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

BETH PAYNE

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INTERVIEW

Q: Okay. Today is the 10th of April 2019 with Beth Payne. And I am Charles Stuart Kennedy, Association of Diplomatic Studies. Now let's have it. When and where were you born?

PAYNE: So, I was born in Roaring Spring, Pennsylvania, which is just near Martinsburg, Pennsylvania. And I was born in 1964.

Q: Let's talk a little about your family. Who was your father? What do you know about him and where he came from?

PAYNE: So, my father was a Mennonite, as well as my mother, and at the time I was born, he was a Mennonite minister in Martinsburg. They had been missionaries overseas, so they had some background with international travel. They were both from Big Valley, Pennsylvania, which is a large Mennonite Amish community. My mother's parents were Amish who converted to Mennonite in their youth.

Q: You might explain—Mennonite, Amish. I mean, did you drive carriages and wear a little hat?

PAYNE: My grandparents on my mom's side were what we called "old order Mennonites." They were very conservative Mennonites. On my father's side were pretty regular Mennonites. They are less conservative than the Amish, so they did drive cars. But they were conservative Christians. My maternal great grandparents would have driven buggies and been farmers since they were Amish. Both my parents grew up on farms. My father's father was not originally Mennonite. He converted to Mennonite. Since he was a pacifist, he was imprisoned during World War II. He met Mennonites while in prison, and converted to the Mennonite faith because he was so impressed with their beliefs.

Q: He was in the military, I figure?

PAYNE: Well, he was actually conscripted and then refused to fight because he was a pacifist and was put in prison. He was imprisoned and threatened with death if he didn't put on a uniform. But he was a pretty devout pacifist, as were Mennonites. So, there were a lot of Mennonites also in the prison farm that he was imprisoned in. And so, then he met these Mennonites and decided to convert to the Mennonite faith.

Q: Well, your family was farming? How much farming did you do?

PAYNE: I never did any farming because my parents never owned a farm. My parents left the Mennonite church when I was in elementary school. My dad left the ministry

when I was quite young, went back to school at Penn State University and got his PhD. We then moved to Shippensburg, where my dad taught at the university and my mom at a local elementary school. I grew up in a small university town, but we would go visit family members who had farms.

Q: What branch of education was your father in?

PAYNE: Elementary education. And my mom also got a degree in education and became a third-grade teacher.

Q: So, you grew up in Shippensburg?

PAYNE: Yeah, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania.

Q: What was it like when you grew up?

PAYNE: I must be honest, it was a pretty narrow-minded, racist, little town and I felt that growing up. I knew it was racist. My parents weren't. They raised us to see everybody as equal. We often had students from all over the world coming to our home. We were good friends with the only Jewish family in town, for example. Yet I knew how narrow-minded my neighbors were.

Q: What did it come from? Was it religion that caused racism, because I wouldn't think Shippensburg would be particularly susceptible to—

PAYNE: We used to joke that it was south of the Mason Dixon line. No, it was—I'll give you a good example. When I was a teenager, I spent the summer staying with an elderly woman who couldn't stay by herself. And she asked if I would help her find a college student who would live in her home to be there once school started. And I did. I found a lovely student who happened to be a black woman. When I called, and said "I found somebody," she was all excited. I brought her over to the house. She opened the door, she looked at the woman, and said, "This won't do," and closed the door in our face. That's how racist it was. And I had friends who used the n-word who I would ask to please don't use that word around me. But it was commonplace.

Q: Shippensburg is fairly far up in Pennsylvania, isn't it?

PAYNE: Central—south central Pennsylvania. It's about an hour's drive from Hagerstown. It's maybe half an hour from the Maryland border.

Q: Shippensburg played a part in the battle of Gettysburg.

PAYNE: Yes. Yes, very much so. We're close to Gettysburg. But a lot of people don't know—in the small towns in a state like Pennsylvania, there is a lot more antisemitism and racism than people would perceive there to be. I'll be honest. Like, it just is.

Q: Why would it be antisemitism? Cause I would think antisemitism would sort of be confined to big cities.

PAYNE: No, oh no, no, no, no. These are pretty close-minded—I mean it's a group of people who don't look much beyond their own clans, their own groups. It was extremely religious. You know, there was a church on many street corners. In fact, there was an ordinance that you couldn't put a bar a certain distance from a church, which meant you couldn't put a second bar in downtown Shippensburg. It was impossible. There were too many churches to put a second bar. There was a lot of suspicion of outsiders, even my family, because we moved into Shippensburg. We're not, you know—we're outsiders. And so, no. There was a lot of suspicion of people from elsewhere and not a lot of diversity. Only one Jewish family when I was growing up. Only two black families when I was growing up.

Q: Well, okay. First, your family, how were they politically?

PAYNE: Pretty liberal. Actually, incredibly progressive for their age. For example, we were also very good friends with a gay professor. You know, at that time was not common for someone my father's age—died recently at 85—to be friends with someone his age who's gay. We knew he was gay. He wasn't out. But we knew that. My parents were very focused on gender equality. My mom grew up conservative, yet my dad encouraged her to be educated and to be his equal. And he shared in the work and in the grocery shopping and — the cooking and in the raising of the children. So, I was raised in a household of equality. All of us did everything. My brother cleaned. I cut grass. We were very hardworking. We worked every Saturday.

Q: What'd you do?

PAYNE: We canned food, we—boy, did we can food, because we didn't have a lot of money. There were five kids. And you know, when something was in season, we would get bushels and spend Saturday canning. We would clean the house. We would paint the house if needed. We would tidy the yard. We worked—we were all expected to work.

Q: Schooling. Let's take elementary school, how did you find—I mean, were you outsiders there or what?

PAYNE: My experience was pretty unique because I could walk to elementary school, yet I never really felt inspired or part of a community. I was always an odd ball. I was always not your normal kid. It's interesting because I think my older siblings worked very hard to be normal, to be accepted, to be popular. I always was a little outside and I think I also have this nature of being myself. I don't conform very easily to the group. Then, you know, going to junior high school and to high school, I was even more of an outsider. For years, I said, "I want to leave this town. I'm done. I want to see more of the world. This is too narrow for me."

Q: Trying to capture your life in a small town like that. What was it like being a girl in a small town? I'll take as a pre-teenager first.

PAYNE: In some ways I had an enormous amount of freedom. If you think about it, they talk about "free range kids" now. I free ranged my whole childhood. I ran around town without any parental supervision. We would race the trains. I mean, things we did that were a little bit dangerous, you know, where we would play on train tracks, we would build forts in the woods. We would run all over the place. I was very young, started delivering newspapers on my bicycle. So, I rode all over the place, delivering newspapers, collected money every week to pay for the newspaper. So, I met a lot of the people in the community. I had to be home in time for dinner. My parents were pretty restrictive on things like dances. It took them a long time to let us go to a high school dance. I couldn't go to any junior high dances. That was so hard because, you know, that highlights how much of an outsider you are, you know. I couldn't get my ears pierced.

Q: Where did you rank in the siblings?

PAYNE: I'm the youngest. Five of us in six years. One memorable thing to know about me is that my father had a vasectomy that did not work, and I was born, and I knew that. And so, part of, sort of my own mythology was, I'm pretty stubborn person who said, "I'm going to be born no matter what you do." But I imagine it was quite a surprise for my parents.

Q: Were you a good student?

PAYNE: Yeah. I was pretty precocious. When my mom in school at Penn State, there was a time when neither my mom nor my dad were free to watch me. I was still pre-kindergarten. And so, my mom started to take me to one of her classes. It was a geology class. We sat in the back, and she was hoping no one would notice that she had this little kid with her, and she would give me paper and you know, pencil and I would draw. One day the professor made an off-color joke, noticed I was in the class and was like, "Who's this little kid? Well what's she drawing?" and noticed that I had been taking notes. I was actually following the lecture and taking notes and drawing the drawings he had put on the board. He let me attend and gave me a certificate and a little hammer at the end of the course. I walked up to the front of the auditorium and accepted my certificate of completion at age four. I was in gifted programs once they were started. I skipped my senior year of high school and went straight to college.

Q: Well, I tell you, then you were a reader?

PAYNE: Yes. An avid reader. And our home was filled with books.

Q: Well, what kind of books particularly grabbed you?

PAYNE: I love a good novel. I would read the stories. I wanted to learn about how people lived. What was it like elsewhere? I loved anything by international authors, even at a very young age. And so, I would read just about anything I could get my hands on.

Q: Three Musketeers?

PAYNE: We weren't allowed to watch TV very much. We were limited in how much TV we could watch. So, in our free time there really was reading. Plus, I realize now I'm an introvert and in that big family I would get exhausted. So, I just grab a book, climb a tree, and sit up in the little nook of the tree, and read for hours.

Q: So, were any of the books—thinking back on it—significant?

PAYNE: *My Side of the Mountain*, where this little boy runs away and lives by himself in a tree. Because I always wanted my own space. I was desperate for my own space. Stories—I forget the name of the novel—where a woman moved to the city and lived by herself in an apartment and had an independent life. I liked books in which the characters had freedom and independence. You could see that from a very early age, I was desperate for my own independence and freedom.

Q: Did you feel confined in Shippensburg?

PAYNE: Oh yeah, very much so.

Q: Where'd your family fall politically?

PAYNE: My parents were liberal in their political leanings. They voted for Democrats. We didn't talk politics a lot growing up since they weren't politically engaged. As we got older, we talked politics more especially when my brother, who is a moderate Republican, would argue with me.

Q: Did your family meals—they're just discussions about various topics?

PAYNE: Yeah. But we talked about life, not so much political topics. You know, we wouldn't talk about Richard Nixon as president or something like that, but we would just talk about life and what did you do today. You know, that type of thing.

Q: How did you relate to the other kids? I would think you would be sort of a loner.

PAYNE: I was a loner. I had a tense relationship with my sister who is a year older than me. Unfortunately, she suffered from depression and now we're much closer. So, that may have made me even more of a loner. My other sister and brother, the middle kids, were best friends and a lot more outgoing than I was. My older sister also was a bit of a loner. She took on a responsible role. I was comfortable being alone. I could take care of myself.

Q: Well, in high school, did you get involved with any activities?

PAYNE: I was a swimmer, which I still am to this day. I played trumpet in the marching band. I did a lot of photography. I was the yearbook photographer. Now, what stood out a lot in high school was that I had this natural group of friends that were all the kids of college professors. But, my best friend was not. And she was from a blue-collar family, and those other friends wouldn't accept her. And so, I left them because I said, "Well, if you won't accept my friend, then I don't want anything to do with you." I ended up with someone who had a very different socioeconomic background than me. But I was just so loyal to her that I broke away from the group that I would naturally be a part of.

Q: Tell me, given the situation, what would it be about? I mean, a group of young people, that a girl from a different socioeconomic background would be excluded. I mean, what law—

PAYNE: Right. Think about it. There's how smart you are. So, you know, we were the smart kids. We were the ones in advanced classes. We had more money, since we were solidly middle class in that small town. So, there's class and intelligence. And not all of them excluded her, but enough did to make me angry. They were say “She's not invited to this party" or "She's not included to this event," so I just said, "Look guys, if you won't include my friend, I'm not coming."

Q: What—I went to all male, sort of prep-schools during the war years. And clothes weren't a big item. I mean—were clothes a big item?

PAYNE: No, not really. I mean, we had the classics, you know, we had the popular girls, the sports people, the intellectuals. There were the groupings. The kids who got in trouble. And I could have been with that intellectual group but didn't. And then, I was just one of these standalones. Like I was like, "I'm not joining any group. I'm not part of a group." And I've always been that way.

Q: Well, I assume that—firstly, what courses particularly appealed to you and what ones didn't appeal to you?

PAYNE: So, here's what was interesting. I was quite a math whiz. I was exceptionally good at math. Which was awkward because then I was in the same math class as my sister, which caused a lot of tension. I was terrible at English. In fact, I had to take special classes because I have a slight learning disability. And so, I was put into special reading classes.

Q: A dyslexic type thing?

PAYNE: Yeah. But it was never diagnosed. I had speech impediments and I had reading challenges. So, I was much, much better at math than I was at English and tended to focus on the math. Ironically, I did not major in math.

Q: Well, I assume coming from your background, college was expected for you.

PAYNE: Oh yes. And I used to like fight with—well, not really fight—but I would struggle with my dad and say, "Well what if I don't want to go to college?" You know, and he'd be like, "No, this is not—you are going to college. There, there is no question." Now, what's interesting is in retrospect, I realize how little I knew about my options. My parents are first generation educated and grew up on farms. We were in a small town, and I really had no idea what majors I could select from. From my dad's perspective you major in a subject that brings you job security. My oldest went into medical in the medical field, a five-year medical program. The next two went into engineering. The fourth went into computer science. And so, that was what I was expected to do. And you go to a state school. I could not go to a liberal arts school because it was too expensive. I remember looking at these schools and bringing them to my dad and saying, "Could I go to this school?" And he goes, "No, we can't afford it." So, I had very few options to select from when it came to going to college.

Q: Well, what were you pointed at? I mean, was your family pushing you towards any particular place?

PAYNE: Penn State, everybody in my family went to Penn State. Both my mom and dad graduated from Penn State. All my older siblings went there. It is a great school and it was affordable. I could afford to go to Penn State. Everybody else in my family went to Penn State. Why not? So, I went to Penn State.

Q: Yeah, we're living in an era right now where people have been caught bribing school admissions people in order to get into the right school. And when you think about it, it didn't make that much difference.

PAYNE: In retrospect, it really didn't. Now for me—I'll be perfectly honest —I think I would have thrived in a small liberal arts school. Instead, I went to a huge state school. That said, so what?

Q: So, you were at Penn State from when to when?

PAYNE: I did my first year of college as my senior year of high school at Shippensburg. So, I was at Penn State from '82 to '85, three years, studying first psychology and then special education. My degree is in special education.

Q: What was it like when you hit the campus of Penn State?

PAYNE: Overwhelming. During my first semester I wanted to quit. I had a boyfriend that I had met as a camp counselor the summer before. I worked at a camp for the blind. I wanted to move to his small liberal arts college, Lock Haven [University]. And my dad, very wisely said, "If, at the end of your first year, you still want to move, we'll let you, but don't move now." And then, by the end of the first year I was fine. But it was a very, very hard adjustment for me. It was hard for me to live in a dorm with a roommate. I'm a very light sleeper. I've always been. So, the noise overwhelmed me. It was very noisy. It was very crowded. And so, it took me a long time to adjust.

Q: Had they reached that point where men and women are taking showers together?

PAYNE: Oh God no. No, no, no. We had all women dorms and all male dorms. Penn State's a very big party school. So, there were lots of parties in the dorms.

Q: What was daily life like in high school?

PAYNE: I was exceptionally shy and did not have a boyfriend in high school. I had friends, but was incredibly, incredibly shy. My first boyfriend was this summer camp boyfriend, and then I had a boyfriend in college, but I did not date very much. I was definitely shy.

Q: Why special education_____?

PAYNE: Because of the camp for the blind. Because I had worked with blind kids and thought, "Well, this would be interesting. I'd like to work with disabled children." And the second time I went back to that camp, I worked with blind adults.

Q: What would your studies be in special education at the college level?

PAYNE: I was really good at math, but I did not want to study math or engineering. I don't know why. I just could not bring myself to do that. So, I had pretty easy classes, not challenging. They didn't really challenge me intellectually. And then, my junior year I was accidentally put into the wrong English class. That was very challenging. It was for pre-law majors. I loved it, and I thrived in it. And I went to my adviser and I said, "I think I want to go to law school.' And then he helped me shape my senior year—instead of it being focused on getting a certification to teach—to prepare myself for law school. So, my senior year, my courses were much more rigorous. But to be honest, in the first few years an education degree didn't have a lot of intellectual rigor.

Q: What'd you do in the evenings? I mean, we're talking about back at Penn State in the first year or two, were you still shy?

PAYNE: I was still shy, but I would join organizations. I was part of a speaker group that would bring the speakers to campus. I got involved in issues. I was involved in educating about HIV/AIDS and the threat of HIV/AIDS. I did a lot of work with disabled children. I

liked helping people become aware of disabilities and organizing events, like a dance where college students would dance with disabled kids. So, I was active. My second and third year I was a resident assistant and that took a lot of time. That also paid for a lot. I think that paid for my housing, my dorm. I worked—my first year, I worked in the dining hall. So, I had a lot to do in addition to just the studies. And I had good friends. I made some very tight good friends. I considered myself what we called a "goddamn independent" in reaction to the fraternity life there. And so, I hung out with all the other misfits. But you know, when you're at a school with 40,000 people, there are plenty of misfits to hang out with.

Q: Well, I mean I would think that a campus like that—I went to Williams. Such a small little campus—the idea of getting the subject of 40,000 people.

PAYNE: Yeah, it was huge. Penn State, of course, is famous for its football, for example. I worked in the dining hall during football games because I was the only employee who was happy to do that. And so, instead of going and tailgating and partying at the games, I worked. That was the type of person I was. I never became a Penn State fan. My brother is an avid Penn State fan. Me, I'm just like, "Hey, I went to school there." That's it.

Q: So, by your junior year were you pointed at law?

PAYNE: That was when I decided I was going to go to law school and my dad was incredibly supportive to give him enormous credit because I thought, "Wow, this is going to be expensive." And he said, "Don't worry, we'll help you out. I support you going to law school." I did want to take a year off and travel. And he said, "No, I'll pay your way to go to Europe for the summer"—Which was shocking. My siblings were shocked—"If you still go to law school in the fall. Don't take a year off." And he gave me enough, it was $11 a day for me to travel around Europe for two months with a Eurorail pass.

Q: You could do it. There's a book called Europe on $10 a Day.

PAYNE: That's what I did. I stayed in youth hostels and bummed around Europe by myself. So, again, at that age, I graduated from college—my best friend in college who was going to go with me, he couldn't go—and I went by myself, which was very rare for a young woman—a young American woman to travel by herself was incredibly rare.

Q: Let's talk about your experiences.

PAYNE: I loved it. At first I was terrified. I flew into Luxembourg, absolutely terrified and then adapted pretty quickly. I think Luxembourg Air was really cheap then. I flew in and out of Luxembourg and then had the Eurorail pass and just bopped around, met with people, sometimes traveled with another person I met at the youth hostel, sometimes went by myself. I had a little fling with a guy in Munich. I hung out. It's amazing that I'm okay. In Denmark I stayed in this flop place where people who did drugs flopped. And hitchhiked from Denmark to Rotterdam. In The Hague I stayed with like a kickboxer who

was squatting. The risks I took were exceptional. I slept in train stations. I slept in a city park once. I hitchhiked out of East Berlin into West Berlin. Who would imagine?

Q: I was a consular officer. So, you would've been meat/neat for me.

PAYNE: Yeah, it was like your worst nightmare. It's amazing. And I was fine.

Q: You hitchhiked?

PAYNE: I can't believe I hitchhiked. Both times I hitchhiked it was with somebody. I never hitchhiked alone. Spending one night in a train station by myself was risky. My mom commented though—when I came back—that I was jumpy. I was like, you know—because when you're sleeping in a train station or in a park, you're always kind of aware. And so, she was like, "You were so jumpy."

Q: So, the era that we're talking about now, drugs are a big thing. AIDS—was AIDS?

PAYNE: Very early. It was the very, very early years, because this was '82 to '85. So, remember the mid-eighties was when you first started. So, we were doing AIDS awareness, that "here's how you protect yourself from getting AIDS."

Q: That must have been a terrible inhibitor.

PAYNE: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It was very scary at that time.

Q: Any particular country or any area that particularly grabbed you?

PAYNE: So, I loved Dublin because we hung out at a dockers bar with all these ship workers—because we didn't know any better—and they sang to us all evening. It was just amazing. I really liked Heidelberg. I stayed with a former student of my dad's. I loved going into East Berlin. This Australian guy and I had met the youth hostel. We went into East Berlin together and went way off the beaten path. You had to spend your $30 that you had to change, and we just ran around East Berlin for the day. It was so much fun.

Q: Did you have any particular feelings about the politics there?

PAYNE: None.

Q: You know, East, West, all that?

PAYNE: None, I really didn't understand it. I'll be honest. I got very little education in the liberal arts. I mean, I didn't really start becoming politically aware until law school, and then I became pretty left wing. But up until then, I really didn't understand politics because I was never taught politics. It was so interesting because the one class that I was accidentally put into, we had to read The New York Times every day. And it was the first

time I was exposed to international news. Even growing up, we just read the local newspaper, which was crap. And I really—I was exposed to international culture by my parents, but not politics.

Q: What about TV?

PAYNE: We didn't watch TV. You know, think back to the nightly news shows from the '80s. There wasn't a whole lot on the nightly news. My dad, every day, would watch the local news and then, one nightly news show, one national news show. And if you go back and study that, there's not a whole lot. That does not expand your horizon. Reading The New York Times every day was a revelation.

Q: Well, I think that we're living in the era—we have a president named Trump now and most of us aren't particularly involved in foreign relations. This is just unthinkable, but it does show that the American population really is not very well educated.

PAYNE: I know this because I grew up in a small town. Think about it. My dad was a college professor. And I graduated from college without much of a liberal education and I'm more normal than the people who grew up in New York City. I actually represent the average American more. And so, that's why I understand why people voted for Trump. I understand why America is going the direction it's going, because that's where I grew up.

Q: Well, I mean for people like me, which is—there's no money, but I got a very good education, more or less by people knowing me and scholarships and all that. But I find that just incredible.

PAYNE: Yeah. You can graduate from Penn State with a special education degree and not really have much of an education. And then, the luck for me was I was accidentally put in this English class, like it was a mistake. And that was life changing. Who knows where I'd be if I had not been accidentally put in that English class?

Q: You graduated in what year?

PAYNE: '85

Q: So, you graduated in '85, then what?

PAYNE: I spent that summer in Europe and then started law school. And so, here's where I give my dad enormous credit. I'd always wanted to move to DC. I only looked at law schools in DC. I visited George Washington University, Georgetown University and American University. I got into all three, and chose American because it was smaller, and I felt like I belonged there. I felt more comfortable with that law school population. I didn't know at the time that it was a very left-wing legal community. But I just instantly connected and so, my dad said, "Fine, we'll help you pay for that," which was very expensive. And I moved to DC. I lived in a basement room, without even a kitchen. We

were two law students in two separate rooms in this guy's basement because it was dirt cheap and walking distance from the law school. I lived there for the first year and then moved to a group house where five of us lived together in this rundown old house because it was cheap.

Q: Well, was law what'd you thought it would be once you got in?

PAYNE: I loved it. I loved it, absolutely loved it. I became politically aware. I thrived in that environment. I did have to work full-time for a few years at the law library, which paid my tuition. I got out of law school with only $11,000 in student loans, which is amazing. Because I got free tuition, cheap housing. And I was very stimulated. It was great. And I had professors who were very left wing who were, you know, very involved in the civil rights movement. I fell in love with the civil rights movement, learned everything there is to know about how to use the federal courts to protect people, to acquire people's rights to—

Q: What is it possible to, through law, concentrate on civil rights?

PAYNE: Yes.

Q: And you did?

PAYNE: Yeah. I had a lot of flexibility in the courses I could take. I took two graduate school classes because they let you, one on Marxism in Europe, one on madness in 18th century literature. So, I just was thrilled. That was where I became much more politically aware. I became the national student representative for the National Lawyers Guild and went to a national lawyers guild conference. I got involved in writing about the Western Sahara and got something I wrote published in a book on the Western Sahara. I hung out with members of the Polisario [Sahrawi liberation movement trying to end the Moroccan presence in the Western Sahara]. I dated an Indian guy, who was the love of my life. So, I hung out with people from all over the world. It was great.

Q: Did the love of your life introduce you to Indian politics or was he—

PAYNE: More Indian culture. He was a business major and wanted to be a businessman. So, he didn't care about politics. But he taught me a lot about Indian culture.

Q: How does it work? I mean, law school's three years?

PAYNE: Three years, three years.

Q: Did you line up a law firm? Were you able to clerk for—or do something?

PAYNE: No. So, here's what I did—which again, threw my parents for a loop—I joined the Peace Corps. I had told my dad I wanted to take time off after college and he said,

"No, go straight to law school" because he was afraid I would never go. And I said, "Well, what about if I joined the Peace Corps in between?" He goes, "No, if you still want to join the Peace Corps after law school then you can join the Peace Corps," hoping it would have the same effect that it did my first year of college, where if you still want to leave at the end of the year that's ok. But this time I said "No, I still want to join the Peace Corps." So, I joined the Peace Corps and went to Tunisia and taught special education.

Q: Okay, well let's talk about the Peace Corps. How did you find the initial process, the *recruiting and the language training?*

PAYNE: The recruiting was very easy. They loved me because I had a degree in special ed. They were desperate for special education teachers because not a lot of people with Special Ed degrees were joining the Peace Corps. And so, I had a minimal training here in the States, unlike some other groups, because I didn't need to be trained in being a Special Ed teacher. Then went to Tunisia, where I was trained in the language, in Arabic. I was never good at languages, by the way. This was another problem for me. In high school, after one year of French I refused to study a foreign language again, because it was so horrible. I have that disability, that verbal disability, that made language learning exceptionally hard. So, I graduated from high school with only one year of language. Then, in college I tried Spanish and I was absolutely miserable. I hated it, and said, "I am graduating from college without a degree and without language." Special Ed didn't require language. It was a Bachelor of Science, not a Bachelor of Arts. So, I graduated from college without a foreign language. So, here I go to Tunisia, and I learned Arabic. But because it was an immersion program and I didn't have to worry about grammar and about all this other stuff—which by the way, I still can't do an English—I managed. I was never phenomenal at it. I was never an exceptional Arabic speaker, but I could speak it well enough to communicate. I was an effective communicator.

Q: Tunisia at the time—you were there from when to when?

PAYNE: I was in Tunisia from '89 to '90.

Q: What was the situation in Tunisia?

PAYNE: Tunisia was really fascinating. What a lot of people didn't realize was how much of a dictatorship it was at the time. And I was in the southern part of Tunisia, where you saw the Islamic movement building and I was very aware of the Islamic movement. My neighbors were Islamists. I would chat with Islamists. They would go to meetings, they would organize. And so, even though I didn't understand the history of Tunisia, I didn't understand the politics of Tunisia, I understood that there was this growing resistance against a dictatorship, an authoritarian government. And of course, we saw this later with the rise of Islamic movements across the Middle East. But I saw that firsthand in the Peace Corps. I left early, by the way. I did not stay the whole two years.

Q: What were you doing?

PAYNE: I was a Special Ed teacher and I had the misfortune of being in Tunisia with a very corrupt director who ended up being fired by the Peace Corps for mismanaging funds. And I could feel that—I knew things were not run properly. And then I was placed in a school with another Peace Corps volunteer that had a director who was really abusive and horrible. We would complain back to the head office and I said, "Look, I'm not going to stay at this school second year. This is terrible."

Q: You say abusive. What does that mean?

PAYNE: Emotionally and mentally abusive and abusive towards the kids. Physically abusive towards kids. Not towards me, not towards the other teacher, but he was a very bad man. You could feel his—like how bad he was. I mean, I hate to use the word evil, but he had elements of evil in him. And he was given the position because nobody cared about the school and they had to put him somewhere because he had connections and he could do less harm than he would in other schools. And so, he ran this school. And he was so emotionally abusive towards us. The other woman left before me. She said, "I've had enough." And I said, "If I want to stay, I'll come up with my own program." And they said, "No, you can't. You either have to move to another town or leave." And I just said, "I'm leaving Peace Corps then." We had a lot of people leave my Peace Corps group because of how badly it was managed. We had an exceptionally high rate of early terminators. And then, right after I left, the Gulf War broke out and they removed everybody out of the country. So, no one in my cadre finished two years in Peace Corps, Tunisia.

Q: How'd you find it in an Arab society? How'd you find it, being a woman?

PAYNE: In the cities like Tunis and Susa, the men harassed women terribly on the street. Actually, worse than almost every other place I've ever been in. I've traveled extensively in the Middle East. India harassment—the eve teasing [public sexual harassment/assault] in India is similar to what they do in Tunisia and the cities. That said, what I've realized is I'm really good at reading the social norms. Like, I can figure out expectations and reach and match those expectations. And so, I adapted fairly well to that conservative environment because I instinctively knew how to do it, which helped me in the foreign service later when I was posted to the Middle East. I was able to maneuver in this weird world.

Q: Did the Mennonite background help?

PAYNE: Absolutely, no question. And being an outsider my whole life helped, because I was always then good at studying the social norms of various groups and adapting. So, I was one of those people who could eventually fit into any group if I wanted to fit in, but not really. And that of course was an amazingly helpful skill in the Foreign Service. But I did that in Tunisia with the Peace Corps kind of instinctively without really realizing it.

Q: What were your students in Tunisia like?

PAYNE: They were a full range of mentally disabled students, ranging from just slight Down syndrome, to pretty severely mentally low IQs. So, in Middle Eastern cultures, unfortunately if you had a child who was mentally disabled, it was perceived as God punishing you for something you've done wrong. So, they would traditionally hide them because they didn't want the society to know that God was punishing them. Part of the effort was to persuade families to let their kids come to our school. And these kids did not have much social interaction outside of the school because they were then hidden usually.

Q: Was the government sympathetic to the plight?

PAYNE: They funded the schools, which was pretty remarkable compared to other Middle Eastern countries. Tunisia was much more advanced because they had schools. Now, their teachers were Peace Corps volunteers. There were a few other teachers from the local community. But really, I mean, the Peace Corps was a huge value added for Tunisia special education.

Q: Do you think the parents or the children—how do they respond to you?

PAYNE: Very well. I felt very welcomed in this town. I felt like people appreciated what we were doing. They really cared about us. We were invited over for meals and we were incredibly well taken care of.

Q: So, when the Gulf War came [in August 1990]—this is when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and we responded— everybody was cleared out of the Middle East?

PAYNE: Yeah, they pulled all the Peace Corps volunteers out of the Middle East. By then I had come back to Washington because I had left a few months before. And then, all the rest that were left actually came back to Washington and I hooked up with them all and we were like, "Oh my God." And they were like, "Oh, it's good you left early because that made a lot easier for you. You could say goodbye." The rest of them left very suddenly.

Q: So, what'd you do?

PAYNE: So, I came back. It was a very scary time because I had no money. I borrowed some money from my boyfriend. I rented a studio apartment in northwest DC, put the first month's rent on a credit card, and looked for a job in the legal field. I submitted applications, interviewed, and found a job as a lawyer.

Q: Where?

PAYNE: I ended up working at the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse. But the search for a job was a little bit traumatic and fascinating. I had one guy lecture me, "You're not supposed to join the Peace Corps after law school." I had one of those classic toxic interviews, where they want to see if you can survive them. And then, they offered me the job and I'm said, "No way. I'll never work for somebody who's that abusive in an interview." It was a classic. It was—you know, you read about it—where they really put you through the ringer.

Q: I've never heard of this.

PAYNE: Oh, it's a horrible process where they want to test "will you stand up to a bully?" So, in the interview they bully you. And I stood up to them and they offered me the job and I said, "No way. I will never work for someone who's that mean."

Q: Well, did they explain to you "We're mean on purpose"?

PAYNE: Afterwards, yeah. That's how I knew about it. I said, "You're not nice. Sorry." I don't know what it was about me that just said, "No, forget it. Even if you did it for the purpose of testing me, I don't want to work for someone who would choose to do that." I said no to a job at the Department of Education because the whole work environment seemed so depressing.

Q: Well, it's a little—where it fits into the scheme of things is—

PAYNE: Plus, you walk in and people smoked like fiends in the office. It was dark. It was dank. But saying no to these job offers was terrifying because I had no money. And I just said no till I found a job that I liked, and I worked for three years at the National Center and loved it.

Q: What was the National Center?

PAYNE: We helped prosecutors around the country prosecute child abuse cases. My specialty was child homicide. I would do research for prosecutors, help organize training, and write articles. We supported the prosecutors who prosecuted the crime of child abuse.

Q: I would think that murderer would be more a police matter and not a—you might say almost a social matter or something.

PAYNE: Oh no. If you murder your child, we're going to put you in jail. So, prosecutors will prosecute you. That's a crime.

Q: Yeah. But I wouldn't think that it would—I think it would almost fall outside of the child abuse.

PAYNE: Oh no. They're very hard to prosecute. Child homicide is one of the hardest crimes to prosecute, because many of the jury members—it almost always goes to jury, which is rare in criminal prosecution—because jurors will sit there and go, "There but for the grace of God go I." So, for example, somebody who shakes their baby to death. There's very little evidence. Even the research on shaken baby is very controversial. So, someone can say, "Look, I did not try to do this. I just shook a little bit, and oh my God, this tragedy occurred." Whereas we would try to show, "No, you shook that baby so severely that you caused the death" and it was hard to get a conviction. Or, the parents will claim that it was a Sudden Infant Death (SIDs), which is a genuine tragedy that occurs in a family. Looking at the evidence, we'll say, "No, you killed this baby." Child homicide is very, very complex.

For many prosecutors, this was the only child homicide case they've ever tried. It's not a common crime. So, they get their first child homicide and they're like, "Oh my God." And they would come to us and we would help them put their case together.

Q: How long did you work there?

PAYNE: Three years. I volunteered at the National Zoo to remind myself that there were good parents in this world.

Q: Were there signs that you were able to—to prevent people from killing the babies. Because I would think that some of this would be just, kid was crying too loud and all that. And I mean emotions—we are raised in a way—I'm sure it was always a man.

PAYNE: No, no, no. Women kill their babies. Don't think that only men killed their children. We were plugged into all the social support networks with the effort of "How do you provide social support to vulnerable families?" But then, there are also just bad people out there. I mean, there are selfish, bad people that do bad things to anyone who's weaker than they are. And children, being much weaker, are very vulnerable victims. You see a whole other part of society.

Q: This is depressing.

PAYNE: Yes. But I mean, I managed it quite well. We had a very dark sense of humor. I remember once we were at a restaurant during a training conferences—and the table next to us asked us if we would change the topic because we were disturbing them so much. I knew all these forensic pathologists and it was fascinating. It was a fascinating world and I enjoyed it. Again, I did volunteer at the Zoo to remind myself that there are good people in this world and to see happy children because you could get very jaded and start to believe that everyone's got this hidden dark side.

Q: Did you get to the point where you could spot a potential child abuser?

PAYNE: Never. And this is the issue. You can't. here are no classic profiles. It crosses all socioeconomic lines. It crosses gender lines. It crosses education lines. And some of the nicest people you've ever met abuse children. And so, no. And that's the challenge to all of us because you want to be able to say, "I can tell." And the reality is you can't. And that's why prevention is so hard because you can't, especially when it comes to child sexual abuse.

Q: I assume that—I mean, when a child is—one doesn't sit down and plan a murder—

PAYNE: Some parents torture their children and then accidentally kill them. That happens. So yes, the torture is pretty regular and then you do something that accidentally kills them. Other parents have the tendency to have violent outbreaks. Where they beat or shake the kid. We call that felony murder. You're committing felony abuse that results in murder.

Q: So, you're saying "child" and "kid," how old—

PAYNE: It ranges from infants through teenage—until the kid's big enough to fight back.

Q: What about—was sexual abuse involved?

PAYNE: Yeah, we also prosecuted child sexual abuse quite a lot. And again, most child sexual abusers are known to the child, they're not strangers—as are most kidnappings. And of course, the stranger cases are what gets society excited. But most of the abusers are known to the child. I have very strong feelings about abuse in the Catholic Church, which we were well aware of and tried to prosecute. And the Church fought us every step of the way. They made it very hard to prosecute leaders in the church.

Q: Did you get involved in any church related—

PAYNE: No. So, I was not religious at all. I attended some churches as a kid. I went to the Methodist Church. I was a member of the Methodist youth group. I went to the Catholic church. I concluded that I didn't want to be a member of a church.

Q: Well, you know, I would just think doing this thing would make you pretty leery of marriage and having children and all that. I mean, it would give you a sort of warped view of life.

PAYNE: And also like a healthy skepticism about institutions, because again, I was privy to some Catholic church memos that were given to us in confidence that even to this day haven't been released to the media despite all of the attention it's getting. But at the time, it wasn't that well known. Even the Boston news articles were just coming out at that time. But I knew things about the Catholic Church that your average person didn't know. And so, it makes you very skeptical of institutions in general. And very wary—you know, be careful—if it's too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true. Like,

there's something going on. So, that Boy Scout leader is amazing and spends all his weekends with the kids and is always there for you when you need him. You tell yourself, "That Boy Scout leader is way too good to be true." He probably is. So, he's probably that good because he's covering up something bad because your average person is not that good.

Q: I guess, when you are getting into criminal law, particularly with children, you realize that you can't rely on the benevolence of any institution because it has to cover up the abuses.

PAYNE: Right, right. They all covered it up, all of them. And it doesn't matter whether it's the Catholic Church, whether it's the Boy Scouts, whether it's Penn State. That is a very common instinct, which is to not want it to be prosecuted, because once it's prosecuted, it's public. And so, you just want to sweep it under the rug, move the perpetrator, and pretend it didn't happen. And it makes everybody exceptionally uncomfortable. And people don't want the discomfort that comes from seeing it for what it is. They don't want to see it.

Q: We're going through a period right now in our body politic of picking males, watching where they put their hands with females. I mean, even things that I would think are sort of innocuous, are no longer considered that way.

PAYNE: But here's the perception that people aren't always thoughtful of: to the male, they might have always thought it was innocuous, but the woman always felt uncomfortable but just never felt she had the power to say so. And so, that's the disconnect. I'll give you a great example. At Penn State every year, men from the fraternities would streak across the campus and call to women to disrobe. That was allowed because it was fun, and it was all in a joke. But there were women in my dorm—I was a resident assistant—who found that threatening and shocking, and they were emotionally harmed by it—even though other women actively disrobed in the windows and played to the men and—but it was this lack of understanding that what men considered to be a joke and good fun some women, was actually threatening and abusive. So, for Biden, how he encroaches on a woman's space, for some women it's fine, and for other women it's like, "Man, you're in my space." Like, "What are you doing in my space?"

Q: Did this affect your life, dealing with men?

PAYNE: No, not at all. Because women abused as much as men. I didn't—I never got a sense—because this is again, a misperception people have. Women can be just as bad as men. So, what it did was actually help me in my thinking of gender equality, which is I don't put women on a pedestal. I don't think if the world was run by women, we'd be fine. Oh no, no. Women can do bad things just as much as men. We are human beings capable of doing great good and capable of doing great bad. It's just that when you have a power of differentiation and men have all the power, then men may become more abusive

because they have power, not because they're men. You put a woman in an equally powerful position, and she has as much risk of becoming abusive as the man does. It did help me understand the nature of power.

Q: You certainly at pretty early age came up with a sophisticated look at the human world.

PAYNE: Human nature. And that's why I loved it because I loved the study of human nature. And so, it gave me this exposure to where I did kind of develop this view of human nature that was much more attuned to the impact that power has on a human being.

Q: Did you stay in Washington?

PAYNE: Yes, I stayed in Washington. When the Gulf War broke out, I went to all these anti-war meetings because I was still pretty left wing. Then, I decided that I disagreed with them. I thought that us going to war against Iraq was justified, that they invaded Kuwait and only a military response would get them out. When I disagreed with the whole anti-war movement —this is that independent thinking that gets me in trouble-- it put me at odds with the entire left community. So, I left them. I just said, "Okay, well, if you can't accept me because I'm not anti-war, to hell with you." I turned my back on the whole left-wing community, and then worked for a bunch of prosecutors. But also, somebody advised me that we needed more liberal prosecutors. There was no reason to view prosecution as conservative. But I was, I went from this left-wing community to this more conservative group—working with prosecutors, police.

Q: Did you find this prosecuting wing of law enforcement—both, police, but particularly the prosecutors— a particular type of person or could they be as liberal—I mean, what they're trying to do is cause a better world.

PAYNE: Right. So, this opened my eyes to the spectrum. They did tend to be more conservative people, but some were very liberal and had very liberal approaches and their intentions were to keep their community safe. And they took what they did very seriously and very responsibly. And it made me understand that yes, there are some prosecutors who abused their power, but the vast majority are really just trying to make their communities a safer place. They follow the whole spectrum politically. And that really opened my eyes because it exposed me to a full range of political beliefs. Now most of them were moderate Republicans. If you would say, "What party are you?" They would say, "I'm Republican," but they tended to be moderate Republicans.

Q: How did you find the judicial system itself? The judges and all?

PAYNE: Overall, I felt like it was as fair a process as human beings could develop. You know, I did believe still that you have to keep everybody accountable. You have to have some checks and balances otherwise people with power abuse it. But surprisingly, it was

a whole bunch of people trying to do their best with a few people abusing their power. Same with the police. Same with the FBI. One of my options if I didn't join the Foreign Service was to go work for the Department of Justice and the sex crimes unit. I respected those people because what they were doing was remarkable. Overall, I would say we have a shockingly fair justice system despite the fact that human beings run it.

Q: Did you have a law degree?

PAYNE: Yes.

Q: So, were you licensed?

PAYNE: I was licensed in Pennsylvania. I took the Pennsylvania Bar and so had an active Bar license. As a staff attorney I didn't go to court, I just supported others. But if I had moved to Justice, I would have been a prosecutor. So, the choice was Foreign Service or Justice.

Q: On your trip to Europe did you run across the Foreign Service? Did you know what it was?

PAYNE: So, my exposure to the Foreign Service was as a Peace Corps volunteer. That was my first exposure to a US embassy.

Q: And what did you gather from that?

PAYNE: I thought they were all CIA agents and I avoided them like the plague. And my Peace Corps director once asked me, "Have you ever considered joining the Foreign Service?" And I said, "No, they're all CIA. Why would I ever join the Foreign Service?" We were so paranoid that they would come and want information from us that we like—I was like, "I will never let an embassy person stay at my house." Because they would sometimes come out and stay with Peace Corps volunteers and I was just like, "I want nothing to do with them." I wouldn't even go have a hamburger at the restaurant on the embassy compound because I thought I couldn't trust them. When I went to Tunis I would never go into the embassy. I had this very jaded, cynical view and wanted nothing to do with the embassy.

Q: Well now, back in a real world in Washington, did you begin to develop a different idea about them?

PAYNE: Yes. My views became more moderate and I realized, "Whoa, wait a minute. If these prosecutors are pretty normal good people, I bet that people who do foreign affairs are similar." And I'll be honest, I couldn't get a job anywhere else to go overseas because remember, I wasn't fluent in any language. I had Tunisian Arabic. That's it. So, I applied to work in all these development organizations and they all said no. So, if I wanted to travel for a living, my only option was the Foreign Service. The Mennonite Central

Committee was willing to give me a job if I joined a church, and I wouldn't join a church because I said "I am not religious and I'm not going to lie to you. I'm not going to fake it." They said, "We'll hire you if you are a member of a church." And, I said, "I'm not going to lie. I just can't lie to you." So, in the end, it was either the Foreign Service or I was just going to give up trying to live and work overseas.

Q: This is going from the child abuse?

PAYNE: Yes, I was in a staff attorney job that after three years you're kind of done. You're expected to move on. It was a normal, entry level job. You don't stay in those jobs. And so, it was, "Where am I going to go next?"

Q: Did you run across any mentor or somebody who knew some of the Washington, in particular the Foreign Service scene?

PAYNE: So, I called Robert Pelletreau the former DCM [Deputy Chief of Missions] at the embassy in Tunisia. I called him out of the blue and said, "Would you mind having lunch with me? You're the only person I know." And he didn't even know me. He had sworn us in as Peace Corps volunteers, that was my only connection with him. And he generously agreed to meet with me. We had lunch, and he told me about life in the Foreign Service and that was it. Otherwise, I had no other knowledge. I just blindly took the test. I think in a way—like, it's so funny cause when I went for my oral exam, I got the impression from the examiners that I was refreshing because I didn't prepare. I was just myself.

Q: Well, as we talk here, I'm enjoying this immensely. And I'm sure that—I mean, you open up.

PAYNE: Yeah. I just didn't know how to be anything other than myself.

Q: Well, I take it that your luncheon went well. So, then what did you do?

PAYNE: I took the written exam, passed, and got immediately scheduled for the oral exam. Part of it was luck. So, at the time that I took the written exam, they were experimenting and letting more people pass the written than in the past, which meant they did more oral exams. And so, I got scheduled for an oral exam very quickly and passed and got my clearances fast. It was only a year from the time I took the written exam until I was invited into an A-100 class [introductory course for Foreign Service Officers].

Q: Well, let's talk about the oral exam. What'd you get? How did it go?

PAYNE: For me, again, this is that understanding human nature that really helped me. We were in the waiting room and these examinees are coming in, and I'm realizing we should bond. Like, I bet we'd all be better if we bonded. So, I'd be like, "Hi, how are you? I'm Beth." And you know, some of these guys would be like, "I see you as a competitor."

And so, I broke down that tension before we even got invited in, so that by the time we did that tabletop group exercise, we cooperated beautifully. Several of us passed from our group because we all performed so well and because we weren't stressed out. And for me, I was like—this wasn't a life dream. It was like, "Well, if I don't pass, I'll join the Department of Justice. Let's see what happens." So, I wasn't stressed, and I actually enjoyed it. I enjoyed the exercises. I loved the inbox exercise because I'm very organized. You know, the problem solving—I liked it all. I had a really pleasant day.

Q: Do recall any of the problem solving that you had?

PAYNE: I don't remember the content at all. What I do remember very, very distinctly though, was them asking me, "Is there any place in the world you don't want to go?" And I said, "Well I have to say"—and you could see their face fall—and I go, "please don't send me to London." And they just cracked up and loved that answer because they ask it to make sure I don't say, "Please don't send me to Cameroon," but by turning it on the head and getting them a little stressed that I'm going to not be what they were looking for, I made them laugh. They also really enjoyed my Mennonite background. This came up in the orals, in the individual one-on-ones and later, after I passed, they mentioned that, that was appealing to them.

Q: You came into the Foreign Service when?

PAYNE: January of 1993. What was unique was that at that time, they were bringing in people un-coned. So, in the early nineties, they experimented with bringing people in without a conal [career track] designation. It was an utter failure. We called ourselves "the great un-coned" because we got ranked when we got tenured and based on our rank got assigned the cone of our choice. So, the perception was, if you then got coned management or consular it was because you performed poorly because the vast majority of people in my A-100 class wanted to be a political officer.

Q: Well, when I came in, the term in embassies—were you in substantive or non-substantive. Administrative and consular work was non-substantive. Which, when you think about it, the protection of Americans abroad, is not of the substance of what we do—

PAYNE: Right. That perception remains to this day. I had to fight that as a consular coned officer. I have fought that perception that consular officers don't do diplomacy, or they aren't foreign affairs professionals, even as a senior consular leader.

Q: As I say, I've spent my entire time—because it was fun. I enjoyed it.

PAYNE: I loved it. I mean, because I came in un-coned and I elected to be a consular officer because the consular chiefs I worked for inspired me and I saw myself in them. I said, "I like what you do. I want to do what you do." I always had to fight that perception of, "Oh, you're consular because you were lower ranked." And it's like, "No, I chose

consular." I always had to say, "I chose consular." Because there was always a perception with that small group of un-coned—it didn't last long. I think they did it for like two years. It was an utter failure. You know, because we then competed against each other—It was weird.

Q: So, you came in an A-100 course. What number was that?

PAYNE: 66th class.

Q: What was it like?

PAYNE: I Loved it. I immediately felt like I belonged.

Q: How about the people?

PAYNE: Great people. I loved my colleagues. I loved the people. Again, you know, here were a whole bunch of people that were well read, that were well traveled, that were interested in other cultures. We've stayed in touch. A lot of us are still friends to this day. I had A-100 colleagues at my house just on Sunday.

Q: How about the instructions that you were getting?

PAYNE: So, John Limbert [veteran US diplomat, held captive in Iran hostage crisis] was one of our instructors. He was my mentor. He was amazing. I mean, how lucky were we? We got John Limbert. We just had great people. I just thought it was fabulous. And maybe I was in this like, you know, happy pollyannaish mode, but I loved every minute of A-100.

Q: Did you feel relief getting away from dead children?

PAYNE: Yeah. It was a nice break. And I had finally found a way to be in a more international environment. And so, that was great. I never looked back.

Q: Were you getting any vibes as you got into this about—at the time—the role of women in the State Department? That there was a glass ceiling?

PAYNE: Not at the time. Not at the time, no. I've seen—and I've never felt there was a glass ceiling. I have seen gender bias and I have been discriminated against because of my gender. I've also gotten enormous benefits because of my gender. In A-100, the only time it came up was when one of our instructors talk to one of the classmates about her hair and her dress. And she got very offended—the classmate—because she just felt like that instructor was trying to minimize her femininity and sort of have her be more of a conformist. And honestly, I don't think that was gender so much as conformist. It was clear to me that the State Department was a conformist organization, but since I was raised in a Mennonite community, that did not phase me one bit. Because I also saw room

for nonconformity, because we were also an eclectic bunch of people. And so, I saw that it was okay to be eclectic and individual as long as you conformed in certain areas.

Q: I was wondering whether you felt—sometimes people come in, they're sort of overawed by the perceived credentials of some of the members in the class. I don't feel like—

PAYNE: I just didn't care. We had some very skilled, capable people. But remember, I had been an attorney in a prosecutor's organization. So, I could stand on my own. Those perceived credentials never affected me anyway. I'm like, "Who are you as a human being?" And to be honest, that played out even as we got promoted because those that sort of had the degree in foreign service and that were aspiring to be ambassadors and that were, you know, on the fast track, didn't quite reach success the way those of us who were just individuals and authentic and didn't care. The people who didn't care did much better than the people who thought only about getting ahead.

Q: Were you picking up—we were talking a little about this consular, administrative, versus political, economic—were you picking up some of the prejudices about where you want to go at A-100?

PAYNE: Yeah. 90% of us, when surveyed, said we wanted to be political officers because at the time, when you don't know anything. So, I had no idea—because we were just in the A-100. We haven't seen an embassy function yet. And I'm said, "Well, if political is the top, I'm going to choose political," because—so, you already knew that political was the most desirable. Somehow that came across. And political, econ., consular, management—and remember USIA [United States Information Agency] was still separate. And so, they weren't included in this great un-coned experiment. So, it was just political, econ., consular, and management, in that order. It was clear. And I didn't know enough to know what to aspire to.

Q: Well, did you have any place in mind of where you wanted to go?

PAYNE: I always wanted to go to Africa. My parents lived in Ethiopia. I had an adopted Ethiopian sister that my dad didn't bring to America but helped out and she was part of my life. I ended up in Tunisia with Peace Corps—you know, instead of going to sub-Saharan Africa, I went to North Africa. For my first tour I bid on every African country on the bid list and got sent to Kuwait because I spoke Arabic and NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] made sure that anyone in A-100 who had any Arabic got sent to the Middle East. I found that out later. They were like, "Oh, Beth, you were going to NEA, no matter what."

Q: So, you went to Kuwait. You were there from when to when?

PAYNE: I was in Kuwait from '93-95. It was in a consular, GSO [General Services Officer] rotation. I had a lot of GSO training before I went. But it was an English post, so I didn't have language yet.

Q: So, what was Kuwait like when you were there?

PAYNE: It was quite remarkable. Skip Gnehm [Edward "Skip" Gnehm, Jr.] was the ambassador. So—can I tell you a great story about Skip?

Q: Yeah.

PAYNE: This was one of the first times I saw gender bias. I love Skip. So, here I am, a first tour officer at the embassy and Skip Gnehm is an amazing ambassador. He is bigger than life. And he used to love to go fishing on the weekends. Kuwaitis would take him out on their boats, and he would always ask an entry level male officer to go fishing. And I was getting more and more annoyed. It was towards the end of Skip Gnehm's tenure, and we're at this reception. My good friend and I are talking when Skip comes over and says to my friend, "Would you like to go fishing on Saturday?" And he says, "Yep, what time?" And Skip goes, "Oh, I forgot the time. I'll be back." And Skip walks away and I turn to my friend, I said, "Does he ever ask women? I mean, I am so fed up." And he says, "I don't know, I get to go fishing with the ambassador. I don't care." And I just got mad. I was just steaming. So, when Skip comes back—here I am, I'm a first tour officer, my first year—I said, "Sir, can I ask you a question? Do you ever ask women to go fishing with you?" And there was an instant of shock on his face. And then, he smiled so widely, and he looks at me and he goes, "Beth, would you like to go fishing with me this weekend?" And I said, "Yes I would." And so, we went out fishing. I caught the biggest fish. He brought pictures of that fish to country team and said, "Look, Beth caught the biggest fish." He got such a kick out of it, because you know, he had his cultural upbringing, which was that men go fishing and women don't want to fish. And I called him on it and gave him a chance to adjust and ever since then he's been my mentor. We just connected over that. I love Skip to this day. He also taught my nephew at GW. So, I keep in touch with Skip.

Q: Well, you'll, at some point, have an account of Skip.

PAYNE: So, imagine Kuwait. Skip is so well loved by the Kuwaitis because he played such an important role while they were in exile. And I'm coming in as my first tour and my ambassador has probably one of the best relationships with a host country an ambassador could ever want. And the Kuwaitis love us, and they love him. And that's my first ambassador role model as a brand-new officer.

Q: What was the situation when you got to Kuwait?

PAYNE: Great. Because the fires had been put out, so that initial post-war challenge was done.

Q: The oil fields or—explain what happened.

PAYNE: So, during the Gulf War, the Iraqis lit the oil fields on fire. Initially after the end of the Gulf War, there was this huge effort to put out those fires. People don't appreciate how remarkable that effort was and how successful that effort was. And so, there was a lot of cleanup post end of Gulf War, which was done by the time I got there. It wasn't as polluted, and it wasn't as hectic. Now, what was exceptional about Kuwait is that there were empty neighborhoods because the Jordanians and the Palestinians were kicked out because they were perceived as supporting Saddam. And so, you would go around the city and there'd be whole neighborhoods that were just empty. But the Kuwaitis were incredibly pro-American at the time. They had become more conservative, but I had nothing else to compare it with. They were just conservative, Gulf Arabs. There was a lot of talk about the POWs [prisoners of war] still in Iraq. That was a huge issue. As a woman though, I had access to both men and women. So, it was a huge benefit to me to be a woman. Kuwaiti women invited me to their homes. I drank tea with women, I had lunch with the families.

Q: How are woman treated Kuwait?

PAYNE: in general, women were second class citizens. As a Western woman, I was a third category—an American woman. I had a lot of respect and freedom. I could go hang out with women, I could hang out with the men, whereas the male officers could only hang out with the men. They can't go have tea with the women. I could do just about everything. I did realize though—and again this is that ability to read what the social mores were like that it was a mistake for Western women, especially embassy women, to go to the parties. Because then other women won't talk to you, because the only Western women at parties were prostitutes or flight attendants who were prostitutes—almost all the flight attendants on Gulf airlines were prostitutes. So, I learned very quickly you couldn't be a party girl. There were certain things that you had to signal so that other Kuwaiti women would be seen in public with you. It's fascinating. I used to teach Western women in Kuwait how to communicate because there were all these rules. Like, if you made eye contact with a man in the grocery store, you were inviting him to follow you home and have sex with you. Because that's how you did it. And so, you had to be conscious that if you're making eye contact with a man, here's what you're communicating, and the man is just acting on what he thinks you're asking for. So, you have to adapt to the rules and the mores. So, if you go to a big party—which was very common, because there were no bars and women could get on the list very easily because there weren't enough women—then, you're basically saying, "I'm a loose woman," and a Kuwaiti woman can't be seen in public with a loose woman.

Q: Did you find that this restricted you?

PAYNE: No.

Q: How'd you get along?

PAYNE: I thought I got along great. Because I've always learned—and again, this is that instinct that's I think helped me my whole career—is I'm in this culture. It's not my responsibility to have them adapt to me. It's my responsibility to adapt to them. And so, how do I get what I need? How do I succeed given the social mores of this culture? And I study the social mores and I adapt. I mean, it got to the point—there was a colonel who became a brigadier general—he was a very, very good friend; I would go have barbecues with his family on many weekends—who would talk to me about Kuwaiti society and Kuwaiti politics. And I'd go back and share it with the political officer. He took me up to the border. He gave me access to things that I never would have had access to if I had not developed a friendship through his family, through his wife. And I learned a lot about Kuwaiti culture.

Q: Well, it must've been a terrible shock—having an invading army come in, essentially loot the place, and then be kicked out. The fighting was right on everybody's doorstep. How did you find the society?

PAYNE: So, here's an interesting twist. Kuwait is a monarchy where a very small number of Kuwaitis are given economic security, while all the outsiders run the country.

Q: These are the Palestinians and Jordanians?
PAYNE: Right. So, the number twos in every ministry were either Palestinian or Jordanian. So, imagine a world where you're not expected to do much and you're economically comfortable. Then you're invaded. And this group of engineers are alive for the first time in their life and fight back and have freedom. And then they win. And then the Kuwaiti government has to tap down that independent-minded feeling. So, I had some of the—mainly people in the engineering field—in the oil industry—would tell me, "That's the most alive I've ever been in my life." And even some of the military people—even though they were terrible, by the way, the pilots, they couldn't hit anything—but they said, "At least I got to do something. Whereas before I sat in a chair"— one guy said, "Well, I sat in a chair and I just whirled around for hours. I had nothing to do." If you don't have meaning in your life, what do you have to live for? So, for many of them, the occupation of Kuwait was the most exciting time in their lives. Ironically enough.

Q: What was your work like?

PAYNE: So, I worked really hard. I did consular work the first year, GSO [General Services Office] the second.

Q: What was the consular work?

PAYNE: Classic visa interviews. With Kuwaitis we issued almost all of them a visa. I was torn by the stateless Kuwaitis, the Bidoon, the people with a Kuwaiti passport, but no

right to return to Kuwait if they left. And so, those individuals, we would have to turn down visas.

Q: Who were they?

PAYNE: There were thousands of stateless. Kuwait only issued citizenship to certain families. And if you were of rocky origin and had moved to Kuwait even a hundred years previously, you were not given citizenship. You were given a passport but not citizenship. Then, after the invasion they became under threat. Kuwait actually threatened to deport them to Iraq. And so, they were trying to get out, but we would deny them visas because they weren't going to come back. They couldn't overcome a presumption of intending immigration because they were intending to immigrate. And so that was hard—that's the first time I saw the tension of, you know, here's somebody looking for a better life, but my job is to say no.

I also did ACS [American Citizen Services] work. It was the first time I became aware of the American women married to Gulf Arabs and that whole dynamic. I even wrote a cable "Brides Beware: American Women Married to Kuwaitis," because you had this dynamic of American women who move to Kuwait with their husbands and change their minds.

Q: Did you do things to get the women out?

PAYNE: I never violated Kuwaiti law. I knew who did and I would just tell them, "You may want to talk to this woman who was in the private community if you want to talk to someone who might give you some options." I was pretty good about being a good consular officer where, "Look, you can't kidnap your child. That's against Kuwaiti law." Women could leave, but they couldn't kidnap their children. So, I just knew who would tell them what to do. I am aware of a DCM who actively kidnapped a child from Kuwait after I left. She dressed her as her niece and gave her her niece's passport and put her on a plane. And then, there was a lot of fallback and Ryan Crocker [Ambassador to Kuwait, 1994-1997] was livid. But that happened.

Q: Were there any Americans getting in trouble?

PAYNE: Oh yeah. I mean, not excessively. Not like in later tours, but enough to keep it interesting. And you know, women also—now, the challenge in Kuwait was women who were abused by their husbands had nowhere to go because it was illegal for single women to check into hotels. And so, we would arrange safe places and work with the Kuwaiti government to make sure those women were safe. Domestic violence was an issue.

Q: Did you find that the Kuwaiti government understood this?

PAYNE: They were incredibly helpful; I have to say. They were very, very helpful, unlike what you got in Saudi—I found the Kuwaiti government—they still loved us. I

mean, they would do anything we asked. We saved them. We could get a meeting anytime we wanted with anybody we wanted. They were incredibly cooperative. It was great. We had a huge military presence. And so, that was a challenge. That became more of a challenge when I was in GSO because of the contracting. They did things very loosey-goosey and that was hard.

Q: Tell me about that.

PAYNE: That was a challenge because here I am, a first tour officer, my boss is a GSO specialist who's not very good at procurement. So, they put me in charge of procurement, which is rare. They should've put him—usually the senior GSO does procurement, but I was a lawyer, I had a contracting warrant, and procurement's a disaster. And so, I cleaned up procurement, which was not easy because I'm telling these civilian, military, DOD [Department of Defense] people, who came under chief of mission authority, "What you're doing violates contracting laws. You can't do it. If you want me to sign, I can't. You have to do it right. If you find somebody else to sign, I don't care what you do." But I kept those files with me my whole career, just in case. I finally shredded them when I retired. I thought, "Someday someone's gonna investigate." And there was a lot of very unacceptable behavior and I just said, "I won't sign."

Q: Well, tell me what sort of things would be sort of unacceptable.

PAYNE: So, like people making major improvements to their rental properties that they were paying for and not the landlord. People making purchases that were single-sourced when they shouldn't have been single-sourced, which increases the likelihood of kickbacks. We're talking millions of dollars too,. Kuwait was buying tons of military equipment from us, which comes with all these civilian DOD personnel to support it. And there was just too much money. And so, it's like, "If you want me to sign, we're going to do it right." I remember a master sergeant saying, "Beth, my job is to get the general what he wants." And I said, "Well good. So, if you can do your job without me, do your job, but if you want me to sign this, this is what I need." And he was being honest with me. He said, "In our culture, I'm the master sergeant, I give the general what he wants." And, you know, a general ran the Office of Military Cooperation. He was a pretty senior guy.

Q: Anything more you'd like to add about the life there and—

PAYNE: One was that Skip Gnehm involved first and second tour officers a lot. So, we went as note takers to meetings. He took us to evening events. We attended national days. You know, we were able to observe a master like Skip Gnehm conduct diplomacy and therefore, learn how to do it ourselves. So, he gave us an enormous exposure to the engagement of diplomacy. So, that, I think, was incredibly beneficial for me. So, that was pretty formative.

He left and Ryan Crocker came as ambassador. He is a stellar diplomat. But there was an incident in that second year that was very impactful on me. A lot of people don't

remember that Saddam Hussein moved troops to the border in 1995 and there was a crisis of whether he planned to invade again. And so, leading up to that reveal, the colonel in the Kuwaiti Air Force, who I mentioned earlier, invited me to join him on a helicopter ride at the border. He was in charge of reparations. A Kuwaiti Air Force colonel who oversaw reparations. He was going to the border a lot and he spent a lot of time with the United Nations folks who were monitoring the border. If you remember, there was a UN force that was responsible to make sure that the border state peaceful and he would regularly go on a helicopter trip sort of along the border. So, he invited me to go along, just on a lark. The security, the RSO [Regional Security Officer] recommended that I mentioned it to the DATT [Defense Attaché]. I told the DATT, "hey, I'm going with this colonel to have a helicopter ride along the border." And he said, "will you keep your eye open? Just look for things that seem out of the ordinary." I'm like, "okay. All right." It was interesting because the UN major, who was an American, and the Kuwaiti colonel seemed quite happy to help me see things that were out of ordinary, like some very abnormal behavior at a rail station in southern Iraq. It was also interesting for me to see how poor and desperate the Iraqi soldiers were who were guarding the border. We would throw them water. I mean they were barefoot. It was terrible. You saw really how awful it was for the Iraqi soldiers. I come back; I tell the DATT what I saw. He thanked me.

A couple of weeks later, I'm duty officer, and I get called into an emergency action committee meeting. Iraqi troops are at the border undetected. No one ever saw them move and we don't know what's going to happen. And so, I ended up being the note taker for a series of meetings about how to respond to this crisis and I learned a lot watching us. Ryan focused on our bilateral relationship with Kuwait. The DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] panicked. The community went crazy. People were terrified. The direction was, "don't remove your kids from school. Don't leave the country." Half the community defied that direction. They took their kids out of school. They sent their families out of the country. There was no formal evacuation. There was no change of tempo, but people were like, "we don't know what Saddam is going to do. All we know, is that he's at the border and that it could be, in hours, he would be in Kuwait." There was pre-positioned military equipment, but three days before US military would get there to use it. The Kuwaiti military couldn't, they weren't capable. So, we knew there was this period, if Saddam was suicidal, where we were in danger. And I watched this, and I learned a lot about crisis response. I learned that if you're not prepared and you panic, you'll have mayhem. And there was mayhem. And I watched the military folks try to provide some order and get frustrated. Luckily, Bill Clinton announced that he was coming to Kuwait. That was really the message to Saddam that, "okay, if you invade, you're going to kill the US president." And so, that kind of calmed things down. And he did. He flew out to Kuwait. I participated in that presidential visit, which was also quite formative.

Q: There was apparently a planned assassination of the president.

PAYNE: Oh, that was of President Bush, when he visited in a private capacity earlier. That was before I arrived in Kuwait. This is a very forgotten episode that actually was more significant than I think a lot of people thought, where we missed Saddam's

movement. So, later, after this was all over, I sat down with the DATT and I'm like, "okay, tell me like, what just happened here?" And he said, "look, I had been getting human intelligence that Saddam was doing something, but there was no satellite imagery to support what I was reporting." And so, what I gave him contributed to this intelligence that Saddam was doing something. And that's why he asked me to look for anything out of the ordinary. But the problem back in Washington—and this taught me a lot about how decisions are made—is they didn't trust the human intelligence because there was no satellite imagery to support it. And so, the intelligence community said, "nothing's happening." And that's how Saddam was able to move troops to his southern border undetected. I mean, who knows how he did it. One afternoon, we became aware—because he made us aware—that he had sufficient troops on that border to invade and cause serious harm if he chose to. And then panic. So, this also taught me a lot about how easy it is to get fooled, how important human intelligence is, and then how important it is to plan so you don't panic. Because the panic at the embassy was pretty severe. And as much as I respect Ryan Crocker and I've worked with him since, I watched him—his focus was on the bilateral relationship, not on the community. I mean, he worked with the Kuwaitis, but nobody really looked after the community, and the community responded in a kind of panicked way.

Q: It was a fairly large community?

PAYNE: I would say was a mid-sized embassy. Wasn't huge at that point.

Q: And other Americans? Oil field workers and that sort of thing?

PAYNE: So, at the time, we did have a private American community that were primarily oil field or engineers. We didn't have a huge defense operation there yet. A lot of private Americans remembered the 1990 invasion and resented the fact that we didn't let them come on the embassy compound and we did not take care of them to the level they expected. There was a lot of resentment in the private American community over the level of assistance the US government gave them in the first invasion. But when I talk about the community, I actually meant the embassy community. They are the ones—official Americans with kids in school and family members. Saddam's at the border and it takes him hours to get to Kuwait. Hours. If he crossed the border, there was no time to get out. It was that community that was scared and panicked, and no one really looked after them. That was very formative for me in realizing the impact of—we did great diplomacy. We maybe could have done a lot better leadership. And that was the first time I saw this distinction between being an exceptional diplomat and being an effective leader. So, that was a very powerful experience for me moving forward.

Q: And also, for people reading this, junior officers are sort of checking off things on their list, "When I get that position and responsibility, this is what I'll do." I mean, every post—no matter what your job is—it's a learning experience, because we're up against all sorts of things.

PAYNE: Yeah. And it's just by chance that you lived through—it was by chance I was duty officer and therefore had a front row seat to watch everything. And to be in a role of watching, not acting, you know, is—note taker. You're observing. And so, I was in this role of, "this is interesting. Here, I'm watching how these people act and then what's the response to that action?" So, that was fascinating for me. Ambassador Crocker was also wonderful. You know, he was also a mentor and also allowed first and second tour officers to be very engaged. And so, with both Ambassador Gnehm and Ambassador Crocker, I felt like I was part of the Foreign Service community.

Q: So, tell me, what were your relations personally with Kuwaitis? I mean, Kuwaitis don't have a very good name in the Arab world. Did you pick up any of that?

PAYNE: So, I had great Kuwaiti friends. For me, I wanted to be in the Foreign Service because I wanted to experience other cultures. So, I made efforts to get to know Kuwaitis, to build Kuwaiti friendships. And so, I spent time at people's homes. I went to people's weddings. I just hung out with Kuwaitis. So, I actually became quite close to several Kuwaitis and learned a lot about Kuwaiti culture as a result. I remember one woman telling me about the cultural pressures that—you have to conform, you have to do what you're told, and if you step out, they shun you. And you know, that was very interesting for me to learn. Like, that's how they controlled each other. That's how Kuwaitis stayed in line. That's why an independent minded Kuwaiti who may be different in the States and college, once they're back home, become much more conformist cause the family just knows how to do it. They've thousands of years of kind of keeping their members in line. They do not allow independent thinking. And so, that was from getting to know Kuwaitis and having conversations.

Q: How do they treat women?

PAYNE: Women are second class citizens. There is just no question. Unfortunately, women in domestic roles, like Filipino women and Indian women, are treated like slaves. It's horrible. They are abused. They are raped. They are cheated. It is horrific. Honestly, other third country nationals who are in domestic support positions—I did a big cable on labor and Kuwait—were also treated like dirt. Like, the way they treat the people who serve them is horrific. I saw things, I saw living quarters, I talked to other embassies that helped to rescue their nationals after they'd been mistreated, lied to, cheated. And it was pretty horrific. And honestly, even Kuwaitis I knew they would bring a domestic to the United States, and treat them like dirt. One woman had slavery charges filed against her in Boston because of the way she treated her domestic. And then would come and talk to me about it like, "what, what's going on? I don't understand."

And I'd be like, "well, you aren't allowed to treat people this way."

"Well, it's how we always treat them."

I say, "well, you can't treat them in the United States this way."

So I'd have these conversations where for a Kuwaiti, they don't see that what they're doing is horrific. But it was pretty horrific. They don't treat people well. That's why—I don't know if you've heard the stories that during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, in other countries there'd be signs saying, "Sri Lankan looking for Kuwaiti servant," as a way of jabbing back at them because of how poorly they treated Bangladeshis, Indians, Sri Lankans, Filipinos, Pakistanis, you name it, horribly mistreated.

Q: What was your impression of the young Kuwaitis, male and female, coming back to Kuwait from university training?

PAYNE: They basically had to conform. A lot of them stayed in the West as long as they could, studying, and it was all paid for by the Kuwaiti government. But you know, there was a time when the family would say it's time to come home. And a very, very close friend of mine really struggled because he was from a very powerful Kuwaiti family. And so, what happens is that a family member is in every facet of government and society. So, the family has the banker, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs person, the Ministry of Interior person, the businessman. In order for the family to maintain its status and power, family members are kind of assigned to various elements. So, they have what we call "wasta," you know, connections, the ability to get things done. There's a family member everywhere. So, if you need something—if you need a favor from the phone company, well a family member works in the phone company. And if you run a business, well the family member buys from you and then there's someone in the Ministry of Commerce to help you with your commercial. So, he was finally told, "You have to come home." He's a banker. He studied banking. And he didn't like living in Kuwait. And he had so many struggles with his family over that, that the compromise became, "We will find you a job in Istanbul for the Kuwaiti Islamic bank. So that if you don't want to live in Kuwait, this is what we'll allow you without cutting you off from the family." And so, he ended up working for the Kuwaiti Islamic Bank in Istanbul as a compromise.

Q: Were you aware of what was happening with these young people, particularly while preparing their getaway?

PAYNE: You never get away. You don't get away. Oh, in case of another invasion?

Q: Yeah.

PAYNE: Oh, they were all having kids in the States. So, the, the getaway is have American children, have US citizen children. I mean, they were all eligible for visas unless they were stateless. So, you know, they always made sure they had a US visa in their passport.. And then you had US citizen children. They were all prepared just in case. And we benefited because they paid hospitals to have children in the States. But there are tons and tons and tons of US citizen children born to Kuwaitis in the years after the Gulf War.

Q: Is there anything more we should cover, do you think?

PAYNE: I think Kuwait's pretty covered.

Q: What were you looking for? You know, your next post. What was your career path? Had you thought about anything?

PAYNE: Well, I didn't really think of a career path. I had no—I just wanted interesting work, but I still wanted to go to Africa. But I was sort of like preempted by Ryan Crocker. So, you know, it's time to bid for my second directed tour. Remember it's a directed tour.

Q: _____

PAYNE: Your first and second tour the HR tells you where you're going. You don't lobby. They just tell you. And at that time—this doesn't exist now—but at that time, they let others influence decisions. I went to Kuwait because I spoke some Arabic, and nothing I said or did was ever going to change that. Well, Ryan Crocker comes up and says, "I think you need to go to Tel Aviv next, so I'll make that happen." Then I went to Tel Aviv. I didn't even look at alternative. I didn't even think about alternatives.

Q: How did you feel? I mean, had you looked at—this is before going to Tel Aviv—had you looked at the Middle East situation and America's involvement, and the Jewish community, and also, the reports that were coming out about the Palestinians being treated as second class citizens?

PAYNE: At the time, I didn't know much. I did know about the Palestinians being kicked out of Kuwait, but I also knew about the PLOs [Palestinian Liberation Organization] plans for Kuwait. You know, how they collaborated with Saddam. So, I was exposed that way, but I had no training or background in Middle East policy. I was not a foreign policy wonk. I was like a cultural—I loved culture, but I knew very little about Middle Eastern policy.

Q: Okay, so, off you went?

PAYNE: Off I go to Tel Aviv. I studied Hebrew for six months.

Q: How did you find the Hebrew?

PAYNE: Very hard and we had a long furlough in the middle of it, which was stressful.

Q: What was that about?

PAYNE: Remember when the government shut down in '96 [December 15, 1995 to January 6, 1996]. We were furloughed for almost a month in the middle of language

training and I had to get off tenure, so I needed to get my score in order to be tenured. So that was a pretty stressful. And I'm not great with languages. So, that was a stressful experience. And I'll be honest, the Israeli language instructors are complicated people. So, that was my first introduction to Israeli culture, which I embraced and got to know them well.

Q: You were taking this in the United States?

PAYNE: At FSI [Foreign Service Institute]. Six months. I got my score and went off to Tel Aviv. Because I already spoke some Arabic, it made it a little bit easier. Although, the instructors were mortified that I initially spoke Hebrew with an Arabic accent. And so, that was my introduction to the Arab-Israeli cultural conflict of "your Hebrew should not have an Arabic accent."

Q: What were you picking up? When one takes language at the Foreign Service Institute, one picks up an awful lot about the culture from your teachers.

PAYNE: Yeah. So, the Arab instructors and the Hebrew instructors hated each other. That was obvious. We also had Area Studies. That's when I got my first introduction to foreign policy in the Middle East. Then, they would always complain about Peter Bechtel, who was the head of Middle East Area Studies, because he was an Arabist. He was pro-Arab. And what I also realized is, you couldn't be objective. Like, you either had to be pro-Israel or pro-Arab. Everybody wanted to know where you were and if you just said, "hey, I'm neutral," like, oh no, no, no, no, neutral is not acceptable. Neutral is not acceptable. And that was when I first learned like, you know—and then, they would want us to Israeli nationalistic songs to sing at student events to piss off the Arab instructors. Like, there was all of this game playing that as students we tried to steer clear of and minimize—you know, we wanted to learn Hebrew—but you definitely saw. So, it was that introduction to, "every day we're going to pick at each other." Like, "we are not going to let it go."

Q: These were not relaxed people.

PAYNE: No. I mean, absolutely charming, lovely people, but not relaxed.

Q: I mean, they obviously, from their own ethnic background, had a cause. And here they were, they had their hands-on people who were going to be representing the United States, the most powerful country in the world. So, by god, let's mold them into a _____

PAYNE: Absolutely. And, you know, even when I got to Israel—you see everything from the seat you sit in. So, from the Israeli seat: “We're small, we're under siege, we could be wiped out, we have to fight every day to survive.” And so, that was that mentality of, "We're gonna do whatever it takes to survive." And you saw that clearly.

Q: What was the job you were going to?

PAYNE: I was second tour officer. I did a consular rotation where I started off in Visas. Then I actually got asked to be the ambassador staff aide. So, I was Martin Indyk's staff aide, and then, I did American citizen services.

Q: You were there from when to when?

PAYNE: From '96 to '98.

Q: What was the situation?
PAYNE: So, it was right after [Yitzhak] Rabin [Prime Minister of Israel, 1974-1977 and 1992-death in 1995] got shot. So, Martin Indyk was ambassador, Jim Larocco was the DCM, and Martin had been absolutely engaged with the peace process and the peace talks and then Rabin got shot. And so, I got there right afterwards, when there still was hope. And so, Israelis were studying Arabic. There were huge Peace Now marches in downtown Tel Aviv. I went with some Israelis on their first trip to an Arab village. So, there was an enormous amount of openness and desire for peace. And I got to watch that deteriorate, which was incredibly, incredibly sad. The tensions were so clear. Like, I got to know my neighbor really well. I'd spend time with her. She had moved from Poland before the Holocaust and so, had not lived through the Holocaust but lost tons of family members. When my HHE, my household goods were delivered, the boxes had Arabic writing on it because it was from Kuwait. They had packed my goods in Kuwait. Apparently, the whole building went ballistic. They panicked when they saw boxes with Arabic on them. She asked, "Who are you?" And I'm like, "I'm a diplomat. I was posted to Kuwait."

"Oh, thank God." Like, "Oh, yay."

So, early on I'm introduced to this level of fear that Israelis felt towards Arabs. But then, I also would go to Bethlehem and hang out with the family of Palestinians whose son worked at the embassy in Kuwait and hear them talk about their fear and their anger and their hatred. I spent a lot of time with Palestinians. I spent a lot of time with Israelis. All of them had a history of past hurts and all of them were terrified of each other, absolutely terrified.

Q: Let's talk about your work—we'll come back to this other, overriding theme. As a consular officer, what was the situation that you were dealing with?

PAYNE: So, from the visa perspective, it was a visa mill. It was just routine visa issuance. We would not waive visas for Israelis because of the Russian immigration mafia issue. There were lots and lots of Russians migrating to Israel as a steppingstone to migrate to the States. And so, we couldn't wave visas because that whole population would then move illegally to the States. That made mainstream Israelis pretty angry, that they still had to come and get a visa, because they consider themselves on par with the European countries that didn't require visas. So, I have to say adjudicating visas for

Israelis was incredibly hard. They're also very argumentative, so even when you say yes, they would argue with you. It is the only time marines had to carry visa applicants out of the waiting room. I've never seen that anywhere else in my life. There was also this enormous tension with our consulate in Jerusalem because we had very different approaches to how we adjudicated visas. And we hated each other, and we disagreed with each other.

Q: How is it split up?

PAYNE: The consulate in Jerusalem reported directly to Washington until very recently. And so, while we were both technically in Israel, we really weren't. And so, Martin Indyk and—I forget who the CG was at the time—I mean, they would have screaming matches with each other. They would fight like crazy. And it all happened to us too. Like, we tried to have meetings where we came together and tried to find common ground and couldn't—despite the best efforts of really good people—because we realized that our view of reality was so strikingly different. Their view of Israelis was much harsher than ours because the Israelis in their consular district were the settlers, were the strident, American citizens, were the Palestinian Americans who kept getting disenfranchised and mistreated. And so, their view of Israel was very different than our view of Israel, which was more liberal. It was Tel Aviv. It was laid back. We didn't mind the Israeli army guys who would apply for a visa. They resented them. You just adopted the view from where you sat. And so, despite our best efforts, we could never come together. So, an Israeli settler who didn't get a visa in Jerusalem, would just come to Tel Aviv and apply for a visa and we'd give it to him. And a Palestinian who didn't get a visa in Tel Aviv—if they could actually get out of Gaza—would just go to Jerusalem. So, it was crazy. But it was also a visa mill. It was just huge buckets of visas. You know, at that time, you didn't interview everybody and so, you'd sit there with these bins of visas and have to paper adjudicate overwhelming numbers.

Q: How did you treat the members of the extreme orthodox community in Tel Aviv?

PAYNE: So, just like everybody else, because we did not experience the challenges that you would experience if you lived in Jerusalem. They didn't bother us. But in Jerusalem, you got mistreated by them, so you didn't like them. You had a personal, up-close, daily exposure and resented them. Whereas, in Tel Aviv you hardly ever saw them. So, when they did come in for a visa, who cared? Because you had no personal emotional response to them.

Q: Yeah. I'm told —a minor note—that the Orthodox community, to the American point of view, a group of the Orthodox smelled. That they didn't take baths or something like that.

PAYNE: So again, this is—I never saw that. And I would suspect that, that is a stereotype that has developed over time, that has unfortunately—again, cause it's like when you don't like a community and they are doing behaviors that annoy you, things like that take on a larger than life and it becomes a stereotype. That is unfair. I'll be

honest, I never felt like any one community smelled worse than another. We did have an enormous amount of a fraud by the Orthodox community when it came to consular reports of birth abroad. They would lie about how long they lived in the States, because Israel is one of the few countries where people actually migrate from the United States to Israel. So, to transmit citizenship to your child, you have a certain number of years you're required to be a resident of the United States. And man, they would commit fraud. They would get fake yeshiva documents, making it appear that they lived in the United States much longer than they really did, in order to transmit citizenship. That was very common. These were communities that were very actively—they wanted their children to have American citizenship. It was important to them, but they were not born American. So, it was fascinating that they valued the citizenship enough to commit fraud, but you know, they had migrated to Israel.

Q: Did you have lots of problems with the American Jewish community coming and bringing cousins back and that sort of thing or not?

PAYNE: No. You didn't—what you didn't have outside of the Russian Israeli community, was this desire to migrate illegally to America. What you did have, were young people working illegally in America. That was very common. But they weren't—unlike other countries, where—like India, because I served in India—where, you would try to get everybody in your family over to the States, in Israel, there wasn't that. There was just, "Hey, I'm after army. I'm going to work for two years for my cousin's trucking company to make enough money to keep traveling to Central America." There's that, but there is not—outside of the Russian—the Russian Jewish community, they wanted to go to America. They did not want to go to Israel, but we wouldn't take them. So, they went to Israel first in hopes of—

Q: We had all these agreements with the Soviets to let the Russian Jews out of there and then, I think we were supposed to separate them—Israel was a very definite second choice.

PAYNE: In fact, someone told me—this is actually a criticism of the Jewish organizations in the States—that we're raising funds even they opposed large numbers coming to the states and they were directing them all to Israel. And so, as all these people were fleeing the Soviet Union, their goal was to get to the States, but the States was like, "oh, no, no, no, no, you are not coming to the States. You're going to Israel." And then, our effort—because of 214B—I mean, if you're an intending immigrant, you don't get a visitor visa. And so, it was weeding out that community to—but outside of the Russian Israelis, you did not see a strong desire to actually migrate to the States—to work illegally in the states, absolutely. But not to migrate.

Q: Did the Russian Jewish take no for an answer?

PAYNE: They were very argumentative. I don't know how many times I just put down the blinds of the visa interview window. Now, there was a dynamic of the local

staff—which I think was important—which I've never seen anywhere else. Our local staff were a mix from every background. Cause you know, Israelis are mixed. You've got Israelis that are from many different countries. Then we had Arabs that were Palestinian or Arab Israeli. So, we had this incredibly diverse group of local staff. Secular, religious, because Israelis refer—like, if you're an Israeli Jew, you would say, "I'm either religious or secular." And religious is Orthodox because they don't recognize the other—the American versions of Judaism. So, you're either religious or secular. So, there's everything. And a senior FSN [Foreign Service National] told me early on—she was so wise—"You don't talk religion. You don't talk politics. Ever." So, one day, someone brought up something—I don't even remember the topic now—but an American officer brought up something and man, that place exploded. Like, it just went "bam!" Like, the fighting and the arguing and—it took forever to get everybody to calm back down. And she's like, "See, I told you. You don't talk religion and you don't talk politics. If we're going to function, and we're going to get our job done, you don't talk religion, you don't talk politics." And I'm like, "Absolutely."

Q: Did you get involved in protection welfare at all?

PAYNE: A little bit. There were several cases that, again, were pretty remarkable. One was when a rabbinical court asserted jurisdiction over an American citizen in Israel on vacation. He refused to give his wife a divorce. Under rabbinical law, either the wife or the husband can give what's called a "get," which is breaking the marriage contract, in order to be divorced. You can't force your spouse, however. No court can grant a divorce unlike in other religions. So, if I don't want to divorce you, I just don't give you the get. I don't let you out of the contract. A man whose wife won't give you a get can get rabbinical permission to take additional wives. So, that gives the men freedom to remarry. But a woman can't. A rabbinical court will not give a woman permission to take a second husband. So, if her husband won't give her the divorce, she's stuck. Religious Israelis pressure the husband and under Israeli law a rabbinical court can fine you, can take away your license to do something. They can take actions that pressure you to give your wife the divorce. So, this American—on vacation in Israel—the rabbinical court put a stop order and prevented him from leaving the country. This was huge. I mean, from a consular perspective—think about it—a court is asserting jurisdiction merely because of your religion, for behavior in your own country. They were married in the United States. They weren't married in Israel. This became a huge diplomatic issue, where, you know, I accompanied the ambassador to the chief of the rabbinical court. We'd go to the Ministry of Justice and they'd be like, "We can't do anything. These are the rabbinical courts." In Israel you have religious courts, which are religious courts just like Sharia except they are Jewish and run by rabbis. It was fascinating for me. So, I got to see some rabbinical court proceedings. It got resolved because they kind of quietly let him leave. We were threatening to do a travel warning, warning American citizens against travel to Israel for fear that rabbinical courts would assert jurisdiction over them, which would have been a huge blow to our relationship. At that time—this was before [Benjamin] "Bibi" Netanyahu won the election—we had a very strong relationship with the government of Israel.

Q: Well, before what happened to Rabin—I mean, things were really looking rosy.

PAYNE: Right. That was just fascinating for me, to see that tension. You know, the rabbinical versus—also, Israel did not allow marriage between religions. So, it's illegal in the state of Israel for a Muslim to marry a Jew, or for a Jew to marry a Christian, or for a Muslim to marry a Christian because marriage—one of the agreements when the state was formed was that marriage would be solely rabbinical. Divorce—you could either divorce in the rabbinical court or the civil court. Child custody could be either civil or rabbinical, but marriage could only be rabbinical. So, a lot of Israelis would go to Cyprus to get married. For a while they were doing marriage remotely with Panama. So, we get these marriage certificates issued in Panama for immigrant visas. This is why we knew all this, because you'd get an immigrant visa and you'd be like, "You were married in Panama? Why were you married in Panama?" And that's how we realized like, "Right. It's illegal for two different religions to marry each other in Israel." So, these quirks—it was fascinating to see how this played out.

A good friend of mine, who was Israeli. She discovered—after her mother passed away that, unbeknownst to her, her mother had not yet converted to Judaism when she was born. So, she thought her whole life that she was Jewish—and you know, it's on your identification card—only to discover that she's not Jewish, but she's secular. So, she's not converting to Judaism because she can't stand the Orthodox Jewish tradition, but she's not Jewish. So, the angst she went through, like, "Do I tell people? It's not fair to not to tell. If I meet a guy and marry him and our kids won't be Jewish because I'm not Jewish." It was a terrible dilemma for her.

Q: Was she of Jewish stock?

PAYNE: Well, this is the way the religion is structured. If the woman isn't Jewish, you don't transmit the religion. Her father was Jewish. Her mother had been Christian and converted to Judaism, but the conversion took place after her birth, not before. And she only found this out after her mother died and she found the paperwork and she saw the rabbinical conversion document and realized that, "Oh my God, I thought she converted before I was born. No, she converted after. So, I grew up thinking I was Jewish and now I'm not. And what does this mean? Of course, the whole world thinks I am, the government thinks I am. So, I could lie about it and get away with it. I could convert except I find the conversion process offensive." And it was a crisis for her. It was a major, major, major crisis. And so, this is the cultural complexity of a very rule-based religion—I love studying religion—so, it's a role-based religion and it's pretty black or white.

Q: Were there any problem with the military service, particularly women____?

PAYNE: They were just as engaged. The only thing we would see from time to time, were American citizens who had migrated to Israel and would come and ask if we could

get them out of military service. And we'd say "No, sorry. Nothing we can do, you're Israeli. No." And that was just a routine. Every now and then we'd get a question. I hung out with Israelis a lot. I was a member of a repelling and hiking club. I would spend almost every weekend hanging out with Israelis. And it was commonplace that the men and women served in the military. If you did not serve in the military, you had a significant disadvantage for the rest of your life because the military service was your steppingstone to everything. Unless you were religious and then, it didn't matter. But if you were just an average Israeli—if you were a secular Israeli and you did not want to serve in the military, you basically were disadvantaged. You wouldn't be able to find good jobs. You wouldn't be able to integrate well in culture, in the society, because military service played an important cultural role for Israel as well. And so, everybody did military, everybody did. Unless you're religious.

Q: How did you view the younger—particularly younger religious—community, because I've always been surprised that they don't serve in the military or at least they didn't.

PAYNE: I did not get to know a lot of religious Israelis. Because remember, religious Israelis are Orthodox. There, you're either secular or you're religious. I lived in Tel Aviv, where there wasn't a large number of religious Israelis, so I honestly did not get to know religious Israelis and they wouldn't have been open to me. It's like the Amish. If you go live in where my parents grew up, you would never get to know the Amish very well because they're not going to let you in. There is just no way, because they are a closed, tight, insular community. That's the way religious Jews are in Israel. Professionally, I got to know them, but on a personal level, the Israelis I hung out with were all secular.

Q: Did you find that your experience back in Pennsylvania on the periphery of the Amish community helpful in understanding Israel?

PAYNE: Yeah. Because it helped me understand the basis of belief. I've always been fascinated with religion. Coming from a community that was conservative, that was insular, that frankly meets the definition of fundamentalists before we associated fundamentalism with violence—made me very open to understanding communities with other religious beliefs that were fundamental. And so, it made me open to understanding, "Oh yeah, you believe you're not Jewish because your mom was not Jewish." That's a fundamental belief. I get it. I understand it. I know where you're coming from. And so, I think it allowed me to be more appreciative of those with belief systems that were rigid, that were narrow, that were different.

Q: You talked about the difference between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv—our posts there—did you find that you were a different creature than the Vice Consul in Tel Aviv, by their experience and your experience?

PAYNE: So yes. It was a lot less stressful to serve in Tel Aviv. It was great. Tel Aviv is an amazing city. Tel Aviv is this great, liberal, secular city on the beach. Think about it. The beach was across the street from the embassy. The food was great. The people were

great. It was so much fun. You go to Jerusalem, and it is stressful, and it is difficult, people are mistrustful, and it is conservative. I had secular Israelis tell me that they wouldn't go to Jerusalem anymore. It's not their country. It's too conservative. It's too narrow-minded. Somebody serving in Jerusalem sees a very different world. They saw abuse every day towards the Palestinians. You rarely saw that in Tel Aviv.

I was so lucky in Tel Aviv. I worked with some of the most amazing people. Jeff Feldman was a mid-level econ officer. Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley was a mid-level political officer. Dana Smith, formerly Dana Shell, was a mid-level public affairs officer. These are three of the best foreign service officers in NEA [Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs]—but they were relatively junior still, at the time. Because they worked on Palestinian issues, because they covered Gaza, they were exceptionally critical of Israeli. Jeff Feldman was impressive, because on a personal level, he was anti-Israel. And then, he'd write a cable that was incredibly well-balanced. He would not let his personal beliefs interfere with his cable writing. But he had just seen so much abuse, because if you spend every day talking to Palestinians, it's horrible. And if you spend every day talking to Israeli Jews, you're seeing a whole different perspective. If you're going out and talking to Israeli Arabs, you're seeing a whole different perspective. And so, it's, it's an incredibly complex cultural mix. What impressed me—especially about Jeff Feldman—was that ability to say, "I have these personal beliefs and then, I have my job for the US government and I'm going to send in a very balanced report."

When I worked for Martin, it was also when Aaron Miller and Dennis Ross [diplomats involved in Israel-Palestine peace talks] were coming. I was regularly exposed to these efforts to bring about a final conclusion to the peace talks. When I worked for Martin, I learned a lot. Martin was a political appointee. He was an Australian citizen recently naturalized as an American. Martin has worked his whole life to bring about peace in the Middle East. As a teenager, he started trying to bring about peace between the Arabs and Israelis. So, this is everything to him. And he is so pro-Shimon Peres, almost to the point where we did very little political reporting on the Likud [the Likud-National Liberal Movement, a political party of which Netanyahu is a part]. There is one mid-ranked political officer who kept saying, "we need to get to know the people in the Likud. This is a mistake." And he was always the outlier and he was pushing. So, it was election day and Peres was running again Netanyahu. Martin's was all excited like, "Shimon Peres has to win" because in order to progress with the peace process, Shimon Peres, had to be the head of government. We watched election results coming in from our control center. At midnight Shimon Peres was winning and we popped a bottle of champagne. Then, we watch as the results continue to come in, and it gets closer and closer and closer and closer until in the wee hours of the morning, Bibi Netanyahu starts to win. And in the end, he wins the election. Lesson learned: we didn't understand how election results came in. We assumed it was done like in the States where you call, you count locally and then you call the results. In Israel, you transport the ballots and then you count. So, the further away you are, the later those votes are counted. So, early votes were of liberal, central Israel and the later votes represented those further away and therefore, more conservative. Our mistake was assuming at midnight that Shimon Peres had won because we did not

understand how votes were counted in Israel. It was a huge mistake. It devastated Martin to have Bibi Netanyahu win. And I think it damaged our approach to Bibi Netanyahu then.

Q: I mean, I never served there at all, but it just seems like Netanyahu is, in a way, doing Israel.

PAYNE: But from a diplomacy perspective, we made the mistake of too clearly backing Shimon Peres. I think we hurt Shimon Peres. I think Israelis said, "The Americans are not going to tell us who to vote for. And who are we to get involved in their elections. We're gonna prove to you we're independent." So, we undermined Peres. Two, as a diplomat, we should have reached out to Bibi Netanyahu, cultivated people in his party because we work with whoever—in a democracy—whoever the people elect. Instead, we said, "We don't like Bibi Netanyahu." Clinton hated Bibi Netanyahu. Martin hated Bibi Netanyahu. Well, if you hate somebody, you're not gonna do well as a diplomat. And the lesson I learned was, it doesn't matter. If it's a democracy and people are voting for someone, you got to figure out why.

Q: It's very hard. I mean, to a person in the diplomatic community, you can imagine several more dictatorial regimes.

PAYNE: Right. That's why I say for democracies. In a democracy, diplomats need to accept the winner, because otherwise we don't believe in democracy. Otherwise, we actually believe in liberal autocracy. A huge mistake that the State Department has made time and time again is, we say, "Bibi Netanyahu"—I mean, on a personal level, I find him abhorrent, but who cares? If I'm a diplomat and the relationship is between the US government and the Israeli government, I need to build relationships because I can't get anything done if I don't have relationships. So, I'm going to have to have relationships with some people I may disagree with.

Q: Okay, let's move to the time you were assistant to Martin Indyk. In the first place, what was your impression of the man?

PAYNE: Absolutely brilliant. An absolute genius with one goal, which is to bring about Arab-Israeli peace. This was his only goal in life. He didn't care about anybody who worked for him and—I mean, he didn't care about me. He liked me because I was good, but he had a political goal, and this was a tool to use to achieve that goal. He was absolutely brilliant. I mean brilliant. He neglected his family. He could have cared less about classified documents. He got in so much trouble over classified documents because he could have cared less. He left classified laptops in VIP lounges at the airport. I carried classified documents to him, which is technically not allowed. He had a personal assistant at the house who had access to his documents even though she didn't have a clearance. The other thing about Martin that I found interesting is that there is this guy—I don't remember his name—who was the ghost writer of the book that was going to be written, who would come with him a lot on stuff and just, you know, take notes. Because when he

did achieve Arab-Israeli peace, this guy would then be able to write the book. I can only imagine how devastating it was for Martin the day he realized that he would not be able to do this. He was not going to bring about Arab-Israeli peace, not him, in his lifetime. He was solely driven by that. He's divorced his wife and had major heart attacks—I'm not surprised. One of the scariest moments for me career wise, was he wanted me to come back with him to be his staff assistant when he was assistant secretary for NEA. And I said no. I was shaking. And he said, "You've made the worst mistake of your career, don't you realize what I'm offering you?" And I looked at him and I said," I've made mistakes before." And I was shaking. It was so scary to tell him no because he's a formidable man. Not abusive, just brilliant, powerful, picks up the phone and talks to Bill Clinton. You know, I patched calls through to the White House. But I wasn't going to work for him. I didn't want to tie myself to his coattails and soar up to the top because I'm associated with Martin Indyk. And it was hard. It was hard for him to hear me say no because not many people said no to him. His OMS (Office Management Specialist) also said no to him. She was brilliant, fabulous, the best I've ever seen. She also decided, "I'm not going to sacrifice my life for you. I'm sorry." And so, she wouldn't go back, and I wouldn't go back.

Q: So, what did you do? Can you talk about some of your experiences—what you were doing?

PAYNE: As staff aid?

Q: Yeah. You were doing this from when to when?

PAYNE: I was staff aid for eight months. He wanted to keep me there permanently and I maneuvered to keep it rotating because I didn't want to stay up there permanently. That was hard. I was saying, "I do not want to be your staff aid the whole rest of my tour." Because you know, when you're staff aid to a principal—if you're a good staff aid—you're basically serving this person and you don't matter. Your goal is to anticipate the needs of this person, to get this person what is critical for them, to make sure all the paper—to go talk to the rest of the embassy about things and saying, "Look, he really needs these talking points from you Wednesday by noon." What's the challenge? What do you need? My whole goal was to get that principal what that principal needs and I don't enjoy doing that.

Q: In doing these interviews, particularly in Washington, people are stamp page up on seventh floor. Usually listen to the good places you get to be an ambassador. But which was sort of to the detriment of many hard-working foreign service officers who are serving elsewhere.

PAYNE: Yeah. Well, and again, this is why Martin—I mean, think about it. If my goal was to sail to the top, I would have gone back with him as his staff assistant. Here he is, the assistant secretary of state for the Middle East, and I would have gotten exposure. But I didn't enjoy the work. I could do it. I was good at it. I was really good at it. But it has

nothing to do with anything I value. I was in a subservient position and I was just making sure he had what he needed. Some people love that. The best staff assistants enjoy it. I'm glad I did it. It was a good learning experience. I would never do it again. I would never take one of those positions in Washington.

Q: Well, we've picked up some of the learning experiences. Shall we talk about some of the things you were doing during this time?

PAYNE: Like for fun?

Q: Yeah.

PAYNE: So, I became an avid hiker. I did repelling, which was great. I learned how to dive. You could still go down to the Sinai. We could drive down to the Sinai diving—I was out probably every single weekend outdoors doing something active, mainly with Israelis. I had a few friends from the embassy, but my social community were Israelis.

Q: *When you say Israelis, these are Jewish?*

PAYNE: Yes.

Q: You really couldn't go out with both sides. I mean the Arab Israelis—

PAYNE: I mean, I could have, except they didn't share the same interests that I shared. Like, I loved hiking. I love camping. I loved diving. Those were activities that the majority of the people who did them tended to be Jewish Israeli—secular, Jewish Israelis—fairly liberal, Jewish Israelis.

Q: What was your impression of Dennis Ross and—

PAYNE: Brilliant, brilliant. And kind, very kind. He was very thoughtful people. I have to say, in my role, you know if someone's abusive. They were very nice people. They were there all the time. They were easy to work with. They thought Jeff Feldman was the most brilliant person on earth because he was. There were people above him, but they would go to him, they would pull him in. They recognized when someone had the ability, they didn't care about rank, they didn't care about hierarchy. They went to the people who gave them what they needed. And there was strategizing—and so, they were pretty impressive. That trio: Martin, Aaron, and Dennis, could have pulled this off.

Q: Well what was—when Netanyahu came in, could you sense that there was a real change?

PAYNE: Oh yeah. There was panic. Because they didn't know him, and they didn't like him. And then, by the time they got to know him, Bibi was so good at manipulating them and using them. Bibi is brilliant. That man is good at what he does. And he had us all tied

up. He was good at using us. There was a little too much pro-Arafat [Yasser Arafat, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization 1969-2004] going on too. Where it was like, "Let's not forget who Arafat is." The tendency for humans is to fall for fame and say, "Oh, he's famous. I want a picture." But it's just like, "Guys, let's not forget who these people are." Arafat's a killer. Bibi is a killer. They're representing their populations. How do we get them where America wants them to go? And I think we got a little lost and honestly, we got chewed up.

Q: Back to being a female officer at the embassy. It's now a matter of—women are talking about being harassed sexually. What were your experiences?

PAYNE: I was never harassed. Honestly, I never experienced gender bias in Israel. I've experienced gender bias in other components of my diplomatic career. You know, even that story with Skip Gnehm not asking me to go fishing, that's a little teeny bit of gender bias right there. I have never—with one exception—been harassed, and definitely not in Israel. I had one exception in Rwanda where the DATT was harassing me, but I called him on it, and he stopped.

Q: Should we move on to the next thing. If you, if there's anything that occurs to you, when you get the document put it in. Okay. So, you leave Tel Aviv with all this experience. In what year did you leave?

PAYNE: I left Tel Aviv in 1998—so, this was controversial because you're supposed to go back to Washington for your third tour, but Ryan Crocker—God bless him—told me, "I didn't go back to Washington for 12 years and it hasn't hurt me." And I finally get to choose. I finally get to bid on a post. I say no to Martin. And to make things worse, I tell him my first choice is Rwanda. And he literally sneered like, "Why would you go to Rwanda? Why?" And I chose Rwanda because one, I finally was going to get to Africa because that was where I wanted to go from day one. And remember my own Mennonite background. You know, I just served in Israel. I had really gotten to understand the Holocaust and the results of the Holocaust and what the Holocaust did to people. And I said, "There's just been this genocide in Rwanda, and I want to understand the impact the genocide has had on these people." So, that was why Rwanda was my first choice. It was an FS-O3 position traditionally given to first tour officers because this was a time when they were giving a lot of mid-level jobs to first tour officers. And a lot of people said, "You're crazy. This is not good for your career. Why would you ever do this? This is a teeny tiny post. Why?" And because I'm stubborn and I'm independent, I'm like, "You don't understand. This is where I'm going. I don't care what it's gonna do to my career. I'm going to Rwanda. I finally get to choose." And of course, I'm like the only person who bids on the job. So of course, I got it.

Q: What was the job?

PAYNE: It was a consular, econ., commercial officer. I studied French, but not the full six months because there was such a large gap between my predecessor and me that the

DCM—Wanda Nesbitt, lovely woman—said, "you can only have three months of French." Fine. They did a waiver for my three-three in French. Rwanda was the best tour of my career. I loved Rwanda. Absolutely loved it. I worked for George Staples—who was ambassador—who is amazing. I don't know if he's done an oral history. He should. He is amazing.

Q: So far, you've had some wonderful ambassadors.

PAYNE: Pure luck. Who would have thought? And Wanda Nesbitt was my first DCM in Rwanda and Don Koran was my second DCM. I worked for remarkable people in this tiny little country, in the middle of Africa, that hardly anybody had ever heard of. I had a blast. I loved it.

Q: You served in Rwanda from when to when?

PAYNE: From '98 to 2001. It was four years after the genocide, when there was still hope that [Paul] Kagame [President of Rwanda] would not be the autocrat he is today. There was a lot of recovering. A lot of economic growth. I got to be a real diplomat. I introduced Rwandan businesspeople to the Internet. I got to see people understand the Internet for the first time. It was so cool. I did tons of commercial work. I got to know Rwandans. Rwandans aren't easy to get to know, but neither are Israelis. So, all the skills I learned to get close to people who tend to be mistrustful, I used also in Rwanda. I got to know a lot about the culture, a lot about the people, a lot about the economy and the government.

Q: When you got there what was the Tutsi-Hutu situation?

PAYNE: Oh, enormous tension. Because remember, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, which was the ruling party, had been the exile population for decades before the genocide. They were now in power, but they're a minority and incredibly powerful. And you had this desire to have a resolution. So, this was the beginning of the Gacaca efforts, of a truth and reconciliation effort. There was also an effort to arrest the major operators of the genocide, you know, the Arusha trials were taking place. So, there was a lot happening around the aftermath of the genocide. You also had threats, still of Interahamwe in eastern Congo and there was a genuine threat of being able to come back and do harm in Rwanda.

Q: Like how many of the people who precipitated the Holocaust disappeared in the jungle.

PAYNE: Yeah. They went into eastern Congo and formed militia. To be honest, again, like the Arab-Israeli conflict, there are no good players in any of this. They've all done terrible things to each other. The Rwandan army was quick to do horrific things in eastern Congo against an Interahamwe that would have massacred people in Rwanda. And so, you basically had bad players on all sides. And you had good players. There were

moderate Hutus that were caught up in all of this. There were people who wanted a more liberal state that got killed.

Q: What had this done to the structuring of the country? I mean, were the entrepreneurs, the people who should be leaders all killed?

PAYNE: So, here's what's interesting: there was very little impact on the structure of the country, because you had a lot of Rwandans who had been in exile coming back in, who were pretty capable and smart. I joined Sunday walking club where I hung out with Rwandans who had grown up in Burundi and they were the entrepreneurs. They were pretty brilliant. They were really good. They all came back from Burundi and started opening businesses. One is now a millionaire because he went into fully washed coffee. I mean they were bright, innovative, creative, and they broke down structures that needed to be broken down. And I'll give you a great example -- it's the coffee washing. Coffee's a major export from Rwanda. I go meet with the head of the Rwandan coffee company who's Belgian. It's the old, rigid structure of a rich Belgian guy exploiting Rwanda of its coffee, selling it in Nairobi in the coffee market, and nobody benefits. And, he's racist. I said to him, "if Rwanda went into high end coffee and started washing their coffee. They would have a major economic impact on the country." And he's like, "they're not capable of doing it, forget it." You know, that classic colonial—and I walked out of there offended. Well, you know what, we worked with USAID [United States Agency for International Development]. Starbucks came in. My friend, Pedro, was one of the earliest people to be given assistance to create a fully washed coffee program. Rwanda exports some of the best coffee in the world today. He is a millionaire. I just saw him six months ago and he's gleefully happy. He was just this entrepreneur. He's still to this day a lovely man. But this is what happened: the old systems got broken down and people like Pedro were given the freedom to go in a different direction to the benefit of the country.

Q: Was the Belgian ruling class still having an impact there?

PAYNE: It was dying. They were being thrown out and they were mad. I mean, they were angry. So, there's an article that was written about me by a Belgian paper, because they were mad. I have mixed feelings about this. You have tantalum ore in eastern Congo, which is this precious mineral that's used to make cell phones and it's worth a fortune. All of it being mined out of eastern Congo went through a Belgian trading company who took off an enormous amount of money and then it was either shipped to Pennsylvania or to China. There are only two companies in the world that process this ore to the wire that all many companies buy. One in Pennsylvania and one in China. The wire is invaluable. So of course, it's in the US interest to help that Pennsylvania company eliminate the middleman, right? Without the Belgian middleman, they would earn more profit. So, my job, was to identify the Rwandans who were in the business and connect them to Pennsylvania. The Belgians went berserk, because the Pennsylvania company then got cheaper inputs and could compete more effectively against the Chinese. And the Belgians lost a fortune. They were basically cut out. And there was an article once where they were criticizing a US commercial officer in Rwanda for interfering. And I gleefully

interfered because it's in the US government interest that this Pennsylvania company have better access. Now, the Rwandans weren't saints either because they were just going into eastern Congo and taking it out too. I mean, they just replaced the Belgians.

Q: Were the Congolese involved?

PAYNE: Well, not so much from my perspective, because I wasn't allowed to go into eastern Congo—I will tell you a story about the one time I did—so, all I could do is deal with the Rwandan business people who would claim that they were having fair interactions with Congolese and I suspect weren't. But all the minerals mined in eastern Congo had to come out from the east. It wasn't economically feasible to have them go out through the west because you had to go through all of Congo. So, it was coming out in the east and the Rwandan businessmen were the ones making the money. And there was a lot of it. At the time, it was a big deal, and it was critical to Rwanda's economy that this was done.

Q: Well, you're dealing with the business community. What was the Hutu-Tutsi balance there?

PAYNE: Mostly they were almost all Tutsis. They were almost all Tutsis. Because they had the power. Remember, very recently, the Hutus massacred the Tutsis, so they weren't going let very many Hutus immediately come back into power. And even now less so. But even at the time, you have to remember how close it was to—like, "these are the people who killed my neighbors." So, a good example is one quite powerful man, who was a very valuable contact of mine. His brother told me a story—his brother was so anti-Hutu, to the extreme—and I'm pushing them on it, saying like, "dude, you guys got to find a way to live together."

And he says, "Look, may I tell you a story? I'm at this gas station and this guy's pumping gas. And I look at him and I say, 'how many did you kill?' And he panics"—Because he's this big powerful guy and he looks at him—"he goes, 'I only killed one.'"

So, this is the reality in which they live. This guy's family—almost all his family members have been killed. So, he's uber angry and struggles to get over it, calls somebody on it, and the guy says, "I killed one." So, he is a killer and they all were living together. Because you can't not live together. And so, this—and it was still very raw then, it was only four years post genocide.

Now, some of the downsides, at least on the economic side: the Rwandan Patriotic Front, little by little, acquired controlling interests in many of the new businesses. And so, if you did not cooperate with the Rwandan Patriotic Front, you would struggle. Another businessman, who I got to know went into the rose business. You can grow some of the best roses in the world in Rwanda because it's on the equator and it's elevated. He was doing brilliant, but he refused to cooperate with the Rwandan Patriotic Front. And he did not last. My friend Pedro, I don't know if he did or not, because I stopped asking. I know

a new dairy company that was starting, they cooperated. A new water bottling company that started, they cooperated.

Q: What was this cooperation? Was it pay or jobs?

PAYNE: I don't know, because no one would tell me. No one would—and it took me years, years, to finally figure out what was going on. Rwandans don't talk by the way. You have to interrogate them practically, to get information out of them. It took me almost the whole three years even just to figure out what are the front companies for the Rwandan Patriotic Front? What is expected? Because what's interesting about the government is Kagame is not corrupt from a money perspective. He's not stealing money, which is why Rwanda is doing so well economically. He just wants absolute power. So, he's not using power to gain wealth. He's using wealth to gain power.

Q: And the Front is Tutsi dominated?'

PAYNE: The Rwandan Patriotic Front is Tutsi dominated because—and I became incredibly skilled about the history of Rwanda. I immersed myself in the history of Rwanda. And I have come to believe that they're not two separate ethnic groups. They're all Bantu. It was a feudal society—with a very complex monarchy that started 5,000 years ago—they look different because of their nutrition—which is what happened in Europe too. If you're a member of the aristocracy, you are taller, your bones are stronger, you have finer features; our concept of beauty because you eat well, you are nourished. And if you were a serf, you are short, stubby, darker because you work out in the sun, and you are malnourished. I believe the same thing happened in Rwanda. So, the Tutsis are the aristocracy and the Hutus are the serfs. And with decolonization, the Tutsis were too uppity, and the Belgians were like, "we don't want to deal with you." And so, they gave power to the serfs and kicked out the aristocracy, who went to Uganda, Kenya, Burundi, and fought to come back. They didn't act like other refugees who made new lives—like the white Russians who never fought to go back to Russia. Tutsis organized, they became members of the Ugandan military. They're brilliant warriors, by the way. Historically, Rwandans are brilliant warriors. They organized and they fought, and they went back and now they rule again. The aristocracy is ruling Rwanda again. It's just not the monarchy. They didn't put the king back. Kagame is the king now. He acts like a king and he reinforces the imagery of king. And Rwandans do what they're told, historically, for thousands of years. If you tell them to kill, they kill. If you tell them not to steal, they won't steal. If you tell them to clean the roads every Saturday, they cleaned their roads every Saturday. And so, on the surface, Rwanda is a beautiful, clean, economically vibrant country ruled by someone who has absolute power.

Q: Well, let's talk about the embassy. It was smaller than you were used to.

PAYNE: Yeah.

Q: How'd you find the ambassador and the spirit of the embassy?

PAYNE: Great. He was fabulous. He was an ambassador who really taught me the value of taking care of people. He's the one who instituted a four-and-a-half-day work week. So, we could leave early on Friday to get on the road to be where we needed to be by sundown. He encouraged us to travel. He encouraged us to be engaged. He gave me full access. I would meet with ministers. I was a third tour officer and I was meeting with the Minister of Finance. He didn't care. He didn't have those rules like, "Only I can meet with the minister." He'd say, "Tell me you're meeting with the minister. But yeah, go meet with the minister." I could meet with anybody who would meet with me. He was great at building a team, at bringing us together, even though we fought sometimes. We had very differing opinions on Kagame. Some of us thought Kagame had hope and others thought he was a terrible man. But he allowed that dialogue and that engagement. And so, it was quite enjoyable. And even when the DATT was demeaning. He would call me toots and the third time he called me toots I just looked at him, I said, "Stop calling me toots. And if you don't stop calling me toots, I'm going to report you because that's not right." And he stopped because he knew if I reported him, he'd get in trouble. So, he stopped. So, George Staples was one of the best leaders I've ever worked for. He was one of the best bosses I've ever had.

Q: You had business. What else were you doing?

PAYNE: I was the consular, commercial, and economic officer. It was a very tiny consular operation. Now, one thing that did come up—this was interesting for me and it was a dilemma. My predecessor, who was a first tour officer, had fallen into the trap of giving visas to genocide survivors. And they used those visas to claim asylum in Canada. Early on in my tenure, a Canadian immigration officer met with me and said, "You have to stop the flow. They're all coming with US visas and claiming asylum." And so, I put a stop to it. Well, Rwandans came out of the woodwork to meet with me.

"Why are you saying no to these survivors? These are people that lived through hell. They're not staying in America; they're going to Canada. Can't you just issue the visas? Before it was just overlooked, they were allowed."

And it was so hard for me because emotionally, well why wouldn't I? But then legally like, "Wait a minute, I'm issuing visas to people who clearly aren't going to return to Rwanda." And the other thing is, "Wait a minute, I'm now giving power to these people, these traffickers basically, to decide who gets to go." I didn't know how much were they getting paid and who was running the scheme. And it turned out that the FSN was probably getting paid. I gave her a special immigrant visa and sent her on her way, and she hinted to her replacement, "Don't do what I did." Because it was scary because these were criminal rings. They are not nice, pleasant people who were probably selling the option to get a US visa to very sympathetic people. But it was really hard. It was morally very, very hard to shut down the visa ring. I felt very torn about shutting down that route to seek asylum in Canada if you're a genocide survivor. And I did, I shut down the route. I also implemented a screening system for genocidaires. If you lived in Rwanda before

the genocide, you had to answer a special questionnaire and be screened to make sure you weren't a genocidaire.

Q: _____

PAYNE: There was a special questionnaire that you had to fill out and we would do a special screening to make sure you did not participate in the genocide, that you weren't a killer.

Q: How would you know?

PAYNE: Oh, let me tell you, we knew enough to be able to red flag people. I started it because of my own interest in catching Nazis who fled to America. We've spent a lot of time finding them and kicking them out. I'm decided, "Under my watch, I'm gonna make it hard for people who committed genocide and I gonna make it easy to catch them and kick them out of the United States." Years later, I testified in a criminal trial against a woman who committed genocide who ended up getting the visa in Nairobi. I refused her several times in Kigali. She had completed that questionnaire and by lying on that questionnaire, we convicted her of visa fraud and deported her and her sister.

Q: Were women—

PAYNE: Of course, there were women killers. Women are just as bad as men. I know this from my prosecution background. Both men and women commit crimes. Women commit murder. Yes, women committed setting genocide.

Q: I would've thought that in something like that men would have sort of pushed women aside.

PAYNE: This is a misunderstanding of Rwandan culture. Women in Rwandan culture have gender equality, more than any society I have lived in. Their mythology, the way they structure themselves, their belief systems. Women are very powerful in Rwanda. Women fought in the Rwandan Patriotic Army. When they had a monarchy, a queen mother would be appointed from a different family than the king in order to balance the power of the king. So, in Rwandan culture, if your husband is fighting—is away at war, there is an expectation that you still need to be satisfied sexually. You are allowed to take a lover and any children born to that lover are your husband's children. It's just expected. Why would a woman not do that? In Rwandan society, men are expected to please women. To highlight the difference, If I'm in a dance club in Congo and men touch you all the time. It's very annoying. In Rwanda, if you're in a dance club, men never touch you. They respect women. If a man want to sleep with me, he has to talk me into it. So, they don't use force. They don't use violence. Culturally, they're expected to win you over. It was eye-opening for me to see a culture that gave women an enormous amount of power. You know, it's one of the first countries where there are more women

parliamentarians than there are men. I mean in the end Kagame is still “king”, but women have enormous power in Rwanda.

Q: You ended up in some countries that are really incredible.

PAYNE: And I was loving it. I mean, I would just eat this stuff up.

Q: Were Congolese at all in Rwanda?

PAYNE: Some. Some and they're very different than Rwandans. Rwanda's a mountainous country which had a singular monarchy—not separate kingdoms like Burundi or Congo but one monarchy—with a monotheistic God, which is rare in Africa. They had one god, not multiple gods. They fought the Arab slave traders, so that no slaves were ever sold from Rwanda. Rwanda is one of the few African countries where none of their people were sold into slavery. If they defeated you, they killed you, they did not take you and enslave you. They had no history of slavery. They were a very strict monarchy that treated their serfs like dirt, but they also didn't let the Arab traders come in. The only way they lost to the Germans initially was that they had a civil conflict between two competitors for the monarchy and one used the Germans in order to win. That's the only way the Europeans made it into Rwanda. It's the only way they were able to colonize Rwanda because they were such fierce fighters and they're known historically for that. And to this day, they are some of the best peacekeepers in the world because they're very disciplined. They're very good.

Q: Did you get much attention from the State Department or Congress?

PAYNE: Not in Rwanda, thankfully. I have later in my career, but not in Rwanda. Because nobody really cared about Rwanda. And George Staples was so good at what he did that we just basically did our jobs in Rwanda. Towards the end of my three years (I extended to a third year, thankfully), I realized that I was bored. It was the first time I was bored since I'd been to Rwanda.

An hour later, I got a call from a UN official An American citizen working for the United Nations has been detained by Congolese rebels in Goma. They accused him of selling currency on the black market. I knew that they were trying to trump up charges because there is no way that a UN official was selling money in the black market, but they wanted to make it look like the UN was corrupt. I called the Ministry of Interior and I say to Rwanda’s intelligence chief Patrick Karegeya (who has, by the way, allegedly been murdered by Kagame in a South African hotel room years later), "You release this man." And he says, "He's not in my custody. He's in Congolese rebel custody." I said, "Look, I know that we all have this political fakery that you can't influence the Congolese rebels. What I'm telling you is, I'm going to Goma and if this man is not released, that's it, we're done with you." And he's like, "I don't know why you're talking to me." He says, "And you're not allowed in eastern Congo." And I said, "Oh, but our ambassador in Congo has given me permission to cross the border. So, I'm getting in a car right now and driving

up. I'm going to cross that border and I want access to the American and I want him released because this is trumped up." And he's still going, "Uh." So, then I call my guy, who I know is intelligence, but he pretends not to be. And I say, "I need your help. I'm going up to Goma, I need a driver to pick me up on the other side." And he makes arrangements. And it's also my way of saying, "I'm deadly serious about this. I'm telling you where I am. No surprises."

And I drive up to the border and it's a little scary because the car can't cross. So, my driver drops me off and I literally walk across the border going, "Oh, you know, rebels could pick me up too. I have no diplomatic immunity in Congo. I'm just this woman with a little suitcase." Minutes after I cross, I get this phone call, it's the American. He goes "I'm released, let's meet at the hotel." So, I go to the hotel. He said that as I crossed the border, the rebel who was in charge of him told him, "You're lucky you're an American" and let him go. And then I stayed that night in Goma chatting with this guy—who, by the way, then became quite friendly with the rebels afterwards. But it was that "you're lucky you're an American" because if they'd have picked up any other nationality, maybe they wouldn't have been as forceful. But the fact that we basically said like, "You know, no deal. You mistreat this guy; you keep this guy in detention and we're done. We're going to stop faking. We overlook the fact that we know you control the rebels. We're done, you touched an American and we don't tolerate it." And they let him go, said, "You're lucky you're an American." And that, to me, also was like the power of America, they didn't want to risk it.

Q: I think this is a good place to stop. And we'll pick this up. Where'd you go next?

PAYNE: I went to Office of Children's Issues as a country officer.

Q: Today is the 22nd of April 2019 with Beth Payne. And Beth, I'll turn it over to you.

PAYNE: Okay. So, I think we left off as I was transferring from Rwanda back to Washington. I took a job as a country officer in the Office of Children's Issues.

Q: What does that mean?

PAYNE: The Office of Children's Issues is in the Bureau of Consular Affairs and they do international parental child abduction and inter-country adoption. I was a country officer working on international parental child abduction. I worked on cases where parents abducted children from the United States to another country. I would work to try to get those children returned to the United States.

Q: What we're talking about is really not what we would call criminal activity, but it's—I mean, the children belong to the abductee too.

PAYNE: It's also a crime. In many states, parental kidnapping is a crime. We had several tools at our disposal to try to get kids back. One was a treaty, if a country was party to

this treaty on parental kidnapping, that was the ideal tool. But if a country was not, we would use criminal charges—the left behind parent may choose to file criminal charges and that would become leverage in persuading the taking parent to bring back the child. If felony charges were filed, their passport could then be nullified. If you have a federal warrant out for your arrest, we can cancel your passport and then you may be in that country illegally and that country's authorities may deport you.

Q: How long were you doing this? From when to when?

PAYNE: My first day in the Office of Children's Issues was September 10th, 2001. And then I finished in June of 2003 when I left for Baghdad.

Q: What was the reaction of the department after 9/11?

PAYNE: It was a pretty traumatic experience. For me, it was my second day in the department, and I had served in countries where terrorism was part of my life. I was very familiar with the threat of terrorism. And even when I went to Rwanda, my pack-out day was when our embassy in Nairobi had been bombed. I thought I was coming back finally to where I didn't have to think about the risk of terrorism. And in my second day, we have these acts of terrorism. At the State Department we thought we were under attack.

Q: I remember I was pulling in on the shuttle. And all of a sudden, these security people came out looking around, and I thought, "What the hell is this?" And I walked on to do my interview and we ended up on the TV watching it. Heard the sirens.

PAYNE: It was horrible. I mean, I ended up going home because it was my second day. I just drove home and gave people rides as scores of people were leaving downtown DC, walking across the 14th street bridge. Imagine just scores of people leaving. And then, when I went back to work the next day, they had a task force because we had to deal with the foreign nationals who had been killed in the World Trade Center bombings. There was a lot for us to do. I joined a task force that was set up—as did every consular official in Washington—and helped to manage this aftermath—the immediate aftermath—from a consular perspective. But I think even more profound was the anti-Saudi sentiment that this incident generated. Since the attackers were Saudi, there was this enormous pressure on the State Department over issuance of the visas. And they set up the Department of Homeland Security and there was a huge effort to move the visa function out of the State Department into the Department of Homeland Security. The Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs, Mary Ryan, resigned and, in the Bureau, [of Consular Affairs], that was a huge blow to us. We respected her. We admired her.

Q: Looking at this from my own perspective, all the people who were involved in the thing, and only one person really got hung out to dry. And that was Mary Ryan.

PAYNE: Well, she chose to hang. I give her enormous respect. The perspective of a fourth tour consular officer was that she chose to resign in order to save the Bureau. We

did not believe she was hung out to dry. We believed that she did an admirable thing realizing that she was becoming a distraction and that if she stepped aside and Maura Harty became assistant secretary, the Bureau would be able to recover. And she was right.

Q: Well, when you put it that way—yes.

PAYNE: Yeah, we admire her, those of us that sort of had a ringside seat to watch this. We watched her struggle initially and then we watched Maura fight to keep the visa function, which was a huge fight. It was a huge fight and Colin Powell [Secretary of State, 2001-2005] really supported her. The two of them worked very, very hard to save the visa function because even then—these were the early days, when people realized that the MRV fees were important to the institution, not just to the Bureau of Consular Affairs.

Q: Can you explain what that is?

PAYNE: I'm talking about machine readable visa fees. These are fees we charge when someone applies for a visa. A couple of years before 9/11, Congress passed a law letting the State Department keep those fees, which meant we had operating funds that were not appropriated by Congress. And those were early days, they weren't that high yet, and the Bureau were very strict on how it was used. It was used solely for visa functions. But people understood what that meant. Even when it was only used for visa functions—it meant other money that would have been used for visa functions was now available for other parts of the State Department at a time when budgets are pretty tight. I got to watch Maura fight to keep the visa function. Closer to home, I dealt with the anti-Saudi sentiment because I was the country officer for Saudi. I worked to return abducted children back to the United States from Saudi Arabia. We became the target of the House of Representatives because the more Americans hated Saudis, the more it looked like we were in bed with the Saudis, and the more likely they would take the visa function away from us.

Q: Did you feel it was focused on the Saudis or was this anti-Muslim?

PAYNE: No, Saudi. It was focused on the Saudis. I did not see a generalized anti-Muslim sentiment. I also dealt with kidnappings to Kuwait and to Bahrain and Oman. It was very Saudi focused. Congressman Dan Burton put enormous pressure on the Saudi government. Some of it was effective. It got the Saudi government to do things that they wouldn't do in the past. But some of it was just knee-jerk, anti-Saudi. And to be honest, the Saudis were hard to deal with. I didn't like Saudis. They're not likable people. You would build relationships in order to try to get your needs met from a diplomatic perspective. I would meet regularly with the Saudi government officials. But I did not consider the Saudis a true ally when it came to returning children.

Q: Did you have relations with the Saudi embassy?

PAYNE: Yes.

Q: What were they like?

PAYNE: They were a pain in the butt. They were hard. They were difficult to deal with.

Q: Did they understand what the problem was?

PAYNE: They understood that they were getting political flack and that they needed to rebuild their reputation. They did what they needed to do to minimize the political flack, but they did not do it out of a genuine understanding. From their perspective, if the kid was born to a Saudi parent, the kid should be raised in Saudi. There is no reason that kid should be returned to the States. And so, anything we got from them was because of enormous public pressure and they wanted to work on their public image.

Q: And every case was a Saudi man and an American woman?

PAYNE: Not always, no. Don't make assumptions. I had a case where it was a Saudi woman was married to an American man. He had converted to Islam to get married. She abducted the child to Saudi and was protected by her Saudi family. That child never got returned. We never got that child back.

Q: Well, it would be very difficult to get the child not to be with the mother.

PAYNE: But when it comes to parental child abduction, the principle is that it's the courts of the child's habitual residence that should determine who gets custody of the child. Parents, men or women, should not remove the child from his or her home in order to get a better hearing—to get leverage. Both men and women abduct children. We would advocate for the return of the child to the United States regardless of whether the abductor was a man or a woman.

Q: Were there cases of children who were still in Saudi Arabia where they had the weight of the law behind them to stay in there? I mean, were you involved in that kinda thing?

PAYNE: We would consider these child custody cases. That's where we would say, "If the child's residence is Saudi, then Saudi law would determine custody. If the American and the Saudi got married and they moved to Saudi Arabia, and then they had children and the American wanted to leave Saudi with the children, Saudi law would determine whether that was allowed. My office would not get involved in those cases because there was no abduction. If a parent abducted the child, then we would help the left behind, Saudi parent go to court in America. And at that point, a nonprofit was doing the returns from the United States. But we would advocate for the child being returned. Because the principal has to stay the same. You can't say, "Well, we advocate only if it's America

where the child is abducted from." The principle of international parental child abduction is that abducted children should be returned to their homes of habitual residence.

Q: Did you get flak?

PAYNE: Oh, my goodness. Did we get flak? All the time. What I realized through this is that one of the best ways to get media attention is to have a parent who's lost his or her child. Dan Burton would hold these hearings with left behind parents, and we would just get beat up in these hearings. I went to a hearing. Here I am, a fourth tour, mid-level diplomat, and I would write a lot of the testimony and we would have a DAS [Deputy Assistant Secretary] or Assistant Secretary Maura Harty testify. At the beginning of one hearing, Congressman Burton called for me by name—because I had called one of his witnesses the day before and passed on information—and accused me of witness tampering and got in my face and just yelled at me. I was shocked. I sat through the hearing. I heard one parent tell a completely different version of what happened. We got her kids out—we got her kids back through amazing work, but she still blamed us. And at the end of that hearing, I got in a taxi and I just fell apart. It was just so painful to experience.

Q: What was Burton's background or reasons for getting—

PAYNE: He was chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. They have subpoena power. And this was his issue. What I've learned since then—and this whole experience taught me a lot—someone will always use the issue of parental kidnapping as their champion issue. It gets them attention. People come to their hearings, people care, people write movies about these cases. *Not Without My Daughter* was a bestselling movie. And there's always some member of Congress for whom parental kidnapping is their signature issue. So, at the time Dan Burton decided this is the issue because it was Saudi—and he wanted to beat up the Saudis—and it gets attention. Those hearings were the best political theater—that's when I realized it was political theater. He actually apologized to me later for yelling at me.

Q: Obviously you work for the American side and all—I mean, that's your responsibility—but did you run across any cases where you really thought it was best for the child to go back to the Saudi parents?

PAYNE: So, here's the temptation: to substitute our judgment for a system that would allow a judge—whose job it is to make that decision. There is a very slippery slope that lots of diplomats fall into, where they start to substitute their own judgment. But where do you stop? So yes, it's incredibly tempting. There were left behind parents and I'd be like, "Oh my goodness, this child is way better off living with the taking parent in my judgment." But who am I—that is pretty bold to think, "Well, the judge isn't going to see that." Because if I decide not to work on behalf of that left behind parent, I'm saying, "I don't trust the judicial system. I don't trust American judges. I don't trust that a judge is going to make the right decision."

Q: Did you ever have a chance to talk to a judge?

PAYNE: Oh yeah.

Q: Did you ever say, "Well, I know it's your decision, but here's what we found out"?

PAYNE: We never testify. That was a big no, no. We did not testify in custody hearings because—could you imagine what L [Office of the Legal Adviser, State Department] would think if we became witnesses in custody cases. We did testify in criminal hearings. I never did, but we did have consular officers testifying in criminal hearings. But in child custody it's the best interest of the child. We would work to try to educate judges about the Hague Treaty on Parental Child Abduction, about the principles, about State Department policy, which is, children who are removed from their home of habitual residence should return to that home in order for a judge to determine the best interests of the child, with a few exceptions—proven child abuse being one exception.

Q: I would think you would run across cases where a judge in country X and a judge in the United States would both say the other parent.

PAYNE: All the time. We would advocate for return of the child to the habitual residence. The custody should not be decided in the taking parents' country, because if you allow it—parents abduct kids all the time—you just increase the number of abductions across the board. So, you need the principle of, "You can't abduct your child in order to get a better decision." And that's the whole thing we fought for: the principle that, "don't abduct your child. We're going to return your child and a court in that child's habitual residence." Even diplomats abduct their children, and we would advocate for return of those abducted children.

Q: Did you get any feedback later on how the children involved in these affairs came out?

PAYNE: A few. There's one that I feel very good about. Rarely did you—once they were back—ever hear anything. But there was one where I got a child back from Saudi, and a couple of years later, the mother called me and she said, "You know, my son's in the backyard." They were so happy. It was really heartwarming to hear from her. It meant a lot to me. Sometimes—because I later ran that office—years later, I would meet adults who were returned as children. But rarely would we hear— when a child was back, for us it was over. We had to move on. We had so many cases. Once you got a child back, you rarely heard the final outcome.

Q: I would imagine there'd be a certain number of cases where the child was really only a way of venting—of one spouse venting anger at the other.

PAYNE: Oh, most of time. Think about it, who would do this to a child if it weren't about anger at the other parent? There were times when a child was being abused and the taking parent was actually doing this to protect the child. But honestly, those were rare. Most of the time it was because these people hated each other and the way they could harm each other was to take the child.

Q: Did you find yourself having to—through various means—sort of keep a hand on the shoulder of consular officers abroad? Say, "You follow the law, don't judge yourself."

PAYNE: All the time.

Q: I was a consular officer in Saudi Arabia, and we would get some of these—it was very tempting.

PAYNE: Yes, it is, and it's common. And so, this is where I would do my lecture of the need to follow the law. Foreign Service officers have enormous power. But if we start to believe that we're going use this power for good and go outside the system—there are times when you do that and it's okay—but if you start doing it a lot, you're just abusing your power. Who are you to decide? And so, I would do this lecture about not substituting your judgment for that of a judge, whose job it is to determine the best interests of the child. That's not your job.

Q: We're almost always talking about American judges, aren't we? And wouldn't they be prejudice—using their power for Americans—to support Americans?

PAYNE: Why? Why do you think that judges would do that? Why do you think that we have a system where judges give people credibility because they were American citizens? Actually, we have one of the most objective judicial systems in the world. I have seen judges return abducted children to Saudi Arabia. They're not biased based on the citizenship of one parent over another. We were actually shockingly objective. So are the Canadians. So are the Dutch. Yes, there are judges in some countries—like, Brazil is very biased towards Brazilians and we try to talk to them about, "If you show this bias, if you have this bias, you don't have a fair transparent judicial system anymore." And one of the values that we promote overseas is a fair and transparent judicial system. And I think we have a pretty fair one. Now, there's an assumption some people make that American judges are going to be biased towards American citizens, and I didn't see that play out. It's a common belief, but the whole system breaks down if you don't have a fair, transparent judicial system. We're reliant on that judicial system to do what's right according to the treaty.

Q: Well, how does a judge in Des Moines trying to determine where a child should be know? You can't talk to people in Saudi Arabia.

PAYNE: You can bring in witnesses. If it's under the Hague treaty [Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction], the lawyers will put the law in front

of them. If it's a custody case, people will bring in evidence. How does a lawyer in Des Moines know about New York City? How does he know about Los Angeles? And these were the arguments the Saudi government would make and say, "Look, this doesn't work because judges won't do what's right." And we just say, "Well, look at this case. Look at this case. Look at this case. This is where a judge in Des Moines returned the child to Saudi." Now, it would make Americans go crazy if we advertised that American citizens abducted from Saudi would get returned back to Saudi, but they were, because our judges are fair and transparent. They do the right thing. You always have exceptions, but we have a very fair judicial system.

Q: How did you find your supporter within the Consular Bureau, and the Department of State?

PAYNE: I would say we were very well supported. I got to know Maura Harty as assistant secretary very well. When I got yelled at by Burton, I thought my career was over. I was sobbing hysterically, and Ryan Crocker (he was the DAS that covered Saudi) was supportive.. They all were just so wonderful about helping me feel better, that I was going to be okay, that this was theater, this is all made-for-TV acting, and I'm now a big player, and they're going to support me. And it really helped because honestly, I was devastated that day. It opened my mind to the games that are played—the political games that are played. And I really was relieved when I got this level of support from quite senior people. I mean, I really felt like Maura and Ryan were there for me.

Q: Can you think of any cases that gave you any particular trouble or agony or joy?

PAYNE: There was one case—this poor woman—it opened my eyes to America because our left behind parents were from every socioeconomic background. This woman was from this incredibly poor background. She married a Dutch man and moved to Holland because she could get her teeth fixed there without having to pay. Her husband then wouldn't let her come back with the kid. And it was not a clear case because it was unclear whether she had changed her habitual residence or not. She was so uneducated and so lost but she loved her child more than anything in life. The Dutch were very good about the Hague convention. It just broke my heart to work with her and the Dutch and to realize this woman moved to Holland because she could get her teeth fixed and that sparked this whole drama about losing her child. It was sad. I'll never forget her. I forget her name. The child was not returned. We worked on finding a solution. This is where if the child legally is not returned, the other country's courts would determine custody. Luckily the Dutch are very proactive. We worked to find a way for her and the husband—ex-husband—and the child to be together. But man, it was sad. It was sad. Oh, it just broke your heart.

Q: What does this do to you? I mean, you go back to your apartment and sit down with a bottle of Scotch or what?

PAYNE: The stress was enormous, and I'll tell you more when I ran the Office of Children's Issues, the stress was enormous. It is very wearing, it is exhausting. And I recommend that people don't do this more than two years. I signed up for a two-year tour. I left early because of going to Baghdad and I was done. I mean, it wears on you and you can't win. You can't win. Someone's always going to be unhappy.

Q: I think this was one of the things that is forgotten about people in consular work. You know, if Kuwait is being nasty or suffering or something, well that's Kuwait. Is that a big country or is that a small country? Very rich. It can take care of itself. But consular officers deal with people and look people in the eye. And you can't help but go back to your quarters and think, "Oh God."

PAYNE: Yeah. These are human beings. You talk every day with human beings. With human beings.

Q: There is a toll.

PAYNE: Yes. Yes. There is no question that there is a toll this takes. And this is the challenge—again later, when I ran the Office, it's hard to recruit people to work for this Office. I mean, I wanted to, I found it interesting, but it's rare that a Foreign Service officer puts the Office of Children's Issues as their first choice. And so, you have to scramble to get good people because it's the hardest consular work there is. I believe that parental kidnapping is the absolute hardest consular work there is. No question. Because you can't win. Plus, it gets so much media and political attention. It will always be in the center of media and political attention.

Q: So, how did you—did Baghdad just come up or—

PAYNE: So, this is what's so interesting. So, I'm working with Ryan and Maura on Saudi. I'm a Saudi country officer. And Maura asked me to come meet with her. This was in March of 2003. I'm thinking, "Why does she want to meet with me?" It's just one on one with Maura, just me and Maura. And she says, "I have a question for you, and I don't want you to answer right away. I want you to think about it. But we'd like you to go be the consular officer in Iraq." I knew that we were planning something. There was all this lead up to an invasion and the team that did the Iraq planning was in the same building as us on the same floor. So, I was getting exposed a little bit to the planning, but never in a million years did I expect to be asked to go be a consular officer in Iraq. And I said, "Absolutely yes." She goes, "No, please think about it and tell me tomorrow."

Q: Why? Did you feel that—

PAYNE: Excited. This was something new, something different. I wanted to be valued. I'd served in the Middle East before. Ryan was slated to be the ambassador, so this is—a lot of people don't know about this, and this is where I wish we had a little bit more investigative reporting. The initial plan was going to be similar to Afghanistan, where we

invaded, we put in place a government, and we had an embassy. Ryan was going to be the ambassador. Tom Krajeski was going to be the DCM. Bill Miller was going to be the RSO. I was going to be the consular officer. Those are the only country team members I remember. I don't remember who the others were going to be. We started planning to set up the embassy and I knew where—they told me where it was going to be—in a hotel outside of what then became the Green Zone. I looked it up on Google earth. I worked with the NEA, with the Saudi desk, to put together what I needed to take with me. We called it a "consular section in a box," but we were planning to set up an embassy, and I was going to be the consular chief on country team. I couldn't tell very many people, so I had to keep it a little bit quiet. People knew I was doing something because I would disappear and go to these planning meetings. I would go, and I was working with a company that was putting together the IT system that allowed me to connect to Washington—actually using very new technology—that we got special DS [State Department] approval to use—that was just brand new, where I could use a key card and log into the system in order to do passports and name checks and things like that. We call it "consular section in a box." I had that all prepared and ready to go. We had everything for the first shipment for this embassy in a warehouse out in Virginia. I went out to the warehouse. It was all there, everything for the new embassy, and then it all went haywire and I wasn't going anymore. Then, no one was going. And then, it went from us putting somebody up as president to us occupying Iraq. And I'm convinced it's because we realized that Ahmed Chalabi had betrayed us. I don't know for a fact, and I don't have access to classified information that would let me know this. But I believe that when we realized that Ahmed Chalabi had betrayed us, we realized we couldn't set up a government with him as the president, and then decided to occupy the country. And then, soon after we set up the Coalition Provisional Authority [CPA], they were getting so many requests from American citizens that Pat Kennedy [Chief of Staff of CPA] called Maura and said, "I need a consular officer here yesterday. I can't do this." He was the deputy to [Paul "Jerry"] Bremer [Presidential Envoy to Iraq and Director of CPA]. And then I went out by myself. There was no country team, there was no embassy.

Q: No passports? No blank passports?

PAYNE: I put blank passports in the consular section in a box. I went out by myself and then that box got shipped, and I set up the office of the US Consul. This was crazy. It was nuts.

Q: Was there any way to have an extra quatre, which is, you know, acceptance of the host government—there's no host government ready to accept is there?

PAYNE: The host government was the Coalition Provisional Authority. It was an occupying force. Our legal office went crazy at the idea of me going out. The Coalition Provisional Authority declared that all diplomatic missions lost their diplomatic status. So, there were no relations with foreign countries under the Coalition Provisional Authority, this occupying authority. I got seconded to DoD [Department of Defense], so I was technically working for DoD. I got one day of chemical weapons training. I got a

Department of Defense badge, I got Department of Defense orders, and I got on a plane and I flew to Kuwait. Now, what I found very distressing was when I landed in Kuwait and I needed to go to the US embassy to pick up cash to carry to Baghdad and pay our local staff in Baghdad. Even though we broke relations, we still had local staff who worked at our interest section run by the Polish government since 1991. Our embassy in Kuwait would not give me a driver because they wouldn't do anything to support the occupation of Iraq. Ambassador Richard Jones would not let them give me a driver. So, I took a taxi with $40,000 in cash from the embassy to my hotel and I was so pissed because I thought, "Wait, I'm one of you. I am State Department. I'm coming to the embassy to pick up $40,000 in cash to pay our local staff. But because I'm on DoD orders, you're not going to give me a driver." I mean it was crazy. It was nuts.

Q: I'm surprised that it got to that—

PAYNE: It was petty.

Q: Particularly in—people are shooting at you and I mean, sort of the rules go by the wayside. I mean, whatever works, works.

PAYNE: And this was what I learned with our embassy in Kuwait, is that our ambassador, who vehemently opposed the occupation, said, "We will not cooperate with any of you." That was the first time I felt betrayed by a fellow State Department employee. And it hurt because I thought, "Dude, you should be helping me. This is all one mission." I mean, I opposed the invasion of Iraq. I thought it was foolish. But I had a job to do.

And then, that first day I was in Kuwait, I went with the consular chief in Kuwait to visit an American who had been detained by the US army in southern Iraq. So, this also was the beginning of the US army detaining US citizens. And I told them, "Guys, you can't just willy-nilly detain Americans. What's your legal basis?" And here I am advocating for Americans in detention with the US army because they are technically the host government. There was mass confusion. I hadn't even flown into Iraq yet. I was just driving in from Kuwait. The first question I was asked (and this became a question the whole time I was in Iraq), was, "We have these Iraqi translators and now they're at risk. Can you please get them to the United States? Can you get them visas to go to the states?" And I had to say, "No, I can't. My role is not to rescue Iraqi translators."

Q: Was somebody working on this?

PAYNE: No, no one thought about this. No one predicted how many Iraqi translators there would be whose lives were at risk, that the soldiers who worked with them wanted to get them to safety. I would explain the rules of asylum and refugees and how if they had a well-founded fear of persecution, they needed to leave Iraq and claim asylum, but I couldn't give them visas. And that was a theme the whole time I was there.

Q: Was anybody realizing—I mean, in the later years, was there anything about putting together something about this translator problem?

PAYNE: Years later Congress passed a law on special immigrant visas. Many Iraqi translators are now they are eligible for special immigrant visas. But remember we hadn't thought this through at all. We thought we were going to invade, install a friendly Iraqi government and have a normal relationship like we did in Afghanistan. It worked in Afghanistan, initially. They had planned for humanitarian assistance. The first organization was the Office of Rehabilitation and Humanitarian Assistance. They had planned on how to help the Iraqi government. They hadn't planned to occupy a country, and all of a sudden, we were occupying it.

Q: I served in Vietnam. But that's something I think we've learned over the years: we're damned poor at occupying.

PAYNE: We are awful.

Q: I mean, we did a wonderful job in Germany and Japan, but there we were brushing against an open door. These were people ready to get rid of a lousy government, and they also had the trappings of democracy already in place.

PAYNE: We also had a unified command in Germany and Japan. When I got to Iraq as a consular officer—and I'll tell you about the flight into Iraq because it's important—I quickly realized that Bremer, who was the administrative authority, did not report to [Ricardo] Sanchez, who ran the occupation forces – or vice versa. They both reported back to [Donald] Rumsfeld [Secretary of Defense, 2001-2006]. When we occupied Iraq, we did not have a unified command. The armed forces did not report to the civilian authority.

Q: Well, this was Rumsfeld's_____

PAYNE: Initially.

Q: He didn't want anybody with Arabic credentials.

PAYNE: That's true too. I was in Kuwait and I'd picked up $40,000 in cash. Luckily, Ethan Goldrich was going in TDY, temporary duty, because Ryan Crocker was there for a 90-day temporary duty working on a democracy in governance effort. Political officers from NEA (Bureau of Near East and Asia) that were fluent in Arabic, and public affairs officers were going in on these temporary 90-day orders to work with Ryan Crocker. Thank goodness Ethan he was there at the house I stayed in while I was in Kuwait. He helped me figure out what to do. We flew in on a C-130, we landed, and there is no one at the airport to take me anywhere. I was told by Pat Kennedy to "Get your butt to Iraq." So, I got my butt to Iraq. I have $40,000 in cash. We land at the airport at like nine

o'clock at night. Luckily there were people there to meet Ethan—these are all State Department people—and they took pity on me and they gave me a ride.

They take us to the Al Rasheed hotel, where Pat Kennedy said I had a room. We quickly discovered that the Al Rasheed hotel was not a hotel anymore. It was an official billet under the Coalition Provisional Authority and you're supposed to go through billeting. And billeting was over in the palace, and the shuttle to the palace had stopped running. You don't get put in the Al Rasheed right away. You get put in this huge ballroom because there are more people needing a billet than there are billets. It's like 10 o'clock now. I am so tired. I have $40,000 in cash. And I say, "Look"—to this guy who's explaining you don't check into this hotel, you go get billeted. I said, "Okay, will you look up and see if Yael Lempert has a billet in this hotel," and they did, and she did. And they thought she was a he and he was rooming with another male officer. I said, in my mind, "Yael and this guy are not in the same room. No way." So, I said, "Can you let us into this room?" And they laughed and said, "You can let yourself in, there are no doorknobs. After the invasion thieves came and stole all the doorknobs from all of the hotel rooms." So, he gives me the room number. We go in and realize that it is a three-room suite. According to the billet, it's only one room. According to KBR, Kellogg Brown & Root, who does official billeting, they've put two men in one room. We realize this is a man and a woman in three rooms. We take these rooms. Ethan roomed with the guy and I roomed with Yael. We snuck two other State Department people into the third room. I was never officially billeted, I just snuck into the Al Rasheed hotel and roomed with Yael. Thank God for Yael. When Yael and they guy came back later that night, both Ethan and I were like, "Oh, thank God for you."

The next day I took the shuttle over to the palace and introduced myself to Pat Kennedy and said, "I'm your US consul." And he said, "I'm going to show you your office." And he took me to the convention center. He said, "We decided to put you in the convention center because it's accessible to the public." The room was completely trashed, like a mess. And he said, "This is yours. Do what you need to do." And I did what I needed to do. And so, a few days later, Pat and I went to the US Embassy building, which had not been protected, and so it was trashed. It was completely trashed. The vehicles that were left there were trashed. They had cut into all of the safes. The graffiti on the walls—it was very sad to see the—and the Polish ambassador, who wasn't officially an ambassador anymore, asked me if I would please take down the Polish flag because it was looking pretty ragged and ratty. So, I did and gave it back to the Polish government. But the desks were still usable. So, I took the desks from the US embassy and used them to furnish my new office. I cleaned out all the crap and set up desks that I took from the embassy and set up the office of the US consul. Pat on the first day made up my title. He said, "You report to Bremer in his position as presidential envoy. You can't report to him as the Coalition authority because you're the diplomat and you're not part of the Coalition Provisional Authority, you can't be, you're the US consul." So, we just decided I report to Bremer in his position as presidential envoy.

Q: So, what did you do? Let's talk about your work.

PAYNE: I needed staff. So, Pat agreed to give me two translators, one American citizen fluent in Arabic and one Iraqi citizen. And they were assigned to me by their translation companies and so, they became my local staff. My consular section in a box finally got delivered so I had a State Department computer that connected to Washington DC via a satellite phone.

Q: Oh, so you were able to have—

PAYNE: I could do name checks. I could look up passport records. I also had a laptop computer that I got through the Coalition Provisional Authority and I created a business account on Yahoo, payne@USconsulbaghdad.com, and that was my official email. I can't believe I did this. L (the State Department Legal Office) went ballistic. L said, "You can't call yourself the US Consul. We don't have diplomatic ties with Iraq. That the status 'US consul' isn't legal." And I said, "But people don't know what US consular officer is." So, I basically said, "Come and tear down my signs." I said, "I will try not to have this be too public, but people need to know there's a US Consul here. I assist and protect private Americans." L was furious with me but nobody in authority come and said, "You have to change this." So, I was the Office of the US Consul. There were consular officers for many countries there. For example, Turkey, Australia, Canada, Sweden, and Denmark. I became the informal head of the consular corps. We started having regular meetings to talk about common issues and problems.

Three issues that were the most common for me. First, there were tons of Iraqis who had been born in the United States and returned as children to Iraq. They were US citizens but didn't have valid US passports. They wanted to get out of Iraq as fast as they could and needed US passports. It took me a while, even though I had the blank passports, to convince L to let me issue passports. So, we initially were just giving them travel letters. But the problem was the other countries wouldn't issue visas on the travel letters. So, you couldn't enter Kuwait on a travel letter. How do you get out of Iraq if the neighboring countries won't let you enter? Then, the Jordanian embassy got blown up with a travel letter in it waiting for a visa to be stamped on the travel letter. And I said, "Enough, you guys, you have to let me issue passports." Americans could travel to Jordan and Kuwait without a visa if they had a US passport. L finally let me issue us passports after the Jordanian embassy got blown up. I was doing a lot and it was hard. These young people, they came as babies and I had to verify that they were who they said they were and that they were US citizens.

Second, lots of people wanted to know how to marry an Iraqi because people were falling in love with their Iraqi translators. The first flyer I wrote was how to get married in Iraq. I met with the judges and I found out how to get married in Iraq. That was a popular flyer because everybody wanted to get married.

Third, Americans wanted to know how to find a private security company because it was dangerous. People came to Baghdad to do business and then they thought, "This is

dangerous. I need a security company." My second flyer was a list of private security companies in Iraq, just like we have lists of lawyers and lists of doctors. Well, I did a list of private security companies so that Americans in Iraq could see who they could reach out to in order to hire to provide private security.

I paid the local staff who had worked for the US Embassy before and agreed that they were to stand down. We were going to keep paying them, but they weren't to come to work except for one who was a Christian Iraqi who became my driver. Now, how did I get a car? The Coalition Provisional Authority could not give me a car because I wasn't part of them. They would give me computers and they would give me an extension cord, but they wouldn't give me a car. When the Polish diplomats who ran our Interest Section left Iraq, they drove to our embassy in Jordan. Our embassy in Jordan had four cars that belonged to the US Interest Section in Baghdad. Pat Kennedy and I decided that I would fly to Amman, pick up the cars and drive back. Then, we would have four cars. I would keep two and he would keep two. I asked several translators, "Do you want to go on an adventure? Do you want to fly to Jordan and drive back to Baghdad?" And they said, "Why not?"

I'll never forget this. Of course, we needed money to do this. Luckily, there was a USAID plane that flew from Baghdad to Amman for humanitarian assistance. And because I was not—they wouldn't let Coalition Provisional Authority use that plane, but I wasn't Coalition Provisional Authority. I was a US diplomat. So, they decided that I was eligible to take that plane, that I qualified, and that my three staff qualified.

Pat Kennedy took me down to the vault where they have all the cash because initially there was millions of dollars that had belonged to the Iraqi government. I got to see that vault with all the cash in it. And he basically counted cash and gave me money. And I paid for the plane tickets and we flew to Jordan. There the embassy was way more welcoming because Skip Gnehm was the ambassador. So, he welcomed us with open arms. He said, "I'll give you anything you want." They gave us TDY quarters to stay in. They gave us a driver. They welcomed us. It was night and day to Kuwait. And we picked up these four cars. And then, on the way back, we picked up everything we needed to have a barbecue, because we decided that once we got to the border and crossed, we'd host the US army on the other side to a barbecue. So, we drive our four cars to the border. Once we got to the border, we discovered that the insurance and everything for these cars don't exist. They were driven out of Baghdad and left at the embassy. They were illegally in Jordan. So, the guy at the border is like, "You can't bring these cars across the border. These cars are not legally in Jordan." And you knew he just wanted a bribe. So, I'm calling the embassy. They're talking to him. They're trying to convince him to just let us across the border. We're stuck there for hours.

Q: These were Americans?

PAYNE: No, no. These were Jordanian customs officials. Remember we're leaving Jordan now. And we have four cars that don't have proper paperwork, because it never

occurred to us to check. And from a Jordan perspective, you can't leave Jordan with these cars. He just wanted a bribe because there were tons of cars crossing that border illegally. By about midnight, I was fed up. I'm like, "I'm tired. We've got this barbecue. I don't care. I'm getting across the border." So, I played the card I have never played before or since. I looked at him, the head of customs, I said, "Sir, you know that I'm the US Consul in Baghdad, right? If you don't let us across this border, I will make sure that you can never ever get a visa to go to the United States, ever." In five minutes, we were across the border.

Q: If you got it, use it.

PAYNE: And it took me several hours before I was willing to use it. And I just finally was like, "I've had enough. I'm getting across this border." I never said that to anybody before. And I've never said it to anybody since, but I'm glad I said it. And so, we got across the border. We made a big barbecue. The army guys were thrilled. We slept in the cars and at six o'clock the next morning we did the drive to Baghdad and that was scarier than hell.

Q: What was it like?

PAYNE: Oh my God, we were crazy. We were four cars. We had a military escort. We drove through Fallujah. This was what, July 2004. We had no idea what we were doing.

Q: Fallujah was the center of the conflict.

PAYNE: We were nuts. If we had really thought about what we were doing, we never would've done that. But we were up for the adventure. Towards the end, the team that was supposed to meet us and take us into Baghdad never showed up. So, unfortunately the previous team had to take us into Baghdad, and they had no idea where they were going. So, we got horribly lost. They wouldn't look at a map. And I'm like, "I have a map. I have a map." They kept using their GPS coordinates. They'd get us to dead ends. And that was the first time I was seriously afraid for my life. I'm like, "We have these four cars, soft vehicles. We keep getting lost. Guys, please, please, just follow the map and get us back to the convention center." And finally, we did, but I had to really—like at one point, like take the guy and be like, "You will follow this map. You guys don't know where you're going." And so, we finally got back to the convention center. I then had two cars. I got a great little, white Ford with Polish tags on it and a Ford Tahoe. And Pat got two cars that were off the books that he could use for things that you needed to use that were off the books and everybody was happy. And so, one of the local staff that had worked for the Interest Section became my driver.

Q: And why would you need a driver?

PAYNE: Because I was going out and meeting with American citizens. I was doing everything a US Consul does. So, what did we do? I had to understand the police in Iraq,

right? Because Americans would come in and say, "I got robbed last night and I don't know how to report this crime." But who were the police? They fired all the police. So, the only entity playing a police role was the U.S. army. They had civil affairs units set up around the country. I went out and started to meet with them and explain my role and found out their role. And they would tell me how confused they were because they had no idea what to do. Remember, we fired the police. So, if an Iraqi's home got robbed, they had no one to call. There was no 911 number. The telephone system had crashed. And so, I'm like, "You civil affairs guys are playing the role of police now. People need security. And I have Americans who are asking me 'who do I report a crime to?'" And so, I was going out and meeting with these civil affairs groups. Plus, they were giving letters to Iraqis claiming to be Americans who would then take the letter to the Jordanian embassy and the Jordanian embassy would say, "What should I do with this?" And I say, "Do nothing. I'm the only one authorized to determine whether or not someone's an American." So, then I had to go to the civil affairs guys and say, "You have to stop issuing these letters. You have no authority. You have no ability to determine whether or not someone's an American citizen." And they all listened to that. They were like, "Okay. right." They would also pick up Americans and be like, "What do we do with this person?" And I'm like, "You either release them"—but you didn't have a police system—who knew what the legal rules were about detaining them.

Q: And of course, one of the things I learned very early on, back in the '50s, that when the military is in large numbers in a place, there are all sorts of hangers on, on either side of the law. So, you're not dealing in a benign situation.

PAYNE: Oh, no. I mean, I saw the worst. Very early on an American went missing. He's still missing to this day. And I do not believe he was killed or kidnapped by terrorists. Then somebody else in his company got killed, an American. And I'm pretty convinced it was another contractor who killed him and is probably responsible for this other man going missing. But because the US had no jurisdiction—until we changed the law, there was no jurisdiction over crimes that Americans contractors committed in Iraq for that first year, because US courts don't have jurisdiction over crimes Americans commit overseas. And General Order No. 1 declared that if you were a US contractor, Iraqi courts didn't have jurisdiction over you. So, American citizens were committing murder. American citizens were stealing. They were stealing an enormous—someday someone is going to investigate this and write the book about what Americans citizens did that first year in Iraq. And it was devastating for me. I mean, here I am, talking to this man's father, a father whose son has just been murdered. CID [Criminal Investigation Division] is investigating but realize they have no jurisdiction—these are contractors. We hadn't yet extended the military jurisdiction to DoD contractors. It later got extended, but not then. And the CID realizing there is nothing—even if we had evidence to prove who did it - there's nothing we could do. And people were stealing money right and left because there was so much cash laying around. So, it was the worst of humanity I have ever seen. Bernard Kerik [Interim Minister of the Interior of Iraq] probably stole millions. He was a scary dude.

People were doing black bag jobs in downtown Baghdad at night. Iraqi parents would come to me and say, "My son got taken last night. I can't find him. Help me find my son." Because everybody was out there kicking down doors and arresting who they thought were terrorists. Some were, some weren't. To the point where one of the guys who was doing it—who I knew—said he was so afraid because sometimes you would have Bernie Kerik's people, and a group of special forces, and they weren't communicating with each other. They'd both show up at the same places and start shooting at each other. It was absolute chaos. And here I am, getting the request, "So and so's disappeared," and I'm trying to deal with the disappearance. Or "So and so has been murdered," or "So and so died and needs a certificate of death abroad," or a woman who comes in and says, "I'm pregnant and I need to give birth in Iraq." It's illegal for an unwed women to have a baby in Iraq so it's too dangerous to go to a hospital. I convinced the army medics to let this woman give birth in their clinic and then figured out how to issue her a consular report of birth abroad because there was no birth certificate because she couldn't get a legal birth certificate. I have thousands of these stories, one after another of absolute craziness and that was my every day.

But I got out and about in Baghdad quite a lot. Because it was a lot safer initially. I drove to Hillah and to Karbala and I flew to Mosul. I spoke at Mosul University about how to apply for a US visa to the United States to study. I was so naive. But this is what we do. This is what we do. I just did my job. I just did what a consular officer does. I spoke at Mosul University without any security, on how to get a student visa. That was early. But then, the UN headquarters blew up with several American citizens killed. It was devastating. That was horrible. My job was to notify the next of kin, to find their property, inventory it, pack it up, and mail it to them. It was horrible. One woman went missing for three days. Everybody kept telling her husband that they saw her get on a helicopter. I kept saying, "We're looking night and day for your wife. We are looking for your wife, but we have no evidence about where she is." And then, she was found in the rubble three days later because it took that long. It was such a huge explosion. And he says to me, "But they told me they saw her get on a helicopter," and I had to tell him that his wife perished in that bombing. It was horrible. It's horrible. I had Americans getting killed right and left. It got to the point, towards the end, where I couldn't do next of kin notifications anymore. It was too painful. It was too hard on me. I took a woman to a morgue to identify her husband who had gotten shot. It turned out it wasn't her husband, she lied. It was her boyfriend.

Q: There was no control? People could just come in?

PAYNE: Oh, it was crazy. It was mayhem. Also remember, we fired the military. We fired immigration officials. We fired the police. There was no structure. I had a schizophrenic American wandering the streets of Baghdad off her meds. Her father was frantic. Little by little it got more dangerous. People forget that the Jordanian embassy was attacked very early and that was the first major attack. Then the UN headquarters gets blown up in a big way. I go to the army folks and say, "Guys, I'd like to put together a committee on how we respond to major terrorist incidents because the other diplomats

who had citizens in the UN bombing are very unhappy with the way the Coalition Provisional Authority treated them." They're consular officers. They're trying to get information and no one in the Coalition Provisional Authority would talk to them. So, I became the conduit. And they said, "Don't worry, we've turned a corner. There aren't going to be any more attacks." And they wouldn't let me set up a committee. And I'm like, "Guys"—

Q: And of course, the corner was never turned it.

PAYNE: It was never turned. It only got more violent.

Q: Did you sense behind all of this trouble—Rumsfeld was sort of both running things and thinking he had control over things, when he didn't, he basically screwing things up.

PAYNE: Human frailty from top to bottom. Bremer was an idiot. He did not know what he was doing. He knew nothing about the Middle East. He became very vain and considered himself the president of Iraq. if you read his book, you see the vanity, which I saw very clearly.

Q: I don't recall it but looking at our catalog of interviews that I've done, and I've interviewed Jerry.

PAYNE: Well, wow, was he vain. The vanity was clear in the fact that he liked that the media considered him good looking. He got a lot of media attention. He wore a suit with combat boots. That was his signature look. He was also terrified. Blackwater security guards were around him all the time and they were rude and mean and awful. And he had no idea what he was doing. The other Coalition members hated him. But also, I saw a lot of human frailty. We brought in some State Department people to advice the ministries. We had diplomats from other countries that were senior advisors to different ministries. And you know, power goes to people's head. When there are no rules, people's behavior gets pretty bad. And it was the realities of war. There were no rules. There were no controls. People's behavior got really bad. And we were running a country—a country that was a real country. Iraq's a real country.

Q: Yeah. And I mean, for the Middle East, the best educated. It's a shame, they should be a beacon to the rest of the area.

PAYNE: And we were like bumbling idiots. I mean, we were bumbling fools. I'll give you a good example. When we invaded Iraq, we declare that Iraqi passports issued after a certain date were no longer valid for travel to the United States. Immediately, as occupiers, we wanted to send Iraqis to the States for training. Oh, but their passports weren't valid. Oh, right, we hadn't thought about that. We needed to issue new Iraqi passports. Oh, that's hard. Coming up with the design, finding a company, that's too hard. Someone had the idea to just create a travel document instead, a secure travel document that the countries could put a visa on. Some poor soul from consular affairs was put in

charge of this travel document. It took three months to do that. But no country will put a visa on it because it's a stupid travel document. I even had to fight with our visa office. They didn't want to put a visa on it. I said, "Look, we did this. You have to put a visa on it. You can't say that you won't put a visa on this. Remember, we're in charge." And then, the picture they used in the sample that they presented to the diplomatic corps was Mickey Mouse. I wish I had kept one. I'm at this meeting where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Coalition Provisional Authority is presenting to the diplomatic corps the new travel document that they want them to put a visa on and it has a picture of Mickey Mouse. The diplomatic corps is looking at me going, "Are you guys nuts? Are you crazy?" And I'm like, "I'm sorry. This is the most incompetent host government I've ever met." And that failed miserably. And then, they finally went back and made all those old passports valid again. And then, L decided we couldn't issue visas on them because it didn't meet some obscure FAM [Foreign Affairs Manual] regulation. And I'm on the phone—I cried. I'm on the phone with L saying, "You have to agree. You can't say we can't. We put visas on these passports for years." That doesn't matter. And I'm like, "You don't get it. We run this country. We need the people we've hired for jobs to get trained in the States. To go to the States, they need a visa." And it took Colin Powell to finally get them to agree that we could issue visas on those old passports. What a nightmare!

Q: Who were the people who were—

PAYNE: I don't remember any of their names.

Q: Not the names, but were they military or—

PAYNE: No, this was L, this was the State Department's Legal Office. The State Department is the only agency that controls passports. Well, this is where I'm disappointed with the State Department. This is what we do. We hated the invasion and occupation of Iraq. L was vehemently opposed—and probably rightfully so. It was probably illegal under humanitarian law to occupy Iraq. So, they were as obstructionist as you could be.

Q: Well, once you do it, you do it.

PAYNE: Well, we didn't. I would have these huge fights. And maybe they were right legally. But guys, we're occupying this country—we needed to get things done.

Q: Well, back to the personal side. Talk about your safety.

PAYNE: Oh, I wasn't safe at all. I was shot at once when I was outside in the Al Rasheed lawn. A bullet went by my ear. So, now I know what it sounds like to have a bullet go by your ear. It's a very distinctive sound. If you've been in Vietnam, you might've heard one. It's a realization that, "Oh shit, someone's shooting at me. This is dangerous." I never went out again. There was so much drinking and partying and weapons in bars. At the Al

Rasheed, there's a bar downstairs and there is a disco that later opened, and everybody drank with their weapons.

Q: That's scary.

PAYNE: Terrifying. So, I stopped going to any bars. I felt like I couldn't go to the pool of the Al Rasheed anymore because the men were so aggressive, especially Bernie Kerik and his people. There were times I would be in my room and remember we had no doorknobs and it's the first time in my life I thought, "Holy shit, I could get raped. I could get raped by Americans who wouldn't be held accountable because there's no jurisdiction." Because remember, I'm a lawyer, so I understand full well that if I had been raped by a contractor, I would never have had justice because there is no jurisdiction. No one could have held them accountable. I was really scared. And that was before I got bombed. A lot changed after the bombing of the Al Rasheed. I was scared a lot for my life.

I became friends with a few guys from a private security company. I linked up with them because of another incident that occurred pretty early on in my office. Remember, my job is to determine if Iraqis who've come in and applied for a passport are US citizens or not. We also emptied the jails after we invaded. So, one guy comes in and claims to be a US citizen and he's got a good story and he's pretty good, but he does not prove to me he's a US citizen. He doesn't have enough proof. And so, I say to him, "I'm sorry I can't issue you a US passport. I am not confident that you are a US citizen." And he threatened me. And I realized that I'm sitting here with no wall between us, like in embassies. He's as close as you and I are right now. And I realize, "Oh my God, he could reach across and kill me, and I have no panic button to call the marines." So, I pick up the phone, I call the army folks who are just down the hall and I say, "Could you please come and assist me? I have a belligerent, angry client." Well, by the time they come in, he could have seriously harmed me. So, they escort him out and we sit down and go, "Wait, you're too vulnerable here. You can't do this anymore." So, we did build a barrier, just a wooden barrier. That's it. And my buddies at the private security company gave me Gurkhas. They had Gurkhas who guarded areas in the Green Zone. And they assigned three Gurkhas to guard my office while it was open.

Q: You must have felt very comfortable.

PAYNE: I was so happy. Later, I realized it was totally off the books and no one authorized it. But that was okay because for the whole time I was there, I had these Gurkhas assigned to guard my office because this security company that I had kind of become buddies with knew I needed protection. Somebody offered me a pistol. I said, "I don't know how to shoot. And plus, it's not allowed. I don't want a pistol." But the Gurkhas really made a huge difference. And again, this was totally off the books. They were supposed to be somewhere else, but this is how things happened. You just wheeled and dealed for stuff.

Q: Well, they're tough little bastards.

PAYNE: Oh my God, they were great. One guy picked a fight with one of the Ghurkas and got hurt, because they're fighters—you don't pick a fight with them. They became quite famous. If you ask anybody who was in the convention center, they'll remember those Gurkhas. They stood outside my office, proud as can be. My office was the only place in Baghdad that flew the American flag, t had the pictures of the president, the vice president, and the secretary of state. I let soldiers fly their flags in my office and then I would issue them a certificate signed by the US consul saying that this flag flew in the office of the US consul during Iraqi Freedom. On September 11th, flags covered every inch of my walls, because word got out that if you brought in an American flag, you could fly it in my office, and I would issue you a certificate. Also, I declared that General Order No. 1 (that you couldn't drink—for the Army) didn't apply to the Office of the US consul because it's US soil. This is not true, but it was a great tradition. I had a fridge stocked with beer, wine, liquor, and if anybody wanted a beer, if anybody wanted to drink, they could come get it from me. And I would tell some of the senior officers, "General Order No. 1 does not apply in my office." No one ever got crazy. I had weekly happy hours. I needed to; I needed these guys. These are the people who helped me. When water ran out, they made sure I had water. When I needed something, they made sure I had it. That's what I did. And it worked.

One other thing that we instituted, and again, thank God for Skip Gnehm. So, I didn't have any money, right? There was no fiscal data. So, what I did was I would accept passport fees in cash—I issued a lot of passports—then I'd use that cash to purchase what I needed to run my office. Then, I would fly to Jordan from time to time, voucher those purchases, receive cash, put it with the rest of the cash, and then deposit the passport fees. So, I ran it all using consular fees. That's how I ran my operation. It's how I put gas in the car. It's how I bought supplies. And it worked. Skip ended up giving me an embassy badge for Jordan to make it easier for me when I came in. He always had a driver for me. I would come in, voucher the money, get the cash, deposit the cash, had all my receipts, was very dutiful about keeping my receipts, but ran the operation.

Q: Was anybody going around and saying, "Tsk, tsk Beth"?

PAYNE: Sometimes. People in Washington would freak out. People on the ground were usually good about it. And Pat Kennedy is like, "Don't worry." Pat knew everything I did. He's like, "Don't worry. Just make it happen."

Q: Well, he is par excellence. The manipulator of the administrative function of the State Department, did this for many years. You couldn't have asked for a better mentor or guide or friend.

PAYNE: Yes, thank God for him. When my roommate Yael left (I was assigned for a year. Everybody else was TDY for just three months) I went to Pat and I said, "Pat, I need my own room. I can't have roommates all the time." So, we invented the fiction that

my extra bed was for an American citizen in distress. And so, I finally was officially in the Al Rasheed hotel with my own room. Eventually they did put doorknobs on and give us keys. He let me have my own room, which lasted for a month because then we got rocketed.

Q: Do you want to maybe to tell it next time?

PAYNE: Yeah, let's tell it the next time. I have one more story about the craziness, which I think is important to have on the record, which I can tell now and then we'll do the rocketing next time. So, another thing that happened, in Karbala—Karbala is the center of Shia conservatism in Iraq. It's a very, very conservative town. I get a call from Pat telling me that three teenage girls had run away from home and sought sanctuary at the army base in Karbala and the army base took them in. So, these teenage sisters are in a base in Karbala, which is already horrible. They moved them up to Baghdad because they feel sorry for these girls. The army officers thought these girls had a horrible life. They live in a Muslim house and their daddy isn't nice to them. And Pat is now stuck with these three girls in Baghdad. And is like, "What do I do with them?"

So, he calls me to help. Of course, I'm the consular officer. I worked in Children's Issues. I'm like, "You guys, you can't just keep people's kids."

And the civil affairs guy who was an advisor to the Ministry of Justice was like, "We need to give these girls the same level of protection they would get in New York City."

But we're not in New York City. We don't have a child welfare program. For all we know, these are just runaways. And they were like, "No, we're gonna put them on a C-130 and we're going to take them to America."

I'm like, "You can't kidnap these kids. That's international child kidnapping. We don't kidnap people's kids."

They're like, "We have to protect them."

So, I arranged through a friend of mine who runs an organization that provides free legal assistance to unaccompanied minors to get these kids an attorney. Well, the first thing the attorney does is call L for advice. L calls me and yells at me, "What are you doing? You're not supposed to be getting these girls an attorney."

And I'm like, "But they're unaccompanied minors." And L's like, "Don't you ever do that again"—they were so pissed at me and I'm like, "I get it. I get it, but these are three runaways and we have to figure out what to do with them." Eventually after lots of meetings, there was an agreement that we would allow what was left of the Iraqi judicial system to play its role. But man, the army guys were so mad at me because they're like, "They're going to get sent back, they're going to be killed." You know, they had these

stereotypes of an Arab household. But the girls were just on a lark. They—especially the youngest one – eventually just wanted to go home.

Q: Having fun too, I'm sure. All the attention.

PAYNE: Right? Oh my God, the attention. We had three girls living in an army facility and no one looking after their interests. Eventually, they returned to their family because the father, of course, freaked out. He's like, "My girls are missing." And then, he finds out they're on an army base. But this is how we also lost the hearts and minds of the Iraqis because someone like him might have been supportive of us, but not after we took his kids. And so, we just made these missteps and mistakes, time and time and time again. That was one of my biggest—where I was like, "You guys, these are human beings involved. You can't just steal people's kids, just because you think they're better off in the States.

Q: Today is the 25th of April 2019 with Beth Payne and I think we're off to have an explosion. You're back in Iraq and what is the date?

PAYNE: It is October 26th, the morning of October 26th and it is the first day of Ramadan and I woke up around 6:00 AM to the call of prayer. I've always found the call of prayer quite enjoyable. It's a soothing sound and I'm thinking, "Oh, it's the first day of Ramadan, the call to prayer," and then, within—I'm not sure the time period—it had to have been seconds, there was this humongous explosion. I mean, the loudest sound I've ever experienced. The building shook enormously, and my room filled with smoke and I knew that we were under attack. There had been a minor attack at the Al Rasheed earlier that month that a lot of people don't know about. I'm wondering now if it had been maybe a trial or something to see what they could do. But you could feel, based on just the building shaking and the noise and the smoke, that this was huge. Now, what had happened was on October 25th, [Paul "Jerry"] Bremer [Presidential Envoy to Iraq and Coalition Provisional Authority Administrator] reopened a bridge that ran along what became known as the Green Zone. Bremer wanted to demonstrate to the Iraqis that our occupation was making their life better. And that bridge had always been closed to public traffic because it was a security risk to Saddam, whose palace was right there. Normally Iraqis could not cross that bridge. Bremer thought he was making a statement to say to the Iraqis, "You can now cross this bridge. See the freedom that this occupation is bringing you."

But of course, it then created this huge security vulnerability. And the next morning, literally, insurgents set up a rocket launcher on the bridge and launched over 40 rockets from a makeshift launcher—because the other thing that was a problem was that all these depots of old armory were left unguarded. Insurgents were able to raid them and get all kinds of old weapons. These rockets were not reliable. Of the 40 that they tried to shoot, only 20 actually launched and then only about eight actually exploded.

I discovered later that one hit my room. It thankfully did not explode. I was incredibly lucky because I had had a satellite radio and I had put the satellite on the ledge outside of my room, which meant my window was slightly ajar, which meant that when the rocket hit my window—and it hit the metal bars in front of my window, bent the bars—the blast was absorbed by the window opening, which meant nothing was crushed and just the smoke and debris came into my room. I don't know what it was about my instinct, but I rolled out of bed the right way—when you have smoke, you stay low to the ground. I put on my Tevas, and I grabbed my phone, which I wore around my neck. I went out to the hallway and it was absolutely mayhem. You can imagine. Everyone's coming out of their rooms. Everyone's running towards the exits. I moved towards the exit and I'm about where the elevators are—my room was at the end of the hall. It was that three-room suite at the end of the hall.

When I reached the stairwell and was about to go down the stairs, I heard someone screaming. And this was Paula Weikle who we had just snuck into our suite that we didn't tell DoD about. We had just let her sleep, a few days earlier, in the room next to me. She was an Office Management Specialist who had just started a 90-day TDY [temporary duty] stint in Baghdad. I had just met her the day before. Her roommate was at a conference in Madrid. Thankfully for many people, there were quite a lot of people that would have been in the hotel that day that were in a conference in Madrid. It was a donor's conference. And Paula decided—her bad luck—that that night, because she had stuff all over her bed, that she was going to sleep in her roommate's bed, which was just below the window and a rocket hit her window as well, and thankfully did not explode. Because her window was shut, the blast broke off concrete and that concrete came and smashed down on her and smashed her arm. She dragged herself across the floor. The time it took me to get out of my room to the elevator bank, she was dragging herself across the floor, reaching up and opening her door—cause by then we had doorknobs—and opened her door and called out, "Help me, help me, my arm. Help me, my arm."

I hear this, and I don't know what motivated me to do it, but I turned around and I went back. And I had had emergency medical training when I was a GSO [General Service Officer] in Kuwait. We had these teams of DS [Diplomatic Security] agents that would come out and do this intensive training. And I was an assistant GSO and I wanted my staff to take it and I took it. That training kicked in and I knew just what to do to stem the bleeding. Her arm was bleeding out, basically. Her arm was crushed. And so, I immediately put pressure in the wound and then I called out to people, "Help me take her downstairs." And what was so interesting is that people were panicked, it was mass panic, and most of the people staying in the hotel were military. But this is when you see how humans respond. And I just basically looked at these guys and I started ordering them around. And I said, "You get in the front, you get in the back, we have to carry her down the stairs. I need to keep the pressure on the wound." And she had also had that emergency medical training and so, she would reinforce me, "Yes, keep the pressure on"—like, she knew what to do too. So, the two of us reinforced each other. But she was in such severe pain. I was so scared that I was actually causing more harm than good.

I don't know how I overcame that fear, but I'm like, "I hope I'm not killing her." So, I kept thinking like, "I hope I'm not hurting her," but I also knew I had to keep her from bleeding out, that if she bled out, there was nothing anyone could do. And then, we carried her down bloodied stairs. I don't know why I thought to put my sandals on, so many people had run out in their bare feet. There was so much broken glass because of the attacks that everybody was cutting their feet. And so, the stairs were bloodied and slippery. There were times we almost dropped her and every time we almost dropped her, she would scream out in pain because it would hurt so much. It was so hard. And luckily, we were on the third floor, so we didn't have to go down too many flights of stairs, but we finally got her down. I'm in the lobby. The lobby's mayhem, there tons of people, and I'm just screaming, "I need a medic, I need a medic," and there's no medic. We had no medic. And so, we get her outside, we lie her down, I keep my hand on the wound, and I'm yelling, "I need a medic."

Now, one of the things I remember that I resent to this day— and thankfully I don't remember any of their names—there were lots of gawkers. It's that dynamic of if you drive by an accident on the highway, you slow down and you watch. Well, there were a lot of people who would come up to see what was going on and I would look at them and I'd say, "Are you a medic?"

And they'd say, "No."

I said, "Then go away. I don't need you guys staring at me. I don't need these people gawking."

Then—and I'll tell you a story connected to this later—this angel, really, he was an angel, with this beautiful South African accent comes up, and I look at him, I say, "Are you a medic?" He says, "Yes, I'm a medic." And it was just like the relief of, "Oh my God, thank God."

And then he said, "Look, I've got somebody else who's injured." He goes, "I'm going to wrap her arm." He was so good. He was like, "You're doing everything that's right. You're not harming her. Thank you. I'm wrapping her arm. Now, put your hand back on. Keep that pressure on. "An ambulance is on its way. We're going to take her" and the person that he was initially assisting, "We're going to take them to the Army clinic," and he just talked me through it.

To me, he was an angel, a beautiful angel. So, finally an ambulance comes. Meanwhile, in the ambulance I have one hand on the wound, and I'm calling the State Department Operations Center because I have my phone around my neck. And I think like, "How well trained am I, that I'm like calling the Operations Center saying, 'The Al Rasheed has just been attacked. I know of at least one State Department person who's been injured. There are other injuries. I don't know who they are yet. We're on our way to the clinic.'"

I'm reporting to Ops while I'm the ambulance with my other hand keeping pressure on the wound.

Q: When you say Operations Center, where's is your Operations Center?

PAYNE: Back in Washington. The State Department Operations Center. So, I had gotten into this pattern of anytime something happened in Iraq I would call them. I was famous with the State Operations Center at that time, because I was well trained. I was pretty good about calling and notifying them of things. And they appreciate it because they're hungry for information. They knew me well by then. They weren't surprised that here I was calling them and telling them what was going on. We get to the hospital and Paula is taken immediately into surgery as is the other person in the ambulance with us. And my angel disappears. I'm in my pajamas. Luckily, I sleep in pajamas. For the people who slept naked, it was actually a problem. There were some people in just their underwear. I luckily slept in long cotton pajama bottoms and in a cotton pajama top. So, I was actually quite modestly dressed. I also, fortuitously, had gotten LASIK surgery a month before I left for Iraq, because I decided that if I got kidnapped, I didn't want to have glasses that could be taken away from me. I wanted to be able to see. Since I had gotten LASIK surgery, I didn't have to worry about my glasses—I'll tell you something about that in a little bit—so, I could see, but I'm absolutely covered in blood.

I also realized that there are other Americans being brought into the clinic. I initially say, "Okay, right now I've got to go get a cup of coffee and calm down." I call my parents, I say, "You might hear about this on the news. I can't talk very long, but I'm okay." Then I go find a cup of coffee and then I come back to the clinic and they won't let me back in because I don't have my badge. And I'm saying, "I'm the US consul, there are American citizens injured,"—there'd been a department of labor person badly injured as well—"I need to get in." And they're like, "We don't know who you are." I was literally covered in blood. I must've looked like a crazy woman. I have a cup of coffee in my hand and I'm like, "You guys have to let me in." Luckily, I had established relationships with the leadership of that clinic because we had so many private Americans getting injured and being taken there, and then the woman who was pregnant. So, I go find him. I said, "Will you please call them and tell them to let me in?"

So, then they let me in, and I proceed to identify: who are the Americans that are injured? What state are they in? I found out about the person who had died, who was a military officer who had gone to the window with his gun and the window shattering killed him. There were some very serious injuries and lots of minor injuries. And I started letting people use my phone to call their families, because the nice thing about my cellphone—they had issued cell phones and it was through a New York City number and I had international calling, so I could call anywhere I wanted in the world. And I just started handing my phone to people and saying, "Call your loved ones, tell them you're okay." And I was just talking to people and making sure people were okay. Very soon Pat Kennedy came, and he looked at what I was doing, and he said, "Great, you're doing your job. Keep it up." Then, at some point, a nurse came up and said, "Can I get you some new

clothes?" Which I thought was amazing. And so, she brought me a pair of shorts and a tee shirt and the other thing I said, "Could you please bring me a nail file so I can get the blood out from under my nails." I became a little bit obsessed with the blood under my nails. I tried as hard as possible to clean the blood off of me, put on these new clothes, threw out the pajamas—I've never seen them since—so that I at least wasn't covered with blood. That happened kind of early in that day. So, then it was maybe afternoon, it was finally quiet. I had nothing else to do. My job was kind of done.

Oh, during this—I have to tell this story. So, while this was all happening, an issue that was taking place was that all these people needed visas for their Iraqi contacts. And I was the conduit. We had set up a system where they would give me their application, I would scan it and send it to Jordan, they would vet the person, and then come back and say, "Your person can come for an interview on X date." And there was a lot of pressure to do this fast. So, this woman in the governance team calls me to give me a hard time that she hasn't been notified yet that her visa applicant is ready. And I just say to her, "Do you realize that the Al Rasheed has just been bombed? Why are you calling me now? Stop, don't call me about this." And hung up on her. I was so angry. I'm like, "Don't you have the judgment to know? People are injured and hurt and dead and you care about a visa for your contact. Couldn't you call me tomorrow?" And I think she was also stunned, and I think she was scared of me ever since, because it never occurred to her not to bother me. Of course, it didn't occur to her. She had a job to do and she had blinders on, and I was just like, "Ugh."

So, in the afternoon I'm finally done. I'm absolutely, utterly exhausted and I don't know where to go. And this very kind, KBR man comes up to me—

Q: KBR?

PAYNE: Kellogg Brown & Root. They had the major contract with the Coalition Provisional Authority—it was a huge contracting company there. This kind man—I don't know his name and I've never seen him since—comes up and is like, "Can I help you with something?" And I said, "I need a ride and I need a shower and I need somewhere to sit." So, he actually took me back to his quarters and said, "You can use my shower to clean up," and let me clean up. And then, I went to a friend's quarters—she was out of town—and her roommate said, "You can sleep in her bed." She stayed in a trailer. They had put these trailers all around the palace that was extra housing for people. And my friend worked for a nonprofit organization that was funded by DoD doing democracy and civil governance. And so, I slept in her trailer that night, except I couldn't sleep because it was a trailer and I knew that I had no protection. And so, I basically spent the night terrified, thinking about dying.

Q: Was this a continuing—were shots fired more?

PAYNE: No.

Q: The hotel was the basic target?

PAYNE: Oh yeah, there was no question. They targeted the Al Rasheed Hotel. The Deputy Secretary of Defense was there. There's speculation that it was because he was there that they targeted the hotel. There was just no security because we opened the bridge, allowing them to target the hotel. If Bremer had not opened the bridge, they couldn't have gotten close enough to rocket the hotel. There had been random rockets shot at the Green Zone and there have been rockets shot at the Green Zone since. This I think was the biggest, because it was 40 rockets shot from a very close launching point.

Q: From trucks?

PAYNE: Apparently. What I was told is there was a rocket launcher, maybe even on a donkey cart. I don't know. But because they were so close, it was easier to hit the target. When they were launching from far away it was much, much harder to hit a target. And so, they were random. It got to the point where we'd talk about the rocket attack the night before and you talk about where you were, and it became like a Russian roulette. Like, "Where were you when the rocket hit?" And "How lucky were you that you weren't at the spot at hit?" That became a pattern in Iraq later. So, the next day, I go back to the clinic. Paula is out of surgery. They have saved her arm, which is a miracle. The surgeon told me if she had been in the military, he would have amputated. But he felt so bad for her, as a civilian, that he swore he would save her arm and it was hours and hours and hours of surgery that she went through. I mean, these Army surgeons are amazing, and he just felt had to do everything in his power to save her arm.

And I visited some of the other Americans who were injured there. The Department of Labor person was very severely injured, and you don't hear much about that. What Paula wanted when she came out of surgery was her eyeglasses. And actually, what I discovered later is a lot of people left without their glasses. They left without their contacts. And then, you had the people who cut their feet. And so, people would pair up. Someone who couldn't see would pair up with someone who couldn't walk, and they would help each other. You had all these people who couldn't get back in the hotel to get anything. And I begged and begged, and Pat Kennedy finally pulled some strings and they let me go back into the hotel—I can't believe I walked in the next day—to get Paula's classes. I said, "Please, she needs her glasses. She just come out of surgery, just let me in to get her glasses." And so, Pat pulled strings and that's when I realized that several doors down the rocket exploded and the room was obliterated. The people staying in that room were in Madrid. The rocket that hit Paula's window had that concrete damage. And the rocket that hit my window, there was no concrete damage because the window was ajar. And I did take pictures of the rooms. My room was covered with soot because of the window sort of being blown open. I got the glasses, went back, and gave them to Paula.

Then, I finally went back to my office. I had befriended a lot of civil affairs Army soldiers who ran the Iraqi Assistance Center, which was right next to my office. They

kind of became my buddies. They hadn't heard from me since the rockets hit. All they knew was I disappeared. And their relief at seeing me and realizing that I had survived—and I just felt terrible because I hadn't thought to send them a message and say, "I'm okay," because I was so absorbed in everything that was going on. They were so happy. They were like, "Oh my God, thank God you're okay."

Then, I also realized I couldn't sleep in the trailers. I didn't feel safe enough. My office was in the convention center that Saddam Hussein built to withstand massive military attacks. It has steel reinforced concrete. I had no windows. I was in a bunker and I had this big office, a little kitchen area, a bathroom, a sort of water closet, and a storage closet, and two doors, a door that opened straight into my office and a door that opened right next to the storage closet. And I said to Pat Kennedy, "I'm moving into my closet. I'm going to live in it. It'll fit a twin bed. It'll fit a tiny wardrobe and a little table. I need a bed, a bedside table, and a wardrobe." At the time, no one was allowed to live in the convention center except the military personnel who were billeted there. Pat Kennedy pulled some strings. I don't know who he had to ask, I don't know who he had to tell, but he gave me permission to move into my closet and he ordered Kellogg Brown & Root to deliver me that day, a bed, a bedside table, and a wardrobe. And I moved into my closet. Eventually, I was able to go back to my room and get my clothes and my things. I moved into my closet and I lived in that closet for the remainder of the time I was in Baghdad. The benefit to the closet was I could sleep at night. I mean, you couldn't hear anything that happened outside, and I felt secure enough

Q: Could you lock the door?

PAYNE: I could lock the door. The only challenge was that the only place to shower was the shared shower in the basement. The Florida National Guard were billeted in the convention center. They had found a hot water heater and they hooked it up to a shower. And that's where I could shower. So, I showered in the same shower as hundreds of Florida national guardsman. You can imagine how dirty and filthy that was. And in the mornings, I would just put on my flip flops and take my little basket of shampoo and walked down into the basement, shower, get dressed, come up, and spend my day and work—open the office and work.

Going back to the bombing: a few things came out of that. One was I was very vocal about the fact that my training had helped me respond and that Paula, also having been trained, was able to respond and that got the attention of quite senior folks in the State Department. The deputy secretary was paying attention to that and that's when they first started implementing this training for everyone. They said, "Wait, maybe before we send people to Iraq, we should give them this training." And you know, it's part of the FACT [Foreign Affairs Counter Threat] training now. It's part of the counter terrorism—every foreign service professional now gets this emergency medical training that I just coincidentally got in Kuwait and 10 years later used in Iraq. And so, I was very pleased to see that that came out of what happened.

Q: Encouraging to know that lessons are learned.

PAYNE: People came and talked to me. They asked me, "Why were you able to do this? What helped you be able to respond so well?" Pat Kennedy put me in for heroism award, which I thought was very generous of him. What I realized—it never occurred to me to leave. I don't know why. It did not occur to me to say, "Okay, I'm done." I did counsel other people who were trying to figure out whether to leave or not. Some people left and they felt very guilty about it. They felt like leadership viewed them as weak. Other people stayed. But there was a tough decision where people were grappling with, "Do I stay or leave? This is not what I signed up for." Iraq was becoming way, way, way more dangerous than any of us really perceived it to be. Remember, just a few months earlier, I'm being told, "Don't worry, we've turned a corner." You couldn't use the word "insurgents" before then. They were just miscreants. One guy says, "Well, there are only about 20 miscreants out there." Like, there was this very naive view that there was not an insurgency but the attack on the Al Rasheed was when everybody woke up and said, "No, we have an insurgency. These aren't miscreants. This is a genuine full-blown insurgency."

And that's also when White House took power from Rumsfeld and responsibility for the occupation shifted from DoD to the White House. And again, I wish more would be written on this because I don't know the back story. I don't know how. I just know that all of a sudden Bremer reported to someone in the White House named, not Rumsfeld. The military still reported to Rumsfeld and then Rumsfeld reported to the White House. So, you still didn't have unified command. You basically had Bremer reporting directly to the White House and, I can't remember now who by then was head of the Coalition troops, reporting to Rumsfeld who reported it to the White House. But the White House was now in charge. That was a slight shift in dynamics of what could and could not be done. So, before that shift, Rumsfeld would not let us bring in a lot of State Department personnel. Pat Kennedy kind of snuck in Bill Miller for example, under the guise of police training, because Rumsfeld would not let DS agents get posted to Iraq. Rumsfeld was very particular about who he would let work for the Coalition Provisional Authority [CPA]. That got loosened up a lot. You started to see more State Department people coming in after the attack. I saw a change in how things were done.

I'm kind of amazed that I still functioned after that, because I was clearly traumatized. There is no question. And later when I had PTSD therapy, that decision to turn back and help Paula, at that time, I had to suppress every emotion and humanity in my psyche to have the ability to put my life at risk and go back. And I kept that suppressed for the rest of the time I was in Iraq. I became somewhat emotionless and—still capable but without effect and way more irritable and way more like, "I'm not gonna put up with bullshit cause man, I almost got killed. I can't deal with your bullshit." A week or so later HR emailed me.

Q: HR personnel?

PAYNE: The State Department's personnel office. Since we could bring in more State Department personnel, the State Department decided they really needed to think about how to incentivize people to come to Iraq on temporary orders.

And so, they developed an incentive package, because before then there was no incentive, it was just catch-as-catch-can. They sent me an email with the incentive package they were considering and wanted to get my input. At that point, I was the longest serving Foreign Service officer in Iraq. Everybody else who had come before me on temporary duty had already left. I was the one who had been in Iraq the longest. I was not in a good mood. I was really angry. I sent them back a very nasty email and I was just like, "I was not incentivized. Nobody gave me anything extra. In fact, I couldn't even put my things in storage. I didn't get HHE [household effects shipped to post]. Nothing, I got nothing. But I came because Maura Harty asked me to. That's the only reason I am here. And you know what? If you're going to ask me what I want"—I was very snarky. I said, "I want Secretary Powell to tell my parents that he is going to keep me safe." I sent off the email. I never met the people who received that email. I have no idea who they are. One day I'd like to find them.

So, a few weeks later, because I'm being given a heroism award, the State Department flies me back to Washington, which was a nice gift, because I really needed a break. And remember, I'm on DoD orders. I don't have R&R [Rest and Recuperation]. I don't have breaks. I had an earlier break in September because consular affairs flew me to a consular leadership development conference, which was very generous of them. And so, the only way I ever got out was when the State Department said, "We're going to pay your way to come and do stuff." So that was nice. I come back for this award ceremony, which I thought was very nice. It was the normal department award ceremony, the annual award ceremony. Secretary Powell says, "I don't have time to give out all of the awards." He goes, "I'm only gonna give two awards. I can't stay for the whole thing." And he gave Bill Miller an award for heroism. And then, he gave me my award for heroism. My mom missed the shot, the photograph, and he stopped, he reposed it, and he let my mom get the photograph, which I thought was very generous of him. Before the award ceremony started. Staff came over to me and said, "Are these your parents?"

"Yes."

"Will they please stand over here?"

I'm like, "Okay."

He walks off the stage, he walks over to my parents and he says, "I'm Secretary Powell. It's very nice to meet you. Don't worry, I will keep your daughter safe."

And he walks out of the room. It was the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me. I mean, it was—it gave me the strength to go back. I would walk through fire for this man. It was exactly what I needed to be able to get on a plane and go back to Iraq. Because it

was hard to get on a plane and go back to Iraq. Everybody else was focusing on, "Oh, you're such a hero," and, "Oh, it's great what you did." That's not what I needed. I didn't need that. I needed Secretary Powell to walk over to my parents and say, "I care about your daughter. Don't worry. I'm gonna make her safety a priority."

I can't imagine what my parents were going through. They put me back on a plane—my mom, who's an amazing pie maker, because remember, she's Mennonite. Mennonites make the best pies you've ever tasted in your life. I love cherry pie. It's my favorite pie in the whole wide world. Mom made me two cherry pies that I carried in a pie holder back with me to Baghdad, so that we can have cherry pie. I take two fresh cherry pies to Baghdad and show up and I invited all my buddies there in the convention center to come and enjoy my mom's cherry pie. And I am back in Baghdad to continue out the year assignment that I had agreed to do.

At that time, we still had nothing in place to transport people from the airport to the Green Zone. So, my driver—remember that little white Ford with Polish tags—meets me at the airport in a soft vehicle. This is now the end of November and I'm traveling—that airport highway became one of the most dangerous places in Baghdad--I'm traveling from the airport to the Green Zone in a soft vehicle.

Q: Instead of armored vehicles?

PAYNE: Right. At that time, CPA had no armored vehicles. Imagine that. Now they have this huge thing that takes you to and from the airport or sometimes you even helicopter, but at that time, it was still sort of a catch-as-catch-can. And so, I just basically asked my driver to meet me at the airport. I was still flying in and out on USAID humanitarian assistance planes. If you've ever done a corkscrew landing, they are the most terrifying experience. The plane, when it lands, in order to avoid rocket fire, goes straight down and turns like a corkscrew. The plane warning sign is telling the pilot, "Pull up." So, the whole time you hear this, "Pull up, pull up, pull up," and you are going down in a corkscrew and I'm going, "Please, pull up. Please, pull up." It's so scary. A corkscrew landing is one of the scariest things I have ever done in my life. And you just put your faith in these pilots that they can pull up. They're very skilled. And you realize, "Right, so they're rocketing planes at the airport." There was one rocket that almost hit the plane that was bringing in all the new currency. Thank God it didn't. Can you imagine if it hit the plane with all this new currency?

And this was one of the biggest fights I had with Pat Kennedy. So, Pat Kennedy and I had two fights. The first fight was very early on. Very early, like in my first week, Pat Kennedy realizes that he has all these American personnel that work for the Coalition Provisional Authority—many of who, by the way, don't even have passports because they've entered on their DoD badge—and they all need visas to go to the various places where they're having meetings. They don't know how to get them. So, he calls me in, and he says, "I want your office to get visas for Coalition Provisional Authority personnel, who aren't all Americans. They're from all over the world."

And I say, "No, consular sections don't get visas for official Americans. That's the management team. You have a personnel office in CPA. That's their job."

And he freaks out and he says, "You're not a team player. I can't believe Maura sent you."

And I'm like, "I know that this would be overwhelming for my office." So, I walk over to the personnel section. There's a colonel that runs it. I said, "Colonel, you have a job to do. You don't know how to do it. You're going to get one of these translators assigned to you and his sole purpose is to get visas for CPA officials. And I'm going to teach him how to do it."

We walk into Pat Kennedy's office. By the way, he didn't have an office. If you walked into the front office of the Coalition Provisional Authority, you walked into this huge room. Remember we're in a palace, so this is a huge palace. You walk into this huge, long, narrow room. Bremer's on one side and his British co-equal is on the other side and he's ignored. And Pat Kennedy is inside the entrance to the right. He didn't make an office for himself. You walked in and the first person you saw was Pat Kennedy, and he was talking to three people at a time and you just dealt with Pat. Pat was the problem solver, the fixer. So, the colonel and I walked back, go to Pat, I said, "Pat, I've solved your problem. I'm not going to do this work because you know the consular sections don't get visas for official Americans. So, you know that it's not right to ask me to do it. I'm training this guy and his job is going to be to get visas and you're going to get visas."

And he's grinned and said, "Hallelujah. I knew Maura sent me the right person," and he never bullied me again. He never yelled at me.

So, the second fight, and I can't remember if this was before or after the Al Rasheed bombing. I'm getting tons of intelligence, because I've connected with all these private security companies who all had to come to me to get on the list of private security companies. I'm developing relationships with them and we're sharing information. So, I know everything that's going on. And so, they tell me there was a rocket launch that almost hit the plane with the money in it. And as a consular official, I'm like, "If they are rocketing planes, I need to do a travel warning for American citizens and let them know that planes are being rocketed."

Well, CPA wanted to keep this quiet. They didn't—remember, they're still pretending there's not an insurgency. They're still trying to give the impression that it's safe. And so, I write up this travel warning and Pat's like, "I do not want you to send this."

And I'm like, "Pat, why am I here if I can't—why am I here? Why did you ask me to come? If you don't want a consular officer, I'll leave. But if you have a consular officer, I have to warn Americans of dangers." And he gave in, he let me send the warning. And that was the only other time where I had to negotiate with him.

So, it's kind of the end of November. We're moving into December. One of the things he won't let me do is do an evacuation plan. So, I go to Pat and I said, "American citizens are asking what the US government will do if we need to be evacuated. Because there were lots of Americans there doing development work. There were missionaries evangelizing. There were lots of Americans throughout the city. I was starting to have town hall meetings for them, where they would come into the Green Zone and I brought together a collection of people who would help them and talk to them about safety and security. I ended up stopping those because they were too dangerous. And I had a warden system that I created. I had wardens throughout Baghdad, and they ended up—we stopped that too because it became too dangerous. But at the time, I still had the warden system. I still had the town hall meetings. I said, "Pat, I keep getting these questions. I think I need to do an emergency evacuation plan."

And he said, "No, because we are not evacuating. We're not evacuating. You are not allowed to do an evacuation plan."

And I said, "Okay, then I won't, but I think we should." But on that one I let him, because he was very adamant because we still, like the White House, didn't want to give the impression that we were losing.

There was so much going on. So, like in October a Spanish diplomat got assassinated and my guys had told me there's a threat against the Spanish embassy. And I went to the Spanish embassy and said, "My guys tell me there's a threat. You guys need to pay attention."

And they're like, "But the CPA tells us there is no threat. Your army is telling us there's no threat."

And I'm saying, "I dunno what the US Army is telling you, but my people are telling me there's a threat."

And then their diplomat gets shot and then the US Army came to me and was like, "Why did you warn them?"

I'm like, "Because your head is in the sand and you don't see the threat."

Sorry, I'm kind of jumping all over the place. So, we're moving into December. Things are steadily getting worse. It is so much worse than it was in the summer. I spent my first Christmas in Baghdad and honestly it was one of the most depressing days I've ever had. We had all these soldiers that we invited for Christmas Day. I put up a Christmas tree. We sat around and got depressed. By then, I had gotten a line that connected to the DoD telephone system because I had caught a soldier using my sat [satellite] phone and I'm like, "You can't use my sat phone. It's $10 a minute. But you can use my DoD line." So, by then, soldiers knew that if they wanted to call, they could use a special DoD line. So, at Christmas Day they all came to use my line. Even though things were set up around for

soldiers to call home, but they had long, long lines. So, these guys all knew to come use my line. We just sat around Christmas Day and got depressed and then it was New Year's. We were like frogs in hot water. I knew that Baghdad was getting way, way, way more dangerous because of what I was seeing. But a lot of people had yet to come to terms with how dangerous Baghdad was.

Q: You had been there longer, so you had seen how it had been.

PAYNE: And it was my job to care. Because I feel very strongly about my duty to assist and protect private Americans. So, New Year's Eve. I had been invited to a friend's home. In the Green Zone there were still lots of homes, beautiful homes. We called it Venice. It was where senior Iraqi officials lived. And it was beautiful. A friend of mine, her father—who is quite well known, I'm not gonna say his name—his home was there, and his daughter was working in Baghdad and invited us over to her house for New Year's. We we're sitting around the table, having this classic, fun New Year's Eve dinner. There were lots of American Iraqis. There was a flash that my dear friend and I both saw out of the corner of our eyes and then an incredible explosion. This was the attack on the restaurant in downtown Baghdad where a slew of Westerners were celebrating New Year's Eve. There was no question that the insurgents knew what they were doing. They attacked the one spot in Baghdad where the most Westerners had gathered. It was a massive car bomb and it caused a lot injuries. And of course, I'm still sensitized because of the Al Rasheed and I dash down into the basement. I'm like, "Holy shit." And we all dashed down to the basement and then we're like, "Where did that come from? Where was that?" Because it felt like it was right next door. It actually was quite a distance from us and we're trying to figure out where it was. I call State Ops. I say, "There's been a massive explosion in downtown Baghdad. I don't know where it is." And I say to my friend, "I've got to get to the clinic cause my guess is there are going to be America's being brought to the Army clinic."

I drop her off. We drop her brother off at the entrance of the Green Zone. He proceeds to walk home and get mugged. I drop off my friend and the girl whose house it was at my room and say, "You're going to be safe here. This is the safest place in the Green Zone. You stay at my place." I go to the clinic and they bring in the journalists, there were several Americans that worked for the LA Times. There was a British woman who was completely covered with tiny little cuts. The shattered glass had just like cut her body from top to bottom. The British consul also came. And again, by then, I knew all the consuls and they all knew me. We all contacted each other. They all knew that I would facilitate anything they needed.

And also, by then, the Army did anything I asked them to do. And at 3:00 AM I look up at the clock and I'm like, "Well, happy New Year. This is my New Year's, and this is my life. What do you know?" I stayed there until it was done. What was really hard about that, was I needed to arrange emergency transportation for the LA Times reporters. So, here's the challenge when you occupy a foreign country. In the normal world, if an American citizen is badly injured overseas, they have emergency medical evacuation

insurance. But in a war zone, there's no way a private company is going to be able to come in and evacuate you. So, the only way you're going to get out is through air transport provided by the US Air Force. There is a mechanism for the US Air Force to evacuate private citizens. When private citizens don't have emergency evacuation insurance, you call the Air Force. And at senior levels, the State Department officially requests the Air Force evacuate this private American and then they send them a bill.

Well, I had this routine down. Every time a private American citizen needed to be transported by plane out of Baghdad because they were injured, I knew the people in the Air Force transportation to call and make it happen at our level. I never had to go through the State Department. There was no bureaucracy. I'd say, "I have a private American who needs to be transported. Can you please do it?" Well, it was New Year's Eve and all my people were on leave. I had new people who were filling in who were like, "You can't do that. We need—" And they were insisting that I go through the formal process. Well, it's New Year's Eve. Do you know how hard it is to get people on the phone on New Year's Eve? And I'm like— and these guys need to be transported. This is life or death. This is serious stuff. And I'm struggling. And bless the State Operations Center and bless the State Department leadership, because I was able to do the whole bureaucratic thing that needed to be done. They got transported. I met them a couple of years later, in some event in the State Department—some AFSA [American Foreign Service Association] event—where they came up and thanked me. Not them themselves, but the Washington correspondent for the LA Times came up and said, "I know what you did for my colleagues and I really, really appreciate what you did." But I got them—finally—military transport out, emergency medical transport out. I helped the British guy get his person situated.

I went back to my room and my friends were still awake and worried, not knowing what was going on. I told them what was going on. We went to bed, woke up the next morning, and my friend and I looked at each other and said, "Well, that was the worst New Year's Eve of our lives and we're going to make sure that every New Year's Eve from now on is better." And we pledged on January 1st, 2004 to spend every subsequent New Year's Eve together if we could. And we have ever since and only missed three New Year's Eves. So, every single New Year's Eve, this friend of mine and I plan to meet. I travel where she is, she travels where I am. We have spent every single New Year's Eve together, except for three, ever since. And every New Year's Eve, we talk about what that felt like and we say, "Isn't this so much better? Aren't we so much better? And let's make this a New Year's Eve to remember and a wonderful experience, because we need to counter that horror of what the New Year's Eve was like in Baghdad." And it was horrible.

Q: You mentioned that nobody wanted to talk about evacuating people or having a plan to evacuate people because that is sending the wrong signal. This is a dilemma that comes again and again. At a country level, if there's insurgency in country X and our embassy says Americans want to leave, well that's interpreted as saying you feel our support system is weak there and we can't take care of that. And the idea that you're

sending the wrong signal. Sometimes, it becomes a dilemma between sort of policy considerations and the consular situation. The consular situation is, "Get the people the hell out." And policy is, "It's sending the wrong signal." Well, if you're an American tourist or somebody, you don't want to be part of the signal.

PAYNE: Yeah. It's people versus policy. That's the first time that became so real to me. In the past, I saw it happen in Kuwait, when they didn't want to alarm anybody when Saddam was at the border and you saw this tension. And I saw it Israel too, by the way. Remember when Saddam Hussein shot rockets at Israel? I was there for that. And again, we didn't want to issue travel warnings. Yet, Israel was being rocketed. And so, I saw that tension. So, luckily for me it wasn't the first time

Q: That would be when there was talk about poison gas. The Israelis had a real problem of a panicky population.

PAYNE: Yes. And they didn't have enough gas masks, so they wouldn't issue gas masks to foreigners. And so, Americans would call us and say, "Can you get me a gas mask?" And I got very good at saying, "If you are uncomfortable with the security situation in Israel, I recommend that you leave the country. You have the ability to leave the country. The US embassy is unable to issue you a gas mask. The Israeli government has declared the gas masks can only be purchased by Israeli citizens. If you are uncomfortable with this current situation, I recommend that you consider leaving the country." And I had gotten—and so, luckily, I had done that enough. But I'll be honest, by December I became—instead of saying, "If you're uncomfortable," I was saying to people, "Get out of Baghdad, what are you doing in Baghdad?"

To the point where I am depicted in a book called Baghdad by Bus by these young college kids who walked into my office one day and said, "We came here because we want to do an internship in Baghdad."

And I freaked and I said, "Get out of Baghdad. This is too dangerous. You are risking your lives. Go do your internship somewhere else."

And then, the guys from the military gave them an internship and they had a wonderful time. They weren't harmed and they wrote a book about it and they depicted me as an over reactive, shrill, crazy, consular officer. Because by then, I was basically telling people, "This is a very dangerous place."

And I would tell missionaries—which is not very nice—I would say, "In my opinion, the worst private security guard is God. So, if you're relying on God to provide you with security while you're in Baghdad, he's lost more people than any other security provider," because these missionaries would come in and trust that God would keep them safe and they kept getting injured and killed. Every single American missionary injured or killed, I served. I would go to the hospital when they were hurt because it was always the Army clinic. I would get them into the Army clinic. I had to be the one who called the head of

the Army clinic and say, "I have a private American citizen who needs care. Please let them in." I'm the one notifying their next of kin. I'm the one—I'll never forget these Baptist missionaries who were killed on the way to Hillah cause they wanted to see a religious site. I was sitting with their supervisor who was just lamenting that he let them go because he said, "this was frivolous. Why were we doing tourism in Baghdad?" And the regret he felt. And I'm sitting there saying "Yeah, because you know what? Of all the security providers, God has lost more people than anybody else. So, if you're relying on God to be your private security provider, you chose a really poor provider." Cause it was just one after another of this happening.

Q: I interviewed Terry McNamara, who was a consular officer in the Congo during the Lumumba times and all that [Congo Crisis]. And he would have the missionaries say, "Well, we're under God's protection." Then, all of a sudden, he had them on his front porch, basically, saying, "Get us the hell out of here." Again, and again it happens.

PAYNE: This is where I just put it in that we're—because by then, also, that flyer on the private security companies doing business in Iraq was the hottest flyer. Everybody—people would come in and they'd be like, "We need to hire private security." And I'd be like, "Here's a list of private security companies in Iraq." And then, I would just say to the missionary community, "If God's your private security provider, he's not good. He's just not good at it. So, hire somebody who knows what he's doing."

By the way, I also have to get back to the angel. So, this South African guy walks into my office a few weeks later—the angel who rescued me. He is the cutest, most charming man. He just comes in and I'm head over heels for this guy. One, he saved me in my time of need. Two, he's cute and has a great accent and he's hitting on me. And so, he asked me out on a date. We go to some pizza joint just outside of the Green Zone. I know enough about Africa that I'm asking him questions. Halfway through, I realize I am with one of the most evil people I've ever met. He was part of the South African—I forget the name of it, but there was a special forces unit that did horrific human rights abuses, horrific, horrific things. So, I'm sitting across the table from my angel going, "My angel is a very evil man and I don't like that I'm here. I am very uncomfortable."

Luckily, one of the guys who I shared information with calls me and says, "Where are you?" I didn't want to tell him I was outside of the Green Zone. He said, "There might be an attack on the Green Zone tonight. I need you to come and stay with us."

And so, I told my guy, I said, "Look, I have to get back to the Green Zone." And the date ended. And I was like, "I don't want anything more to do with this guy."

Moving forward, I'm in Senegal at my next posting the following fall—it must have been fall—I'm reading Time magazine and this group of mercenaries have just been arrested for trying to overthrow an African government and they're put in jail in Zimbabwe. And who's in the picture? Who's the head of this operation? My angel and he's in prison in Zimbabwe. I go to the South African consul and I say, "Look, there is a man from South

Africa in prison in Zimbabwe who helped me in a time of need and who is, I realize, a very bad man and clearly a mercenary. Could you please make sure he doesn't die in prison?" And he said yes. And then, he ended up being released because he was actually in Zimbabwe legally. And I don't know if he's ever been charged in South Africa for mercenary. But these are the types of people, by the way, who are working in Baghdad.

Q: You know, there's attraction. There are war lovers. I've seen it within the Foreign Service. People who go to these places—Terry McNamara. He ended up at Beirut, [Lebanon]. He had to evacuate his entire staff from the consul general in Can Tho when Vietnam fell. There are people who are attracted to this sort of thing.

PAYNE: It gives them the freedom. It gives them the rush. So, this was the one person I personally met, I'm personally aware of. I know he's a mercenary. He was arrested as the head of a mercenary group attempting to overthrow an African government. How many other horrible people did we hire to provide security? So, he was part of a private security company when he was in Iraq.

Q: We've had a lot of problems with Blackwater.

PAYNE: Oh, Blackwater—who was Blackwater hiring? And it's amazing worse things didn't happen. My buddies, who had Gurkhas. There was almost an uprising by the Gurkhas and they almost opened fire on their Gurkhas at one point. This was kind of later, in April. But there was so much going on. When Blackwater lost their four people in Fallujah I got involved because they're private Americans—remember, all these private security companies, if they hired Americans, they fell under me. They were private Americans. So, Blackwater calls me and says, "We don't what to do." And so, I go over—they were totally unprepared to have any of their people die in Iraq. They didn't know how to notify next of kin. They didn't know how to transport the bodies back home. Nothing. So, I walk them through everything: "Here's what you need to do. I issue a consular report of death abroad. I will facilitate transportation of the bodies." The military agreed to transport the remains of American citizens back to the United States. You know, all these things I had to arrange, because nobody really thought about it. I worked with Blackwater for these four. They were absolutely traumatized. That house—when I walked in the Blackwater house after those four were killed—you know, they were horribly tortured—it was like a morgue. They were so unprepared. But there were also some very, very bad people. And that's where like my angel, when I realized, "these private security companies are hiring these horrible human rights abusers that had served in the special forces in South Africa. That's who they're hiring to come into work in Baghdad." It was crazy. It was absolutely crazy. A buddy of mine was trying to train the Iraqi army, but we fired the Iraqi army, so anybody with any experience was gone.

Q: That's what I consider a real mistake on Bremer's part.

PAYNE: Huge mistake. And because Ahmed Chalabi asked for it. Ahmed Chalabi was doing the de-Ba'athification and he was using de-Ba'athification to get rid of anybody

who would support the Coalition. Because we did de-Nazification. And the righteous thing to do was to de-Ba'athify, but we did it too deep and we did it based on what Chalabi was asking for. And I believe he was working for Iran. I believe he was an intelligence agent for Iran. When we took his advice, it always backfired, and it ended up with Iran gaining some benefit. I don't know this based on any classified information; I have no access to classified on this. It's just what I believe.

Q: Well, wartime and the immediate aftermath are really messy places. I know why. I was in Vietnam during the war and I was a vice council in Frankfurt only a few years after World War Two. And _____car salesman and Bible salesman and all sorts of—these were not upright-standing citizens

PAYNE: It was so complicated. You see the worst of humanity. You also see the best. You see quite heroic actions. But I saw the worst of humanity. I've never seen anything as bad before or since. So, I don't know if you want to continue through the end of the tour in Iraq.

Q: Why don't we continue?

PAYNE: Yeah. So, now it's January, we're realizing that things are rough. We're also seeing the transition of the military. Remember the concept was we were going to go in, invade, take care of humanitarian needs, and a new government would form, and we'd be done. Except that didn't happen. And so, the soldiers who came in, they were getting worn out. They had been assigned to Iraq for a long time. In January, we started to see the rotations taking place. We also started to see that the military didn't have passports, but they wanted to go on vacation. I got this incredible increase in passport applications because all of the military who were leaving wanted a passport. I was getting to the point of like, "I can't keep up." And so, I started to make arrangements with Washington where I would fly by helicopter to a military base, accept all these passport applications, FedEx them to the Department. They'd be issued in the States and FedExed back to these military personnel in time for them to get a passport before they completed duty. And I give Pat Kennedy credit. I felt very strongly about doing this. Pat felt strongly about doing this. This was also very new. We weren't doing that at the time, but we felt like we had to support our troops. We had to be able to say, "Yes, if you want a passport, we will get you a passport." But man, was I under enormous like workload pressure. And we got everyone a passport. I'm so proud that I got everybody who wanted a passport, a passport.

Q: When I was consul general in Vietnam the troops got three weeks leave during their years tour. Those who wanted to go to Australia, New Zealand, or somewhere had to have a passport. We made an arrangement. One, we had a soldier typist who happened to be getting his master's in English literature at Harvard. In between times he was our passport typist. We had a courier system. It worked very nicely.

PAYNE: Yeah. You do it. What I told the DoD leader is, "Guys, you need to tell your folks, 'get a passport before you leave for duty.'" But they don't. They travel on their DoD

badge. And so, they don't think that at the end of their tour of duty, they want to be a tourist. And some people might've thought it was frivolous, but I thought, "No, it's important. If you want to go to Italy—you just spent a tour of duty in Iraq. If you want to go on vacation afterwards, I'm going to get you a passport." And I remember flying to one base, it was terrifying. By then, I no longer liked to fly on helicopters. The first time I flew in a helicopter it was cool. By then, I knew how dangerous it was. So, I knew I was taking a huge risk. But I just felt like the soldiers deserved it. I felt like we needed to. And then, just the morale of the troops.

Another thing that was happening was more and more Iraqis where coming in, applying for their passports. And I was seeing—so, in the '60s, we sent a lot of Iraqi scientists to the States to study. All of them had children. And then, they came back to Iraq after their studies. Then, as Saddam became more oppressive, their kids hid the fact that they were American. And so, all they had was the passport with their baby photo. And I had to do the linkage. I would call their parents in and I would interview, and I'd say, "Bring every piece of evidence you have." Well, there was one family who had nothing. Apparently, there had been a fire. Everything had burned down. They had nothing. And so, these now young adults—these are all now what? '20s and '30s because it was '60s and '70s that they sent these scientists, and their only way out of what was a crumbling awful situation was to get that passport. It was painful. I had to tell the parents and this young adult, "There's just not enough evidence. I just don't see enough evidence. I'm so sorry." The next week, another family came in and it turned out they were at the same university and I said, "Did you know this other family? Could you vouch for them." They gave me all the evidence I needed. I called up the other family and I said, "Ironically, did you know so and so?" "Yes. We haven't seen him since we studied together." I said, "Well, they were in my office this week and they gave me all the evidence I need to confirm the citizenship of your child. Please come in for the passport." Stuff like that made my day.

We had an Iranian/American flee Iran and illegally crossed the border to apply for a passport. And I was able to confirm his identity and citizenship and I gave him his passport. And then, I gave him a little lecture on civic government. I said, "You're an American citizen. I'm here to serve you."

He goes, "You're the first time any government official has ever said to me you're here to serve me."

I said, "Well, you're an American and your government serves you. Welcome to America. Have a safe flight home." That type of stuff kept me going. Every time I could give a US passport to somebody and say, "Welcome home," just made it worth it. Because by then, the dying was overwhelming me and I needed to have this boost of "Here soldier, here's your passport, go on vacation. Here Iraqi American, here's your passport. You have a new life."

Q: How about your staff? Did you have other Vice Consuls?

PAYNE: I had no other American staff. And you know, I said, "Don't send more people here. This is a war zone. This is dangerous. We need to do the bare minimum." I still had my two staff, although they were getting very demoralized, because they'd come hopeful and now, they weren't hopeful. And then, eventually, the woman who worked for me, her brother got assassinated. And that was awful. It was just awful. But I had two Iraqis—one Iraqi American, one an Iraqi Iraqi—who were my staff. I had my driver and me and this is what we did. And I worked seven days a week. I'd get up and I'd work. I just felt like it didn't put more people in harm's way. And it's so funny because later Dan Smith [Career Ambassador] joked about how people would say, "You only have one consular officer in Baghdad?"

And he's like, "She can do it. Just let her do it."

Because I just didn't want to be responsible for anybody getting killed. When Assistant Secretary Maura Harty came to visit, I was terrified she was going to get killed. I felt responsible for the people there and I thought, "I can't have anybody die on my watch. Let's do the bare minimum. That's enough." We were under enormous pressure to issue visas and Maura fought that back. I was under pressure to help people get visas. In fact, I do show up in another book where a reporter felt like I was dismissive and treated him like a cockroach because he wanted me to help his Iraqi interpreter get a visa. And I said, "I can't, there's nothing I can do." I'm glad I didn't have the power to issue visas. I'm glad that I could legitimately say, "I can't help you," because if I had the power to issue visas—

Q: You couldn't issue visas?

PAYNE: No, we facilitated visa issuance in Jordan. If you were traveling for the US government on US government travel orders, you could submit your application to me. I would scan and email it to our embassy in Jordan. They would vet the applicant and set up a visa appointment. The visa would be issued in Jordan. We never were able to issue visas in Baghdad. Thank Goodness. Because the pressure on me to facilitate visa issuance was enormous. Just enormous.

Q: You mentioned the interpreters, young ladies, who were interpreting for the American troops, and of course, love blossomed.

PAYNE: Oh boy, did it blossom. The Florida National Guard lived in the convention center and when they left, they were replaced by Rangers. I don't know what company, but it was a group of Rangers. So, of course, as the Guardsmen were getting ready to leave, they're all coming into my office: "I have fallen in love with an Iraqi. How do I take her home with me?"

And I'm like, "Well, here's a flyer on how to get married in Iraq." But of course, they're all forbidden now from leaving their post. One actually did and got in trouble. So, they can't get married because they can't leave to go to the courthouse. And I'm counseling

them. Even one of the chaplains had me come do a session on marrying locals and what you need to look out for. And I suggested, "Maybe go home. If you still miss her, then send for fiancé visa," knowing that once they're home and a little clear-eyed, only a few of them would still want to stay together.

After they go home, all the Iraqi women would come into my office: "My lover, promised to send for me, but then never did." They would be devastated. They were like, "How do I contact my soldier boyfriend?"

The other thing is that the Guardsmen had so much alcohol squirreled away, even though it was forbidden under General Order No. 1. They all were coming in and bringing me their leftover alcohol because by then, I knew all of them. They were bringing me bottles of alcohol, saying, "We're done. Here. We're done. Here."

The other thing they gave me was the hot water heater for the shower and I hired a plumber. Remember, I told you I had this wet closet? I brought a plumber in who built me a shower and I had a shower. I didn't have to go to the basement anymore. I had a shower and there was one woman assigned with that Ranger group. There was one woman. I gave her a key and I let her use my shower. I said, "You do not have to shower with these men." But after the Rangers got there, they had to take care of the building. The convention center was not an easy building to keep running and the hot water boiler would constantly break. That's why the water heater was critical, because the only way to get a hot shower would be if you had a hot water heater. But I took the hot water heater, so there was no more hot water heater for the troops. The first week they're there, there's only cold water. And so, people come into my office, because they know I've been there a long time. They say, "There's no hot water in the building. What do we do?"

And I said, "Well look, this would happen on a regular basis. Somebody from the Florida National Guard knew who to call and what to do to get the hot water turned on. Let me talk to the guy in charge of the Rangers." So, I go to the Ranger and I say, "Look, I know you guys are new and you're getting settled in, but there's this whole dynamic with hot water in the building." I didn't tell them I took the only hot water heater. He didn't need to know that. And I said, "Can I give you some advice. I think you should figure out what to do to turn the hot water on."

He looks at me, he goes, "Ma'am, I kill people for a living. I don't have a second job."

And I looked at him and I said, "Okay."

A week later, he knew how to get the hot water turned on, because I don't care if you kill people for a living, your people want hot water and if there's no hot water, people are going to scream. And so, they learned how to turn that hot water back on. But he looks at me, goes, "Ma'am, I kill people for a living. I don't have a second job." Yeah, we'll see how long you last. I did not get as close to the Rangers as I got to the Florida National Guard. Mainly because the Florida National Guard weren't full time soldiers.

Q: They were homeboys.

PAYNE: Yeah. And honestly, they didn't know what they were getting themselves into. They were like, "What?"

Q: Nobody trained the National Guard to end up in Iraq.

PAYNE: Right. This was when the reality of like, "Maybe this wasn't a smart thing to do." Because also some of had businesses that that were falling apart while they were there. I used to hear all the stories about these guys. Then of course, you know all the love affairs that broke up. For weeks and weeks and weeks after the Florida National Guard left Iraqi women would be coming into my office crying and "Help me. He said he'd send for me" and I'm like, "I'm really sorry but nothing I can do about it."

Now we're kind of moving into the spring. I have almost no memory of February. I think I was so worn down and destroyed by then that I could barely keep it together. I did come home in March for vacation. By then, the State Department agreed to just give me an R&R. I think I must have been completely shell shocked. It was extremely difficult to be home. It was difficult to interact with people. While I was home, there was a news report that a woman who I had become friends with—she was a missionary doing development work had been killed. I'd been to her home in Baghdad. She left Baghdad when things started to get dicey. It turned out she went back to Baghdad with a group and they were killed. And I called State Operations and I said, "I understand that there've been Americans that were killed. Who are they?" And they told me, and I lost it. This woman was my age. She was single. She was my friend. I thought she left Baghdad. And so, in my mind she was safe. She survived. She left Baghdad. But they had just come back to do something and were killed on the highway to Fallujah. I lost it. Like, I couldn't—that news was too much for me and it was just a few days before I was scheduled to go back. So, then—my parents had come up to Washington, they were driving me to the airport—my mom wanted to tidy up my apartment and I freaked out. I said, "Stop cleaning. It's as if you're cleaning because I'm not going to come back because I'm gonna die." I, again, freaked out. I said, "Just stop. Stop cleaning." I don't know how emotionally broken I must've been at that point—

Q: How stood the state of post traumatic—basically, it's a post-combat situation. I mean, there are lots of articles about this, but how stood the situation, particularly as a civilian, in those days?

PAYNE: It clearly was a devastating emotional effect. I had no idea what was going on. I had no idea that I had post-traumatic stress disorder at that point. I just knew that a woman who I related to was just killed. And I had to get back on a plane and go back to this horrible, dangerous place. What I never considered was to say, "Don't go back. It never occurred to me that I could say, "I'm not going back," because I had made a commitment. I was going to keep my commitment. But I was so clearly terrified and

broken. And so, even that little effort of cleaning my house to me symbolized, "Well, I want your house to be cleaned, so that if you die, you have a clean house," which wasn't her intent, but that was my interpretation. I can't believe I got on the plane and went back. I can't believe I was able to physically get on a plane, do what needed to be done, land in Baghdad, get picked up at the airport and driven on that dangerous highway in March of 2004, and get back to work.

I'm back to work. There's still a group that works for the White House that naively thinks everything's going fine. They decide that they need to have an international trade fair at the Baghdad fairgrounds. It's going to bring in all these US companies, especially oil companies, and we're going to have this trade fair. So, by then, there were a group of DS agents that were working regularly in CPA because we were able to bring in a lot of State people by then. The chief of that office and I would talk regularly. He says, "Beth, I don't know what to do." I said, "This trade fair is a nightmare." He said, "There is absolutely no way we can secure the fairgrounds. There is no doubt in my mind that this fair is going to be rocketed."

And I said, "You've got to turn it off. You've got to tell them that you can't do it."

And he said, "The pressure's too great. These are people from the White House. They're not going to let us turn it off." And they don't let him turn it off.

And so, I say, "Well, in that case, I need to issue a travel warning." Pat Kennedy is gone by then. I write up a travel warning: "The US State Department cannot guarantee the safety and security of this trade fair. There is a high risk of terrorist attacks. We warn American citizens." I send it to Richard Jones, who replaced Pat, to clear and I go, "50/50 chance he's going to clear it." And I said, "If he doesn't clear it"—just said this to myself as I went to bed that night—"if this is not cleared, if I am not allowed to issue this warning, I will resign and I will release this to the New York Times." All the newspapers, by the way, were on my mailing list for warnings. They got everything. I knew all the media people. I said, “Because I can't live with myself. If I don't issue this warning and Americans come for this and get killed, I can't live with myself." And so, I decided that night, before I went to bed, that if it wasn't cleared, I would resign. To give them credit, they cleared it. I issued it and the White House went crazy. They were so angry with me because all the Americans pulled out. They said, "Because of this warning, we are not coming." And man, the one guy—again, it's good I don't have a good memory because I don't want to know who these people were—but he yelled at me. He was so angry. He's like—

Q: Was this by phone?

PAYNE: No, no, this was in person. Because the White House had this team of commercial people in Baghdad. They said, "We were going to—man, this was gonna work. We were going to have all this great trade in oil business. It was going to be great". The guy who yelled at me said, "You've undermined us. You've destroyed this effort."

And what I realized is that it was easier for everybody if some mid-level person got the blame for doing the right thing. Senior people did not want this to happen. So, what I realized is I played a good role for them. They weren't given the blame, but they wanted it cancelled. I was the perfect person to cancel it. And so, I took the blame. But then, a few days later, you had the uprising, the Shia uprising, and all hell broke loose. Those people who worked for the White House all left because then it was too obvious that it was a disaster. And guys, you were never going to have a trade fair. What were you thinking? Did you not see what was happening around you? But the Shia uprising saved me, because the others were willing to let me take the blame. I was going to be the one that White House was going to destroy. I was going to be the one and I was okay with that.

Q: But you got it cleared.

PAYNE: I got it cleared. So, I also didn't have to quit. The idea of quitting was scary. —

Q: At a certain point, you realize, "There will be blood on my hands if I do this for convenience. But here's somebody who knows they're doing, and you can blame her."

PAYNE: I was blamed. I was willing to take the blame, I'll be honest. I was like, "I can take this," but I was saved by the Shia uprising. Cause the Shia uprising—I mean, all hell broke loose.

Q: Let's talk about it. What was this?

PAYNE: So, you had in Karbala seriously huge battles between Blackwater and other private security companies, protecting Coalition positions, and Shia militia. Shia militia basically attacked Coalition forces. It was a couple of days of the Shia cleric [transcriber note: Muqtada al-Sadr] in Baghdad basically telling the Shia, "Rise up, fight the Coalition." And it was just days of fighting taking place. And so, these uprisings were just happening around the country, Karbala being the worst. And they were real battles. Until then you had insurgent actions. You had terrorist attacks. But you didn't have battles. These were actual battles taking place. It was a total shock. This is when everybody realized, "Oh, wait a minute, we're done. We've lost." And I don't know when the decision was made to transition from an occupation to back to normal, but it might've been made because of the Shia uprising. This I don't know. All I know is that that marked the transition from occupation to Iraqi led government. We said, "You know what, we're gonna end this Coalition Provisional Authority. We're no longer going to occupy Iraq. We're going to hand over sovereignty to the Iraqi governing authority. We're going to set up an embassy and we're going to end the occupation," because that started all the planning to end the occupation. And that's when I started to see State Department coming in to prepare for the new embassy that was going to open in the summer. And even real estate people coming in and talking about, "Where are we going to put the embassy?"

So, I would take all these real estate people around and show them all the good places. Like, "If I were you, I would try to get that place for the embassy." I was the inside person who knew more about the Green Zone than anybody else. And so, I'm helping them plan and transition.

What irritated me the most was when one person quite senior in the transition team asked me, "So where's your evacuation plan?"

And I said, "I wasn't allowed to write an evacuation plan."

And he's like, "WHAT? I can't believe you don't have an evacuation plan."

I'm like, "Dude, I can't deal with you. I wasn't allowed. Whatever you guys decide to do moving forward, I'm happy. Please don't yell at me for not having an evacuation plan. Because I tried and I was told I couldn't have one."

But that was the period where, "Okay, we're going to stop occupying."

Q: Essentially, we didn't have an embassy.

PAYNE: No, we had the office of the US Consul, which was a made-up entity that L wouldn't even agree to and that was our diplomatic mission.

Q: But you were the only one.

PAYNE: I was the only one

Q: One person.

PAYNE: Yup. Who ran the office of the US Consul in Baghdad for 10 months.

Q: Did things come to the US Embassy Baghdad? It was sort of a legality in a way but not a reality.

PAYNE: Yeah. I just did what I thought was the right thing to do. In retrospect, it is true—understanding what it takes to occupy a country. We had no understanding of what it meant to occupy a country. None. Because we hadn't planned to occupy the country. I'm convinced the decision to occupy was a split-second decision when we realize that Ahmed Chalabi betrayed us.

Q: Well, again, according to Rumsfeld, we're going to march in, we'll be met with waving flags, Saddam Hussein is going to be toppled, and then we'll leave.

PAYNE: Yeah. And then, we'll set up a government, like we did in Afghanistan, that we will influence heavily through our embassy. I'm convinced that was the plan. Ahmed

Chalabi betrayed us. And I know somebody who told me he accompanied Ahmed Chalabi to Iraq when Chalabi went back for the first time and was surprised that they were going through Iran. And he said to Chalabi, "Why are you going through Iran on your way to Iraq? The Americans are going to believe that you've betrayed them." And he just laughed and said, "Well, because it doesn't matter anymore."

Q: You might explain who Chalabi was.

PAYNE: Ahmed Chalabi was a prominent Iraqi dissident who the Department of Defense, the Office of the Secretary of Defense believed was going to help them govern Iraq. The CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] said he's a flimflam artist and not to be trusted. The State Department said he's not to be trusted. But the Office of Secretary of Defense trusted Ahmed Chalabi. Ahmed Chalabi also had the IRDC, the Iraqi Reconstruction and Development Corporation. He had all these Iraqis that were part of his structure. When we occupied Iraq, he brought all those people in and placed them in different ministries. I know that because one of them died and had claimed to be an American citizen. And so, his brother came to me for a report of death abroad and I could not confirm his citizenship. I said, "I'm not going to issue him a report of death abroad because he's not an American."

"Who's his employer?"

IRDC, but IRDC wasn't an official employer. Oh, there was an SAIC contract that was ordered to hire all of the IRDC people. I go back to SAIC and say, "One of your employees died in Iraq and is claiming to be an American citizen. Do you have evidence of citizenship?"

And they said, "He doesn't work for us. We were just told that we had to put these people on the books. So, we did. But he's not one of ours."

I'm like, "Look, people you have to decide. SAIC, if you're going to be paying these people money, they're yours. IRDC, if you're an entity—" But you know, DoD didn't contract directly with IRDC. They contracted with SAIC and then said, "Here is a list of people that you must hire and send to Iraq." And they were all Chalabi's people.

Paul Wolfowitz's, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, girlfriend was an IRDC person. This was the woman he got in trouble for at the World Bank. These people had very close connections with the Defense Department. And I think they conned us into invading Iraq because it was in the Iranian interest to do so. But I don't know this for a fact. I only know this because I see certain things. I know IRDC is real. I met lots of people who were IRDC. I know they lied to me. Finally, I got someone to admit that the man who died wasn't an American citizen because I said, "I'm not issuing a report of death. I cannot confirm his citizenship."

And finally, somebody confessed and said, "He is just a green card holder." I found that whole group of people very dishonest, corrupt. I didn't trust them. They were scattered all throughout the Coalition Provisional Authority. They were everywhere. They were influential. I don't know how many stayed after I left but I knew while I was there how influential Ahmed Chalabi was and his people.

Chalabi was also part of the Governing Council. I'll give you another anecdote about that. Early on in my tour, the Coalition Provisional Authority put together a Governing Council for Iraq. The hubris. I knew some of the people involved and I'm like, "I can't believe we're like selecting the future governing body. It's like in the old days, when the British appointed people as head of state. We're selecting the heads of state. It's got to be diverse; it's got to be this." So, CPA people hand selected the heads of state. On the day that they were being placed in office, Pat Kennedy needed somebody reliable to help staff a checkpoint who could decide who was allowed in and who wasn't allowed in. The Army is too black and white. He needed somebody who could think. So, he said, "Beth, will you please staff this checkpoint?"

I said yes. And so, I would make those decisions when people came to the checkpoint of whether it was okay for you to come in. They all come in, they meet in this one building, and then they're all going to drive to the convention center where they're going to have the grand ceremony. Their security is told, "You must stay behind. We don't want to see people with guns. That's bad imagery. So, security you stay behind." I'm at the checkpoint. Tithe Governing Council drives to the convention center. Ahmed Chalabi security comes and says, "We can't leave Ahmed Chalabi."

And I'm saying, "Security has to stay behind. You can't follow." And they point their weapons at me, and I say, "I'm not going to die for this. Go." I let Ahmed Chalabi's security pass. The only security. All the other governing council members were fine with their security staying behind except for Ahmed Chalabi. And honestly, when they pointed their guns at me, I'm like, "Go, I don't care." And it was the right choice.

Then, I go to the convention center. And what Pat Kennedy didn't realize until the last minute was that there were no security officials. They didn't want any guns. So they told the US Army to stand down, but then they realized there was no one to check the people attending the ceremony. So, Pat Kennedy, me, and a private security guy grab wands and start checking people. And we're wanding people and checking them. I'm physically stopping people from forcing their way in. I'm like, "No, you need to go through the check point," because the Army was told, "We don't want that in the picture. We don't want the news photos to have any weapons." And we just realized, "Well we can't let people in without being screened. Somebody could bring a weapon in and shoot up the building." And so, we were security that day for the Governing Council. That was in the early days when the Governing Council was established.

I got to know the Governing Council because of course, I facilitated all their visa issuances. I knew who was spoiled. I knew who was an asshole. And Ahmed Chalabi was

the biggest asshole. He got the most important ministries in his portfolio and he was in charge of de-Ba'athification. The recommendations he made, and that Bremer took—Bremer didn't have to take the recommendations—were devastating. Just devastating. But I also knew there were very corrupt people involved in all of this.

So, back to April. The last case I work on involved a man named Nicholas Berg. I get a call from parents in the United States and they say, "My son was in Iraq doing business and he was due back in the States on this flight and he wasn't on the flight." This happened all the time. I had lots of missing Americans. This was routine for me, by then. I say, "Okay, I'll look for your son." So, I look for their son and I find their son. He is being held by the US Army in Mosul. So, I emailed the parents, thank God there are no typos: "I have located your son. He is being detained by the US Army in Mosul."

The parents freaked out and asked, "Why is the US Army detaining my son?"

Well, what the US Army tells me is they're detaining this man because his behavior is erratic, and they think he's going to get himself killed. And so, they detained him for his own safety.

And I'm telling the army, "Look, you can't just randomly detain Americans. You have to charge him under Iraqi law for a violation of Iraqi law. You can deport him from the country because that's within your right as the occupying entity. You can go through deportation proceedings or you release him, but you can't arbitrarily detain him."

Meanwhile, the parents file a lawsuit against the Department of Defense. Then, the Department of Defense says, "We are not detaining your son. Iraqi police are detaining your son."

And they're saying, "But the US consul told me that the US Army is detaining my son."

"She's wrong. It's the Iraqi police detaining your son." That way they can't get sued. And then they say, "Let's just release him."

luckily, there was a State Department person embedded with the Coalition Provisional Authority in Mosul. She met with him and he signed a privacy waiver. She tells him, "We can help you get out of the country."

He came down to Baghdad and I talked to him on the phone. I say, "Nicholas, I've got a seat on a plane for you to fly out to Jordan tomorrow. All you have to do is get yourself to the airport."

And he says, "No, I don't need it. I've got other arrangements. I'm going on a convoy down south to get out through Kuwait."

I hang up the phone and I look at Paul Boyd, who was going to be my replacement. I'll tell you that story in a little bit—And I looked at him and I say, "Paul, I'm not sure this guy's going to make it. Let's see."

So, I have a week left. I'm transitioning out. Luckily, I think people in CA [Bureau of Consular Affairs) realized that I was worn out. I was supposed to stay until summer, but they called me and said, "Would you do us a favor and leave two months early? We have this guy, Paul Boyd, who's really interested in doing like a three-month temporary assignment. It'd be great. He'd overlap with you for like a week and you would then leave like in early May or end of April."

And I'm like, "That's the best thing. Of course, yes, please get me out of here. I can't take it anymore." I gave everything to Paul. I must've looked like hell. I don't know how I survived. I got on a plane, meet up with my friend in Paris and she thought our friendship was over.

My friend said, "You looked so cold and emotionless and affectless. I didn't know what happened to you."

And then, I flew on to the United States. Luckily, I'd had a vacation planned where I was going to go meet with dear, dear friends (a couple named Olen and Murph) of mine in Texas. It was in two weeks after I got home and I was really looking forward it. Then, right after I got home Olen died of a heart attack. I'm thinking, "Seriously? What is it?" I thought, "Okay, I finally survived. I got out alive. Did he die instead?" I had this weird emotional response that like Olen died for me. I was supposed to die, but it was Olen who died.

I go down to Texas be with his widow and I get a phone call: "Beth, do you know that Nicholas Berg has been beheaded and the video is everywhere. His parents have blamed the US military saying that if he had never been detained, he would've left on his initial flight and he never would've been killed. And the military is denying that they detained him, and your email exchange has been released to the AP [Associated Press] wire."

And I'm thinking, "Holy Shit. Really? Seriously?" I just lost one of my best friends in the world who I think died so I wouldn't, which is crazy, but that's where I was emotionally. I'm there with his widow, who's devastated, who's lost her husband way before he should have gone. He just dropped dead of a heart attack. And I have Washington calling and saying like, "This thing has hit the fan," and it's everywhere. I don't know if you guys remember when this guy got his head cut off. It was huge. That orange jumpsuit, everything. So, it is everywhere. My name is everywhere because of the email exchange and because I was contradicting DoD.

The PDAS in CA, Dan Smith was wonderful. He was very supportive. And I'm say, "Dan, my best friend has died. I'm with his widow and I'm not sure I can deal with this right now."

He says, "I'm so sorry, but I think we have to deal with it. And by the way, a lawyer is going to call you. A State Department lawyer is going to call you and you have to talk. You have to do this."

So, I'm on the phone with the lawyer. I'm a lawyer and I realize, based on the questions the lawyer is asking, that they want to be able to excuse themselves from the lawsuit and say I was working outside of my lane. I was there illegally. I wasn't working for the State Department. They were gonna throw me under the bus and they were gonna walk. They were going to try to get out of any lawsuit. Luckily the parents never sued. But I realized, "L was just going to say, 'She was a rogue. She was a rogue actor.'"

Then, I realized I had no records of the incident with me. Remember, I was doing everything from a Yahoo business account on a laptop. Nothing was being backed up in a server. Nothing was on a State Department server. I was functioning using a Yahoo business account, which was evidence that I was rogue. So, I called Paul Boyd and I said, "Paul, will you please do me a favor? Every email, every piece of evidence that exists about what the Army said and what the Coalition Provisional Authority said is on this one laptop. Will you please preserve all these records, and will you do a timeline for Dan Smith, who's asked me for a timeline of what happened?"

And Paul Boyd—this is why you're nice to people. He was a stranger when he came to Iraq, but I helped him. I got him settled. I made sure he had what he needed. He says, "Absolutely." He did the timeline and he preserved the records. He saved my ass because once he sent all that into State, I think people realized I was iron clad. You couldn't touch me. It was clear what I was told by the Army. It was clear what I was told by CPA Mosul. This is the first time I will publicly say this because I've had media ask me this ever since, and I wouldn't contradict the State Department, but DoD was holding Nicholas Berg. There is no question in my mind. I can finally say that because I don't work for the State Department anymore. It's not classified. But the State Department didn’t want to say it. They didn't want to outwardly contradict DoD. So, they did this fuzzy talking point that said nothing. But in reality, the US Army detained Nicholas Berg because he was acting crazy and was going to get himself killed. They did it hoping they would protect Nicholas Berg. And then, Nicholas Berg gave up an opportunity to leave Baghdad safely and got himself killed. And it just so happened that he's the one who got himself killed on television in a way that was quite shocking at the time. I got professional liability insurance after that because I said, "Holy crap, I dodged a bullet," because if those parents had sued, State wasn't going to stand behind me. I was on my own. I was going to lose it all.

Q: When I joined the Foreign Service, I was told this as a very junior officer: essentially, the Administration will turn her back on you if you get into trouble. We're given a lot of responsibility and we're expected to use our judgment. And then, they'll wash their hands of you.

PAYNE: The institution will protect itself. They will sacrifice an individual for the institution. You will be thrown under the bus. Individuals will try to help you, but they can only do so much. Dan Smith would have done everything he could to protect me, but he had no power. The institution would have thrown me under a bus. After everything I did in Iraq, after everything I did for the State Department, all to assist and protect private Americans—none of it in my personal interest—I realized you'll still get thrown under the bus. It doesn't matter.

So, two things happened in that last few weeks in Iraq that are important. One, remember, I'm the only one assigned to Iraq for a year, other than this one other woman, and I'm an FS-2 officer. I need an EER [Employee Evaluation Report]. It's April. I'm supposed to get an evaluation. I go to Richard Jones and I say, "Richard, what do you want to do?" Because he became my supervisor after Pat Kennedy left.

He says to me, "We got this special permission to do memos for people in Iraq and I don't want to write any EER for you. I don't have time."

And I'm like, "Okay. I've almost died. I feel like shit. I've been here ten months, longer than any other State Department employee. I'm going to walk away from Baghdad without an evaluation, without an EER. I don't care about a memo. I know how the promotion boards are. What's a memo going to do for me?" This is the same guy, by the way, who wouldn't give me a driver in Kuwait because he didn't believe in the mission, who's now replaced Pat Kennedy. He doesn't give a shit about me. And he's like, "I don't care."

So, I email Pat Kennedy. I say, "Pat, Richard Jones won't write me an EER and I'm not quite sure what to do. I'm at wit's end. I'm tired. I'm exhausted." I don't know, it must've been a day or two later, I get back a fully written EER. Pat Kennedy is the rater. Maura Harty is the reviewer. The review board is waived. He says, "There's your EER." And it's a great EER. He called Maura and said, "Maura, you gotta do the review," and bam, I had an EER. And again, this is where Pat—he has his flaws—but when the chips came down, he took care of people. He understood that for a Foreign Service Officer, you need an EER. You have to have one EER a year, so that when you go in front of the boards, you're normal.

Q: Just to explain for anyone doing this, we're—unlike civil service, we're an upper out. If you don't—we were rated and at a certain point, either you're promoted, or you're selected out of the Service. I mean, you've got so many paths, but it's extremely important. It's not a matter of ego. It's a matter of your profession.

PAYNE: Critical. And here I'm thinking, "Oh my goodness, I'm going to walk away from this all and not even have an evaluation." But no, Pat wrote it. It's one of the best evaluations I've ever received. And so, that made me feel better.

And then, leaving. Here's where I've learned that soldiers freak out their last day at war, their last day on the battlefield. I freaked out my last day on the battlefield cause I'm thought, "I'm going to die today. I'm gonna die." And my friend Wally, who worked for a private security company, he agreed that he would put together a team to escort me to the airport because by then, it is so dangerous, that airport road. He's like, "You are not going with your little Ford and your driver. We're going to escort you to the airport." And he goes, "Meet me in my office at this time." I get to his office, he says, "Beth, I'm so sorry to tell you this, but they have found an unexploded device at the airport road and we cannot leave for the airport."

And I'm like, "No, we have to leave for the airport."

He goes, "Beth, we can't leave."

I said, "You have to." And I'm freaking out. He's calming me down. And I'm saying, "If I don't leave today, I'm going to die. If I don't get out of this country today, I'm going to die. If anything changes, I'm going to die." Luckily, he was calming me down. By the way, I gave him the actual flag that flew in the Office of the US Consul the whole 10 months, with a certificate signed by CA Assistant Secretary Maura Harty, thanking them for what they did for us. He has the flag that flew the whole 10 months. He calmed me down and he got me to the airport safely. I got on that plane and I was so thankful I didn't die. As we're taking off with our corkscrew take off—which is not as scary as the landing—and I'm finally out of Iraqi airspace, I thought, "I survived. I didn't die. I can't believe I didn't die."

And then, a few days later my best friend dies and I go, "He must've died instead of me. The world—whatever the world does, he gave his life so that I could survive." There was a point at which I thought I was going to die in Iraq. My dad thought I was going to die in Iraq. He had a premonition that I wasn't going to get back, that I wasn't going to get out of Iraq. And so, that was just like such a relief to know that I lived, I survived Iraq.

Q: Today is the 10th of May 2019 with Beth Payne. Where are we?

PAYNE: I just left Iraq. My next post is Dakar, Senegal. What's interesting is that while I was in Iraq was when I had to bid on my next post. The Assistant Secretary of State, Maura Harty, basically said I could have any consular job at the FS-2 level that I wanted that was on the list. I could choose whatever I wanted. I had three priorities for my next assignment. I wanted to get my 3/3 in French because I needed that to cross the senior threshold someday, I wanted to work for an ambassador I liked -- Richard Roth was the ambassador and he was my DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] in Israel. I really enjoyed working with him. And, I wanted to kayak, because I was an avid kayaker. That whole year in Iraq, I wanted to get back to my hobby. The only post on the list that met these three priorities was Senegal, was Dakar. Later, Maura told me how disappointed she was because she wanted it to be obvious that I was being rewarded for serving in Iraq and

here I go to Senegal, which for many people is not perceived as a reward. And she said, "I understand why you wanted it, but it wasn't obvious to anybody this was a reward."

Q: You were in Senegal from when to when?

PAYNE: I then was in Senegal from 2004 to 2007. I was the consular section chief.

Q: And what was the situation in Senegal, at the time?

PAYNE: Oh, very quiet. Very normal. I went to FSI [Foreign Service Institute] to study French. I was the first language student of hundreds that they would eventually see coming out of a dangerous post with post-traumatic stress disorder, low resilience, and I couldn't study French to save my life. I had no memory. I was irritable. I couldn't sleep. I was getting maybe three to four hours a night of sleep. And the worst thing you could ever do is say, "Here study a language." I was miserable. I probably drove my teachers crazy. They were very generous and kind to me.

Q: Had been any studies about this or not?

PAYNE: Not at the time. Remember, I was one of the first long-term assignees to Iraq. In fact, I was the first. I was the first State Department person assigned more than 90 days to Iraq. So, no one was really paying any attention at all. There was a little bit of thought in the Leadership School and Transition Center. They interviewed me. They were trying to figure out how to better prepare the people going, but for me there was basically nothing. And what ended up happening was I did not get my 3/3 in French. I just got on a plane and went to Senegal. It was torturous. It was very hard. The other sad thing was, I learned as I went to pack my HHE [Household Effects], that the State Department considers a kayak to be a boat and they don't ship boats, so they wouldn't ship my kayak. And so, I pursued it all through the bureaucracy, but ended up paying for that out of my own pocket, sort of reasoning that, "Well, that's from danger pay." Because by then, I was getting danger pay. During my first six months in Iraq I wasn't getting danger pay but eventually I got danger pay. So, imagine: I was not getting danger pay when I got rocketed. But anyway, it didn't matter because I did get danger pay. I said, "Let me use that to pay for the kayak to get shipped." Because that was one of the reasons why I chose Senegal and so, to not have my kayak would've been terrible. So, I get to Senegal. At that time, I have to tell you, it was the best post for me, because there was really nothing going on in Senegal at the time.

Q: It's been sort of the regional spot.

PAYNE: Right. There are a lot of regional officers there.

Q: So, one reason why it's that way is because it's very French, it's very nice. It's not overly challenging for somebody.

PAYNE: It's not a hard place. At that time, there was no terrorism threat at all. Senegalese are the loveliest, nicest people. There's no significant US interest in Senegal. I mean, we were always looking for Muslims who weren't anti-American and they were incredibly pro-American. They were a more moderate strain of Islam. A poor country that depended on donors. But we had the Millennium Challenge Corporation working there. They were easy to give money to because they were appreciative. They weren't horribly corrupt. They did something with the money we gave them. They were easy to work with.

Q: How was their relationship with the French at that time?

PAYNE: Senegal had a great relationship with the French. They were one of the French colonies that actually had more rights in France than other French colonies in Africa.. There was a big French cultural center there. The French ambassador was very well respected. There were times when Ambassador Roth and the French ambassador would have some tension, but not like our ambassador to Israel and the French ambassador in Israel. They had a terrible relationship. But in Senegal we had a good relationship with the French. It was a very easy posting. For me it was great.

Q: Good bread?

PAYNE: Oh, amazing bread. Because you had that French influence. Great food. We were on the ocean. One of the nicest things that the management section did for me—because remember, I'm coming out of this horrific, horrific year in Iraq—and in my housing request, they always send you a survey and you say what you want in house. I said, "Please, I've lived in a windowless room for one year. Please, give me a place that has sunlight." And they gave me the most beautiful apartment overlooking the ocean. When I walked into that apartment, it was like I was looking at a Matisse painting. It was stunning. It was so good for me because I just had this beautiful apartment walking distance from the embassy. I ran a small consular section with good people in it that wasn't overwhelming. It wasn't too hard.

Q: I wouldn't think you would get an awful lot of Senegalese influence in the state.

PAYNE: It wasn't hard. It was not a hard—we had a few issues—we had a teenager jump off a building. That was terrible. But we had nothing that was overwhelmingly hard. I didn't officially cover the region, but I mentored a lot of the single consular officers at different—

Q: You might point out the problem at many posts in Africa consular-wise.

PAYNE: Oh, they had first tour officers all alone running the consular section.

Q: And often it turns out that their ambassador and all, haven't really done consular work. They're on their own.

PAYNE: Right. It was a challenge. I would informally mentor them. In fact, sometimes I would even send my officers to fill in when they went on vacation. And even when there was an evacuation out of Guinea Conakry, I flew down and managed that evacuation for them, because you could see no one was—they were all new and they didn't know what to do. And I said, "Would you like me to come down and help you?" I had a nice relationship with the region. I did immigrant visas for the region. I had also work-related reasons to be in touch with them.

Q: What kind of immigrant visas? I can't imagine there'd be many.

PAYNE: Senegalese love to love to migrate, but not overwhelming. I mean, it's not like India or Mexico. In fact, we started to crack down on fraud, which reduced the numbers even more. We had a very manageable workload. We did non-immigrant visas for Senegalese. We did immigrant visas for many countries in the region. We did ACS [American Citizen Services]. We had the full range of consular services. I had several first and second tour officers working for me. It was a very manageable consular section. I even hosted the consular leadership development conference one year because I had the time. I had the ability to do extra work and wasn't crushed by the workload.

Q: I have a friend who going back there's as a treasury representative.

PAYNE: We had lots of other agencies that had their regional postings in Senegal. What was challenging for me was I had PTSD. For my first two years I couldn't understand why I wasn't sleeping, why I was more irritable, quicker to anger, and not building relationships the way I had in the past. I wasn't getting close to Senegalese the way I'd gotten close to Rwandans and Israelis. I kept thinking, "Okay, this is going to pass. This is going to get better." But it never got better. So, two years into the tour, luckily, I served on the promotion boards, so, I was back in DC for quite some time, and I took the opportunity to go to a wellness facility.

One of the doctors there, I did some hypnotic thing with him and he says, "You know, you have post-traumatic stress disorder and you really need to see somebody, you're not going to recover from this unless you see a professional."

And so, then, while I was on the boards, I saw a therapist in the area. I went to a private social worker therapist and got therapy for my PTSD. It was perfect. I was here for a long time because of the boards and I got therapy. And then I realized, "This happened. I suffered and I needed to get better. I needed to work at getting better."

Q: Can you explain for a layman what they do for therapy for this?

PAYNE: There are lots of different options. What I chose was cognitive behavioral therapy, which is more about learning certain skills and tools that change the way you think. There are other forms of therapy, it depends on how chronic and how severe the

post-traumatic stress disorder is. Some people take medication. Some people do a rapid eye movement therapy. I like cognitive behavioral therapy. No medication. She would give me exercises to do that I would do and then come back and talk—

Q: Can you give some examples?

PAYNE: So, one good example was recognizing that when I had to turn back and risk my life in order to help Paula Weikle, I had to suppress a part of me. You could call it a child, you can call it emotion, but I had to suppress it. In order to recover, I had to actively bring it back. I used to wear a ring and the sole purpose of that ring was to remind myself to be emotional. And so, I would look at that ring and say, "Okay, bring your emotions back up"—

Q: How do you do that?

PAYNE: —until they did. It was just that reminder, "Hey, it's okay to laugh. It's okay to cry. It's okay to have fun. It's okay to get close to people." Maybe you're with your friend and my instinct is to be withdrawn. And then, I would look at that ring and say, "Don't withdraw. Come on, join, get in, get in the group." And then, I would get in. So, that very simple technique, very useful, incredibly effective.

Q: Did you find yourself changing?

PAYNE: Yeah. I actually improved very quickly. I responded very well to therapy. I very rapidly recovered. I mean, rapidly is relative, you know. Some of my immediate symptoms, like lack of sleep, went away. And so, I started sleeping better. I became less irritable. It was easier for me to become close with people. And then, here's the irony. So, then I start telling everybody, "I have PTSD."

At the embassy, nobody knew the difference. They couldn't see a behavior change because they didn't know me before. But the people close to me who saw the behavior change were reluctant to say anything. This was my lesson, I've realized if we don't talk about this, people suffer in silence. I wrote for the Foreign Service Journal, "Living with Iraq," about having PTSD and what I've done about it, because no one was talking about it at the time. That kind of sparked a few people to try to do more about the returnees coming out of Iraq and Afghanistan. And that's when the High Stress Assignment Outbrief started. And there were some congressional hearings on PTSD. That was 2006 when you started to see some attention. And part of that was my article was the first one to go public and say, "Guys, you know, for two years I suffered."

Q: You mentioned another treatment: rapid eye movement?

PAYNE: I don't know much about it. I just know from talking to other people who've had it. It's just a technique. I'm not sure—I can't explain it to you, because I've never done it. It seems to have some success with post-traumatic stress disorder. By now, it's a huge

deal with both State and the military. The military is pouring millions and millions of dollars into post-traumatic stress disorder treatment because we've been at war now for how long? 15 years. There are so many soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder, but there are also State Department professionals with PTSD. This is one of my frustrations with our medical bureau, because they always seem to want to downplay the number of Foreign Service personnel with post-traumatic stress disorder. It's like they don't want to see that it's happening. But even if you've not been diagnosed, you might have low resilience and you're not as effective as you could have been. You ask the language teachers, they see it a lot. They saw me. They see students struggling ever since Iraq and Afghanistan that they never saw before. So, anecdotally you see that there are issues, but administratively—I mean they did create a special group in Med that helps people assigned to dangerous posts. That's very good. And that was at one point even providing therapy, which was great, but the larger picture would rather just not see it.

Q: So, life in Senegal. What'd you do?

PAYNE: I kayaked, which was great. I hooked up with a member of the Senegalese kayak team and we would go kayaking together. It was fabulous.

Q: Where would you kayak? Was it the ocean?

PAYNE: It's an ocean kayak. It was a beautiful ocean kayak. And I lived just up the hill from the ocean, so, I could roll my kayak down the hill and put it in the water. I didn't even have to put it on my car. I spent a lot of time in the ocean, kayaking. I traveled a little bit around the country, because I've always liked to explore. I had some very dear friends who are friends to this day where we would go out to eat. I mean, Senegal's not an exciting country, but it's a nice country. It's a nice place to live. I enjoyed Senegal. There is nothing significant there. Unlike other postings, Senegal was just a nice place to be. I did almost get PNGed [declared "persona non grata"] though, because I refused a visa for the daughter of the Minister of Foreign Affair's second or third wife. They have multiple wives. I believed the daughter of the third wife was not coming back to Senegal. He got so angry that he threatened to PNG me. But we held the line, we never gave the visa.

Q: You might explain what PNG is.

PAYNE: Thrown out of the country. Declared "persona non grata." Basically, the government is always welcome to declare any of us posted "persona non grata" and give us three days to leave the country. That was a threat. But you know you have that always.

Q: Did you have traveling Lebanese or others who were visa shopping?

PAYNE: We had a lot of Lebanese. So, I did a little experiment because I had time. I'd served in all these high threat places with terrorism. We had a huge Lebanese community living into Dakar for a long time. They were a well-established Lebanese community. There is no question that a percentage of them supported Hezbollah. I said, "I'm going to

do an extra interview with every Lebanese applicant and delve into their background and try to see if through interviewing I could identify Hezbollah supporters." And I couldn't. There was no way to identify Hezbollah members without intelligence. There was no way a consular officer could interview these guys and, in any way, detect the terrorist. They were well established business people. They were all returning to Senegal. None of them ever stayed illegally in the States. It helped me realize the value of the intelligence arm of the government. Without intelligence, you don't know. A consular officer is never going to detect a terrorist.

Q: In an interview wouldn't they be prepped to give you—

PAYNE: It didn't matter. There was no way—there was nothing in the answers and I would spend like 20 minutes with them. There was nothing. But it was a good experiment, because it helped me see that when we focus on the interview—the interview is to determine if you're going to overstay your visa or if you are an intending immigrant. But you can't use an interview to detect a terrorist. If you think you're interviewing all these people to weed out the terrorists, forget it. That's what name checks are for. That's what intelligence is for.

Q: Were there any significant developments while you were there?

PAYNE: No. Senegal is an interesting democracy because there are elections that are free and fair, but also, you have powerful centers. There was an election while I was there. And that was quite fascinating to be election observers and to monitor the election. But what was very interesting is that the new prime minister had a green card and his children were born in the United States. And so, when the children needed new passports, we agreed that I would go to his office and accept the passport applications from him and his wife for the kids, so that he wouldn't have to come to the embassy.

Q: But the kids wouldn't need a passport.

PAYNE: This is the reality of Africa. If your kids were American, you made sure they had valid passports at all times, because you never knew what was going to happen. And so, this is the prime minister of the country, making sure that his kids had valid US passports, just in case. And then, what was so fascinating—I won't tell you who it was—is that he then asks me, "Is there any way in the future, when I'm not prime minister anymore, that I can get my green card back?" And I said, "No, it's done. You lost it. Someday, your children could file for you to immigrate again, but you won't have your old green card." But this shows how—here's the man who's just won election to be prime minister of a pretty major African country, and it matters to him that he has the ability to travel to the States.

Q: Was there any problem there with Gaddafi and all?

PAYNE: No, nothing. We had very little rumblings of terrorism in Mauritania above us. Islam in the Maghreb, that then morphed into whatever, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb, but only—I mean, not in Senegal. Senegal was incredibly peaceful.

Q: How was the social life?

PAYNE: Because I had PTSD, I wasn't socializing as much as I normally would, but I had good close friends and enough to do to keep you busy. It was not like Israel, not Tel Aviv. It's not a city that's exciting. But for me, at the time, it was a nice city. It was a nice, relaxing, easy city.

Q: Just on the beach with your kayak. Kayaking, was it still dangerous? What if a big wave—

PAYNE: Yeah. Ocean kayaking is not the safest hobby. It's okay in rivers, but we would go out into the ocean. I had learned to roll. You can roll a kayak. You don't do the big waves until you know how to roll, so that if you get flipped over, you can roll back up. But it wasn't deadly dangerous. I also was diving, but I was afraid of diving after Iraq. With the PTSD I would use my air up too quickly. I was too anxious and did not enjoy diving. But I still enjoyed kayaking because while it had some risk, it wasn't nearly as risky as diving. I stopped diving cause the anxiety would just go through my air too fast.

Q: How were your relations with the ambassador?

PAYNE: Great. We got along great. And then, Janice Jacobs came after him and she's great. And Rob Jackson was my DCM and he's an amazing man. He's one of—I don't know if anybody realizes this, but we had an inspection by the office of Inspector General. They nominated him for DCM of the year, because the inspection was so positive. Imagine. We had a very good country team. We had a group of people that enjoyed each other. We had very little conflict. We had the DCM of the year as our DCM, who went on to be an amazing ambassador. A great guy.

Q: So, what were you thinking about next?

PAYNE: Here I was, I'm recovering from post-traumatic stress disorder. I'm working through intellectually what happened in Iraq. I say, "I want to go to the National War College because that would give me an opportunity to sort of process all of this," and very fortunately got accepted. Very fortunately, because George Staples was the DG—remember, I worked for him in Rwanda—and he didn't like the old way they selected people for the National War College, which was based on these points and made no sense. By then, I had made FS-1, I got promoted in Senegal to FS-1. When Staples saw the list they gave him, and he said, "No one here has served in Iraq or Afghanistan." So, he threw the list out, and he pulled the files. That year he selected a lot of people who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan, like me. I benefited from him saying, "I want to send State Department officers who understand." I spent that year 2007-8 at the War College,

which was great. What I found quite interesting was how the military really respected my combat experience. I had seen more combat than many—not the marines. There was a certain number who had seen quite significant combat, but a lot that didn't. And so, they were kind of shocked that here's a State Department person who was smack dab in the middle of everything. They didn't think about that.

Q: Did you share—something that I came away with from our last interview was how people in the State Department, particularly those in Iraq—State Department didn't support this, military did. It was like two different policies.

PAYNE: We were able to talk it all through.

Q: Did you? I would imagine you would be an excellent resource.

PAYNE: And you know, having other people who also served in Iraq and some at the same time I was—it was really healthy for us to talk through it all and to understand it and to explore some of the issues that we had witnessed. It also made us feel validated because all of us thought that, that year was crazy. There was no one in my War College class that experienced that one year of occupation, who said, "Wow, that was done so well." They're all like, "What went wrong? What's going on?" So, it was very healthy for us to have this opportunity and freedom to discuss it.

Q: To be in a setting which is all part of the structure that has to deal with going into a country and occupying and all that. They call it nation building.

PAYNE: Yeah. So, it was very healthy for me. I think that's when I finally fully recovered, because I just had this time when I could process and people to process it with. Made some very close friends. It was a really wonderful year. I really recommend that diplomats go to the War College.

Q: What was your impression of the officers?

PAYNE: Phenomenal. Exceptional. Really, some of the smartest people I've ever met were colonels in the military as fellow students. It really opened my eyes to really seeing the quality of officers we have in the armed forces.

Q: They have a remarkable system and when you consider how many people are in it. And those who rise up to the colonel level, they've gone through a lot.

PAYNE: Yeah. And this was the cream of the crop selected for the War College. Many of them had combat experience. But I was really impressed with the quality of my fellow students.

Q: Some of the people I've talked to have mentioned that they were particularly impressed by Marine officers, because they have a rather broad view of things. Where the

other armed services were somewhat limited. But the Marines have to be ready for about anything.

PAYNE: The Marines were remarkable. I'll never forget my one colleague got his PhD from Yale. You know, here he is, a Marine colonel. He was just amazing. You would sit in these seminars with these guys and they were impressive. We read a lot. So, you really got a sense of someone's thoughtfulness and how they processed information. And man, some of them just blew me away. It really impressed me with the thoughtfulness and the quality of the men and women that we have in our armed forces at senior levels, at officer levels. Very different than what I saw in Iraq because I was seeing a different group of military in Baghdad than I saw at the War College.

Q: Where did you want to go after that?

PAYNE: After that, I went to be principal officer in Calcutta, India, in East India, which was my first choice. I was so thrilled that I got it. I went for three years. I extended to a third year to be consul general in Calcutta.

Q: Calcutta, it's spelled differently now, right? Pronounced the same?

PAYNE: It's pronounced differently too. So, the British version is Calcutta, but then, after independence, years later, they changed it to Kolkata. So, C. A. L. C. U. T. T. A. is the old, and K. O. L. K. A. T. A. is the new. So, now it's Kolkata, but many people still call it Calcutta. Half of the people living in Calcutta still call it Calcutta. Even the names of streets—they changed all the names of the streets from the colonial names, and half the people still refer to streets by the old colonial name and half refer by the new name. We were on Ho Chi Minh Street, because there was an elected communist government of West Bengal and they changed it years ago to Ho Chi Minh during the Vietnam War to annoy us. We were on Ho Chi Minh Street, which I used to laugh with the communists, because I don't really care.

Q: Let's talk first about the consul general itself and then, we'll talk about the situation there. So, what's the consul general?

PAYNE: Part of me loved the role of consul general because you're basically a combination of a mini-ambassador, DCM. You're running your own consular district. You have a lot of independence and freedom. You still have to make sure you're part of the bigger country mission. I reported to the DCM at the embassy. I still made sure I understood embassy policies and directives. But I had an enormous amount of freedom in that part of India. I had 300 million people in my consular district. The population of my consular district was the size of the United States. I had a very healthy travel budget. I was expected to travel. I traveled all over Eastern India, which was spectacular. For someone like me who was a travel buff, India was an explosion of new cultures, new languages, new food, new ways of living. It's the most diverse part of the world I have

ever seen. And as consul general, I got to see all of it. It was amazing. It was quite, quite remarkable.

It was a small consulate with not that many Americans, but lots of Indian staff. You are a celebrity. So, this was my first experience with celebrity status. I was a celebrity. I was in the newspaper all the time. I learned how to use my celebrity status to promote US interests. You want to stay off what they call page three, which is the gossip page and be on the front page promoting American values and American business. I got very skilled at that. I learned a lot about how to get on page one, which I could now teach a class, I think, on how—

Q: Could you give an example?

PAYNE: So, here's a great example. Luckily, I became very close friends with the editor of the largest English language newspaper in the region and also, then became friends with his photographer. So, here's what I learned. He wants to sell newspapers. So, every day he's looking at what photographs, what articles that his reporters and his photographers have sent up. What's going to sell a newspaper? What you put above the fold on the front page is what would sell that newspaper. The photographer wants his picture chosen over all of the rest. The reporter wants his or her article chosen above all the rest. I want to be above the fold because it shows my influence and it promotes my message. I learned as a woman to wear a very colorful dress, because a photograph of a woman with a bright outfit sells more newspapers. Better yet, if you're eye level with a child, people love it. I got very good at giving the photographer—who became a very good friend—his shot. I learned from him. I'd say, "What are you looking for? What do you want?" If we're at an event, I gave him his shot, and then, he would present it, and the editor would say, "Great, that's going to sell newspapers." And then, I'm on the front page of the paper.

I started to have a very unified message. I stopped doing everything everyone invited me to and said, "If you want me to come do a keynote, it has to be on gender equality. If you want me to speak at your university, it has to be on gender equality. If you want me to come to your company? It has to be on gender equality." Every speech I would promote this message of gender equality.

Q: How did you see the role of women in India?

PAYNE: Very challenging because in public space women were mistreated horribly. And even in companies. For example, in an IT company, in West Bengal, the state law prohibited women from working the night shift. And so, I would talk to the company heads and I'd say, "Look, you're losing half your competent staff."

"Well, we're afraid they're going to get hurt."

I said, "Then provide protection, but don't prohibit them from working." There was a lot of discrimination against women at the time in India, even though women politicians did better than our women politicians.

Q: Were you there at the time when they had this horrible thing: a woman was raped on a bus?

PAYNE: This happened all the time. This was a constant in India. Women in public space were often harassed. Rich women were never in public space. The rich were isolated. A rich woman wouldn't walk. A rich woman had her own world. The lower class, the lower cast, you were really targeted. It's why India has women only sections on a bus or women only carriages in a train. Because if you were taking the metro, for example, you were going to get harassed if you were a woman.

Q: When you speak of harassed, it was not just talk?

PAYNE: Oh, no. Touched and groped and hurt. If you went out at night and in an isolated area, you were probably going to get raped. It was, "You don't belong in public space." It's very dangerous for all but the most powerful women, even though they have women deities, and they have a history of powerful women. If you're a poor—so, for example, a woman could not live by herself in Calcutta. Did you know that? Even a wealthy woman could not rent an apartment and live alone. No one would rent her apartment. If you were a single woman and you couldn't live with family, if you were lucky, you found a room in a home run for women. Six or seven women would live together in a house. The idea of a woman living alone was foreign, even if you could afford to buy the place. Women don't live alone. You live with your family, either your husband or your father.

Q: How about you? I mean, obviously an American and in the real world, you're a powerful figure. But still.

PAYNE: My power overcame discrimination. I'll give you a great example. I'm in Bihar and I'm having dinner at a very senior politicians' home. After dinner, the men go one way and the women go the other way, which always happens. And I stood up and said, "Oh, come on women, we're going to go join the men." And then, they said, "Okay," because I was powerful enough that the men had to adapt to me. Also, many men in Kolkata started drinking red wine because I drank red wine, even though they're all whiskey drinkers. But I did not say, "Okay, I have to become a whiskey drinker." I said, "Well, I like red wine." All of a sudden, all the men are drinking red wine. I realized, "I now have power that I can use to help the case of women, to help them see."

I'll give you another great story. So, I had a house manager and we were looking for a new employee. We had interviewed several. And I said, "Which one do you prefer?" And he selected the man who had no prior experience at all over a woman who had years of

prior experience. So, I said, "You know, she has way more work experience. Why didn't you select her?"

"Well, she's unreliable."

I said, "Really? You know, she has good references and he does not have references."

"She's unreliable."

I said, "I don't understand. Tell me what in your mind is making you say she's unreliable," and he finally gets frustrated.

He looks at me, he goes, "Because she's a girl."

And I looked at him and I said, "Do you realize that I'm a girl?"

He just was stunned. Of course, we hired the woman. But there was also a reaction to me, "Oh my, right, you're a girl." Because I was the Consul General, he forgot that he was talking to a woman. But this happened a lot. My drivers would say, "A woman can't drive. We can't hire a woman driver."

And I would say, "Wait a minute, women can drive. I drive. So, if you have a woman applicant who is a good driver, you hire her." This happened constantly.

Q: Did you find that women in various positions would sort of haul you in to preach the doctrine?

PAYNE: Women did not. Women were very appreciative of what I was doing. They were like, "Oh, thank you." Because I had the power to do it. PricewaterhouseCoopers would let me speak to their whole staff about gender equality because I was the Consul General. They wanted the Consul General to come to PricewaterhouseCoopers, so they can have a picture with the Consul General. Indians love to be close to someone with power. And so, the deal was, "Yeah, you can have the picture with me if I get to talk about gender equality." It was great. Here's another perfect example. I became very close with the chairman of Coal India. We were visiting one of his coal facilities and everybody coming up to me were men. And I finally turned to him and I said, "Do you have any women that work here?"

And he goes, "Wait a minute." So, he found a woman. They had a woman who drove one of their large mining machines, which was pretty exceptional. He found her and he brought her up. She got to sit next to the US Consul General and we talked about her life. And after that, he implemented an annual award for the most effective woman working for Coal India. Because this opened his eyes. He had never thought to ask. And once you ask, he realized, "Wait a minute, I do have these amazing women that work for me. I should be celebrating them." It was great.

Q: You're an example of what I've experienced, and I've seen through interviews, but sort of the American ability—and not using it in a bad term, but to meddle. I mean, if we see something that's wrong, even if it's not our culture and all that, we can't help it. We try in our own way to do something about it. And often it's effective. Sometimes, we get—like getting into Iraq—we go off and do the wrong thing, but essentially, we can't keep—

PAYNE: The question is how do you do it? If you do it in a non-coercive way, it can be very influential. But if I had gone in and started to lecture them or say, "You know what, we're not going to do business with you if you don't." If I started to preach to them, I don't think it would have gone over well, but it was much gentler. It was a soft—this is diplomacy. This is how you promote US values. Because remember, every country wants to promote its values and equality is a value of ours. Gender and racial equality are one of our core values, which we seem to forget today, but it is a core value of America. And luckily, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was promoting gender equality globally. So, I was fitting right into what the State Department's priorities were. But you have to do it in a way that doesn't offend them.

Q: So, tell me, what was the situation in your consular district politically and economically?

PAYNE: I was in India the best time ever. India was opening up because we had just signed the nuclear deal with India [U.S.–India Civil Nuclear Agreement, 2005]. That was a huge deal. We were becoming much closer with India. They had a growing middle class that was a really, really important economic market for us. So, what I was also seeing was all this market potential. I would work closely with our foreign commercial officer to help sell American goods and services to India. For example, we promoted Subway franchises. We sold over a billion dollars' worth of coal equipment and maintenance. We looked at roads and airports for possible markets. GE [General Electric] sold a very important gas engine product. I helped to get this deal with Coal India, it took several years of working with them. When they finally signed the contract with a company in Indiana—there are hundreds of people working in Indiana today because I helped beat the Chinese competitor to sell Coal India mining equipment and a 10-year maintenance contract worth over a billion dollars. I mean, that's the money that was at stake there. And we had competitors. I used to joke with the Chinese. They were cheaper, faster and not as good. We were expensive. It took longer, but we lasted. We were quality. And so, I needed to convince Indians to buy more expensive, slower, better quality equipment than what they could buy from the Chinese. I used to see the Chinese Consul General. We would talk. He would even have us over for dinner. He was my biggest economic competitor.

Other things were problematic. Clean energy was a huge deal for India, only to realize that, while yes, I'm promoting some American companies selling solar equipment, everything's being manufactured in China. That wasn't having the impact on the US economy that selling coal equipment did. The other thing that was problematic is

outsourcing. We also had the American companies based in Calcutta that I'm supposed to support—we have the American Chamber of Commerce—that are drawing jobs from the US because they're outsourcing everything: call centers, computer assisted design, law, legal work. There's a law firm in Calcutta that does research and writes motions for lawyers based in the US. I saw every type of outsourcing you can ever imagine.

Q: At one point, we were looking to getting Indians transcribed. It didn't work out, but—

PAYNE: It was hard for me because I realized, "Okay, US interest was to promote stronger economic ties between India and the United States." But I also felt guilty, "Okay, but those economic ties are sucking jobs out of the United States." Americans would love that I was selling $1 billion worth of coal equipment but not that I was helping American companies transfer jobs from the US in India. The coal area was controversial because Obama was promoting clean energy and really didn't want to focus on coal. We had to convince EXIM Bank [Export-Import Bank of the United States] to finance the Coal India because at one point they wouldn't finance coal-related exports. We wrote cables and lobbied them and said, "Here's why you should finance coal exports. I know coal is not clean, but they're going to buy it from the Chinese. We're talking jobs for Americans here." There was a plant in Indiana that would have closed down if they wouldn't have gotten this contract. We convinced EXIM. I used to get frustrated because there was a little disconnect in the Obama administration between liberal ideals and what's in the economic interest of the United States. The conflict came up again when Obama visited India. He wanted a photo op that involved both a sale of an American product and clean energy. But the problem is every clean energy product was made in China. All of the equipment that was made in America was either gas or coal. So, he scrapped it. He didn't do it. I learned a lot about coal. I'm a liberal, but I have a deep respect for the role that coal has played in the economic health of a nation. And it is what it is.

Q: Did you get involved pushing American cigarettes?

PAYNE: No. Fortunately, I did not. I'm glad.

Q: Your area includes—is Bengal?

PAYNE: West Bengal was the state that Calcutta is based in. I covered Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa [now Odisha], Sikkim, Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram, and the Andaman Islands. I ended up giving the Andaman Islands to our consulate in Chennai. One of our problems was that Calcutta used to be a huge center of spy activity in the ancient, ancient days. The Indian government, while getting closer with us, was still suspicious of us. They would not approve any additional positions at the consulate. SI had one pol. econ. officer, and we had democracy breaking out, we had markets opening up, and we had work. There was no way we could keep up. We could not expand. The State Department approved positions that the Indian government would not approve. People were shocked that I convinced the ambassador to move the Andaman

Islands can go to Chennai. Bihar went to Delhi, but then they gave it back later. Orissa went to Hyderabad because they did not have a very large consular district. We had 300 million people in our consular district. States like Orissa were really growing and becoming more important. They were building one of the deepest seaports in India. You know the contracts when it comes to building a seaport, the potential for US export with a seaport? They just managed this latest typhoon that could have killed thousands and only killed dozens because they're that competent now. They were becoming less corrupt and more attentive. Also, the state of Bihar, which used to be the worst state, was getting roads and electricity and had a chief minister who was not that corrupt. It was remarkable.

And West Bengal was busy. Communists were elected to office in West Bengal for over 30 years, and I was there for the election of the new chief minister. The communists were anti-American, but I would meet with them from time to time. I had relationships with members of the Communist Party. They're being challenged by a populist, a woman, Mamata Banerjee, who was getting farmers to protest against the communist government, because the communist government is rapidly industrializing and taking farmland away from farmers. It's ironic that the communists were seizing land from farmers and giving it to companies to build factories. They gave land to Tata [Group] to build a huge car factory and their nemesis is fomenting revolution on the part of the farmers where they at one point blocked a major highway. Tata pulled out of the plant as a result. There were protests and uprisings all of the time. We also had Maoists, by the way, who were fighting. We're talking real life Maoists, who would attack the government. I went to a groundbreaking ceremony of a steel plant and two cars in front of me, the Maoists blew up the car. I'm two cars behind. This was under the communists. So, the Maoists were way more extreme than the Communist Party of India (Marxist.)

What is the US interest? We wanted the communists to be defeated. It was in our interest that there is not a democratically elected communist party in India. And so, the defeat of the party was important. How would we do that? How would we influence the outcome? Well, one of the things that we wanted to do was remove the idea that Americans are the boogeyman. The communists would use America as the boogeyman and convince people to vote communists because of these bad Americans. They were really active in the Muslim community. About 30% of West Bengal are Muslim. We conducted a major Muslim outreach effort to show Muslims that America could be trusted, that we were not the boogeyman, that we weren't as bad as they thought. One of the Party members actually told me that hurt them. It hurt their numbers. They did not get as much of the Muslim vote. It also helped that Mamata Banerjee also did a great job reaching out to the Muslims. She really won over the Muslim vote. But the communists could not use Americans anymore as a boogeyman. She won the election, which was a big deal. Secretary Clinton actually visited Kolkata after I left and met with Mamata, because she was an example of these independent politicians in India that were not [the National] Congress and were not communist and were not BJP [Bharatiya Janata Party]. She wasn't necessarily behind [Narendra] Modi [Prime Minister of India] either. These were independent politicians. It was exciting. It was fascinating to be there then. One of the

things that could have damaged this effort was WikiLeaks, which happened while I was in Calcutta.

Q: Explain what WikiLeaks is.

PAYNE: This was when Chelsea Manning released the cables. There were thousands and thousands of classified cables released. And what was interesting is that WikiLeaks would give collections of cables to various news outlets. They didn't put all of them on their website. One of our jobs was to review all the classified cables that we had sent to get an idea of what was going to go public. There was one newspaper that every day was releasing cables. I had met with Mamata Banerjee discreetly at a social event and had a long conversation with her. She told me things that if released to the public probably would have hurt her chances to win. I was sure that we had written a cable on it. We looked and looked for that cable. We could not find that cable, only to realize that the political officer who I had given my notes to and said, "Please could write this up," forgot. And I had forgotten. But thank goodness we never sent that cable because it would have disrupted the elections. It would have hurt her if there had been a cable from me saying what I said. I was so relieved. I thought, "Oh my goodness, that's the best luck ever, that that cable was never written."

On the other hand, I had good contacts, who I had to meet with and say, "I wrote a cable with your name in it. Here's what it said. I don't know if it's going to get leaked, but I want to give you a heads up. What can I do?" And it was horrible. It was awful because we have contacts with whom we become friends. We might write a cable about what our friend told us last night over a beer. So, they're a friend, but they're not. I mean, you're writing a cable. So, you have this very gray area where no one's your genuine friend.

Q: Well look, when we we're officials, we were reporting on these people in what we hope our objective things. And nobody's perfect.

PAYNE: Right. But now it’s public. In one case, I wrote a cable about what a news editor told me about his boss, who was influential in Bengali politics. I told him and I said, "How can I make this right for you?" He said, "Please meet with my boss and tell my boss." I went to this very powerful figure and I sat down and said, "Look, I have something I need to tell you. There is a cable that says that you said X, Y, and Z, and it might get leaked."

At first, he was upset. Then, he said, "Wow, you care what I say." He then got flattered. After he went through his stage of "Holy shit, what I said could be public." This guy has a role in India that's pretty powerful. He doesn't want the things that he says privately in the newspaper. But then, he was thought, "Wow, you care? You care what I say?" Then he was fine. But it was pretty traumatic, the WikiLeaks exposure.

Q: Well, I think a government leader in one country—we were explaining things. So, I said, "Well, you should see what our people are reporting about you."

PAYNE: Right. But you just don't want it airing in public. The nice thing though, is that people were pretty impressed with how good our writing was and how right we were. When the Indians would read the cables that came out of Calcutta, they would all say to me, "Wow, you guys are really good at what you do." Because we were, we were good. We were good at what we did.

Q: Well, how stood—you mentioned all these different provinces—are they provinces or—

PAYNE: States. So, states and territories.

Q: A lot of them are mountainous. I mean you got sort of the Alps of India. How unified was India from what you saw?

PAYNE: Mixed. When you would talk to Nagas, they would say, "I'm going to India." If you talked to people from Meghalaya, they would say, "I'm going to the mainland." So, you had differences. In Nagaland, they did not identify as closely with being Indian. They were Naga first, and they just happened to exist in a political entity called India. But it depended on their history. In Sikkim—they have always felt threatened by China because China invaded Tibet. Sikkim is Tibetan culturally, and it was a kingdom. We helped the Indians basically make sure they got it instead of the Chinese. And so, even though the Indians pretty much stole Sikkim from the monarchy, the Sikkimese appreciate that they're part of India, because they knew if they weren't, they'd be part of China. And so, they were very connected. But even so, you needed a special permit to go to Sikkim. A lot of these states you needed special permission, not just anybody could go because of the sensitivities. Arunachal Pradesh had been invaded by the Chinese in the '60s. The Chinese still claim the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese. And so, once, when the prime minister would to Arunachal Pradesh, they protested saying, "You can't go to Arunachal Pradesh. That's China. You should get a visa." It's incredibly mountainous and very sparsely populated. That was a whole different dynamic about Arunachal Pradesh and it's hard to get a permit to visit. Assam was much more assimilated. The Indians had moved in and created tea plantations and settled. There were very few Assamese, but they had an active rebellion. There was violence and conflict. They had rebels fighting in the state of Assam against the state of India.

Q: Did you take that famous railroad?

PAYNE: I did not, no. Through the "Chicken's Neck" [Siliguri Corridor]. That would have taken way too long. Flying was much easier. You also had the Gurkha movement, which wanted to not leave India but to form separate from the state of West Bengal because in Darjeeling most of the population were originally Nepalese. They didn't want to become part of Nepal. They wanted to be a separate state entity in India. And then, of course the Maoists in Orissa and Bihar and Jharkhand that were violent. They wanted to

overthrow the state of India. Their goal was to overthrow the government of India and establish a Maoist political entity.

Q: What was the relation of China to all this?

PAYNE: There was no evidence of China in any way being involved with the Maoists. We looked for that. Everybody looked for that. As much as the Indians would like to blame China, the Maoists are home-bred. China opened a consulate right before I arrived in Calcutta. They were kind of brand-new back in Calcutta and they were quite influential with the Communist Party. But what they were looking for was economic opportunity. They were looking for markets. They need to employ their population. They need money. And from a security perspective they want to make sure that India never interferes with their seizure of Tibet because Tibet is about water security. What people don't realize about Tibet is Tibet is the origin of an enormous amount of water. And that's why China has interest in Tibet. If India got too close to Tibet, they would threaten to invade Arunachal Pradesh again. You'd have these border skirmishes between China and India. They were very sensitive about the border. But it was, again, China using its power to make sure India didn't go too far in its support of Tibet.

Q: Particularly with China opening consulate there, a lot of your effort there must have been keeping an eye on what the hell they were up to.

PAYNE: Oh yeah. And they were keeping an eye on what we were up to. And the Russians were there too. They also had a new consulate in Kolkata. So, we were keeping an eye on each other.

Q: By this time, had Russian influence really gone way down?

PAYNE: Yes and no. India had always been proud of being non-aligned and of looking for what's in their interest. They're an enormously nationalistic entity as a country. While the Soviet Union dissolved, they never cut ties with Russia. They were still looking at Russian military equipment. They were looking at buying a Russian aircraft carrier. We wanted them to become closer to our military. Our interest was to have closer relationships between US and Indian military. But the Indians are very suspicious, especially in government service. So, for example, I went to school with an Indian colonel. We became very close. He was not allowed to see me while I was in India. I could see his wife. Every time I went to Delhi, I'd see his wife, but he was not allowed to talk to me. Finally, the head of the Indian military posted in Calcutta—I would meet with him regularly—I was like, "You guys, I understand why you're doing this." I said, "The Pakistani colonel can meet with anybody he wants." I said, "I went to Nepal and had dinner with the Nepalese General I studied with, but you don't let me maintain a relationship with your military person because you're afraid he's going to get too close to us." And so, at the very end he approved that he could meet me for drinks at the officers' club in Delhi, but no more. So, they were very—they're by nature, very suspicious. And so, yes, while we were doing some joint military actions, like ship visits and Andaman

Islands, they were also looking at Russia and looking at China. They don't align. They're famously non-aligned, even now.

Q: One thing I've noticed in the Foreign Service life, the Indians and the Americans have one trait in common—which is sort of amusing—we preach to each other. So, you must have found yourself—

PAYNE: Oh, all the time. And then you listen. You can learn something. But they're very a nationalistic culture. I would wear a lot of Indian silk. They loved that, because it was like, "Yeah, we make the best silks in the world. Of course, you would wear our silk." Anytime that you praised an Indian author or Indian art or Indian music, they would just love you for it, because they're a highly nationalistic country. They also focus on military threats.

Q: I mean, we're not threat.

PAYNE: Not us, but China and Pakistan are threats and we're friends with Pakistan. So, they're very conscious of our alignment with Pakistan. They perceive us as being closer to Pakistan than we are to India. That will come up a lot. When I spoke to Indians our relationship with Pakistan would come up a lot.

Q: What about Bangladesh?

PAYNE: They kind of look down on Bangladesh. What was interesting for me is, of course, they're all Bengali. I'm in West Bengal, getting to know Bengali culture. I'm also meeting lots of Bengalis who, when the partition happened, were Hindu and their families fled Bangladesh to India, but then it was Pakistan. You had a lot of Bengalis who were scarred by the partition of India and Pakistan. The partition of India and Pakistan is a huge scar that particularly affects Bengalis. Then, you have this belief that India fomented the revolution in what was then East Pakistan, in order to create the state of Bangladesh, in order to have a weaker neighbor, so that Pakistan would not be to their east. And it was interesting, because at the time there were negotiations about land. There are enclaves of India within Bangladesh and enclaves of Bangladesh within India. But the Indians would kind of look down on the Bangladeshis. There is this ranking. And of course, the religious difference of that the Bangladesh was primarily Muslim and India was Hindu. But 30% of West Bengal were Muslim. Not everybody moved.

Q: I thought that Bengali was a real cultural powerhouse.

PAYNE: Yes. Yes. This is what's fascinating. They share a language. They share food. They eat the same food, but it's the religious difference that has divided them. And the fact that many Hindus that lived in Bangladesh then moved to the Calcutta area and many Muslims who lived in the Calcutta area moved to Bangladesh. And now Bangladesh is less well-off economically. They also worry that they're sending terrorists across the border. So, there was a lot of attention paid to the border to ensure that Muslim terrorists

wouldn't come across. There was a risk of Muslim terrorism. A Muslim terrorist attacked the American Center in 2000 in Calcutta and killed policemen. There was a genuine threat of Muslim terrorism and a genuine threat of Maoist terrorism, which was uniquely Indian, had nothing to do with anybody outside of India.

Q: Did you get involved with any demonstrations about our relations with Pakistan?

PAYNE: Only when I did public outreach and people would ask. I wasn't in Delhi. I wasn't the one to talk to government officials. That that was all done in Delhi.

Q: Did you see—in Bangladesh and Pakistan, is there any residue of relationship, military or otherwise?

PAYNE: There's a little bit with Bangladesh because they're not full-blown enemies. I never got involved with Pakistan because that was not my consular district. That was totally separate. Not with China. I mean, they had as much tension with China at the border in my consular district, I think sometimes as we have sometimes in Pakistan, except Kashmir is a much worse situation. But the tensions between the Indians and the Chinese—every now and then there were border skirmishes. Nothing nearly as bad as with the Pakistanis, but very, very tense border.

Q: Let's turn to what consulars do. Visas, Americans in trouble, let's talk about these.

PAYNE: So, luckily, we did not have a huge visa workload. India is known as a visa mill, but people in East India don't travel the way people in other parts of India travel.

Q: You weren't involved with Patel motels?

PAYNE: No, that's North Indian. We were actually a pretty small consulate. We had a lot of American citizens services. But we didn't have a huge number of tourists. Eastern India is not the place most Americans go when they go to India. They'll go to North India, that's popular—or South India or Goa.

Now, we did have a case in the Andaman Islands that was fascinating. We get a call, a young Indian man. He had a gorgeous young, from Boston, American girlfriend. The Indian man reports to the local police that they are frolicking in the ocean and he's filming her. And a big sea crocodile comes out of the ocean and takes her away. But then, he dropped the camera because he was so startled. There's no evidence of this because he says he dropped the camera. And we're like, "Right?"—we don't believe him. The Indian government tells us there are no sea crocodiles in the seas around Andaman Islands. We think this guy murdered his girlfriend. She's beautiful and she's from Boston and this is going to get media attention. We send the RSO [Regional Security Officer] from Delhi and a consular officer from Chennai. And what do you know? They find the video camera. And what do you know? A sea crocodile came out of the ocean and attacked her. They finally found the sea crocodile with, of course, the half-eaten woman in it, which

was horrible. Luckily, that video never got leaked. There's a huge interest in those types of videos. I don't know if it got destroyed, eventually. It never got leaked and it never got much press. But then, we had a fight with the Indians because we put in the travel warning that there are sea crocodiles in the Andaman Islands. They went berserk and we're like, "No, sorry. You can't pretend that you don't have sea crocodiles."

Cause that's their way. "Oh, we don't want to put bad things out. We'll just let somebody get eaten by sea crocodile every now and then."

So, they got really mad at us because we were like, "We have to tell Americans that are going diving. Andaman Islands is becoming a popular resort. You have to warn them, because sea crocodiles are dangerous. They stalk human beings. They killed an American." So, something like this would come up every now and then.

Q: The bureaucracy? I mean, I got a little glimpse of the thing when I was vice council in Dhahran [Saudi Arabia] and we used to go to Bahrain and the clerks there on Bahrain—this is under British rule. But all these documents piled high.

PAYNE: I can only imagine. The seat of government of West Bengal is called the "Writer's Building" because in colonial India—Calcutta was the seat of colonial India—the bureaucrats would write documents. They were writers. And so, it's called the "Writers Building." And you go into people's offices—because we would sometimes have to check records for certain things, especially visa and consular stuff—and it's books and books and books and books and paper and paper and paper. You have never seen bureaucracy until you have visited an Indian government office. I've never seen anything like it before or since. And you'd think by now they'd have computers. They have some of the most brilliant IT professionals in the world.

Q: People go to them and get—

PAYNE: Not the government, because they also, remember they have a civil service that is actually similar to our Foreign Service. You apply to be part of the Indian Administrative Service. You come in as a junior officer. You get minor postings. You get assigned a state that becomes your specialty. You get minor postings. You work your way up. And if you're lucky, you get selected for national government. Your goal is to someday work in Delhi for the national government and not get stuck in a state. But I used to get to know all of these government servants. Some were spectacular. Some are really good. Some would get stuck. They ran the administration of all of India and they're part of this Indian administrative service. And they have bureaucracy. Oh my goodness. And they would play games with us. It took six months for my OMS [Office Management Specialist] to get a visa. The Indians were playing with us and they didn't want to give visas. The first same sex couple, oh my goodness, it took them forever to get their visa because they were very uncomfortable with the idea of a same sex couple. But they did eventually issue a via. Not a diplomatic visa, but a visa that allowed her to live there. But bureaucracy was a challenge.

Q: Did you run into or observe the marriage business? The color and—

PAYNE: Oh yeah. I love India. I love the Indian people, but they are very racist. This is what I've also learned, the core of Hinduism, the caste system, was originally color. So, they really care about your skin color. It is very hard for African Americans living in India because they care about color. When it comes to the marriage, it's still popular to indicate your skin color when you put in an announcement that you're looking for a spouse. And it is still common to have arranged marriages. In fact, the local paper had a serial story of a young woman who was looking for marriage and "Was it going to be a love marriage or was it going to be an arranged marriage?" This is targeting people in their twenties in India. So, the tension between having an arranged marriage and a love marriage is still very present.

Q: Was there any consensus on—because from what I understand of love marriages and arranged marriage is that arranged marriages tend to last longer. But I'm not sure if this is true or not.

PAYNE: It could be because the culture says you can't get divorced. They might last longer, but if you're in a culture that demands that you have an arranged marriage, you're probably are pretty discouraged from divorcing someone you don't want to live with anymore. So, it's hard to tell. And divorce is still frowned on. A good friend of mine had been divorced and she said it was really, really hard. Being a divorce woman in India is exceptionally hard.

Q: And again, this goes back to a woman living alone. How about lesbianism? Could a woman live with a—was this—

PAYNE: It was not. I was impressed that they were very accepting of our same sex couple. They are not at all supportive of same sex couples. When I arrived in Kolkata, we had a same sex couple, two men, who did not speak openly about being a couple. It was just that the officer had his roommate—who happened to be Czechoslovakian, I think—and he lived with him. The local Indian staff never put it together that they were a couple. And then, at his farewell party I said, "And you are such a lovely couple and we're just so happy that you as a couple could be with us."

And all the Indian local staff were sitting there with their mouths open going, "What? You are a couple."

I mean, these guys lived there for two years and it's like the Indian staff actively overlooked it. They just didn't want to see it. So, then when we had the two women come, on the first 4th of July, they come to me and say, "What do we put on the invitation card—"

I say, "You say Mrs. And Mrs." I said, "They're married. They're a couple."

So, the local staff were lovely people who struggled with their own bias. Even the local officials. But on the other hand, Indians tolerate each other, they tolerate things because otherwise the place would be exploding every day. In Delhi, they harassed same sex couples. Like, I know a same sex couple that left India early because they were getting harassed in Delhi. Bengalis are a little bit softer. No one was harassed. They're not nearly as harsh as North India.

Q: Well, I probably have my initials wrong, but BJP—

PAYNE: BJP, that's the current government.

Q: That is the—

PAYNE: That's a Hindu nationalist party.

Q: Now was this causing—where there militant Hindus in Bengal?

PAYNE: Yes. Luckily, not as many. I made a big mistake once. This was my biggest mistake as a Consul General in Calcutta. I was also an avid photographer. We had this club that we called "Food and Photo," and we would photograph on the weekends. The Bengalis loved that I would go everywhere in Bengal and photograph. When I left, I had a big photo exhibit on my photos. But one Saturday morning, we're out photographing, and I see this great image and my friends do, too. It's of all these young people in formation with brown shorts and white shirts. From a photographer's perspective it was beautiful, and we instinctively start to photograph. Then, I realize I'm being photographed and then I go, "Beth, you're at an RSS [Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh] rally."

Q: RSS?

PAYNE: That's the extreme right of the BJP. They look like storm troopers. They looked like little Nazis. I mean, I'm at a rally of the extreme right and that's news. And so, my public affairs officer is getting calls from the newspapers, "Why is the Consul General at an RSS rally?"

And he's going, "Um, you know, she's an avid photographer. I don't think she's there for any other reason than she just happens to be there taking pictures."

Luckily—see this is why you make friends—all the editors liked me. I had very good relations with the media. They could have skewered me. They could have put that on page one. Instead, my friends said, "Beth, we had to report it because it was news, but it was a small article without any photograph."

Thank Goodness. Just a little article about the "US Consul General is at RSS Rally."

Some of my contacts, the next day asked me, "What were you doing at an RSS rally?"

I'm said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry, it was a mistake. I forgot who I was." For one hour of my life, I forgot that I was a US Consul General and I thought I was a photographer. It was a good lesson. I'm always the Consul General. I'm never not the Consul General.

Q: Well, the swastika is the reverse of the Hindu sign.

PAYNE: Right. But the whole concept of the Aryan race is an Indian concept. The whole caste system is a racial suppression technique. All these religions would break away from Hinduism—Sikhism, Jainism Buddhism—in order to get rid of the caste, to get rid of this racial suppression. And none of them succeeded. Hinduism is still the most powerful religion in India. We had Hindu-Christian conflict. We had a lot of issues in Orissa with Hindu-Christian violence, where Hindus would attack Christians because they don't like that the lower castes leave Hinduism and become another religion. If you leave and become Muslim, if you leave and become Christian, the political Hindus, the right-wing guys, are very offended because they're getting rid of their caste. They're saying, "I no longer have to subject myself to this caste system." And the Hindus nationalists resent it, so they'll attack them and try to force them back into Hinduism.

Q: How about your Indian staff at the consul general? How did caste, skin color, what have you fit in?

PAYNE: You didn't see it on the surface at all. But you did have to be very conscious and accepting of the various religions and cultures that they represented. We would have religious ceremonies at the consulate. There's a big puja every year for anybody who works with a tool. And if you don't bless your tools, you're going to have a bad year. If you don't bless the cars, you're going to have accidents. So, we would actually have this puja.

Q: Which means what?

PAYNE: A religious ceremony where a priest comes, and you give offerings to the god. They believe in multiple gods. And so, what would happen is the Muslims and the Christians in the group, they were pretty tolerant. Indians are on a day-to-day basis, tolerant. But then violence breaks out. Here’s another good example: we were building a new consular section and there was a lot of tension and people were fighting. I was called down because they're like, "Beth, the management and the consular people were at each other's throats." So, I took the Ganesh, the elephant god. He is the remover of all obstacles. That's his role. And I asked a Brahman who worked in the GSO [General Services Officer] section, if he would please do a small religious ceremony and blessing to remove all of the obstacles. We put this god up on the shelf and then everything went away. They got back together, and they finished without any problem. It's their belief. That's how you would resolve conflict. The biggest festival of the year in Calcutta is a 10-day festival of the goddess Durga, where they would build temporary temples to her

all over the city. It is amazing. And at night people would go out and visit the temples. For 10 days, the city had tens of thousands of temples built. Everybody loved it. It didn't matter what their religion was. We all loved it.

Q: Some of the things I've heard—this goes back quite a way—was people coming to Calcutta and saying that it's terrible walking down the street with all the beggars and the crowded—so, how was it?

PAYNE: It was filthy. It was loud. The air quality was horrific. And it was crowded. I walked every morning. Every morning, I would get up, and the police would escort me down to a local park. They would stop traffic so I could cross the street because I was a very rare Westerner. I was a rare person of importance that would walk the streets of Calcutta. And I walked the streets of Calcutta. Every time I had to cross a busy street, the police would stop the cars and then I would cross the street.

Q: Did you have any problem with harassment?

PAYNE: No. I had a bodyguard. As Consul General, I had a police escort and a plain clothes bodyguard with me at all times. I had one negotiated agreement with the RSO that if I was leaving my house just to walk to the bookstore, I could go without my bodyguard. But every other time I went anywhere I had a vehicle filled with uniform police and a plain clothes bodyguard. The difference in India is that they don't isolate their poor. The wealthy areas also have people living on the street right in front of you. And there's garbage on the street right in front of you. They don't say, "Well in this area we're gonna clean it up and make it look nice because rich people live here," because they value the inside. They don't value public space. Public space is where the poor—the poor spend time in public space. So, the minute you walk out your door, it is just filled with people and people living on the streets, people bathing on the streets, people cutting hair on the streets, dogs, crows, people urinating. Honestly, I am so happy I don't smell urine anymore. You're just hit with humanity and it is shockingly crowded. It is so noisy and there are beggars everywhere.

When it comes to begging, you can't give to everybody because there are thousands of beggars. I would give money to this little old woman who begged at the place I walked in the morning. Every morning when I crossed the street, I would give this woman a little bit of money. Then, once, she was gone for a little while and then came back and she had her arm wrapped, she'd been hit by a car, because cars don't care about pedestrians. Pedestrians are low class; they can be hit. It's very dangerous to cross the street in Calcutta because the upper-class have cars and they don't care if they hit somebody. So, she gotten hit. I would bring her dressing and salve. She also realized that if she waited for me, she could cross the street with me. Every morning I would take her hand and we would cross the street together. That's how she crossed the street safely and could then beg from the people in the park.

But anyway. If you can't see past the crowds, the dirt and the noise, you are absolutely miserable in Calcutta. You have to see past it to the amazing people, to the intellectual stimulation. It has the most bookstores in any city in the world. The artists are spectacular and world-class. And there are art galleries everywhere. And the food and the music and the people, they're amazing. And so, you have to look past that to get the richness of Calcutta.

Q: Well, as a chief of an office, did you have problems getting particularly the younger people or even in middle aged Americans accepting this and not being turned off? I think this would be a problem.

PAYNE: Yes. We had to help them past. I would say, "You have to look past the dirt, the noise, and the crowds and find the good of Calcutta." When new Americans came, we would spend a lot of time helping them get past it. And you have to leave regularly. We would tell people, "You are a short flight from Bangkok, get out, take breaks, because it'll drive you crazy after a while." And some people would adapt and absolutely love it. For many people, it's their favorite place they've ever been. Some would tolerate it and do okay and say, "Not my favorite place, but it was okay." And then, some would hate it. There was this was a guy that I recruited. He came after I left, but he cried when he saw what Calcutta was, and then he cried when he left because he loved it so much. And so, that dynamic happens where you get there and you go, "What have I done?" And then when you leave, you don't want to leave.

Q: Did you have American men coming to get wives?

PAYNE: Not in Calcutta, no. There have been Foreign Service officers who've met their wives in India, but you don't have that dynamic of men looking in India. Not like you have in places like Bangkok.

We didn’t have families either because we didn't have a good school. We tried to create an American school. It failed. We mainly had singles, older couples or couples with very young infant children or singles. That's why we had so many same sex couples.

Q: Did you get any high-level business?

PAYNE: Secretary Clinton came after I left. We worked very hard to try to get her to come. I was very proud of the groundwork that we laid. We had the ambassador very often.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

PAYNE: So, it was [David] Mulford at first. Then, the Timothy J. Roemer from Indiana. He was a former senator. He loved to travel. When he came, it was like having a senator visit. I mean, the work we had to put into him visiting was what we put into a senator. But on the other hand, the Indians loved him.. And he was good at public outreach and

we took him around. We did not get very many senior US government officials, some assistant secretary levels, but not senior.

Q: _____of universities there, what was your relationship with them?

PAYNE: I would speak at them all the time. There were good universities.

Q: This makes me want to go there.

PAYNE: Oh, I love Calcutta. Eastern India is amazing. India is amazing. I'm thankful that I could serve there. I joined the Foreign Service because I am addicted to travel. I love traveling. India satiated me. After three years of living in India, I was satiated. I finally saw enough, and it was an odd feeling that, "Wow, I have seen so many different things and different cultures and different places and had amazing, out of this world amazing experiences."

I was in Orissa in the town of Puri for something called the "Juggernaut Festival." You know the term "under the juggernaut?" This is because they have a tribal Hindu god who's the only god that's made out of a tree. Once a year, they bring him and his brother and sister by chariot it down the strip of the main street of this town. Only the god could invite you there. There are tens of thousands of pilgrims, you never see how many. They build huge chariots. It's a particular blessing to be selected to pull the chariot, the big horses, big wheels. And so, falling under the wheel of the juggernaut is if you're pulling during this temple festival, if you fall under the wheel because the energy and the way you felt energy. I've never felt anything like it when these three gods started to be pulled down the street. It really brought in like, "Oh, that's what they mean by falling under the wheel of a juggernaut," because there's huge carriages. And I got to see that. What a blessing. A lot of foreigners never get to see it. I was so lucky.

Q: So, after you finished there, where then?

PAYNE: I went back to DC. I ran the Office of Children's Issues where I had worked before. I became director of that office and oversaw both adoption and abduction.

Q: Good time to stop. Well, okay, we'll pick this up. When did you leave?

PAYNE: I left in 2011. So, I was there from 2008 to 2011.

Q: Today is the 23rd of May 2019 with Beth Payne. I'll turn it over to you. Tell me what you're up to.

PAYNE: I had worked in the Office of Children's issues, as you remember, as an abduction officer. I wanted to go back and run the Office because I feel very strongly that that type of work's important. I went back and oversaw all the child abduction issues and the international adoption. The first challenge was in that office everybody saw

themselves as caseworkers. We'd have all these cases, especially in abduction, you worked on cases. But the problem with that is the cases will only get harder unless you change the environment in which cases are being managed.

I wanted folks to view themselves as diplomats, to be country officers, to think, instead of just, "I've got to try to return these children kidnapped to Japan." It's, "How can we change Japan's approach to child kidnapping?" And we had two international treaties that we were tasked with implementing, that we were the central authorities for. These are Hague Treaties, one on abduction, one on adoption. We were the designated treaty center for the United States for these treaties. I challenged folks with, "How do we get other countries to join the treaties? How do we have countries that are members of these treaties to implement the treaties in ways that further US foreign policy interests?" This goes back to the dilemma that all consular professionals grapple with, which is, "Are we technicians who assist and protect Americans and issue visas, or are we diplomats who influence foreign policy so that it's easier to assist and protect Americans and issue visas?" This has always been a tension within the Bureau of Consular Affairs. And of course, I'm on the side of "We are diplomats." We are just as capable and effective policymakers and diplomats as anyone in any other cone.

The job classification for the Civil Service employees that worked in my office—we were about three quarters Civil Service, one quarter Foreign Service—was a catchall miscellaneous category called "citizen services specialist." They did not get a lot of the benefits that foreign affairs officers got, like loan forgiveness and other benefits. And it was kind of insulting. What did that mean? I tried to change that classification to foreign affairs officer. I believed that my people were policymakers, were foreign affairs experts. They became steeped in the countries that they covered. We were divided by countries, so people were country desk officers just like in the regional bureaus. You know, someone has the Japan country desk, so they become really skilled at Japanese culture. They interact with foreign government officials all the time, probably more than most desk officers in regional bureaus. They traveled regularly to the countries they covered. They were engaged in high level meetings. It was foreign policy. I tried to change their classification, and I was not supported, even by the Bureau, which was very disappointing. It was very disappointing to me to see the Bureau of Consular Affairs not support this effort.

Q: Was this sort of the Foreign Service mafia, that we don't do that?

PAYNE: No, I thought I would get the resistance from Foreign Service. It was the technicians in HR that couldn't see beyond the casework. They did a job review and equated our staff to social security clerks that take calls from Americans who have questions about their social security. It was so insulting. I mean, it was hurtful because we're not clerks. He wanted to put us in the category that social security clerks were in. My staff, even though they were GS-13s, were considered nonexempt because of the classification, because they were viewed as clerks. It matters how people view themselves. When you come into an office and people say, "Well, we're just clerks"—

Q: I would think the at least at the assistant secretary or something level it would—

PAYNE: No. It was very disappointing. I met with Maura Harty after I failed and she said that she tried to do the same thing when she was the head of Overseas Citizen Services—Maura Harty was a former assistant secretary—and she regrets—then, when she became assistant secretary she forgot to make the change. You know, when you're up there, it doesn't seem important. When I told her how hard it was for me and that I failed, she was like, "Oh my, I could have done this when I was assistant secretary." She tried as hard as I did when she ran OCS [Overseas Citizen Services] and then she says, "Oh my, I forgot about it. And so, it's gonna be this constant tension in the Bureau of how do we view ourselves?

Q: If you jump and designated a different title, what difference would it have made in Civil Service?

PAYNE: Several differences. One, foreign affairs officers are considered the high elite of the State Department. If you ask any Civil Service employee when you're ranking who's at the top, it's foreign affairs officers. That's the self-image. But the practical impact is that the State Department has designated that category as extremely critical to our foreign policy and therefore they are eligible for loan forgiveness. Not every Civil Service classification gets loan forgiveness.

Q: What does that mean?

PAYNE: That means your student loans get paid every month a little bit. The government will pay off your student loans over time. It's real money. There's a financial implication. The miscellaneous classification doesn't qualify for loan forgiveness whereas a foreign affairs officer does. Also, when you post a position, you're getting people with language and you're getting people with international affairs training for foreign affairs officer positions. These were the types of people I was looking for. I needed intelligent, thoughtful people who were good writers. We wrote so many memos and testimony. We were writing, again, more than most regional desk officers. There were three excellent reasons to make the change and the bureaucrats in the system could not see beyond the casework we did. And I got to the point where I had to pull back because I was being threatened with, "If you push this, it's going to get worse for your people." And I said, "Okay, I'm going to pull back."

Q: I can't see somebody taking a stand against this.

PAYNE: And this was the Bureau of Consular Affairs, HR. This was HR in the Bureau, not big HR. What I also regret is I didn't know enough about HR. I didn't realize how much power the bureau HR had because they would always come back and say, "Well, big HR said we had to do it this way." Honestly, I did not have the skill to do this.

Q: This is one of the things I think that is often lacking within the Foreign Service and that is they don't understand Washington. I never really—I served in Washington as in personnel, but I didn't feel any of that.

PAYNE: They don't understand the Civil Service system. I understood H, the Legislative Affairs Bureau. I understood the Legal Bureau. What I didn't understand was this high-level Civil Service world. Because you don't get exposed to until you're quite senior.

Q: Did top level Civil Service see this as a threat to their position?

PAYNE: No, they supported it. They supported it.

Q: Sounds like just lethargy on the part of—

PAYNE: Well, not even that, because we were actively fought. We were surprised at how hard was. We were really, really surprised. This is the lesson I learned: bureaucrats have preconceived ideas of what consular officers are and do. Those biases, those incorrect perceptions are still there, interspersed even within the Bureau, that we are just technicians, that we are clerks, that we manage cases. And that's that narrow view of consular work that we just need to keep actively fighting is as long as consular officers are in existence.

Q: Well, I came in when officers—Foreign Service, we divided it into two categories: substantive and non-substantive. And consular, administrative officers were non-substantive.

PAYNE: Yep. Well, this is that distinction right now. Right now, it's the same distinction.

Q: Okay, well let's turn to a flawed system. Describe that the problems and how you dealt with them, and maybe the countries to which they pertained.

PAYNE: So, I'll give you a good example of one of our biggest challenges. And even though I wasn't able to change the classification, I did change the way that the country officers viewed themselves because I could change their titles. I said, "You're all country officers. You're no longer case officers, you're country officers." Japan was one of our biggest problems. When a woman abducted a child to Japan, we would never get the child back because Japanese culture and law gives a divorced woman sole legal and physical custody of the children. And the expectation in Japanese culture is that the man will never see the children again.

Q: Well, in a way, this is what we—some of the thrust of what we're trying to do in our country, but not to that extent.

PAYNE: It's pretty extreme. It's the most extreme of any country in the world where there's a cultural belief that the man should have no contact with his children after

divorce. Imagine how hard it is to return abducted children. And we couldn't even get access to children half the time. And Congressman Chris Smith was making Japan a big issue. He was going to the media and having hearings.

Q: Where was he from?

PAYNE: New Jersey. He's the child abduction guy. He was really beating us up all the time on Japan. We had just gotten beat up on Brazil because there was a very famous case in Brazil that did get resolved, thank goodness. But you know, these were very sympathetic, left-behind parents. We looked totally inept and incapable because we could get nothing. We could do nothing. So, we changed our approach and said, "We are really, really going to go hard on getting Japan to join this treaty," and put together working groups across the government, worked with other governments and shockingly, got Japan to join the treaty, which was amazing. And I have to say, we then orchestrated that an event where the left-behind parents came to the State Department to deliver their applications for return of their children under this convention. And we let them, we said, "Yes, we will do this." It was on camera. Chris Smith came, and we celebrated the fact that Japan's now part of the treaty and we're going to hold them to their treaty obligations. It's still been hard. We've only gotten one child returned under the treaty but that's kind of remarkable. But it's that changing the landscape and working with these countries to say like—with Japan it was, "If you want to be part of the world, if you want to be considered a world leader, you need to join these international treaties and if you refuse, you will never be a world leader. You will never be considered a world leader."

Q: What role did the parents play in the treaty?

PAYNE: So, they would have to file an application through us. We were the central authority for that treaty. Then, we would forward that application to the central authority in the country where the child was located. And then, at that central authority, sometimes, depending on the country, would provide an attorney, sometimes not. Sometimes the left-behind parent would have to hire their own attorney because you still had to file in court. The central authority would first send a letter to the taking parent and say, "Do you understand that under this treaty there are legal obligations to return the child?" But eventually you'd have to go to court if the taking parent didn't voluntarily returned the child. And then, in court, the hope was that the court would order the return under this treaty cause these treaties have legal standing. So, even in US courts, if there's an abduction from a treaty country, it's the treaty law that prevails not State law. So, even if you file in State court for return, State has to follow that treaty.

Q: So, in Japan, the woman gets the kids and that's sort of it.

PAYNE: So, this then would supersede their child custody laws

Q: But I can't see many cases of men—normal court things say, "Well the mother is—"

PAYNE: But it's not a custody hearing. It's not about custody. It's about return of a child who's been kidnapped. We're only talking about children who've been removed from the United States against the wishes of the other parent. This is only international parental child kidnapping. Under the Hague treaty, all it is is return the child to the home of habitual residence so that a court in that country will determine custody. A court in the States could say, "Yes, the mom gets legal custody and can move to Japan." But what you're trying to prevent is a parent from saying, "I'm not going to go to the courts. I'm just going to take my kid. I'm just going to steal my kid and tell the other parent."

Q: I mean, obviously you're representing both men and women.

PAYNE: We represented left-behind parents seeking the return of their children. Not represented in a legal sense, but we facilitated—I wouldn't more say we facilitated, we advocated for the return of abducted children, because we believe that in a world where people can abduct their children, overall, those children are worse off. And so, if we can prevent abductions by making it impossible to succeed, then children will be better off.

Q: Well, all right, what would State do? They see the child is returned, but would they get involved in custody matters?

PAYNE: No, not at all. Once a child is returned back to the United States, the role of the State Department is over. It's great when there were Hague parties because then it's under a treaty, you have treaty obligations. And you know, some countries don't follow their treaty obligations. So, we'll protest. If a court makes a decision that our lawyers believe is inconsistent with the treaty, then we'll protest. We'll do diplomatic protests saying, "You are not following your treaty obligations."

Q: I think in most of the cases it would be the father wants the child and the normal inclination of courts and people is that the child should be with the mother.

PAYNE: Yeah. But that violates the treaty. It's not a custody decision. It's a treaty decision. You return the child to the home of a habitual residence so a court in that home could determine custody.

Q: And then what happens?

PAYNE: Well, then that court determines custody. You just don't steal your child. Men and women both steal their children. We play no role in the underlying custody of deciding who's a better parent. There are few exceptions to return under the treaty. If the taking parent credibly gives evidence of child abuse by the left-behind parent, or if return would place the child in danger, or if it's been more than a year and the child's become habitually established in a new country, like, the abduction took place three years ago and only now you're filing a Hague convention application. There are exceptions that consider the safety of the child and the best interest, but it's not a custody determination.

Q: Well, you talked about kidnapped children. I was a consular officer in Saudi Arabia and I probably—I can't think of any now, mercifully—but I probably helped some American women kidnap their child from Saudi. What happens in Saudi Arabia?

PAYNE: We would facilitate the left-behind parent filing in court in the United States for return of the child to Saudi because we don't believe that any parent should kidnap his or her child unless the safety and security of that child's at risk. And we have seen courts in the United States order the return of children abducted from Saudi Arabia because we believe in rule of law. And this is what's interesting. That is a core value of the United States, right? Rule of law. It's a value that we promote all over the world. When it comes to children, how quickly people throw rule of law out the window and go back to their own biases about what's better for a child. And I would always have to fight that tendency in human beings to have their own biases prevail rather than rule of, law. It was a constant challenge, even though rule of law is of core value of the United States that we promote.

Q: You mentioned Japan. We mentioned Saudi Arabia certain extent. What countries gave you the greatest problems?

PAYNE: So, in addition to Japan, you had Costa Rica because their Supreme Court justice would make findings contrary to the Hague Treaty. You'd get good findings in the lower courts, and then, this one Supreme Court justice would just violate the treaty and roll against return.

Brazil was an issue, a very hard issue, because they were also treaty members. We had a lot of talks with Brazilian government authorities, trying—because when they're treaty members, when they become party to the treaty, then it's influencing the courts to make legal decisions consistent with the treaty.

Another issue was Poland. They were really clever because they understood the law. They would make legal findings that were very close to violating the treaty but didn't quite violate the treaty and never would order the return of a child. So, they were much cleverer and how they did it.

Other countries that used to be a problem, like Germany, became quite good. Germany is a perfect example of a country that never returned abducted children, and then, over the years, as judges became more educated on the treaty, actually started to very fairly implement the treaty in a good way. We had to do an annual report on treaty compliance. We would track these numbers and determine the countries that are not complying with the treaty. But Costa Rica, Brazil—Poland was technically complying, but they were a problem—Japan.

Q: I would imagine, having been a consular officer, that when you go to a country like Brazil and tell our ambassador, "Get them to obey the treaty," you'd get, "Oh my God, I got oil interest. I got sugar interest. I don't have time for this."

PAYNE: There was enormous pressure from Congress. And, this was in the news media. There are hearings. We rarely had to persuade senior leadership at an embassy to make this a priority. For example, with Japan, the embassy was working right alongside us to get the Japanese to become treaty signatories, because Chris Smith was ripping up Japan and it was jeopardizing other interests. I rarely had to talk an ambassador into caring about this. And for consular section chiefs, this is a great thing to work on. It sings in your EER [Employee Evaluation Report]. If you just got a country to implement a treaty more effectively or you just got to country to join the treaty, that's great. This was star work for consular chiefs because it's true diplomacy. There's nothing more diplomatic than dealing with treaty obligations. And so, the consular chiefs, almost to a person, loved it. And same with adoption.

I'll shift a little bit to adoption. For adoption, there's also a Hague treaty. The challenge with inter-country adoption is that there's so much fraud and so much baby selling, America led the effort to come up with a treaty that would govern the way children are adopted in order to minimize fraud. And once you minimize fraud, hopefully the process for the adopting parent then goes more smoothly. It's hard working with countries like Ethiopia where you had high adoption rates, trying to get them to join the treaty and then implement procedures that the treaty requires to minimize fraud.

Q: When you say fraud, what are we talking about?

PAYNE: Two things that go wrong. One is outright stealing babies and then placing them for adoption. Guatemala closed down all international adoptions after there was widespread baby stealing. We have one case still where a birth mother had her baby stolen and we know who that baby is and the birth mother is trying to go through legal channels to return her child. But, the child was adopted by American parents who don't want to cooperate. The most common is baby scamming. Adoption providers will go to poor parents and say, "If you place your child in this care facility, your child's going to get cared for and it's going to get educated. Just sign this paperwork." Next thing you know, the children are gone. I sat with parents in Freetown [Sierra Leone] in a police station, because then they wanted file charges. All of them had lost their kids because they believed that if they put their kids in this care facility, they would get taken care of and educated. Instead, they never heard from their children again. Sometimes they're told they're going to be educated in the States and then, they just never hear about their kids again. This is rampant. We actually facilitated—I was so happy and DS [Diplomatic Security] did a great job—criminal charges against an adoption service provider in Atlanta, Georgia for outright lies and fraud, stealing children from Ethiopia. They'd go to small villages in the southern part of Ethiopia and they would scam children away from their parents because there is a huge market for infants under the age of three and there are not enough infants under the age of three to fill the demand. But there's also this huge political pressure to make it easier to adopt internationally. The State Department is often criticized because it's perceived that we've made it harder to adopt internationally and the Hague Convention is unpopular.

Q: I would think that the sort of market of babies, as the rules relax and more women are not getting married and having babies, this would mean that the market would be—

PAYNE: Right. There aren't as many babies available. I'll give you an example of the problem. We're meeting with Colombian adoption professionals. They have a very, very good process for adoption. They invited government officials from all the countries that adopt children from Columbia to this meeting. European countries as well. And the bottom line came down to "Folks, we don't have enough babies to meet your demands." Part of the conference focused on, "So, how do we manage all these demands?" At one point, I just was like, "Okay, we have to stop. How do we ensure that these children get the loving parents they deserve? To hell with the demands of the parents. Really, why are we talking about the parents? Why aren't we talking about what these children need? And so, if you, Columbia, want to require that adopting parents speak fluent Spanish, then require it. To hell with us."

Q: All sorts of things are _____any social thing. You gotta do this or that. The parents both have to be certain of ethnic persuasion or something. You know, in some places—I was in Vietnam in the middle of the bloody war and the president of the country had to sign off on every adoption. I mean, we wanted to empty those orphanages and there's quite a few because of—

PAYNE: Here's the dilemma. If emptying those orphanages make a lot of people a lot of money, you're gonna have three orphanages in six months filled with kids that aren't real orphans. So, right, the drive is, "Man, I have all these orphans. I want to give them loving homes." But if you aren't careful, you end up creating orphans. You've seen this all over Africa. When I visited orphanages in Africa, most of those kids weren't orphans. There was too much money to be made.

Q: How do you sort out this?

PAYNE: It's very hard. I believe that the Hague Treaty is a way to sort out, because there's some protections in place. For example, you don't get a picture of the child until you know that child's eligible for adoption. The best way to make money is to send pictures of a child early on to that adopting parent, and you bond with the picture. The minute you've bonded, that's your child. And then, later you find out what that child isn't eligible. Well, that parent will do anything to get that child. I've seen parents move to Africa and live three years to bring their child home because the minute you bond with a photograph, that's your child. So, the Hague treaty tries to minimize that early bonding because it's manipulative and tries to put in place processes that ensure that you're not getting kidnapped or scammed children into that system. Some countries have more honest officials. Korea is also one of my favorites. They're very honest.

Q: I just went to Seoul [South Korea] and we have a booming business. I also recall one time when one of our little orphans that came through was Woody Allen's wife [Soon-Yi Previn].

PAYNE: You did bring up an issue though that's quite challenging. When a celebrity adopts its torture on the State Department. We're about rule of law. We are about doing things in a fair, transparent way. When Angelina Jolie wants to adopt, do you think it's fair and transparent? And then, she makes it's popular to adopt from Ethiopia. Everybody now wants an Ethiopian kid because Angelina Jolie adopted an Ethiopian. Every time a celebrity adopted from a poor struggling country, it was torture. It was incredibly, incredibly difficult.

Q: I mean, as a job, okay, everybody has a job. But I mean, this gets awfully personal, doesn't it?

PAYNE: Oh, this is hard.

Q: You were a Foreign Service officer. You were in for a couple years and go through the ringer and then you get out. But how about these caseworkers.

PAYNE: Country officers, please call them country officers. They are not caseworkers but country officers. It's not a job you can stay in for a long time. As the head of Children's Issues, I also managed a workforce that was under enormous emotional stress and pressure. It was when I started to implement a lot of the resilience concepts that I had been studying after I recovered from PTSD. I had a hundred people working for me that are under enormous stress and strain and pressure every single day. How do I maintain their resilience, so that as a team we can become more effective and we can do things like get Japan to join the Hague Convention? I'm very proud of the results. Three years of prioritizing people over policy and prioritizing resilience made us a much more effective team.

We got Congress to pass a law that made non-Hague Treaty adoption service providers follow Hague rules. Now the State Department regulates all adoption service providers in America that do international adoptions. We wrote the law and teamed up with DHS [Department of Homeland Security] to persuade Congress to pass the law and they passed it, so that if you provide assistance in international adoptions, you must be accredited by the State Department. That's great.

Q: Did you find people in American trying to pull scams?

PAYNE: Oh, my goodness. I told you that these guys in Atlanta had criminal charges. All the time. All the time.

Q: How about pedophiles?

PAYNE: No. We never saw this. And it's interesting, Russia adoptions was huge, by the way. We just have to accept that wealthy white people tend to want to adopt white babies. But as white babies become more and more scarce. In Latin America it's no longer a stigma to be an unwed mother or you have more opportunity to have abortions, so there aren't as many babies. You started to see this move towards Eastern Europe. There was a huge adoption effort with babies coming out of Russia. And then, because of the Russia-American tension and in response to us passing a law, the Magnitsky Act, Russia suddenly, without any notice, shutdown adoption to the United States. Anytime a country ends adoptions, there are adoptions in the pipeline. We're dealing with mom and dad who have bonded with this baby and now their baby is stuck. We would then have to negotiate with the Russian government to get these pipeline cases finalized. The Russians looked for every case of child abuse of a Russian adopted child they could find in America. And every single time there is a child abuse case involving a Russian, they slammed us with it. They put it in the media in Russia to say, "Look, Americans are taking your kids and then abusing them." I mean, the rates of abuse are the same as it is on regular parents.

Q: And also talking about getting children for their livers.

PAYNE: None of that happened. They never found cases of that. They didn't do that... But you know, parents abuse their kids. If there were charges filed against somebody and it turned out those kids were adopted from Russia, they would blow it up.

Q: A lot of Western European families adopt Russian kids too.

PAYNE: Yeah. But this was against America. This was shutting down adoptions to America. It was a big deal because we had tons of kids in the pipeline. Now I'm proud of how we handled the shutdown—and I would credit this to the resilience of our team. In the past, when a country shut down adoptions, the State Department got blasted in the news media. Like, "Why did you let this happen?" But in this case, because we were very proactive in reaching out to the adopting families and to the adoption service providers and to members of Congress, so we were never blamed. And even though in the end, some parents didn't get what they wanted, which was their child, we were never blamed for what the Russians did, which was exceptional because we'd been blamed elsewhere, like Guatemala. It was painful dealing with the kids in the pipeline in Guatemala when Guatemala shut down adoptions. We've never fully recovered from that. We are often blamed for Guatemala stopping adoptions. There's rampant, rampant fraud taking place. But we were never blamed for Russia because of how we managed it and how proactive we were in talking to the parents. We got some kids through that were in the final stages, but if there hadn't been an adoption decree issued by court yet, then those kids stayed in Russia.

Q: What's the situation of Muslim countries?

PAYNE: Most Muslim countries don't allow adoption. A few will allow foster parenting, like Morocco. So, you could take the child and then adopt the child in the States. But very few Muslim countries allow adoption.

Q: So, I mean this wasn't—

PAYNE: Yeah, you don't see international adoptions from Muslim countries with the exception of Morocco.

Q: Do consular officers look around for possible markets or sources for American adoption?

PAYNE: No. We do promote adoption from the United States. We have over 500,000 children in foster care in the United States. We are the only Western country that is also a source country for adoption. We would advocate with foreign governments to say, "If you want to encourage your nationals to adopt from our foster care system, we'll connect you to the right people so you can learn how our foster system works." We have children adopted out of our foster care system to Western European countries.

Q: Is there any sort of—in the adoption system from the United States, do they show them from a particular pool, ethnic or anything like that?

PAYNE: Most children in foster care are African American. We also have private adoptions. We're unique— we're very close to violating the treaty ourselves—in that we allow open, private adoption in America. So, we would see a lot of Canadians adopting children from Florida.

Q: Travel?

PAYNE: It's just that Florida had a pretty robust private adoption industry. And for some reason birth mothers seem to like Canadians. I don't know how familiar you are with this private adoption process in the States. Basically a birth mother will say, "I don't want to keep my child. I want to place my child for adoption," after the child's born and go to an adoption service provider. The adoption service provider will have all these parents that are looking for children to adopt and they will put them together. If you're the parent, you'll write an essay about why you're the best parent and you might have some unwritten agreements on what you're going to pay for, for the birth and the medical care and stuff.

And here's where we have the fine line, because you're not allowed to buy babies, but you are allowed to provide support for the birth mother. And then, the birth mothers are going to be presented with several parents to choose from and they're going to choose the parent they want to adopt their child. And then, if it all works—and then, under different state laws, she has so many days to change her mind after giving birth. It depends on the state. It's all managed by the state law. None of it's federal. And if the child is placed with a

foreigner, then it becomes federal because it has to follow the Hague Convention procedures. I literally had to sign certificates that says, "This child can be adopted. This is all right," in order for that child then to get a visa from their home country. But it's pretty complicated. And sometimes, we would find ourselves with issues. For example, we had a same sex couple adopt a baby and they were from Belgium. In Belgium, same sex couples cannot adopt legally. We had to work with the Belgian government who wouldn't issue the baby a visa. We'd say, "Look, this baby is now the legal child of this couple and this couple is Belgian. They want to live in Belgium, where they're from. Can we find a solution to this because we can't leave this baby without his legal parents." So, you'd have these little quirks happen from time to time, where it's legal in one country and not in another.

Q: Seeing that you were involved in birth and relations between couples, were you—you were there from when to when?

PAYNE: So, I ran the Office of Children's Issues from 2011 to 2014.

Q: Well, at that point in time, same sex marriages were pretty well established. Not everywhere, obviously, but still, it was a fairly common thing. Does this cause any problem for you?

PAYNE: No, we support it. Some countries don't allow adoption by same sex couples. For example, Russia is very homophobic and they were vehemently against same sex couples adopting. You have to follow the laws of the country that you're adopting from. And then, they would also—some of their anti-America propaganda is like, "All these kids are being adopted by homosexuals. You have to be careful, in America it's filled with homosexuals—" But we would just counter that. We were very, very supportive where same sex couples were allowed to adopt. Incredibly supportive of that.

Q: How did you find the reaction of consular officers abroad? I would think they would get very involved and sympathetic.

PAYNE: Well, usually what happened was they would see so much fraud that they would become kind of hyper-vigilant to guard against fraud. You rarely saw a consular officer go to the extreme on the other side and just say, "I want to save all these babies. Let me issue immigrant visas." You hardly ever saw that because remember, if you're on the ground, you see reality. I did adoptions when I was in Senegal and I saw horrible fraud. Most consular officers, when they're giving that final visa to the child—they're the last protection—they will tend to err on the side of being more vigilant. That can sometimes cause problems because if someone just wasn't vigilant—they're just an average normal consular officer and they're not paying attention and they just issued visas because they don't care—and then, you get another one right after who's hyper-vigilant, well, that changes things.

We saw this in Congo where we had pretty inexperienced consular chiefs. What happens is that the adoption service providers can see that. If we have an inexperienced consular chief, all of a sudden, adoptions go from 10 a month, to a 100 a month. And it starts to overwhelm the system. And then, consular officers say, "Holy crap, what's going on?" and they try to put in controls. This happened in Congo and it became a nightmare for consular staff and adopting parents. It's why we've got to stop sending inexperienced people to run consular sections in Africa. After we finally put in place a process where we would investigate fraud and make sure the children were legal orphans, the government declared that no adopted children could leave the country at all, period. We would issue an immigrant visa, but the children can't get out. Parents started to sneak out with their children and of course, we would say, "You can't violate any laws." And then one got caught sneaking out. So, the Congolese government became even more strict. This became a huge issue. It took two years or more—it happened after I left—to finally get Congo to lift the blanket prohibition. They wouldn't prohibit adoptions. They just prohibited the kids leaving the country. They would issue an adoption certificate. That child is your legal child. You just can't take your child out of the country. It's the only country where I've seen that. Usually, they just prohibit the adoption.

Q: What about the role of the Catholic Church? Let's take in the States first. I see signs for the Gabriel Project. If you're pregnant and need help, they'll help you.

PAYNE: I've seen no unique role of the Catholic Church. I have seen a lot of roles of conservative Protestant churches. I don't know domestic adoption. A lot of adoption service providers are connected to a conservative Protestant denomination.

Q: How supportive did you find it? Were you sort of the thorn in the side of the consular section?

PAYNE: People were very supportive. And I have to say, even the front office, Assistant Secretary Janice Jacobs and then, Michele Bond were very supportive. We've been grappling with this for decades. I mean, this was nothing new. And we had a senior advisor for Children's Issues, Susan Jacobs, who was fantastic. She would travel anywhere you needed her to go. Sometimes it would be hard to get the attention of the regional bureaus. But again, when it became—with Russia, we were hand in hand with the regional bureau. Adoption is a bilateral issue that affects other issues. For example, Susan Jacobs and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and a whole bunch of people on both sides with sit down and have talks. It's classic diplomacy.

It was very hard to build a stronger and better relationship with the Department of Homeland Security because under US law, visa policy rests with the Department of Homeland Security. And when it comes to immigrant visas, they handle the petition part of it. And then, we issue the immigrant visa. We could sometimes have widely varying views. I would argue that in DHS they would air on the side of just let them adopt. Because remember, they're not in the country seeing the birth parents. They're only in America, seeing only the adopting parents, and they see us as a barrier to having a

smooth adoption process. When I first started, we were at each other's throats so we had to build relationships. I traveled with the head of the international office of USCIS [United States Citizen and Immigration Services] to Ethiopia. We developed a relationship. We started monthly meetings. We would sit down and work out issues because we had to work together. Because there were times when we were just sending completely opposite messages that was only confusing adopting parents.

Q: Did Department of Health—

PAYNE: Health and Human Services didn't get involved. It was only Department of Homeland Security.

Q: The Department of Homeland Security when they're practically all little kids. Did you have problems adopting children over the age of 21?

PAYNE: You can't legally. They have to be under the age of 16 for a child to come in on an immigrant visa as the child of an American. And most of the children were younger. There were some that were teenagers and we would try to get the process completed so they wouldn't age out. So, we would flag a case where—"At risk of aging out, make this a priority." Because you didn't want someone to not be able to immigrate just because it took two years. International adoptions, because of the fraud protections, were taking longer and longer to process. It's hard to do fraud investigations. Can you imagine what it's like to do a fraud investigation in the Congo? It's horrible.

Q: What was the situation at the time?

PAYNE: Horrible.

Q: How did it work? I mean, how did the situation work?

PAYNE: Dirt poor, where again, these agents would go out and they would go to a poor village and say, "You know, if you give me your kid, I'm going to take them to the capital, Kinshasa, and they'll get educated and they'll come back to you with money," and then, they'd never hear from their kid again. Some kids were literally stolen from their parents. This happened in Sierra Leone. So, sometimes the service providers would offer the same children to several American parents and sometimes they just would scam the parents into paying monthly orphanage fees and never processed the adoption. I found that also where I'd go and say, "Wait, we have petitions for the same children from two different adopting parents. They can't both have those kids."

But they were scamming them for the monthly orphanage fees because they'd say, "Until this is done, it would be so nice if you would pay the orphanage to take care of your child." Because once they bond it's, 'That's my child. I've got a child." And the games they would play: "Oh, look at how horrible. We need blankets. We need food. Can't you help?"

I mean, you have whole industries that run on images of poor children, the tug at the heartstrings, so you'll send $25 a month to take care of that child. You really think a child's getting taken care of for that $25 a month? There are plenty of really legitimate, great adoption service providers genuinely looking for loving homes for orphans. But on this other extreme, you have adoption service providers looking for children for parents and they want—"You pay me, I'll find you a child. You give me money; I'll find you a child."

Q: What about China?

PAYNE: China was hard. They joined the Hague Convention. A lot of times once they join, then adoptions stop because they don't meet the requirements, like Vietnam. But in China we worked very closely with them to try to find this in between where we could allow adoptions to move forward, but in a much more regulated way. I suspect there is still baby stealing in China. The Communist Party officials just take people's babies. I think that the children with special needs in China are probably genuine orphans. Most of the Americans adopting from China these days are adopting children with special needs. There aren't that many children that aren't classified special needs available for adoption from China these days.

Q: What did you do? Did you have any other jobs?

PAYNE: I do want to talk about a little bit. When I ran the Office of Children's Issues, I started to really promote resilience as a state of being, as a skill that could be learned. And I started designing resilience training for consular officers. One of the things I noticed after I became pretty skilled myself with resilience and seeing the impact it had on the office, was that a lot of senior consular officers had low resilience. Over a 20 to 25-year career, little by little, their resilience would erode. And then, by the time they are a senior manager, they're cynical, they're tired, they're reactive instead of proactive. They can't problem solve. They have no memory. They're crappy leaders. I started to advocate in the Bureau that we need to teach people how to maintain their resilience throughout their career so that it wouldn't erode, but it would stay stable and then they would be much more effective senior leaders. I designed a resilience training module and started training it in the classes for American citizens service consular officers. The deputy chief of mission course got wind of it and asked if I would give it to that class. And I was becoming known for resilience.

That's why when I screwed up and did not get the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] jobs I applied for after Children's Issues—because of my own mistakes—I found myself, for the first time in my career after handshake day without a handshake, without an onward assignment. And word got out to the director of FSI, the Foreign Service Institute, who was really keen on developing a resilience project at the institute. And Ray Leki, who runs a Transition Center, was working on resilience efforts, almost parallel to mine. We were working at that time in a parallel way.

And he said, "Beth, come to FSI," and Nancy McEldowney said, "Come to FSI and be Associate Dean in the School of Professional and Area Studies."

And I said, "I'll come if you let me do resilience training," which wasn't part of the job.

And Nancy said, "Fine." So, I came here as Associate Dean with the understanding, and I give everybody credit. I spent 20% of my time doing resilience and no one objected. And so, my only special project while I was Associate Dean—

Q: Was anyone else doing resilience?

PAYNE: Well, Ray Leki was doing his own kind of efforts and they had developed a class already. Laura Smallwood, she's wonderful. She had developed a personal resilience class and it was the early stages. I came to FSI and then, became part of this team that involved Sam Thielman, who was an RMOP [Regional Medical Officer/Psychiatrist] who came here on a Y-tour, a one-year tour, Laura Smallwood, Ray Lucky, and myself. And we forged the resilience project.

Q: We probably talked about this before, but what do you mean when you say resilience?

PAYNE: Resilience is the ability to thrive in adversity. It's the ability to manage during a significant emotional event or a crisis and then to bounce back fully, maybe even bounce forward after the event. For example, the rocket attack in Baghdad. If I had been more resilient before the attack happened, I might not have gotten PTSD as a result of the attack. Resilience gives you that ability to function well during and then to bounce back if not bounce forward after.

Q: Resilience is an individual process?

PAYNE: It's a state of being.

Q: This is not something that you carry on to—

PAYNE: You can have resilient teams as well. This project, the four of us, first we looked out around the world to find out who's already doing resilient training because if someone's already doing it, we weren't gonna do it. We used a lot of research by these two psychiatrists, Doctor Southwick and Doctor Charney. But there was no existing model that we thought worked for the Foreign Service. We developed our own model for personal resilience. Then, Sam Thielman recommended a model for a resilient team You know, how does an embassy respond in adversity and we developed what we call the "Seven Cs of Community Resilience." Then, the last thing we did, was develop a model for leaders. How does a leader lead in a way that encourages resilience? And we looked at ambassadors, the ones that worked, the ones that didn't work. We found champions, we developed trainings. FSI now offers classes in individual resilience and in resilience

leadership. They have resilience modules in over 60 existing classes. We helped individual embassies where we'll do a needs assessment, determine the levels of resilience, and design a training program, and go out and work with that embassy. It's pretty remarkable what we developed in a few years and at the time, it was just everybody's part time job. We would meet every week, the four of us every week and hash through these ideas, hash through these concepts because we were developing it from nothing for the foreign affairs community. It was a very specific approach for foreign affairs professionals.

Q: So, the foreign affairs community, what was that?

PAYNE: That would be the foreign affairs agencies. So, Department of Treasury, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, Department of Commerce, USAID [United States Agency for International Development], State Department.

Q: I would think the Department of Defense would have it.

PAYNE: They had a lot for uniformed military personnel but not so much for civilian. Remember, Department of Defense also has civilian personnel. Believe it or not, I would go over to the Mark Center from time to time and give resilience training to DoD [Department of Defense] civilians because yes, they had it in the uniformed services—And the army has done amazing things on resilience, on individual resilience. And they were one of the groups that we learned from in developing our own resilience program—but DoD is one of those siloed agencies where just cause the uniformed services gets it, doesn't mean the civilians get it.

Q: Well, can you give me an idea of what sort of basic things you would tell a DCM or upcoming ambassador?

PAYNE: Yeah. So, what we taught in the ambassador course was an ambassador needs to model good resilience practices. The model for resilience is to have meaning and purpose in your life, to have good self-care—which is exercise, sleep, eat and rest—have a positive outlook, be an active problem solver, and have social support networks. We would teach the ambassadors that you need to do more than just practice this, the people who work for you need to see you do it. When you go on vacation, stay off your email, because if you're emailing during vacation, you're not really resting. If you work during vacation, you're working, not taking vacation. Put your exercise on your calendar so that people can see it. It's really talking to them about the importance that they're role models and the importance of mentoring your staff. And we would focus on DCMs for this: How do you have a conversation with somebody with low resilience? Talk to them and allow them to talk and help them seek the support they need. Because after Iraq and Afghanistan, we'd have these people coming out with issues and we'd just leave them be and they'd be a wreck. No one would talk to them. No one would mentor them. And then, the last is how do you foster the resilience of the community itself when we have the 7Cs of community resilience.

Q: Did you have a way of developing—how do you look at somebody and say if this person resilient or not?

PAYNE: So, no, it's not as simple as that. We did develop behaviors that are red flags for low resilience. We'd help people understand that if you're seeing these behaviors in yourself or others: irritability, lack of memory, inability to sleep, certain behaviors that are red flags that may indicate low resilience, you need to do something. And then, if you're talking to a colleague, how to have that conversation in a way that doesn't shut down the colleague, but that really allows them to open up and gives them permission to express themselves. It was very exciting. I did that for two years as Associate Dean, and then I got hit with, "Well I really liked doing this. I kind of got off the path of my next stop is DCM." In the Foreign Service path, maybe once or twice DCM, then ambassador. You're on this trajectory. And I debated, "Well, maybe I could even throw my hat in the ring for ambassador now for a small African country." And then I was like, "I don't want to leave the resilience work behind. We're not done yet." I had to make the decision whether to retire because I was coming up against my six years in the US. And I said, "Okay, I'm going to retire from the Foreign Service so I can do resilience work full time." So, my last two and a half years at FSI where as a Civil Service employee, not as a Foreign Service employee.

Q: Are there any other things we haven't discussed about what you were doing at FSI?

PAYNE: No, because really the whole focus of my—I loved SPAS [School of Professional and Area Studies], but I have to admit, I was in that job to do resilience. The team I worked with were superb, they didn't really need me. We had an amazing Dean, Mark Pekala. My division directors were all ones and 15s and were just great. And so, SPAS kind of ran itself. It gave me that freedom I needed to do the resilience work, which is what I came to FSI to do.

Q: You know, looking at this, I think particularly consular training attracts people who like to do things and have something to do. I never was considered for an ambassadorial job until I got up to a MC [Minister Counselor] title. But I was always a consular and I never really—for a little, I was consul general, I realized I don't really like some of the diplomatic thing of going out and meeting people who talk to you. I like to get my hands on things. And I think that the Service separates us.

PAYNE: As I've done the resilience work, you'd be surprised how many ambassadors don't like the ceremonial requirements of their jobs and are introverts. I talked to a bunch of ambassadors as I was trying to make my decision, and you'd be surprised how many introverts don't enjoy it. Once you're ambassador you have to show up to events, you can't skirt them. And it would just drain them, all of these ceremonial events that they are required to be at, a three-hour ceremony where you say something for 15 minutes, but the American ambassador has to be there. And so, this is a huge drain on a lot of people. Some extroverts adore it. I did recognize that I'm a very strong introvert and that I didn't

care for it when I was Consul General in India, but as ambassador it would be so much worse. Do I really want this? And I think a lot more Foreign Service should think about this before they take an ambassadorship. They just want the title and the rank and the authority that goes with it. But you pay a price. There's a sacrifice to be made when you're ambassador, a huge sacrifice.

Q: As consul general in Naples, I really didn't like the—every time anything happened, the Italians—I used to go to all these ceremonies.

PAYNE: Tedious, very tedious. People don't appreciate the tedium that ambassadors have to— and Consul General—have to deal with. So, I think that's my career.

Q: Well, looking back on it, what do you think?

PAYNE: I loved it. Absolutely loved it.

Q: You have any recommendations for young people?

PAYNE: If you thrive on change, this is the perfect career. If you don't like change, think twice, because this is a career filled with unexpected change. You could find yourself assigned to a country and the day before you're supposed to leave, you can't go because now an ordered departure and you're going to shift to something else. It's a wonderful life. You make the best friends you'll ever make in your life, but you've got to be open and adaptable and flexible. This is not for rigid people.

Q: Well, right now we're going through a particularly bad period with the president [Trump]. I hope it's an aberration.

PAYNE: We've always had our ups and downs. You know, when I joined in '93 it was also a pretty low point for the diplomatic corps. I would say to people, if you're coming in now, think long-term. There are always ups and downs. There is the ability to influence US foreign policy, to implement foreign policy, to assist and protect our nation. It can be hard. There were times when I did not like the Americans I was representing. I'm not gonna lie. We have to come to terms with that. We represent all Americans, not just the ones we like. We represent all of them. We can't say what we want to say publicly. It's the first time I've said certain things in this oral testimony that I've never said before. You lose all privacy. Don't even think you have privacy. Forget it. When you join the diplomatic corps, you're giving up all of your privacy and you're giving up your freedom of expression, but it's worth it.

Q: At the end of one of these sessions, I remember somebody saying, "Do you know Stu? They pay me to do this?"

PAYNE: They paid me. If you turn 50 and you have 20 years in the Foreign Service, you get this amazing pension. It builds in this opportunity for second, third lives. You don't

have to work for 35 years in the Foreign Service. If you want to, great, but you don't have to. Our annuity is fine—

Q: I'm living very nicely, thank you.

PAYNE: At the end, if you make it to 50 and 20, you are rewarded for it. You are thanked in your pocketbook. You're never going to be rich. We don't get rich doing this, but you will be very comfortable. You have a good, rewarding, wonderful life, and you'll have just enough. My financial advisor told me a month ago, "Beth, you have enough."

Q: Well, thank you very much Beth.

PAYNE: What a pleasure this has been.

End of interview