Estonian posture: we are a small country, we can tack like a sailboat and change direction quickly, unlike other countries that are more like aircraft carriers.

Q: Right, right.

BROWN: So, the government had the buy-in of most and a lot of western support, but they had complicated problems. Estonia had a coalition government that was constantly shifting–the pro-western parties competed with each other but generally grouped together to form a majority to keep the one political party that was more pro-Russian at bay. There was a good deal of political maneuvering that was interesting and even entertaining to watch, since it generally never resulted in Estonia having a deadlocked or ineffective government.

Q: Yes, sure.

BROWN: So, they are small and had a limited number of actors. But I can tell you then had very, very, very talented political leaders that stepped up.

Q: Wow. And now, turning from sort of the national issues to what was it like for you as a DCM in your first embassy.

BROWN: It was one of the best jobs I've had. The staff had their hearts in the right place, the Country Team was united. The Ambassador was experienced and patient. As a DCM you're a bit like the monkey in the middle, satisfying the expectations of your Ambassador while supporting the troops. It can be a bit lonely, but I had good friends who were DCM's so if I was challenged by a situation, I would call and talk to them about it to get their advice and help. Ambassador Gillian Milovanovich, who was then DCM in Sweden, was a support, as was Ceinwen Jones, who was the British Deputy Head of Mission in Estonia at the time I was there.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: Now, back to my Ambassador, Melissa Wells. She was a three-time ambassador, and an extremely able and charismatic person. So, I was lucky. In terms of decision making, I came to understand that there's never just one right answer to a problem. And the mental exercise I would do as I wrestled with a problem was as follows: If someone approaches you after you've made the decision and asks, why in the world did you do that, and if you can articulate specific good reasons that you've turned around in your head and examined from all sides, you probably are going to do alright. I found, though, that it's important to let decisions marinate and that clarity takes time.

I found the diplomatic corps in Estonia very congenial. We were not only colleagues but most of us were friends. It was the same crowd that was going from one event to another, and we were all working together to support Estonians in their aspirations. Except for the

Russians, of course, who were in the corner licking their wounds. It was a very rewarding experience that reflected some of my highest ideals and aspirations.

Q: How–Since the kids are still in school, how did you handle their education?

BROWN: There was an international school there, the International School of Estonia, but it was not U.S. accredited. It was new, so that's not surprising. Since my children were so young, I wasn't too concerned about the lack of accreditation. And one of my good friends, Susan Sutton, who you can rely on for good horse sense, suggested that as long as they learn to love to read, they'll be just fine. And they are. Both did well in high school, and one went on to Columbia College and the other to UVA.

But, back to the school, I was on the Board and helped steer its development. The school had 80 students, with a handful of Americans, less than ten. Many of the students had English as a second language, so the school had the challenge of catering to a disparate community. Some affluent Russian-speakers sent their kids to this school because they wanted them to learn English. And there were a few with suspect connections.

I worried a bit, but not unduly. My children were getting an experience that was unique, and they were learning their math and learning their English and learning their science. They might have not had the best facilities in the world. They had to share the school grounds with a nursing school. They didn't have a library. They didn't have a lab. But at that stage and time, I think just meeting all of those people from all over the world was rich enough. My older son manifested some physical maladies. I think it was nerves and moving–you know, everybody reacts differently to moves and he had lost his father. The world probably felt a bit harsh. But I think if you asked them today, they would say it was a good experience.

Q: Now, the last question I want to ask is, were you there as late as 9/11?

BROWN: I was the chargé ad interim on 9/11.

Q: That must have been quite a moment.

BROWN: It was a moment. Melissa, my ambassador, left post permanently, the day before 9/11. The day before 9/11!! I had been chargé before but this was a different situation entirely - when she is permanently gone and the new Ambassador is not due to arrive for an indeterminate number of months.

Of course we all remember the moment we saw the planes hit. For me, it was about 3:00 in the afternoon. I was at the Embassy. The political officer, Bob Filby, an old hand, ran into my office, telling me a plane hit the World Trade Center. Well, I said, keep watching, Bob. Then he came in a few minutes later, telling me another plane hit. Both of us are New Yorkers and incredulous. We immediately called an Emergency Action Committee meeting to gather the Embassy leadership. I stood in front of the Embassy and watched Bob, whose father was a New York City firefighter, hanging out the window, lowering our flag. Everybody was calling me to express their outrage and sorrow–Estonian President Lennard Meri called, the Foreign Minister called, the Interior Minister called. All asked, what do you need? What do you need? My children remember me coming home that evening and telling them there probably will be a war.

As the charge, I focused on two immediate issues. Number one was protecting my staff, because we had no idea what was going to happen next. Number two was bringing together the local American community to honor the victims of 9/11 and to be able to express our collective grief and to support each other.

Since the Estonian government asked me what I needed, I took the opportunity to ask a close contact at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to block off the street in front of the Embassy, as we had no setback and were vulnerable to car bombs. Local governments generally don't like to do this, as it impacts their own people who live adjacent to the Embassy. Estonia was not a high-threat post, but again, our Embassy didn't meet Inman security guidelines, so I thought, why not? I would imagine the Estonians winced, but they said okay, but it's going to be temporary. So, the next day huge bulldozers appeared and placed giant cement blocks in front of the Embassy that blocked off the street. And it remains blocked off to this day.

Q: Whoa.

BROWN: It seemed like a logical thing to ask for. Our State Department architectural people prettied it up and now there are plantings around the bollards–no cement blocks remain–so it looks nice.

And in terms of the American community, we put together a service in a local church a few days after the event. The American community was small there, so we had only forty people. The local people strew thousands of flowers over the steps of the Embassy. We didn't change our security posture at the Embassy significantly, but I know the Estonians were vigilant in watching over us.

Q: Yes, because honestly, in a situation like that, there really wasn't much more you could do.

BROWN: Right.

Q: Okay. So, then, the other question about your management as a DCM is, what were the principle outcomes that you were working on? You know, the mission always has a couple of top-level accomplishments that it wants to achieve in a given number of years; do you recall what those were?

BROWN: At the time that I was in Estonia it was still very early after they achieved independence, so the top level outcome was to support the Estonians in solidifying that independence. A critical part of that goal was to support the Estonians' aspirations to accede into western multilateral organizations such as NATO and the EU. We also were busy with the business of establishing our bilateral relationship across a whole spectrum of activities – from diplomatic to military to legal, etc. Estonia also was important in plugging up any holes in the loose nukes issue, ie., nuclear weapons being sold and smuggled out of the former Soviet states and into the hands of people who would do us ill. We also supported the U.S.'s Northern European Initiative, which sought to strengthen links between the peoples of the Baltics, Russia, and Northern Europe – Iceland hosted one notable women's conference that brought influential women together in Reykjavik.

Q: Good. Alright.

So, this is your first DCM post, you're doing a number of different kinds of management, not just policy management, personnel management and so on. What would you say were the key skills and abilities you developed that you then drew on later as you moved up in your career?

BROWN: The most important thing is to listen. People don't necessarily expect you to solve their problems. The big lesson was that if you just listen and respond honestly, that most people will understand what you can and can not do. And don't let problems fester – that's an easy mistake to make.

Approach discussions with MRI–the most respectful interpretation–of peoples' declarations and views.

I also came to understand the importance of consistency and clarity in communications, and that there's no such thing as repeating key goals or principles too much.

Be thoughtful but bold in your advocacy – I finally went into the Estonian government to ask for a school building after years of fits and starts, and made the case that it's needed for Estonia's own development. We got it.

And, finally, personal relationships really do count, and building trust does count. It's critical to have diplomats on the ground, because we can leverage those relationships when it matters.

Q: Interesting. Sure.

Now, as you are approaching the end of this tour, what are you thinking about for your next, you know, for your next tour? You're about 15, 16 years now into the service, and you're an oh- Were you promoted?

BROWN: Yes, the more responsibility you take, the more likely you are to get promoted.
.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: What was problematical is I needed to determine whether I was going to pursue straight management jobs, which I had not done for some time, or continue branching out. So, I opted to do the latter, and went to the National Defense University.

Q: Although, you know, the DCM–

BROWN: Yes that's true, DCM's do manage but it's a completely different job than overseeing the management functions in an Embassy such as housing, finance, human resources, etc.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: It was a good choice because I had an intense three years and I needed to figure out what I wanted to do next. I knew I wanted to come back to Washington because my eldest son was going into his first year of high school and I wanted him to go to an American high school, to have that experience and to develop his roots in the United States. That was the main reason I came back.

Q: Right, right, right. Okay. We will then pick up with that at the next session.

BROWN: Okay. That sounds good.

Q: So, today is October 29. We are resuming our interview with Dolores Brown as she prepares for a year at the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

BROWN: I was still in Estonia when I knew that I was going to ICAF, and I was excited about being able to mix it up with my DOD (Department of Defense) colleagues because it's so important to be able to deal on the interagency level to progress in the State Department–and let's face it, it sounded like a nice year. I remember what my Ambassador told me (Ambassador Joe DeThomas, who succeeded Melissa Wells). He said there's two things I want to tell you, Dolores:. show up on time; they don't like it if you come late, you've got to show up on time. And if they give you a nickname, they like you, even if it's a nickname you don't particularly like!

That was good advice because you needed to understand that there are certain cultural norms that we don't necessarily have at the State Department people and that we're going to be in a DOD environment so we need to adapt. To this day I'm more prompt.

It was interesting for all of us–military and civilian–because we were there to get out of our own cultures and to grow and develop as leaders. Sometimes I felt that the few civilians in the mix were there to act as a bit of a hand grenade as some of the things we said shook up the assumptions of our military colleagues. The military is a distinct society, it tends to be all-encompassing, and the typical colonel doesn't have an opportunity to interact in the interagency as much as we at State interacted with the other agencies. Fairly early in my career I was a back bencher in Principals' meetings and also in the Homeland Security Council and I got a sense of what it's like to build a consensus approach by taking into account the various points of view around the table. I admired the discipline and rigor that goes into a career in DOD.

Q: Let me ask you a question here. When you decided to go to ICAF, were you foreseeing using the experience there for anything related to pol-mil or–in other words, how did you foresee using the learning and training you got there afterwards.

BROWN: I was looking at it in terms of learning more about leadership. I didn't have aspirations to do anything specific in the political-military sphere. As a State Department officer rising to more and more responsibilities I felt it was absolutely essential to be able to interact with my military colleagues in an effective way.

The military really has very clear ideas about leadership, and acting as a collective, as a unit. I'm an only child, and a willful one at that, so I was used to operating on my own. I had a lot to learn about that.

Q: Now, a question about the studies there. They have, of course, you know, required courses, but they also let you do kind of a specialization.

BROWN: Right.

Q: What did you choose as your specialization?

BROWN: I chose IT (Information Technology) because it will shape our future and how the world develops. Now, to be frank, what we ended up focusing on when we went on our trip to Japan and other countries in the region was how those countries were developing their own IT sectors. It was clear that leaders of countries saw that in order to bring their countries forward they needed to catch up technologically or be left behind.

But in terms of foreshadowing even what's happened over the last 10 years in terms of IT and its impact on society, I can't say that we examined that topic.

Q: And one more question about ICAF as an institution. They have the specialization–

So, you were at ICAF from 2002 to 2003 when we began the Iraq military engagement. How did that affect you or how did that affect the people around you?

BROWN: Yes. Well, I mean, people around me were still coming off of 9/11.

Q: Wow. Yes, yes.

BROWN: 9/11 wasn't so long ago at that time. In fact, one of the officers in my seminar was at the Pentagon on 9/11 and was wounded in the attack. It was certainly the period of determination that the United States wasn't going to take this lying down and there was a surge of determination more than discussion. Later, of course there was a lot of talk about whether we should or shouldn't have gone into Iraq, but at that particular moment in history that wasn't what people were thinking about.

It was affecting people because they knew they were going to be deployed, so actual combat was not theoretical anymore. And people understood that it's not going to be an easy war and it's probably going to be a long war. But there was resolve.

Q: And to the extent you were able to keep up with them after, did you have a chance to talk to them about deployments or about what they did later?

BROWN: I kept up with one person. And he conveyed a sense of disillusionment with how we handled the War on Terror and with the erosion of U.S. influence in the Middle East, specifically Turkey. This was in the early days of Erdogan, and as you know, he's led Turkey in a more independent direction.

Q: Oh, okay.

BROWN: During the Obama era we were trying to play a more balanced role in the Middle East. President Obama, in my estimation, wanted to find some kind of sweet spot where the United States wouldn't have to take rigid sides in regional conflicts, particularly those in the Middle East. Certainly the last years have illustrated how no-win it can be for the U.S. to take sides in sectarian conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan. This may be an oversimplification of the thinking, but I think our appetite for continuing to go to war was decreasing. There were and are legitimate questions about what we were really achieving in our various efforts.

Q: Now, as you're proceeding through ICAF, you're also bidding.

BROWN: That's right.

Q: What was going through your mind about bidding on a next assignment from ICAF?

BROWN:. I wanted work that would meld my operational and policy experience, and I was interested in continuing to have more leadership positions.

I saw on the bid list that there was a position open, it was a senior position – I wasn't a senior quite yet – in State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), where I had worked in the past. The position was Director of the TIPOFF office, which was the keeper of the Department of State's watchlist for consular purposes. I thought the issue timely and important, and the job had both critical operational and policy dimensions. I learned that the main thrust of this job was to guide the office as it became part of a larger interagency entity.

You see, State had the U.S. government's best watchlist on terrorists emanating from the Middle East. The watchlist was overseen by both INR and consular affairs and was the brainchild of a brilliant man, John Arriza, who came up with the idea to extract biodata from highly classified information, enough to share with our consular people, so they can identify visa applicants with terrorist connections and keep them out of the United States. So John was instrumental in creating this entity called the Tip Off database, which started out as a shoebox full of index cards and later grew to an automated watch list used by consular officers around the world.

But this list was only as good as the information we had, and after 9/11 it became clear that other agencies were not sharing as much information with us as they should have. John became something of a hero because he had the foresight to create this watchlist, but it had holes. It wasn't long before the President signed a Homeland Security Directive that directed the FBI, DHS, and State work together to create an effective watchlist. The Directive also created a new organization called the Terrorist Screening Center.

So, as I found out more about the job, I became more interested and a little terrified! I was told that my main mission was to protect State's equities as we turned over our watchlist to form the core of the Terrorist Screening Center's ultimately more comprehensive one, and that I had to be sure that there would be no degradation of service to State's consular people as a result., I was told I would be a deputy director, along with two other deputy directors, one from the FBI and one from Homeland Security, and that we would have to figure out how to do this.

So, I would report to two different Bureaus, INR and consular affairs, and I needed to wait until the position was ceded because I was a mid-level officer and the position was on the senior level and should be all rights go to a senior officer. I was in peril because all of a sudden in December I was told I was on the short list with six other people to go to Azerbaijan because I was unassigned late in the bidding cycle. I managed to get officially paneled soon thereafter in the TIPOFF job, so that danger went away.

Q: Alright. Now, just a quick recap, the understanding at the start was that this would be an interagency group that would be providing real time or close to real time data to consular officers or others in the field who deal with people who are trying to enter the U.S.

BROWN: It was bigger than that.

Q: Oh, okay, okay.

BROWN: That was our piece of it, but the Department of Homeland Security and law enforcement were also going to use the list for their agencies' purposes. And the intel community was one of the sources of that information. The whole idea was to make sure that information was shared broadly enough so that the relevant agencies can protect the homeland. That didn't happen before 9/11.

Q: I see, I see.

BROWN: It was putting all of the salient information drawn from the intelligence, law enforcement, and diplomatic communities on a watchlist for a multiple of purposes for all of these agencies. We all had our institutional missions and priorities. My job was to make sure that the State Department still got what we needed, that we weren't cut out and that we were influencing the conversation.

So, that was it. I handed over State's data and worked within this new organization to build a viable watchlist. And also, I was responsible for expanding international cooperation, particularly to put in place data sharing agreements –data meaning the identity of suspected terrorists.

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: We already were cooperating with the Aussies, the Brits, the New Zealanders, and the Canadians.

But there are firewalls between intelligence, law enforcement, and diplomatic entities,no matter which country you're talking about. The U.S. was actually quite innovative in its approach. It made other countries a little nervous but they saw the value in it.

Q: Right, you're right. In that international effort, what were the usual counterparts you dealt with in the foreign countries? The reason I'm asking is I'm wondering was there a role for NATO in that, or were you just going directly to the foreign country's security services?

BROWN: Yes. Well, that's a very good question because sometimes they didn't know what to do with us exactly. We met with our counterparts in intel, in customs and border protection, and in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. In the U.K.'s case they focused internally on the IRA and weren't so focused at the time on getting terrorism-linked information to their border officials.

Q: Ahh. Wow. Even into the mid-2000s they were still, yes, people forget that. Well, I certainly did.

BROWN: The way that many countries' bureaucracies were set up was mostly to think of an internal terrorist threat while in the U.S. at that time we were focusing on an external threat. That very issue has a profound impact on which part of the government takes the lead.

I wouldn't say it was the easiest job I'd ever had. I had to deal with a lot of different personalities. It's always hard to be one of three Deputy Directors! But we all knew that we had to build this organization, and in the final analysis we all got along because of the commonality of purpose.

Q: So, you were satisfied that at least as things went along you were getting the information that you needed for State in the timely way–

BROWN: Absolutely.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: Absolutely. But there was a cost to this for us. My staff had to go through a lot of difficult hoops. Because they were now working for the FBI, they all had to take lie detector tests. I was a State officer and seconded to the FBI, so I was not subjected to that.

Q: Were your staff FSOs or civil servants?

BROWN: Civil servants.

Q: Ah, okay.

BROWN: Everything was new in terms of accomplishing our mission and we were under pressure to do it quickly. We were working to implement Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6, and we needed to create a viable watchlist quickly.

Q: Oh, right, right.

BROWN: The first problem was that we were compelled to include every name we gathered on the watchlist. Our goal was to prevent another attack, so quality control was not foremost in our minds and we ended up creating a blunt and inexact instrument.. Famous people got stopped, such as Senator Edward Kennedy,. Ironically, my own sons were stopped as we were going on a family vacation to Cancun. I thought I was getting away from the rigors of the Terrorist Screening Center but no! My two little boys' names, Richard Brown and William Brown, were both on the watchlist. .One was 13 and the other was six, and they obviously were not the actual people who belonged on that list. Personnel at the airport looked at these kids but were afraid to make a decision. Ultimately they let them through. But during this period many innocent people were stopped and we didn't have a solid redress system in place at the time. That was our next utterly critical step.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: So, that was my experience at the Terrorist Screening Center. FBI Director Robert Mueller gave each of us individual "Director's Awards" for our work there, which we deserved given all the stress!

Q: That's no small thing.

People outside of the FBI and outside of the State Department don't realize that, you know, a director doesn't give that many awards. There are plenty of other awards, you know, down the line, but if you get all the way up to the directors' office for-

BROWN: Yes, it was kind of cool.

Q: Yes, yes. Your experience undoubtedly was similar to many other of the interagency groups that had to do similar things, maybe not for consular affairs or visas but, you know, immigration, people who arrive at the border, and refugees, and political asylees and on and on an on, all of whom now had to be looked at with a different pair of eyes.

BROWN: Right.

Q: And with a whole new set of data. And, yes.

BROWN: Part of the problem was, and this was in the 9/11 commission report, that the information about bad actors wasn't being shared. Some of those guys that perpetrated 9/11, other agencies had information on them.

Q: Yes, yes. No, I mean–

There wasn't an imperative, before 9/11, to share the information so that people could be stopped at the border.

Q: Right. And that has to come from the top.

BROWN: Right.

Q: It has to be a statement that our internal workings are now going to change and you know, military branches, different offices of the same department, etcetera, they're all going to now have to work together much more closely, much more collegially, and that is now, you know, a presidential directive.

BROWN: Right. That's it.

Q: Right. This is not a choice anymore.

It's not a good idea; it's an order.

BROWN: I saw this kind of dynamic played out in Embassies. If you've ever been in charge of the interagency at embassies, a lot of times how much information people share with each other depends on the personalities in the Country Team and the leadership style of the ambassador and the DCM. I've always felt that it put the Ambassador in a ticklish situation when people who worked for other agencies had their own separate means of communication to their agencies. Chief of mission authority is absolutely essential but it's something that has to be reinforced and tended to.

Q: Oh, yes. Oh, and there are often bad mistakes that result. But okay. I mean, that's another-

BROWN: That's another subject. But certainly, I think that it was a stressful job but I saw something up close that many people don't get to see. And it was that spot for me, of the intersection of policy and the management that I enjoy.

Q: Yes, I understand. How long was this job?

BROWN: I guess it was about two years. And then after that I became the head of the Watch at the Operations Center.

Q: Okay. That's not too surprising given the fact that you were, you know, your immediate previous job now was very interagency, and the State Department Operations Center is sort of the location where everything comes in from everywhere.

BROWN: Yes. And I had been a Watch officer and had seventh floor experience.

Q: Right. Talk about that.

BROWN: The Operations Center is a 24/7 office.. It's the nerve center, it's like the State Department's 911. And it tends to attract an ambitious and talented crew of people. But it's very taxing in a way because the Watch Officers work two days between about seven and four, then two days between three and midnight, and two days between midnight and eight am.

Q: Oh, no. There's 7:00 to 4:00, 4:00 to midnight, midnight to–

BROWN: I didn't work those hours, I oversaw the people who worked those hours. Watch Officers cascade through those shifts every week. Two, two and two. So, you work for six days and then you have the equivalent of about two-and-a-half days off. It's a crazy schedule with pluses and minuses. I was responsible for putting together that schedule and trying to make that whole thing work, which was really painstaking.. Were you a Watch officer?

Q: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I had been a Watch officer. So, you're preaching to the choir.

BROWN: Yes. So, it was–the good thing about it was, I think for people, is that once you're off, you're off. It's one of the most responsible and eye-opening jobs for that level of officer.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: Very responsible. We talked about this earlier, when I described my thoughts about being a Watch Officer. You see how policy is made, you see very highly classified cables and distill them for the Secretary and Principals. When I worked there Watch Officers would listen in on the phone calls and write up conversations between very high officials, including the Secretary and his or her equivalents. So, it was a bird's eye view and you saw how people at that level discussed important issues and how decisions are made. And you learned how to write for the Secretary,and people were constructive but unstinting in their criticism of your writing. We had a whole cool vocabulary at the Watch. There was the "knit", for instance. As the shift editor, you would be responsible to write up a compendium of what happened overnight for the Secretary that had to be concise and accurate, You would pass it out to all of your colleagues who were on that shift, maybe six people, and then they would, because it was going to the Secretary, have no compunction about tearing it apart and making sure it was absolutely perfect. So, you learned how to write and to write quickly. But, doing that as a Watch officer was one thing; as the head of the Watch and trying to get people all through this process, it was a totally different ballgame.

I needed to be at work at 7:00 because that's when the senior Watch officers who were working overnight would brief the Executive Secretary. In addition, I was on night duty for literally one-third of the year. Any time anything happened after office hours that the Watch assessed warranted an alert to the Secretary or a Department Principal they had to first either call me, the head of Crisis Management or the head of the Operations Center, three people. So we three people shared the overnight duty for the year. I had a classified phone in my house that the neighborhood kids would come and look at. It wasn't red!

The Watch always prided itself on having the key news for our Principals out first. But at this time the news cycle and speed of communication were exploding. We had to start thinking of how to ride the wave and up our IT infrastructure. We created a position in the Operations Center for an IT guru at that time, to help us do that. We were on the cusp of great change and had to ask ourselves: what is our value added and how do we operate? We of course still had Embassy reporting information so there was obvious value-added to getting the full picture from the Watch–we just had to be faster.

Q: Now, can you- is there an example that isn't classified that you can refer to about what, you know, what the experience was like?

BROWN: What's–

Q: In terms of like a crisis or something where you know, you as the head of the Ops Center-

BROWN: I was the head of the Watch, not the whole Ops Center.

Q: I'm sorry, yes, yes. As head of the Watch had to put together very quickly, let's say, a crisis management team or begin the reporting of something?

BROWN: Hmmm, a big one was when the Israelis waged war in Lebanon in 2006, with lots of aerial bombing throughout the South and in Beirut. This happened during the summer and we at the State Department had inaccurate numbers on how many American citizens happened to be in Lebanon. There apparently are a lot of Lebanese-Americans who decide that Lebanon is a really great place to spend the summer or to send the kids to be with the grandparents. So, it turned out there were about 13,000 American citizens there, many of whom wanted to be evacuated, and we weren't as prepared as we could have been if those citizens had registered at the Embassy.

So, our job at the Watch was to coordinate the government's efforts in getting those 13,000 American citizens out of Lebanon. We set up a number of 24/7 Task Forces. One centered on answering the phone of concerned citizens. An interagency task force kept a running tab on military and political developments on the ground, how our efforts to evacuate American citizens were going, and producing written products on these topics. Another Task Force dealt with the logistical part – renting boats, planes, etc., to get people out and to set them up in Cyprus..

What I remember the most was that we needed to coordinate very closely with Department of Defense to get people out of there and how difficult it was to nail down how quickly that could be done. In the meantime, the French and other European countries were evacuating their citizens overland and into Syria and we weren't able to do that. We needed to evacuate people out by sea. That reality made us look a bit flat-footed, as our citizens were not the first to get out. In fact, Anthony Bourdain happened to be doing a show in Lebanon at this time and was one of the evacuees, and did a show on his perception of events that wasn't entirely flattering.

So, I was interacting every day with my colleagues from the Department of Defense to coordinate to get people out as quickly as possible. Many issues popped up. Which agency was going to pay the costs? Were American citizens going to pay for their evacuations? Where were we going to take our citizens temporarily? How quickly are we going to get them out of the temporary evacuation point, which turned out to be Cyprus? How could we make sure that our citizens had reasonable accommodations in Cyprus? The administration was sensitive to any criticism that the U.S. government did not take adequate care of these people.

Then, of course, foreign governments were getting in touch with us, asking us to assist their citizens with evacuation. We had to determine our treaty obligations and weigh our moral obligations, as well. I can remember telling one foreign government representative whose nation was evacuating its people by vehicle–well, you better put a flag on top of your car that has the Red Cross emblem on it because there's nothing the U.S. government can do to guarantee that vehicle's safety. And this went on for days. We managed in the end to get everyone out. We weren't the first to get our people out because as I mentioned, the Italians and the French were long gone. But we managed to get all those people out with no lives lost.

It was a great team effort. We had standard operating procedures at the Operations Center that prepared us to ask the right questions and to put the structures in place to oversee such an operation. It wasn't like I had to be a whiz kid. The protocols were detailed enough to outline the representatives we needed from which organizations, what information we needed to include in reports, etc. It was a real coordination act, and my job was to get the right people in the room to manage the effort and solve the many problems that arose along the way.

And about a month later, President Bush was coming to State for a meeting and he wanted to stop by the Watch to thank us for the success of this operation. We knew he was due at a certain time and we were all pretending we were working and we were all a little nervous. And then all of a sudden President Bush appears through the door at the Watch, and I welcomed him and he pats me on the back, kind of hard in the Texan way, and he says with a real smile on his face and a twinkle in his eye, "You're running this place, Dolores.?" He recognized every one on our team and shook their hands, and it was a wonderful moment for all of us. He seemed like a very warm and genuine person.

Q: That alone says a great deal about the importance and the credibility, you know, you get from working on the Watch even as it was changing and its products and the way it interacted with the senior staff at the State Department was changing with the IT revolution.

BROWN: Right. And you got a real feel for institutional prerogatives and mores. One of the most important things is that you need to write it all down. You need a record of why decisions are made and how they're made.. The State Department is very rigorous in that.. And that was something that followed me throughout my career, that you must document important decisions. And that writing something down requires that you think matters through critically and clearly – you can't BS. And in fact, when I went back to the pure management world, sometimes I would insist on having a written record and sometimes I would get pushback on that from my staff, but then later they'd say yes, that's right, we needed to codify that. It's State tradecraft.

Q: I agree. I was there much earlier than you, but that was my experience as well.

BROWN: Yes. Which year were you there?

Q: I was there from '88 to '89 and then as the transition from Reagan to Bush and from Shultz to Baker I went into the Baker inner officer in a kind of unusual staff position because the nature of staffing Baker was so different from the way Shultz was staffed.

BROWN: Right, right. Right. Well, I was a Watch officer in the early part of my career. I guess it was '89, after you were there. I was a Watch officer.

Q: Oh, interesting. Okay. So, I would have been interacting a little bit with the Watch, but generally with senior Watch officers.

BROWN: Right. Well, I must have seen you then.

Q: That's true.

BROWN: Well, do you remember that people would get in trouble for bringing fish to eat in the Watch because you didn't want that microwave fishy smell in the Watch. And I loved all the conventions, like the Blue Room, which was the bathroom and had a blue light outside that was lit when it was occupied.

Q: So, one of the benefits of being on the Watch is that you're in contact with all the different bureaus and you can do a little lobbying for your next position.

BROWN: Right.

Q: So, what are you thinking about for your next position, and did you do any lobbying?

BROWN: Oh, yes, of course. You're lobbying all over the place. You know, I think at that stage, what was I after? I either wanted a big management post or another DCMship. And I ended up getting Embassy Cairo, which is one of the mothers of all management jobs in the Department. It's either Cairo, Bogota, Baghdad, or Kabul. . And also, I was looking for a place where there would be a good high school, which really narrows your possibilities. I couldn't go off to a place like Embassy Tallinn, which didn't have even an accredited American school when I went there. At this stage I had my younger son, William, who was about to go into high school, and it gets serious in high school.

Q: Oh, yes, sure.

BROWN: .Cairo has the American School, a really good school, so it was a logical choice for me and my family. Generally speaking, you had to go to a big post to have a really good secondary school at your disposal. So, either I had to be posted as a DCM at a big post or as a Management Counselor at a big post and I ended up being a Management Counselor at a big post.

Q: Because now you are OC? You were promoted?

BROWN: Yes, I was an OC

Q: Okay.

BROWN: So, Cairo. My mother was living with me at this time, and she had given up her house and she said don't worry, when you go abroad next I'll be dead by then! A real jokester, my mom. But of course, I didn't want her to be dead by then and she wasn't dead, so she needed to go to Cairo with me. So, Gladys, a little lady from New Jersey, goes to Cairo. I had my son who was about to go into high school and I had my elderly mother and there we were, going off to Cairo. And this is a pretty exotic place.

Q: Did they give you any training?

BROWN: I took morning Arabic so I had some basic vocabulary. But I had a healthy enough respect for how difficult it is to learn hard languages, so I didn't set high demands for myself. I spent many years learning Russian. I studied Estonian. Knew some French. I felt my brain chips for languages were pretty well used up.

Q: Oh, yes.

BROWN: And at that stage in my career, remember, this is 2007, I'm thinking oh, I don't know if I want to do Arabic anyway. But it didn't matter. They're not going to send the Management Counselor for two years of Arabic. I would have thought twice about it, frankly, because at that stage of my career it would have been really a slog.

Q: That's two years off.

BROWN: Yes. Two years off, yes.

Q: To learn the language before you even get in the job.

BROWN: Right. And it takes time. With Russian, it's so deeply wired in my head that if I went to Russia now, many years after I studied it, I could be reasonably proficient in six months. One thing about Arabic though, that I enjoyed – the script is so beautiful, I loved learning to write.

So, off I trundled to Cairo with my son about to enter ninth grade, my elderly mother, and my Jack Russell. Yes, okay. You laugh, you laugh, alright. I'm really very excited because this is an entirely new part of the world for me. A little bit of trepidation was there but mostly excitement.

Q: Okay, yes. This is good, yes. Set the stage a little because are you management counselor only for the embassy, or are you also responsible for all the other embassy elements there, USAID, the military element and so on?

BROWN: Yes. You hit it. That's what made the job complicated. I was management counselor and oversaw the support for all of the many agencies there. For many aspects of life at Embassy Cairo, I was the go-to person..

Q: Just a quick question, the security officer did not report to you? How did they wire the management of security there?

BROWN:,In the past, diplomatic security did report to management officers, but at a certain stage DS said this isn't working and they began to report directly to the DCM. Management and security always have to work hand in glove and much of what we do is overlapping. Personnel, security of housing, contracts, we coordinate and cooperate with each other. Nary a month went by when the DCM, the Regional Security Office, the regional psychiatrist and I got together to determine how to handle one personnel issue or another.

Q: Yes, sure.

BROWN: At an Embassy you end up getting involved in the private lives of people if they are having difficulties, to determine whether these difficulties can be handled at post or if they need to be sent home.. In Cairo's case, there were many different constituencies and many just weren't used to living in foreign environments. On top of that, it was like a little city – lots and lots of families were assigned there.

Q: You mentioned that it was about 450 properties in your–under your control as management counselor. Roughly how many people were more or less under your service agreements?

BROWN: Well, 450 families, let's say four to a family. So, our times 400 is 1,600. Plus, I had 800 Egyptians working for management. It was a small army. One of my key responsibilities was the compensation package for Egyptian employees. The locally-hired employees had a council with about 10 members that met with me periodically to address grievances and air issues.

Q: One issue that affects every single local employee are questions about the value of the Egyptian pound and whether it goes up and down and did that–and you know, if there was a financial crisis in Egypt and suddenly the value of their money goes down, did that happen?

BROWN: That didn't happen while I was there. That happened later. But there is one thing that–and I don't know how the State Department has actually ended up dealing with this–but we would peg our salaries to what other enlightened employers in the country would pay people. But oftentimes, for the more menial work, the guy that cleans your carpet or the groundskeeper, those salaries put employees under the poverty line. So, we had to work on that because I didn't want to preside over a work force in which some of the employees weren't being paid a living wage.

Q: Did you have enough and because of the strategic importance of Cairo and so on, was Washington more or less friendly and helpful to you when you went there, or were you like any other post, you know, begging, pleading, cajoling?

BROWN: They were supportive. But there were certain things that were happening that was even beyond what my bureau could do for me. One of the biggest challenges that I had was that we were a relatively safe patch in 2007, in the very troubled sea of the Middle East. So, there was more and more demand for personnel from other agencies to set up shop at our Embassy in the area, and for very good reasons. Embassy Jordan couldn't accommodate more personnel, So Cairo became a hub in demand and we received over ninety NSDD-38s in one year.

Q: Decision Directive, National Security Decision Directive.

BROWN: Yes . Essentially, it was a request to the ambassador to put an extra person for agency X, Y or Z in Cairo. Now, in my experience as a management officer up until that time, these requests were formulaic and normally approved without a lot of fan fare. Most ambassadors want to be forthcoming and want more personnel to be in the country to assist with the Mission Program Plan. And if the FBI says they need someone in Cairo, for instance, who's to say no? But what ended up happening in this case is that we had legitimate issues with the numbers. First, we couldn't get guaranteed extra funding for–or extra staff to deal with–this increase which was far from incremental. When I went back to NEA and said I have 90 people in the pipeline who want to come, are you going to give us more funding so we can support this increase, the Bureau told me that it couldn't guarantee it.

I again went back to the department and said we can't do this if we can't get more money. It was unusual to say no like this, but the ambassador just couldn't see us managing those numbers. One serious issue was – how could we even get all of those people out of Cairo if we needed to evacuate? If this place goes down the tubes, can we in good conscience say we could handle the security for all of these families? And when we went back to basics, as to the actual purpose of an NSDD-38, it was not to be formulaic, it was to make a case for what that new position would do for the work of the Embassy and its Mission Program Plan. And when we started really looking at these requests from that perspective, a lot of the positions were for regional requirements.

Q: Of course. That's because it was, as you say, it was one of the–

BROWN In the end, we didn't take all of the people that they asked us to take, and that was okay, that was what my ambassador wanted to do.

Q: And of course, getting the ambassador involved at this level. If it's just one or two additional people yes, who cares? But when it's 90 and they're all coming at once.

BROWN: Housing also was problematical in Cairo because there was a wide discrepancy in quality of housing between the senior ranks and everybody else. Everybody wanted a villa, which was a freestanding house. There were few of them, and they went to senior people. Most of the housing consisted of apartments of varying quality, and with maintenance issues of every stripe, some of which were not easily resolvable. So, that set up more rancor in housing assignments than is normal.

The other challenging assignment for me was my role on the school board of the Cairo American College. That may sound like a soft job, but it wasn't. One of my friends in the U.S. told me the most contentious body she's ever been associated with was the PTA in her hometown – there's nothing like your children's education to bring out the bear in you!

CAC is generally regarded as one of the best schools on the African continent. Every upper crust Egyptian wanted their children there. Mubarak's grandchildren attended the school. The Europeans also sent their kids there. I had people wait outside my home to lobby for their kids to gain admission. My job as the Embassy representative was to preserve it as an American school in character and curriculum, the vision of the founders, but these different constituencies had their own ideas about how the school should evolve. There weren't enough Americans on the Board to carry these votes, so there was a need to build alliances and use your art of persuasion. There was a battle over whether the Headmaster had to be American, and we won that battle. One memorable night an agenda item was to set the school calendar. Easy, right? Well, this turned into a slugfest concerning which holidays would be official and how to balance American, local, and European preferences. Can't have them all or the kids would hardly be in school. I know it sounds low level, but we had the Finance Minister of the Egyptian Republic, Yousef Boutros Ghali, along with a lot of other heavy hitters, at the table. My head was almost hitting the deck by 11 pm while we still were finding consensus.

Q: Right. I was going to ask you, isn't this a job you could have delegated, but now I see why you couldn't have delegated it.

BROWN: The DCM wanted me to be on the board to protect U.S. interests.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: The situations that come up are utterly unpredictable. Cairo was threatened by swine flu. In response, Egypt closed all the schools, including ours, which rippled through our community. The community asked – why close our school down, too? Let us decide!

Q: Oh, right.

BROWN: Anyway, we set up study groups, and made sure everybody was internet-ready so that the kids could continue to study. But this turned into a perception problem for Embassy leadership. The DCM and I did a whistle stop tour in the various communities to talk to all the U.S. parents. We almost had tomatoes thrown at us!.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: It was hard for people to understand that we did not have the power to go to the government and demand that the school be opened. It doesn't work that way. It reminded me of when I was a consular officer and an American got in trouble and was locked up – and how many Americans thought we could just get him or her out tout suite. And were enraged when we could not. I believe that most people are reasonable if you level with them and I am by nature a truth-teller. But sometimes things are very emotional and you're not going to please people and you just have to understand that. But what was interesting in the backdrop is that President Mubarak had a grandson who went to that school who had died of meningitis not long before this occurred. And his other grandchildren attended this school. People say Mubarak was never the same after his grandson died.

Q: Wow.

Were there goals at the very beginning that you were given that you had to complete? You know, for example, closing an old warehouse, buying new property, you know, those sorts of things?

BROWN: Yes, there were many significant issues, including purchasing real estate, establishing an on-ground OIG presence for its work in the region, and many others. But they were relatively straightforward compared with the most entrenched and intractable problems that hit people where they lived: feral cats and smoking on compound! I'm laughing but I'm not kidding. There were too many feral cats wandering around the compound, and the Ambassador, who lived on compound, would have representational events and these cats would gate crash them. One had a habit of jumping on his breakfast table in the morning when he chose to dine outside. This was not good. And as for the second issue, while the United States largely had given up on smoking, the Egyptians decidedly did not.

So, I'm taking my first official tour of the compound as Management Counselor and I see a little house-like structure that my facilities people are building by hand. What is this, I ask? They said oh, yes, (name redacted), wanted us to build a house for the cats. Whoa, I say, we are not building any house for any cats on the Embassy compound. So, that started my education concerning the pro-cat and anti-cat factions at the Embassy; both sides were quite passionate. Finally, we arranged for the U.S.'s naval medical unit in Cairo to capture and neuter the cats and them to a happy place (really). But there were always more cats. They were coming over the walls! So, I never won the cat battle. One of the last times I saw the Ambassador before I departed post, a large black tabby interrupted our conversation.

As for the smoking. We ended up designating locations where people could smoke, but then we had the anti-smoking police that wandered through and corralled people to smoke in those locations.

In short, Cairo was like a city in microcosm, with different constituencies that had starkly different ideas about various issues. And because it was such a big place, I think it was harder to foster a sense of togetherness. Doors were locked between offices for security purposes. It just wasn't as cohesive an operation as I was used to – we built a gazebo on the Embassy grounds, and scattered tables around in the hopes of creating a space where people could congregate and get to know each other, which was good but couldn't solve the larger issue.

Q: Of course. Because it's so large and–

Q: Interesting. In that sense, in the sense of cohesive, because you had so many large mission elements, was it like little separate cultures? You know, you had USAID, I imagine you had Peace Corps and the military and all of that.

BROWN: Yes, I would say so. I certainly think on the upper levels, like the Country Team, people appreciated each other. It's just that it was so big it was harder to communicate directly with people.

Q: Okay. Now, you get promoted there to MC, so for all the challenges and difficulties you must have been doing something right.

BROWN: Yes. my head was above water most of the time. To get promoted, it's important to take the jobs that have substance and responsibility to them. But that wasn't my primary aim. I just liked the work and kept at it and kept progressing.

One of the very interesting issues that I dealt with concerned the school. The Cairo American College had no legal status in Egypt.

Q: Right. It's not all that surprising. Other countries have a similar problem with American schools. Local regulations, local licensing issues and so on.

BROWN: Right, right. Yes, it's not unusual, but I started working with a very experienced woman from State's Overseas Schools office named Beatrice Cameron. We were very interested in establishing a legal character for the school so that no matter what happened politically we would be protected.

Q: Yes. Yes, I-

BROWN: You get it.

Q: Yes.

BROWN: Okay. You get it. But many reps on the School Board resisted the idea of placing the school under the Embassy. They wanted it to be placed under Egyptian authority and characterized as an NGO.

The Egyptians had a Ministry – the Ministry of Social Solidarity – to oversee NGO's, which is an oxymoron. NGO's are supposed to be free of government interference. But we all know that Egypt had its thumb on civil society and had no compunction about repressing certain NGOs that supported liberalization of the government. In fact, I would drive past this Ministry every work day – it was festooned with a 3 story high banner of Mubarak with sunglasses on.

Q: Oh, yes.

BROWN: This turned into a stark battle on the Board that really boiled down to one's perceptions of Egypt and its political landscape and the nature of American influence.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: The issue never was resolved– I almost got there, but almost isn't enough. When I would have my sidebars with members of the Board to talk to them frankly about why it was so important for the school to be protected by the Embassy umbrella, even some Americans didn't really understand the potential for a change in the Egyptian government's hands off attitude towards the school and the clear vulnerability of NGOs in that society and hence the risk.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: The DCM was fully engaged in this effort, too, so it went to the top of our Embassy and he weighed in consistently, to no avail.

Q: Wow.

BROWN: Yes. It was an eye-opening experience. Seemed to me that people were naïve and wrongly relativistic in their assessment of this issue.

Q: To trade away diplomatic protection for, you know, the Egyptian government's whimsy, dealing with NGOs, I mean, to me that's a no-brainer.

BROWN: I know.

Q: If I were anybody involved in that school, I'd say the embassy can really–we can really go under the embassy?

BROWN: Well, the Board Head was onboard, and ultimately many of the Board members. We got as far as hiring attorney but the whole effort got mired down. I would say that that to me was symptomatic of my overall experience in Cairo. In Estonia and other posts we were all marching in the same direction most of the time. I didn't have to expend so much energy to gain a consensus. This was really a totally different kind of experience and a maturing one.

Q: Wow. Wow.

Okay. Today's December 10 and we're resuming our interview with Dolores Brown at the end of her tour in Cairo.

BROWN: Yes. For Cairo I think that it was my first experience with an extremely large embassy with a significant number of components and where the State Department was outnumbered by other agencies, and how complex it was to run a management platform in an environment like that. It was almost like being the mayor of a small town. And of course, we had our commonality of being part of the mission and all being Americans of course, of course, of course. But nonetheless, because it was so large to try to create a cohesive feeling in the community was a challenge. So, I would say it brought home since, like the 1980s when I first went out, how many more agencies are abroad in a big way.

The other thing was how does the State Department deal with growth, And what I found is that there wasn't a central brain in the Department of State that was looking at this in a holistic and global sense; it was up to the Chief Of Mission (COM) in each country to determine whether a request met the specifications, so there wasn't a holistic view of how the map was laid out and the COM did not have that information, either. I thought that there should be more thought being put into it. Eventually the Department started looking at this in a centralized way, mostly driven by security concerns.

Q: Okay. Given that eventually you found that the department was thinking in those terms, I'm a little surprised to hear you say that, at least with Cairo, there had not been at least perhaps in the deputies' committee or something about Cairo, given how important it is as a post how much from a strategic point of view we wanted- we the United States Government wanted to place in Cairo in terms of human assets. And just as a larger question, how much we want to put _______ and you hear all of these things like pivot to Asia or before pivot to Asia there was Condoleezza Rice's diplomat initiative where you were going to strategically place positions in the most important locations for whatever the W Bush president needed and this sort of thing.

BROWN: I hope what I'm saying is not in conflict with that appraisal because we had a lot of important foreign policy priorities in the Middle East, including counterterrorism cooperation. What Cairo had going for it is that at that time it was stable and at that time the school was one of the best in Africa.

Q: Sure. And it's a hub.

BROWN: And it was a transportation hub. Things take time to resolve in any bureaucracy, as we know. The Department took appropriate steps to deal with it and to bring back fidelity into the process.

Q: Well, and I imagine at some point, when you're getting too many additional people, you need at least one or two additional administrative staff simply to manage their needs.

BROWN: Right. That's actually the main point. You can't bring on 90 more positions without a plus-up in administrative support staff. And, I was worried about the security.

Q: Sure.

BROWN: And in fact, when, the shoe dropped in 2011 and Egypt erupted, it was difficult to get everyone out. I wasn't there, but I heard.

Q: It doesn't surprise me. Wow. Remarkable.

BROWN:
After Egypt, .I ended up working in EUR (European and Eurasian Affairs) in a deputy position for a bit as I wanted to position myself for a western European post. But many of

those positions, rightly, were going to colleagues who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. And I was asked to do that a number of times, but I declined as I'm a widow and did not want to leave my family rudderless.
I considered the management counselor position in Moscow but I did not want to jump from one giant management job to another. As much as I would have loved to go to Moscow since I had studied Russian forever, I had second thoughts about it because of the nature of the job.

Q: Sure.

BROWN: I ultimately decided to stick around in DC, mostly because of my mother's failing health. I heard through the grapevine that the Department was looking for someone to be a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Management in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. I was intrigued.

There was a new political appointee named Rick Barton who had been an ambassador to ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and was a well-known thinker with CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies). He had been a senatorial candidate in Maine. A very well-respected man, a Yankee gentleman who believed there should be a conflict prevention component to diplomacy. He was slated to be the Assistant Secretary, we spoke and ultimately I was chosen for the job.

Q: Well, take one second to describe the office itself. How was it composed?

BROWN: A new structure was being set up; there were four deputy assistant secretaries, two political and two Foreign Service.. The political appointees were a woman named Karin Von Hippel, who is now the head of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), a think tank in the United Kingdom on security and military affairs. The other political appointee was a man named Jerry White, who was a founder of Survivor Corps. When he was a student at Brown University he was hiking in Israel and stepped on a land mine and one of his legs was destroyed. He devoted his life to preventing that from happening to others and was instrumental in working with the UN to ban landmines. The PDAS (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary) was a former ambassador named Patricia Haslach, who's now retired. So, it was the four of us as DASes and Ambassador Barton as the assistant secretary. There was a core of civil servants in the organization, some Foreign Service officers, Suffice to say that Ambassador Barton came in with a very clear idea of the changes he wanted to make.

Q: Oh, okay

BROWN: They created my position because they needed someone with the experience to take on a significant restructuring of the organization, including phasing out a body called the Civilian Response Corps. which was an on-call interagency body essentially on retainer to respond to conflict situations. But the ambassador preferred a different model.

Q: Okay. Interesting.

BROWN:.The ambassador had a vision of lean, hand-picked teams going out, He had set up a similar Bureau at USAID so brought the lessons learned from that experience to State.

Q: Let me just ask you a quick question here about strategy.

BROWN: Yes, sure

Q: So, it was decided that the structure of the Civilian Response Corps was–

BROWN: Not cost-effective and not necessarily the right people for the job.

Q: Right, not cost-effective. Was there a vision of replacing it with something?

BROWN: Yes, absolutely.

Q: Oh, okay.

BROWN: Absolutely, yes

Q: And what was the basic approach then to how you would replace the function of what these people formerly did?

BROWN: Well, I think that there was a sense that you needed people with experience in conflict prevention and an understanding of the country to which they are being sent.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: The other clear idea that the Ambassador had was that we should rely more on local talent, so that instead of having an expert from XYZ agency, including the State Department, that we should be teaming up with and listening to the people who were local and on the ground. We could hire them, or we could join forces with them through local NGOs. So, instead of having a band of American specialists, he really believed very deeply, and I agree with him, that it's much more effective to get local people involved on the ground. With American leadership.

I can give you very costly examples of American interventions of every sort being less effective because of our myopia.

Q: That is a great idea in principle, but the question I have is could you in the end, from a practical point of view, rely on countries to actually give you reasonable names that could then actually be called upon? Did it work out?

BROWN: I think it did, actually. It's not that we relied on the country. We worked with NGOs, some of them American, such as Mercy Corps. We made it our business to learn about local experts and sometimes to hire them. And we designed programs particular to the situation we were trying to address. For instance, in Central America we were trying to help the government of Honduras, for instance, to reduce gang violence. To that end, we worked with Mexican prosecutors and law enforcement who had experience in dealing with a similar set of problems in their own country.

We worked with the Syrian opposition to launch a non-violent political offensive against Assad. We worked with an implementing NGO that was British, and we set up a townhouse in Istanbul where the Syrian opposition could meet and collaborate. We gave Syrian journalists movable communication equipment. All this was pretty unusual for State.

Q: And this office's remit could be anything from natural disaster to what you were doing in Central America or–

BROWN: USAID was and is the port of call for disaster response.. We were dealing with conflict prevention.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: Ultimately, I was the Acting Assistant Secretary of the Bureau for a period of time between Ambassador Barton leaving and a new A/S being put in place.

Q: And just a last general question about the remit of your office is, how did you get your assignments? So, you had one in Central America, you had one for Syria, but, you know, did you notice, you know, an upcoming problem in perhaps Congo and say, you know, we're going to be facing a major issue in Congo in, you know, less than a year based on the reporting, or did your assignments come from on high?

BROWN: Some came from on high and some didn't. Syria certainly came from on high, as the U.S. was ripe to try an approach other than a military one, given our long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the lack of appetite to get involved in yet another conflict in that region. There wasn't a formalized procedure. We tended to work more closely with the African and Western Hemisphere Bureaus. For instance, the Ambassador in Kenya invited CSO to work to prevent conflict during the 2013 Presidential election In Nigeria we worked very closely with the consul general in Lagos who saw potential for our work to calm the waters in some highly volatile regions in the South, Nigeria's oil production hub with substantial Western economic interests. .

Q: Okay.

BROWN: We partnered with a Nigerian filmmaker named Jeta Amata, who was the son of a famous Nigerian actor. We produced a movie with hand-picked young leaders from this region who talked about the importance of peaceful resolution to political problems.

Q: And who was the audience or the intended audience for this?

BROWN: Nigerians.

Q: Oh, okay.

BROWN: Nigerians. It was blasted all over Nigeria.

Q: Wow. Great, great.

And during that time is there one particular accomplishment that you recall as being really illustrative of what the office could do or was intended to do?

BROWN: In the case of the 2013 Kenyan election, I think you fairly could say the U.S. government and CSO contributed to the success of a free and fair election. And this was not a cake walk. The 2007 Kenyan election was marred by the deaths of over 1,300 people and the Kenyan government welcomed our involvement. We funded and worked with Kenyans to set up early warning systems where election-related violence had been sparked in the past. I visited one of the offices in rural Kenya, a small room setup with five phones and staffed by a group of young Kenyans. They had hot lines to the police and could report incipient violence so that there was time to separate the parties and resolve matters peaceably. By the way, the police weren't fully trusted, so we facilitated meetings between the parties as a confidence building measure. One person in the office confessed that he has a nightmare: all the phones are ringing at once and he can't answer them all. I'm glad we helped prevent such a nightmare.

Q: Interesting.

In Syria what we did is support the people who Ambassador Barton called the unheard middle. His view, and I think that there's a lot of truth to this, is that when a country is confronted by political change, polarizing elements end up claiming the narrative and fomenting violence. But that we should be attempting to work with and to shore up the beleaguered people in the middle, who just want to create a reasonable body politic peaceably. We certainly didn't achieve our goal in Syria. But from my studies of revolution and political change, I've always gravitated to thinkers like Alexander Herzen, an intellectual during the Russian revolution. He lamented the lack of a middle ground during those convulsive political times in Russia, and it's an approach worth exploring.

Q: Wow. So, you were there for three years.

BROWN: Yes.

Q: Did you see changes in the way the U.S. Government handles these sorts of either early warning for conflict or post-conflict reconciliation? Were you at a moment when you sensed that there were just changes in the whole approach?

BROWN: Well, I mean, the whole idea was to change an approach and CSO was at the forefront of that initiative, but it's going to take more effort and application for these concepts to be used more broadly in the U.S. government.

Q: Okay. Was it your sense by the time you left this office that it would remain an office, it would continue to have a role and–?

BROWN: You mean, do I think it took at State? I'm not sure, but I believe the approach has merit. And I think that there are a number of people in the State Department that believed it had merit. We assessed outcomes, as well. So, I thought the Bureau was developing in a positive way. Other governments believe in this approach and devote significant resources to it – the Euros, the Nords, the Aussies, and the Canadians. It's an important element of soft power so it's more a question of where this competency will reside, in State or USAID, rather than whether it will survive. I think it will. The U.S. Institute for Peace, that big building over there, is devoted to how to use carrots effectively instead of sticks. And hard power has its limitations, as is well illustrated by our recent history.

Q: Okay. Then, as you're approaching the end of the three years that you had in this particular, you know, interesting, new kind of place, what did you aspire to? Because you know, at this point you're high enough in the hierarchy, I think, to be considered for an ambassadorship.

BROWN: Yes. Well, I tried for a few positions in Europe as I was more interested in place than title. But it didn't work out. I think I was near to getting the CG in Milan. Italy was really my dream. But I had to withdraw my name from the process because my mother was very ill and I'm an only child. I just couldn't say to her, I'm applying for this job and I might get it and she knows she's really sick, and that she wouldn't be able to come with me and I, in effect, would be deserting her. I just couldn't do that. She ended up passing away before I would have had to go.

Q: But how would you know that?

BROWN: Yes. If there is any regret that I have over my entire career it's that I wasn't able to compete until the end for that job.

Q: At this point you're a minister counselor?

BROWN: So I looked again for a position in Washington DC that centered on the nexus of policy and management. And I thought I don't want to work 12 hours a day, either, what with my mom's condition. So, I looked at political advisor positions in DOD, and there was one that piqued my interest at the Defense Logistics Agency.

Q: Let me just- I'll interrupt just one second. The way you were describing the kinds of jobs you were most interested in, in other words, jobs that required knowledge of logistics and resourcing but also policy and strategy are there kinds of jobs that the National War

College, the War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces prepare colonels for as they are approaching the possibility of becoming brigadier generals.

BROWN: Right.

Q: Because so much of the military is managing the tail end of the people you put out in the field, all of the travel, the, you know, the meals, the weaponry, the support for the weaponry, all of that, and as you were talking–because I attended it.

BROWN: I went to ICAF, too.

Q: Yes, oh, yes, yes, yes. And so, as you were speaking, I was thinking the likeliest place for your skills for, you know, a next job would be either teaching at–

BROWN: Yes, at NDU or something.

Q: At NDU or somewhere in that nexus between sort of military activity or–

BROWN: Right. Right, right. It made sense. I mean, sometimes I think things are meant to be in your life. DLA was eight miles down the road, very near to where I lived.

I don't know if you've–have you talked to other people who have been POLAD's?

Q: Not yet. Oddly enough, I mean, I've talked to plenty of people who have been in high positions in Iraq and Afghanistan who had to deal on a much smaller scale with resources and interface with military but nothing quite like a political advisor.

BROWN: Yes. Well, it really depends on the chemistry between you and that particular general. And the job is more obvious for people who are in the COCOMS, because your commander, your general, your four-star wants someone with substantive regional experience. And so, when I walked into the Defense Logistics Agency, my arrival came at the same time as the new general. The previous general really liked having a political advisor; the new general wasn't so sure. But ultimately it all worked out very well because I was able to demonstrate value to his command.

Q: Oh, yes, yes. Yes, exactly.

BROWN: DLA spends $34 billion per year buying supplies for all of the military branches. $34 billion. It would be on the Fortune 500 list if it was a company. And they buy supplies all over the world. When I got there, I was told that my main role was to keep them on the right side of things internationally. They got caught up in a corruption scandal before I arrived when they were buying fuel for our war effort in Afghanistan. They were buying it in Kyrgyzstan, and they got mixed up with certain government officials on the take in a corruption scandal. The subsequent Kyrgyz government made quite a public issue of it and the U.S. government had mud on its face. You may remember Manas Air Force base was in Kyrgyzstan, which was critical to our war effort.

Q: Ah, okay.

BROWN: There was a congressional inquiry into the situation and the result was a report called Mystery at Manas. The report intimated that either the U.S. Government turned a blind eye or was too vapid to see all this corruption. So–for me to be able to fulfill that role I had to have an awareness of what is going on across the organization. It's huge, has about 25,000 people. In addition, there are satellite branches all over the U.S., including in Pennsylvania and Michigan. So, I had to keep an eyeball on all of these different activities while embedded in the General's office.

Q: Right, right.

BROWN: I would insert myself as I needed to and was included in the General's daily 7 am meeting with a small leadership group of about eight people

One of the most interesting issues that arose was China's One Belt/One Road initiative, which has the Chinese building infrastructure literally around the world to support, they say, their economic ambitions. The U.S. took time to focus on this and it truly presented direct competition for influence with us.

Q: Yes, you're right.

BROWN: The Chinese have been assiduous and have a grand plan for how they are spending money all through Africa, all through Europe and they are recreating different trade routes and they are inserting themselves. And we don't have a strategy on how to respond.

Q: We're not doing it in the U.S. much less other countries.

BROWN: I travelled to Djibouti with my General. I had talked to him a lot about this as the Chinese were making significant inroads in that country. They built a railroad from Djibouti to Addis, for instance. And they are opening a port there, right next to ours. There couldn't be more of a blatant play for influence.

Q: Right, and it's a rather strategic location.

BROWN: That's right, it is a rather strategic location and in fact, it's the only country on the entire African continent that allows a U.S. military base. And it provides a vivid illustration of the fact that we are in competition with the Chinese. Djibouti is a tiny country.. Its foreign ministry consists of about five people. The only thing it really has that it can sell is its strategic location. Like any country, they are going to make the most of what they have. So, they are going to continue to work with the Chinese and us as best they can and balance both interests. We have to realize that this is where the rubber meets the road. We need to illustrate that we are good partners, in fact, better partners than the Chinese. Now, at the same time there was a piece of U.S. legislation called Djibouti First.

Now, this is perfect, this is the kind of issue I love, bringing management and policy interests together. This legislation allowed the United States Government to give Djiboutian vendors preference over American vendors – and I worked with DLA to use that legislation to win hearts and minds in Djibouti

Q: Interesting.

BROWN: So I made the pitch to DLA to use that legislation to procure as many items locally in Djibouti as possible. Who else in the U.S. government spends 64 billion dollars? I wanted to leverage that money to bolster our influence and help the economy of an ally. The General agreed because he had the legislative framework in which to work. The military, however, has imperatives – force protection, speed, etc. But he gave the orders and we tried it.

Q: Right, right, right.

BROWN: The General issued orders and the staff in Philadelphia where contracting for food is all of a sudden had to figure out how are they going to work with Djiboutian vendors. We ended up ordering thousands of croissants from a little French bakery run by a Djiboutian family. The Djiboutians didn't know what hit him, though. Due to force protection requirements, there were many inspections of the premises that revealed problems, and the process took a long time and was rigorous. I tried to make sure that the wheels didn't fall off this train– if we are putting this baker through his paces and a year later, he turns up with nothing, we're going to get people angry instead of what we are attempting to do here.

Q: Right. Right, right.

BROWN: With the military orders are orders and people aren't necessarily interested in the why, and the why was so important to success. So I had to ensure that people down the line, the inspectors, etc., who was going out there needed to understand the why too. And that was a constant challenge.

I was there for two and a half years. And when tensions were ramping up with North Korea.

Q: Active time for DLA.

BROWN: Yes. And later. I happened to be walking down the hall at State and Secretary Tillerson was conducting a town hall meeting. The door was open and I just caught him talking about One Belt/One Road and how we had to ramp up our public-private partnerships to be more effective to counter this. I thought, yes!

I had a very satisfying time at DLA. I made inroads. And it gave me the headspace that I needed to deal with my family situation.

So, today is December 17, and we're concluding our interview with Dolores Brown.

You conclude your tour as a political advisor/polad in what year?

BROWN: I concluded the assignment in 2018 and started the job search program in March of that year.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: I was disenchanted by what was happening at State, and I was closing in on the mandatory age for retirement. I approached retirement as a period of renewal. I thought a lot about what I wanted to do in advance. I planned an extended trip to Europe, I went to London, I went to Estonia, I went to Sicily. There was so much going on politically in the United States and so much going on in Europe with Brexit and the disarray in the EU that it was good to check in on my friends on the other side of the pond. I sat with a friend, a retired British diplomat, in her little Peter Rabbitty cottage in Wiltshire and we watched President Trump's trip to London together. The Victoria and Albert had an exhibit called "Does Democracy Still Work," I saw Paul Simon, Santana, and James Taylor in Hyde Park, and an incredible pan-European art exhibit called Manifesta in Sicily on migration. It all was so thought provoking and a perfect capstone to my last years as a diplomat.

And I had something specific waiting for me when I returned home. I was recommended by a colleague for a temporary position at the American Foreign Service Association to assist retirees. This mission sang to me as I wanted to help people who were leaving the Department –State was bleeding at that time, there was a great flight of officers. AFSA is one of the few institutions that advocates for diplomacy and is non-partisan. AFSA also is committed to getting the message out about why diplomacy is important for this country. So, what better thing can I do? Later, I accepted a permanent part-time position.

And then secondly, I work as a contractor playing a deputy chief of mission for FACT, ie, security training.

So, I kept my fingers in the pie. And I started writing. I wrote an article for the Foreign Service Journal about what I had wished I had known before retiring. I also wrote an essay to enter the White Castle Hall of Fame (I grew up with those burgers), quoting a Chinese philosopher who said, "patriotism is the taste of foods eaten in childhood - " no joke! So, I'm doing things that are fun and meaningful to me. I'm quite happy with retirement and it seems like things are falling into place nicely. It's also freeing to be able to be involved politically, ie, beyond the Hatch Act.

Q: Of course, sure. Sure.

BROWN: For the security training I talk a lot about my own personal experiences. I was in apartheid South Africa not long before the change and I was in Estonia not long after the Russians left. And, in Cairo, of course, right before the Arab Spring. I think that

Americans sometimes don't have the imagination to understand how fragile systems and governments are. . If there is anything that I can really impress upon people before they go abroad, is you are steeped in how the United States works, and if you think other countries work that way you're going to learn the hard way that they don't. I know it sounds so simple, but I think it's an element of the difficulties that we went through when we were trying to win the war in Vietnam or were trying to prevail in Afghanistan and Iraq,

Q: Yes. Now, you are one of the graduates of the Foreign Service after the women's class action suit.

BROWN: Right.

Q: Did you notice changes in the way women could advance or get training or get mentored in the period of your career, you know, given where it all came from?

BROWN: Yes, I was asked to join the class action suit but I didn't. Maybe I was naïve. I felt so supported by everyone around me that I didn't feel it was necessary. I could have jumped on the bandwagon.

Q: Right.

BROWN: When I came in there were fewer women. I felt that the opportunities for me were pretty broad, but I also think that I walked into a good situation as by the time I joined, in my view women were broadly accepted in the FS. I think just by virtue of the nature of the Foreign Service it's a bit more difficult for women. If you get married, is your spouse going to want to move around? I also think there can be more impediments to mixing with the local population for women. That's what I tell young women, I think they have to be aware of that. It depends where you go – most of the world isn't Sweden.

Q: Sure.

BROWN: So, I would say that women may have to make more personal sacrifices, and I don't know if that's changed.

Q: And then, the follow-on question is, treatment of families. And by this, I mean support for families over the period of time you were in the service.

BROWN: Well, I always felt my family and I were supported, but it wasn't institutional support. It was because I often was surrounded by good people, who cared about us. I think the institution has made strides in trying to accommodate families, but it's spotty and has been influenced by the growth of unaccompanied posts.

Q: And what about your field of management? Any last insights or recommendations?

BROWN: I think there needs to be more centralized direction over certain types of decision making in the management arena. And more standardization and data driven decision-making that would make management more coherent, but not strangle initiative.

Q: Right, right.

I would also look at the size of our tail. It's huge. Other Embassies don't provide the range and level of services that we do, or even try to replicate the kind of life that staff would be living if they were in their home country. I remember the ambassador from Belgium to South Africa. He may have had three staff members. He found his house. Now, that kind of self-sufficiency is an extreme example. Fewer services won't work in every post, of course, but it's worth looking into.

Q: Okay. So, the final question that I want to ask you is, what advice would you give to a new U.S. diplomat or someone contemplating the Foreign Service about how they might prepare or what they need to consider if they, you know, take this job very seriously as a possible job for them?

BROWN: Well, for preparing the first thing I would recommend is to read the press consistently, one or two of the major American newspapers of record . You need to have a firm basis in general knowledge to pass the written exam, and the oral exam, for that matter. I remember questions ranged from what is Reaganomics to recognizing a painting by Grant Wood. So, I think that you would get that if you were reading newspapers every day and knowing not only cultural references but economics, politics, and the issues of the day. You need to know how to write and speak and have sharp critical thinking skills, which are skills that you learn through a solid liberal arts education. You don't necessarily have to major in political science - you can major in any academic discipline. And common sense applies to – I remember another question I had on the orals – What would you do if you were the consular officer in Naples, Italy and you learned a U.S. aircraft carrier was about to arrive? What preparations would be necessary? I flippantly answered, "Call the cops," which got a smile out of the examiners and certainly is one prudent, common sense step to take in that situation.

I would counsel FS hopefuls that to be successful and happy in the FS they will need to be adaptable and have a basic curiosity about the world. If you're not adaptable you're not going to be successful in this career. You need to be able to make the best of any situation. You're not always going to go to the dream post. You're not always going to have the dream job. Sometimes your dream job could turn into something that is not your dream job. And so, if you have a general cast of mind that allows you to make the best of a situation and be curious enough about whatever country you go to, to be able to be inspired by what's around you, and to just do whatever job you have to your best ability, that is key.

Compared to many of my colleagues, I was probably more laissez faire about my career. My family situation was always number one. When I met my husband-to-be in South Africa, I got a follow-on tour in South Africa that allowed us to be together, and that was unusual for a junior officer. But if I didn't, I probably would have left the service. I was carried by the force and direction of my life. I wanted to come home after I had my first child and so I bid on location as primary, not the job. After that my husband was posted to Paris and I wanted to get anywhere within striking distance of Paris, I accepted a job as a finance officer, not exactly my forte, as you're talking to someone who majored in Russian and art history. I approached raising two children in the FS by making sure they had a balance between living abroad and living in the U.S., because I believe deeply that people need roots. I rarely went from one foreign post to another, as I wanted them to have significant periods of time at home. I also sometimes sent them home during the summer from a foreign post, to be with friends or relatives. I didn't want them to be lost when they came back to the U.S. I knew how important my stable upbringing was to me. So, my advice to new FS personnel is that they will need to look deeply and carefully about how they are going to manage this balance.

Another thing. In the Foreign Service, your life is episodic. Once you leave, say, South Africa, that chapter of your life, as an Embassy official, is over. The chapter is over and the book is closed. You can't go back. So, you lose the life continuity that most people have, and that fact can be disconcerting and even melancholy. You lose friends, the places you grew to love in a country.

There's a tradition in my family – I think it comes from Russia – to sit quietly for five minutes or so before leaving a place. A meditation of sorts. I still remember those meditative moments from my last days in Tallinn and Cairo.

Q: Right.

Okay. Now, in closing, are there any sort of last thoughts or insights that you want to share as we end the interview?

BROWN: I think that the diplomatic corps as a whole has an immense trove of wisdom to share with the American people. So, we should continue to engage with issues close to our profession and be active in our communities, as we have a distinct and important and unique point of view to share.

Q: Okay.

BROWN: I feel very fortunate to have had the kind of life I had. Now I can try to read War and Peace, maybe even in Russian.

Q: Okay.

End of interview