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

HARVEY LEIFERT

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INTERVIEW

Q: So, today is Monday, June 18th [2018], and we're beginning our first session with Harvey Leifert. And I pronounced that right?

LEIFERT: Yes, you did.

Q: Very good. And Harvey, where and when were you born?

LEIFERT: I was born in Manhattan, New York. February 28th, 1938.

Q: And is that where you grew up?

LEIFERT: Yes.

Q: Okay. So, whereabouts in Manhattan? Because obviously there's lots of little neighborhoods.

LEIFERT: When I was born, my parents lived in Washington Heights, but they moved when I was a baby, and I don't even remember that area, although I've seen photos. Most of my childhood and up through high school, even through college, we lived on East 70th Street, or just around the corner on Second Avenue and 70th.

Q: Okay. So, were you the only child in your family? Brothers and sisters?

LEIFERT: I had a younger brother who died in 2006.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Wow. But, now, a lot of people have seen the ads on TV all the time now, have looked into their ancestry. Were your parents' first generation, second? Do you, have you looked into where your family came from?

LEIFERT: Well, I know they all came from Russia or parts of what was later the Soviet Union. My grandparents all arrived in New York in the very early 20th century and stayed in New York, and my parents were born there, and I was.

Q: Okay. So, your parents met each other in New York City?

LEIFERT: Yes.

Q: Now, when your grandparents arrived and your parents, what sort of work did they do?

LEIFERT: I don't know all the things my grandparents may have done, but what I remember is my paternal grandfather had a dry cleaning store in the Bronx, and my maternal grandfather had a laundry in Manhattan.

Q: Okay. Did either of your parents work in the family business?

LEIFERT: I don't think so. I don't know about earlier businesses when they were younger, but not that I ever knew about.

Q: Okay. So then in that case, what, what kind of professional—what sort of work did your parents do?

LEIFERT: Well, my father did the same thing as his father. He also opened a dry cleaning store in Manhattan. My mother was mostly a stay at home mom, but she had a number of jobs in her youth or pre-Harvey. The earliest one was typing—the earliest one I know about—typing tombstone inscriptions on a Hebrew typewriter for a monument company.

Q: Wonderful!

LEIFERT: And, much later after my brother and I were both out of the house, she went back to work and worked for Parrish Hadley, one of the leading interior decorating companies in New York, as a bookkeeper. So, she kept their books, and Mr. Hadley, who was one of the partners, kept her on as his personal bookkeeper, even after my mother retired from the company as such.

Q: Marvelous. So, now you went to school, you went to public school in New York?

LEIFERT: I went to PS [Public School] 6 in Manhattan and the Bronx High School of Science, Columbia College, and Columbia University—what they now call—Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. And, the only other formal education I had was a year at Georgetown University, much later in my career.

Q: Okay. So, now to go back for a little while, to the neighborhoods you grew up in, what sort of neighborhood was it?

LEIFERT: It was an all white neighborhood. Midtown, east midtown, Yorkville was what it was called. It was mixed in terms of ethnic origins. They were kids who had Irish ancestry and other European ancestry, Italian and so on. Most of the ones I knew, mostly Catholic. I was the only Jew on the block as far as I knew, and that's really about it.

Q: Was your family at all religious; did they belong to a synagogue at any point?

LEIFERT: Yes, they did, and I went to it also until I left home: Kehilath Jeshurun it was called on East 85th Street in Manhattan.

Q: And, what, stream of Judaism or what—?

LEIFERT: Orthodox.

Q: It was Orthodox.

LEIFERT: Yes.

Q: So you must've had quite an education in Hebrew and, and sort of Jewish liturgy, and so on?

LEIFERT: The latter, yes. In terms of actually learning Hebrew? Not very well. I mean enough to pray in the synagogue and follow a prayer book, but to have a conversation in Hebrew, no.

Q: Okay.

LEIFERT: Not to this day.

Q: And, your parents remained with the synagogue for a while?

LEIFERT: Oh, forever.

Q: Oh, okay. Yeah. Now, let's turn to your school. About how large was it?

LEIFERT: PS 6? It's in a new location now. It moved a few years after I graduated. The building I was in dated from the late 19th century. It had five stories. The top floor, the fifth floor, was just a gymnasium.

Q: Interesting that the top floor was the gym.

LEIFERT: Yeah. And, the ground floor was all open area that we used for indoor recess and fire drills. So, the second, third and fourth floor were classrooms. I'm just trying to estimate how many kids there may have been, but, I would say probably in the neighborhood of 600 or so. ballpark.

Q: So, a graduating class would be something in the neighborhood of—? Well, PS6 was both elementary and high [school]?

LEIFERT: Yeah, it was kindergarten through eighth.

Q: Okay.

LEIFERT: It was pre-junior high, pre-middle school; they hadn’t been invented yet.

Q: So, a graduating class would be relatively small, perhaps a hundred kids?

LEIFERT: More than that. But, yes, still relatively small by today's standards.

Q: Now, while you were in school, were you also involved with any extracurricular activities, either in school or scouting or sport or anything?

LEIFERT: In elementary school, not really. I was in a Boy Scout troop. I considered it was probably the worst troop in the world. We didn't do very much, and we never went on overnight hikes and that sort of thing. If we once in a year had a day hike somewhere, that was it, you know? Yeah. I don't remember what we did at our monthly meetings.

Q: Okay. But, what about in school: any, you know, things like band or drama or, or so on?

LEIFERT: We didn't have much of that. When I started school, it was still during World War II, and I was there from five years old, so 1943 roughly, and graduated in '51. So, in the early years, there really weren't any special extracurriculars or things like that. Even in the latter part of it, not that I really remember. We very infrequently had a field trip somewhere to visit some institution or a museum or something. It was very infrequent.

Q: But then again, since you lived in New York, in a way you didn't need, you didn't need field trips.

LEIFERT: That's absolutely true, with regard to the museums. We could've used some field trips in nature.

Q: Right. So in school, were you already or were you talking with your parents about the kinds of areas of interests that you had?

LEIFERT: I was a good student in elementary school. I was one of the two or three top in my class. There are only two other people I've ever kept track of since then. One was Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary, who was a very, very good friend. I mean, we played together all the time. Went off to different high schools. And Carl Leubsdorf, who was a longtime Washington correspondent for the Dallas Morning News. The only two names I recognized later as people that I went to school with—elementary school. So—I forgot the question!

Q: You know, beginning to think about, you know, the kinds of interests that you had.

LEIFERT: I was good in a lot of subjects. I loved reading. I was reading before school. I was interested in science. Yes, from a young age, especially astronomy.

Q: And, so, I imagine you had some visits to the Hayden Planetarium.

LEIFERT: Absolutely. Very often. And I enjoyed it. And, also the adjacent Museum of Natural History. Not so much art museums, but I was very interested in the natural world. Yeah. Even though I grew up in the skyscrapers.

Q: Did, well, did your parents take you on trips or, you know, outside of the city?

LEIFERT: We did, of course. In the early years it was gasoline rationing and—

Q: Of course. It was actually, that's a question I meant to ask you, about the experience even in elementary school, of going to school during the war, how it affected the school or how it affected your view of things as a child growing up.

LEIFERT: Well, what I remember is the stamp lady. I don't know if that means anything to you, but it was a woman who came around maybe once a month, and she would sell stamps—not postage stamps, but special stamps for just cents apiece, and you would paste them in a book that you got. And, when the book was full, you traded it in for war bond. You had paid for a war bond on the installment plan, essentially. So, every time she came, your parents would give you a little money and you would buy whatever number of stamps they could afford for you to buy. So, I knew there was a war going on. I didn't listen to news much on the radio at a young age; in upper elementary school grades, I did. We would occasionally go to the movies and see newsreels, which always had the war in them.

So, I knew we were fighting a war, and I knew who we were fighting against. But, that was about it. I vaguely remember D-Day as being a big thing having happened that day. And, I remember a victory in Europe. And, I remember Roosevelt dying, so, well, in the opposite order, but, those were the things that I remember from the news in those bygone days. Yeah.

Q: And, rationing: did that—

LEIFERT: Yeah, we had rationing, yeah. I never felt deprived of anything, but you were limited to a certain amount of meat or eggs or dairy products and not sure what else, but certainly gasoline.

Q: Oh, rubber and, and there would be collected. My father recalls collecting bottles or cans.

LEIFERT: Yeah, we did that. Yeah. Yeah. We flattened the cans, and I don't remember where we took them. Also fat, you took it back to the butcher—

Q: Right.

LEIFERT: —in these big cans.

Q: Right, right. Yeah. The reason I even remember it even though I wasn't present is because as a child, some of those old cans were still around. And you know, I would say, what's that? Oh, that's where you put the schmaltz [chicken fat] when, you know, and so on. Okay. But, so in other words, during your adolescence and your high school years, you didn't do any foreign travel or, or really have a great deal of, of international exposure?

LEIFERT: I think I was still in elementary school, maybe in the eighth grade when we went to Montreal. That was by car. That was after the war, obviously. And, it was our only foreign trip. In fact, we didn't travel far. I would say my geographic boundaries before college, Montreal was the furthest north. Boston was the furthest east, and Washington was probably furthest south and west. It was in that sort of triangular area

that we lived, and we did have summer vacations, either in the mountains or at the beach. But, no real travel other than that.

Q: Okay. Did, did other things or teachers or, or access to books and so on, did anything else while you were growing up begin to give you that bug for international service?

LEIFERT: No, I can't say that it did.

Q: Okay. No, that's fine. That's fine. So, of course, now as you're proceeding through high school, at some point, either you or your parents begin to talk about high school. I'm sorry, about college. And what were you envisioning in terms of a college or in terms of the fields you, you were going to pursue?

LEIFERT: I was, I went to, as I said, to Bronx High School of Science, which is an academic high school, one of the so-called elite high schools in New York, which required an entrance exam. And, it was quite rigorous in all fields. It wasn't just about science. You had English and math, social studies, as it was called, which was history and all related fields, civics. I don't even remember what else. What it slighted was music and fine arts, but we did have a smidgen of both. I don't remember even then having any clear idea of what I might want to do in terms of a career. I was remarkably unaware of colleges and universities. I know nowadays, and perhaps even then, most kids have a really good idea of where they might want to go to college, early on. It may not always turn out that way, but they know one from another. And, I didn't, really. All I knew about colleges was football scores. In many cases, I didn't know where those colleges were that you heard every Saturday they were playing somebody. And, that was it for me.

So, we did have a guidance counselor and he made some suggestions, and I applied to, let's see: Syracuse University, Union College in Schenectady, I think. NYU [New York University], Columbia, and Queens.

Q: So, all within New York.

LEIFERT: Yes. And, the reason being that I applied for the New York state scholarship, which you could only use at a college in New York State. And, I assumed I would get it. At Bronx Science, a large percentage of the student body passed it and got the scholarship. And I did, but you can only use it in New York, so I never even considered anything elsewhere, even on the off chance that they would give me a scholarship. I didn't even try.

So, I got into all of them except to Union. And, it was very interesting. I went up there for an interview, and it was a very good interview; I'm with my mother. And, the admissions counselor told me, quite frankly, and you can just not imagine this today, that the number of Jewish students they admitted was limited by the number of people the two Jewish fraternities could take each year, because it was a very fraternity-centered social life on campus, and you pretty much had to be in a fraternity, and they wouldn't want to admit a Jewish student who couldn't be accepted in one of those two Jewish fraternities. So, as it

turned out, I did not get accepted, which I guess I was not in the top, whatever number that would enable me to be in a Jewish fraternity. It's just hard to imagine that today. And, I bet they would deny they said it, even back then. They did.

Q: Oh, and, so, I'm sorry—what year you were, again, were you applying to colleges?

LEIFERT: Well, I graduated high school in '55, so I guess it was in '54 and '55.

Q: Fascinating that, you know, even at that point, there were still essentially quotas.

LEIFERT: It was a quota, but the college claimed, oh, it's not our quota. It's just, we only have two Jewish fraternities. I didn't ask about any other ethnic group.

Q: Okay, but so, then you've got your scholarship and you're accepted to Columbia what is now Columbia University, but I guess they called it Columbia College when you—

LEIFERT: Well, it was both. Columbia College was the, as we considered, the keystone of Columbia University. I mean the oldest part of it. Yeah. But, it was still both, and my diploma says Columbia University.

Q: Okay. Were you able to commute to it?

LEIFERT: I did for the first year. I thought it made sense, but I didn't like it, because I was spending a lot of time on campus after class and getting home late and I had to do homework, and I would do it in the library or someplace, and I wanted to be on campus or near campus, for the rest of the time. At that time, they had very limited dormitory facilities. It's expanded considerably since then. Then, they only had three adjacent resident halls for male undergraduate students.

Q: And so it was not coed yet.

LEIFERT: Oh, Columbia College was not coed yet. The other parts of the university were, but not the College until well after I graduated. So, they had the three dorms and they weren't fabulous, but they were right on campus. That was very nice if you lived there. Second year—

Q: Well wait, before we go into second year. Yeah. So, in your first year, I imagine you were just essentially fulfilling requirements, but did you have a, were you already thinking of a major?

LEIFERT: Yeah. You start thinking of it then. I was very taken with the, what we called, what they still call the core curriculum, especially Contemporary Civilization. It's a two year program. At least it was then. The full name is Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West. So you study history, philosophy, and related subject matter, starting with the ancient Greeks, I recall. And, it was done through readings, a chapter here, chapter there of different great writers, and that was followed in the second year by

a more contemporary, truly contemporary take on the same things that bring it up to the 20th century.

But, back in the first year you had that; you also had required and that was I think three times a week. You had Humanities A, we called it then. I know the name has changed, but it was basically a similar type of thing about great literature of the West, starting again with, maybe, Herodotus and moving up. I forget how far, but pretty close to the 20th century. But, again, either extended chapters or whole books, which you couldn't possibly read in a week, but you did the best you could or faked it, whatever.

So those are, that was twice a week, I think. So, five days a week, you had these really stiff required courses, and the rest of it was required basic English course, Health Ed, math and/or science. I think there was one year of each required and they were not well taught compared to the others. All the other classes at that time were in small groups like eight to 10, sometimes even fewer. The math and science were lecture halls. And, you could tell the difference, at least I could tell the difference in my learning—did much better in those small group settings than in the massive lecture halls.

Q: How large is the freshman class—was the freshman class?

LEIFERT: It was about 600 then. I think it's over a thousand now.

Q: And what did they do or what did you do to get to know any of the students—the campus life?

LEIFERT: I had a couple of extracurriculars, but the one I remember and the one I devoted an incredible amount of time to, was the campus radio station, WKCR. Still on. When I began, it was a kind of closed circuit, a station that you could only hear in the dormitories, and we always doubted that anybody actually listened. But we enjoyed doing it, anyway. Midway through my college years, we got an FM license. The university got an FM license, and they built a new studio for FM. And, we were on the air, very low power at the beginning, at 9.9 watts. But Morningside Heights is a high place, so we had a fairly good coverage of midtown Manhattan and up and nearby New Jersey. So, some people did actually listen at that point. And, for me it was fun, because I had always enjoyed radio.

We haven't mentioned it so far, but I've always been interested in broadcasting, and this was a chance to really do it and learn how to do it. The station was run entirely by college students, at that point. There was a faculty advisor, but the faculty advisor covered half a dozen different extracurriculars. It's not somebody who was there every day. So we ran it. And, you know, as you moved up the ladder, you got into the governance of the station, as well as doing the broadcasting, and it was really educational in its own way, but I spent way too much time there, and many others did too.

Q: Was it, was it mostly music or, what, what was the—

LEIFERT: It was a variety. We had classical music. Much later, after I left, they moved heavily into jazz, but not then. We had a lot of—not a lot—we had some classical music. At the beginning, we got our news from WQXR, the New York Times station at that time, and they let us air their news twice in the evening. We had a number of other programs that we produced ourselves, and one of them was called Spotlight Columbia that I worked on for a year or two. What it was was mainly recording events on campus and then broadcasting them. We had so many lectures going on and other activities, and we would just take our tape recorder there and set up a mic, and we had a program with relatively little editing or anything to correct. And, you brought things that were happening on campus to the somewhat wider community

Q: And you learned more or less the craft of radio broadcasting as well.

LEIFERT: Yes, very much so. There was a bit of a dichotomy between the engineering types and the talent, as later it was called: people who were actually on the air. We took a turn at most things and, I had a pretty good idea of how radio stations ran by the time I left. Yeah.

Q: Okay, so that brings you into sort of a wider circle of student life and you're following in humanities and so on. Now, what about other world events going on? You're in college from the late fifties to the early sixties now. Did any other events or, you know, trends begin to become visible while you're, while you were there on campus?

LEIFERT: Well, even before, in high school. It was during the McCarthy period, which affected teachers enormously. There were congressional hearings at which some teachers who had been named by other people were called to testify and either swear that they had never been communists or decline to do so, in which case they risked being fired. And, I think at least a couple of teachers at Bronx Science were let go before then. One name I remember was James Hlaverty [?], Hungarian origin, who was the chair of the mathematics department. And, he had actually worked for the Voice of America, in their Hungarian service. And, I don't know what happened to him or why, but he left and it was widely assumed that it had to do with McCarthy and related House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), that whole plethora of investigations that were going on then. So, even then, we had some understanding of what was going on, and it helped shape my own political views, which trended, and later much more so, toward the liberal side.

Q: But, then on time in college, as you know, the '50s continue; were there other things came on to campus?

LEIFERT: Well, that was long before the events of 1968. I was in what was later called the quiet '50s.

Q: Yes, I understand.

LEIFERT: But, nevertheless, we weren't completely quiet. I mean we followed elections. Even WKCR radio station had really good election coverage, because we enlisted a few professors who follow this thing to do analysis during the evening as results came in. And, I remember one year I went down to the Biltmore Hotel, which was the Democratic Party headquarters. And there was somebody else at the Republican headquarters, for the gubernatorial election, which was Averell Harriman against; I forget if it was Nelson Rockefeller or somebody else at that point. But, yeah, we covered it live, including the speeches, and also, yeah, we had a lot of involvement. We just didn't do a lot of protesting.

But, I remember in 1959, soon after his revolution, Fidel Castro came to New York and he visited the Columbia campus. And that was the only time, I think. It was before he declared himself a communist. But, nevertheless, he was on campus, and he had quite a crowd. I mean, I think we were all in favor of his revolution against Batista. So, that happened. But, it wasn't a hotbed of activism.

Q: In, in talking about this, it also, there was a question. Well, it's all right. We can move on. Oh yeah, I know what it was: a lot of, I don't know the extent to which you covered city politics, because New York is such a unique location in the United States. Its population is larger than a lot of states, in a very compact area. And, I wondered if, you know, as you were growing up, there were aspects of the political life of New York that that struck you.

LEIFERT: Well, I remember Fiorello La Guardia, growing up. He had a radio program every Sunday. My parents listened to, so I listened to it. And, he would talk about city issues, some of which I understood, and some of which I didn't. One time, he famously read the Sunday funnies during a newspaper delivery truck drivers' strike. He didn't want the children to be deprived of the comics. But, otherwise he gave a talk every week about issues in the city, and he always began and ended it, I remember, with his slogan, "patience and fortitude."

Q: That was in an era when you can have that kind of a slogan.

LEIFERT: Yeah. But after that, I don't think I was especially interested in New York City politics or knew much about it beyond the superficial—can't remember. We had Lindsay, who was a very popular mayor, and several others who were less so, and many of them are well known ones who were after I left New York. So, yeah.

Q: Because, you know, as you know, from having grown up there, in New York City itself, [it] went through kind of waves of development and change, some of which related in general to the country at large and some related very, you know, parochially to just the New York area.

LEIFERT: Right.

Q: But okay, no, that's fine. So, now to go back to college, you were proceeding through and what are you thinking about? How are, what are you envisioning for yourself after college?

LEIFERT: I was thinking it might be great to be a foreign correspondent for a radio or TV station. I can't say it was a burning desire, but it was as much of a focus as anything else. I didn't have a lot of thoughts about what I might do later.

Q: Had you taken foreign language?

LEIFERT: I took Spanish both in high school and the, I think, one year requirement in college. I can read it. I can read a newspaper maybe with 50, 60 percent comprehension. I can't speak more than a few simple sentences, and if people are speaking at, if it's anything like a normal speed, no. They slow down, maybe. It's nothing I ever followed up in the Foreign Service. So, it was just a high school and first year of college.

Q: And, did you ever actually have a chance to meet with foreign correspondents and you know, kind of learn the life?

LEIFERT: No, I don't think I ever did while in college.

Q: Okay. So, now as you're, as you're completing college, were you satisfied with the education you got and, what were you thinking about afterwards?

LEIFERT: Okay. I was very satisfied with the education I had, not without quibbles, but, overall, yes, absolutely. And, I just sort of assumed at one point that I would go on to graduate school, and it seemed to be what people were doing, some kind of graduate school. And, beyond that, the job market wasn't very good. There weren't things you could run out to and get huge salaries, as graduates can today, even what counted for a big salary back then. I mean, now starting salaries are like what I ended up with in the Foreign Service. So, no, I didn't have too much of a career push still, at that point by the end of college, but I thought I would go on to graduate school and the courses that had most interested in me as I worked my way through, and I eventually had a major in government, but most places would call political science. And, I wanted to continue that, and I was able to do it at Columbia. And, again, I got a state scholarship [actually, fellowship], which covered full tuition for two years, which was the course requirement essentially.

Q: I meant to ask you, did you work in, you know, to earn money while you were studying as an undergraduate?

LEIFERT: Only summers. The jobs were a mixed bag. Their best one was as a desk assistant at NBC [National Broadcasting Company] News in the RCA [Radio Corporation of America] Building. I worked the overnight shift from midnight to 8:00 a.m., running copy to the news writers and similar tasks, while learning a lot about the broadcast news business, which was still mainly radio. Other summer jobs I had

including record keeping at a downscale department store and distributing soap samples door to door. While in high school, I had worked two summers at a summer camp, as a waiter and maintenance man.

I didn't work while on campus. Some did. It wasn't a really big thing back then. Some who were from out of town worked in the residence hall cafeteria. You could work, I think, I forget what it was, two hours a day and get all your meals for the week or something like that. Maybe, it was three hours, I don't know. But, the food wasn't terrific. I'm amazed at how good food they serve in colleges now, but it was, we thought, barely edible back then.

Q: But, so you just worked summers?

LEIFERT: I worked summers. Yeah.

Q: All right. So, you're going to go on to Columbia graduate school, but things are moving along and, what kind of experience for you did you want to get out of graduate school?

LEIFERT: More education for the sake of it, for sure. But also some substantive knowledge that would be useful in a career. And, I was more and more thinking of some internationally oriented activity, but I had not taken the time or trouble to research specific job openings, the kinds of things one might do, whether for the government or a bank or any other kind of company, beyond journalism. I knew what foreign correspondents did, and I still thought that was a really cool thing. But, I wasn't laser-like focused on that, nor on an international career at all, but it's where I was sort of drifting toward.

I had some very good teachers. Henry Steele Commager was one of my history professors, and I had him when I was still an undergraduate. They had a wonderful thing. They did it with several different teachers, but he had a graduate course, which meant two hours consecutively, once a week. He came down from, I think, Boston. He had this two-hour course in American history. For undergraduates who signed up for his course, there was an additional hour before the other two, just for us. And while the big class might've had a hundred or more in it, we were like eight or 10 around a table. And, that was just fabulous. Because, he just knew everything about everything, in American history.

I had Zbigniew Brzezinski before he worked for [President] Carter. He was a famous Russian scholar and Polish scholar, even then, and a few other professors, in unrelated fields. I had Mark Van Doren for English, and a few other famous names, but in these fields, they were among the ones who really connected, I connected with, and I thought were not role models in the sense that I wanted to be like them, but, at least provided material to help make a decision or a path.

Q: Now, were your parents in any way trying to guide you towards something; did they have ambitions for you?

LEIFERT: Only that it'd be something that would pay well enough to keep me living in the style I should be living in. They grew up during the Depression and like, I think, many of their contemporaries, financial security was the most important thing. So, if I ever suggested something—well, for example, one of the advanced courses I wanted to take while in college: remember, we had that basic fine arts course, which was a review of European and somewhat American art through the recent centuries. They offered a number of electives. And, I took one in architecture, which interested me. They couldn't understand why I would want to study architecture, in that I clearly had no interest in being an architect. But, I just wanted to understand it better. And so, I took it, but they were not happy with it. And, you know, to this day, I'm glad I took that course, because I go someplace new, and I can look at buildings and understand them in a way that I don't think I would have otherwise. I have a nephew who had the same experience. He went to Brandeis a generation later. He also took an architecture course, totally out of his main line of courses, and he just got so much out of that, and he loves it.

Q: Wow. Yeah. Okay. But, you know, you get to the end of graduate school in Columbia at that—and now you're into the early '60s.

LEIFERT: Yes. Got the M.A. [Master of Arts] in 1961.

Q: In what field?

LEIFERT: Well, the major was political science. No, I'm sorry. The major was international relations.

Q: Ah, yes. Okay. Interesting. And, I imagine, you know, by then on the Columbia campus, they have some kind of connections to interviewing at various places, that might offer graduates opportunities?

LEIFERT: Not that I remember. There may have been, I don't remember it, or maybe, I mean there was an office that—a placement office of some sort, but it was proactive on your part, and if you wanted to go to it. I decided that maybe I should go on for a PhD [Doctorate in Philosophy]. There was perhaps some good reason why I wanted to do it, because I didn't really intend to be an academic. But, I think it was partly just prolonging the campus experience and avoiding the decision of what kind of career to pursue. Also, avoiding the Vietnam War, by then.

Q: Oh, my! Wow. Yeah. Okay. That makes perfect sense. Okay. So again, can you apply for a scholarship for a PhD?

LEIFERT: I had actually done all the coursework that you would need, but then there was a period of individual study and eventually leading to thesis writing and all of that,

which, and exams to take for sure. But, other things intervened. I don't know how much longer you want to go on today.

Q: So, we're at the end of your MA, and you're considering the PhD, at least in part also to get your deferment.

LEIFERT: Yes. But, it was really mainly to defer a decision on a career, because jobs still seemed very tight then, and no matter what it was you wanted to do, it seemed, it's an uphill struggle to get a job. However, in the meantime, I met a young woman whom I married. It wasn't for me a college sweetheart, but she was a graduate school sweetheart. She was at Barnard, which is across the street from Columbia, and one of their brainier students. Three years behind me. She was the class of '62. You want her name?

Q: Sure. Yes. I mean it's a true story.

LEIFERT: Her name was Ellen Willis. She later became a fairly well known feminist activist and writer. Our marriage just lasted a few years, but in any case, that's when it began, on campus. And, she won a fellowship to the University of California, Berkeley, in English. And, that was to be for the academic year '63-'64, and maybe a second year. I had just gotten my master's in '61 and was hanging around campus doing other research and stuff like that, and we were dating, and it got serious and we got married in June of '62 and then packed up and drove to the west coast over a week. But, first, I had a summer job in Washington that became significant. More on it later. We were absolutely unprepared with where we might stay in Berkeley. We stayed in a motel, I think, for a week or two till we found an apartment, and she started going to school. And, I meanwhile was able to get a job teaching at San Francisco State College, a part time job, which didn't bring in very much money, but it was pretty much able just to keep us afloat. So, I would commute over the bridge to San Francisco every day.

She went to classes in Berkeley, and we did that for, a couple of years. And, we enjoyed the Bay Area very much. I was again in radio; I volunteered for KPFA, the Pacifica station there. It was the time of all the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley. Very fortuitous coincidence. We were there when it was really exciting. Whereas, San Francisco State at that time was Quietsville. I mean, there was nothing happening there. In fact, and I think it's still true now, although it's now San Francisco State University, it's the only university of its size I've ever seen that did not have some kind of community around it with restaurants, shops, bars, bookstores, places that students like to go to. It was a totally residential neighborhood, and you couldn't find any of those things without getting on a trolley—

Q: Interesting.

LEIFERT: —or driving. So, all of our social life was in Berkeley, which was the exact opposite of all that. A very exciting time to be there. And, since I was only teaching part time, I had plenty of time to volunteer at the radio station and, I forget what else we did. One thing I recall was an effort to start a weekly newspaper, owned by a consumer

cooperative. Co-ops were very big in the Bay Area at that time. But yeah, it was very nice.

In the meantime, I skipped over this, because it's the lead-up to the foreign service. But, in that summer of '62, before going out to California, I was able to land what we would now call an internship, a summer internship at the Voice of America [VOA]. So, we went to Washington right after being married in New York, did find an apartment. She had a cousin and an aunt and uncle who lived there, in Arlington [Virginia]. So, that was easier. We found a tiny apartment in Foggy Bottom, and I went to work at VOA in the Worldwide English Division and had a thoroughly enjoyable summer. Although I was the lowest rung on the ladder there, it was fun. It was an exciting place to be.

One thing I remember from that summer in Worldwide English: whenever a new name came up in the news, we wanted to be sure that our English-speaking newsreaders pronounced it correctly. My task was to call the appropriate language service—VOA broadcast in 30 or 40 languages at that time—and get someone to pronounce the name. I wrote it down in the phonetic alphabet, which they taught me, and it got to the newsreaders, who also knew that alphabet. If we had no appropriate language service, I would call the country's embassy or U.N. [United Nations] mission to get the pronunciation.

And, a by-product of working at VOA, which I had heard of before— I mean, I knew it existed, although you couldn't hear it in the U.S.—was learning about USIA [United States Information Agency]. Because, VOA was part of USIA then, and as part of our internship, we had a number of meetings, you could call them classes, I guess, at which we learned about the various activities of USIA overseas, as well as VOA's. Now, I knew there were American libraries abroad. Yeah, I had a vague sense of that. And, I remember during the McCarthy period there was the Cohn and Shein tour of American libraries in Europe, where they determined that we had many, much too many, books by socialists and communists on our shelves, and these libraries should really be closed and blah, blah, blah. So, I knew these libraries existed. I knew nothing about the rest of what USIA did. Fortunately, the libraries weren't closed, although I think some books were purged. So, that's how I first knew about USIA and its foreign service. When I got to Berkeley—that was in August, I guess—of '62, in December that year, I took the foreign service test. So, that might be a good breaking point.

Q: Okay. But, you would, in other words, you knew about the foreign service tests from having done this summer job, this internship with— Okay. Well, I do want to ask, was the test entirely written at that time?

LEIFERT: Well, it was in stages. There was a long written test, which was something like the Graduate Record Exam, or something of that sort. I know it's gone through many permutations since then, and I doubt I could pass it today, but I did pass it. The next step was an oral interview, in which two examiners came out. I guess they were on a circuit. I don't imagine they came just to see me, but I met them somewhere, maybe at a federal building in San Francisco and had this interview, which I don't remember anything about

except one question: they asked me about Virginia Woolf, and there was a play on Broadway then, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? I'd heard of the play. I knew vaguely that Virginia Woolf was a British author. Didn't know anything else about her or the play, and I can't remember why on earth they even brought it up. But, I must have mumbled my way through it. And I'm assuming it wasn't a significant part of the test, because I wouldn't have passed if it were. But, I don't remember any of the other things they asked.

But, I eventually learned that I'd passed that. And, the next thing was a security background check, and that was done. I don't remember what the timetable was. You remember I took the [written] test in December '62. The rest of this was spread over two more years.

Q: Oh, my!

LEIFERT: It was a slow process, and it was only toward the end of '64 that I—there was also a medical exam you had to pass—only at the end of '64, I think, had I hit all those stops and passed each one. So, I was admitted to the JOT [Junior Officer Trainee] class entering in June of '65, the 67th JOT class.

Q: Was it called A-100, back then?

LEIFERT: Yes, it was.

Q: Okay. And, what building do you recall?

LEIFERT: It was in Arlington Towers. It may have been in Room A-100.

Q: Okay. Yeah, the old Rosslyn building that had many uses.

LEIFERT: Well, there was an apartment building above it. And, it was a complex; there were several buildings, and FSI [Foreign Service Institute] was in just the basement of one of them.

Q: Sure. All right. Sure. Why don't we pause here, since we—? What we can do is pick up the next time with the experience of joining, training, and going on to assignments?

LEIFERT: Okay.

Q: Okay. So today is July 18th [2018]; we're resuming our interview with Harvey Leifert, as he begins his A-100 class in 1965.

LEIFERT: Okay.

Q: Well, my question is, how big a class was it in 1965?

LEIFERT: Okay. I was in the USIA class: that was 10. The interesting thing was it was five male, five female. That was very unusual. And, we still meet around once a year,

those of us who are left and are in this area; we have lunch. And on our 50th anniversary, we did an overnight at Shepardstown, West Virginia, and it was like a huge reunion, but with spouses, significant others, whatever. Yeah.

Q: That's lovely.

LEIFERT: We don't know any other class that does that.

Q: Right. I was going to say there is, you know, A-100 classes do tend to bond and stay in touch for a while, but they don't tend to have enough cohesion to last that long. As long as the one you're talking about.

LEIFERT: Well, I should clarify that. The reunion was of the entire class—the State Department people and the USIA people. Again, those of us who were still alive and in this area.

Q: So how many, so how many others—

LEIFERT: —were there? I'm trying to visualize the class photo. It might have been in the neighborhood of 30 to 40.

Q: And, was the State class to your recollection similarly diverse?

LEIFERT: No. I mean there were some women, but it was overwhelmingly male. I think it was entirely white, as was ours. Yeah. Other than that, I don't really remember.

Q: Okay. Now, even back in 1965, USIA would have had you do different things from the State Department junior officers, in terms of initial training, but they would also have you integrated with the State people in various points. How did that work?

LEIFERT: Well, just as the written entrance exam was exactly the same for State and USIA applicants, we did the entire A-100 class, the exact same things that the State people did. Then, in addition, I think it was after that, we had separate USIA-specific training. And, that was at the old headquarters at 1776 Pennsylvania Avenue, in Washington, D.C.

Q: Holy cow. Yeah. USIA moved more than once, then.

LEIFERT: We'll move next door to 1750. Then, it moved down to Fourth and C Streets, Southwest.

Q: Now, what was back in '65? What was the specialized USIA training they gave you?

LEIFERT: Well, that's a very good question. We learned the mission of course, and how the posts were set up and what we did, but we had some specific hands-on training. I remember learning how to thread those very unwieldy 16 millimeter projectors we used; they were the same ones at every post. So if you ever mastered it, which wasn't easy, you could do it anywhere. Of course, it was pre- any kind of electronics. We learned the

communications we did have with USIA, a lot of it through the diplomatic pouch, what were called Operations Memorandum—Memoranda, or OMs. And, all I can say is, stuff like that. We had some talks by outside people on cultural themes. I don't really remember any details, and it wasn't that long. We'd gone through the A-100, which was two to three months, I think, at that time. And, this was an add-on, maybe another two to four weeks. And, then we went into language training, except those who already had at least 3-3 in some language, who were able to go directly on to a post.

Q: So now, a little bit of the technical side of video, but did they teach you anything also about audio, radio station soundboards or anything like that?

LEIFERT: No. And, it wasn't videos, it was film.

Q: Oh, sorry. Yes, correct. Right. Okay. So, just how to operate the projectors, not really anything else.

LEIFERT: On the technical side, I don't remember anything else.

Q: Okay. Now, the one other thing I'm curious about in terms of the training was, did they teach you how you would evaluate your programs and what kind of forms or details they wanted when you completed the program, or something like that and needed to describe its effectiveness?

LEIFERT: I don't think so, not as part of our basic training. I think that all came at the post, and over the years, there were several efforts at creating objective systems of evaluating programs, none of them successful, in my view.

Q: Okay. So, that time you don't recall any particular formats or anything?

LEIFERT: No. I'm wracking my brain trying to remember, what did we do or learn during those several weeks, and I'm drawing a blank. I only remember the projectors because they befuddled me for as long as we used them, and otherwise, I don't really remember.

Q: Okay, that's fine. Now, you have your flag day and do you—

LEIFERT: No, we didn't. There was no—

Q: Oh, you didn't have it back then?

LEIFERT: No, there was no such thing.

Q: Oh, interesting. Well then, how did you determine, or how was it determined where you were going for your first post?

LEIFERT: Okay. What we did there was, I think we may have heard representatives from several geographic areas talk in general terms about those areas. And, I might be inventing this here, but I think maybe we did. We were encouraged to go to the library and read post reports and some books. Several State Department people and retirees had

written books about their experiences at whatever post. I remember reading a fascinating book about Afghanistan back then. And, we were told incidentally that we would have to list, I think, three choices, and we would surely get one of them, as long as it wasn't western Europe. We could put down a post in western Europe, but there was so much competition for that that they weren't making any promises.

I really wanted to go to Africa. I had met some Africans in the past, particularly when I lived in San Francisco. I worked for a local volunteer agency that had a contract with State to locally program international visitors. And, I did a number of those. I took them around the city, that kind of thing. I found the Africans really interesting, from several different countries. So, all of my choices were in Africa. I think they were Addis Ababa, Lagos, and I'm not sure about the third. And, I got Addis, but there was no ceremony at which we all learned our posts or were handed flags, or anything like that. We just got a piece of paper telling us.

Q: Now, of course, Ethiopia has a unique language; did you get any training in that?

LEIFERT: No. Interestingly, I got training in French, and the rationale, and it wasn't crazy, was on the one hand, I would only be there for one year as a training post. And, there's no other place in the world that speaks Amharic. And, on the other hand, French is used in a lot of places, and I would surely be posted to one of them sooner or later. Which was true.

Q: Especially in Africa.

LEIFERT: But I did, I took out the FSI books and tapes on Amharic, just to get a feel for how it sounded, but I didn't make any concerted effort to learn it. I did learn enough on the job to haggle in the market and that sort of thing. The numbers, and "that's too expensive," or whatever. Or, "do you have any lima beans today"? That kind of thing. But, I never had a serious professional discussion with anyone in Amharic. And, in fact, most of the educated Ethiopians spoke very good English.

Q: All right. So, you get what, about six months of French?

LEIFERT: No, it was 16 weeks.

Q: Oh, that's all? Oh, wow.

LEIFERT: Yeah, but it was good. Back in A-100, we heard a very good talk, an introduction to language training, by Jim Bostain, who headed language study at FSI at the time. He was a scientific linguist, which he explained meant not that he necessarily spoke lots of languages, but that he knew how languages were structured and used. He implored us to imitate our native speaker teachers and not wonder why he or she said it this way or that way. The teacher, who was not a linguist, spoke that way, because that's how that language is spoken back home, and he or she might not know exactly why. I took all this to heart.

In our French class, just six people, teachers rotated, I think, every four weeks. So we had four different teachers, plus the occasional substitute. We heard a variety of voices, male and female. And, my favorite, I think everybody's favorite, was Madame Visson, who was a legend at FSI. In fact, when she died many years later, there was an obituary in the Washington Post for her. She lived in Alaska in her last years. But, she was a Belgian, and she always insisted that the Belgians spoke better French than the French did. And, we had several other people.

The head of the French department was Mr. Salazar, which certainly didn't sound like a French name to us, but, we didn't ask. He didn't tell if he was actually from Portugal or whatever, but he was the head, and there were several other teachers, and they were all good. And, we had an excellent book and tapes, excellent program. It was the best of the three languages I took through FSI. It was the best run, the best materials. And, I still speak French to this day, and well, that was aided by my second wife being a native Francophone also. But, regardless of that, I think it was an excellent program, which was not as much the case for the next two.

Q: Interesting. All right. Were there any other noteworthy things before you go out to Ethiopia?

LEIFERT: Not that I remember. We did not, for example, visit the Ethiopian Embassy. Was there anything else? No, we basically, when we finished our language training—and it was a different length for different languages—we just, went off to our posts. For me, it was my first flights ever: New York to London to Cologne, where I spent a few days with a JOT friend who was already at post in Bonn, because he spoke good German. Then, on to Rome, with a refueling stop in Khartoum, my first steps in Africa, and finally Addis Ababa.

Q: Now, I imagine Ethiopia at that time was considered a hardship post.

LEIFERT: It was.

Q: And, what did they do for you, in terms of special support or anything like that? Did you have a consumables allowance? Could you, you know, bring in any special things to—

LEIFERT: No special things. We were told what kind of car would be best to have in terms of suitability for the local roads and availability of service and repair facilities, which were either Volkswagens or Fiats, and I bought a Volkswagen Beetle here in D.C. [Washington] for delivery in Addis. And, there's a story about that too, which I'll get to eventually. But, nothing else that I remember; take a short wave radio, for sure. So, I bought one, a small one, but it worked fine. Now, when I got there, they did have an apartment for me. It was like a three story walk-up at 8,000 feet. So, at first, it was a real chore, getting home every day. And, the problem was, they didn't have a set of furniture for a JOT. USIA didn't; State didn't either, as far as I know. But, they did have a warehouse, and there was lots of leftover stuff in various conditions of decay, and they sent over enough for a basic household, nothing matched, nothing looked very nice. You

wouldn't want to invite anybody over to see it. But, I had a bed and a night table and some chairs and a dining room table. And, I sent over my own dishes. They were unbreakable, Melamine, which had been recommended. And, that was basically it.

Q: Did you have regular electricity? You know, a gas stove or electric stove?

LEIFERT: It was electric, I think. And, as far as I remember, it never went out. I don't have any recollection of any problem on that score.

Q: Okay. All right. So, now that you're there, what's the setup there? Was USIA just a section of the embassy? Did you have a cultural center or a library? You know, that sort of thing?

LEIFERT: We had a building of our own. Well apart from the embassy. It was in downtown, and the embassy was, and I think still is, up in the hills leading out of town. But, we had our own building. It was opposite what they call the Municipality, the city hall. And also has the TV station and I don't know what other offices, but we were very well located and close to shopping, and it was maybe a mile from where I lived. I would take the little, what they called seicento, a Fiat 600, which were used as sort of jitney taxis. They're tiny vehicles, but, they would cram people in and it would just ply the direct road that went from my house to USIS [United States Information Service]—that was until my car came. And, the USIS building had a library on the ground floor. I didn't really go into it very often. I probably had a rotation in there for some days or weeks. But I don't remember very well. Upstairs, we had at least two floors. I don't remember if there was anything else in that building in addition to us, but we had four American officers: a PAO [Public Affairs Officer], a CAO [Cultural Affairs Officer], an IO [Information Officer], an Assistant IO, and now also a JOT. Several regional officers were based in Addis, as well, and we had a large Ethiopian staff. Yeah.

Q: Now, so what services did you offer to the public at that time?

LEIFERT: We had film showings with those accursed projectors. But, fortunately, Ethiopian staffers ran them, and occasional lectures. We had the IV [International Visitor] program; experts came and spoke either at USIS—we had a small auditorium there—or at venues around town on their areas of specialty, and one of them in particular, I do want to get into this conversation later. We dealt with the news media—newspapers in three languages, radio, TV, and we had cultural attractions. I remember a pianist, Armenta Adams, who gave some performances and the De Paur Chorus. There was a trade show—that was mostly the [Department of] Commerce people, but USIS supported it with publicity and posters and that kind of thing. I was only there one year; it was a training post, and it was just this one year. Everything I'm telling you took place in that one year from January 1966 to January 1967.

Q: At that time, was there publishing of, you know, basic US Government, either books or documents, and so on at your posts, or did you get items? Did you order items from a regional printing area?

LEIFERT: The latter, mainly. We did get what was then called the wireless file every day. I think that call it the Washington file now, which had gone through several iterations over the years. I think it started as Morse code and then moved to a radio teletype system, when I was there, and now of course it's all online. But, we had somebody who would come in every morning, one of the Ethiopian staff, and fiddle with the radio till they got the right signal, and it was connected to a teletype, and it just rolled out with documents and information and whatever else they sent us. And then it was reproduced in our shop in multiple copies and sent first of all to the embassy and also to local media and probably some other key people, but I don't remember who.

Q: Now, in this one year sort of journeyman post, what did they have you do?

LEIFERT: I was rotated through the various sections of USIS and at the embassy also. I did spend maybe one month at the embassy, and there I was in at least political and economics. I didn't do anything consular, although I had a commission. And, I think, even with the Agency, I may have spent a little time. I never got into anything they really did. But I liaised with a couple of their people.

But, at USIS itself, when I was with the IO, Gordon Winkler, who was an ex-newspaper man, I wrote press releases, I met journalists occasionally, usually with him, sometimes alone, answered occasional questions, that kind of thing, and don't remember any much greater detail.

When I was with the CAO, Bill Davis, and his background, it was strange for a USIS officer: apparently, he was an ex-Treasury agent and had served in Moscow and spoke Russian. Bill, who's passed on, was the only USIS officer I ever knew who was happy to cultivate an image that he might be an intelligence agent, he might know more than you think. And, all the rest of us, we're trying to dissuade people from the thought or even the accusation that we were really intelligence operatives in disguise. And, frankly, I never met or knew of a single USIS person who was cover for the Agency.

Q: Okay. I see you're rotating through these sections. Did you also travel, did they send you out to do regional things?

LEIFERT: I did, with others. Oh, we had a Regional Librarian stationed in Addis who covered two or three countries, but within Ethiopia itself, we had not only the library in Addis, but we had, I think we had one, in Asmara. Eritrea was then part of Ethiopia. I think we had one there, but we certainly had a number of reading rooms scattered around Ethiopia that were staffed by local Ethiopians. Ann Davis, who was the Regional Librarian, would visit them a couple of times a year. I don't know. And, I went on one or two trips with her. And, when I was in rotation at the embassy, I tagged along when one of the State officers was making a trip by car up to Gondar, which is a regional capital, still important. I don't remember if she was there totally on business and for just a holiday weekend for her, or a combination. But nevertheless, I went along and found it fascinating.

And, as I mentioned, we also had two or three other regional officers there. I should say, Harry Heinzen was the VOA correspondent based in Addis who covered the Horn and East Africa. And, we had a person who was our regional motion pictures officer who went around to various posts fixing those projectors and bringing films. And, I don't remember what else Tom did, but he was the regional "mopix" person. And, I found him fascinating. I'm trying to remember if there was any other regional person. I don't think so.

I went with Ann Davis on one trip she made out into the boonies to a place, a town, it might've been a two or three hour drive from Addis. And, at this time it had not only a USIS reading room, but two Peace Corps Volunteers were stationed there, a young woman and man, not related, who shared a house. It seemed remarkably progressive for the U.S. Government, at the time. And so, Ann was liaising with them as well and bringing stuff from the Peace Corps office to them. I don't remember what—some books. In those days, each Peace Corps Volunteer got a book box. It was literally a box of books, paperbacks, I think, a wide range of topics, fiction and nonfiction, all American, which was for their enjoyment and also to leave behind, to give to a local library, give to friends, do whatever they want, but not come home with them. And, and I think, maybe different volunteers had different book collections. I don't know if they still do that, but it was a wonderful program. You were a Peace Corps Volunteer?

Q: No, I was not, I went in directly from university, but that's another story.

LEIFERT: That's your oral history.

Q: All right. So, now I'm curious. You had mentioned that there is a story about your car.

LEIFERT: Yeah, well the Volkswagen Beetle was of course a stick shift. And, I had only driven automatic transmissions in the U.S. When I got to Addis, I told them that the VW was coming sooner or later and that I needed to learn how to drive a stick shift. So, they assigned one of the Ethiopian drivers to teach me.

Q: Wow!

LEIFERT: Now, the only vehicle available was what we would now call an SUV; it was a big Jeep Wagoneer. And it's a large, ponderous vehicle. And, he drove it with great ease. But, I had a tough time at first learning how to coordinate clutch and gearshift and brake and accelerator and all of that. And, we had our lessons on the streets of Addis Ababa, many of which were clogged with people, other vehicles, and even livestock. Also, it was quite hilly. But, he taught me over a period of a couple of weeks. And, by the time my car came, I was able to drive it. So kudos to the driver, but at some point later, he drove that same Wagoneer off a low bridge into a creek. While apparently drunk. Now, what happened in a case like that in Ethiopia—I'm talking about at that time; I don't know about now—the first thing you do after an accident is you round up witnesses whom you pay to tell your story, which I think was that he was forced off the road by some other vehicle. And, I have no idea how that turned out. As far as I know, he continued working

for USIS. I don't think he was fired. Could be wrong there. It's a long time ago. But, anyway, he taught me well. He, unfortunately, didn't do so well himself later.

Q: And, you also mentioned that there was another story about your work there, that you wanted to come back to.

LEIFERT: Yeah. Well, at least one. The most interesting one was during my tour with the cultural officer, Bill Davis. I got to escort several international visitors, using the term very loosely, people who came on different exchange programs—escorted them to their appointments and all that sort of thing. The most important of these was the poet Langston Hughes. Now, the way this came about was in Dakar that year, Leopold Senghor, who was the president of Senegal and a distinguished author and poet himself, convened the First World Festival of Negro Arts. The idea was to bring together black intellectuals from all over the diaspora to Dakar for, I don't know how long—a week, two weeks of conferences, performances, whatever it is they did there. Langston Hughes was one of the invitees and the State Department picked him up to visit several other posts after that conference as an IV [International Visitor], since he was already in Africa.

Bill Davis latched onto this and came up with this wonderful idea of using Hughes's visit as a way to promote Haile Selassie. Haile Selassie was the emperor, of course. He had been in exile during World War Two, made a famous speech to the League of Nations and eventually came back to Ethiopia after the Italians were kicked out. But, in his later years, he had become increasingly authoritarian and autocratic. But, he was a great friend of the United States in a time when Africa was sort of up for grabs between the Soviets and the free world, as we put it.

We had a communications facility, Kagnew Station, near Asmara, which in the pre-satellite era was a very important means to communicate between the Middle East, and maybe as far as India, and Washington. It was a relay station which was also high up in altitude, not quite as high as Addis, but high. And, Haile Selassie always supported having this station there, run by NSA [National Security Agency] or whatever its predecessor may have been. There were a lot of people who—well, the Soviets in particular—planted rumors saying that this was some kind of nefarious scheme to spy on Ethiopia or worse. And they planted rumors, which were credible to some people, that there were tunnels under Kagnew Station that led to, I don't remember what—to where. And that there were all kinds of other terrible things. Selassie, to his credit, had always said he would give, I don't know how much money, to anybody who could find anything other than what it said it was—a communications relay station.

So, anyway, there were lots of people in Ethiopia who were anti-emperor, especially the younger people, the university students and others who, not necessarily believing the Soviet line, nevertheless thought his time had come and gone and there should be something else, and that something else should probably be more socialist than they were.

We wanted to prop him up. So, Bill Davis had the idea that maybe Langston Hughes could write a poem in praise of Haile Selassie, and he sent a cable to Dakar, asking if

they would forward the message to Hughes while he was in country, asking him whether he would do this, recognizing Haile Selassie's great contribution to his country and to negritude in general, which was the theme of the conference. And, Hughes agreed. And, then after the conference, he started moving across Africa, on his way toward Addis. And, Davis would send cables to each post, reminding him that we needed the poem, and he said, yeah, yeah, I'll get to it. I think finally, I could be wrong about this, but my recollection is that in Khartoum, his last stop before Addis, as he worked his way from west to east across Africa, he finished the poem, and the post cabled it to Addis, and it may have been the only time an original work by a major poet was ever sent by diplomatic cable.

And, what the post did then was take it, and we printed up, I don't know how many hundreds of copies in a nice little blue folder. And, Davis had set up appointments around Addis for Hughes for while he was here. Well, I was assigned as the escort officer for him, and the most important stop and the only one I remember in any detail was at what was then called Haile Selassie the First University; it's now called Addis Ababa University, much less colorful. But, we went to a large lecture room there, and Hughes was well known; you didn't have to tell them who he was. They knew, very many of them did, anyway, and they were anxious to see him and hear him.

And, he spoke, and he read various poems and then he read this one, which he said was dedicated to the emperor, and he read it. It was about Haile Selassie's contributions to negritude and how he inspired black people in other countries, and so on. And, we had a stack of these on the table that the kids could pick up on their way out. There was a question period, and I think it was very courageous, but one of them said, in a sort of halting way, well, you know, not everybody thinks that the emperor is what we need right now. I forget the phrasing, but it was sort of reluctant, though definitely clear as to what his message was, that we're not all crazy about him. And Hughes, who had been briefed by Davis that this would probably happen, gave a really good answer, saying he was not going to get involved in Ethiopian internal politics, that wasn't his purpose. He was simply recognizing the undeniable contributions of a great man, the inspiration to blacks elsewhere and so on. And, it seemed to go over.

Q: Curiously and, and strangely, in a way, Haile Selassie ends up having outsized influence in Jamaica and other places, perhaps, in the Caribbean, where, you know, Rastafarianism—to the extent it developed as a religion or a cultural movement did idolize Haile Selassie?

LEIFERT: I'll get to that in a minute, because it's very interesting as you say, but at the end of this lecture, every one of those paper copies of the poem was picked up, and a lot of them, a lot of the kids, asked him to autograph it. And, I have one also, which I will be donating to the new museum up at State. Then, on his way home, Hughes sent me through the post a very nice thank you letter from Paris, thanking me for all the courtesies and all that. And, I was just musing recently when I was talking to the people up at State about it, that in the 25 or so ensuing years in which I must have escorted hundreds of VIPs, I never got another letter.

Q: Yeah, yeah, kind of the end of an era. But now, you mentioned that you would have something to say about Rastafarianism.

LEIFERT: Well, Rastafarianism, the name itself, means Haile Selassie. Ras is a title in Ethiopia, a title of nobility, and Tafari was his name before he became emperor. He was Ras Tafari. And how this got to Jamaica, where they considered him a god, I don't know. But, he did make a trip to Jamaica, during that year I was in Addis, and it was his first, and as far as I know, only trip to Jamaica. And the embassy was in a real tizzy about it. They were worried for his safety, that somebody might assassinate him, or somebody might want to kidnap him and keep him there. I didn't know what the worry was, but there was just a huge volume of cables—I don't know if they've been declassified yet—about preparations for his visit. And, why the U.S. Government was involved in this at all was simply because we wanted him to stay alive and well and leading the country. So, he did, he made the visit. He was treated like a god and, and he came back safe and sound.

Q: Incredible. What fascinating story. All right, so now, are there other unique things that you remember about this post? Because, the other thing that's going on since you're there only one year is you're also looking at where you're going to be going next?

LEIFERT: Not really, because, in those days we didn't bid on posts. We were just told we were going next.

Q: Ah, wow. Okay.

LEIFERT: Yeah, this was in the dark ages. But, what else I remember was my introduction to Ethiopian food. I absolutely remember the first time several of the staff took me to lunch—Ethiopian staff took me to lunch at an Ethiopian restaurant. Now, this wasn't a real restaurant. This was in somebody's house, a woman served lunch to people she knew, basically. And, she made the most wonderful Ethiopian food. And it was spicy. Let me tell you. They said they toned it down for me, but still it was, it was outrageously spicy. I like spicy food, but up to a point. Anyway, I did it. And after, I said to myself, okay, I've done my duty; I'll never have this again. And, you know, after a week or two, I started getting a craving for it and started going to regular restaurants. There was one that was set up for tourists, especially: nice decor, food is a little more refined, but it was still quite authentic. And, I went there with some of the other staff occasionally. That was, it was wonderful, and I still would get those cravings a couple of weeks after each meal. And, after I left the post, I continued for at least a year to want to have some Ethiopian food. Not till I got back to Washington in retirement was I able to do that. And I'll tell you, I haven't found any restaurant here that truly reminds me of that first meal.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

LEIFERT: Anyway, yeah, so that is something else culturally that I took away from Ethiopia. I did go back just a few years ago with a friend, as a tourist.

Q: What, so what impressed you as different then?

LEIFERT: Okay, I should say I went back twice. Once was in 1978 when I was stationed in Paris. That was with the USIS Africa Regional Services office, and I made a tour of African countries every year. Not all of them obviously, but some, especially in francophone Africa, but I could usually wangle one or two other places. And, one year, I went to Addis. I think it was '78, and that was during the red terror period, as they call it. And I'll tell you, although I lived alone when I was there as a JOT—apartment on my own, no other Americans nearby, as far as I knew. I used to go to movies alone at night. No problem. I never worried about it, but gosh, there was gunfire in the streets at night in 1978, and I didn't want to leave my hotel room till the embassy car came to pick me up to take me to an appointment and then take me back. It was really scary in '78. Selsssie had been deposed. I'm not sure if he had been murdered yet, but, he was, at least, in jail if not dead. There is a museum about that period now in Ethiopia, which I saw during my recent visit. I think of it as their Holocaust memorial museum. It must've been around 2014, '15, something like that, '16 maybe. A friend, also a retired FSO [Foreign Service Officer], and I went to both Namibia, which was my last post, and Ethiopia, my first. And, we did a lot of touring around the northern part of Ethiopia, by plane mostly, from city to city. And, it's just really different now. Or, then even, though they were still having political difficulties and war with Eritrea was still officially on, although dormant. We felt no fear and had no problems. We had local guides who were very good, and we had a wonderful time. And, Addis I didn't recognize. I could hardly find where I lived. I mean, it's just a burgeoning city.

Q: OK, if that sort of sums up your, your first year in USIA, where are you going next?

LEIFERT: I am going to Ouagadougou, Upper Volta [now, Burkina Faso]. Which had been a legend in training. You know, if you really screw up at one post, they're going to send you to Ouagadougou. But, I should add a footnote to my stay in Addis. It was while I was there that my divorce from Ellen came through. We had separated while I was in the middle of French training, and she returned to New York, where her parents lived. She got the divorce in Tijuana, Mexico, witnessed by the American consul there, as it was still quite difficult in those days to get a no-fault divorce in the U.S.

Q: Ouagadougou, okay. How did you arrive there? Did you drive or—

LEIFERT: No. It's all the way across Africa. I flew—what I can't remember is whether I flew directly, well not directly in the sense of nonstop, but if I had any vacation in between. I don't think so, because I recall that I had R&R [Rest and Recreation] not long after arriving in Ouagadougou. So, I probably went pretty much directly from one post to the other, although not nonstop. Would have been at least one or two changes of plane.

Q: What happened to your Volkswagen?

LEIFERT: It went also; I used that car in three posts. Ouaga was the second. I think it was air lifted. We had a regional services office. "We" meaning the State Department, in Lagos, or outside of Lagos near the airport, and they supplied all kinds of posts with all kinds of stuff, and part of it was moving services, and they came and, as far as I remember vaguely, they came and collected my car and flew it, probably to Lagos and

then to Ouaga. It didn't come right away, because I remember had to buy a little motor bike to get around on in between. It was called a Solex, that was the brand, using a gas-oil combination. It was noisy, it made fumes, it was slow, but it got me from my house to the office and back.

Q: Okay. So, describe what Ouagadougou was like in, I guess this is now 1966, '67.

LEIFERT: It's early '67, and I was also there for just one year, because it filled out the two year assignment from my JOT year. So, I got there, and I had two PAOs during my time there. I'm struggling to remember the name of the first one. I can visualize him, and I remember his wife's name was Nancy. We had a library. Again, it was well removed from where the embassy was. It was near the central marketplace, near the railroad station. There's a railroad from Ouagadougou down to Abidjan—at least there was then, I don't know if now.

We had a library on the main floor, and we had offices upstairs. It was a much smaller operation than Addis, and politically, there was really much less going on with need for it. It is, of course, a former French colony, and the French were still very much the dominant external power there. They had a cultural center, a block or so, two blocks, from ours, which was way nicer, I mean, more beautiful, better equipped, better furnished, more programs, and all that. But, you know, we sort of still thought of it as their [France's] territory, so we weren't really jealous. But, nevertheless, we had our run of international visitors and occasional performers, and we did media liaison. It was very much a government controlled press there, but we monitored the radio; we sent press releases and the wireless file to the one local newspaper and did all that sort of thing. It was same range of programs, but on a way reduced scale.

Q: And, like Addis, were you rotating through the different specialties?

LEIFERT: Well, we only had two officers, the PAO and me, and my title was IO, but really, a better title would have been Deputy PAO, because I did a little of everything. It wasn't just the information work. And then, we had a long gap between PAOs. The first one left—Marshall Berg I now recall was his name. And, the second one came some months later; his name was Thad McDowell. He was an outside person. He was an artistic person who had worked at the Smithsonian, if I remember correctly, and had never had an overseas post, never been involved with USIA before. And, however it happened, he became the PAO in Ouagadougou. But, we had a gap. And during that gap, I was the acting PAO for, I think, several months. And, during that period I had to prepare the budget for the following year. And, although I did have some help from the embassy, a budget person, it was largely something I did on my own. It was a great learning experience. Nothing in Addis had prepared me for that. I didn't do any admin work there. But, you know, I went through all the documents and all of this year's budget and what we were allocating for this and that. And, I somehow came up with a document that was acceptable. I don't know if it was the best possible document, but, I remember that taking a huge amount of time.

We also had an inspection during my time there, a USIA inspection, and we hadn't had one in Ethiopia during that year. So, I had never gone through the process. We had, I forget if it was one or two inspectors who came, and the office was a mess. I mean, we had a lot of stuff that I inherited from my predecessor, whom I followed into two different posts over the years, as it happened. There were just papers strewn everywhere. Not filed. Books, documents—I'm not talking about the library, but the actual office upstairs, and I can't let the inspectors see this. So what I did was, I started packing up all this stuff—by then my car had come, and so just took it all to my house. None of it was classified, of course. I took it all to my house and put it in a storeroom during the inspection, hoping the inspectors weren't going to inspect my house! But, so I had a reasonably neat office when the inspector came. His name was Vince Rotundo. He turned out to be really nice guy and very sympathetic to my "plight" of being in Ouagadougou. And, I didn't have the impression that he really wanted to find anything wrong. He was just glad somebody was willing to be there. I offered to drive him out into the countryside, so he could see a little more than the capital. And, he agreed, and we got into one of the embassy's Jeep type vehicles. The roads, they were like washboard surfaces. The traffic and the weathering just made them truly like a washboard. So, we got used to it. You're just bumping along. We got about five miles out of town, and he said, okay, I've seen enough. We turned around and went back, and he had even more admiration for me for being in this place at all.

Now, I have to say, Ouaga was not unpleasant. It was isolated. There was not much going on. Culturally, it was a backwater, although it did begin, I think just around the time I was there, hosting an international African film festival that I think still goes on. It may have been the first year, or I may be just imagining this, but I think it just began around that time. But, really for the rest of the year, there wasn't much happening. I remember a dance exhibition, with dancers from various villages around the country demonstrating their local dances. There were a couple of decent restaurants. There was a hotel with a nice swimming pool. There were things to do, and you had a few friends. The staff was very small. But, it wasn't unpleasant. It wasn't dangerous, for sure. And it was hot. Yeah, it's very hot, but okay, you dealt with it. Had to boil and filter the water or buy French bottled water, which was flown in, as the French expats went through it really fast.

So, I didn't find Ouagadougou unpleasant. It was just uninteresting in many ways. It was definitely a backwater. We had a few visits from USIA people and VOA [Voice of America]. We had a visit from Leo Sarkesian, who died just last month. I think that would be June, 2018, in his upper nineties. He was one of the world's great ethnomusicologists and self-taught, and he had a program in the Voice of America, Music Time in Africa, that may endure to this day. And, he would collect music all over the country, indigenous music, and he'd go out in the boonies and villages, and he would get the real stuff. He was also an accomplished portrait artist, and he sketched the people he met. He was a great guy, wonderful person. And he visited Ouaga and did his thing there. We both went to meet the president at the time, General Lamizana, who had come to power in a coup and I think would eventually be ousted in another one. But things were calm. It was not a dangerous place.

Q: And, your French knowledge served you well?

LEIFERT: Finally came in handy.

Q: You got around fine.

LEIFERT: Absolutely. I had to; I mean, this is not a place where you say, oh, everybody speaks English. They didn't; they spoke Moré, their dominant indigenous language, and French. Our ambassador at the time, Elliott Skinner, was a former professor at Columbia, which was my Alma Mater, and he had studied the Mossi people, whose language is Moré, for his dissertation. And he spoke the language.

Q: Interesting.

LEIFERT: Yeah. He spoke the indigenous language, as well as French. He was very welcoming at the beginning. I have a photo of us, both smiling broadly, as he swore me in as FSO-6, my first promotion. At some point, he started not liking me toward the end of my tour. I never knew why, but it was clear that he didn't like me, and I couldn't imagine what I had done or not done. But, that's really neither here nor there. The most interesting thing as regards Skinner and the staff was the swimming pool. When the residence was first built or bought, whichever it was, for the American ambassador following independence, it had a swimming pool, or maybe one was constructed, which was intended for the ambassador for representational purposes and the staff at other times. So, basically what you had was wives and children using it during the day and staff members on the weekend, except when there was some kind of representational event, and that was fine with everybody. And, I say wives, remembering that there were no married female officers at that time. There were no dependent husbands. So, all the spouses were wives.

At some point, Ambassador Skinner decided he didn't really like all these half naked bodies lying around his patio, and he somehow persuaded, the State Department to install a separate but equal swimming pool across the street on an empty plot of land that the embassy actually owned, which was totally vacant at the time. So, that was done in record time. It was all done during the year I was there, and it was really a lovely facility. We liked it, we used it a lot. I think we were all happier also having our own place, so we wouldn't have to worry about whether the ambassador had guests or not. But, still, it was a huge expense for a very small staff. I think the American staff, there was not more than 10 or so. 10, 12 max. That was not including Peace Corps, of course, the Peace Corps Volunteers, who did not use the pool. Anyway, that was the saga of the swimming pool.

We did have Peace Corps. We also had Operation Crossroads Africa, which was a private organization that existed at that time. It got donations from people, and sent young Americans to various African countries and did good works in cooperation with local people. It was all meant to be cooperative. We had one group coming the summer I was there, and they participated in building a schoolhouse, which was very nice. It was actually built—I'm not sure if it was finished during the summer they were there, but it was certainly started and well under way. And, they did some traveling around the country too, as part of their cultural enrichment. I remember very well that in one village, the local chief honored them by giving them a sheep. The expectation was that this would be dinner at some point. So, they come back to town with the sheep, and what are they

going to do with it? Their compound didn't have any facilities, but I had a huge lawn right next to my house. So, somehow I wound up with Snowflake as they called him or her, whatever it was. Snowflake was on a really long leash and happily munched on my grass, until the final farewell dinner, when, to their dismay, Snowflake was the dinner. I don't think it was the whole dinner. I think they had to get another sheep also. It was still an interesting experience having those young Americans right in the town, there. Of course, the PCVs were all out of town. I hardly ever saw them.

Q: Okay. Did you do also, did you do any traveling around the country?

LEIFERT: Not a lot. There's only one other major city, Bobo Dioulasso, which is on the railroad line. I can't remember if I ever really visited it or not. If I did, it was for a day. And there weren't many other places you could go. Those roads were really terrible. I did travel once down to just short of the Ghanaian border, which was south of Ouaga. And, that's really all I remember. Now, I did have R&R, as I mentioned at the beginning. And, the way I did the R&R is, I flew to Europe and visited some friends who had been in my JOT class, who were now in London. I stayed with them a few days and went on to Copenhagen and West Berlin and Amsterdam.

In West Berlin, I checked in with the American mission. It was not yet the capital; that was in Bonn. And, one of the officers said he had to go into the east zone the next day, East Berlin, and would I like to accompany him, so I could see a little bit. And, I said, well, sure. So, we went through Checkpoint Charlie, and he took me to Unter den Linden, which is the main boulevard leading to the Brandenburg Gate on the east side. He recommended a museum, the German History Museum, and he said that he would pick me up there at whatever time, and he recommended the museum as something to do while I was in town. So, I went through the museum. It was interesting. German history—it was all in German. I didn't really speak German—I knew some words, but yeah, I could see it, anyway. It was interesting, and then he picked me up and we went back. It was uneventful, but it was at that time my only foray into the communist world, at least for a few hours. Then I went back to London, saw my friends again, went back to Ouaga.

When I left Ouaga at the end of my tour, I took the train down to Abidjan. It's like a, I forget, it was a 24 hour trip or what, but it was decent. You had first class, which was like half of the first passenger car. Then, I think there was second class, which was not quite as nice, the other half of that car. And then, the rest of the train was third class or whatever they called it, which was unacceptable. But, it was an interesting experience. You would go through villages at night and you would see glows coming out of huts, the TV sets. They had electricity; they had TV. This was in the Ivory Coast, not in Upper Volta. Once we crossed the border, you would see the difference. It was a much more economically advanced country. And, we went through the night. Then, the next day we arrived in Abidjan. There, I took a ship, to Marseilles, with stops in Dakar and Las Palmas, in the Canary Islands. So, that was a real R&R, a nice relaxing boat trip. It was a French ship, half cargo, half passengers, a very pleasant way to unwind after two years in Africa.

Q: Lovely. All right, so let's pause here. So that takes care of Ouagadougou. Where are you going next?

LEIFERT: This would be now January '68, and where I'm going to is Washington, for a short while. And, I then had an assignment in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. This was still before we bid on posts; we were just told where we were going. My PAO in Ouaga—this was the second PAO, McDowell, who was not a career FSO—when he heard I was going to Haiti, he opined that I should rather quit. I'd be lucky if I lived through the assignment! So, this was very encouraging, but I had a certain amount of time in D.C. I don't remember what we did during those consultation periods, but, it was, for a couple of months at least, I think.

I don't remember which month I went to Haiti, but I did; I didn't quit. I went to Port-au-Prince. I was the nominally the CAO at a two officer post. PAO was Hugh Sutherland, a gentleman who was nearing retirement, assuming it was his last post before retirement. And, he had some health issues. Several times during that two year assignment, he was away getting medical treatment, I have no idea for what, in the U.S., and I was the Acting PAO. Fortunately, I had a little experience doing that from Ouagadougou. But mainly—now I couldn't say mainly. I was going to say, mainly I did do cultural work, but it was a real mix. We put out a monthly news bulletin in French, and I think I did most of the work on that. And, I did some of the media liaison. There were a number of newspapers, as well as radio and TV. Radio and TV were state run. The print media where ostensibly private, but, this was during the Papa Doc Duvalier regime, so you did not have an opposition press, at least not in the country.

François Duvalier was a fascinating person, whom I only met once. It was the occasion of one of the two science related activities I did during my entire career. It was presenting him with a moon rock. President Nixon decreed that every head of state would get a moon rock, and they were quite small, moon pebbles really. But, they were put into a nice display case, and every ambassador got one by actual diplomatic courier to give to his or her head of state. And, the ambassador, Clinton Knox, kindly asked me if I'd like to go along with him to the presidential palace—the one that was ultimately destroyed in hurricane a few years back—to give it to Duvalier. And, I said, yes. They had a funny a system, funny to me system, in Haiti when there was any kind of serious event: you were told it was either black suit or white suit, and you're expected to have both.

Well, I didn't have a white suit, which is what was specified for this event. I did have a black one, or one that was dark enough to pass, but I was also told that if you didn't have the appropriate color, you could safely use the other one. So, I did and went through in my black suit. The ambassador, Papa Doc, and his aide de camp were all in their white suits, and Duvalier was fascinated by the moon rock. He looked at it. I have a photo of him, gazing intently through the Lucite cover over the presentation case. And, he asked questions. Remember, he was an actual doctor of medicine and therefore had some scientific background. It was a very nice ceremony, and ultimately I shook hands with him. I have a photo of that, too, which I can't believe: you know, I actually shook hands with Papa Doc. So, that was one of the two science related things. The other was back in Ethiopia, where I simply escorted two of the Gemini astronauts to meet Emperor Haile

Selassie. I was in the room with them, but didn't speak to the emperor, didn't have any real contact with him, but, I was there.

Okay, getting back to Haiti, we had a fairly active program. We had a cultural center called the Haitian-American Institute, which was separate from the embassy. The embassy was right downtown on a main boulevard along the waterfront, Harry Truman Boulevard. I think the embassy moved since then, due to the heightened security issues. I think most embassies like that have moved, but anyway, that was down on the waterfront. That's where my office was. We had a separate person who was the Haitian-American Institute director, who ran English teaching programs and things like that at the institute. I think there was a library there as well. I didn't have very much to do with it, frankly, but I did program a lot of international visitors in the institute's auditorium. I think the most notable one was Jessye Norman, who later became a world famous opera singer. This was at the start of her career. She was wonderful even then. She was wonderful to deal with, and I met her again years later in Paris, and she professed to remember me and certainly remembered her gig in Haiti. But anyway, we had a few people of that caliber, or almost, on our cultural exchanges. I gave at least one lecture there in French, on the space program, which my parents attended, during one of several visits they made to Haiti while I was there. In contrast, during my year in Addis Ababa, I never spoke with them by phone, due to the communications system there, or lack of it. We communicated only by letters through the pouch.

We also did a couple of films. One was a real full length movie that USIA produced, one of only two, on Apollo 8, and that actually played in a regular movie theater. The other one was Years of Lightning, Day of Drums, about the Kennedy presidency and his assassination. Other programming, the usual; it was really the usual media relations, answering questions. We did put out that monthly news bulletin, which was an important vehicle of communication.

I remember we had an election night. It was 1968 and the PAO, Hugh Sutherland, the USIS secretary, Sandy Farrar, and I went to the Haitian TV station and we did an election program. Sandy was listening to VOA and writing down results as they came in and feeding them to us, and we'd discuss what they meant. And, it was quite interesting that we had posters behind us. One of them was of Richard Nixon and the other of Hubert Humphrey, We had big photos that USIA had provided of the two of them, a great backdrop. The only thing lacking in this whole activity was TV sets. There were very few in the country. I have no idea how many people watched this program. It might've been in the dozens; I would say at most, maybe in the hundreds. But, we did it. We had great fun doing it.

What else? I enjoyed Haiti; the people are wonderful. They're very welcoming. It was not dangerous. There were some burglaries of houses. That was the worst crime, I guess. There was very little political activity. All of Duvalier's opponents were either dead or in exile or in prison. Huge population of Haitians in Montreal at that time, as they obviously spoke French. And so, there wasn't much in the way of political ferment. There was one event I remember during my two years, where some members of the Coast Guard revolted, and I don't even remember what the issue was, but I think it was just one

Haitian Coast Guard vessel that fired off some rounds toward the capital from out in the bay. Port-au-Price is right on the waterfront. They didn't hit anything, and they eventually surrendered or gave up and went away or whatever. But, that was the most excitement of that type. And, it lasted just part of one day.

I participated in a theatrical group, Le Petit Théatre, which put on two plays each year, one in French and one in English. I acted in a couple and made my directorial debut in one. Several Americans from the embassy were in it, along with various other expats and, of course, some Haitians.

Traveled around a lot in the country, considering the condition of the roads. Went up twice to Cap Haitien, which is on the north coast. The roads were absolutely abominable. Took like all day to get there, and it's only 150 miles at most. Once, I visited the Citadelle, the mountaintop fortress near Cap Haitien where the Haitians held off the French army for quite a while, en route to becoming the second country in the Americas to gain independence from their colonial overlords, after the U.S.

I guess the personal highlight of my tour is that I met my wife there, my second wife, Claudine, who was Swiss and was working as a volunteer with a Swiss volunteer organization, something like the Peace Corps, but I think it was church run, and they were working at a local school. They had a one year contract. The year had ended by the time I got there, but Claudine and one of her friends had liked Haiti and wanted to stay on. So, they did, and they got jobs on the local economy and rented a house that was back to back with mine. Now, it was on a hillside. I was on the upper street, and the back of my house looked down the slope onto the roof of their house, whose entrance was on the next block, at a lower elevation. What made it interesting for her, before we met, she wondered who lived in that house up on the hill, because when the power went out, which was every day for a couple of hours—it was pretty much scheduled—that house had lights, because we had a generator that the embassy provided.

And, because there were no working telephones, we also had a radio network and you had to leave your walkie talkie on all the time, because there might be an emergency announcement. That's what it was for, really. But, we occasionally used it for other messages and we, each of us, had a code name, like I was Golf One, and she could hear this. She couldn't make out what was being said, but she could hear this crackling up the hill, Golf One, come in, this is Delta, you know, that kind of thing. And when we finally met, it was all made clear to her. The way we met is, I was either late or early for work one day, and she was the opposite. I saw her standing by the taxi stop, where you got the collective taxis that went down the hill into Port-au-Prince. We lived in the suburb of Pétionville, which was at a higher altitude and much nicer, the weather especially. It was cooler and drier, and we didn't even have air conditioning. We had fans and kept the windows open, and it was fine.

Q: Oh, okay. 'Cause you were high enough that insect problems wouldn't be—

LEIFERT: Well, we did take malaria prophylaxis every week, but that was mainly for traveling down to lower levels, which we did every day. We went down to the embassy.

But, anyway, she was waiting at the taxi stop, and I had never seen her before, and it was rare—there were very few white people living in that area. And, I sort of rolled down the window and asked if she wanted a ride downtown. And despite everything her mother had probably told her, she said, yes. I gave her a lift down to where she was working and, it went on from there. We eventually got married, I think a year later, in Haiti by a Haitian justice of the peace, technically an Officier d'Etat Civil. And lived happily ever after, for as long as she lived. Yeah. Mm. Yeah.

Q: Wow. That's great. Yeah, that's, you know, one of those foreign service, remarkable stories.

LEIFERT: Almost everyone I knew was married to a foreigner. I mean every American FSO whom I knew, if they were not already married when they came into the foreign service, they married a foreigner. It makes sense, because that's who you mostly see when you're overseas.

Q: Sure. Yeah, sure. All right. So, that was a historic tour if only for that reason.

LEIFERT: One other thing: I said, she had worked, Claudine worked when she was a volunteer, in a school. It was called the Nouveau Collège Bird, named after someone. That was the school that Baby Doc attended—-Jean-Claude Duvalier. And, she knew him. I mean, of course, she worked in the school. He was a terrible student. He knew he didn't really have to study hard. But, yeah, that was one of the schools he attended, and he eventually became president. Not quite for life. He was ousted, unlike his father. Papa Doc died, I think, the year we came back to the States or early the next year.

Q: So, the total time you were in Haiti was then '68 to '70.

LEIFERT: I think it was two full years. Yep.

Q: What did the, how did the stars align to send you back to Washington?

LEIFERT: Well, the fact that I married a foreigner dictated it. Well, first of all, in those days, if you wanted to marry a foreigner, you had to submit your resignation.

Q: Oh, Wow. I had forgotten that.

LEIFERT: Yeah. Yeah. And it could, or could not, be accepted, depending. So, you filled out all kinds of forms about the fiancée, and again, they were still all female fiancées. And, Claudine started getting letters from friends and relatives in Switzerland saying, you know, the American Embassy was asking about you! And, they couldn't understand why. A lot of her more distant relatives or friends, people she had listed on the form, didn't know that she was planning to marry me. All they knew—some of them thought she was in Tahiti. They had no clue as to where she was or what she was doing.

Q: Haiti, Tahiti—yeah, it's all the same.

LEIFERT: So yeah, the American Embassy has been asking questions about you, what's going on? So she was very amused by that, but she was cleared eventually. And, virtually on the day that I was going to send in my pro forma, hopefully pro forma, resignation, an FAM [Foreign Affairs Manual] page came out abolishing that requirement. So, so I didn't actually have to go through the procedure.

Q: Very good fortune.

LEIFERT: It was very, very fortuitous that on that very day, I think, and then I opened it up and read it. So, that was that. When we went back for a vacation trip years later, her girlfriend with whom she had rented the house had stayed on. As far as I know, she lived the rest of her life in Haiti. I don't know if she's still alive. Yeah. She never went back to Switzerland, maybe for a visit, but she basically lived in Haiti.

Q: Interesting. I'm sure they could use her skills and her help. So, when you go back to Washington then, what sort of job awaited you?

LEIFERT: Yeah. Okay. This was the time I worked at VOA. Yeah, we bought a house on Capitol Hill, our first house; it cost $38,000. It would seem like an astronomical sum. I knew nothing about owning a house. I only had one friend who owned a house. Everybody else, you know, sort of grew up in cities and lived in apartments and rented. And, it was never in my wildest imagination to own a house, except that one of my classmates, when we were back in training, had bought a little townhouse in Georgetown. And, I said, oh wow, you can actually buy a house, who knew? And, so we started looking, and we bought one and we kept it, even when we left, we rented it out and kept it for some years, until we got the next one.

But that's neither here nor there. During that tour, I worked at VOA in Worldwide English, in the, a section that prepared not the hourly newscast that you hear at the top of the hour, but what we called the back halves. It's something like Morning Edition or All Things Considered. There were correspondents' reports and actualities and other news related features that came in each day.

Q: Now take a second, because this is 1970. What is the relationship between VOA and USIA? How, what was the governing structure?

LEIFERT: Well, VOA was still fully a part of USIA. It was before there was a Broadcasting Board of Governors, or anything else, and VOA liked to be, or pretend to be, as independent as it could. And it had its Charter, which was actually federal law, and to this day, I think, people that work there rely on that. It requires them to be an independent, objective source of news, and so on. But, there was never a problem. We all wanted to do that, anyway. There were some political types, I would have to call them, at the very top, but they didn't interfere. At least, nothing that ever trickled down to my level. Yeah, as far as I know, it was a reasonably honorable operation back then and presumably now. So we just did these daily news programs. We edited tape, we wrote scripts, and then they were voiced by what we called the talent.

Q: So, you never actually became a news reader?

LEIFERT: Not at VOA, no. And that was fine. Each of us—we had a whole group of writer-editors, and some were foreign service who had assignments like mine, who had area expertise, after all, in different parts of the world, and others were career VOA people. The programs were aimed at particular regions, depending on the time of day. When it was evening prime time in that part of the world is when we broadcast programs that emphasized news from that part of the world. Obviously the main news of the day, whatever it was, would go on. But where there was discretion, we would think of which part of the world was listening at that hour, so we had Report to Africa, Report to Europe, Report to East Asia, Report to Latin America, and so on, so on.

Q: Sure. So now, during this period, did you also sort of gain the skill set for broadcasting?

LEIFERT: I already had a lot. I worked in broadcasting in college, and worked briefly at the Associated Press in graduate school, writing news stories for radio stations to air. So, I didn't need a lot of, of training on how to do this. I guess what I brought to it was some area of knowledge when we were dealing with a story from that area, from Africa, mainly. So, that was a fun tour. And, I mostly commuted by bicycle from my house on the Hill to VOA, which was, and is, at Fourth Street and Independence Avenue, Southwest.

Q: Did Claudine do anything herself? Did she have opportunity to work or study or anything?

She did one year at George Washington University. I can't remember if it was at this time or, I think, it was during a subsequent Washington tour. She also worked at the African American Institute, programming international visitors. And again, I'm not sure—I really have to go look it up—whether it was then, in the early seventies or a decade later, when we had another Washington assignment. But yeah, she did. But, at first, she worked on improving her English, which was fairly good right from the start. She had studied it in Bournemouth, England, one summer, while still living in Switzerland, but she wanted it to improve it. So, at the beginning, she would watch Sesame Street each evening, which she found a great help. You know, it started with very basic concepts. She built up her vocabulary and swiftly moved on to other programs.

Q: An unexpected success for the teaching mission of Sesame Street.

LEIFERT: Absolutely. Yup. Yup.

Q: Okay. As much as I would like to ask you questions about VOA, it sounds like this is a period when VOA was not a particularly hot issue. In other words, how effective it was, or whether it was sufficiently pro-American government. These are all issues that would come up later.

LEIFERT: Yeah. I don't think it was much of an issue at that time. I think there were—well, most Americans had never heard of it. We weren't allowed to broadcast into the U.S., and now you can get it on Facebook. So, anybody can tune in to VOA, or at least read news stories on Facebook and probably other platforms as well. But, at that

time, we were very much under the Smith Mundt Act, which prevented internal U.S. dissemination of what was called propaganda. Now, we didn't call what we did propaganda, in the first place. We thought we were the best news service in the U.S., that we did a better job of broadcasting radio news than any of the networks. It was before there was an NPR [National Public Radio], certainly better than ABC [American Broadcasting Company], CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System], NBC [National Broadcasting Company], Mutual, whatever we had in those days. They didn't do anything like this, you know, almost constant broadcasting of serious news.

Q: So, especially coverage of the wider world.

LEIFERT: Yeah. And, we think we did it very straight. I mean, there were editorials then, VOA editorials that were labeled as such, and which we suffered having to put into our programs every now and then, which supported the government's position on whatever the topic was. But, the charter required that "responsible," in quotes, opposing views should also be aired. And, they were, maybe not with the same frequency, but they were, so, no, it wasn't really much of a domestic issue, whether VOA was doing a good job or not.

Q: And, you know, later still, whether VOA was necessary after the fall of the Berlin Wall and those sorts of things. But yeah, that would come much later. So the first two years you're in VOA in Washington, did they think that you would have a second office tour in Washington? How did that work?

LEIFERT: Well, Claudine was fast tracked to citizenship, which I think was standard for foreign spouses of FSOs. They'd already been vetted once, and she filled out whatever the paperwork was. She was called in to an examiner, and she had to pass a literacy test. And, the literacy test literally was, she was given a of paper and she had to read what was on it, and what was on it was, "it is a nice day." She did that successfully!

Q: Wow! Oh, you're never gonna see that time again.

LEIFERT: No, I guess not. And I don't remember if there were any questions. She had studied up on the system of government and all those things that prospective citizens are supposed to learn. If she got any questions about that, it was of the same order, the order of, what do you call the person who's the head of the executive branch? I'm not saying that was a question, but it wouldn't have been harder than that. They wanted to do it. They wanted to get that citizenship done. So she became a citizen, got her black [diplomatic] passport, and we were almost ready to head out to our next assignment, which was Copenhagen.

Q: Wow. Okay. Now, Copenhagen, and it was again general assignment or were you an information officer? Press officer? Cultural?

LEIFERT: It was again a two officer post, two officers and an American secretary. And, this time I was called the Information Officer. But, again, you pretty much got your hand in everything. That was the wonderful part about USIA. Being a small agency, you did everything, including the admin work. So, we had a better handle on the whole of what

our agency did than our State counterparts, who were already being funneled into cones. I'm not sure when that word came in, but, nevertheless, they were starting to specialize in places, in areas, and in subject matter, and had a less broad view of all that was being done than we did.

Q: Did they give you training in Danish?

LEIFERT: Yes. Yeah, that was my second FSI, language. The first one, as I probably said was in Arlington Towers, at the very first FSI place, where Room A-100 actually existed. And, I learned French there. By the time I learned Danish, it had moved to a high rise, also in Rosslyn. And, I remember that our Danish class included three Army Green Berets. Yes. And Claudine and me, and I think that was the whole class, because six would've been the maximum. So, it was the two of us and the three Green Berets, and we would pick them up every morning, right near here, where they were billeted, and we would drive them to Rosslyn, and we would park in the basement garage and we'd all walk up the seven flights to where our class was.

Now, the problem with Danish was that FSI had not produced a Danish course book as they had for French and many other languages. And, in addition, the teacher we had—he was a native speaker of Danish—he was a Dane, but as far as we could tell had no training in teaching Danish as a second language. I don't know how many years he'd been doing it. He was elderly then and, well, to be honest, he was not very effective. The first month or two—I forget how long the course was, maybe six months this time, we made very little progress. What he liked to do was smoke. He would have a cigar, a pipe, and a cigarette lined up. It was perfectly legal in those days. And, he also liked his beer, and occasionally after lunch, he would bring an additional one back.

And, well, he was introducing us to Denmark in that way. The Danes love their beer, and the Danes loved, at least then, to smoke. Maybe they still do, I don't know. But, we didn't learn a lot of Danish. And, then he got sick and had to leave. And, fortuitously, an FSO came back from overseas with his brand new Danish wife, who had been a teacher of Danish as a second language, and she moved right into the slot. And, from there it just took off. We started really learning Danish.

Q: Wonderful.

LEIFERT: Yeah. Yes. She was wonderful. And, still we didn't have the materials, so there was a lot of improvisation. There was a book, but it wasn't an FSI book. It was okay, but it wasn't up to what I consider the high FSI standard. But, nevertheless, I was able to get a 4-4 in Danish before leaving for Copenhagen.

Q: Oh, that's remarkable.

LEIFERT: Yeah. Maybe they're were a bit generous. It was surely a solid 3-3, maybe it was a 4-4. The nice thing about going to Denmark, my PAO, Peter Heller—I think he was on his second tour there; he had been there some years earlier. He spoke Danish. I think he was German by birth. He certainly spoke native German. He arranged for us to have "consultations," in quotes, in Reykjavik and Oslo on our way to Copenhagen, to help ease

us into the Nordic way of life. So, we flew from Washington to Reykjavik, and the added fillip there was that Pan Am kindly upgraded us to first class for that leg, which was not unheard of. They did that for the State Department, and maybe they didn't know I was USIA, but they did it in those days. They wanted to be considered the airline of choice of the U.S. Government, so they did things like that.

Anyway, we had three or four days in Iceland. We saw all the sights. I guess we did actually have some consultations at the embassy as part of that, but it was really just an area familiarization. And, then we flew on to Oslo and did the same thing for a few days. Now there was, an interesting anecdote from Oslo. Back in Washington at FSI, the three Scandinavian languages that they taught, Norwegian, Danish, and Swedish, were in adjacent rooms on the seventh floor of the FSI high rise building. And during the breaks, the three teachers would go out and they'd all chat with each other in the corridor, but each one would use her own language.

Q: And it was mutually intelligible?

LEIFERT: Yes, they all understood each other, but they spoke their own language, and we, who were struggling to learn, thought, this is so cool! The three of them can talk, and they all know what they're talking about.

Q: Fascinating.

LEIFERT: So we went, we arrived in Oslo, and we had to go to a shop to buy something. I don't remember what it was. And, we said, well, let's try our Danish and see if he understands. So, we went into the store and we spoke in newly minted Danish and told the clerk what we wanted, and he understood us perfectly. And, he replied in Norwegian, and we didn't have a clue!

So, that was the only time we tried that in Norway, but we had a good time there. We saw a couple of great museums and just the city itself. It was a nice, again, easing into Scandinavia, and we finally flew on to Copenhagen and started what was a two year tour.

Q: Okay. Now was there by this point—you arrived in '73—by this point, there are beginning to be issues: arms control, you know, Soviet Union and dissidents and refuseniks?.

LEIFERT: And not only that, the Vietnam War.

Q: Of course. Sure.

LEIFERT: Especially the Vietnam War.

Q: So what were—did you arrive and have goals for what you were going to be doing there?

LEIFERT: Yeah, I think our goal was to persuade Danes that our presence in Vietnam was a good thing and that it should be applauded, encouraged, whereas, in reality, there

was a real divergence of opinion and a lot of anti-Americanism among the Danes, especially the younger ones. We felt that the real dichotomy was age-related, and the pro American people were the older generation that remembered the Marshall Plan and how it saved Denmark, or at least made life better. The younger generation had no recollection of that, and if they knew it academically, were probably indifferent or embarrassed that they had needed the help. And, they saw the war as the U.S. imperialistically trying to thwart a popular movement in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. So, that was the main issue while we were there.

The interesting thing about the American Embassy was, it was on a main street, Dag Hammarskjölds Allé, and behind it was a cemetery. And, on the other side of the cemetery was the Soviet Embassy. So, this led to all kinds of morbid jokes about the two superpowers and the cemetery between them. The only time I was ever in there was, I think, after, it must've been Khrushchev, died, and they opened a condolence book. The PAO and I took the opportunity to go over and sign the book. Now, we were so smug: our embassy, right out on the street; you walk right in from the street; there was maybe a Danish policeman standing there, and that was it. And, you walk in; there was a Marine in the lobby, and he would direct you where you want it to go, and you just went. And, it was like that at every embassy, I think, certainly in the west.

The Soviet embassy was surrounded by a very high wall, and they checked your credentials on the way in. And, you were very limited as to where you could go. And, we said, our two embassies, reflect our ways of life. We are an open society. We don't wall ourselves off from the people, whereas the Soviets are a closed society, and they do that. I don't think many American diplomats are saying that today.

Q: Right. Yeah, unfortunately. Well, yeah, changing times. But, okay. Now, how did you do outreach given the, you know, attitudes of younger Danes now about the role of the U.S. In the world and various areas that they disagreed with you as policy?

LEIFERT: Okay. Well this for the first time in my foreign service career was an open democratic society, and it's very refreshing. There was just one TV channel, the state run TV, at that time, although we could get the two Swedish channels as well. And it was the Danish state radio, which may have had more than one channel, but it was just that, just the state radio. But for print media, there was a plethora of newspapers and magazines. They had a news agency, the Ritzau Bureau; newspapers ran the gamut from left to right. I had good—I was the IO—I had good contacts at all of them. I was very happy about that. They were, even if they opposed American policy, they were happy to meet with me, and we would talk or have a beer or whatever. There was only one editor of all the ones I ever dealt with there who did not speak English. And with him, I had to use my Danish. Otherwise, I used Danish very little professionally. It was very helpful when shopping or traveling or anything like that. And Claudine had also studied it, as I mentioned, but professionally, it was largely done in English, and nobody objected. I mean, they liked doing it that way. They wanted to work on their own English.

The newspapers ranged from Information, which was a definitely leftist paper, to Aktuelt, which was from the Social Democratic Party, the ruling party. There was Kristeligt

Dagblad, which was a Christian newspaper, and the two mass newspapers were Berlingske Tidene, which was a little more conservative, and Politiken, which was a little more liberal, but both of them were reasonable mainstream papers. And, then there were a couple of tabloids. Each of those papers had a tabloid afternoon paper, which were much more sensational. But again, nobody was controlling them. This was an open society.

And, the only thing that struck me as odd was that to get a job as a journalist at that time, you had to be a graduate of the journalism school. You had to be actually certified as a journalist to take a job as a journalist, which I thought was odd. In the U.S.,. anyone can call himself a journalist and, there's no formality about it. You just say, I'm a journalist, and nobody can say, no, legally, you're not a journalist. But, that was the way that was. Again, I don't know what things are like today, if it's the same or different.

Q: Okay. So, did you, for example, meet with students? Were there difficult times when you had to defend things, or you accompanied American experts who then were subject to all this is kind of—

LEIFERT: More the latter. I remember giving one talk, but I can't remember what it was about, at a university, in Danish. But, mostly I didn't meet with students. I met with editors and journalists and people like that. I did travel; other cities had their own newspapers. So, several times a year I would make a circuit of the mainland, Copenhagen being on an island, go to Jutland and the two major cities there, Aarhus and Aalborg—both had major newspapers, at least one each. The other interesting thing about Jutland is every year on the 4th of July, they had a big ceremony there, honoring America. And, I went one year when the queen attended and it was notable, because she stumbled on her way up to the stage, and that's all anybody remembers of it. But, they had a 4th of July ceremony that was specifically intended to recognize the role that America had played in defeating Nazi Germany, which had occupied Denmark. And, freeing them and then helping them economically, till they got on their feet again. So, that was very well attended. Again, probably more by the older generation or by people out in the boonies where this occurred, who didn't have much other excitement. So, once a year they would do something like this. But, that's just being cynical. I think probably a lot of people thought it was nice that they did this. Danes thought it was nice that they had this observance every year.

Q: Totally sort of sidebar question: Once, the myth of King Christian, very prevalent there, the myth that he wore a yellow star while, you know, in the time of the Nazis.

LEIFERT: I think it's probably true. The Danes were very proud of having exported all of their Jews to Sweden in the dead of night. The cynical people say that they were happy to get rid of them. But, the official line is that they wanted to save them from what would surely be death. And, so that story was told a lot. I think the story about the king is probably true, although—.

Q: Because, you know, I've read articles on both sides of this that say, yes he did. And people saw it, and others say, no, it just kind of arose because he was a popular king, anyway.

LEIFERT: Maybe, he did sometimes. Yeah, you'd have to find a better authority than I, because I wasn't there during the war. But, I know that you continue to hear about the heroic, night ferrying of Jews across the Øresund to Sweden, which was neutral.

Q: Hmm. Okay. Well, if it sounds like otherwise a good tour, and you had the opportunity now to do really more of a traditional information officer work. Did you begin to have your own career trajectory in mind? Did you, where did you see yourself at this point going?

LEIFERT: I don't remember when the bidding system came in, but I remember that in Copenhagen I was given three options for my next post, which was a first, and the three options were Yaoundé, Cameroon; Fez, Morocco; and Paris, in the Africa Regional Services office. Now, you're laughing, but I did consider them seriously. I did not want to go back to sub-Saharan Africa right away. I wanted to see some more of the world. I did give Fez a serious look. I contacted the current BPAO [Branch PAO] there, and I asked him, since Fez is a center of traditional Islamic culture and one of the great centers of learning, is it reasonable for me to go there, If I don't speak Arabic? I speak French, which is an official language of Morocco, but wouldn't I really need Arabic to do a decent job? And he thought that I would.

I looked at Yaoundé cursorily, and I looked at Fez a little more seriously, but as I said, the current occupant of the job really thought it should be an Arabic speaker. And I then turned to Paris, which everybody would say was the obvious choice. But, I wanted to let the others have a chance. The job in Paris was called Information Student Affairs Officer in Africa Regional Services. That's a mouthful. Okay. So, you have the USIS Paris post that did all the things, with a rather large staff, that any big western European embassy would have.

Also there in USIS was a separate operation, technically under the PAO, but essentially autonomous, called Africa Regional Services, that provided a range of services to Francophone African posts. And this ranged from a weekly news bulletin that I can go into at great length at some point, as to how it worked. We found Americans in France or traveling through France who spoke French and would be willing to go to Africa to give lectures in their fields of expertise. And, we published books, translations of American books into French, a series called Nouveaux Horizons, New Horizons, and they were for—I'm not sure if it was free or very low price—distribution in Africa. And then, there was a second series that was a little more technical, called Tendences Actuelles, Current Tendencies, which was more on technical and economic issues like that. But again, translations of American books.

And, very importantly, liaison with Africa-oriented news media based in Paris. Yeah, because most African regimes were autocratic and did not have a free press, there grew up in Paris a whole series of magazines, especially, that were about Africa, aimed at

Africa, and to a large extent sold in Africa, as well as to Africans living in Europe. And the most important of those was Jeune Afrique, Young Africa. Still exists, I think. But, there were possibly a dozen others, a couple of them, very light stuff, and others, more serious and of various political tendencies. So, a significant part of my job was liaising the editors and writers of those magazines.

Q: Sorry, just one second before we actually move with you to Paris, because you'll be there '75 to '80. What did Claudine do in Copenhagen?

LEIFERT: Oh, yeah. She was able to take advantage of having learned Danish to get a job on the local economy with a Swedish company that manufactured high quality optical lenses. She was one of the very first diplomatic spouses to take advantage of a new regulation that allowed spouses to work on the local economy by giving up their diplomatic immunity while they were at work. And it required bilateral agreements between pairs of countries, and I think she was one of the first beneficiaries of the U.S.-Danish agreement. So, she was able to get this job, using Danish, and, working for this Swedish company, but in Copenhagen.

Q: And she enjoyed that?

LEIFERT: Oh, yeah. She did, very much. And she did that, I think, for most of the time we were there, most of the two years.

Q: Now, the other question about your spouse that I want to ask is, what did the two of you, or what did USIA think about her at all, in terms of your career or in terms of, you know, being sort of a second individual in the U.S. Foreign Service? Was there any thought given to that at all?

LEIFERT: I don't think so. I think we had passed the point of spouses being evaluated officially and probably even unofficially. I think we're past the point where an ambassador's spouse, especially wife, could just commandeer the time and the work of the ambassador's subordinates' spouses. That had existed, of course. But, I think we were beyond that by now. And, we are also beyond when female FSOs could not be married. That reversal came in at some point and affected one of my JOT classmates, who had been forced to resign when she got married, and she was reinstated, I think with back pay, some years later when the rule changed.

Q: Wow. Okay. So, now go ahead and continue. You moved down to Paris, and these are the work requirements.

LEIFERT: Yes. We were located in what was called the Hôtel Talleyrand. It was the mansion right on the Place de la Concorde that had been the home of Talleyrand, the great diplomat. I forget what century already—18th, I guess, and early 19th. That's where he lived, and that's where I worked, up in the attic. We had, it was where the embassy's consular service was, on the ground floor, and the whole rest of the building was USIS Paris. And, up in the attic under the mansard roof that's typical of Paris, we—Africa Regional Services, or ARS—had a whole string of offices. I should add that during World War II, this building was Gestapo headquarters for Paris. In the basement, the one time I

went down there, I saw a row of small cells, and I could only imagine what had gone on there.

ARS had one FSO, Corinne Heditsian, who did the cultural programming. The director, Paul Polakoff, did the book program, and as I said, my original title was Information Student Affairs Officer. So, that was my dual job, doing the information liaison work and student affairs. What student affairs was, was very nebulous. My predecessor—the same one whom I had followed in Ouagadougou—she had used it as a way of meeting African students. And, I think she had, by all accounts, some wonderful soirées at her apartment, where they all chatted and everything. But, in terms of actually doing something, I'm not sure how much in that area was done. What I noticed when I took over was, I had a steady stream of African students looking for scholarships to study in the U.S. It's the only reason they came up to me—and you could come in very freely off the street, in those days. You just walked in and looked at the directory. There it is. Okay, fourth floor. And they would go up the tiny, ancient elevator, impossible to believe now. But, they would come up and they would have either wonderful stories, or tales of woe, but they always ended with needing money and the desire to study in America.

And, I felt terrible because there was nothing I could do for them. We had no scholarship funds that I could, you know, just okay: you can have $1,000, or whatever. And, all I could tell them was to get in touch with the cultural officer in their home country, who might be aware of programs available to citizens of that country. This was truly a copout. I mean, it was just to get rid of them, frankly. There was nothing I could do, and no way—I would tell them, I have no funds. But they figured, well, I really do, somehow. So, I would tell them, the only thing you can do is, if there is such a program, the cultural officer in your country would know about it. Eventually, I persuaded Washington, well, first my boss in Paris and then Washington, to just drop Student Affairs from the title, because there was no student affairs work I was actually doing. Or could do. So, I became the Information Officer, and that's what I really did.

Now the other thing that I did to expand the job, as compared to that contracting of it, was expanding it to London, because there was a similar situation in London, where English language magazines about Africa were proliferating, because, for the same reason, that back home, the press wasn't free and, they couldn't express opinions, and all that sort of thing. So, maybe not as many magazines as in Paris, but there were still at least half a dozen, maybe more. And, I persuaded whoever required the persuading—I'm not saying it was hard—to let me make a trip to London and scout out as many of these as I could and see if there was any kind of liaison we could work with them.

And, of course we did this with the knowledge of USIS London. I worked with them to set up the list of places I would go and people that we were trying to meet. And, I did that, and it worked pretty well. And, that included the highly influential BBC Africa Service. I had a very good friendship with George Bennett, the person who headed it at that time, and it became a semiannual trip. I would visit London on a regular basis, for the rest of my tour in Paris. We would also send the materials to those media, or the post in London would do it directly when they had them, that would be possibly of interest to them. So, we did what we could to make these publications that were widely read by

Africans cognizant of our policies, even where they disagreed with them, but at least from a basis of accurate knowledge.

Q: Over the five years, how did your job change, or what were the issues that changed over that time?

LEIFERT: Well, at the beginning, I guess, it was still Vietnam, big issue. And, that was ever since Ethiopia, actually. But, the big issue during my time in Paris, it was mostly relations between the U.S. and France, not Africa, was airplanes. There were two big issues. One was getting landing rights for the Concorde in the U.S., and the other was, which warplane would NATO adopt in what was called the arms deal of the century. There was the American F16 versus the latest Mirage and the Swedish Viggan; those were the three in contention. And, at the Paris Air Show, whichever year that was—and Claudine worked at that air show; she was in the economic section of the embassy at that point.

Q: Ah, okay. So, I neglected to ask you, she was now an eligible family member or the equivalent?

LEIFERT: It wasn't even called that. She was just, they hired her; I'm not even sure on what basis they hired her. But, yeah, she worked on the Paris Air Show. She even got a commendation for it. But, that was the show, it was at Le Bourget, when the three planes showed off their stuff, and frankly there was no comparison. The Viggan flew, the Mirage flew, and then the F16 took off and went up at what looked like looked like 90 degrees vertical, and everybody's just gasping; it was an incredible sight. And, ultimately, that's what they adopted; it was the F16. So, there were one or two other issues that I don't remember what they were, but they were also airplane related.

With regard to Africa, the issues were apartheid in South Africa and whether the US was supporting it. And, certainly the Reagan administration was, although we tried to blunt it as much as we could. I don't think there was anybody, any American working at the embassy or consulates in South Africa, who supported apartheid, but Reagan saw the government of South Africa as an ally in the fight against communism, which they were. So, he wasn't anxious to do anything to upend it.

One of the interesting by-plays of that was our ambassador, Herman Nickel, the one who was there when I ultimately arrived in South Africa—I'm getting way ahead of myself. But, before leaving, Nickel had amassed a huge amount of South African wine that he wanted to take back. He was going to pay the duty on it. That wasn't the issue, but just before he left, Congress passed the Anti-Apartheid Act, over Reagan's veto, which prohibited importation of South African agricultural products, which included wine. He couldn't take it to the U.S., and we all thought it was so fitting, because as Reagan's ambassador, he was definitely friendly with the local government. That's getting way ahead of myself.

Q: Yeah. all right. Now, I imagine also had the opportunity to travel and so on, but did your travel also include trips to Africa—orientation and so on.

LEIFERT: Yes. As the information officer for Africa, I made a trip to Africa every year, and the first trip I think was in '76 and earlier in the year, I guess, I told the head of ARS, Paul Polakoff, that although this trip—normally my predecessors had visited Francophone African posts, the ones we were directly supporting—I said the main issue we're dealing with is apartheid, and I've never been to South Africa; I have no sense of what it really is. I would like to go and find out. He thought this was a good idea. And, so I went, and I don't remember how long I spent; it was at least a week. It was probably longer than a week, in Johannesburg and Cape Town. I had some really interesting meetings. I did give a talk at the University of Stellenbosch in Stellenbosch, which is east of Cape Town and is the—I don't know what you would call the equivalent in the U.S. It's really the training ground for the Afrikaner elite. It was an Afrikaans language university, of which there were several.

But, it was the main one, and, I gave a talk there, in English, about American policy, I guess. I think it went over reasonably well. I don't remember any of the details, but I wasn't chased out of the room. So, it was nice. And, that was my first direct exposure to South Africa, and I really wanted to go back, which happened one day, some years later. We'll get to that. But, anyway, I had been talking to all kinds of people in South Africa, but mainly, people that I would call liberal or in Afrikaans, they would call verligte, which means enlightened, and they were all people who were ready to make compromises at the very least with the black majority. I said to the PAO there, the Branch PAO in Johannesburg, Jake Jacobson, everybody I talked to seems to be from the American Civil Liberties Union. I want to talk to somebody who really defends and supports apartheid, thinks it's the right thing.

Jake said, I know just the person, and he sent me up a meeting with the retired editor of an Afrikaans newspaper, and he did just that. For the first time, I heard their rationale for what they do with their basis for their mythology of the country. I don't use the word pejoratively, but their story of how everything happened and why and why how it evolved is good and should be maintained. It was the first time I'd ever heard it. I mean, subsequently, I've read books and met other people, but that was the first, and I was very appreciative of the opportunity, although I can't say I agreed with much of what he said. But, at least I heard an honest description of the policy and its rationale.

Q: Hmm. Interesting. Okay. also in this period, from '75 to '80 or so, did the tradecraft of USIA change, or the tradecraft of what you were doing?
LEIFERT: You know, I don't think it did a lot. We still didn't have video, I think, I can't remember now for sure. But, in France, we weren't going around to villages with the movies, in any case. That didn't happen. We still got the wireless file by radio, I think, but that wasn't ARS. We just received a copy of it. There's a big press operation at the embassy, and they produced that and distributed it every day, which meant a courier took it around. There's no electronic dissemination. So no, I don't think, aside from Xerox machines having come in to replace the old mimeographs, Gestetners, that rolled around and around, and yeah, I don't think there was a lot of difference in things we did and how we did them.

Q: Okay. Yeah. And your wife had good, you know, professional work and she was more or less satisfied.

LEIFERT: She did. She worked both in the consular section and economic section, at different times. I don't think she had any jobs on the local economy in France. Can't remember. I don't remember that she did, but she, she enjoyed her work. She had something to do and, it was at least reasonably interesting.

Q: Okay. So today is the 1st of October 2018, and we're resuming our interview with Harvey Leifert, while he is still in Paris from 1975 to 1980. Let's look at, as well, the responsibilities you had with the African posts.

LEIFERT: Okay. Well, I can't remember anymore exactly how many Francophone African posts there were at that time. But, what we did with regard to them was, I think I covered previously, was such programs as preparing the weekly news bulletin that we sent out by air freight every week. Now, you would just do it by computer; I presume they do. And, it covered all the usual things you would expect: life in the U.S., especially, the black community. It had political and cultural information in it. We sent a cover with it every week, but some posts didn't want the cover. They substituted one of their own and added local content about whatever they wanted, their relations, that country's relations with the U.S., to the extent there was something to say.

So that was one major activity. Another major activity was the book translation program, the New Horizons books, Nouveaux Horizons, which were American books translated into French and distributed either free or very inexpensively. It was later supplemented by another series, Tendences Actuelles, which were somewhat more sophisticated books, I think mainly about economic issues and things like that.

And, then we had a speaker program. We would locate French speaking Americans, mostly in France, but anywhere in Europe, and send them down as a counterpart to the Washington based speaker program, which had various names over the years. I think those were the major activities. If I've forgotten one, it might hit me later, and I'll come back to it.

But, oh yeah, the other important part was liaising with the African news media based in Paris, of which there were a lot. These were mainly magazines that were distributed throughout Francophone Africa, getting around the local censorship that made it very difficult and sometimes economically impossible, for those countries to produce weekly or monthly publications of their own. The most famous of these was called Jeune Afrique, which was edited by a young man named Paul Bernetel, who was born in raised in Cameroon. You would say he was an African, except his parents had French citizenship, so, he did, too. He had a French passport and lived in Paris and was legally a Frenchman, but culturally an African. This was the main magazine, I think possibly it still is, that dealt with world affairs from an African perspective.

During my time in Paris, I became aware that in London there were similar publications aimed at the Anglophone African countries. And I persuaded—I'm not sure it took a lot of persuasion—but I persuaded the authorities that I should go over there and have a look, make contact with the editors of those publications and see if there's anything we could do mutually. And that was a very profitable trip, because they were more than interested. And, it involved such things as simply providing what was then called the wireless file.

Q: Now, when you say they, you mean the U.S. embassies down there to distribute or—

LEIFERT: No, no, I'm only talking about people in London at this point. We did not produce a bulletin for Anglophone Africa. But, we did make contact, first on that trip and then about every six months after that; it became a regular thing. I would go to London and meet with the editors of these half a dozen to a dozen publications, but also very importantly, the BBC Africa Service, and just sort of wave the flag a little, and we did such things as provide the wireless file through USIS London. And, the post in London was totally on board. They were happy. They didn't have to divert personnel to do this, and it was somebody else who would do it, without impacting their budget. That sounds a little cynical, but basically they were very helpful. So, I expanded the program in that direction and it continued, at least through my tenure, which ended in mid- or late 1980. And, I presume it went on after that. So, we had all these activities under Africa Regional Services in Paris. There was no comparable sub-unit in London or anywhere else. It also, in those days, got me a trip to Africa every year. Now, I think even desk officers are lucky if they make one trip to their posts during their tour of two or three years. But, at that time, I made an annual trip to Africa and visited some the same and some different countries each time. And, I found that very helpful for me in understanding Africa and African-American issues.

Q: When you went, I imagine the embassy put together a little program for you?

LEIFERT: Yes.

Q: Who did you meet with when you were down there?

LEIFERT: I typically met with editors, journalists, occasionally academics, or other movers and shakers in a given country. But, it was primarily media related—meeting with the people whom we could encourage to use USIS materials, especially the wireless file. But, also other publications, magazines—there were several. There was a USIA magazine called Topic in both French and English editions that was distributed, I think, six times a year in Africa. Was very popular. And then just the usual chatting and helping the local PAO where we could.

Q: Okay. What were your impressions of the state of journalism there? Or, was it more or less a tool of whatever the administration was at the time?

LEIFERT: It was almost entirely the latter. Which doesn't mean that there weren't some good journalists and, although it's not francophone, I think South Africa was the best example of that, that despite all the censorship and pressure, there were some very independent journalists. Some of them were Afrikaners who stood up to the system or worked through or around it the best they could. In the other countries, maybe they weren't so creative, but nevertheless, you could work with them. None of those countries was particularly hostile to the U.S., so that wasn't an issue. It was just that the powers that be wanted to remain the powers that be.

Q: Okay. So, that that turned out to be also an important aspect of the work that you were doing from Paris. Were there others, I mean, for example, were you traveling within France to do other kinds of activities?

LEIFERT: No, almost not at all. I would say not at all. I mean, I traveled in France a lot for fun, sure. Like fun and wine. But, no. The outreach, to the extent we had it, was all local. One of the more difficult parts of my job was that the position I inherited was called Information Student Affairs Officer. No commas, hyphens, or anything. Weird title. My predecessor, Jean Mammen, who had also been my predecessor in Ouagadougou, had developed lots of friendships with African students studying in Paris. And, I think she had sort of a salon in her apartment and was very popular with these people. When I got there, they came to me, expecting the same thing. And, I wasn't really that interested in just hosting soirées. What they really wanted was money. They wanted money to study in the U.S. They wanted scholarships, but there wasn't any such program.

So, I told them as gently as I could that we had nothing here in Paris that could help them study in the U.S. Perhaps, if they contacted the cultural affairs officer at the American Embassy in their home country, that person might know of something. I didn't say they do know something, because I didn't think there was any serious effort to get African students to the U.S. at government expense. So eventually, the stream of African students who came to my office dwindled and stopped, The word gets around. And, I was sad that I had nothing to offer them, but happy in a sense that they weren't taking up my day in being sympathetic and making excuses and all that. I was as nice as I could be, but I couldn't help them in the long run. So that was sad. Anyway, to finish that, I got the name of the position changed, dropped Student Affairs from it. So I just became the Africa Regional Services Information Officer, and that's what I really did.

Q: Now, to step back a second, the U.S. Foreign Service would begin to change starting in 1980 with the Foreign Service Act of 1980. You begin yet to see any changes in the way things were, were done leading up to this in Paris? Because I—

LEIFERT: Yeah, I'm trying to remember what the changes were. I don't even remember the Foreign Service Act of 1980.

Q: Okay. It's just the regularization of a variety of things, like the, equalization of consular officers with the other substantive officers and management officers, and so on. The end of requiring women to resign when they get married, just a whole variety of

things that defined "worldwide available." And, the nature of having to change positions and so on. And, also set up the current version of the hierarchy from going from an FSO-5 or 4 all the way up to Career Ambassador, and set out what the basic requirements were to move from one to another.

LEIFERT: Well, at this remove, I can't say that even that synopsis has jogged my memory about any impact it had on what I do or did. It may have, behind the scenes, in terms of assignments or promotions or whatever. But, in my actual day to day work, as far as I can recall now, no significant effect.

Q: Okay, that's fine. So, unless there are other activities to review here, as you're approaching 1980 and you're getting ready to move to the next assignment, what are you thinking about? You know, do you have a career goal in mind, or are you just sort of thinking for the moment from post to post or what? What's the thinking you've got?

LEIFERT: Well, one thing that had evolved over the years was the institution of the bidding process for new posts. I'm not sure if it was part of that Act or just an administrative thing in State and in USIA. So, my first posts were all just assigned, my JOT posting in Addis, the follow-on in Ouagadougou—I wasn't asked, I was told. And, then the next one was Port-au-Prince, and similarly, I was just assigned there. I think I had been offered Copenhagen, or perhaps that was another administratively assigned post—don't recall. By the time of Paris, that would have been '75, I was offered a choice of three posts: Fez, Yaoundé, and ARS Paris. By 1980, I was a ready for Washington tour, and I was thinking about what that might be.

And, I had about four and a half to five years that I was in Washington, which was good for my wife, further "Americanization" in quotes, because she'd only been there from '70 to '73, having been a Swiss national until then. So, it was good that we could live in Washington and help her improve her English, which was already very good and became quite excellent, as time went by. My first position there was at the Voice of America. I had several things over that period of time. The first one was an evening shift at the Voice of America and we had our, house on Capitol Hill that we sold and moved up to American University Park, and that's where we lived during that period.

Q: And the Voice of America offices or the transmitter was up around there?

LEIFERT: Well, the offices, no, were down at what's now called the Cohen Building between Third and Fourth Streets on Independence Avenue. It was originally the Social Security Building, and I had worked there before as a summer intern right when I started. Well, it was before my career, really.

Q: Ah, it's the WAMU transmitter.

LEIFERT: Yeah. Anyway, I was a writer and editor in the Worldwide English part of VOA and did everything from writing news scripts to editing tape physically, which they don't have to do anymore. They edit sound electronically. And all kinds of things like

that. It was very fun. It was an active newsroom environment, and it was enjoyable work. But, then, at one point, I had the opportunity, and took it, of a mid-career academic assignment, which hadn't much interested me before then.

Q: Just a quick question before you go on to that. To what extent were you censored or advised to keep certain kinds of reporting within certain limits while you were in Voice of America?

LEIFERT: Not at all. Yeah. I don't know what may have happened on a much higher level, but I was never, nor my colleagues, told to slant something one way or another or omit something. I think it was a very honest, very professional news operation. I'm just trying to think, were there exceptions? Not that I know of. I would say it was as good working there as it would have been, or better, than at any of the radio news networks that existed then.

Q: Now, the other question is, Voice of America, its radio transmission could also be picked up by Americans. I am not sure if they could pick it up with their regular FM, but they could certainly get it on shortwave.

LEIFERT: Yes.

Q: That would always raise the question of Smith Mundt restrictions. Were those discussed, or were they a consideration while you were there?

LEIFERT: Well, we were certainly aware of it. We were aware of two laws. One was the VOA Charter, which was, it's an actual law, which protected VOA's integrity as a news operation, provided for editorial comment, clearly labeled as such. That was hanging on the wall in every office, basically, and people relied on it. That was one, though. The other was Smith Mundt, which was only negative, in the sense that it told what we couldn't do, which was directly broadcast into the U.S. It affected all materials produced by USIA: films, magazines, books, whatever. So, yeah, if you had a shortwave radio you could pick up VOA. And I did, because I was something of a shortwave buff since high school days. I would hear, you know, stations from all around the world. In terms of VOA, that wasn't really an issue, because it was recognized as a byproduct. The fact that you could hear it in the U.S. was a byproduct of the fact that it was being broadcast overseas. Well, now you can get VOA on Facebook, no matter where you are. So, I don't know if the law has changed, the interpretation has changed, or just they're ignoring it all.

Q: It's also just interesting you mentioned that you were a bit of a shortwave buff. That was an era when many people were shortwave buffs or CB radio buffs. And, just as a quick aside, as an aspiring Boy Scout, I had to get a merit badge in those things, learn how to actually operate them. And, I think I even had to learn Morse Code. So, even into the early 'eighties, that technology was still a very popular one, and there were many people who took advantage of the opportunity to listen to Arabic programming and so on or even just talk to people in these very distant countries that you could get on this form of transmission that you couldn't get any other way.

LEIFERT: Well, there were two things you raised that are not quite the same. CB radio is not shortwave in the traditional sense. I think actually it's ultra-shortwave? But, the radios that received CB were different from the ones that did traditional shortwave. And, a lot of people got into the CB business—not business, but hobby, because it was easier than getting a ham radio license.

Q: That's it!

LEIFERT: And now, I actually had a ham radio license when I was in high school. Never really used it, but I passed the test and I was K2HHV, until that eventually expired. If you hadn't used it, if you couldn't show a log with actual transmissions, it just went away.

Q: Yeah, yeah, that's what I meant: ham radio.

LEIFERT: As for shortwave, yeah. I listened a lot, and some other people did too. And, VOA was a strong presence in the countries where it was mostly aimed at, like the Soviet Union, which had techniques to block it. I forget what it was called now, whatever the word was used—

Q: Jamming!

LEIFERT: Jamming, that was it!

Q: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And same with Cuba.

LEIFERT: Yes. And China. And meanwhile, those countries were broadcasting into the U.S., and of course we were not jamming them, so you could hear Chinese broadcasts relayed from Albania and Russian broadcasts on like 20 or 30 frequencies at a time. They just blanketed the airwaves. Anyway, I did a stint there.

Then, I had the opportunity to apply for an academic year, and I did that. I'd never been interested in that option before. I'd been through college and graduate school, and I wanted to get out of the academic life and teaching for a couple of years and I did; I wanted to do something different. But by then, it sounded like an attractive proposition. So I applied for the program and got it. I don't know how many people did per year in those days.

And then, there was the question of which university to go to. I could pretty much go to any university I wanted. But, I wanted to stay in the DC area; I didn't want to move yet again. So, it was pretty limited to schools in this area. And, Georgetown reached out to me—the head of a mid-career program they had there in the School of Foreign Service—and I can't remember his name, unfortunately. Sent me a letter inviting me to come over and find out what we could do at Georgetown.

Q: This is '81 now?

LEIFERT: '82 I think into the '83 academic year—might've been the next one. I'm not really sure of those dates.

Q: Was it the master's program?

LEIFERT: It was a certificate program. You got a certificate called Fellow in Foreign Service. I already had a master's, so it wasn't for the academic credentials that I did it.

Q: The reason I ask is, the master's program director at that time was Allen Goodman, if that name rings a bell.

LEIFERT: I don't think so. The name does ring a bell, but I don't think that's who it was. I could be wrong.

Q: Because, I was taking my master's degree there roughly at the same time.

LEIFERT: In the school of Foreign Service? It may have been; I would have to dig back in my files and see if there was anything. But, what was wonderful about that program was, you were free to do pretty much whatever you want. There were maybe 20 people in it, not all Americans, and certainly not all U.S. foreign service. It was meant for people in companies that had international dealings. There was one participant who was from the Nigerian Embassy, based in Washington. And, the rest were Americans. A few were foreign service, one was CIA, but not all. So, we met once a week. We had a seminar, one evening a week. That was the one thing we all had to sign up for. And each week, there was a visiting lecturer on some topic of interest internationally, and we would have the lecture, have a very lively discussion afterward, and that was it. No papers, no tests, nothing like that.

And for the rest, we could design our own curriculum. So, I decided to emphasize African studies and I took on one program notably with Donald McHenry. Don McHenry had been U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations after Andrew Young, who had been eased out after some comments about the Israeli Palestinian situation, which seems to never end. But, he left, and Don became his successor. And then, eventually, he went back to, I think, what had been a prior position at Georgetown in that school. I didn't have a class with him. What I did was to arrange essentially a term paper—an academic year paper—on the negotiations for Namibian independence. This was during the Reagan Administration, and I remember interviewing FSOs, the equivalent of FSOs, at several embassies in town that were active in this situation, including the South African Embassy and several others. And then all kinds of other people who had something to say on the topic, did a lot of academic research, read papers, articles, and submitted a draft. He did critiques of that, a second draft, a third draft, and eventually, it was accepted. And, we'd become friends over this period of time, because it involved a lot of office hours with him.

In addition to that, I took several classes. I don't remember what they were, but one at least was in the French department, to help improve my French. And, I think that was very helpful. To be honest, I don't remember what the other ones were. But, the other nice thing was, I got to use their athletic facilities, so I should use the pool, the gym, the running track, all that sort of thing, at no cost. So, I really enjoyed that academic year, finally, on all fronts. And, it was a very helpful experience, because later—I'm jumping ahead—but it helped me get the postings to Johannesburg and Windhoek later in my career. But, anyway, after that year was over, I did some time in the Africa Area office of USIA. I'm trying to remember if that's the time when I was the, what we called the desk officer, really country affairs officer, for Francophone West Africa.

Q: Oh, so you concluded the executive master's at the end of '84?

LEIFERT: Think it was mid '83, and it wasn't a master's, just that certificate. I'm a little fuzzy on the dates, but, it was around then, within a year. Okay. And I then went back to USIA headquarters for another couple of years, or a year and a half, at least. At one point I was assigned to WorldNet, which was the then nascent television service. It didn't do live broadcasts of TV shows, as VOA does now. Mainly, it was set up to be a two-way with posts, where they would assemble in a studio, usually at the local TV station, a panel on some topic, and we would have an expert on that topic in Washington in our studios. And, it was sort of like a press conference or a lecture plus Q and A. It was sort of innovative at that time, because satellite technology, which it depended on, was relatively new then. It was the brainchild of Reagan's USIA director, Charles Wick.

And, part of the package was that USIA provided satellite dishes to broadcasters in Africa especially, and I presume elsewhere in the developing world, that would participate in WorldNet. And, then they could also get other programs that were beamed on this satellite, and for the rest they could do with it what they want. They used it to point to other stations. But, as long as they would do the WorldNet things when it was relevant to their country, then we were happy. So, that was a huge financial investment. But, it was the first time that some of these stations had any kind of satellite connection. A few had already; the French were doing something similar in Francophone Africa. But, anyway, I was in the office that produced these, and I was mainly the area expertise for Africa in the WorldNet office.

And then, part of the time, it was back in the African area office itself, overseeing USIA programs in Francophone West Africa. While in the area office, I made annual trips to African posts, including to countries that I had never before visited: Conakry, Guinea; Nouakchott, Mauritania; Banjul, Gambia; and Bissau, Guinea-Bissau. Now, of those, only Conakry is actually francophone, but our office handled all of them for administrative and logistical reasons. Only Conakry had an actual USIS post. We provided funds to the American embassies in the other countries to offer minimal services, especially distribution of materials. We paid for an FSN at each place to facilitate that. What I discovered was that the USIS-type activities were vanishingly minimal and that the FSN was mostly serving State's needs, not USIA's. I recommended that we just close these minimal distribution posts and save the money. Further, I could

not see any relation between the issues affecting Mauretania and those typical of most of our sub-Saharan posts. I proposed that we transfer USIA's activities there, minimal as they were, to the office that handled North Africa, where the appropriate expertise lay. Both of my recommendations were actually put into effect.

So, all together, I was in in Washington for about five years. My wife was able to work while we were in Washington, but it was not easy, because she did not have a university degree, which was not unusual for Swiss women at that time. Her sister did, but that was unusual. Most women did not go to university, and she did not. And without having that credential, even though she was fully qualified for a lot of the positions she applied for, she couldn't get them. But, happily, the African American Institute [AAI] did hire her. That was an organization that had a number of programs of its own, but it was a key programming agency for U.S. Government-sponsored international visitors from Africa. When an African post would nominate an international visitor for what was then a 30 day program in the U.S., AAI was the place where that program was established. They knew what the post's objectives were with this person, what kind of people he or she should meet. And, they would set up a program, visiting a number of places around the country. AAI also had a few other activities, but that's what Claudine was involved with. So, that was enjoyable to her, something she could do and did do.

Q: Did she actually serve as one of the escorts?

LEIFERT: No. No, but I did, I was able to use my influence both at USIA and at AAI to do one escort trip. It was not French speaking. It was a gentleman from Lesotho in southern Africa, and he was a government minister of something or other, some infrastructural program. I don't even remember what it was. And, we went around the country. I remember a number of stops, including in Helena, Montana, where we were received by the governor at that time, and the visitor was invited to sit in the governor's chair. The governor was really very pleasant, very helpful. I don't remember his name.

We also went to a number of other places. I remember Madison, Wisconsin. We started off, as was often the case with IVs, at Disney World in Florida. And where else? The Navajo Reservation, Las Vegas. I don't really remember all, but, yeah, four or five places, ending up in New York. I was very positive about the experience for me, and I highly recommended that every USIA officer should do this at least once in his or her career and preferably much earlier on than I did, because it gives you a totally new perspective.

What I learned about the international visitor program was that there were a number of organizations involved in it, and they all have ownership of it. For example, the post nominates somebody; it's their visitor. Once in the U.S., it's USIA's program, or State's, especially if the visitor is a political figure back home. This person is coming to America under USIA auspices, and he or she is our visitor. The program agency, like AAI—and there were at least half a dozen others—it's their visitor. They're the ones who arranging the program. "Our" visitor from Africa is going to these places. Then, you get to a particular city, and there it's the local organization in that city—the World Affairs Council of Toledo, Ohio, or whatever. "We" have an international visitor coming to Toledo, and

we are showing him this and that and the other thing and getting him in the paper, and all that. And I thought that was just wonderful. I think it was totally a by-product. It wasn't planned that way, but everybody took ownership of this program and helped make it a success. And it was a success. I mean, there were all kinds of statistics about how many future heads of state or government had participated in it over the years, and not just those, but all kinds of leaders, because the posts very good at picking out up and coming people.

Q: Oh, yeah, I mean names like Margaret Thatcher and good Lord, all these European leaders were among the ones who did these kinds of programs.

LEIFERT: Absolutely. Yeah. So it was a fun activity from every point of view. Even the escort may even have taken ownership. "My" visitor is going here and there and the other. I was hopeful that others would do it, but I don't think that ever happened. I don't know how many active FSOs have done even one such tour, and they're shorter nowadays, not 30 days, anymore. But I still think they should.

Q: You also just mentioned that your wife had worked also in Washington while you were there.

LEIFERT: Right. It was the first time she had had a job that lasted several years since we were married and one that was reasonably—well, they were all reasonably professional, but in Paris she had worked in the both in the visa section for a while and also in the econ section for a while. The interesting thing about her stint in the econ section was, it included the year of the Paris Air Show that involved the arms deal of the century, as it was called. It was a question of whether NATO would adopt one of three fighter planes as its standard for the next whatever number of years. There was the American F16. There was a French Mirage, I don't know what model, and a Swedish plane, the Viggen, also. The Paris Air Show, which involved a lot of other things as well, included a demonstration of these three planes in action. It took place at Le Bourget airport outside of Paris, and she worked really hard on it, as did the whole econ section, for months leading up to it. And then, during the week or whatever it was of the show itself, the F16 won handily, through its demonstration at the airport.

I don't credit Claudine with having caused that, but she got an award from the Commerce Department for her work on it, which she was very proud of. But still, it was only maybe for a year or so that she was in the econ section, and the rest of it wasn't nearly as exciting. But, at AAI, she handled visitor after visitor, and it was reasonably satisfying.

Q: So, where next?

LEIFERT: Well, we're now up to 1984, or let's say toward the end of my Washington tour and bidding on foreign assignments, and Johannesburg was opening up in '85. And, that was at the top of my list. It may have been the only thing on my list, I don't know. But, I really wanted to go there, because I had been intrigued by South Africa since that first visit in 1976. And, I even went back one more time, while I was still based in Paris, but it

was that first visit that was the mind boggling and eye opening trip. I really wanted to go back. I thought it was an exciting place.

I bid on Johannesburg. The area director at USIA headquarters, the area director for sub-Saharan Africa, was then a State Department officer on, I forget the phrase they used, but like an exchange program. Excursion, perhaps? He went to USIA for a tour, and some USIA person presumably went to State for a tour, for enrichment or cross-fertilization, or whatever. What I did not know was that he and his deputy director, who was a career USIA FSO, had assumed that the deputy would get that post, Johannesburg. He was area director, was in favor of it, and they were lobbying for it, I learned later. I knew none of this. I just put in my form and didn't do anything to promote it. The fact that I had gone to Georgetown for that year and had studied African affairs in particular—

Q: And Namibian independence, in which South Africa had a big role.

LEIFERT: The main role! Yes, that actually is what swung the balance, as I later learned. I was awarded that post, and the area director, whom I barely knew, was furious. Because, he had been working the backstage strings, whatever, mixing metaphors. And, he just assumed it was a done deal, because he, the area director, was in favor. But, the counterargument was that, well, the Agency had invested a lot of money in sending me for African studies, and particularly on issues about southern Africa, and it made sense for me to go to Jo'burg. Although it was a branch post, it was actually bigger than the mother post in Pretoria. USIS Pretoria was more of an administrative center, and we had three branch posts, in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban. The Branch PAOs, and especially in Johannesburg, dealt with the media in those areas. Now, the main media were in Johannesburg, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the biggest national newspapers, both in English and Afrikaans, and even one or two aimed at the black population, such as The Sowetan. They were all in Johannesburg.

In addition, Soweto is a suburb of Johannesburg, and that's where all the ferment was. We had a library in Soweto. It wasn't my doing; it was already there. It had been for years. And, it was a really important operation. So, for all these reasons being in—I'll get back to the specifics of that when we talk about the actual post. But, for all these reasons, Johannesburg was a really important post, and I was very thrilled to get that BPAO assignment.

Claudine, my wife, was not so thrilled. I mean, she knew about apartheid and all the things that were going on there, and it was somewhat dangerous. I wouldn't exaggerate that, but there were occasional bombings and things like that. She was not excited about going, but as we can talk about later, she later really got into it. So, I got the assignment; it was not broken, and in March of 1985, we left for Johannesburg. I remember the trip itself. My wife had had some kind of accident in which her foot was injured, or ankle, or something like that, and, she had a cast on at the time we were supposed to fly down there. And, on the basis of this medical necessity, the need to stretch her leg, she was able to get business class, a business class ticket on the flights. I was not! I was supposed to sit

in economy, as usual. Well, I paid for an upgrade to sit next to her, but I thought that was particularly chintzy on the agency's part.

I should mention that I learned Afrikaans before heading to South Africa. It was my third language acquired in the foreign service, and each one was more difficult than the previous one—not the difficulty of the language itself, but the method of learning it. As you may recall, my first was French, which was a full-out FSI experience: a rotating staff of instructors, a dedicated book, and tapes. It worked well for me. Next was Danish: a poorly trained instructor at first, luckily later replaced by a professional Danish language teacher, no FSI textbook, just a so-so commercially available one. For Afrikaans, there was no FSI program, although a textbook and tapes had been developed and were in what we would now call Beta testing. Some State FSOs apparently had access to that material, but the person in charge at FSI would not extend that opportunity to me, as a USIA officer. Instead, they contracted with a private language school—I forget which one—to teach me. The school hired South African students as their instructors, and I had the impression they were just winging it. It was slow going and far worse than even my original experience with Danish. I somehow emerged with a 3-3, but unhappy with the process.

There was a coda. A year or two into my tenure in Johannesburg, I received a request from the very person who had denied me access to the developing FSI Afrikaans materials. He wanted me to purchase some books and/or magazines in Afrikaans and pouch them to FSI to help train current students. I wrote back, saying no, I don't plan to do that, as you denied me the opportunity to study Afrikaans with your new book. He apparently barely recalled that incident and pleaded to my better nature to help future colleagues acquire Afrikaans. I eventually gave in, of course, but gained some satisfaction from not doing so immediately.

Once at post, I hardly used Afrikaans professionally. The one exception was being able to follow news and discussions on SABC-TV, which broadcast alternate evenings in English and Afrikaans. I also skimmed Afrikaans newspapers for relevant stories. Upon arrival, I also asked our FSNs which African language I should learn. There were about a dozen, but just a few major ones—Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana. To my surprise, they advised me not to learn any African language, the reason being, "only the Security Police learn our languages well, and you will be suspected if you speak one." So, although I picked up a few polite phrases, mainly in Zulu, that was it.

Q: So, what year do you go down there?

LEIFERT: March, 1985, early March. I think it was March 5th or something like that. Right after my birthday, which was February 28th. So, we got there and were met and taken—I can't remember if we stayed a few days in a hotel or not, but we were taken to my predecessor's house in Lower Houghton, one of the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, which were the white, middle and upper class residential areas. And, we lived there for a while, but we didn't like the house; it had a lot of things wrong with it, functionally, although it was in a wonderful location. So, we started looking for a

different place, and it took a long time to find something within the housing allowance and meeting our needs, and so on. But, we did eventually find one in a suburb called Morningside, which was farther out, but in the same direction, north of Johannesburg, in city called Sandton, which has since become a really big hub. But, at that time, Sandton was one high rise building, maybe 20 to 25 floors, with offices and a nice mall, a very nice mall, and some other businesses, but not otherwise exciting. It was at that time a bit removed from downtown. Later it became a much bigger city. You're looking for it on the map, right?

Q: Well at that time, what were the major industries or economic sources of development in Johannesburg?

LEIFERT: It was the center of the mining industry, especially gold, diamonds, some other minerals, but those were the sexy ones. We are looking at the map. Here is Johannesburg; you know, Pretoria is like a quarter of an inch away, so it doesn't show anything in between. But, you can see Sandton on a larger scale map, if you have one somewhere.

Q: The interesting thing about this map is, it's older; it still shows the Soviet Union, and it still shows the old homelands that the South Africans created as part of apartheid, to keep, you know, a majority or certainly many of the black and colored races separated from them.

LEIFERT: Interestingly, it doesn't include all of them. There are, let's see, one, two, three, four on this map—and I think there were 10. But, that whole thing is another story. But, anyway, we found a nice house there. We were able to rent it through the embassy, yeah, through the embassy. And, we were very happy there in that house. No security really. I mean, based on what happened later, this was incredible. It had a fence, I mean, a wall around the property, which may have been a quarter of an acre. It was big. The wall was, however, only about six feet high. It provided privacy, but it would've been easy to breach. It had a gate where you drive in. We never closed the gate, much less locked it. We certainly locked the house, and it had bars on the windows, or at least some of them.

But, we didn't think security was a major issue. At that time even, most of the South Africans' houses did have much higher walls—and dogs. You could walk down the street, and you would hear dogs barking behind the walls, and you couldn't see what was on the other side. But, these dogs would be barking, snarling, and, it was really very uncomfortable. You just hoped that gates were locked. So, that was our experience getting a house there, and I went downtown every day by bus. The post was located in an office building on the third floor, separate from the consulate-general, which was about two blocks away on the same street, Commissioner Street. Both offices have long since moved several times. The first time I had visited, back in '76, USIS was in a different building, sort of diagonally across the street from the one I would be working in.

Our building was called the African Life Centre, named for the insurance company that owned it. We were on the third floor. And, one story I remember that Jake Jacobson, the Branch PAO back in '76, told me at the time was, they were also on the third floor of that

building across the street. There was an elevator. Blacks were not allowed to use the elevator. So, nobody at USIS used the elevator. The American staff was, I think, all white, or most of the time was all white. And they always walked up the three floors, because it really was three floors. The ground floor is zero. Every time. And, I think that made a kind of statement. In our building, the one that I was in from 1985, that was not even an issue, anymore. Blacks could use the elevator, and we all used the elevator, also to the third floor.

On the third floor, we had our offices and a library, and—I don't know how much detail you want about the program we conducted there, but—

Q: Well, certainly, you know, at least enough to give people an idea of what your average day was like or what, what you were expected to do, what your mission goals were.

LEIFERT: Well, we had a Branch PAO, who was me at that time. We had a cultural affairs officer, Kate Delaney during my tenure. We had another officer, a first tour after JOT, Susan Wagner, who eventually married a South African and became Susan Wagner Crystal and may still be an active FSO. At least, she was the last time I saw her a few years ago. Anyway, we had those three Americans. For a while, we had a JOT of our own. And, we had a large local staff, which was multiracial and multicultural, which is to say—it's hard to use all the terms they used then—but, among the whites, we had both English speaking and Afrikaans speaking people. Among the blacks and what we called "so-called" coloreds, they were from all different ethnic groups. Also, at least one Indian. They all got along fine, contrary to the national propaganda, which was that these ethnic groups all hated each other, and if it weren't for the apartheid system keeping them apart, especially the black, what they called, tribes from one another, they would be at war with each other.

We were an example of this not happening, as were the other branch posts. So, we had all these people, some of them were professional, some were administrative, you know, drivers, that kind of activity, but they all got along. And, what did we do? The library was open five days a week, starting, I think, at 10 o'clock. The principle of USIS libraries, worldwide, was to have American materials available to the local population, so they could read and learn about the United States. So, we didn't have Shakespeare, 'cause he was not an American, but we did have American fiction and nonfiction, American magazines, and all that.

Every day at 10 o'clock, the doors opened, and a stream of young black students who had been waiting patiently outside the door poured in to the library, and very few of them consulted any of the materials there. They liked Ebony magazine. But aside from that, they were there to do their homework and study, because at home they had no electricity. In most cases, they may not have a space to study quietly. They certainly had no indoor plumbing, and all those things made it really hard. So, they would come in and spend hours at our library. I don't know when they actually went to school, but the schooling wasn't so great for black students, in any case. So, they would come in, and they were very quiet, very respectful. They occasionally would look at one of our materials. But, we

just figured, this is a really good use of our facilities. If they remember later that they were accepted at USIS, that the Americans gave them a place to study where it's warm and dry, that could be all to the good.

And in fact, I remind myself that on two occasions over the years there, I heard a very similar story. I remember the first one in particular: an elderly black man—I don't remember where I ran into him and under what circumstances—but when I told him that I ran the USIS library, he said something to the effect of, well, I'm very happy to meet you, because when I was young, that was the only place I could go and read a book and where I got a lot of my education. I had very little school. But, your library always made me feel welcome. And, I heard something like that again on another occasion. I presume there were many such people, so we were happy to do that.

Another thing we did that would seem sort of quaint nowadays was, we broadcast the news, well, we didn't broadcast it, we showed it on video. USIA had a contract with ABC News to record their evening news. It was, I think, with Peter Jennings at that time. They would record it in Washington every night, and they would edit it down to a one hour package for the whole week, obviously leaving out the commercials. So, that brought it down to 20 minutes a day. Anyway, they would strip out the purely domestic and fluffy stuff and leave in all the important national and especially international news. Now, the international news always almost always included what was going on in South Africa. And that was in there—this same package went all over the world. It wasn't just for us. We would get it by diplomatic pouch. It was before we had a satellite dish, and we would have it a week to maybe two weeks delay after the last date on the recording. And, despite the time lag, we had a standing program every whatever day of the week it was, in the evening. We would show the ABC News, and our auditorium was packed every time. I'm not sure how much they were interested in news about China, but the two or three minutes about South Africa that was on each evening's program, boy, that fascinated them, because they learned things they would never see on the SABC or even read about in their papers. So, that was a very popular activity and one that built a lot of credibility for us.

And then, beyond that, we had the usual run of the speakers sent out by USIA that would tour around Africa, and they covered a wide variety of topics. We usually had good talks by them. I gave some talks of my own a number of times, and one incident, I remember really well.

There was an organization, maybe still is, called the Union of Jewish Women. And, I don't think they knew I was Jewish, but they wanted to have somebody from the American Embassy or Consulate give a talk on current affairs, U.S.-Africa or South Africa relations. It was in Jo'burg. So, I decided to do it. I went, and it was a program they had, which lasted all day, I think, different speakers on different topics. I got there maybe 15 or 20 minutes early, and I just sort of slipped into a seat in the back of the room and listened to the previous speaker and the Q and A period that followed it. Then, when that person left, I got up and introduced myself to the chair or whoever was running the program. And, she said, oh, we're so relieved. When you came in and sat down and

nobody recognized you, we thought you were probably from the security police. They were really afraid they would be shut down or arrested or worse. As it turned out, there was, as far as we could tell, no one from the security police there, but it shows the kind of paranoia, much of it well taken, that existed at the time.

Q: Did you have any contact with the Johannesburg Jewish community? If I'm not mistaken, there is a reasonable size one.

LEIFERT: Yes. And, it was somewhat controversial. There was a huge number of Jews in the Johannesburg area and in the Cape Town area, especially. They had a number of synagogues and some organizations like the one I just mentioned, and there were a lot of Jewish activists, Helen Suzman being the most outstanding example. She was a Member of Parliament, probably the only Jewish Member of Parliament, and for some years the only member of her party. If it weren't for Suzman, it would have been 100% National Party. So, she was the one exception. We can talk about her after.

But, as a community, there was a very little activism. I had a friend there, Barbara Ludman, who was a reporter for a newspaper called the Rand Daily Mail, and we can also talk about the Mail after, separately. But anyway, she was a reporter. She was Jewish, and she wrote a column soon after my arrival, titled, "Where are the rabbis?" Her statement, her argument, was that whenever we see some kind of protest march, it's led by a number of clergymen, linked arms, walking at the head of the march. There's Desmond Tutu who was then not the archbishop, just a priest, and the Catholic equivalent, and a few others. And, she said, we never see a rabbi. And why is that? Well, apparently, in her estimation, and I think borne out by others, there was a kind of an unspoken, unwritten deal that the Nationalist government, which in its roots was virulently antisemitic, in its origins back in the forties, would allow Jewish South Africans to donate money to Israel far in excess of what their exchange controls permitted in general for anyone to change money. They had a very restricted currency, the rand. And the quid pro quo was that the Jewish community would just cool it on questions of apartheid and the political situation in general. So, it didn't prevent individual Jews from being active, and many were. But, as a community, if this unwritten agreement, which is what I would have to call it, was true, that was the reason that you didn't see rabbis protesting overtly and leading their congregations to do things overtly.

Q: Now how long were you in Jo'burg?

LEIFERT: From '85 to '89.

Q: Okay. So you're there almost to the point where it changes, or beginning to, but did any of that change for the Jewish community in the period of time you were there, or did that begin to change in the Jewish community in terms of openness to opposition to apartheid?

LEIFERT: I don't think so, with regard to the Jewish community as a community. There was certainly a lot of liberalization going on, loosening of what had once been tight

restrictions on the micro level, what they called petty apartheid. That had to do with where you could sit and where you could pee and where you could go to a library, things like that. I'm not saying they all changed, but that kind of thing was where there was some relaxation of what had once been rather draconian restrictions, but on what they called grand apartheid, no, there was no obvious movement, either by the Jewish community or other whites. Certainly not Afrikaners. By grand apartheid, they meant the underlying principle that the African ethnic groups were separate—separate what?—separate peoples entitled to their own land. These spots on the map that they created, homelands, they would be reasonably sovereign in their areas, although not including foreign affairs.

They would not have any political rights in South Africa itself, and that would just be the way it was. So, there were 10 of these: KwaZulu for the Zulu people, Bophuthatswana for the Tswana people, the same ethnic group that lives in Botswana, neighboring it, the Swazis—everyone else. Each of those groups had its own little homeland, as they were called. And the principle was, they should all move there. Most of them had never been, I mean, the ones that lived in Johannesburg had never been to these places. That was grand apartheid, and that was not going to budge. But the petty apartheid, okay, we can make some accommodations. So, I don't think I anticipated that anything big was going to happen just two years after I left the post.

Q: Now, you had mentioned that you wanted to go back and talk about Helen Suzman.

LEIFERT: Yes, Helen Suzman was a phenomenon, the only Member of Parliament who represented the Progressive Party, in opposition to the ruling National Party. She was elected from Houghton, which is the suburb of Johannesburg where I first lived, when we got there, the house we eventually gave up. I met her once, much later. She represented that area, a solidly white liberal-ish area. And, she used her authority as a Member of Parliament, though the only one from her party, to do such things as visit prisons. Now, any Member of Parliament had the right to visit prisons and talk to inmates and see how things were going in the prisons. I'm not sure if any of them did, but she did. And, she did it repeatedly, and she reported on conditions, and she did other things like that. She just took the authority that she had as a Member of Parliament and used it to the hilt. And, I noticed, the last time I was in Cape Town, just a few years ago, there's now a Helen Suzman Boulevard there, and trust me, very few whites have places named for them nowadays.

Q: And the other person you had mentioned was a journalist, a woman journalist whose name I'm forgetting.

LEIFERT: Barbara Ludman? Barbara was a writer for the Rand Daily Mail. It was probably the most liberal newspaper of its time in South Africa, which was up to early 1985. Very soon after I got there, it closed. The Rand Daily Mail was owned by the Anglo-American Corporation, which is a mining company. It's not particularly Anglo or American, but that's the name, and I don't really remember the origin, but in any case, they do a lot of the mining, especially of gold and diamonds. And they had owned this

newspaper and they finally decided it was not making a profit. That might've been the official reason they decided to close it, but they certainly had very few advertisers, because advertisers were not going to take the risk of advertising in this paper that often opposed government policy.

Now everybody who worked there got a very decent severance package. Some of them, led by Anton Harber, took their money—and Barbara was one of them—to create a new newspaper, which they called the Weekly Mail. It was obviously weekly, not a daily, like the Rand Daily Mail, but they wanted to carry its tradition of liberal reporting and investigation into issues, and so on. And they did that for many years, very successfully. They were eventually bought out by the Guardian, which renamed it the Mail & Guardian. As far as I know, it still exists, but all the original people, I guess, have long retired.

I know Anton Harber went on to become a professor of journalism at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, and he may still be doing that, or he may have retired by now as well. And he, they all together, carried on that tradition. They were, to me, real heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle. They would do things that on the face of it were illegal. They would take something that the State President, who was P.W. Botha at the time, had said, and, they would oppose it, say it was incorrect. And, I would ask Anton, well, you know, isn't this a violation of the law—I can't give you specifics; I don't remember them—to come up against them like this? And, he said, no. We're not supposed to condemn an official government action. But, here, clearly what Botha said was not what he meant. He was not in his right mind, or words to that effect. So, it couldn't have been the actual government policy, what he said. Anyway, this went on for some years.

I don't want to omit a few very courageous Afrikaner journalists, some of whom were jailed. There was an editor, Harald Pakendorf, who ran one of the Afrikaans papers, and I can't say he was a liberal, but he was way on the verligte, enlightened, end of the Afrikaner movement. And, he certainly wanted to see a much greater liberalization of the petty apartheid and treating more people, more black people, with dignity and respect, even though keeping the political system firmly in white hands, but still even that much took a lot of courage. He was one of the people we sent on an IV trip, an international visitor trip to the States..

So, I dealt with a huge number of journalists. A pioneer was Percy Qoboza, a thorn in the side of the government, who died while I was in Johannesburg. Rich Mkhondo, who had written for a black newspaper and later, after apartheid crumbled, for the Star, a Johannesburg based paper; later, he became editor of the Pretoria News. He had worked for Reuters way back then when I was there. As a writer for Reuters, he had a little more freedom and flexibility than if he were writing for a local paper. So, he would send his dispatches out on Reuters, and the local papers in South Africa could use them or not, but the news got out in other countries. He's written a few books, a couple of books, and is really nice guy, really good reporter. Sadly, I've lost touch with him over the years, but I'm hoping he's still going strong. [He is, I learned later.]

Q: So this is the, press side, sort of the press and media side of your job. What about the cultural side?

LEIFERT: Yeah, I don't even want to finish with the press side yet. There was the South African Broadcasting Corporation, the behemoth, the only TV broadcaster and the, almost the, only radio broadcaster. They broadcast in English, Afrikaans, and all of the principal African languages as well. All the same line, of course, no matter which language it was. They had a radio program called Radio Today. It was on every morning, and it was sort of—I don't want to draw the parallel too closely—something like Morning Edition on NPR. It was a roundup of news with correspondents' reports from various places, and they had two Washington based correspondents, both Americans, who would report to them on news about U.S.-South African relations, and they did a pretty straight job of it, I have to say. So, if the Congress did something, pass a resolution or whatever, they would report that and seemed to get it on the air. And, I got to know the program host pretty well—her husband was of Swiss origin, like my wife—and sat in once or twice during the broadcast, just to see how it went.

But, they were the sole real broadcasters. Now, there were a couple of exceptions. The fact that you had all these homelands that could run their own internal affairs meant they could have their own radio stations. So, a few of them did and were able to broadcast strongly enough that you could hear it in Johannesburg, Pretoria or wherever they were near. And well, they didn't take any bold steps. They could sometimes go beyond what the official South African line was in broadcasting their version of the news. I wouldn't say any of them were crusading journalists, but sometimes they added a dimension that wasn't otherwise there. Yeah.

Let me give you another example. Before I arrived, just before I arrived, the MacNeil Lehrer News Hour, as it was called then, had sent a reporter and producer to South Africa to do a series of reports on apartheid. It was Charlene Hunter-Gault, who later had a long career at PBS. She did, I think it was a five-part series, called Apartheid's People, and it was interviews and, you know, all kinds of reporting on life in the black townships, as they were called, the black areas, residential areas, mostly in the Johannesburg area. That was all done before I arrived, but it took a while to produce it. And, then it was aired on PBS. We got those tapes and—I mean, with permission—and we showed them at USIS, at all of our branches in South Africa. We showed them repeatedly, because we couldn't get all the people that wanted to see them into our auditorium at one time. And, these reports were stunning. I mean, nothing like this had ever been on the SABC, interviews with blacks of all types, professionals, students, homemakers, you know, everybody, and how their lives were impacted by the apartheid system.

One of the programs focused on a particular township on the East Rand, an area east of Johannesburg, one of the other townships that Americans rarely heard about. Everybody knew about Soweto. One of the programs in the Charlene Hunter-Gault series was about this town. We invited the people from that town to come and see it at USIS. We couldn't take it there. That would be illegal. So, we had the equivalent of the mayor of the

township and some of the community leaders, and all the people who were actually interviewed on the program, in our auditorium. And, we showed them not just their segment but the whole series, and they were astounded. They said, this is amazing. So, we invited a larger group from that township on the East Rand to our auditorium for a special screening of this series from PBS. Afterwards, the leader, the person I'm calling the mayor, but I don't really remember exactly what his position was. He may have been a religious leader; he told us, you know, that was a wonderful experience for us, not just to see the, the program, but because we were able to get together with each other in ways we usually don't back home. We don't have a proper community center or anything like that.

And we came up with an idea, my colleagues and I, and he, that we would have regular programs at USIS, specifically for this community. And, there was always an actual program. We would show a film, or we'd have a speaker, or we would do something. But then, after it was over, the Americans would withdraw, and they would have a community meeting on their own and talk about whatever they wanted, and we didn't know what it was. So, you know, that would go on for a half hour or an hour, and then they would go home. We did that any number of times. The person who coordinated that mostly was the aforementioned Susan Wagner, on her first post-JOT tour. So, she would organize this, I think it was monthly, program for the residents of that community. And, it went on for a couple of years, at least, maybe to the point where it was no longer needed, that they were able to find a way of meeting back home. But, we always had the basic America-related program that was the rationale for their coming to this place. And, it worked very well.

Now, another cultural activity we had, I mentioned that we had a library in Soweto. It had been there for many years. It was in the YMCA. There was a YMCA in Soweto and we had— it was either the top floor or part of the top floor—a room with a lot of books. It was not a huge library by our standards, but it was the only library in Soweto, and it got a pretty good crowd, but it was in a cramped space. And after I was there for a while, the people at the Y said, you know, we really need that space for our own programs. Can you find another place to have your library?

And that launched a lengthy investigation. Soweto was not a place where there's lots of vacant office buildings or anything like that; it's a very poor residential area. But, they had a few institutions like the Y. One place they had was an Episcopal, or as they call it, Anglican church, run by Reverend David Nkwe. The church authorities, probably with a lot of foreign help, had just put up a beautiful new community center for them. It included an actual church and some classroom space. And, then there was an area that had been intended to be a library, but they had no funds to operate a library or buy materials to put in a library. And we arranged with them that we would create the library.

What we did was two things. First, and this is all in coordination with Washington, of course, at the YMCA, we told them we were donating the entire existing book collection to them, and we would pay for the librarian whom we had supported for one more year, and they could do whatever they wished—have it as a library of their own and add to it, or whatever. So, we gave them the books, and we gave them the person for one year, we

paid for the person. At the new place, the Ipelegeng Center, as it was called, we arranged with the Reverend Nkwe and his staff to put in a USIS library and pay for a librarian there. They could add to it any other books they wanted on other subjects, but we would have essentially an American library, as elsewhere. They could augment it, and there could be programs conducted at the library.

And, everybody thought this was a great idea, and it was done. Susan Wagner again was the point person on this. She would go out to Soweto once or twice a week to work on it; she usually went alone. Here was this young white woman driving to Soweto, which the government thought was like a suicide mission. And, she did it repeatedly. I mean, I did too. We all did, and no problem, ever. We also went there for weddings and funerals of our staff members' families and were always warmly welcomed. So, we had that library set up within, I don't know, a year or two years. And, I think it's still there. I think it's functioning. I don't know how it's evolved over the years. I'm sure Reverend Nkwe is retired by now. His wife ran an orphanage. They were very active people, but not overtly political people. This was maybe a little bit of a stretch for them, but it was the only way they were going to have a library at their center.

So, that was an important activity, and it got people who didn't come into our Johannesburg library at least to a facility that was attractive. It was; it was a modern building that had just been put up and, they had access to our materials and whatever else. We put in a satellite dish, so they could get those WorldNet interviews and broadcasts and anything else they wanted to get on the satellite. So yeah, it was a great activity. And it's an example of the way we came at apartheid indirectly. We did what we could when we could, and we hope it had some effect, as Chet Crocker used to say, at the margins. We weren't the force that overthrew apartheid, but maybe we contributed a bit.

Q: You know, while you were there, you were under the, policy of constructive engagement. How did that play out, if at all, in the work that you did?

LEIFERT: Actually, constructive engagement dated back even to when I was at Georgetown; part of that paper I wrote for Don McHenry was about the Reagan Administration's constructive engagement policy. The policy was not liked by anyone, really, in South Africa. The blacks thought it was a sellout, that we were just supporting the government, you know, pure and simple. The whites though we didn't go far enough. I mean the Afrikaners, especially—but, I mean it was really just a phrase. I think our relations with them were similar—I mean, the way they were conducted—was similar to other countries. What did happen during that period was that Congress passed the CAAA, the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act and that, among other things, put a prohibition on the importation of South African goods, including agricultural products.

Now, today I can buy South African oranges at Trader Joe, and they were exporting them back then. But, that was stopped by the CAAA. And, importantly, wine is also an agricultural product, and they have some decent wines. They're better now than they were then, but even then, they had some good wines that they liked to export, and that was cut off, suddenly. Now, President Reagan vetoed the CAAA; Congress passed it over his

veto. As I related previously, it went into effect just about the time that Ambassador Nickel, Reagan's appointee, was winding up his tour and leaving. He had assembled a huge cellar of South African wines that he was planning to ship back and pay the duty, of course, but nevertheless ship back case after case of good South African wines. And now, all of a sudden, it was illegal. I don't know what became of them, if he sold them back in South Africa or what. But, we always thought that he was perhaps—when I say we, I think most of the staff members I knew—maybe a little too close to the apartheid government in philosophy, as well as in normal dealings. And, we were all sort of amused at the very least, at the fact that, the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act affected him directly and personally.

Q: Did gold and diamonds escape the CAAA?

LEIFERT: No, it was important. Another important export they had were Krugerrands, which are gold coins, which are traded on commodities markets, and technically it's worth one rand, the same as an ordinary coin, but it's gold, so it's actually worth a lot more. And, they may have been already under some kind of embargo even before that, but certainly after that—I think even before. So, it affected all of those commodities as well.

Q: Okay. So now should we turn to the cultural activities?

LEIFERT: Yeah, well, the libraries are part of that. We had, as I said, we had speakers come in. Of course, on our premises we always had multicultural audiences. When they spoke at universities, it was whoever was allowed to go to that university. There were black universities, a colored university. There were Afrikaans universities and English speaking universities. They had a lot of universities, and also what they call technikons, sort of like community colleges, aimed at preparation for one kind of trade or another. And some of them were quite good, and they had those for different racial groups, also. So, our speakers would speak at relevant institutions like that, of all ethnic stripes. What else did we do? It was hard to do much else, because of the UN boycotts. The sports boycott and the cultural boycott meant that very few—although the U.S. never officially supported those—it meant that it was difficult to get people willing to come.

And then, we thought that if a South African audience could see the multicultural successes of the U.S. through sports teams or performing groups, it could only help. But, a lot of them just accepted the UN embargo and refused to come. But, one or two did, made very good impressions—taught people how to, whatever it was: paint, weave, play the trombone, anything. We did have some, but not to the extent as at other posts where there was not a political issue in coming in the first place.

Whether the embargoes had any real effect—and also the business embargoes—it's hard to say, the disinvestments and all that. Probably, what hurt the most were the sports boycotts. It's a very sports loving country—was then, and they were not allowed in the Olympics. There were very few, if any, international competitions they could participate in. I remember one exception was that the New Zealand rugby team was coming to South

Africa for some matches. Now, the New Zealand team is called the All Blacks, for the color of their uniforms, which was hilarious because, you had these weird headlines in sports newspapers, like All Blacks Are Welcome Here, and others that I can't remember, but they did come. There was nothing particular that I remember about it, but it was a very rare instance. Rugby was played almost exclusively by whites in South Africa at that time.

Q: So far, you haven't talked very much about your foreign national staff. Are there interesting aspects to how you worked through that staff?

LEIFERT: Yeah, as I said before, they were a multicultural, multiethnic, multiracial group. They included some professionals. We had a press assistant who was very knowledgeable about the media situation there, and he would often go with me on visits to editors. He was a Zulu, and, interestingly, one of his friends was the son of Mangosuthu Buthelezi who was the Zulu chief at that time. Buthelezi became a government minister ultimately, after apartheid ended. But, he was seen by many blacks as too friendly with the apartheid government at the time. Now, his son, who was a good friend of my staff member, often dropped by the office and they would chat and go to lunch together, or something. And so, I got to know him a little, a really nice guy. He didn't seem very political himself, but I tried not to get into that at all with him. Just, you know, he was there as a friend of one of my staff.

So, we had cultural staff, young, professional level, who organized activities, lectures and so on. Our librarian was a white woman who had immigrated from England years before, a very private person. I knew almost nothing of her personal life, unlike the others—I knew if they were married, had children, whatever. I knew very little about her, but she ran a really good library. And then, we had some who were support staff—drivers, ran the mimeograph machines, things like that. And they, as I said, they all got along. I was never aware of any kind of rivalries or disputes, certainly not on an ethnic level among any of them. And they, I think, they were all happy to have a good job, frankly. And, they all worked very well.

Q: Were there any large events that you had to cover or honcho while you were there?

LEIFERT: We had a few CODELs, congressional delegations. I remember one in particular, Sam Nunn from Georgia and David Boren from Oklahoma. They were a two person CODEL, both Democrats, and they flew to South Africa for the usual fact finding. We had a lot of these fact finding missions, and Nunn and Boren had their own U.S. Air Force plane. In Johannesburg, somehow I was their escort officer, and even in Pretoria. Pretoria is the seat of government. I accompanied them to a lot of their meetings. I didn't participate in them, but I just was their escort. And, then they had other embassy or consulate staffers who, you know, were in and out, were with them here or there.

But, then it came time for them to go down to Cape Town, which was the seat of Parliament. And they said, we want Harvey to go with us. He's the only person who's been with us all the time. So, I hitched a ride on this, I think it was a 707; it was a big

plane and just a handful of us. The two of them; I don't even remember if they had staff members with them, their own staff members. And, there was me and maybe one or two others from the embassy. I don't even remember that. But, I do remember sitting in the cockpit of the 707, as we flew down to Cape Town. I was so impressed with the pilots; they were estimating to the second when they would touch down and, and they did, I mean, within a second or two of their estimate; they were just incredible. And then I escorted the senators with the help of my USIS counterpart down in Cape Town, Samir Kouttab. He was obviously the lead down there, and also people from the Consulate General escorted them to their appointments there.

Whether you call it a consulate-general or an embassy depended on the time of year. During the legislative session, when the entire South African government moved down to Cape Town, it was the embassy, and the rest of the year, when Parliament was not in session, the embassy was in Pretoria, and Cape Town reverted to consulate general. That may still be the case. I don't know. So I remember that CODEL.

I remember CODEL Paul Simon, a Democrat, Illinois, chair of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate. I remember him visiting Soweto and other places. He visited the decrepit same-sex hostels where black miners from far-flung areas had to live, while working the gold mines near Johannesburg. In particular, he visited Albertina Sisulu at her home in Soweto. This was monumental. She was a medical worker and the wife of Walter Sisulu, the person who got Nelson Mandela into politics. They were both imprisoned on Robben Island at the time, and Albertina was under a banning order. Among other restrictions, it meant that she could not receive visitors. But, she invited Simon, about whom she knew, and he arrived, with Ambassador Edward Perkins—our first black ambassador in South Africa—and trailed by a huge press corps. She came out to greet Simon, and one reporter asked if she was not worried, due to the banning order. She replied, no, she was covered by the ambassador's immunity. Well, of course, the ambassador had no immunity that extended to her, and she surely knew it; she was just a courageous woman. As a footnote to CODEL Simon, some people were disappointed when they learned that the Paul Simon who was visiting South Africa was not the folksinger who had recently released the Graceland album.

I remember Coretta Scott King came once, a very unpleasant visit for her. She couldn't wait to get out of there, although they didn't treat her badly. It was just what she was seeing all around, wanted to get out. Senator Nancy Kassebaum, Republican from Kansas, came with her daughter. She was just a delightful person, one of the nicest senators I've ever met. She also was appalled by much of what she saw. I just saw her name in the news recently, although I can't remember why. Anyway, we had a lot of CODELs and other VIPs.

Q: That pretty much ends the questions that I have for you for South Africa, but it strikes me, you might have some other anecdotes outside of the areas I've mentioned.

LEIFERT: There were a number of other things of interest that occurred while I was there. I got very much into the art scene. There's a lot of very vibrant art in South Africa,

in the broadest sense of the term, including theater. And amazingly, although books were censored or banned, basically not so much censored as outright banned, there was a very little impact on theater. There was a lot of creative theater, antiapartheid theater that existed, to the amazement of many of us, especially in Johannesburg at the Market Theatre. It's called that because it was in a building that had been a marketplace in the past, and they did a lot of plays that dealt with the issues of apartheid.

One of them actually went to Broadway. It was called Sarafina. It was a musical, and it was very creative, very lively. It had a cast of mostly young people from the townships. And they all went to Broadway, where I presume they got at least union scale. And, the show was a big hit, as I remember. I remember briefing them before they went. I don't remember much else, but we saw a lot of good plays there. There was also an art center called FUBA, for Federated Union of Black Artists, whose director was also an activist, Sipho Sepamla. They were a venue where you could create art and also exhibit art. There were art galleries galore. I bought a Chagall lithograph at one of them. Another was run by the husband of Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer, which I also patronized. I knew Nadine, as well. There certainly was a lot of art by local artists of all persuasions. The Johannesburg Art Foundation was run by a couple, a white South African and his wife who was Dutch. I don't mean Afrikaner, I mean actually from the Netherlands. And, they were, again, a venue where art was produced and also exhibited and they had a few people who became well known artists who worked there. And, I bought a couple of things there, and I still have them.

What else? Music. Well, there were groups that still exist today, like Ladysmith Black Mambazo. It has gone through many personnel changes over the years, but the group goes on, and I have tickets for a performance of theirs in February, 2019, at Strathmore. So, yeah, there were a lot of things to do.

Now, also, unfortunately, a lot of people died. Some people I knew died in traffic accidents. I can think of two or three, in particular. The roads were wild and wooly, very poor traffic safety. A couple of contacts were imprisoned and/or died in detention for political reasons. Many others were in and out of prisons. There was a particular police station only a quarter to a half mile from USIS Johannesburg, on the same street. It was a police station, four or five stories, and people being interrogated had a terrible habit of falling out the window from the top floor. It happened a number of times, always accidentally, of course. So, there was all of that going on, which was unpleasant.

I did get to travel around the country a lot. Went to Durban, a lovely city on the Indian Ocean. Cape Town as often as I could, once took the Blue Train, which still exists. It's probably even better now. You could go down there overnight. They have a narrow gauge railway system, so the trains don't go terribly fast. It's only about 600 miles or so, a thousand kilometers, from Johannesburg to Cape Town, but it's a long trip overnight. But, the most comfortable bed I've ever been on in a train anywhere, and the food was scrumptious, all prepared on board. It was a really first-class train, and actually, I think I did that twice. So, it was great. You can take your car, also; they had a baggage car, specifically designed so you could take your vehicle with you. Went to Cape Town and

that area as often as I could, only in the nice season. In their winter, it can be really nasty, with winds blowing up from Antarctica. But, in the spring, summer and fall, it's delightful. And, I've been back, I mean a couple of times since leaving the post, just to travel along that area along the southern coast.

But, anyway, there were a lot of nice things that you could do if you were white and/or a diplomat, because foreign diplomats had all the privileges, regardless of their own ethnicity. So, that wasn't a problem. We occasionally had black FSOs at the embassy or consulate. That's over the years. Not many, as far as I know, up to that point, but there were some, and my second ambassador was black. Ambassador Perkins later became Director General of the Foreign Service.

Anyway, South Africa was a wonderful place for tourism and still is, I think, and I was very happy to be there. Claudine worked at the consulate part of the time, not always, but as I said, she really got into it, after having been rather upset at the assignment when it was made. And, she got involved with a number of activities with the local community. There's one in particular, I should mention. It wasn't a USIS activity at all, but the Consul General in Johannesburg was Kenneth Brown, later ambassador elsewhere. His wife Bonnie became the retiree person of the foreign service later, but she was his spouse there in Jo'burg. She came up with what I think was one of the most creative programs for bringing races together in South Africa. She started organizing luncheons at the Consul General's residence, at her residence, in which she would invite both black and white female contacts. The embassy and consulate had lots of black contacts, and by black, I mean in the broadest sense of nonwhite: Indians, coloreds, every black ethnic group, so on. So, she brought them and white women together for lunch. These were mostly professional people on both sides. And, they would have lunch and they would have a discussion.

Different people each time, maybe some overlap. Claudine participated in these, was very active in them. And the thing is, it became a hot ticket. It was one of the only places in Jo'burg where black and white professional women, it was always women, could meet and chat with each other, other than with your housekeeper, if you were white, and with your madam, as they were called, if you were a black person. And, this went on for a while, and it became a hot ticket. Women heard about it and wanted to attend. Bonnie came up with a subsidiary idea: okay, you can come again, but, you have to bring somebody who's never been to one of these luncheons with you. So, that expanded it to a wider group than what it had become, a sort of a self-perpetuating one. I don't know how long that went on, but it was a really successful program, and all it did was bring people together to chat and see that they were all human.

Q: Yeah. Using the convening power of the embassy to—

LEIFERT: And the venue, which was not under apartheid restrictions of who could eat where and when.

Q: Right. Excellent. Now, you're there four years?

LEIFERT: From March '85 to January '89, which is when I got the assignment to Namibia. But first, I had bid on ongoing posts, mostly in Europe, I think if I remember right. I really wanted a change of pace from the pressure cooker that South Africa was. And I'd bid on Brussels, I forget if it was PAO or what, but I got that assignment, and I was preparing for it—this was months ahead. And then, the State Department decided that they would open a liaison office in Windhoek, Namibia, because the UN program to bring Namibia to independence—they called it the 435 process, that was UN Resolution 435 on ending not only apartheid there, but ending South African control over Namibia—was picking up steam. This is something that I had written about with Don McHenry years earlier, as it stood at that point. And I said, oh boy, I'd like to be there for this transition period. And, I wrote to Washington and told them, you know, this has just been announced, that I'd really like to do that, and I don't remember the details, but I was able to break the assignment to Brussels. Some people thought I was crazy to give up going to western Europe to go to some place they thought of as the African desert—which is only partly true. But I thought this would be fantastic. And it was.

So, I left Johannesburg. I mean, I flew out there. There was a U.S. Government facility in Windhoek. Years before, there had been a liaison office, and after two of its members were killed—probably not targeted, but killed in an incident at a gas station in the north of the country, in Oshakati—they closed that office, but they maintained the premises. They kept paying rent on it. Small. It was a section of a two story office building. So, they already had that facility, and the original group that now went in, that I was a part of, was no more than four or five American officers, including one State Department officer who had followed Namibia for quite a while.

Another officer was the head of the mission, a State officer who had a USIA wife, they were a tandem, somewhere. He was the head of it, and I have to look up the names, but there was at least one other. I'm not sure if there was a military person or not, but at least one other. And administratively, it was still all handled from Petroria. So, I was the USIA person, and we lived in a hotel, the Kalahari Sands in downtown Windhoek. And, it went on that way for quite a while. But, in the meantime, I had to finish up my tour in Johannesburg. So, I flew back, packed up, had all the stuff forwarded—and it was the only time we ever drove from one post to the next. We took three days to get from Johannesburg to Windhoek.

Q: And the road was good enough that you could—

LEIFERT: The road was very good, because it was military highway. Now, I omitted mentioning that at one point during our South African tour, we went to Namibia as tourists. We flew there, and we took a two week bus tour of Namibia. It was in two parts, a southern loop the first week and then back to Windhoek and then a northern loop, the second week and back to Windhoek. Some people were on for the whole two weeks, some just for one week or the other. But, we saw a lot of the country that way. Not all, but we saw a lot, and I thought it was just fantastic. It was so big, wide open spaces, had a lot of interesting places in it. I never, we didn't know at that time that we'd someday be

stationed there, and I said, this is my one chance to see this place that I had been studying about and writing about. So, we had that wonderful trip. Now, when we drove up there, we drove up part of the way we had been before and got to Windhoek, and we stayed in the same hotel until we got housing.

An administrative officer from Pretoria came over at the point where it looked like we really would one day be opening an embassy, and he started buying up houses. And, that was an easy thing to do, because there was a lot of white flight. A lot of the whites were fearful that black rule was coming, and they wanted to get out. Certainly, the South Africans who were living there, but even some of the white Namibians, who still also had South African passports, even though they may have been born there. Also, some of the German speaking people that were still there, descendants from the colonial days. It was originally a German colony. Anyway, a lot of people were leaving, and good houses were going cheap. So the embassy officer just was buying them up left and right and got some really good properties, and one of them became the PAO residence. I mean, I was able to pick from the ones he had at that time, because there were only, as I say, four or five of us, and we each picked the one we wanted. There was no ambassadorial residence chosen yet. That was a much harder thing, because of all the security requirements, even then, of a residence. There was one beautiful place, but it was on a hillside, and they were afraid people would just be raining bombs down on the house from up above. I got a really nice house. It had a swimming pool. It had grounds, gardens. It wasn't a huge house itself, but it was adequate for our needs, and we were very happy in that house. We stayed there two years.

Q: Today is March 4th, 2019, and we're resuming our interview with Harvey Leifert as he arrives in Namibia.

LEIFERT: Okay. Namibia is a big country, with not many people in it. At the time, the population was estimated at about a million for the whole country.

Q: And this was 1989?

LEIFERT: 1989, January I think. Of the million, one-tenth, about a hundred thousand, were thought to live in and around the capital, Windhoek, which was the only big city, "big" maybe in quotation marks, only two or three other cities of note, Swakopmund on the coast and Keetmanshoop further south, Lüderitz, but they were all small. And then, there were many, many other towns smaller than that, settlements, around the country and lots of wide open spaces, everywhere. It was very underpopulated. I'm not saying the country could have sustained a huge population, because water is an issue. The big issue. And, Windhoek used recycled water.

Q: Interesting.

LEIFERT: Yeah, even way back then, they had a very sophisticated system for recycling wastewater and using it again. And, there were aquifers in various parts of the country

that helped, and the few rivers, not really—most of them were ephemeral. They flowed after a big rainstorm, and that was it. But, if you saw it, it was quite spectacular.

Q: What made Windhoek the location for the capital? In other words, was it on a river or what natural advantage did it have?

LEIFERT: It's on a plateau. It's more or less in the center of the country, not on any body of water—significant—there are a couple of little lakes nearby, but not big ones. it may just be that it was high enough that there wasn't malaria. It was, I forget how many feet, 4- or 5,000 feet, and I think that put it above the malaria, the mosquito level that carried malaria. If there was an economic reason it was there, other than that, I don't remember what it was. It's a nice little city. It was, even then; it's grown a lot since then. I've been back. But, it was still small.

I remember at one point during my stay there, Flora Lewis, who was at the time the chief foreign affairs correspondent of The New York Times, came through on some kind of African tour, and I took her to lunch at a restaurant that was one flight up, and it had a kind of terrace overlooking the main street, which was then called Kaiserstrasse. It's now, I think, called Independence Avenue. But, we sat on this terrace overlooking the city and watching the traffic go by, a little park across the street, and she was flabbergasted. I think she expected something decrepit like Conakry, which I had been to and is not a prime tourist destination. But, Windhoek is a lovely little city. So, anyway, that's just an aside.

We got there and stayed at first, as I mentioned, in the Kalahari Sands Hotel, and we, along with the several other Americans from the mission. It was walking distance—on a hot day, you wouldn't want to walk it—but walking distance of the pre-chancery, the liaison office, which was still in that little office building. We had the lower level. That's where it had been established years earlier, a row of, I don't know, five or six offices along the windows, with bars on the windows, and a larger room that was used for various things. Eventually, during my first year there, we bought the whole building, and the people on the main street level moved out, and then we had offices on the main floor as well as on the lower level. My new office faced the street. We had the necessary blast curtains. These were like sheers, sort of, but very heavy, and they draped way onto the floor. I remember that.

I was the whole USIS operation there; it was me. There was no foreign service national staff member; there was no anyone else. It was I, and my role was just to get it established. This was, I arrived in '89, independence eventually occurred on March 21st of 1990, and I was there for one, almost one more year after that. So, in that first year, my goal was to find a premises for a USIS center and do whatever information media liaison work I could and anything else that fell under USIA auspices, but on a reduced scale. Now, looking for permanent premises was really difficult, because as I say, it was a small city, didn't have huge office parks or anything like that.

I looked at many properties in the city and outside. Again, security was an issue, not the way it became later, after 9/11, but it was still an issue, and there were definite concerns. We eventually took space in a brand new building, then completing construction, called the Sanlam Centre. It's an insurance company, a South African insurance company, and they were building a Namibia headquarters in which they would obviously have some of the space and rent out the rest of it. There were other diplomatic missions there, too. I think the actual German Embassy was in that building and maybe one or two others that I don't remember now. We had a large part of the third floor, and there was security on the ground level. You had to go through some kind of thing and state your name, which I think was recorded, and you were photographed.

So, we had designers come in from Washington to look at the space, and they came up with blueprints, to allocate it among offices, a library, a multimedia room, and, you know, a few other ancillary things. I'll just jump ahead and say it all came to fruition about the time I left, which I think it has been the case for many other officers who open posts or develop new facilities—that they do all the work, and then their successor gets to enjoy it. But, in any case, I continued working out of the embassy for all of the two years. And, the first functional thing I did came, very surprisingly, not long after I got there. It was during the period leading up to independence, as I mentioned previously. There were lots of reporters starting to come in and make a base in Windhoek.

There were already four or five daily newspapers, believe it or not, of different tendencies, in English, Afrikaans, German. And, of those, one, The Namibian, was sort of the equivalent of the Weekly Mail in Johannesburg that I referred to earlier. It was a liberal, pro-independence, pro-equality, pro- all the good things newspaper, edited by Gwen Lister and a thorn in the side of the South African administration there. But, it was allowed to exist. And, they were, I guess, the only source of relatively unbiased information about the peace process that was unfolding.

So, I did deal with all of those newspapers, but very soon after I got there, a front page story appeared in The Namibian, which said that the U.S. Government was secretly supporting the DTA [Democratic Turnhalle Alliance], which was the main opposition to the black liberation party, SWAPO [Southwest Africa People's Organisation], by funding a media center for the DTA during the election campaign period. DTA was almost exclusively white. Although it may have been for independence from South Africa, its supporters wanted the whites to continue running Namibia, the local whites. So, it wasn't a slam dunk that if Namibia became independent, it would become independent under majority rule. The article that appeared in The Namibian was, therefore, a kind of bombshell, and I saw no way it could be true. Still, I immediately took it to Roger McGuire, our chief of mission, and said to him, there's no truth whatever to this—is there?

Roger looked at it, and he was aghast also and said, no, absolutely not. Now, I was so new there I didn't even know what they meant by a media center. A media center, in the local context, was a place, a facility where journalists could gather and do everything from shoot to the breeze to get briefings to file stories. So a media center, in itself, was

just a place, and there was already one, a very nice one that was sort of independently run and which I went to frequently.

The reporter who bylined the story was actually an alumnus of our international visitor program, from the time of that earlier liaison office that had been closed. I first called him up on the phone and said the story is completely untrue, and I'll come over and discuss it with you in detail, if you want. He readily agreed. I don't remember all of the details of our discussion, but they printed a big page one story in the next edition, saying that the U.S. Government denied that they had done this, and it quoted the director of the U.S. Information Service in Windhoek, me, which was the first public announcement that we existed.

And, and the original story was pretty easily debunked. I mean, there was no media center, and there was no place they could do that. But, it put us on the map, in a way, and it enabled me to have easier contacts with other publications, because they knew who we were and what we were doing. So, that was totally unexpected. It wasn't thought when I got there that I would have any significant program activities. It was mainly administrative and getting the operation going. But, I was happy to be able to jump in feet first on this one and have an effect, actually. We later concluded that the fake story was planted by the East German intelligence service, as both East and West Germany were vying for influence in their former colony. Of course, East Germany collapsed soon afterward.

Q: Now speaking of that, of incorrect aspersions cast on the U.S. Government, did you run into any of those crazy urban myths that you had to deny, you know, selling baby parts or, you know, inoculations that cause parts of your body to fall off? You know, all these crazy things?

LEIFERT: No, I don't remember anything like that. I mean, the country was just totally focused on issues pertaining to independence, the upcoming independence of the country, and how that would be. There were two dueling press conferences every day. The Administrator General, the top South African official, obviously a white South African, conducted a briefing every day, and the whole press corps, locals as well as the international press who were there, would attend it. And then the head of the UN office, Maarti Ahtisaari, who later became president of Finland, had his press conference. So, we would all traipse from one to the other every day, and whatever they said, they said. I remember that in those days, everyone had pagers, and you could send out a mass page to reporters. I remember more than once sitting in a press conference when all of the journalists' pagers would go off—beep, beep, beep—you know, 10, 12, 15, 20 of them, one right after the other, and they would all look to see who was calling, and so on. But, that was just a distraction. Anyway, that was how I got there and got started working, at the same time looking for office space that, as I said, we got in the Sanlam building, and I'm getting to know the country a little better as well.

Q: When putting the USIA center together, did you have internet?

LEIFERT: We did not have internet. We did have a satellite dish, and in fact on the Sanlam building, eventually we had a satellite dish on the roof, and it was a tall building for Windhoek. I forget how many stories, maybe 15, possibly. And, it had a space that we definitely staked out early and reserved for our satellite dish. We had a satellite dish also at the temporary embassy—well, it became the permanent embassy at independence—liaison office at the time. And, we used that to record the ABC News, which we had done in South Africa to great effect. We did the same thing. We found premises in Windhoek at the Academy, where we could take our tapes. At first they came by pouch, and then later, we could download it directly, I think, from our dish. It was also a very effective tool, for Namibians to see a non-government-sponsored newscast.

And in those days, South Africa was in the news a lot and Namibia somewhat, when anything happened. But, mostly, that peace process, the 435 process, went along very smoothly, and it eventually led to independence on March 21st, 1990, at midnight, midnight of the 21st. It was Claudine's and my 20th wedding anniversary, so I'll never forget the date. I remember being at the Windhoek stadium, where it happened. The South African flag was flying at 11:59 p.m. on the 20th, and then it was ceremoniously lowered, and at midnight, with great fanfare, the new Namibian flag went up. There had been a competition to design the flag, and the winning entry, the flag Namibia adopted, was created by an American. Obviously, great cheers. Lots of ceremonies. Don McHenry was there in the stands, the former UN ambassador with whom I had studied at Georgetown, and we sort of—well, high fiving didn't come until later, but essentially that's what we did. We waved to each other and with big smiles. It was a wonderful event.

And then, the work began for the Namibian government under Sam Nujoma, their independence leader. The American delegation to the independence was led by Secretary of State Baker, James Baker, with a large press corps and administrative staff following him on his plane. And, we had to house them while they were there for a few days. This was an embassy-wide issue. As I said, it was a small city with only two significant hotels, the Kalahari Sands downtown and the Safari, which was on the edge of town. And there were some smaller facilities. All were fully booked with diplomatic delegations. What we did with the American press corps, the visiting press corps, was, we housed them in sleeper cars at the railroad station. It wasn't my idea, and I think they had done that before for some other event, and it had worked. So, they had this train essentially parked at one of the platforms of the railway station. And, the sleeping cars were assigned, I think two to a compartment, and there were bathroom and shower facilities on the platform somewhere, and that's what they did. It wasn't ideal, but seemed to be the only viable solution. I'm sure a lot of those reporters dined out on that for years after they covered the Namibian independence. We did set up a press center near the train station where they could file and get news incoming, as well.

So meanwhile, back at the Kalahari Sands, which was—is—right in the heart of downtown, we were able to set up an area where we could post news clippings every day. Now, thanks to the relatively recent miracle of fax and the cooperation of my USIA colleagues in Washington, we were able to get fax copies of articles in the American press about Namibia the same day. And, we would post them, and this became a huge

draw for people, both journalists, to see how their stories played, and also ordinary people, to read stuff that wasn't even in the local papers. So, it was a terrific and easy public affairs activity that we did. Many other delegations, temporary and semi-permanent, stayed at that hotel, as well. I remember, for independence, a group came in from Fiji, I think they were Fiji police officers to help with the security, and they came in wearing their dress uniforms, which were knee high skirts. That attracted a lot of attention, as did the Moroccan delegation that set up the hookah in the lobby of the Kalahari Sands.

And, the thing is, in a big city, this would go almost unnoticed. But, Namibians were not used to seeing foreigners. The only foreigners, if you could call them that, were South Africans, who were scarcely foreign, in the practical sense, and Germans who still came as visitors, to see their former colony, and some had relatives, descendants from colonial times, there. The rest of the world, they didn't know about really. There was not a huge level of education or sophistication about the outside world. And, to see all these people with exotic appearances, exotic dress, exotic language, and all, milling around in the streets was pretty heady experience for some of them. The more sophisticated ones reveled in it, as if to say, oh, at last, you know, we have some people here from elsewhere. And for others, it was just sort of amusing or interesting, but I remember that very vividly.

Q: Were there several ethnic groups or linguistic groups combined in Namibia?

LEIFERT: Yeah, a whole bunch. Interestingly, in South Africa, after what I think of as independence, but it was really the birth of majority rule, all of them became official languages. I think there are about 13 indigenous languages, 14, if you include Afrikaans as one, and English. In Namibia they did just the opposite. Only English became the official language, and the other groups, Herero, Damara, Nama, and a whole bunch of others, they still retain their languages, of course, but they aren't official languages. On the old maps, you still see where they lived. Damaraland is here, and Namaland here, and so on. And, there was one area, Bushmanland where the San people still live.

Q: Wow. There, the expanse of San habitation goes all the way into Namibia? Because, you think of it as more to the east, in Botswana.

LEIFERT: Well, there was no effective border, for most of history, and they just drifted back and forth. But, I remember I made one trip, later, to what was then called Bushmanland. All those names have vanished since; they now have different, I forget what they are, provinces or regions, or whatever, with other names. But, I remember going there. It was the most remote area of Namibia I had been to, fewest roads, small settlements. We went to the village of N!xau ǂToma—that's not a typo, and I can't pronounce it properly—the actor who starred in The Gods Must Be Crazy. I don't even know if you remember that movie.

Q: Absolutely.

LEIFERT: It took place in Botswana, the film, but the actor apparently was from Namibia. And, we visited what we were told was his village, but he wasn't there. The film was released in 1980, and there were sequels. A Bushman, as they were called, was walking through the desert, and some tourists were flying overhead in a small plane, which he didn't even notice, and one of them a finished drinking a Coke and just threw the empty bottle out. It landed with a thud, right near this man. He had never seen anything like that before, picked it up, and his future was sort of dictated by how people reacted to this Coke bottle, which none of them had ever seen before.

It may have been a bit farfetched even then, but nevertheless. So, he came from Namibia, apparently. I keep putting in these modifiers, because I don't know for positive, but we were told that's his village. And over there, that's his hut, but he's away most of the time now. Big Hollywood star. But still, it was a really remote area. The only souvenir I have of that trip is a porcupine quill that picked up on the side of the road. Really nice. I still have it in my living room.

Q: And the porcupines there are pretty much like ours, or are they considerably bigger and scarier?

LEIFERT: I've never seen one in the U.S. I mean, I know they're here, but I haven't seen one. The quill was about this long, about a foot, a little over a foot, in alternating stripes of color, dark gray, and very light, uncolored. That was that one trip. USIA provided two vehicles to me as PAO. One was a sedan that I used for my commute, which took about four or five minutes depending on whether the one traffic light on the way was red or green—a very short trip from my house. The other was what we now call an SUV, a Nissan Patrol, which was for going out to the hinterland. Now, in South Africa, that makes sense. In most African countries, that make sense, that you want to go out and visit cities and villages outside the capital and take some of your materials, or show films, or whatever. In Namibia, there weren't very many places you could go to do that.

I used that vehicle a lot for what I'll call area familiarization, which meant just taking long weekends to see the country. It was reassuring to have four wheel drive, although I think I only actually used the four wheel drive once. The roads in Namibia were very good. The main ones are paved, and the vast majority, which are dirt or gravel, are well maintained. That was originally because they would need it for military movements to Angola, which is why the South Africans held onto Namibia so tenaciously, because of the communists who were taking over Angola and would probably move south into Namibia and then into South Africa. So, a lot of that was behind their tenacious grip on Namibia.

Q: Now, at the time you were there, was Namibia on the map, in the sense of being like an ecotourist location, or anything like that?

LEIFERT: No, it was not on any kind of tourist map. I can't say tourism was zero, but there were no organized trips. And again, I think the only groups that ever came, individuals who ever came at all, were mostly German and maybe to an extent British.

And some South Africans, who maybe also wanted to see the place. Now, ecotourism was not a thing, and basically no kind of tourism was a thing. They did have hotels in most towns. They were modest, but generally clean and decent. The South Africans had a very good administration, I would have to say, in terms of infrastructure. We had electricity just about everywhere. I mean, everywhere there was a town, and you could drink the water, I think, pretty much anywhere, if I remember correctly. And, in ways like that, they did a decent job. Their human relations left something to be desired.

Q: And then the, I guess the other question, sort of in general is, as they come to independence, what is the principal means of economy or commerce?

LEIFERT: Yeah, good question. Mining, which had always been. They don't have gold mines, as far as I remember, at least, I don't remember there being gold mines, but lots of other minerals. But, diamonds were the big thing. The whole southwestern part of Namibia, on this old map, it says, restricted diamond area. That was an area, I mean, hundreds of square miles, that were just closed off to the public, to anyone—fenced off. And, that's where diamonds were originally discovered, just lying on the surface, maybe a hundred years earlier. Eventually all the surface diamonds were found, and they started digging them up, and when they got pretty much all of those up, they started going offshore. Because, they were washed down the Orange River from South Africa, from the Kimberley area and wherever there were kimberlite veins, I mean, over millennia, eons. So, they would wash down and some wound up in Namibia and some surely wound up in the Atlantic Ocean, and they were retrieving those as I think they are to this day.

Q: Now, the very long coastline. Is any of it usable for tourism, or is it kind of mud and then, sharks?

LEIFERT: It's a combination. There's one seaside resort town, Swakopmund, which is next to Walvis Bay, which is a whole separate story. We can get to that later. But, Swakopmund was German; Walvis Bay was English. Swakopmund is a nice little town, still has a lot of German architecture in it. German restaurants and so on. But, from there, up north along the coast, there's a relatively short stretch that's of touristic interest leading, especially, to a colony of Cape seals that live there, on the shore. I mean, thousands and thousands of them. And, you can go and see them, on an elevated boardwalk, and they'll bray and stink. It is fascinating. And, there are a couple of other things along the way of touristic interest. North of there is what it's called the Skeleton Coast, and it's called that because of all the shipwrecks that occurred over a few hundred years from when exploration began until relatively recently. What happened was, ships would wind up, battered by storms, onto the shore, and the sailors who survived that and got off the ship thought they were saved. But, they were in a desert that was more than a hundred miles wide. There was no water, and they all died, and their skeletons were eventually found. That's why it's called that. And, the ships themselves became skeletons. Now, you can visit. They have air tours; you can fly over it and in a few cases land on a strip and spend a day or two there at rudimentary but adequate, facilities. But, not back then, not even when I was there. So, that part of the coast is quite pristine, because you can't visit it easily.

South of Walvis Bay, you have a national park, the Namib Nauklift National Park, which includes an area of red sand dunes that are among the highest in the world. I've visited them, I think, three different times, including just a few years ago, and, that's quite a spectacular sight. And then, at the southern end of that area is the little originally German town of Lüderitz, which is charming, but really isolated. It's a long drive to any other town. I mean like three, four, or five hours. Yeah. And, below there is the diamond area, which is closed, down to the Orange River, which is the border with South Africa. So the coast has a few touristic opportunities, but not the whole coast.

Q: Now you were going to say something about Walvis Bay?

LEIFERT: Walvis Bay, means "whale." It was a British colony. In territory, it's a small area around the city, which is around the bay, which was under British control, possibly even before the Germans got to the rest of what was then called German Southwest Africa. And, it came under South African control. When the Brits left South Africa, they left Walvis Bay also, and they left its administration to South Africa. So, it was a little piece of South Africa, on the coast of Namibia. After World War I, when Germany lost its colonies, the British gained a mandate over Southwest Africa, which they passed to the South Africans to administer—and the South Africans never left, until 1990. There was no distinction in their eyes between Southwest Africa and Walvis Bay.

Now, the interesting thing when I was there, the Namibians—this was after independence—the Namibians considered that Walvis Bay was theirs. It was just still being occupied by South Africa. And, the South Africans insisted it was their sovereign territory. So, you could freely, pretty freely, cross on one of the roads. If you went from Namibia into Walvis Bay, on the South African side, there was a customs and the immigration control; they would look at your passport and wave you on. When you came back, the Namibians didn't consider you had been in a foreign country, so there was no control on the Namibian side. You just drove into Namibia, which was all very amusing. Eventually a few years after independence, I forget how many years, the South Africans just ceded it to Namibia, a goodwill gesture or whatever, or for practical reasons.
So, Walvis Bay is a nice little city. It's bigger than Swakopmund, its neighbor, and has a lot of bird life, which was of interest to me. Flamingos spend part of their year in that area, and then they fly up to Etosha National Park, where there's a huge salt pan, where they breed in the right season, when there is water there. And somehow, down in Walvis Bay, they know when it's time to go up to Etosha, which is not the same week every year. I don't know how they do that, but they did—and sometimes they miss, I think, they get there too early or too late, but normally, that's how it works. It's a great birding site.

Q: Now, during the time you're there, Namibia comes to independence. Were there any serious political, you know, confrontations or agitation or, you know, was it—after all the population's only a million—kind of quiet and, and nothing to see here?

LEIFERT: Well, there was an interesting turn of events in Europe that affected this, which was the collapse of the Soviet Union and, even before that, the collapse of most of

what we called the satellite countries. Now, SWAPO the South West African People's Organisation, led by Sam Nujoma, was essentially a pro-socialist, in that sense of the word, organization that was expected—and it was one of the reasons for the white flight—that they would impose some kind of East German or Czech or Hungarian regime—you know, all of that period—on Namibia. Anyway, when independence came, it was around the same time that all those places in 1989 were overthrowing their pro-Moscow regimes and adopting more liberal constitutions. Soviet Union hadn't yet collapsed, but it was heading that way. And, the SWAPO leadership, I think, was smart enough to realize that the countries that they had assumed would be their supporters and backers, financially and otherwise, after independence were probably not going to do that if Namibia adopted the same kind of regime that those countries had just overthrown.

So, over a long period of time, I mean, months and months, maybe a year or more, they worked on a new constitution for Namibia that became one of the more progressive constitutions in Africa and possibly in the world, with lots of freedoms guaranteed and a very progressive outlook, much more so than the South African government of the time. They didn't reach their, quote, "independence," unquote until what, '94, the first elections. But, Nelson Mandela had been released in 1991. I actually saw him in Windhoek, the only time I ever saw him. He came for the independence ceremony. And that was a big thing.

Jim Baker, as I mentioned, came to head the American delegation and to open officially the American Embassy, which had been a liaison office. They brought in a Marine Security Guard detachment of four in full dress uniform with the flag. And, they marched around outside and in the lobby of the building, and it was officially dedicated as the American Embassy. It was quite a moving little ceremony, and it was covered by the media. I remember the ABC diplomatic correspondent at the time, John McWethy, was there as one of the reporters, and he was covering it. I asked him, do you think this ceremony will actually make the news tonight? And he said, nah, this is just for when you guys get kidnapped. We can say, little did they suspect when opening the embassy that just x months later—

Q: So, they had just enough B roll to start a terrible story.

LEIFERT: Exactly. Fortunately, I guess, they never had to use that B roll. Yeah, but I remember that he was quite upfront about it and very amused, as we all were. Baker was originally only going to be there overnight, and he extended his stay for two or three days to have meetings with all kinds of people, including Mandela. I remember Mandela was staying at a house. I didn't know whose house it was, but another person there was Joe Slovo. Joe Slovo was the head of the South African Communist Party. I remember looking into the lobby from across the street, where we were, and I saw Mandela and Slovo talking to each other. And I said, said to myself, I wonder if Baker knows Slovo is there. So, I got the word to somebody and had to explain who Slovo was, and, whatever, it worked fine.

As protocol dictates, Mandela was originally going to come to the American Embassy residence, which we had picked out by then. But, he wasn't well, and Baker agreed to go see him where he was staying, which was that other house. Our residence sat above a long and very steep driveway, up from the street. It was, believe me, a difficult climb and could have used a rope line for pedestrians to hold onto. That became apparent when another important visitor arrived there to meet with Baker, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze. Shevardnadze's limousine could not make it up that incline, and after several tries, he got out and slowly walked up. Baker waited at the top, arm outstretched, to grab his hand and pull him up the last few feet. So, these are all little snippets of that independence period, and it was a very exciting time. It was the only time that I ever participated in, or even witnessed, anything like that. I wasn't in South Africa when they had their big election, but I was in Namibia when they became independent.

Q: Were there any other regional issues from Namibia that you were concerned about at the time? You had mentioned Angola and the war there.

LEIFERT: I don't think so. At least, none that I remember now. There were some soldiers from other African countries who had come down as part of the UN peace keeping force, but they all left, eventually. And, the Angola war continued on for a while. I don't remember now how many years, but it was still an issue. In my travels around Namibia, I only once got north of Etosha National Park, which is in the north, but not all the way in the north. Above there, north of there, up to the river that formed most of the boundary with Angola, it was still considered unsafe. The one exception was well after independence, when I flew up to the border town of Rundu with our first ambassador, Genta Hawkins Holmes, in connection with the arrival of the first Peace Corps Volunteers. Another place of interest, but off limits then, was the Caprivi Strip, which is that very narrow band that stretches east from northern Namibia between Botswana and Zambia. I've never been there, although I hear it's a beautiful area, lots of wildlife.

Q: Were there any other major events while you were there that indicate anything about the future of Namibia?

LEIFERT: I have to think about that. I don't remember any; I think they were content to, get their own country off on the right foot and fulfill the dream that they had had. And, I think they did pretty well. I mean, they've had several elections since then, and I don't know how free and fair they are on a scale of zero to a hundred, but they're way toward the upper end, certainly as compared with many other African countries. They've all been, I think, legitimate elections.

Q: Now, while you were doing all of this, was your wife working?

LEIFERT: No, not most of the time. I'm trying to remember if she did. I think she may have been involved in some volunteer activities, but I don't think she had a job, even at the embassy. The embassy was so small, even after independence, although more people came in, and they weren't hiring spouses or other dependents. We certainly didn't have any reciprocal agreement with Namibia at that time for a diplomatic spouses to work on

the local economy. So, I guess she didn't. But, she liked it. I mean she found Namibia fascinating, and as I said, we got out whenever we could to see some more of the country, other parts we'd already been to or places we have not yet been to.

There was an interesting story, I can relate. During that bus trip we took, while still stationed in South Africa and not knowing we would ever again be in Namibia, we signed up for this two week bus tour, which was like a figure eight. It was a southern loop out of Windhoek for a week. And, we got back to Windhoek overnight, did laundry, and then we had a second week on a northern loop. One of the places we stopped at on that original bus trip was a rock formation. It was well off the main road, but it was a well-known tourist site and geological site that they called the Finger of God. It was a monolith, a natural monolith that rose up from the desert, and then it had a narrow waist, and then it widened and went straight up and ended in what you could think of as being a finger pointing upward. The local legend was, among the whites, maybe among the blacks as well, that if that ever fell, it would mean the end of white rule in Namibia. The implication being, it's been here for a million years, and it's not going anywhere. Well, one day it fell.

Q: Really! That's fascinating!

LEIFERT: In the middle of the night; nobody saw it happen. But, the next people who came to see it, it wasn't there. It was all just rubble on the ground. And, the prophecy came true, and that was after we were there on that bus tour. It just, everybody was flabbergasted that this thing had collapsed. There was no earthquake that I recall or anything like that.

Q: But, your story just put me in mind of one other question: were there any archaeological activities going on there?

LEIFERT: None at that time that I'm aware of, or remember; there are a lot of petroglyphs, a lot of rock paintings that still exist today, and one or two sites in particular that were visited by such tourists as came back then. Then, there's another area that I only visited much later on, a return trip as a tourist, a huge area where you can see lots and lots of them, and probably there are many more even yet undiscovered in that region. But, as for digs, I'm not aware of any.

Another big scientific thing is the Hoba meteorite. It's the largest meteorite in the world that still lies where it hit the ground, making a small crater, and you can go visit it. They made a little amphitheater around it with benches, and you can sit and look at it, which we did. Aside from that, geologically it's a fascinating country, but archeologically, I don't know if there have been any significant digs, looking for ancient civilizations or anything like that.

I should add one other institution of scientific interest, the Desert Ecological Research Unit, DERU, located at Gobabeb. We learned of it when meeting its director, Mary Seely, at an event in Windhoek. She is an American scientist, and she invited us to visit DERU,

which we did, twice. Gobabeb is not even a town, just a place name in the middle of the Namib Desert, on a seriously unimproved road between Windhoek and Walvis Bay. The research center studied everything about the desert environment—weather, flora, fauna, geology. Seely was worried that with independence, the new government might take this well-maintained facility and turn it into a tourist camp—or a prison. Her fears did not materialize; DERU has evolved into the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre, and its work goes on.

Q: Okay. So then, as you approach the end of this tour, what are you thinking of for your next assignment?

LEIFERT: Well, as I approached the end of my tour, I certainly hoped and expected to get another two years in Windhoek, to see the library to its opening and the start of a real program of cultural activities there. But, two interesting things happened. One was that I received a Superior Honor Award from USIA for my work in Namibia. I had already shared in the group Superior Honor Award that State bestowed on those of us who opened the liaison office and shepherded it through to embassy status. But, another notice informed me that I had reached by time in class and I would therefore be leaving the Foreign Service. That was sort of ironic, as the text of the Superior Honor Award reads, "For outstanding creativity and perseverance in opening USIS Windhoek and quickly establishing the post as visible, credible proof of the U.S. commitment to Namibian independence.

Q: Wow! Oh my God!

LEIFERT: Yeah. So, I didn't really plan much for a next post. But, if you want to get into an administrative thing, my time in class issue—there were two issues for me. The first was when I was still in Johannesburg. For most of my tour, I had a PAO, Bob Gosende, with whom I got along really well. We're well coordinated, we're friendly with each other, and even beyond that. Great performance reviews. He went on to become the area director for Africa for USIA. His replacement, Gene Friedman, and particularly Gene's deputy, Bill Zavis, seemed to be of the opinion that they had to undo everything that Gosende and his staff had done. So, every program, every activity that we had conducted, they looked at, skeptically at best. And that included the whole basis of USIS Johannesburg, which was meant as the main media liaison office of the U.S. Government in South Africa, because the main media were based in Johannesburg. Pretoria had a daily newspaper, maybe two; several other cities had them as well. But, this was the hub. It's where the South African Broadcasting Corporation was. And so on.

So, there was no country information officer. The Branch PAO Johannesburg was in effect, the main information officer who dealt with the media. The two other posts, Cape Town and Durban, their branch PAOs dealt with their local media, but Johannesburg was really the main national one. I say all that, just as prelude to the fact that when the new PAO came in, he said, well, this doesn't work. The country information officer should be in Pretoria, where we are. And so, I think—trying to remember all this now—I think they did actually have a position created and brought someone in. Now, I still was dealing

with all those media in Johannesburg, but there was now somebody else who looked for things he could do.

My rating officer was the Deputy PAO. The problem is, aside from the fact that he and the PAO were of this opinion that they had to change everything that had been done before quite successfully, he was the same grade I was; Zavis was also an FSO-1. Now, he was competing with me for a promotion to the Senior Foreign Service, but he wrote my efficiency report. And not very well. And, I always thought that that was improper at best, that he could do that, I mean that he could be my rating officer. It seemed like an obvious conflict of interest.

Q: Wow. Did you investigate that while you were—

LEIFERT: I did. I can't say I made a thorough investigation, but I checked with AFSA [American Foreign Service Association], and they were really uninterested. So, I don't know, maybe there are lots of precedents for it. I just don't know. But in any case, I did not get promoted that year.

That was my last year in Johannesburg. When I came up the next year, in Windhoek, the Africa area director, my former PAO Pretoria, was on the actual review committee, and I didn't get promoted that year either. Although I got another Superior Honor Award, as I said, for my work in Windhoek, for which he had nominated me! He told me later he was really sorry about the non-promotion. He thought I had one more year of eligibility, and the committee took advantage of that to get somebody else who was in his last year onto the promotion list. And, I also was in my last year, but he didn't seem to realize that, or so he professed. You know, at the time I was annoyed, or maybe more than annoyed, but I also thought maybe this is an opportunity to get out and try something else while I'm still young enough to do something else.

Q: So, how old were you at this point?

LEIFERT: We're in 1991 when I retired, so 53. Clearly eligible for retirement, but I would have preferred making the decision myself. So, I had these two consecutive years of what I consider unfair procedures in the promotion process. And, maybe I should've been more aggressive about complaining about them, but, that was then, this is now. I don't remember all the thought process that went into not doing more. I mean if the reviewing panel had simply thought the other guy was better and deserved the promotion more than I, that would be okay. I mean, I could accept that, but when he said that they would have promoted me, except for the fact that he thought I had another year and could easily do it then, that didn't seem quite right. Could have at least checked.

Q: Right, right, exactly. I imagine something like that's grievable. But, okay.

LEIFERT: Probably was, but I was not really into that. But, there's still a lot more about the years in Namibia that was interesting. I mean, around the time of, independence, shortly after, we had a visiting group, Sweet Honey in the Rock. Do you know them?

Q: Yeah.

LEIFERT: Singing group, a capella singing group. I think, four women, who sang Gospel and spirituals and songs like that and other types, as well. They were making a tour of some African countries, and we got on the list, and they did two performances in Windhoek. We billed it as the U.S. Government's principal cultural gift to the people of Namibia upon their independence.

Q: Very nice.

LEIFERT: Which in a sense it was. They did two performances, and we arranged that the first one would be in the so-called colored township, at a school. And, the second one would be at the only legitimate theater in Windhoek itself, which had been patronized mainly, if not exclusively, by whites in the past. It was now after independence. Nobody, of course, had ever heard of them. We did some promotion, and we had a decent crowd at the first performance, which was free, of course. And, they were thrilled by it. The word got around really fast, too. I think it was just the next day for the second performance, and there were lines around the building to get in. Not everybody could get in, although we did have some VIPs invited, who sat in a special section. We didn't have the facilities then even to broadcast into the street with loudspeakers.

Those were two really good cultural performances by Sweet Honey in the Rock. And, it involved a lot of fancy footwork. Rather shortly before they arrived, we were informed for the first time that one of the members needed oxygen, had to have an oxygen tank. Now, if we were in Washington, no problem. Even Johannesburg, no problem. Windhoek, something of a problem. But, there was a company we found that did that, affiliated with one of the hospitals, and we were able to get her oxygen at the last, well not at the last, minute, but with very short notice. And, the performances were great.

We had at least one other cultural activity, an exhibition, a traveling exhibition of miniatures. I don't remember the content of them, but they were all very small works of art, therefore easy to ship. We had them mounted in one of the museums, I think, don't really remember exactly, but again, it was a big hit. These were really good works of art and helped to cement us as a cultural partner of Namibia.

We had an exchange program. We sent a certain number of international visitors to the U.S. One of them was a judge, a South African judge, but he and his wife, they had lived in Namibia for years. Harold Levy had been one of the lawyers for Steve Biko in South Africa, who was one of their crusading black leaders. Biko was arrested by the South Africans and died on his way from southern South Africa to Pretoria in a police car, in the cold, possibly naked, possibly very thinly dressed. Anyway, Harold Levy, who had been one of his lawyers, was later appointed a judge in Namibia and was there, and we nominated him as an international visitor. He and his wife, Miriam, went to the U.S. A very successful trip. But, the only part of it I remember and that he remembers is that

they were in San Francisco in 1989 when a 6.9 earthquake hit, the one that was during the World Series.

Q: Incredible.

LEIFERT: Yeah. And, they were just staying at a hotel down near the Embarcadero, part of which collapsed in the earthquake. I don't remember anything else about Levy's professional visits or anything else they did during the 30 day trip, but I remember that he was there during the, I think it was the Loma Prieta, earthquake.

And we, of course, sent a lot of other people, as well. We did one actual exchange, in the literal sense. We sent one Namibian journalist to Washington state to the Wenatchee World newspaper, where he spent a summer, I forget, really, how many months. And then, one of his editors came to Namibia and worked on his newspaper, there. I think it was The Namibian, for several months also. And that's the only case I know of in which we had a literal exchange, people going to and from the same institutions. They were both very successful.

Q: Yeah, you're right. In all the time, I was a public affairs officer, an exchange usually meant we would send someone to the U.S. In a given profession and to the extent the U.S. would send someone, it wouldn't necessarily be in the same profession.

LEIFERT: Or even related to that. Whereas, what most foreigners think that's what it is. They think it's a literal exchange. You come here and I go there. Right?

Q: We did have that in some places for English teachers, but it was very small program and, you know, you really had to work on it in great detail because obviously, occupying someone else's home for x amount of time requires a great deal of preparation, legal, et cetera, et cetera.

LEIFERT: So, I found Namibia to be a very rewarding post. I'm so glad I went there instead of Brussels where, I don't even remember if I was going to be one of the three PAOs, they have there, or something less. It was my only full country PAOship, and I was glad to have it. And, I've been back twice since then, once on the 10th anniversary of their independence. That would been in 2000. My wife and I made a trip to South Africa and Namibia, and we were there for their celebrations on the 10th anniversary, but also for regular sightseeing, up to Etosha again.

I remember, we were back in the Kalahari Sands Hotel. I think we were on one of the top floors this time. Coming down on the eve of independence, the elevator stopped at the floor below us, and in walked three men, one of whom I recognized as Kenneth Kaunda, the first president of Zambia, and the hero of their independence, and I guess two of his bodyguards. I recognized him right away, and I said, "good evening, Mr. President." I think he seemed startled that this white guy knew who he was, and he greeted me and my wife, and we chatted for a few moments as the elevator descended. I mentioned I'd been in his country and liked it very much. It was a brief TDY [temporary duty] of a month or

so in 1976, around the time of the American elections. We reached the ground floor. I waited for him to get off, but he gestured to Claudine; he wouldn't get off before she did. And then, he gestured to me. I said, no, Mr. President, you're next. And then, I've never seen him again, but it was so nice.

Q: Remarkable. You know, the little things that happen as you approach these moments, these historic moments, the people that you run into.

LEIFERT: The other big regular event we had there was, again, showing the ABC news. I described previously how we got it, a week's worth at a time, minus commercials and purely domestic U.S. stuff. We showed it at what was called the Academy, their only institution of higher learning at the time, in a big auditorium, and we pretty well filled it once a week. Because, people wanted to see the news, and the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation was, well, originally the Southwest African Broadcasting Corporation, you know, and their news was just not—he tried to look for diplomatic way of saying it—the way we would do it. Namibians wanted to see the world news and, to the extent there was southern African News, it was mostly something they hadn't seen before. So, that was another activity we had there.

And again, most of those two years were getting that library built. We had books sent in from—oh yeah. That was another thing: books. A library was mainly books in those days, not computers. In fact, we had USIS libraries, and the last time I was in Namibia, it was still there. That was just, maybe, four years ago, something like that. I hope it still is, but one of the few left in the world, I think. But, anyway, we had a regional librarian, based in South Africa, I think, who came periodically and cataloged all the books. They were in the storeroom in my house in Windhoek, and they were coming in, shipments from Washington, all the books that would be put into our library when it opened. And, she did all the cataloging of them during her visits. I hardly ever saw her, looking back—did she eat dinner with us, or did she go out, or what? I don't remember. But she was squirreled away in that storeroom the whole time of her visits, getting the books ready for the opening, which, as I said, occurred around the time I left.

And the other book related thing was, we got from Washington, two sets of books to distribute. I mean as a collection. They were an American collection, like classic American books, both fiction and nonfiction, maybe a hundred books. And, we got two sets of them. With great fanfare—this was even before independence—we presented them to Sam Nujoma, who had returned from exile, before becoming president. He was then just president of SWAPO, and we went with great ceremony to his house and presented him with these two sets of books. One was to go to the nascent University of Namibia. Until then, they just had that Academy, which was a kind of higher education institution, but they were going to set up a real university, and one collection was for it. The other was destined for the national library, also in its earliest stages. Nujoma was very appreciative of that. I don't think that he or Namibia got anything like that from any other country, at least not as of then. And, he appreciated the recognition, as well as the substance of it. We did a lot of these things.

Q: Now, once again, I don't want to cut you off, but I'm curious about what happens from Namibia.

LEIFERT: Yeah. Well, I was told that I was being timed out. I was signed up for the retirement seminar at—it was out in Ballston in those days. I don't know where it is now. Maybe here?

Q: Yeah, it's here.

LEIFERT: And, I left Namibia in January of 1991. I don't recall the day, but you can look it up, because that was the day Desert Storm began. I got a call from the defense attaché early in the morning telling me that this had happened. He knew I was leaving. He said, I just wanted you to know. And I was thinking, OMG, who's going to be dealing with the media on this? And then I said, not my problem. So, we flew out. I forget the exact route we took, but we went via Europe. The transatlantic flight was almost empty. I think people were afraid to fly, but we noticed someone in the first class section that we recognized; it was Christian Barnard, the South African doctor who had conducted the first heart transplant. I'm pretty sure—both Claudine and I were pretty sure—that was he.

Okay. Got Back to Washington, did the—not immediately, but after a month or two, I think—that retirement course began. I found it very useful. I enjoyed it. As soon as I finished it, I was ready to sit back and start receiving my pension. I got a call from a friend at VOA, Margaret Binda, who headed the Africa Service at that time, and she wanted me to come on board, as chief of African affiliate relations; that meaning dealing with African radio stations. So, not having any other job prospects in mind, I said, well, sure, I'll do it for a while. I didn't know for how long. So, I became a GS [General Schedule] employee of the Voice of America, and my pension was put on hold, obviously. And, I continued making trips to Africa.

Q: Today is May 24th, 2019, and we're resuming our interview with Harvey Leifert at VOA.

LEIFERT: Okay. so I was at VOA as head of African affiliate relations. We had a group of three or four staffers in my section. One was technician, audio engineer, and the others were editorial types. And we mainly provided tapes of VOA programs to radio stations in Africa. We would make multiple copies and send them out by pouch, and the posts would deliver them to the stations in Africa that wanted them. And, in principle, they broadcast those tapes.

Q: This is in 1991?

LEIFERT: Yes. It had been going on for years. The problem was that I knew from my own experience in Africa that for some stations at least, the main value of this service to the stations was providing the physical tapes, which they then erased and used for their own purposes. This was long before all these things were put on a little cartridges and later on chips and now not even the chips. Now, it's all completely audio files, but in

those days, a quarter inch tape was the medium, and it was expensive in Africa, and here was an unending supply coming in from VOA.

Q: Now, let me just ask you, these are recorded news tapes?

LEIFERT: Well, not so much news, but features, so timeless. It could be about agriculture or health or literature, whatever. I don't really remember the substance, but it was not the day's news.

Q: Who made those; who actually recorded them?

LEIFERT: Oh, those are VOA programs. They were completely created and produced at VOA. Sometimes with staff members only, sometimes with guests, but they were VOA shows.

Q: Now, one last question about this: the content, was it entirely what the VOA Africa office thought the African posts needed or did the posts have some input into the content?

LEIFERT: I guess posts had input in the broadest possible sense that we didn't do programs for one specific country or radio station. So, the same one went to all over Africa, at least in that language, whether it was French or English. I'm not even sure if we did Portuguese or anything else. And again, only sub-Saharan Africa. North Africa was considered part of the Middle East. So, we sent these programs out by tape, and some of them made it on the air, to be sure, but many did not. I told them this, I told my boss, the head of the African service; it was Margaret Binda, and I suggested that we make greater use of the satellites that we had provided to many of these stations, or would provide if they wanted them, and they could take down the programs they wanted themselves and record them on their own tape, or tape they had acquired from us and other international broadcasters, and use them as they would.

And, this idea took hold, and we eventually moved away from pouching hundreds of tapes per week to putting them on the satellite, with advance notice to the posts, and the posts could take them down and record them, or the radio stations could, directly. And, the second thing we did, because it was an era in which African radio stations were beginning to become independent, not just state media, or stations opening in addition to state media, that we would try to get them to broadcast some VOA programs live as they occurred. To do this required a job of information and salesmanship. So, with the cooperation of the posts, I made several trips to Africa with the express purpose of meeting local radio station administrators and telling them about the possibilities, what we had to offer, that we could provide them with a satellite dish to take things down, programs down, on their own, and all the related information.

And as we pointed out, you can also use those dishes to get other stations. The French were also doing this, Radio France Internationale had a somewhat similar program, although, if I remember right—and perhaps I don't—I think their satellite dishes were

tuned to get only RFI transmissions, whereas ours could be tuned. You could get VOA or anything else that was up there.

I remember making one trip in particular to Nigeria with Steve Lucas who was the head of the VOA Hausa service at that time. Later, became head of the whole Africa service, I think. Steve was born in Nigeria. His parents were missionaries, and he spoke perfect Hausa, the main language of northern Nigeria. We went on a tour to the north and a few intermediate places, and we met with a number of radio station heads. I don't remember too much about the details, but we came across one radio station that was new. It was run by a Nigerian who had lived in Canada, and he was married to a Nigerian woman who from the south and was anything but a traditional Hausa. In their home, she wore miniskirts and jeans and makeup. She didn't look anything like the women—I mean dressed—anything like the women you saw outside on the street, but that was on their compound. But, the point of it all is that he had a satellite dish of his own and he was looking for material for his little radio station, and we were able to connect with him. As I understand it, it took a while, and I was long gone by then, but they did become one of our real affiliates.

Another anecdote: on that trip, we were driving through a rural area on our way back toward the south, and we stopped at a petrol station. We were driven by an embassy driver in an embassy vehicle. We stopped at a petrol station to fill up, and we got out of the car, Steve and I, and immediately, a whole gaggle of young boys gathered around. I think they were really startled to see these two white guys coming into their little village and were wondering what it was all about. Then they were flabbergasted when Steve started conversing with them in Hausa. They had a real lively conversation going, when all of a sudden, one of the boys piped up in Hausa, "I know who you are; you are Steve Lucas from the Voice of America." Amazingly to me, he recognized Steve's voice. He was a listener, and as Steve pointed out later, it's an aural society, and they tell stories and all; not so much is written down, traditionally, as is spoken, and they listen carefully, and this kid just recognized his voice.

Q: That's remarkable.

LEIFERT: I thought that was an amazing even, that story. Also on that Africa trip, and actually, I'm not positive it was the same trip or another similar one, I'm in Mali. Mali had recently cast off its longtime socialist government and was now at least in principle a democracy, a very young one. One of the things that happened was that they opened up broadcasting beyond the state broadcaster. That was radio and TV, but I'm just talking about radio. And what they permitted in the first go round was what they called association radios or radios associatives. That meant, if you had an organization of some sort, you could have a low power radio station to broadcast about whatever it is your organization did. When I say low power, I mean on a neighborhood basis There were a lot of these that already popped up around, Bamako, the capital, and we visited, we were going to visit some of those, the PAO and I. I can't think of his name right now. I think it was Bill something; it may come to me. He and I were to visit two radio stations in the same neighborhood. In fact, they were both in a big apartment block. If you can imagine

a long four or five story building with a number of entrances along the street to different sections of it, and each one had its own stairway, no elevator, going up. There were two of these association radios in two different parts of that same long block.

So, we went to the first one, and it was I think on the third floor, and we were greeted by the director, and we looked around for the equipment. I have to say there was less electronic equipment in that room than there might be in your own living room at that time as a hi-fi stereo system. It was very rudimentary. On the roof was a little antenna, I think in the shape of a basketball hoop, that would broadcast some blocks from where they were. Okay, we were up there talking to the director, a very affable young man, and we started hearing noises down in the street, and they got louder and louder and stronger and stronger, and we peeked out through the window. We saw there was what looked like an angry mob filling the street, and it became clear that they were looking for this radio station, that they knew that it was somewhere in this block, but they didn't know exactly where, and they were mad. And why were they mad? Because, the day before the station had aired a talk show in which two women were chatting about things, and one of them said that she would not allow her daughter to marry the driver of any of these collective taxis that they had.

I forget the local name for it, but you see them in many countries. They were essentially trucks with seats in the back and they would ply a route, and for very small sum you would hail them, get on, get off where you wanted. So, this woman had said, no, these are not nice people and she wouldn't let her daughter marry one. The other one said, I wouldn't even let my daughter date one, because they're dirty and, you know, everything you can think of as negative about them. They had either heard the broadcast or heard about it, and these were all drivers of these trucks, and they were angry, and they were looking for the radio station. Finally, one of them found out where it was and they started throwing rocks up from the street.

I'm sure some hit the wrong windows, but some did hit the right windows, and they were trying to break into the building. It had a metal door securing the entrance, which residents had a key for, and the stairs were inside. They were banging and trying to tear down the door and everything. And, we were getting a little nervous, because they seemed to be extremely belligerent and out of control. They never thought of asking for equal time. In their experience, the way you deal with something is, you destroy it, if you don't like it.

Now, two things happened; one was how we got out. The other was, the other station, down the street, was obviously aware of all this noise and what it was about, and they got the leader of the truck drivers' union to come up and get on their air and appeal for quiet and to disperse. They had a loudspeaker broadcasting this into the street below. It had, I would say, maybe modest success. Incidentally, no police were anywhere to be seen until way later. So, here's this thing was going on and they were starting to be able to break down the door. Bill and I figured we had to get out, but the only stairs were those leading down to the street. So, one of the staff members, I think he shinnied down a water pipe in the rear. There was a rear courtyard that was empty and fenced off, and he knew there

was a ladder down there. He put the ladder up against the rear of the building. And we, the PAO and I, unceremoniously climbed down that ladder. Later, we learned, they, the mob, did break in, destroyed all of that modest equipment and the antenna on the roof.

The PAO's vehicle was parked down in the street, and it suffered some damage. They didn't know whose car it was, but the rocks falling back down did some significant damage to the roof and windshield, and so on. Meanwhile, one of the local employees, one of the FSNs from the post in Bamako, was making his daily rounds distributing what we called the wireless file back then, showed up at the building, saw what was happening, saw the PAO vehicle, and he had the key for it. So, he got in, and he drove it around the corner. Meanwhile, the PAO and I went the back way down the block, went to the other radio station that we were going to visit and had a much quieter visit there.

The story doesn't completely end there. The PAO saw it as a teaching moment for the directors of these association radio stations. He invited three or four, five, of them over to his house the next evening for, I forget if it was hors d'oeuvres or dinner, and a discussion on how to run a radio station in a democracy. How you might deal with issues like this; maybe you should immediately offer equal time to someone who's maligned, and that kind of thing. It was a really good discussion, and he took advantage of a difficult situation. It wasn't difficult regarding the United States, but nevertheless, we were in favor of multiplicity of the outlets, not just the state broadcaster. So this was a very successful, for him, attempt at getting these people together and sharing their experiences. They didn't compete very much, because most of them were in different neighborhoods and there was hardly any overlap of listenership.

So, anyway, that was another highlight of my career at VOA. You know, looking back on it later, I think we were in some danger at that radio station, maybe not a lot, but we were in some danger. And, I think that was a more dangerous moment for me personally than any I had experienced while actually in the foreign service. I think things are so different today in terms of perceived threats. At least back then, we didn't think much about danger at all, and it rarely found us outside of actual combat zones.

Q: Yeah. Yeah. So, this took place in Mali?

LEIFERT: Yes.

Q: Okay. Since now, many of the posts now had satellite dishes, were there problems as a result of that? In other words, were they pulling down material that we didn't particularly like?

LEIFERT: Not aware of it. I don't know of any such instance. Probably, we wouldn't have provided a dish to a station that was clearly anti-American. On the other hand, they could easily get one somewhere else. We had no monopoly on this. But, I remember, in Windhoek when we finally found the building where we would have our post, I think I described it—an office building, one of the first considerations was that there'd be a place for a dish on the roof. And there were hardly any dishes in Windhoek at that time, 1989

to '91. So, we were among the first, and we had our engineers who had come from Washington to scout the building, and they picked out a place where they thought the dish should go, and we reserved that space and presumably paid rent on it or something. But that's where our dish went, and it was still there when I visited a few years ago. I'd like to think it still is.

Q: The other question I have is as now they had access to so much programming, I would think that they would also have a way of pulling down sport events, especially maybe soccer or if you're in a English speaking country, maybe cricket, and just invite people to listen to a game.

LEIFERT: Oh, the posts, you mean? I can't remember doing that, but maybe we did. I do remember that while I was in Windhoek, there was a summer Olympics, and they had a runner, Frankie Fredericks. I can't remember if he won or not, but he was their greatest hope in the Olympics to score some kind of medal. And, everybody was watching and listening. They didn't need us. I mean, the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation had pretty good equipment of itself, inherited from its predecessor, which was the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation's Namibian operation, or what they, of course, called their Southwest Africa operation. So, yeah, that wasn't a real problem there. In other posts, I don't remember. You know, I suppose it might have been a good idea if it legally were permissible, but I just don't know. We might have shown the Superbowl, but in that case, nobody would know what was going on.

So, so I stayed at VOA for about two years roughly, and then moved on, out of the government finally, and headed a nonprofit organization called Medical Education for South African Blacks, abbreviated by its acronym MESAB, which was actually founded by a retired FSO, Herbert Kaiser, who died a year or so ago at age 94. Herb had been political counselor in Pretoria before I got there. He had come down with a melanoma, and it was successfully treated by a South African doctor, in South Africa. He was fine for the rest of his life with regard to that, but he realized that the medical treatment he received was unavailable to the large majority of the population. When they retired a few years later, Herb and his wife Joy founded this organization in order to raise funds to send black South Africans to medical school, originally, later expanded to any kind of health science: nursing, podiatry, optometry, and so on and so on. They raised the money, mainly in the U.S., in order to provide bursaries, as they're called. It worked very well. They set up a counterpart organization in Johannesburg, headed by a South African at the University of the Witwatersrand. He was the one who was in charge of dispersing the money through the various schools that accepted blacks o recipients. It was almost never a full bursary, but it often made the difference between being able to go or not. And later they expanded, I should say we expanded, to other activities, such as mentoring programs, because what happened is blacks had very inferior secondary and primary education. When they got into college, which was hard enough by itself, they were at great disadvantages, compared with the whites who had gone to schools as good as any we have.

And, they had a hard time. So, several things were done. We started the mentoring program. We organized it, and we paid the mentors, and it was a great help to many students. Also, a couple of the universities, at least, I know the University of Cape Town, lengthened the time of study for black students, so that they didn't have to take as many courses at the same time as the better prepared whites. Medical school in South Africa was a six year program directly out of high school. You didn't go first to a four year college as we do and then to a four year medical school. So, they didn't get the liberal arts training, all the other things that we might provide a doctor in the first four years out of high school, along with basic science. They went right into it, and for six years they studied mostly medical courses.

So, it was lengthened for the black students, if they needed it, to possibly eight years. They had to take and pass the same courses, but they didn't have to take as many at the same time. So, it was stretched out a little. I should add a footnote. When I say "black," I'm using it in the sense that we used it, which was anyone who was not white, and in South Africa, that encompassed three distinct groups. The name kept changing: Bantu or African or blacks; the coloreds who were mostly people of mixed race, but not entirely; and the Indians, descendants of those who were brought in from India to work on the tea plantations in Natal a century earlier. So, for the antiapartheid activists, and MESAB also, all of those were just subsumed under "blacks." They were all victims of apartheid, although to varying degrees.

So, with that footnote, for four years, I headed MESAB in Washington. We had office space provided pro bono by Kaiser Permanente, first in DC on Wisconsin Avenue, and then, when they moved out of there, in Rockville, Maryland, on East Jefferson Street. That building is still there and it's still Kaiser Permanente. MESAB was there, even beyond my tenure, which was four years—which involved a trip to South Africa every year and once to Namibia—to oversee, manage, consult, all those things, to see how it was going, and especially to meet with students we supported and university administrators.

After four years, I left that and took, I guess, the most surprising turn in my career, which was working for the American Geophysical Union [AGU], which is a scientific society and deals with Earth and space science, everything including, ocean science, atmospheric science, geology, paleoclimate, you name it, and their definition of geophysics keeps expanding. It's whatever they want it to be. So, for nine years, I was the public information manager, the first one they had as a full time employee. I found that very invigorating, although it had very little, if anything, to do with Africa or other countries at all, although the international membership of AGU is growing steadily. I forget what it was when I was there, but now it's over a third and approaching half of the members who are not actually American. So, it's sort of a prestigious society to belong to. The number, the raw number, of members has increased from something like 10 or 15,000 back then—late 1990s—to I think around 50,000 or so worldwide. They have an annual meeting, in San Francisco mostly, and occasional other meetings that have a more focused scale. I used to run press conferences at those meetings and did media liaison the rest of the year, with all of the publications, both specialized and general, that reported on

science. It was a fun job, and, I still do science writing to this day, although on a greatly reduced scale, as a freelancer.

Q: Now, talk a little bit about what you actually did for AGU.

LEIFERT: Well, there were two main domains of activity. One was media relations, which was ongoing all year. That meant putting out press releases about scientific discoveries that were published in AGU journals. That was the focus, answering questions, finding experts. If a publication called and said, we're doing a story, and we need somebody who knows about the Arctic Ocean and its changing temperature; who do you recommend? We would get back to them, because we had experts all over the place. I mean physically all over the place, as well as covering all these topics.

So, that was one locus, and it was ongoing, dealing with the media proactively and reactively. And, the second was setting up press rooms at our big meetings, especially the big annual meeting in the fall, which was in early December, mostly in San Francisco. There used to be a spring meeting whose location varied. I think they've cut back on that. But, there were also meetings on very specific topics that were held sporadically throughout the year. Some of these are really arcane, but at least for the more general meetings, we would have a press room. We would organize in advance press conferences on some of the more interesting and accessible discoveries being reported at the meeting, which required a lot of coordination and took three to five months in advance of each meeting, to do the organization.

We attracted up to 150 to 175 media people to that big fall meeting. I think it's even more now, and by media people, I mean a combination of reporters, staff writers for various publications, freelance writers, of which I am now one, editors, and the public information officers of universities and government agencies involved in science—NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Agency], NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration], lots of others. Also, any kind of university that had professors presenting at the meeting. Often they'd send a public information officer along to help promote that person or more specifically that discovery or that science, to the reporters who were there. It was an exciting job.

Q: Now have you ever had enough science to have enough of even the vocabulary, initially, to really understand what they were talking about?

LEIFERT: Absolutely not. In fact, when I decided I wanted to leave MESAB, started looking for other jobs, I sent out dozens, hundreds, of resumés, got no answers. I saw an ad from AGU which, said they wanted a public information manager and among the requirements was a PhD in one of the, at least one of the, sciences covered by AGU. All those topics I mentioned earlier. Well, I went to the Bronx High School of Science, to be sure, and I've always been interested in science, but in college I never went beyond the required introductory course in chemistry. It could have been a different science, but I took one in chemistry and in mathematics, and I didn't do brilliantly in either one of those, but passed. I had no interest in doing other academic science at that time. My

interests turned to political science and international relations. So, here I was applying for a job where I didn't meet the minimum requirement. Nevertheless, a couple of days later I got a call, and they wanted to interview me.

So I had an interview first with—hope I remember the right order—but the first two interviews were with HR, which I think was a very basic kind, to make sure I wasn't a criminal, I guess. And then with the person who would become my immediate supervisor, John Dickey, and we had a really nice chat and got along very well, and on the point of the question you raised, I said, well, look, I have some expertise in dealing with the media, and I know how to do that. It will be my job to get the scientists to explain to me clearly enough what they've done, so that I can relate it to the media. And, we probably discussed that at some length, but he seemed satisfied with it.

Then I had my third interview, which was with the executive director, the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the society, Fred Spilhaus, and, we had a similar talk. Interestingly, he was born in South Africa, but came over at a very young age. I don't think he had any recollection of South Africa. His father was Athelstan Spilhaus, a famous scientist who is remembered among other things for a science comic strip he wrote and that was syndicated in many publications. I've seen some of the strips. He also, I think, is credited with Minneapolis having a network of covered walkways between buildings in the winter, which some other cities like Montreal now have as well. I was told, and I'm really hazy on the details, that he was one of the guiding forces behind erecting that system in Minneapolis. He also created the Sea Grant program, through which NOAA funds ocean science research. Anyway, Fred, his son, was an ocean scientist, I believe, to begin with, and had headed AGU for many years. We had this talk, and I mentioned that I had served in South Africa, which I'm not sure if it was positive or negative or neutral to him, but I did mention it, and then I was offered the job, so I took it and it was very happy there for nine years.

Q: Well, let me just ask, while you were there, was there a particular exciting discovery or development that you were involved in?

LEIFERT: Only involved in publicizing it! Yes, actually. Oh, well, it was very interesting. It was around that time—this was 1998, February 1998, when I began there, and I served till the late 2007. Climate change was becoming a really important issue at that time, and in 1998, AGU put out what I think was its first statement, official policy statement, on climate change. It was very cautious, because the science had not gone that far at that point. We did not come out with a definitive statement that humans were the principal cause of climate change, of warming. We called a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, to announce the policy statement. Incidentally, AGU is in Washington; that's where all this happened.

Q: Isn't office currently located near Dupont Circle?

LEIFERT: Yes. On Florida Avenue. It's a very striking building. The building, as an aside, has been under total renovation for the last few years, and they are now in a

temporary location on Scott Circle. But, the building was gutted and almost rebuilt to meet high LEED standards, and it will have a green roof among other things and will generate as much energy as it consumes and all those wonderful things, at a cost of many millions. I took a tour through it—it hadn't quite opened yet, and I think it still hasn't quite opened yet. It looks really magnificent now on the inside.

Q: It's certainly eye-catching.

LEIFERT: Yeah. And there will be, for the first time, displays in the lobby and along the Florida Avenue facade where there are big windows to attract passers-by.

Anyway, getting back to your question, at this 1998 press conference at the National Press Club, which attracted a big crowd, most of the reporters were very disappointed that we had not come out squarely, saying that human or anthropogenic activity is the main cause of the spike in temperature rise globally. They thought the evidence was there. AGU was much more cautious, and it took some more years before they came out with another statement that said, yes, this is the case. They really wanted to be conservative about it—in a small "c" sense—and not go beyond what they were sure the science supported. There was anecdotal evidence, to be sure, but in 1998, the board that decides on policy issues just wasn't comfortable making that declaration. A few years later, while I was still there, they did. And they've been quite active proponents of what is now pretty well accepted globally, that human activity is causing the spike in temperature rise and other climate issues.

Q: Now, you were there for some seven years—

LEIFERT: Nine.

Q: Oh, nine years. How's it funded? In other words, if it can afford the multimillion dollar renovation, it must have a rather, you know, a good endowment.

LEIFERT: It has an endowment, but the renovation was funded, as I understand it, primarily by floating a bond, a DC bond, which is how the original building was built. I mean, it's the same building, but that's how it was done, and they've been paying off that bond, ever since. Their sources of income are dues, which are quite low. They were $20 a year per member for my entire tenure and only have gone up to, I think, about $50 by now, from about 50,000 people worldwide. They get fees for publishing. If you publish an article in one of their journals, as with other journals, you pay a fee, and at the meetings if you're presenting, you also pay a fee. There are exhibitors at the meetings who pay significant fees to have booths and promote their agencies or companies. And, they have investments. I mean, they invest the money they do have, I hope wisely. And so, money has not really been an issue, but they're not extravagant with it, either.

Q: And then the only other thing is, aside from the, you know, the strictly scientific aspects of things, you know, peer review articles and periodic conventions, do they have a particular, activity that they support, for example, do they fund certain investigatory

groups that go to, I don't know, maybe Patagonia and look at the glacier valley or something like that?

LEIFERT: No, I don't think so. I think they depend on scientists at universities and scientific organizations in general, government agencies, to do that research. And their role is to publish it. And to present it at meetings and publicize it, as well, but I don't think they actually support expeditions or anything of that sort.

Q: And my last question is, certainly the people who take part in it or are experts, do they also put out, sort of, science for the lay person and issue, you know, articles or press releases that are written in a way that can be understood by an average college student?

LEIFERT: Well, the press releases are meant to be understood by, let's say, at least reasonably well educated high school students. I suppose there are some that don't quite meet that criterion, but basically they're meant to be readable. They're published online, as well as distributed to the media. They get lots of comments. So I guess to answer your question, yes, but it's part of the normal flow of business. It's not a separate activity.

Q: And, over the period of time you were there, did they begin using social media? Or was that really something for into the two thousands?

LEIFERT: It was after I left. I can't remember that we had any social media presence by 2007; I think not. But now they do, they have an active program. They're on Facebook. They have their own website. I don't know what other platforms that are on, but yeah, that's part of the activity now. They've gone way beyond what we did in my time. The press conferences at the meetings were in press rooms, set up with chairs and tables for taking notes. Dais up in front with several professors or researchers, and I would lead it. They would each make a presentation about their discoveries, then there would be questions from the reporters who constituted the audience at these. Nowadays, they're streamed live as well on the web. Reporters can, who are not there, can send in questions. I forget which platform they do this on, but they can send in a question on the chat line, and it will be read by one of the staff members during the question period. So, you don't really have to go to the meeting anymore, to participate in the press conferences. But, of course, being there at the meeting gives you a vast array of other things going on, from the oral sessions to the tens of thousands of posters that are put up to the exhibit hall to ancillary meetings that go on in the margins, and all sorts of things. It's an incredible experience being at one of these meetings, and no one can take it all in.

Q: So, you were there for quite some time. Did you get more and more interested in the actual science of it?

LEIFERT: Oh yes, for sure. I did even learn some of the jargon and the trick then is to keep it out of your press releases once you've learned it, so they're still intelligible to other people. In fact, that reminds me of an anecdote of a young woman, a graduate student at the time, in ocean science. There's an annual program at the AAAS, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, that places graduate students in

the sciences at news media for eight or 10 weeks during the summer. These media are all over the place. This young woman, who was studying at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, was assigned to Newsweek, which was a real magazine at that time and had an active science section. She conducted a number of interviews over those weeks, and as she related it to me, the scientists appreciated that she was someone who understood what they were doing, what the scientific method is, and how they reached their conclusions. She asked intelligent questions. And so, she wrote a series of articles on a number of topics, she said, until one day she had to do a story that was in her own field and she called this professor. And, they immediately lapsed into a jargon that no one would possibly understand. Then, when she wrote it up, her editor said, what is this? And she had to rewrite it into normal English. So yeah, that's always a danger.

I stayed at AGU until early 2007 when I decided I would leave. My wife's health was declining, and she eventually died late in 2008. But, I was called back to work at the fall meeting, the one that takes place in early December that year, because the person they had chosen as my successor had either left or was ill, I can't remember what it was. But, so I came back on a temporary basis. I did a TDY with AGU for that one meeting, and then by the end of that year I left.

But, I had already left in spirit, and I had told—what I did have was a good Rolodex, if you remember those—of publications in the sciences and editors. So, I put the word out that I was retiring from AGU and would like to do some part time freelance science writing. Several, editors jumped on that and said, yeah, we can use you either regularly or sporadically. And so, I did that for a number of years. I still do it, but on a greatly reduced basis now, for a couple of reasons. But, I do go back to the AGU meeting every year. Now I'm sitting in the audience at the press conferences, not up on the dais, and I'm asking those tough questions of the scientists.

So, that was always fun, and the people that I was working with are a wonderful group, the science writers, and I belong to two science writing organizations. One is national, the National Association of Science Writers, which has its own annual meeting, and the DC Science Writers Association, which is in the DC, Maryland, Virginia area. It's a very large one, because of the huge number of science writers here. So, these are both professional organizations, and their meetings tend to be of the nature of professional development. I keep up the contact with that. I'm still a member of both. And, as I say, they're a great group and although some of the members I only see once a year or not even, but we connect on Facebook or whatever; that's fine.

I continued doing that, and I wrote for a number of publications, but three primarily, and two are well known, at least among people interested in science, and the other less well known, based in England. Then I left one of them voluntarily because, to be honest, I didn't like their editing. The editor I had had there for some years left, and the new one was much more aggressive. There was one article that sort of was the tipping point, where what was eventually published did not contain a single sentence that I had originally written. I just thought that was going too far, and so eventually, I just said, I

think we should go our separate ways and I wished them well; it's still a very good magazine.

The second magazine I was writing for, that I really loved writing for, was Earth magazine, published by the American Geosciences Institute [AGI]. I wrote any number of feature articles for them and a few shorter ones, more newsy. And then AGI, the publisher, abruptly terminated the magazine this year. I presume for financial reasons; they never gave an actual reason. They bequeathed it to another publication called Nautilus, which is going to establish an Earth section or separate website or something and continue the publication of Earth in some fashion, to be seen. AGI is maintaining its website of the already published stories going back over the years, including a lot of mine. but I really felt bad about them closing because, it was a wonderful outlet, and you could write a long story if you wanted to. They paid a pittance, but I didn't depend on them for income, so I was willing. Maybe that was unfair to my fellow writers who do depend on their writing for a living, but I didn't mind the low pay, because it was fun doing it. I mean, for example, I wrote a story about the U.S. Geological Survey's astrobiology center in Flagstaff, Arizona, which I had stumbled on by accident. I didn't know it existed, but it was out there, and I found it. I went back to do a story on all they do. They map planets, they map the Moon. They map Mars; they map Jupiter, and so on and so on. And, if we ever find life somewhere else in the universe, they're on it.

Q: Now when you say mapping, does they also try to map these, I think, the dwarf planets that we're finding now at the edge, you know, just beyond Pluto, or are there potential ways of mapping exoplanets?

LEIFERT: Well, the first part first; yes, they do map dwarf planets the best they can. Not all of them are beyond Pluto. Some are between Mars and Jupiter.

Q: Right, right.

LEIFERT: Comets, even. But, as for exoplanets, the truth is we have never seen one yet. We only intuit their presence, because they pass across the disk of their star and the light dims ever so slightly. And, using really sophisticated equipment, they can determine the planet's size and its distance from that star and lots of other things. But, we have never actually seen one. Every image you may have seen is an artist's impression and they're not always labeled, in my opinion, clearly enough as an artist's impression. But if it ever comes, we have equipment to do that; they're on it.

I did one story for Earth on, and this is of some international interest—in the late 1880s, the United States called a scientific meeting, an international scientific meeting, probably the first ever held in the United States, to determine the prime meridian. The prime meridian, as we know, passes through Greenwich, England, and many countries already recognized it as such at that time. But, not all. The French had the meridian of Paris, which they used, very slightly off from Greenwich, but still different. And, there were a couple of other concepts floating around, even an American prime meridian, based on 24th Street Northwest in Washington, DC. As you may remember, across from the State

Department is the old Naval Observatory, which is now, I think, part of the State Department—the buildings are—and there's an observatory there. And, that was used as a meridian for mapping the west of the U.S. All the states out west that have straight line borders were measured from 24th Street Northwest in Washington.

Railroad expansion was one of the reasons that they needed to get some clarity as to where things were in the world, both in Europe and in America, in order to establish timetables. And, that was related to time zones, which were then established. But, before you have time zones, you have to have meridians that everybody agrees on. And so, this meeting was called. I was at a Foreign Affairs Day conference at the State Department, and I was walking down a corridor—I forget which year. There's a corridor outside where all those conference rooms are, where they have mounted interesting historical photographs. There was this one photograph of a couple dozen men in formal attire, posing on the steps of the old State, War, and Navy building, now the Old Executive Office Building. They had just been across the street at the White House, having lunch with the president, and were now posing.

They were there at this conference to establish the prime meridian, and different countries had different views, and it went on for a month or so. They finally decided that Greenwich officially would be the worldwide standard. Then, as an ancillary activity, they divided the world into 24 time zones, based on the Greenwich Meridian. And, we still have them to this day, although in some cases, they've been severely modified, that is, the time zones have. But anyway, I wrote this up for Earth. It was one of the most interesting articles I had written, I mean from my own point of view, because I was able to find the minutes of the meeting and just go through day by day what all these delegates had argued over, and, it was just fun doing it.

I did another article years later, also about a meridian, the 100th meridian. That's in the Midwest. The only place that it forms a border of a state is a short distance between Texas, the north panhandle of Texas, and Oklahoma. Short distance, but that straight vertical line is the 100th meridian. A hundred years ago, more than a hundred years ago, John Wesley Powell had explored the west, a lot of it, and had come up with the idea that the 100th meridian is the approximate boundary between the wet and fertile east and the dry and arid west, which was true. It was on the great plains, and as you go further west, it becomes drier and drier, less and less vegetation. He had this revelation, I guess—he was the second director of USGS [U.S. Geological Survey]. This was late 1880s, also, and he had this hypothesis about the waters of the warm humid Gulf keeping the eastern part of the country moist and humid. That that didn't exist in the west, till you got to the coast, and that's why it was so arid there.

My article was about how, with climate change, the 100th meridian is moving eastward, not literally, but the implication of this being the boundary between the arid west and the moist east is now maybe around the 99th or 98th meridian, rather than the 100th. Some scientists, including a couple of student scientists from Columbia and Penn State, were involved in this research. It was presented at one of the AGU meetings. I saw their poster and I said, this is interesting. I interviewed a couple of, well several of, the scientists

involved in this study, and Earth published it. So, that's why I enjoyed writing for this magazine. They would take a really wide range of stuff, and I'm sorry it's gone, and maybe under its new auspices, it will continue this tradition. I hope so.

And a lot of other articles. You can Google my name under Earth magazine, but I had a great time. Wrote one about the spacecraft that visited and landed on a comet for the first time. And my last one, actually the cover story of their last print issue, was about another spacecraft, Juno, which is currently orbiting Jupiter, has already come up with many discoveries in a whole range of areas about the planet, and, there's still more to go. So, that was my swan song for Earth magazine under its old management. In fact, I only have one publication left that I wrote for regularly and still do, but I mainly write for them from that AGU fall meeting in December and not much the rest of the year. It's called Environment and Energy, and it's published online only by the Institute of Physics in the United Kingdom. So, that's my science writing career.

Q: All right. So at this point, you have sort of retired from the foreign service and then retired again mostly from your post foreign service career.

LEIFERT: Correct.

Q: The interesting thing, of course, is you had a full career in the foreign service; you developed various skills. You took them with you to subsequent careers. As you look back on the foreign service now, what would you say are the major changes that you have seen in the way we conduct foreign policy? I'm not, you know, gonna make you talk about the policy itself, but, from the practitioner's point of view, what, what do you see as the major changes?

LEIFERT: Well, I think, probably the major change is the greater diversity in the foreign service corps. When I was there, when I entered, let's say, it was practically all white. I couldn't tell you what percent was not white, but it was a very small percent, including some of my colleagues. I think USIA was a little more progressive in that regard than State. The situation of women was, of course, totally different. You could only be an FSO if you were unmarried, and if you married, you had to resign. And that affected at least one in my own USIA class, who later came back in with back pay after the policy changed. But, several others probably did not come back in found other careers and, went their merry ways, I'm tempted to say, unfortunately. In terms of ethnic diversity, as I said, there was not very much of it. In terms of gender identity, things that have become issues in more recent years, you couldn't be gay in the foreign service. I mean openly, although I knew one or two people who I assumed were, but it was sort of don't ask, don't tell. That wasn't State's official policy, but I think in essence that's what it was. Transgender—nobody even heard of that. So, yeah, things have changed quite a lot in that regard. In other foreign services too, I think. But, certainly ours.

Q: Now, in the particulars of working as a public affairs officer, how did the change in technology affect, positively or negatively, or, you know, how, how would you reflect on that?

LEIFERT: There wasn't an awful lot of technological change during my tenure, with the exception of the advent of satellite dishes. We had mimeograph machines at all my posts, or some version of that. I remember at Johannesburg, email came in. We could email between Johannesburg and Pretoria. I don't know how it was done. Only one FSN had access to whatever device it was done on. And I would say, could you send an email to Pretoria saying this? And she would do it. I don't know how she did it. And, if we got an answer that channel, she would tell me. Clearly, it was only for unclassified, but 95% of what we did was unclassified.

Other than that, oh yeah, I remember when I was in on a Washington assignment, I guess early 'eighties, we got our first Wangs, the Wang computers came in to the Africa area office of USIA, and the exec officer decided that they were for use only by secretaries. And so, the way it worked was, at least in that early year or two, was that all the FSOs, who were mainly what State would call desk officers—we covered areas of Africa, in in my case, francophone west Africa. If I had a message to send, I would type it on my IBM [International Business Machines] Selectric, hand it to my secretary, who would retype it on the Wang. And, it just seemed, even at the time, it seemed like a ridiculous duplication of effort. Finally that went away. Secretaries pretty much went away, except for the head of the office. So, we typed our own stuff and, you know, we survived.

Q: Now, you were at least an observer of the State Department while you were in VOA. Did the subsequent changes as USIA is slowly being eliminated, you know, how did you see that as an observer of that process?

LEIFERT: Yeah. Well, the first iteration of that kind of thing was in the Carter administration when, when for whatever reason, they changed the name of the U.S. Information Agency to the International Communications Agency, which of course was abbreviated ICA and very easily confused with another agency. Nobody liked it, but John Reinhardt, the director of USIA and a man I admired in many ways, was a strong proponent, or at least advocate, of the change. And, it happened and lasted a few years. I can't remember how many, until we went back to the old name, but it was still an independent agency. The amalgamation of USIA into State occurred after I left, but during the Clinton administration, and the story we heard was that it was a deal between Madeline Albright, secretary of state, and Jesse Helms, senator from North Carolina, who had always hated USIA for all sorts of reasons. Too liberal, I guess, would sum it up. He had always wanted it to be abolished completely. I guess the compromise they reached and what Helms gave up was that he allowed the U.S. to pay its back dues to the UN [United Nations], which he had been holding up. He and a few others.

So, they made this deal and over some period of time, USIA was absorbed into State. Of course, some of it had always been there, like the exchange program had never left State, originally at the insistence of Senator Fulbright, who sponsored the academic exchange programs that still bear his name. It was just administered by USIS overseas. But, all the information programs abroad were brought into State, in what I thought was a pretty clumsy way, and it kept going. Still changing, as to whether it's part of the larger public

affairs unit or if it's a separate thing. I have not followed this closely, but I think it was pretty rocky for a lot of my friends who were still in at that time. And that's all I can say about it, ‘cause I wasn't involved.

Q: Now you developed this set of skills to get into the foreign service in your time; if you were advising someone who wanted to go in now, how would you advise them to prepare?

LEIFERT: Yeah, I'm not even sure I would, and I say that for one reason: security. When I was in the foreign service, I went wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted. Except that incident in Mali, after I left the foreign service, I never felt in danger. And, there was no question of having armored vehicles or security officers, beyond an RSO [Regional Security Officer] and the Marine Security Guard detachment, which we didn't have it every post I served in. In fact, several I served in did not have marines. Nowadays, I'm told, you just can't decide to go visit some editor whenever you feel like it and drive over there in your own car. It has to be arranged and escorted and all, and it just seems to me, if that's true, then it's a much less appealing activity.

That said, if you were determined to do it, I don't think you have to learn different things. I would say, if you're going to be in the information cone or exchange code or whatever they call it now, doing USIA-type things—this is all I can really speak about—I'd still say, good to have a basic liberal arts education. American studies would be wonderful. Then, some basic international relations courses; one or two foreign languages can only help, assuming you're good at them. And, beyond that, I don't think there's any particular thing. I think the department needs a lot of generalists, I think, people have all kinds of background in different academic areas and also in work experience.

I think those people will find their niche, whatever it is, because I think the needs are so varied and so overwhelming, and leaving out all the fiscal and security concerns about how big a post should be and all of that—whether we should open a post here or reduce the size of that one there—I'm not getting involved in that, because I don't have the knowledge, but I just think that the generalist idea's a good one, and there's very little they can teach you in college or graduate school that you'll directly apply day to day. Some of it you will, but you don't know what it will be. It might not be the international relations course. It might be that Russian literature might help you at a post in a way you never thought it would.

Q: And to the extent you've been able to kind of continue watching Africa, are there any, you know, if you are blue sky, what one thing would you recommend that we do in Africa to promote good relations, to promote the possibility of additional commerce, and so on and so on? What does African need the most now?

LEIFERT: Well, from my point of view, I would try to keep those libraries and cultural centers open. I think the soft diplomacy is very effective in Africa. Chinese are coming in with billions of dollars to build stuff, and they have been doing that for many years, but much more now. If we're not prepared to do comparable things, and I guess we're not, we should at least be trying to reach ordinary people in ordinary ways. I remember that

anecdote that I recounted previously. In Johannesburg, at some event that I was at during my tenure there as Branch PAO, an elderly black gentleman came up to me after and said, you know, I want to thank you. And, I said, for what? And, he said, well, not you personally, but your library. Because, when I was young, the American library was the only place I could go and read books and take them home and use them to study. And, I learned a lot that would just not have been possible without that library. I don't think he was unique. So you never know how it's going to turn out.

We had another incident, in Namibia, soon after I arrived. And again, I'm repeating; I apologize. My goal in arriving there was to set up a post and that was expected to take about the two years, and I wasn't really expected to conduct programming, at least not at first. But, very soon after we arrived, there was a headline that appeared in one of the local newspapers—and Namibia had at least half a dozen daily newspapers in English, German and Afrikaans—one of the English language papers, the most liberal one, had a headline to the effect that the United States government was secretly funding a media center for the DTA, the leading party in the independence movement that favored continuing white minority rule.

This text appeared in the paper, and I went to the acting director—the chargé—it was not an embassy yet. Went to the chargé, and I said, this is bull, isn't it? I mean, we're not doing anything like this behind the scenes, are we? Because, we were never particularly close to DTA in the first place. He said, no, it's pure nonsense. So I called the reporter who had written it. It turned out he had once been on a cultural exchange program run from USIS Pretoria, in which he had spent some weeks at a newspaper in the U.S. And, he had learned a lot about American standards of journalism. I said, you know, this story is untrue. I'm going to do a little digging and get back to you, and I would appreciate it if, you know, I could put my side of this in the paper. He said, of course. So, what did I do? I spoke to the chargé, talked to a couple of other people. It was total nonsense. So, I issued a public statement to all the media, saying that this was untrue, that we were totally neutral in the election campaign that was to follow independence, who's going to run the parliament, would be the prime minister, president. With that, the story completely died.

And that was the first impact we had, because it was reported that Harvey Leifert, the Director of the United States Information Service in Windhoek, said— And that was the first anyone heard there was such a thing, because we were maintaining this low profile, just trying to get organized. So, that was, I think, an important breakout moment that, A., we were able to get our message in, B., exchange programs can have value that you never anticipate, years later.

And that's why I think—really long answer to your question—the more we can do, not withdraw from activities, physically or financially, the better it'll be, especially in third world countries that still don't have access to the kind of media we're used to, even though they may have cell phones now and can get on Facebook and all, they still need broader and deeper sources of information and access to what we would consider more accurate, more objective information and also information about what we do, as a country.

Q: Right. And then the final question is, any closing thoughts about your time in the foreign service or, you know, any, any other, recommendations or—

LEIFERT: Well, I thoroughly enjoyed my career. There was no bad post. There were posts I went to reluctantly, like Port-au-Prince, but I enjoyed them. I even got married in Haiti. And so, you never know. And then, on the other side, I was assigned to Copenhagen. Wow. A western European capital; it's going to be fantastic. From a work point of view, it was relatively boring after Africa. Yeah, there was a variety of media, and we did conduct the usual programs, but outside there was not a lot to do. There's the Danish ballet. Great. But how many times can you see it? And, I think in the two years I was there, not one international orchestra came to visit, to put on a performance. It was sort of a cultural backwater, I have to say back in the early seventies. Restaurants: Danish food was excellent, but if you wanted something ethnic, it was cooked by a Dane and had varying degrees of success. I'm being charitable. So, you know, all of these things, you never know what the post will bring you, whether you'll love it like it or—it didn't happen to me—hate it.

I was sorry about the way I left the foreign service, which was time in class, because of two things that happened. And again, I already went over these. First of all, when I was still BPAO in Johannesburg, with the PAO in Pretoria. He and I were very close and got along well. He liked my work. He put me in fore the Superior Honor Award, and that continued later, when I was assigned to Windhoek, and he became the area director. But, back in Pretoria, my new rating officer was now the deputy PAO, who was the same class as I was, FSO-1. And, I thought this was very unfair, and we didn't get along that well. the PAO and Deputy PAO seemed determined to undo everything their predecessors had done.

They questioned every activity, every program, and maybe it's fair to look at it with new eyes, but they seemed determined to undo. So, everything we thought was wonderful, they thought, eh, it was not so wonderful. Okay. And here, these are now my rating and reviewing officers, while the rater was competing with me for a limited number of slots into the Senior Foreign Service. And I thought that was unfair. I did write to AFSA. I didn't file a grievance about it, but I got what I considered a mediocre review, and I wrote AFSA about it. And, to be honest, I never really heard anything back substantively. AFGE [American Federation of Government Employees], which was competing with AFSA that time to represent the foreign service officially, did express some interest when they heard about it, but they weren't yet the representative; they never were. So, there's nothing they could do, but they thought it was an issue, and AFSA apparently did not. And I'm sure I wasn't the only one in that situation.

Okay. That was one thing that held me back. Then in, Windhoek, this same former PAO and area director who loved my work, was now on the panel, the promotion panel that I was competing in; this is the following year. I did not get the promotion. He later told me that he was really sorry about that. He thought I had one more year of eligibility and the panel therefore gave it to someone else who was borderline. And, again, I thought this is

a grossly unfair system, but I was, I guess, willing to accept it and move on. But, I think it was not the way to go out, two situations where in the one case, conflict of interest, in the other, pure human failure to check things out—because I'm positive that he's sincere in saying if he had known, I would have gotten that promotion into the senior foreign service. So, that was the end of my career. But, again, no hard feelings.

End of interview