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

HENRY "HANK" WEISS

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
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INTERVIEW

Q: Okay. Today is August 12th and this is our first interview with—do you go by Henry?

WEISS: Henry or Hank.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Q: Okay. Hank, and where and when were you born?

WEISS: I was born in the state of Illinois in 1954.

Q: Okay. What town?

WEISS: Joliet, Illinois.

Q: Okay, great. Now did you grow up there though.

WEISS: My mother was from Joliet and we lived there until I was 12. My mom had five brothers and immigrant parents--(who) were my grandparents--but my father was from Ohio. My father was a deck engineer and Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy as well as a chemical engineer. He worked in a munitions plant near Joliet. Once the war was over, and things had progressed, he was transferred back to his home, which was near Cleveland, Ohio. So, at the age of 12, our family moved to Ohio and we were near my dad's side of the family. And we had an interesting childhood because my sister, Sharon and I knew both sides of our family, and it was a very rewarding childhood.

Q: Alright. So, let's go back a little bit then, in Joliet, how or, wherever, how did your parents meet?

WEISS: My father was working as a process engineer in the chemical plant in Kankakee, Illinois, with another gentleman, a friend of his who had been dating a woman that worked in a bank. He went with him to the bank and the woman was best friends with my

mom. So, they did a double date. About two years later, they got married. Dad was sent to go out to the World War II effort and was going to be sent to sea from California. But before he went out, my mom went to Denver. They met in Denver and were married in Saint Rose of Lima Church. They chose Denver because my mom had a cousin there. It was quite an adventure because, at that time, the early 1940s folks did not travel to marry. They both came on a train. My grandma, who was an immigrant also--who'd never been out of the state of Ohio, went to see her son get married. My mom's mom, who'd never been out past the Mississippi River, also went out to Denver. It was quite an experience. I actually went to the St. Rose of Lima church to trace that wedding and learned it was a remarkable thing they did. Sometimes, whatever you think your spiritual guide or Karma happens to be, guides us. In his case it guided me to see where my parents started. They were happily married for their whole lives.

Q: Now you were mentioning your grandparents, and immigration. How far have you traced your family origins?

WEISS: Well, I just started that, but I had one interesting experience on my father's side. Both of my paternal grandparents came from what was originally the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, then Yugoslavia and now is Slovenia. The Slovenian language and culture were a large part of my dad's side of our family. Also, I really loved my grandmother. When my mother passed away, we were teenagers. My grandmother came to live with us and she was a remarkable woman; even though she had never finished high school. She was fluent in four languages and pretty good in two others. Amazingly, she could get by in about six foreign languages and never finished high school. She was remarkable, she never drove, and was raised Catholic, as were we. She cooked for the priests at a university and at a Catholic high school. I was so impressed with her. I never saw her swear or really get angry. She got up very early each morning. She made great fresh food, and was just the most wonderfully productive, good person and we loved our grandma Angie, dearly.

About two years ago, my wife encouraged me to go to Slovenia and trace our roots. Long story short, my paternal grandmother, Angela Weiss has an unusual maiden name, Svirt. A contact of ours at the Slovenian embassy told me, "This is an easy last name to find. Just go, look in the phone book and you'll find your family." We looked for Svirt online and when we got to Slovenia, we stayed by the national university and got a student translator. With his help, we called the only family in the country with the last name of Svirt. The person who answered was a farmer and said, "I don't have much time for this, but call my sister." So, we called his sister.

The farmer's sister, Melita, asked me a few questions and I couldn't answer all the questions. So, I called my oldest cousin in Seattle, USA, Maria, who gave me the correct answers. I called Melita, the farmer's sister back and gave her the correct answers. Melita replied: "We're definitely related. Come to this little village in about three hours. We'll meet you there."

They were in a rural village in South-Central Slovenia, near Novo Mesto, which is the same town that Melania Trump is from, by coincidence. We drove to this little village in about three hours. Once there, we saw about 40 people at the gate in front of a vineyard. That gate and wall had my grandmother's last name Svirt, painted on it, beautifully.

Now no one from our family in the USA ever returned to Slovenia since our grandparents left Europe, almost one hundred years ago. Even though they left nearly a hundred years ago, the Svirt clan treated us like family that had never left their little village.

They got out accordions and started playing their music. We were also treated to their wine, sausages and the bread they made at their farm. The amazing part about this was that these were the same customs that my grandparents brought when they came to Ohio from Slovenia. My grandparents also had a little fruit farm in Kirtland, Ohio. They made wine, sausages and fresh bread and played their music too--it was such a wonderful, rewarding experience.

No one from our family had gone back to Slovenia and Yugoslavia became a communist country in WWII. No one went back for nearly one hundred years. Yet, when we went back and made these connections, it was like we had never left. They embraced us all totally. We're still in touch and it has been a wonderful experience.

We learned that my grandfather Frank Weiss came from the same village, in fact his and my grandmother's homes were only a few thousand meters apart in this same Slovenian village! I thought of the doctor that told me "coincidence is God acting anonymously!" And, I recalled my father quoting Albert Einstein's saying that "God does not play dice with the universe!"

Now what about your father's side?

WEISS: I'm sorry, that was my father's side, the Slovenian Svirt-Weiss family in northeastern Ohio. My mother's side of the family was also an interesting mix. My maternal grandfather, Joseph Loeffler was an immigrant from the Baden-Baden area of Germany. He came to the U.S. when he was about 17 with his brother. They worked in the US steel and wire mill in Joliet, Illinois. It was the largest steel wire mill maybe in the country at that time. It was a huge mill, U.S. Steel and Wire.

He met my grandmother, Nellie Brown, who is Irish, so you can imagine—his native language is German. She's Irish with an Irish brogue, and they got along. They had six kids, five boys, my mom's older brothers, all in a row. My grandpa and two of his sons worked at the same US steel mill. My mom--who was the youngest--Dorothy, was the sixth child. They all got along very well. My uncle Ray Loeffler was an electrician and inspector who worked for the city, my uncle Bern worked at the mill all his life, my uncle Arch spent most of his life as the President of Joliet Rivals Club, my uncle Harold was a fireman for the city after he got out of army, my uncle Joe started at mill but only worked a few years at the mill and was a tool and die maker. My mom actually worked at the

Joliet explosives plant during the war. My Grandpa Joe Loeffler ran for the office of Sheriff for Joliet.

Unfortunately, my grandmother, Nellie Brown passed away when I was about 11. I am actively trying to research that because, my mother, God bless her, before she passed away with cancer, she went back to find her mom's and grandmother's village which she did, in Ireland. So, I hope one day to trace both of my grandparents on my mom's side. My father's background is easier because my cousin, Bill Loeffler gave me my grandfather's brother's passport. He came over to the US, with this salvo conducto, that is like a passport. Now we know his village, which is near to Baden, Germany. We hope to visit if life gives us enough breaths and strength. I would like to go back one day because I had such a positive experience with my grandmother and dad's side of the family in Slovenia. Just Wonderful!

Q: All right, now Joliet. As you're growing up in this town, what's the major economic center? What was Joliet as a town like while you were growing up?

WEISS: I was born in 1954. The largest thing there, as I understand it, was the wire mill. At one time that steel mill in Joliet, called U.S. Steel and Wire, was the largest wire mill in the world. They made wire products, steel cable and other essential items. My grandfather started there. Two of his five sons worked in that steel mill. I think about half of the town worked in the steel mill at some point. Joliet, had a traditional work ethic. The other major employer was Caterpillar Tractor. It was shift work so many got up early and were physically fit. All my uncles and my grandpa were physically fit. They looked like athletes; it was hard work in the mill, but this was balanced by two things. One was the spiritual richness of their lives. They were practicing, devout Catholics and not in just a ceremonial sense. They believed, treat others as you want to be treated, and be good to your neighbors. It wasn't a rich town, it was a steel town, yet, I never saw poverty. I never saw people homeless. I did not see people treated badly. It was a wonderful growing up. Even though these were steel workers with hard jobs, my uncles, my mom, my grandpa-- I never heard them swear and yell. I never really saw them raise their voices. This was a remarkable upbringing because you don't think, sometimes, of those things when you think of the industrial times and steel mills in our country.

This was balanced in another interesting way because the German in my grandpa, Joe, was a bit stoic. My grandfather didn't say much. He was a tall, strong and athletic man. They all played sports—baseball or softball. It was that one pastime, the national pastime.

My grandmother, Nellie, was Irish and like my mom, Dottie, was happy-go-lucky. She'd sing, cook and crack jokes. She often was the life of the party. As she aged—she had six children—she got a little plumper, but she was your traditional Irish housewife. Happy-go-lucky, singing and often laughing. The whole family would sing. Every time there was a holiday, Thanksgiving, at Christmas, at New Year's, at Easter, they would all sing. My grandma would start and then everybody would start singing. First, they would start with Irish songs, then they would switch to more traditional German songs. It was a beautiful

upbringing because I would see this year after year after year, and it was just a wonderful tradition. The whole family would get together on holidays, a large family with us and all our cousins. We were and are still pretty close.

Q: What sort of school—was it a one school town, or was it big enough that there were several schools? How did your early schooling work?

WEISS: It was pretty much a Catholic town. There were, at about that time, almost a hundred thousand people in Joliet and there were, maybe, 15 parishes. I went to the Catholic school that my mom and my uncles went to. It was an old school called St. John the Baptist School. I remember in first grade I had a sister, a nun, who was my teacher. The priest would come in every day. Also, we would go to church every day and would mix education with some spiritual teaching. I remember when I was in the first grade it was an old schoolhouse with a wood floor. I recall I could look through the floorboards and see some snow. This parish was not a rich place, but I knew that they really cared about us. The teachers wanted us to learn. There was no doubt to me that during my grade school years that the teachers loved us as children and wanted to make sure we treated each other well. Good behavior, good virtues, and good citizenship. Being a good person was valued as much as academic excellence. Also, they made sure we could read and write and add, subtract, and do our school work too. It was, for the most part, a good experience.

Q: Now, you mentioned that your mother died relatively young and your grandmother came in as a kind of a substitute mom. How was your father? How was his life?

WEISS: My dad, Hank Weiss was a thoughtful, kind, and analytical, loving person. He had the traits of his Slovenian parents which were to be kind and respectful. He also liked to crack a joke and would try to make people feel at ease. At the same time, he was an accomplished chemist and chemical engineer.

My father was a chemist and chemical engineer at the start of the WWII, war; he worked in an explosives plant in Kankakee, Illinois where he met my mom. As I said earlier they went to Denver to be married before he was sent to the war as a Deck engineer in the Navy. Then after WWII was over, he was honorably discharged from the Navy. He went back, got a job and he and my mom in Joliet moved to Akron, Ohio where he worked in a laboratory. He actually worked in the laboratories where synthetic rubber was invented and saw Plexiglas invented. When the Plexiglas products were invented, it was a great breakthrough and material science advance in construction and industry.

He and my mother were married their entire adult lives until mom passed away due to cancer in 1971. Unfortunately, that was when my younger sister was in middle school school. It devastated her, my dad and all of us. Dad never remarried.

Again, another literal saint came into our lives. At that time, our loving grandmother, Angela, who never drove a car, spoke broken English, never finished high school, came to live with us. She set the best example two kids could ever see. She baked bread and made our home a warm and loving place again.

Our grandmother, Angela (which translated means Angel) was always busy and there for us. It showed us a wonderful example of how we are shown examples of goodness in our lives and we have to choose to listen and emulate those opportunities. Being able to see this wonderful example of our grandmother was a true gift. It helped us all immensely, and in particular our dad. He could not run our home as a single dad and still be a busy, accomplished chemical engineer. Dad was devastated by the loss of my mom. Our grandmother, dad's mother Angela, was the angel who appeared, at just the right time.

Q: Now, where in the birth order are you?

WEISS: I'm the oldest.

Q: Okay.

WEISS: We also had an older brother, Patrick who passed away very young, as an infant.

Q: Okay. Then your sister?

WEISS: Yes, I have one sister. Sharon.

Q: Okay. Now, you finish, let us say it's about middle school or elementary school, and then the family moves to Ohio.

WEISS: Yes, when I was 12, at the end of what would now be called grade school, in middle school we moved to Ohio.

Q: Okay. Describe that town, the location where you were living.

WEISS: My grandparents on my dad's side of the family had a farm outside of Cleveland, Ohio. It was a small fruit farm. My uncle Frank, my dad's brother was a couple years older than our dad. Uncle Frank was an accomplished tool and die maker. He made turbine blades for jet engines though he never got to complete his college. He would often work the second or third shift because he also had the farm.

He loved farming, like our grandfather, Frank. He used to tell me, "I love to plow a field and see that earth turn over and become productive." Uncle Frank and my dad were close, and my dad would take us to the farm from time to time. We'd harvest fruit, mostly grapes, make wine and grape juice, apple cider and a few times they even made sausages. It was a good upbringing.

Our dad, Hank had to travel a bit because of his job in chemical plants around the Midwest. For as long as our mom, Dottie, was alive, we had a great upbringing. Mom was kind of the happy-go-lucky-Irish. We went to school in a little town, Bay Village. I went to middle school and high school there. Our parents kept our Catholic religion and told us, "Either you go with us to church or you can go on your own." Sometimes, I would ride my bike out in the country through the fruit farms to go to our Parish church. It was a new church out in the rural area. I remember riding my bike on the country road, Walker Road, through the apple orchards, vineyards and trees to get to our new church called Holy Spirit parish.

Another wonderful thing was that our parish priest at Holy Spirit went to high school with my father and knew dad well. Again, sometimes the divine hand or karma puts these guardians in our life. This parish priest was my father's high school classmate. He also grew fruit at the priest's house, the rectory, where we would visit him at his little fruit farm from time to time.

We had a pretty good community with folks looking out for us. We went to what is called CCD, which are Catholic spiritual talks on Sundays. It was helpful since we went to public school and that would balance our secular, public school academics. We often heard "be a good person, be kind, be polite and be nice to people. Also, we learned to discern good from bad or evil and to have a spiritual side in our lives. Our faith and church on Sundays were a helpful compass in life. I am grateful for those years with our Catholic teachings about the bible, scripture, saints and about the spiritual aspects of life and angels.

Q: Now talk a little bit about the public school you went to. Was it large, small? Was it diverse, what was that like?

WEISS: Well, I would say it was a medium-size school on the edge of what—now, they call it the "ex-burbs." Basically, this is where the city and suburbs ended and the farmland started. We were on that rural – urban boundary or edge. I had schoolmates whose parents and grandparents farmed. In fact, one of my high school friends is now a third-time congressman for our district, Ohio-16, Bob Gibbs. Bob was the United States Hog Farmer of the year. He also was the Ohio Farmer of the Year and has been our congressman for about eight years. We grew up together. Then Bob and I, after college worked together in agricultural research and development at the Ohio Agricultural R and D center (OARDC) in Wooster, Ohio.

Q: Wait a minute, I have to ask, what does one have to do to become the Ohio Farmer of the Year?

WEISS: Well, I think it's sorta like precepts in the foreign service 😊. You have to be recommended, you have to have an outstanding reputation in your community, in your profession and in your industry, as well be exceedingly honest. I don't believe that you can have shady business dealings. You have to be quite a productive farmer, because they measure productivity and yields. You must be a good person, a good neighbor and a good

community person. My friend, Bob Gibbs, is that kind of outstanding human being. We grew up on that edge between the urban and rural Midwest. It was a blessed time to be there because things were working well in the 1950s up to the 1970s. The little midwestern towns were productive and there were jobs. High school was a good experience with enough jobs for graduates in the city, as well as for rural jobs and so the small towns prospered too.

Q: Okay. Alright, great. What size was your graduating class.

WEISS: Our graduating class was about 300.

Q: Okay. Now as you are going to middle school and high school, did you begin to have interests in extracurricular activities? Could be scouting or athletics or drama or debate? Any of those sorts of things?

WEISS: Yes, our parents always kind of stressed study hard and physical fitness. Our uncles, dad, mom--were pretty good athletes in their youth. They played sports and tried to stay physically fit and set a good example. I was encouraged to play sports. I played sports in high school. Baseball was my main sport. I also played basketball and football. Earlier in grade school I was a Scout and later as a dad was a scout leader with our sons. The scouting program led me to be a Peace Corps country director, which is another story that we can talk about later if of interest. How scouting led to being a Peace Corps country director, a remarkable experience. My mom was a scout leader, my dad was sometimes involved, when he was not traveling.

Then the other thing my parents like to say was, "the world is getting smaller every day. The communications revolution is coming. Learn a language, look at your grandparents." My grandparents could switch seamlessly between Slovenian, German, English and Serbo-Croatian. My grandma, who is from basically a rural peasant town and didn't finish high school, but she speaks three or four languages. I saw this and was being encouraged to learn a language at an early age. Our parents bought old vinyl records. We had a Spanish record collection to learn Spanish and they put them on just about every night and we'd listen. They planted that seed early, probably when I was 9 or so. My sister, Shar, was younger. Learning Spanish worked for me all my life. I'm almost bilingual in Spanish now.

Q: Okay. Sports--take a moment and talk about your Boy Scout experience. How far did you go? Did you reach Eagle Scout?

WEISS: No, I didn't. When we were in Illinois, we were quite active with scouting and then when about age 11 we moved to Ohio. Our father got busy, so we became less involved with scouts. However, scouting planted another good seed and led me to something very interesting later in life when I became a Scout leader and chair of the parents committee. We started a scouting program in El Salvador at the embassy with the ambassador and spouse. It was quite successful and the program's still running. Also, it led me back into the Peace Corps.

Q: Alright. We'll wait for that. We'll come back to it. Okay. Also while you were in high school, did your parents encourage reading or were you much of a reader for pleasure?

WEISS: Yes, our dad was a well-versed reader even though he was a scientist and engineer. He read philosophy. He read Kahlil Gibran before anybody was thinking of Arab poets and Arab philosophers. He read about the Greeks, the Romans and history. He would read poetry and philosophy. I often really didn't recognize the wisdom in that until much later in life. But he would plant great ideas like Rudyard Kipling. At bedtime he would quote Kipling's poems sometimes, say a prayer and tuck us in. My mom was more happy-go-lucky. She'd watch movies, listen to music and television. She was very emotionally intelligent and people loved her. She worked as a teller in a bank when she finished high school but never went to college. She would read magazines, newspapers and things like that.

As I mentioned, before we went to sleep at night, my mom and dad would always see us off and give us a nice word. Then my dad would come in after and would say something philosophical or quote a poem from someone famous like Kahlil Gibran or Rudyard Kipling. Then he'd pat us on the head, we'd say our prayers and go to bed. That was every night. It wasn't long, but it was a remarkable upbringing and I'm very grateful. We had God and a spiritual element of goodness or karma in the world. All of us hopefully get some of that. It's our job to recognize it and to listen to it. I am very grateful to my parents for doing that, of course.

Q: Okay. Now, the other thing in high school is, which subjects began to interest you more? Where did you do well, but also where were your passions?

WEISS: Well, my father always encouraged us to study science and math and said, "You need to understand how things work." I got that from two ends in our family. My father was the only one who ever went to college in our family, so he'd say, "You have to understand the world," and that meant to him, physics, mathematics, chemistry and philosophy. On the other end, my uncles and my grandpa were tradesmen and farmers and said, "You need to understand how things work." To them that meant to know how to fix things, how to cut steel and weld, how to build things, to work outside and do practical things. I got a good balance because on the one side my father was saying, "Develop your mind intellectually to understand how the world works," and my grandpa and uncles were saying, "Learn how to use your hands to understand how the things you will need in your life every day work." I liked math a lot, physics and science, but I also took shop and studied Spanish in high school. That was a nice balance. I was blessed, we also had courses in sociology, civics but took shop courses and drawing, all those things. I remain grateful that in the late 60s, the high schools worked well. I remember we were there to learn and to study. If we misbehaved, there were consequences. I can remember, there were some pretty severe repercussions for misbehaving in high school. I remember those well and I don't recall students disrespecting a teacher and getting away with it. There was good in that. Our teachers were to be learned from, respected and listened to. Sometimes I worry about our high schools nowadays. I'm not sure that's still the case. I

hope we can get back to that because I do remember in our high school, you were there to learn; it was a learning environment and no one was allowed to disrupt the class or disrupt other people. It was an easier time to grow up, maybe.

Q: That description then also leads me to ask since your father had gone to college, was he or your relatives starting to talk to you about whether you were going to go to college and if so, for what? Were you beginning to form a view of completing high school and going to college or, or where did you see yourself after high school?

WEISS: My grandmother worked with Catholic priests and teachers. She was a cook and housekeeper at Catholic school called St. Joseph's. How about this, it's now called Villa Angela - St. Joseph's. My grandmother's probably smiling in heaven!

The Catholic university system and the Catholic high schools are quite good. Angela didn't have money for her sons to go to college. My grandfather and my grandmother were immigrants. They didn't have much. Through her job, grandma knew the professors and many were priests. They recognized my father was smart, worked hard and was good at science. Those priests helped dad earn a scholarship to go to a Catholic university, South of Cleveland, Ohio, John Carroll U. Dad was the only one in his generation, on both sides of our family, who went to college. Again, it seemed, the saints were with my dad and my grandmother, who were truly good persons.

Those professors and priests gave my dad a chance, but he had to do well in college and science to keep his scholarship. I share this story because my parents told us, to do our best to fulfill our potential. They told us to study hard, to do our homework and to prepare ourselves. College was not just a right, it's not an entitlement. We were to use it to help prepare us for life just like our dad did. We were encouraged but there were consequences if I came home with bad grades or if a teacher told my parents that I didn't do my homework 😊(laughter).

Q: As you're approaching graduation from high school, how did your college process end up?

WEISS: Then we all had to take two admissions tests. In 1971, these tests were the ACTs and the SATs. If you didn't score high, your chances of getting a scholarship was limited. As you know the Jesuit system has some great universities. On the tests, I scored well at math, but not too well on other parts of the exam and my scores were not competitive enough for a scholarship. Especially at the better schools in the Jesuit system. I sense my dad was a bit disappointed but he did let me know directly. As you know my father earned scholarships for both his Jesuit undergraduate, at John Carroll, and his master in science at Marquette U., another great Jesuit school. Marquette, by the way was where our son Frank Weiss graduated from their school of civil engineering and construction management.

So here we go again, it seems to me through a guardian spirit or good karma, history repeated and now my dad's grandson, Frank Weiss is an engineer/manager and his

grandson, Henry is a scientist at an important pharmaceutical lab at the Illinois science and technology center, just like his grandfather. And all of them went to Jesuit Universities. Sometimes I think dad is looking down from heaven, praying for his grandsons and is very proud of them both. One is a scientist in a lab, like he was. The other an engineer from his alma mater, Marquette.

I did not score high enough to get a scholarship, so I went to our Ohio State public university system. In state tuition was much less expensive in the Ohio State U. system then. I started at the Ohio State, Oxford campus which proved to me that we have to earn things in life. What my parents told me was true, we need to study hard and prepare ourselves. To our sons' credit, they did not repeat my mistake. They both were accepted to outstanding Jesuit Universities just like their grandfather, Hank Weiss.

In my senior year of high school when I turned 18, the war in Viet Nam required the military draft via a lottery. My draft lottery number came up as #62 out of 365, which was low, so I was fairly sure about being drafted into the US Army. I was accepted to Ohio State University, and I signed up for ROTC. Then college ROTC postponed our military service until your 4th year of college. I spent a summer in Army basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. It was a hard and dusty summer at Ft. Know. I had good drill sergeants and Ft. Know had great wood, metal and mechanical shops that we learned in. Overall, ROTC was a good experience but I was glad the Vietnam war was over before I finished college. After I completed a year and a half of Army ROTC, the war was over and they did not need us to enlist.

Q: Now, before we follow you through college, it's already the end of the sixties, beginning of the seventies. Counterculture movement is boiling away. Did it reach you in any way as you were finishing high school?

WEISS: The most direct way it faced me was my uncle and dad's brother, Frank. He had five children and his second oldest daughter, my cousin Irene, went to Kent State University in Ohio. That was when the Kent State riots happened. The Ohio National Guard fired upon the college students. There were a number of young Ohio students fatally wounded. At that point, my cousin Irene, was impacted emotionally, like many in her class in Ohio. So, she left college and never went back. It made my sister; Sharon and I reassess things because we were applying to those universities in the Ohio State public university system.

To my uncles and my dad's credit, they pretty much said, "look, this was an isolated case. It was a tremendous error, but sometimes things happen you cannot control and you need to continue your plans in life." That was basically the message conveyed to us, even though it impacted my cousin, Irene and my sister, Sharon. Both never finished college. Irene worked at a bank like my mom, and she has a wonderful life. She has her family, two children, all still in Ohio, in the same town, and, I think I can say, they live happy lives. It so happens this year is the 50th anniversary of the Kent State shootings, documented in a book called "13 seconds."

Q: Alright. You were accepted to which campus in the Ohio State public university system?
It sounds like this is the first time you're away from home for any length of time?

WEISS: That's correct.

Q: Okay. What were your first impressions of this big state school? You're going from a relatively small place to a pretty big one now.

WEISS: It helped me to be blessed with good parents and family. They shared a spiritual and positive philosophical outlook. Even though my mom had passed away the year before and I know dad's heart was broken, dad drove me to the University. He took me to the front door of the dormitory and as kindly as he could, even though I know his heart was breaking, looked me in the eyes and said, "You're a man now and need to get a good education. That's going to be up to you to prepare yourself. Do your best, be polite, be kind and say your prayers." That's basically how we parted and dad's message was clear. "Do your best, but if you have a doubt, questions or a problem, I'm here for you." He was a wonderful father, who really loved us.

Q: Okay. Now when you got yourself settled, were you thinking of a major or were you guided towards a specialization; how did that work?

WEISS: At that time, Oxford was the best science campus in the Ohio State system. I started in the basic engineering, science courses. When I mistakenly signed up for the human physiology course as a freshman, I had a wake-up call. Human physiology was usually for 2nd or 3rd year pre-medical students. I was new at college and did not know that many of these Juniors were on their way to med school to be doctors. They had been studying science already for two years in college. I was used to doing pretty well with my grades, in math and physics. Then that human physiology course with these pre-med students, really ate my lunch. (Laughter). I had to struggle like crazy, and the best I could get was maybe a C minus or maybe it was a D-plus. I just squeaked through without flunking out. Then I thought, "Holy smokes, I better think this college plan through more carefully." That adjusted my thinking and approach to college to make better use of our advisors, college counselors and professors.

Q: Going from a small pond to a big pond.

WEISS: Yes, exactly.

Q: But you still wanted to stay on the engineering science track, just not human or life science?

WEISS: That's right. I learned to go towards pre-engineering courses, basic science and math. I got my undergrad and graduate degree in engineering via some errors like that human physiology course along the road. I feel empathy for young people now, as it's a

more complex world. There are more decisions and more options. But my dad's message is as true as ever "do your best!"

Q: Now the other thing is, while you were there, how did you finance your studies? Did you work or how did that work out?

WEISS: I had a few sources. Dad and I were Ohio state citizens, so in-state tuition wasn't very expensive. Also I got a monthly stipend from ROTC and another monthly stipend from Social Security because mom passed away the year before. I also had part time jobs and dad helped me pay any balance that the sum of ROTC, Social Security and my part time jobs did not cover. Ohio State schools were very affordable back then. I think I paid about $300 a semester and books were $50, so a quarter cost $350! In the 1970s, in-state tuition in the Ohio State U. was affordable

Q: By the same token, were you working part-time or what about that?

WEISS: As early as maybe seventh grade, I had jobs. We always had summer jobs. I had jobs painting houses, doing yard work and a job clearing land. About when I was in 10th grade, I worked after school in a shop where we fixed cars and trucks after school through the fall, winter and spring.

Then the day after my high school graduation day, the very next day, I started working at a steel mill. I worked in that steel mill all summer, my first summer after high school and made good money. In those days, you made good wages in the steel mills. I was working at a big steel fabrication plant, it was an interesting life experience. There were no college-educated people working on that steel mill floor so I learned a lot about people that you do not meet in college.

Here comes my guardian angel again. I got that job through my grandmother, Angela Weiss. My grandmother used to walk the dog about 6 PM or so. She was from the old Slovenian neighborhood on the east side of Cleveland, called Sainte Claire. The biggest steel fabricator there was run by a man who saw her walking the dog. She talked to this man and said, "I have this grandson, his mom passed away. He's going to graduate from high school, soon. He's in good shape, pretty athletic, maybe you could use him in the steel mill, someplace." My grandma, Angela, got me that first job in the steel mill. The day I graduated from high school, the very next day, real early in the morning, I started working at the steel mill. We started work at six o'clock in the morning. I'd leave home, in the dark, at five o'clock or 5:15 in the morning.

Q: Now, what were your tasks there? Because it's huge and lots of people did different things.

WEISS: It was large, the area I worked in was steel fabrication. My most memorable experience was when we made huge pen stocks. These are huge steel pipes or tubes that a man can walk inside of. They're about six feet in diameter, sometimes larger and used for the hydro-electric turbines at dams. A skilled welder, who was older than I was, sat up on

a welding machine above me, atop of the pipe, to weld the seam that joined two huge pipes together. The two pipes are on top of big rollers in a huge industrial bay. My job was to grind the seam from below the welder above me, so the steel was clean to be welded up. Then once welded, the pipe was rotated on the rollers back down to me again to grind off the welding slag. So, you get the picture? After it was welded at the top, the pipe came down around again. At times the pipe would wobble since the man welding was sitting up top of it. The two halves of the big pipes being welded, turn on the rollers which are on a concrete floor. There are bays on both sides of us, similar to the bay we worked in.

One day, the creator, karma or that guardian angel that watches over us, saved me. This steel mill is not a sophisticated place. We didn't have engineers or safety professionals in that part of the mill. Some of the welders were rough, former convicts. They did not always work safely. They wanted to get done fast because they were paid by the amount of work done, piece work. They were not paid only by the hour and the production bonus could be more than the hourly wages.

One day, as I was working in our bay, between two of these pipes on the rollers. something went wrong. Just by God's grace or divine messenger, I just finished from grinding under the pipes so I could step outside of the rollers. Seconds later, that huge pipe fell off the rollers. If I would have been in that row, under the two pipes and among the rollers, I would've been crushed dead. This all happened within a few seconds.

Again, “coincidence is God acting anonymously!” A few times in my life, I have had experiences where, God or Karma, sent an unexpected message that gave me a second chance. It shook me up and I thought to myself, "you better do something good with your life because you just got a second chance."

This also made me realize how important safety is and what a gift the life we have is. Also do not let people push themselves, too hard just for money. This was a valuable lesson, early in life about the importance of safety, having good procedures and making sure people are safe in the workplace. This experience benefited my career, later in life, when we chat about NRECA.

Q: But then did you continue with the steel mill, between semesters during the summer?

WEISS: I finished the entire summer in the steel mill. When I was completing my first year of college, a friend of mine told me, "the ore boats on the Great Lakes are paying much better. They're bringing ore to the steel mills and looking for steelworkers with some experience, to work below deck."

Below deck is where the maintenance of the electro-mechanical gear, the motors, the diesel engines and the generators are done. I worked in shops in high school, in ROTC and with my uncle and dad, plus in the steel mill. I felt I could do this job and that it may be a good learning experience. Also, it paid much better than the steel mill.

I wrote to the owner of the Cleveland Cliffs shipping company, George Steinbrenner, who was also the owner of the New York Yankees. I was advised that if you wrote a handwritten letter to Mr. George Steinbrenner stating: Dear Mr. Steinbrenner, I'm from Ohio and I worked in a steel mill. I'm going to college and need a summer job. I would be grateful if you would consider me for work as a merchant marine on one of your ships.

Not too long later, I got a cable from Mr. Steinbrenner's office in Ohio to "Report to Cleveland Cliff's office to apply for a merchant marines license." I went to the Cleveland Cliff's office during my college break. It was in the old Rockefeller building in front of Lake Erie at the port of Cleveland where the ore boats come in. The lady in HR told me to take a test that was relatively straightforward. In a few days they called to advise me to report to the longshoremen and seamen's union hall and get my merchant marines license.

I still have that Great Lakes merchant marines license from 1973. I was assigned to the below deck engineer and also got to learn about deck engineering as his assistant. That was golden because right then my salary tripled. (Laughter)

Again, to my father and my grandmother's credit, they did not discourage me. Even though I knew my dad's heart was broken and my grandma loved us and they would have liked me to stay around. They knew I could make much more money for my college savings because as an assistant engineer on an ore boat on the Great Lakes at that time, it was a great job. A lot of older men would leave home to take those jobs. Here I was, 19 years old, and I had a merchant marines license. I worked that summer on an ore boat, the USS Ben Morrel.

It was a pretty startling experience. A lot of the seamen were tough men with rough lives. It taught me the importance of balance in life. I would seek solace to read and write while at sea. I wouldn't play poker at night in the break room. I tried to stay away because some of these men were difficult. There were about 15 of us on that ship. It was close quarters and some of them were pretty rude, unpleasant men.

Q: That's the reputation. That's certain. Then that, did that continue? In other words, were you able to return every summer to work as a deck engineer?

WEISS: I did one year of work on the ore boats and it was a harsh environment. I had some rough experiences. Sometimes the men would go to port, they'd drink too much and get in fights. Or they wouldn't wake up for their shift and then the captain would get rather belligerent and mean. After my first summer out on the great lakes, I decided, even though the money was good, the environment was not, and so I switched jobs that next summer.

Again, one of my guardian angels helped me with another good lesson in life. My dad, Hank Weiss, was also a deck engineer in the Navy during WWII. He understood and encouraged me to move on and try something else after I worked one summer on the ship out on the Great Lakes.

Q: And went back to the steel mill?

WEISS: No something better yet.

Q: Those were summers in between school years. Now as you're going along in school, were there--were there other opportunities to do other extracurricular activities, or maybe even a summer abroad or a year abroad?

WEISS: There was a phenomenal thing [that] happened to me that I'm again blessed with. At one point, my father was asked to go back to the headquarters for his company. The headquarters for the Rohm and Haas chemical company where he worked was in Philadelphia. When I was finishing the second year of college, dad was transferred from Ohio to Philadelphia. My sister, Sharon and I knew we should go with dad. We all just lost our mom and grandma couldn't go to Philadelphia so dad could have been all alone. To my sister's credit, she went with dad. I was guided to go too and I think another guardian spirit guided me.

I went hiking with a group and there was a more mature couple among the hikers. The woman was a college counselor. I don't recall how we got on the subject but I told them that my dad was transferred to Philadelphia, that mom passed away and that our dad was heartbroken. He was going all by himself. She told me of a great program in Washington, D.C. The School of International Service (SIS); one at Georgetown and another at American University. She had a relative there and advised me that SIS liked transfers with engineering and econ course work. One program on international economic development was related to infrastructure engineering. She encouraged me to apply and I got in. To me, this was like a small miracle. I got to be near Philadelphia with my dad and my sister. I took the train every two weeks back and forth from SIS in Washington to Philly to see my dad and sister on the weekends. The move to SIS opened my eyes to foreign service. When I completed the SIS, International Development Program in Washington, D.C. my world view changed and expanded.

I'll never forget, my first night in Washington, D.C., I could not sleep all night. I still don't know why this happened but for me, SIS and DC was such a paradigm shift. I was up most of that night thinking about SIS. This like, what do I know about nuclear proliferation, or about diplomacy and defense or international development? What have I got myself into? I stayed up much of that first night, worrying for nothing, (Laughter).

Once again, a good messenger and karma helped me. One of the SIS counselors was my professor. She told me about a SIS program with Venezuelans studying petroleum engineering and English. She connected me with my roommate, a Venezuelan, aspiring petroleum engineer, Eduardo Paez. He was a poor young man, with a scholarship, learning to be a petroleum engineer and needed to improve his English. I needed to learn Spanish. We became great roommates and friends. I've had my share of times when I experienced an unexpected message that guided me in life and realized that "coincidence can often be God acting anonymously!"

Q: Your father transferred to Philadelphia, your sister and you move there too. You're transferring to the SIS at American University and your dad and sister are living in Philly?

WEISS: Yes, I would get to visit them in Philly on the weekends. From my SIS dormitory, I took the metro and the Amtrak train to Philly then back to SIS during the week. Then trains were inexpensive and the trip was about two hours. My sister, dad and I got to have some great weekends and summers together.

Q: What was it like when you transferred to the School of International Service (SIS)?

WEISS: At first, I felt a bit like an Ohio country bumpkin in the nation's capital. My paradigm of how I understood the world became more accurate as I completed the School of International Service Program in International Economic Development.

Q: While you're in Washington were you able to work on things to enhance the experience like an internship or anything like that?

WEISS: Would you believe one more messenger guided my life. I was in a SIS discussion group with many foreign students. A few wealthy Middle Eastern students, the petroleum engineers from Venezuela and a few Asian students. The discussion groups had some 12–15 students with a graduate assistant as the guide. This particular class guide was an Argentinian construction manager / civil engineer in the SIS graduate program. He was in his late thirties and led a discussion on comparative infrastructure economics. One of the Middle Eastern students made a derogatory comment, something like "The American people are getting lazy. You Americans have it made now and do not work hard anymore." I just asked him in front of the group, "Have you ever been inside a steel mill?" That's all I said, nothing else. The Arab student who made the derogatory comment just shook his head, no.

After the class, the Argentinian graduate assistant pulled me aside and said, "Hank, SIS has another program. It's an exchange program with the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá. It's a more technical and scientific university. You've studied enough Spanish but you've never been out of the country. Why don't you apply?" I consulted with dad, my SIS advisor and my profs and applied and I got in. (Laughter). I studied for two quarters in this exchange program with the Universidad de Los Andes, probably the best scientific and engineering university in Colombia. That message shared a great idea that guided me on a better path at the right time in my life.

Q: Wow! Now, which semesters were that?

WEISS: They were on quarters and I got sufficient credits for these two quarters of my senior year to graduate. I graduated gaining this remarkable experience at a great university and vastly better Spanish skills.

Q: Sure, you would have had to in order to just pass courses in Spanish there. Remarkable. Now, before we leave college, other than learning Spanish, what were some other things that became useful to you as you look back? There are so many ways you have to be resourceful the first time you live in a foreign country back then in 1975. What are some of the things that stick out?

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WEISS: There were two items that come to mind. One was another good recommendation. Another professor suggested I do an internship at the Peace Corps. In those days, the Peace Corps was still, relatively new, about 10 years old. I interned there after my university classes were over and on the weekends. I went to the original, old Peace Corps headquarters. It was about a 6 story, historic triangular stone building.

I learned about how the Peace Corps supported development with the School Sponsorship Program. American schools in the USA donated to help build and improve schools in Latin America, including; design, materials, engineering, construction, donations and support. It was a great experience that prepared me for going to Colombia. It also gifted me a more accurate global paradigm for learning Spanish language in a culturally and politically sensitive way. There were issues in Colombia with the guerilla war that were politically and culturally sensitive. As I was a visitor, I was a guest in their country. I had to learn quickly in Colombia, to perceive things I did not focus on as a teenager and to be extra careful until I learned Spanish very well.

The Peace Corps turned out to be a wonderful internship that led me to a great career, later in life. Another coincidence where I suspect that God acted anonymously, happened to me in a small village of Otavalo, near the border of Ecuador and Colombia.

About a year after that Peace Corps internship in Washington, I was in this village called Otavalo. Of all the people in the world, I ran into my supervisor from my Peace Corps internship in DC. She was visiting her brother, a Peace Corps Volunteer working on that School Sponsorship program nearby! Otavalo is a somewhat remote town, far, far south of Bogota, Colombia where I was based. Both of us just happened to be in the exact same room, in the exact same building, in this same remote village at the same exact time! What's the chance of that?

This memory stayed with me for over 30 years. When I came back to the Peace Corps in 2005, over 30 years later, I often thought of that chance encounter in the village of Otavalo. This was another déjà vu moment that gave me a spiritual insight into where my life was to be guided, 30 year later!

Another thought, which comes back to saints or guardian angels in our lives. I don't think so many of these events in my life could have just happened by chance. The University of the Andes was a great technical and science university. I got credit at the School of International Service, for all this great course work in Spanish and in Latin America.

Courses in engineering, electrical, agricultural and mechanical engineering. It was beautiful but it made me realize I really liked engineering. That planted the idea to eventually get my graduate engineering degree. This experience also helped me so that I wasn't just a provincial Midwestern technocrat. I got to see a bit of the world, learn a foreign language and finish my degree. Also, many things dad told me proved to be true. I could hear him saying "the world is getting smaller and it helps if you understand how things work."

Q: Right, okay. You come back, you graduate, you've gotten all of your credits. What's next?

WEISS: There was a rising demand during the later 1970s towards diesel fuels. There was a global liquid fuel shortage and the diesel cycle is more efficient. That resulted in a lack of engineers and technicians specialized in diesel cycle prime movers. And it just happened that the Ohio Diesel Technical Institute was one of the three best diesel institutes in the USA. And, it was in Cleveland, Ohio some three kilometers from the steel mill where I used to work. What an incredible coincidence, or was it one of my guardian angels looking out for me again!

And again, I applied and got in but didn't have the money so I took student loans, went to the Ohio Diesel Technical Institute night school program and worked days. The night program started at five PM, sharp and went to 11 PM, five nights a week. This was hard work, in diesel labs, running tests and hands on. Much was with large machines, diesel engines used as prime movers for electrical generators for generating electricity and power for huge commercial ships, tractor trailer trucks, buses, earth moving, construction and mining machines. Most were large and heavy components in big machines at night after working all day. So even though I was 23 and young, by 9 or 10 PM, I was tired.

Also, the steel industry started to taper off, and I was better off working in the upcoming diesel industries. I worked on large tractors, earth moving machines and diesel generators to pay for school tuition and living costs. In 1977 and 1978, I lived in a pretty rough East Cleveland neighborhood around East 82nd St. and Superior Ave. where at first, I didn't know anyone.

Well, I was fortunate to have a good family. My dad was getting close to retirement. His brother Frank rarely liked to leave Ohio and had his farm. Uncle Frank was still working too and also getting close to retirement. I was glad my family encouraged me to finish the program.

Again a real life saint came back to guide me. One weekend, I happened to go to a community development meeting about putting up a basketball court. This was a rough, low income neighborhood with kids that needed places to play. This was from about the East 60th to the 80th blocks of Cleveland where the immigrants, Latinos and African American, lived in a poor area. The old Slovenian neighborhood, which was where my grandparents lived when they came to the USA and their old immigrant church was not

far away. So, I went to a neighborhood community center meeting at one of the churches, St Francis Parish and who do I see there?

Our family parish priest from some eight years ago when we were in high school in Bay Village, Ohio. He's now the parish priest assigned as the pastor to this poor inner-city parish. I asked him "Hi Father Martin, do you remember me?" He said, "Yeah, I remember you and your sister." He asked me what I was doing there? I told him and then he asked, "What are you doing for a job?"

This wasn't a safe neighborhood and it wasn't the best situation. The house across the street from where I rented, was burned down one winter night. Later, my bicycle was stolen. Father Martin said to me, "Hank, we have a school, with facilities and the church. I'm the new pastor and we need to better maintain these facilities and fix the items donated to us. We need a maintenance man, so why don't you try it?" Now listen to this, he told me, "You can maintain the buses, the boilers, the school and take care of the buildings. Do the maintenance during the day and you can live in our rectory, the priest house and continue your education at night at the Institute. You can live with the priests in the priest house rectory and have your room and board for free."

Now here is the most amazing part, this old church, school at St. Francis parish on E. 71st St at Superior Ave. was where my dad and my uncle Frank Weiss went to the exact same grade school some 60 years ago! And, it is only a couple kilometers from the Diesel institute. I got to move from a pretty rough living situation to live with the priests in the St. Francis priest house, which is near to where my dad's family started when they immigrated to the USA in the 1920s. I'm the maintenance man in the daytime and a student at night. You can't make this stuff up, it was incredible! I got to finish my education at night and the best thing was I got to have lunch with the priests every day. Again, what is the probability all these things happened to me randomly?

At lunch and work I would listen to some amazing human spirituality, service and life lessons. Many of these priests and nuns were like saints. Other missionaries taught in the school and would also sometimes have lunch with us. It was such a gift to be near these people as a young man. And of course, the incredible fact that St. Francis is the same parish where my dad and my uncle went to school, when my grandma and grandpa first immigrated to the USA in Ohio.

Up 71st street north toward St. Claire was the largest Slovenian community in the USA. St. Francis had a grade school in the 1920s, but by 1977, that same school was now about 75% African American and Spanish and only 25% or so 2nd or 3rd generation Slovenian kids. Another remarkable experience happened to me there. Our diocese of northeast Ohio has a sister diocese. The Vatican assigns dioceses in the US with partner dioceses in poor countries. The poorer country that our diocese of northeast Ohio is assigned to is El Salvador.

In 1977, I was living in the priest's rectory at St Francis parish. I am 23 years old and going to the diesel institute at night and working in the same Catholic parish and school

where my dad's family started. Now who comes to visit St, Francis and stay as a guest of the diocese at our priest house? The Archbishop of El Salvador! This was shortly after Archbishop Romero was assassinated and later named a Saint Arnulfo Romero. The new Archbishop who came to visit us at St. Francis was Archbishop Rivas y Damas

Q: Oh yeah, Archbishop Romero the one who was assassinated--

WEISS: Yes, when Archbishop Romero was assassinated his replacement was Archbishop Rivas y Damas and his life was in danger too! The US church brought him back to Ohio to raise funds for a more robust and safer program in El Salvador. The priests in our rectory helped the Archbishop with fundraiser events in Ohio for his churches and parishes in El Salvador.

The Archbishop stayed in our priest house rectory. I was one of two people in that house who spoke Spanish. My friend Father Martin told me, "Go up there and chat with him in Spanish, it'll make him feel more comfortable." I went to talk to him and was advised that the Archbishop was probably the top Catholic figure in Central America at that time. He was as important as the president since a large majority in El Salvador was Catholic. What Archbishop Rivas y Damas says, most everyone listens to on the radio in El Salvador. I realized that I would be conversing with maybe the most important person in the country of El Salvador at the time. Yet, he was such a humble and meek human being. He showed me a few photos of the history of the civil war in his country and what the people were going through. He shared prayers and spiritual thoughts in Spanish and English with me.

Now how about this! Some ten years later, in 1988 I completed my graduate engineering and MBA degrees and was selected for a USAID project in El Salvador. I accepted, moved and wound up living and working in El Salvador for nearly 17 years! There, I met my wonderful wife and we started our family there. Shortly after we married, we saw the peace agreement signed while we lived in El Salvador. Yep, another divine type of message came into my life in 1978 which showed me a glimpse and precursor of the future life I would have in El Salvador from 1988 to 2005!

This whole series of events was a most serendipitous, wonderful, I dare to say almost a holy experience. The lesson in life that I learned from watching those priests and nuns daily and eating lunch at the same table with them was just an amazing blessing. If I ever learned anything about humanity, service, being kind, meek and humble, listening for the inner goodness in us all; it was there as a young man working and living with the priests and sisters at St. Francis parish.

Further proof -- I was a young 23-year-old working days, then going to the Ohio State diesel institute at night, tired and dirty much of the time. Yet, these priests gave me the best room in the house just to show me, "It's not about us." They gave me the best room, I just couldn't believe this. There was one balcony in the entire rectory priest house. Yet they gave me the only room with a balcony. I'm a 23-year-old kid among these older,

much admired priests and they gave me the best room in the house! That was a real-life lesson from above.

Q: What was the Ohio diesel institute program like and where did it lead?

WEISS: It was an undergraduate, technical institute for completing the mechanical engineering technology degree. Sometimes I wanted to quit but the priests and my family told me not to. I thank God they told me that I had to finish that Ohio Diesel Technical Institute degree. Just about then my father contracted cancer. When dad passed away was one of the two saddest days of my life. His final words to me were, "son, I am ready to meet my Maker." Right up to his last breath, our dad shared with us the importance of seeing the good and spiritual sides of life.

While I was at St. Francis there were many saints or guardian angels who guided me. One of the old timers in the parish had a farm in rural North Central Ohio near Wooster. It just so happens that this farm was less than 10 miles from the Ohio State Agricultural Engineering Research and Development Center (OARDC). This neighbor lived right across the street from the parish school and the rectory where I had my room. We chatted and he told me about his farm near Wooster, Ohio. A few months later when I was graduating from the Institute, he told me a job was advertised at OARDC. He drove me down to Wooster so I could apply for the job and showed me his farm. He told me if I got the job, I could stay at the cabin next to the river at his farm for free. So, I applied and the darnedest thing was, I didn't get that exact job that I wanted but something very interesting occurred. I really wanted to work in the OARDC engineering research and development center since they made and tested solar energy and row crop equipment prototypes for new products which fascinated me. The OARDC engineering branch didn't have an opening then but advised me to apply to the Ohio State U.'s Animal Science Research and Development Labs since they had an opening at their experimental pig farm.

The OSU was the biggest university in the United States at that time. So I went to apply at a research center where this experimental swine farm had some 3000 acres. OARDC had thousands of animals and acres of experimental labs and farms. That experimental swine farm smelled pretty bad. Part of the job was, what do you do with all this manure? The center had an experimental going with CH4, which was to make methane fuel from the manure. Now, here's the really amazing part; this is where, again, my life taught me that God puts messengers into our lives at some key moments.

Try and picture my first day at this experimental lab and farm? I walk into the Ohio State Animal Science Research and Development swine farm and imagine the humility one needs. It smells terrible and I'm there to apply as an assistant to the swine farm manager to help make methane (CH4) fuel from all the manure. I realize we have to test ways of moving tons of manure, a pretty horrible job. For some of this there was no machinery and OARDC is asking us to figure out how to convert all this pig shit to methane gas, CH4. Now this is my first day on this job, I walk in a huge pig barn to meet the OARDC

swine farm manager to learn about the job and how we are going to move tons of pig manure. You will not believe this! Who do you think that hog farm manager was?

Q: Oh no, it's somebody you worked for in the past.

WEISS: It is better than that! He is my old high school buddy and the son of a hog farmer, Bob Gibbs. This is the same guy I told you about, who's now our Ohio state congressman. Of course, now, some 40 years later, he is Congressman Gibbs, but over 40 years ago he was the OARDC swine farm manager who was the first person I met as my team lead and my first boss there.

That first day we are in the pig barn, Bob comes up in overalls, pig shit on his boots and says, "Hank, what are you doing here?" I said, "I guess I'm going to be working for you." We worked together for many months and are good friends to this day. It turned out to be a strong bond of friendship for us both. We worked on a tough, challenging, nasty problem together and started some new processes to make the entire industry better. After that, Bob got a bonus and bought his own farm and his own land some 20 miles from OARDC. I helped him build his new design for his swine farm, farrowing house, which was a cleaner, healthier way to raise small pigs. Bob became a phenomenally successful and a progressive hog farmer. I remember those days well. It was another unexpected message and grace that we both wound up at that pig farm at the Ohio State OARDC. After a few months, we finished our work and Bob gave me a good recommendation. Then I got that engineering technical job that I wanted at OARDC.

Now you tell me, what is the probability of that happening? Ohio State (OSU) was the biggest university in the entire country. I was trying to get into the OARDC engineering research and development center. They sent me to the OSU hog farm for the only related job at OARDC at that time. I went to the hog farm and who is the farm manager? My old buddy from high school. It is just--it's beyond belief. As my father quoted and Albert Einstein said “God does not play dice with the universe.”

Now, let’s jump to the present, if I would like to talk to a Congressman, I text Congressman Bob Gibbs, he texts me back the phone to call him on in less than an hour. I don't have to go through legislative assistance, Congressman secretaries or gate keepers, etc. You know, most folks wait for months just to get a brief meeting to see a congressman, here in DC? When I send a text to Ohio Congressman Gibbs, he replies that same day!

God put some amazing messengers in my life. Congressman Bob Gibbs is as honest as the day is long. His success has helped me to believe that in the long run—integrity, honesty, hard work and being a good person who serves others, really does work, because that's his story and why he has been re-elected many times to serve as an Ohio Congressman for over 10 years now.

The last piece of Ohio history is how I got my first international development job. I worked at the OSU engineering R & D center in 1978 and 1979. It was entry level and

did not pay well, so I shared a rooming house in Wooster, Ohio, near OARDC with about four men who also worked there. One of them was a former Peace Corps volunteer (PCV) and an agricultural scientist. The four of us played music on the porch after we played ball on the weekends. We all were from small Ohio towns so two of them played guitar and the other a banjo. I had an accordion, which many Slovenians play, that I got while I worked at St. Francis. One day we were playing music on the porch. We were not very good, but there was not much else to do for free in Wooster ☺.
The returned PCV showed me a job listing called the Peace Corps hotline. It had some interesting jobs and that's how my international career got started. Another messenger via this PCV roommate who just happened to start working at OARDC, the same year that I did.

Fantastic. All right. We'll pause here and we'll pick it up later.

Q: Today's August 20th, 2019, we're resuming our interview with Hank Weiss as he is completing his work at OARDC in Ohio. Hank, what were you doing during the years immediately preceding the Peace Corps?

As we chatted, in 1978 and 1979, I worked at the Ohio State Agricultural Engineering Research and Development Center (OARDC). While there, one of my colleagues also worked at the center and had a Peace Corps background. He showed me a job lead in the PCV hotline that formed the next phase of my life and a career in international development. Then, some 25 years later in 2005, I went back again to the Peace Corps which we can discuss later, if you like.

Q: Okay. Now, you find out about the Peace Corps job hotline in 1978?

WEISS: Yes, due to that, two things happened. I applied to a couple of jobs I would have never learned of. We were living in Wooster, a small town in a rural area near the Ohio State Agriculture Research and Development Center. As I mentioned, one of the patterns in my life has been for angels, saints or special people to share a message or teach me a life skill or lesson. I had to learn to recognize these moments.

As an example, in the winter of 1978, I replied to a PCV hotline job lead with a handwritten letter to one of the founder's sons in a three-generation, engineering and management firm called Jorgensen in Maryland. His grandfather, Roy Jorgensen was a civil engineer who started the company. His sons were the chief engineer and the CEO / business manager. I wrote the letter to the CEO John, who I'm still friends with now, 40 years later. They called me at the OARDC engineering lab and offered to fly me to DC to meet. I flew to DC to meet them and at lunch an interesting thing happened. Carlos the chief engineer for the Americas, along with the founder, Roy Jorgensen, who started the company, took time from a busy agenda to have a sandwich with me. Roy knew a great deal about both engineering and agriculture.

The Jorgensen HQ is on the family's cattle and dairy farm in Buckeystown, way north of DC. Over lunch Roy and Carlos asked me a few questions. Two questions stood out; one

technical and the other about character and ethics. I answered both with knowledge I learned from working with the priests at St. Francis parish and with the engineers at OARDC. I thought to myself, how strange that he asked me two questions, that required knowledge which I had to learn during two very challenging times in my life? To this day I wonder about how he chose those two questions which allowed him to learn much about me in a short time?

In about a week, their Latin America team called and advised me that Carlos and John had a job for me. They paid to move me from rural Ohio to Rockville, Maryland, outside of the greater Washington D.C area. At the Jorgensen HQ office in Maryland, I worked on a series of projects with State and Counties in Pennsylvania. Then I was sent to work on world bank projects and USAID contracts from 1980 to 198. The work was in infrastructure systems and development of training projects targeted for developing countries, mostly in Latin America. I saw the value and believed in the work we were doing and at age 25, felt that I found a worthwhile calling for my life.

Q: Now, that job was still in the U.S.

WEISS: During my first year in 1979 and part of 1980, they kept me in the US to learn the systems and the technology. Once they saw I was ready, they sent me overseas to work on national level infrastructure projects in Honduras, Ethiopia, Dominican Republic, Belize and Guatemala from 1980 to 1985.

Q: Where else did you go?

WEISS: I was mostly in Central America; Honduras, Guatemala, Dominican Republic and Belize and TDY work in Costa Rica, Panama, Nicaragua and Haiti.

Q: Wow, that's quite a variety. What sorts of tasks were you developing in these countries?

WEISS: The focus was performance-based budgeting and maintenance management systems for sustainable infrastructure development. That included sustainable transportation, logistics, facilities, public utilities and city management. The HQ for Jorgensen Engineering and Management Company was located next to Bechtel Engineering up in Frederick, Maryland. In the 1970s, Bechtel was the largest private engineering firm in the world.

In the 1960s, Roy, the founder, was a professor of Civil Engineering at the University of Connecticut. There he developed the basis for performance-based budgeting for infrastructure. His methods were legislated into law by the United States Congress and applied all over the United States. It's the basis for our federal highway system as well as other infrastructure budgeting in the United States.

The World Bank and the regional development banks saw this was good method to sustain infrastructure development in what they used to call third world countries. The

funding grew to support this methodology for many less developed countries (LDCs). The teams I worked with developed systems with transportation, energy, public utilities and public works organizations, mostly in Africa, Latin America and a few of the Gulf states.

Q: Fascinating. Now, were they accepting of it? You bring the project to them, but sometimes they're not as happy to think in American terms as they might be.

WEISS: That's another diplomatic question (Laughter) and I'm glad you asked. I learned this a bit later in my life. I was struggling with this issue as a young engineer. Why is AID sometimes successful and why sometimes not? The answer to your question is so very important to the impact of all foreign assistance programs, as well as the projects funded by the World Bank, USAID, all the donors and the regional development banks. Also, it's important for American taxpayers.

It's difficult to make progress without a strategy that is based on an accurate theory of change. Infrastructure and national systems only work when there is good governance, rule of law, honest people, fair and free elections, et cetera. One of the things State and USAID do, is work in all of these areas of good governance because they are related.

It doesn't matter if you have the best engineering, best performance budget or a great national system without good governance. I learned how important these foreign assistance programs can be as part of our overall foreign policy. Thanks to that experience, I became a true believer in promoting international development programs and good governance as part of our diplomatic strategy.

Development and good governance are a large part of what keeps peace and progress in the world. It also reduces the risk of massive waves of refugees and impoverished migrants, seeking either economic opportunities or fleeing oppressive living conditions. I learned that it's important for our US citizens to realize that supporting good governance and sustainable development especially in fragile countries is good for America and good for our world, for all of our futures. That's the lesson I learned during 28 years overseas and that I'm grateful for.

Q: As you think back, is there one example in particular that sticks in your mind as either one that was really successful or one where you tried, and although you weren't successful, there were lessons learned that you were able to carry with you into the future?

WEISS: There are. Much of the work done in the 1980's was in civil war zones. Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Haiti and El Salvador were all in different levels of civil war. As the conflict grew in El Salvador, USAID, saw the importance of stable electric grids and public health logistics. Without electricity, there was no reliable water. Without good water, there was no good hygiene, health, hospitals or refrigeration.

There was a critical section of the power line that was destroyed in the war, in northeastern El Salvador, in Morazán. One side of the line was controlled by the Frente, which was the guerrilla opposition. The other side was controlled by the government and military. This section of the blown up power line was in this disputed area. The project strategy was based on sustainable development, situational analysis and a solid theory of change. USAID had brilliant local staff that understood the context and situation in Morazán.

We learned that it's important to have staying power in a country to build that local team who understand complex social contexts and can define the theory of change to avoid or mitigate armed conflict. The local staff and engineers suggested to send Americans who aren't in uniform, civilian engineers to work with both factions, the frente and the government, as a neutral party.

We worked with both sides and the red cross to help rebuild the power line down to the end of the disputed areas. With the guerrilla crews on one side to form an electrical co-op and on the other end we worked with the local government power company (CEL) utility crews. When the rebuilt powerline reached the last few open spans in the middle, it was like the great US railroad during our civil war. We Americans went in alone with the Red Cross to connect the final spans of power line in the center.

When the main electrical switch was energized and the lights went on, it was like nothing I'd seen before. That first night after the power switch and the lights were back on in the villages, it was like Christmas eve! I observed what a privilege and honor it was to work on projects like that. Programs with real impact, like electric power and infrastructure development that help people live better and satisfy basic human needs. Another lesson learned was, conflict prevention was possible and cheaper than the costs of war. An important goal of our diplomatic efforts is to contribute to peace and minimize the potential for conflict and human suffering.

One of the saddest days of my career was in Salvador when we lost two rural linemen to an electrical accident. The two men were electrocuted and though I was not in that district, I carried that with me for life. I got extremely involved in safety after that. Two lessons I learned from the experience were the importance of peace building and of working safely.

Q: What about Ethiopia, what was your experience there?

WEISS: I was sent to work In Ethiopia in 1983, during the famine years. There was a bad famine and the main seaport didn't have the civil works, equipment or logistics to import grain, other food, key supplies and oil fast enough. I was part of an engineering team to help develop a more modern system so ships could dock, unload quicker and move the supplies inland without the wasted time, losses and spoilage. This included design, civil works, cranes, construction equipment, warehouses, roads, trucking and training and education for these systems. This added a maintenance management and a performance budget capacity to maintain the systems.

There were so few trucks and truck drivers then, we built a truck school for men to learn to drive and repair trucks. It was an integrated systems approach to get food, public services and supplies where needed. I'll never forget the day we pulled into a weigh station between the port and Addis Ababa. It was a fairly large city, maybe a quarter million people. I went inside the main grocery store and all I saw there was cooking oil, salt, sugar, green bananas or plantains and rice. That's all they had, that was it. Right then I learned to value the importance of what America has to share with the world. Also, to transfer technology and know-how for a better quality of life.

Q: Looking back, was the infrastructure sustainable, did it remain as developed?

WEISS: Now, that's a big question. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has developed into a modern city with vast infrastructure. The old saying—if you give a person a fish, you feed them for a day. If you teach them to fish, you feed them for a lifetime. The integrated, systems thinking approach with performance-based budgeting, maintenance management and modern training works. They generate revenue, train people to maintain the systems and move the economy. For the most part, it has grown sustainably.

Again, many of the countries I worked in, there were long-term gain and positive improvements when and if there is good governance. The cases where I've seen progress lost is when the country slips into corruption, incompetence and/or violence. Corruption, conflict and/or bad governance, destroys so much human progress. Our first objective should be to minimize conflict and stop human suffering. Then to make our projects sustainable in the long-term by supporting good governance and rule of law.

Q: Now an exception to that is Haiti where there isn't really civil war, but every five years or so there's some natural disaster that sets back progress. How did you see that case?

WEISS: What I learned later in my career; I wish I would have recognized when I was younger. The first time I went to Haiti was 1981. I remember flying from the Dominican Republic to Haiti and all of a sudden, everything below changed from lush green forests and farms to dry, barren, savanna-type, desert. I never saw the impact of environmental overload till then.

Unfortunately, the environmental degradation reached a tipping point. Now it's a very challenging situation to get the environment back in balance and sustainable in Haiti. So much of the country is deforested, watersheds and other systems are no longer intact. Landslides, erosion and all the related damage from heavy rains, hurricanes, floods or fires. I wish I would've learned that lesson earlier in my career.

Later in my 30’s I better understood how important the environmental pieces are. USAID knew electrification is important, because without electricity, people cut down trees for firewood and for light, cooking and other things. The banks, AID and the State

Department now know that environmental factors are more important than we realized in the 1970's and 80's.

Q: Now during these first few years where you're on contract, yes?

WEISS: Yes.

Q: As you're going through this period, are you thinking now about a larger career, where you would like to be? Did you see yourself staying or moving into a different realm — What was your thinking back then?

WEISS: So once again, there are times when we have messengers placed in our lives. At this point, I was a 30-year-old engineer and had two good people give me some good advice. One was a military officer I worked with. He said, "Hank, think about a career in terms of a bigger organization. You've worked for aid contractors for a while now. Why not try a bigger organization or the government?" At this time, I had an undergraduate degree and those types of positions required post graduate work or degrees. I advised the company I worked for during the past six years that I wanted to get my graduate degree in engineering. They said, "Okay, we have projects in Florida you can work at and get a graduate degree at night and the weekends."

And I had another blessing in my life. When I went to the graduate school of engineering in Miami. The U. had a few grants focused on productivity and engineering. The lead professor was a global expert in this field and a saint of a person. We're still great friends, Dr. David J. Sumanth. He's known in the field of productivity engineering all over the world. Now he volunteers, and gives away his know-how and time for worthy charities.

Back then in 1985, he told me, "Hank, you continue to practice engineering and work since we have two federal grants that may be a fit. We'll structure the research so you can go to grad school at night and on the weekends and work days. You should be able to complete the graduate degree in two years."

It was a wonderful experience. I got my Master of Science in Engineering and stayed on to get an MBA. A few months after graduation, a USAID colleague called me to have dinner. He flew into Miami from a health sector program and told me about a new USAID cooperative agreement in El Salvador. Since we'd worked together in Colombia, Central America and Mexico, he took my resume with him.

In a few days I got a call to fly to D.C. to interview for the program. About a month later I was leaving the Miami International Airport for a country that I had never worked in and was in a civil war, El Salvador.

I went to work at the USAID cooperative agreement in public health and infrastructure. Later I worked with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). NRECA had one of the major USAID co-operative agreements in the Americas. I worked with NRECA for nearly ten years based in San Salvador. Working with the National

Rural Electric Cooperative Association and with Dr. Sumanth changed my life for the better.

LOVE, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Q: What year is this?

WEISS: In 1988, when I boarded the plane to travel to work on the cooperative agreement in El Salvador, I can't believe who I see on that same plane? We're going to a country in the middle of the civil war, El Salvador, where I have never worked before. There are all kinds of restrictions and clearances required to work there. I'm one of the only a couple—maybe the only American on that plane. Who do I see on the plane? My former counterpart from five years ago in Honduras, Jose Armando Santa Maria, who was born in El Salvador. We worked together on the same project in Honduras in 1982 and 1983.

Imagine that! What is the probability of this happening to a recent graduate like me, who gets on his first international flight in two years and finds his closest colleague from Central America is on the same flight, at the same day and time? Coincidence sometimes is God acting anonymously.

Q: When you say counterpart, do you mean your site engineer?

WEISS: Yes, he was the engineer who worked closest with me, on almost everything. He was my counterpart and every day we worked together. I used to go early in the morning and pick him up at his grandfather's house and we'd go to work together. Now many years later Armando just happens to be on the same airplane in Miami going to El Salvador. Armando asked me, "What are you doing here?" And I asked the same to him. He told me he was also working on a USAID project. We talked on the plane and he asked me, "What are you doing when you get in to San Salvador?" He then told me, "I've been going out with a nice girl for some time now. I think we're pretty serious, and she's got a friend, maybe we should go out on a double date." I wasn't married, just graduated and was single. Thanks to Armando I went and met this lovely woman and the rest is history (Laughter).

Two sons and 30 year later, Bea and I still have lots of love, plus our shared spiritual beliefs and family values. And to top it off, my wife, Bea, is also an engineer. Like my dad and Albert Einstein said "God does not play dice with the universe." That's how I met my wife, Carmen B. Weiss, they call her Bea. We're happily married, have two sons, in love for over 30 years now.

Q: That is a pretty amazing story. What sort of engineering work did she focus on?

WEISS: Bea is an industrial and systems engineer. During the civil war she worked in coatings and corrosion protection for key infrastructure like water and fuel supply tanks. Once she and I both worked on the largest thermal power plant in all of Central America. She has had some remarkable experiences.

Later when we joined the Foreign Service, Bea found interesting jobs and volunteered. She put together a remarkable career, now works at Main State and at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI).

Q: Incredible. Just for a moment before you go back to before El Salvador, what were the main takeaways that you got from those two years of study and work?

WEISS: My mentor and professor, Dr. David Sumanth, is a world class engineer and teacher. He immigrated from India and understood international development. He developed technical exchanges with Latin American, African and Indian engineering centers of excellence at our university for graduate engineers. I worked closely with some of them. I learned much about how they approached development. Then I worked on a thesis with one of the Indian engineers. Our thesis and last year of grad school was funded by a federal grant.

One of my takeaways was that productivity can be measured in most any situation. However. The outcomes depend on honesty, integrity and doing the right thing to serve others. Think of public service and good governance directed to basic human needs as the goals. This is the underpinning of long-term sustainable productivity because without that, the most productive team in the world won't be successful and projects won't be sustainable.

Dr. Sumanth earned his Engineering Ph.D. from the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) in Chicago. He and I shared many midwestern values. I learned with him that the underpinning of much human progress is sound character, ethics, good values and virtues. I saw that in the cultures we worked with, India, Latin America, Africa and the USA. Dr. Sumanth taught us to be selective to work with ethical people of sound character and values. The graduate engineers in these exchange programs, weren't just good engineers, they also were good people.

TWO SONS GROWING UP OVERSEAS

Q: Now, you're working on the cooperative agreement, doing engineering with NRECA?

WEISS: After I completed my graduate degree, I started on the cooperative agreement with USAID and then National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Q: It was a cooperative agreement with USAID exclusively with El Salvador?

WEISS: The AID and NRECA agreements also worked in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, Belize, Dominican Republic and Honduras. I was based in El Salvador with Bea and our sons went to school there. I also got to work with the Caribbean Utility Association, as well as some South American and African Utilities.

Our two sons, Henry and Frank were both born in El Salvador in 1991 and 1993. Those were great years and I remain grateful for those wonderful family experiences. I've had understanding leadership in my career that allowed my family to have stability, even though I had to travel.

Q: When you began, what were your major tasks or the goals that you were going for during the civil war years?

WEISS: The goals were to mitigate the damage caused by the war and assure the electrical infrastructure and that nexus with the water and health systems were more reliable. This extended to public health systems because hospitals and health centers depend on power and water. There was a great program called the productive uses of electricity to help farmers in the poor rural areas get and use electrical power. Those were a few of the main goals.

Once the peace agreement was signed, it was remarkable to witness the changes. The United States embassy and the Agency for International Development played a role in bringing peace to El Salvador. I was in country then and give credit to our diplomats and teams of development workers that contributed greatly. Once the peace was signed, then it was about bringing electricity and better public services to the unserved areas. At that time, much of rural El Salvador and the other Northern triangle countries had no electricity nor reliable water and roads. This program supported that post-war reconstruction.

The first year was working with local public utilities to repair damage to the national electric grid. In the subsequent years the work was more about bringing electricity to those without power, mainly rural electrification. You may have heard what secretary Tillerson said when he was questioned by Congress prior to his nomination as secretary of State. "One of the surest ways toward world peace and progress is to get people electricity." I saw that firsthand.

Q: At this point you're a little bit higher in the hierarchy and have a significant local staff that you supervise?

WEISS: Yes, again, there were guardian angels in my life. I had some remarkably good family influences. My wife's family, especially her parents, Carmen and Rey were just the best. First, we lived with Bea's aunt Loli's family and it was great. Then we all lived in the same house in San Salvador with Bea's folks and her sister. Those were some of the best years of our lives.

Carmen and Rey were more than in laws and grandparents to our sons, they were best friends in forming a loving family. They shared with me, a foreigner, deep insight into Central American life and culture. Bea and I even published a guide book about El Salvador that sold some 20,000 copies in 1997. By then, I understood the Central American reality better than most gringos.

Myk, our NRECA project manager, was an outstanding engineer, former Peace Corps and a true humanitarian. Myk placed me at the national utility training center below las Piletas, near San Salvador. I was the only foreign engineer working in this large training center, called CENCADE. Just about everyone that worked in the public utilities trained there. At first I went there to listen and learn what they needed most. We learned they had

too many accidents and high voltage safety risks having to do with tools, standards, equipment and training. Electrical power work can be dangerous with the potential for horrible accidents. You cannot see electricity and it can be difficult to really understand how electrical systems work.

There were too many electrocutions and electrical contact accidents, in large part because of a lack of safety and training. It's a high-level skill set to climb a tower or pole, up to a hundred feet high to work on power lines and equipment that is energized at up to 500,000 volts (for transmission lines) and up to 40,000 volts for distribution lines. The country had no formal training or apprenticeship program for these high voltage electrical workers.

Myk told me to, "Find the best safety and training program you can in the US and let's see what we can do." We searched for the best safety records in the United States. You would think it would be in a place that had an easy climate, right? Maybe some place like Texas, California or Florida. We found out, to our amazement, the best safety record and reliability standards were in some of the states with the toughest climates, Minnesota and the Dakotas.

I traveled to the Minnesota state Rural Electric Association (MREA). I asked them what they attribute this safety record to? MREA said they attributed much of this to one teacher, "who's astounding and lives near the border between South Dakota and Minnesota. Do you want to meet him? Next thing I know they call up Mr. Dennis Merchant.

Denny was this great teacher and he agreed to meet. We meet on the border of South Dakota and Minnesota. I explained the safety situation in Central America. Then Denny shared his history, "My dad was a lineman. I worked in my dad's telephone and electric company. I could not find a good safety and training program, so I started my own. I wrote and teach it at my local community college and trade school. I kept improving what I was teaching. I've been doing this almost all my life and now we have a pretty good program. What an understatement that was for a great but humble man!

Then Denny and his son told me they wanted to see their South Dakota safety program help other countries train safer workers, so they have better lives. Then they basically offered to come down to Salvador and help produce a translated, Spanish version and donate the program. He and his son helped us get it translated into Spanish. Then both he and his son helped us produce and improve the Spanish version for Latin American conditions. At this time, Denny was in his mid-sixties and he volunteered to come down to El Salvador to help us get started.

One of the things you must gain in developing projects is trust and credibility. I brought Denny to the national electrical training center. We were there with some tough young linemen, most six feet tall, 200 pounds who climb poles for a living, lift transformers and are rock solid. A key skill is how you climb an electrical pole. If you know how to climb

an electrical pole skillfully, that's instant credibility. Kinda like a basketball player who can shoot swishes into the basket.

Everybody at the center was watching Denny, who was not a young man, climb the pole at the training site. When you climb a pole, the less the pole shakes and moves around, the better you are. That 65-year-old, Denny, showed he could climb a power pole as smooth as any young man. The pole didn't move or shake as he climbed. When he came down, the men realized right away, this is the real deal. This guy is for real. The word got around and the electric utilities and co-ops jumped on board as the program was translated. It's still going on today some 25 years later.

It's spread to about 15 or 20 countries around the world. It's gone to Africa and all over the Americas. Thanks to these two good men and their families. I would call them almost like saints who saw the greater good and wanted to contribute and help to solve an important issue in less fortunate lands. Denny told me, "I don't want to make any money off of this. We just don't want to see people get electrocuted and hurt. We want to help." Mr. Merchant was a great man, who donated his life's work to helping others work and live safer with electrical power. Sadly, Denny passed away in 2018. May God bless him and his family. May he rest in peace.

Q: To go back to the question of how the employees and stakeholders get this training, how many people are you now responsible for getting the training and safety program?

WEISS: We probably had close to 800 total employees involved from the power companies. In each country, we had anywhere from 30 to 150 people in the program. We worked mostly in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. Also, all the power companies in the Caribbean Electrical Association called CARELEC, used it. This is a four-level training and safety program. My main role was quality assurance and supporting them to learn to use and teach the program.

Our team's overall goal was to support the country's electrical utilities to design, build and maintain safe, reliable power lines and better-quality electrical grids. It was a team effort. Myk Manon, was the chief engineer and our manager, in charge of the overall program. I served as the safety and training officer.

Q: For a long time in Central America, they talked about integrating the electrical grid among the Central American countries. Variety of good reasons. Were they already considering that way back when you were doing this?

WEISS: The SEITEC program, which is Spanish name for the integration of the Central American, electrical transmission system had been considered from the 1980s. It finally started seriously in the 1990s. In about 2001, I was one of the engineers invited to help the regulatory agencies work out some of the standards, protections and other regulatory and engineering aspects. The Central Americans worked it all out over the past 20 years

and now completed the integration. Power is now traded among the Central American countries based on that electrical transmission system integration.

Q: Did the full integration help develop the electrical market?

WEISS: It did, as well as lowered the cost of power through better economies of scale, quality, safety and reliability. What happens, now is when one country is short of power, another country can export that excess power. This allows for optimization, now the system does not use the power plants that pollute as much. As you know coal pollutes most, then heavy fuel; then diesel fuel plants; then renewables like geo-thermal, hydroelectric, wind and solar are the least polluting source of power.

With the integration of the Central American electrical transmission system they use the most cost effective and environmental sources first. This is called the lowest marginal cost of power and the grid is optimized. It's had a good impact on the environment and the economy as more people now can afford electricity. Part of the concept of the marginal cost of electricity is to bring on the lowest cost, marginal power plants into the market first. That way, the economics, the environment and the power grid are all optimized.

Q: I don't know if you would know this because it's at the very end of the process of electricity, but did you find that the average person in these countries, still very poor, understood that electricity costs money and we're more or less open to paying?

WEISS: That's an important question, that actually impacts the future quality of life for millions of people. Two of the dominant variables are; people will pay almost anything for the first 25 to 50 kilowatt hours (kWh) of power because the pump for water, refrigeration for food, lights at night, charging cell phones and internet. The key item that changes lives. After that initial 25 – 50 kWhs, how and why poor people pay becomes more complex. I like to think we have new approaches that may be better than the Chinese approach.

Not to put this in an adversarial way, but many now question how the Chinese in Africa fund projects to build power stations and other infrastructure. This has been called buying the control of natural resources.

The idea of paying for electricity only works if the country can provide good quality, safety, rule of law, honest governance with low levels of corruption. That's the under-girding to much of the ability to pay for key public services like power and water. If people live in a country with rule of law, good governance, free and fair elections and where honest people rise to the positions of leadership; then the people paying for electricity get their money’s worth. If there is a corrupt government, it becomes difficult to pay. When power projects are not well built with quality materials and safe, reliable designs; they do not last long, are not safe nor reliable so people do not get their money’s worth.

Q: Now throughout this period, are you acquiring skills and abilities that will serve you later? What do you recall about that?

WEISS: My team lead, Myk was a smart, kind, good man who put me in situations to learn and grow. I was on the board of directors for a National Energy Efficiency Center and on the steering committee for two large utilities. Through that, I learned that as you gain experience you can contribute more to sound designs, strategy and a solid theory of change. I learned much from the other board members about how to motivate, make fair but difficult decisions, strategic resource allocation, safety and building best practices.

I also got involved in bringing the Cub and Boy Scouts back to the embassy in El Salvador. I served as the chairman for the Scouts parents' committee. One night at the embassy during a meeting with the parents, one dad told me, "Hank, the Peace Corps is looking for country directors with backgrounds like yours. Have you thought about applying to the Peace Corps?
Up to then, it never crossed my mind. They encouraged me to apply and that was another messenger that changed my life. (Laughter). How many times good people were put into my life? These experiences from many years ago reached into my future that night at the embassy.

While I was in Ohio in 1978, I mentioned the young engineer and agronomist from the Peace Corps who showed me the Peace Corps hotline jobs for engineers. Also, in 1974 when I interned with the Peace Corps School Sponsorship Program working with schools in the US to donate money, materials, furniture, books and other things to schools in Latin America. Schools were modernized, improved and sometimes built from scratch. I worked in the old Peace Corps headquarters when Peace Corps was still a small organization in a tiny, triangular building that you could probably fit maybe 40 people in. As I interned in the School Sponsorship Program, it planted this seed for public service. Then I got to be a Peace Corp Director over 30 years later!

It allowed me to learn the value of public service, volunteerism and how, like my dad told me, “the world is becoming smaller”. We're all connected and progress as a society and country when the rest of us progress. That planted the seed so that many years later when I applied to the Peace Corps; I was comfortable, even though it was at the highest level as a country director.

Q: Please describe that early experience with Peace Corps and what you recall.

WEISS: How hard people would work to make the development projects work back then. Now it's easier with cell phones, the internet and international wire transfers. Back then schools in say, rural Kansas would box up and send textbooks and materials in trunks. We'd get it, repackage them and send them to faraway places like Bolivia. Some schools would have a $1 a brick, fundraiser for donations to buy building materials in far - away places. The schools were built with attention to detail and care. People were highly motivated and careful with the funds. They believed in the program. In fact, I remember

one of my supervisors at the time, a fairly young woman, probably 30-something actually lost her sight in one of her eyes working on a project overseas. She had a patch over her eye and she was still there, working hard. This was the same woman I ran into visiting her brother in the Peace Corps many years later in the village of Otavalo in South America. What a coincidence!

Q: At this time, with this Peace Corps activity, you were in Washington, but went out to projects.

WEISS: I got to visit projects in Columbia, Ecuador and Mexico.

Q: You were a Peace Corps bundler?

WEISS: I guess you can call it that. (Laughter). Literally! Sometimes we even bundled books and sent them in trunks overseas. I saw how motivated many young Americans and volunteer two years to help others, who were less fortunate

Q: Now, fast forward here. You are now in a USAID cooperative agreement, and somebody is recommending that you reconsider another Peace Corps experience, but at a higher level.

WEISS: Yes, that experience at the Scout meeting at the embassy that night gave me the information and confidence to apply. As you know, it is a long, detailed, in-depth process, with clearances, foreign service exams and panels. Documentation to evidence international development, language, cultural skills and overseas work experience. Then a series of interviews, with some of the toughest interviews I ever had. One interview was with Peace Corps staff and another with former volunteers in the countries I was being considered for. They had in-depth knowledge about the situation in country and interviewed me on scenarios. The next interview was with a leadership panel at Peace Corps HQ with still more complicated scenarios. The final interview was with the two top leaders; the director of the US Peace Corps and then the regional directors for Africa, Latin America and Eurasia.

Up to then I never participated in a video conference. The interviews were through video conferences from El Salvador. For the first time in my life, I was on camera, seeing the director of the US Peace Corps, whose boss is the President of the USA. He is on a TV screen, asking me questions. It was a humbling experience but I saw they wanted to be sure to get the right country directors. I said to myself, "if the good Lord gets me through this one, I'm gonna go for it. They are really careful to assure good fits."

A few months later, I was in a group of six people selected to be country directors. A total of six of us were selected from 300 professionals in the interview process. After we completed training for directors, we were assigned to our countries.

Q: What was the training like? In other words, what particular things did they want to be able to drill into you that they expected you would need to have when you went to your country?

WEISS: It was solid, fast training since Peace Corps is a solid training organization. This was in 2005 and the agency had over 40 years of training experience by then. First, they went over international developmental skills and the Peace Corps experience. They confirmed our language and cultural skills to be able to communicate well in country. This included safety, health and security as well as administrative rules and regs. We also served as warranted contracting officers, certifying officers, duty officers and country team members and the training covered that as well.

Much of it could be categorized in these areas. One is the importance of experiential training since posts locate the volunteers out there, some in huts and remote towns in poor countries. This learning included the set up and facilitation of experiential training sites while also learning the language and culture in community development settings. It encompassed how to apply international and community development skills in safe, healthy and environmental ways.

An interesting point of this training model is that it is done while living with local host families in villages. This experiential training is a cost-effective approach to train young Americans overseas within the budget that the PC operates with. As of 2018, the Peace Corps budget was about $400 million, while the budget of the State Department was over $50 billion. On a unit cost basis, to place a PC Volunteer overseas cost an average of about $40,000. Compare that $40,000 to the cost to place a State Department FS Officer overseas at an average of about $600,000?

Another aspect was how to apply the evidence on better ways to work with specific generations like; the millennials, Gen Y, and Gen Z. What are the characteristics of each of these generations and how to best relate and successfully guide them to educate themselves with the experiential training models used in Peace Corps posts overseas?

This caused a light bulb to go off. We weren't teaching, we placed Volunteers in environments where through guided interactions with their local community and our PC staff, they were educating themselves. We just helped their own cultural and situational awareness get better. This was a powerful learning experience because it’s difficult to fool yourself in these local community settings. It was impactful to see the results and how fast a young, maybe affluent person from a well-off community in the United States could assimilate the language, culture and lifestyle. All this while living in a rural village, maybe in a hut, in a remote West African or majority Muslim village, where we worked. This was an empowering and at the same time humbling experience.

Another part of the learning is understanding how the three goals of Peace Corps work. The first goal is local community development and integration in it. The second, to share an accurate knowledge of the United States with their local communities to better know

the US and the American people, our values and culture. Then, upon completing their two years of service and returning to the US, that third goal is to share the importance of international development to help Americans see that we're in one integrated world. Share their third world experience from working and living in Africa, Asia or the Americas, with their hometown communities in the US. These three goals integrate in a wonderful way to make for a meaningful, worthwhile life of public service.

Q: Now we're in about 2005. Where was your first country of assignment.

WEISS: My family and I expected to be assigned in Latin America due to our experience and Spanish skills. There was a need to develop a new program in a majority Muslim country with some innovative programs. These included municipal development, municipal engineering, teaching and teacher training in the country of Albania. They switched me from going to Latin America one day and said, "we've got a new program in Albania and you're going."

Albania just recently opened up. Our US embassy was closed for many years due to a brutal and crazy dictatorship in Albania. I had little experience in Muslim countries, but Albania turned out to be a great experience. We built a remarkable team that worked during the transition and new reality in Albania. We brought in people who worked in US municipal government, public administration, city management, economic development and urban planning. We learned to develop municipal sites to match our Peace Corps skills to the needs in the key municipalities of Albania. It was a very rewarding experience. My family and I were glad to serve there.

Q: To go back one second, now you're also taking your wife and your two sons to a very different environment. How was it for them?

WEISS: I have a wonderful family, Bea my wife, is a great mom and saw the greater good in this. I think at first were we thought we'd go to a post where we would be speaking Spanish. Bea saw Albania as a chance for us to grow and to contribute. We got to do something we believed in and grow as a family. Bea made up her mind to do her best. She got a job as a schoolteacher and did a phenomenal job.

In the first year, our son was the only American in his high school class. In another year, our younger son was one of maybe three foreigners in his class. These were growth experiences for us. Albania has world class religious tolerance. In the northern part of Albania, about 20% of the country is Catholic. In the southern part of Albania, about 20% of the country is Orthodox and the middle 60% to 70% is Muslim. The cool thing was they all got along, no violence, not many issues. This was another remarkable experience for our family to experience firsthand. Our sons served in the only Catholic Cathedral on some Sundays with a great young priest. We made some great friends and neighbors and the Albanians taught us a lot, especially in religious tolerance even though at the time we may not have realized it.

WORK WITH PEACE CORPS IN AFRICA AND ALBANIA

Q*: Now, as the agency head of the Peace Corps in Albania—we have an embassy—how did all of the different embassy elements relate? I'm just curious, given that it was a country at the beginning of development, how did the U.S. mission community interact when you were there?*

WEISS: This was my first experience on a country team and as an agency head. I was fortunate to be with seasoned, experienced diplomats. Ambassador Marsi Reis was our Chief of Mission, her husband was the ambassador to Greece. They were an important combination because Albania was getting ready for NATO. Marsi and her team were great to work with.

I learned much in the country team as I was there during the avian flu as well as for our strategic planning to come up with the mission resource request (MRR) and the integrated country strategy (ICS) process. There were about 15 of us in the inter-agency team. The defense attaché and I, the Peace Corps director, were the only two agencies that agreed on a basic objective. The military wanted reliable electric power and good local government so did the Peace Corps. When the two of us agreed and the ambassador said, "Now isn't this interesting? The only two agency heads who agree on this as the key objective are the Department of Defense and the Peace Corps. At that point, the team saw the logic of this and decided this was something to include and pay close attention to. From then on, we had a quite collaborative country team. It was unusual for that to occur and it served to get us all working together. We even found that more defense funded development projects complemented our work too. We came in to add value where we could, given the guidance for where the Peace Corps can work.

The other thing I learned is the importance of donor coordination. Our team made sure AID, the Peace Corps, DoD, all the US interagency coordinated with the international donor community and the banks. It wasn't just the Americans out there doing our own thing. If we were involved in education, it was with the Ministry and the Education Sector Donor Coordination Committee. We were selected to train other Peace Corps staff in the Treaty of Paris on Donor Coordination. This importance of donor coordination teamwork occurred at both the US interagency and the international levels. The US mission is more effective by working in Donor Coordination and not on our own. We showed our support of positive change by working within the Treaty of Paris for Donor Coordination.

Q: Do you remember a particular instance where all of the team was responsible for some successful project or some big goal?

WEISS: During my tour in Albania, the ambassador asked me to sit on the Infrastructure Donor Coordination Committee and attend some key meetings. The power sector had a focus on improving electrical power reliability, safety and quality. In attendance were the

Western Europeans, Russian, others who spoke Russian, World Bank engineers, Eastern European countries speaking mostly Serbo-Croatian, the Chinese and the Japanese. A powerful lesson I learned was ways to “encourage” good governance.

Albania was emerging from this extreme, crazy dictator with a sad history; violent, brutal and lacking sanity. It caused a lot of corruption. The National Electric Company—KESH—had a global reputation for corruption. In one of these donor coordination meetings, it was raised diplomatically, that one of their major substations was selling more power than was coming into it. This of course, is impossible. Through good diplomatic coordination, we circled the wagons and said to KESH, "look, it's time for good governance. The dictatorship is over and honesty is the only way to obtain investments. Either you're going to fix this or the next time it's going to be made public and embarrassing for KESH when investors leave." I saw how diplomacy can move a sector and even a country to good governance. In this case, the power of a diplomatic tool called “name ‘em and shame ‘em.” The cool part was we did not even have to do it. We just let them know we could do it!

Q: While you were there, did you see the beginnings of improvement in that vital sector of infrastructure?

WEISS: we all depended on electrical power and even for our resistance heating in winter. Our first winter, the entire country had terrible power outages. Power would go out for eight or more hours, the winters are cold in Albania and homes are not thermally insulated. At times, backup generators weren’t reliable. Once one experiences the loss of electric power with no heat, no water, no television, no computers for a few days in winter, you tend not to forget that. Our team banded together, as the DOD and the Peace Corps suggested. Then the power sector became one of our mission’s critical objectives. We agreed to support this key public service to be more reliable. The next winter, there were no more extended power outages. Power was reliable and Albania went from eight hour rolling power outages, to almost no significant power outages in one year.

I learned, it matters how you leverage the data, evidence and facts to promote critical objectives. Also, to share evidence and “name them and shame them” when corruption needs to be reported. When and if the leadership won't do the right thing, use the diplomatic tools to encourage them to do the right thing.

Q: How to get buy-in. What were you hearing from the volunteers in the field during your time there? What stands out in your mind?

WEISS: Our first group was quite adventuresome and brave. I was there when the first group of volunteers completed their first two-year tours. The experiential training needs to continually improve. Our first group's training program, though it worked, was not as good as the second group’s, or the third 's. That first group had a challenging time, in part because Albanian is a difficult language. It has its own branch of the language tree, out near Hungarian, but there's almost no other language like it, making it harder to learn. In

the rural areas, few Albanians speak any English at all. A few of the older ones might speak a bit of Italian, or a little Greek in the south, or some Serbo-Croatian in the north, but few could speak English. The importance of learning the language was critical to work in the local culture with the right vocabulary to get anything done.

We heard from the volunteers about a difference from being near a city to being out in rural mountain towns, especially in winter. From the ports in Albania, you can almost see the Italian shoreline. You think, this is Europe, but when you visit a volunteer in a mountain town, and go to their school where our teachers worked—you'd see little kids come to school in the dead of winter, holes in their shoes and socks. I saw one of them pull out a bag for lunch and all that's in it was a few pickles. We all learned about the big differences between rural, remote poverty and the city. I came to really respect these rural volunteers and their counterparts.

Also bless my wife, Bea, she always had a hot meal and if needed, a room for volunteers who came into the capital, Tirana. She made them all feel that they were welcome. I think our sons learned a lot from those experiences as well.

Q: What else affected the volunteers, other than the basics of electricity and water. What were you hearing about during your site visits?

WEISS: I learned impact is a function of the situation, your skill set and experiences, learned over many years or decades. And they are related. We might identify a critical municipality to work with, at the one at the end of the electric grid. But, if that mayor was corrupt, it would not work even if this was a great volunteer in a critical municipality.

When you don't have honest people with good character, ethics and leadership for good governance, you can't get much done. I personally made site development mistakes and learned not to be too analytical with economic development statistics and public service improvement data alone. Often the more important factor was if we had honest, ethical and good people to work with for good governance and rule of law.

At times we had to move some Volunteers. As a new country director in Albania, I made some mistakes. We developed sites at first, based more on economic and related data. Later we found some local governments were not honest nor interested in helping their own people. Then we'd have to relocate our people to better sites in order to work with good government leadership and ethical people. That was my rookie mistake and learning experience. I should have listened closer to feedback from the local staff and volunteers in those sites and moved quickly when we saw bad governance or corrupt local officials.

Q: How was your wife working while you were in Albania?

WEISS: My wife's an engineer with an MBA as well as a special ed teacher with certification. In Albania, Bea taught tech and computers for all the grades, from kindergarten to 12th grade. She was the computer teacher for everyone and she taught all the kids at the school. It was a small school with little alpine huts for the classrooms. One

little hut had her computer center. All the students loved and knew her. Bea was, I think, one of a team of American, international and local teachers at the school back then. The local teachers loved her because she loved all the kids and the staff as well. It was their mom who was the teacher helping everyone learn how to better use computers and technology. Bea is such a good person, and for our sons to see their mom teach and see that the students loved her for that, was a wonderful experience.

Q: Here, you've had experience in Albania for two years and learned a lot. What are you and the family thinking about now in terms of where you're going next? It's now about what year?

WEISS: It's now 2007, almost 2008, and the Peace Corps is not exactly like the Foreign Service. In PC as an agency head, country director and FS-01 they assign us where needed. After two years, my regional director said, “okay, you're in eastern Europe, things are pretty good here now at your post. We have another post in West Africa, and need an experienced agency head and country director. Then he told me, "Hank, you're to move to West Africa. Here's your ETA, travel orders, and how to report for duty."

I told Bea, my wife and our sons and to their credit, they were on board to go. My older son, Hanco, to his credit, really encouraged me to do it. I am grateful to my family because they all really supported this new assignment to Africa. That summer of 2007, we packed out and moved to West Africa, for a whole 'nother type of experience!

However, before we chat about that move to Cape Verde in West African, there is one anecdote about leaving Albania that shows the power of the Peace Corps when we do the right things.

At the end of my tour we had President Bush's (Bush II) visit to Albania. The country was getting ready to be a NATO country, so this was a high profile and important POTUS and VIP visit. It was during my last weeks in Albania and as you know, for these POTUS visits, everything is closely scheduled and planned for efficiency, safety, security, protocol and the best possible diplomatic relations and outcomes. One of the meetings planned required travel by motorcade from Tirana, the capital city to Durres, the port about one hour away.

The motorcade had to drive through a small village where one of our Peace Corps volunteers developed, with the municipality, a small business program which helped start a town bakery. As the POTUS motorcade was going by, the Peace Corps volunteer was out in front of the town bakery with the little old lady who does the baking with an American flag flying high. They had some fresh baked goods there too. I guess this caught the president's eye, and he ordered the motorcade stopped. There were hundreds of people around his motorcade because Albanians love Americans. President Bush directed the whole motorcade to stop and let him out of the armored limo. He gets out of that big black Caddie and security was getting really nervous. My US ambassador, Marsi is getting a bit nervous too. He walks right through the crowd to the Peace Corps volunteer and old lady at the bakery. He says hi, has a taste of the baked goods, shares

some nice words for the crowd, then finally gets back into the motorcade and proceeds. It was not planned and nobody back at the embassy could believe he did it.

Then later that day there was a meeting with all the Embassy families. Bea and I are there with our two sons. President Bush got my sons and he put his arms around them. We got pictures of President Bush with his arm around our sons. That was one of the real memories and blessings of our Albania foreign service tour of duty. How we all got to share moments like that. President Bush had a remarkable POTUS visit and brought a lot of good will by just opening that car door and taking those steps to see the little old lady baking for the village!

Q: You're right, the amazing amount of progress you can bring and goodwill just with one presidential visit. So, suddenly you're going to West Africa. I can't imagine it's the one West African country that speaks Spanish.

WEISS: No—Portuguese (Laughter).

Q: Oh, reasonably close. Now, which country is this?

WEISS: Cape Verde and we closed down the post in Guinea-Bissau. To my good fortune, I had met the director who started the program for Guinea-Bissau and Cabo Verde while we both were in training in D.C. Cape Verde and Guinea-Bissau were two of first four Lusophone, (Portuguese-speaking countries) where the Peace Corps had started programs. Guinea-Bissau fell into a violent civil war and became a dangerous place. The entire Guinea-Bissau post was evacuated so we moved the staff and volunteers from there to Cape Verde.

Now Cape Verde is an island nation of 11 islands in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. My deputy, Yonis, was also deputy in Guinea-Bissau. He was a Michigan State U. Ph.D. in agricultural engineering. Earlier in my career, I worked at the Ohio State Agricultural Engineering Research Development Center, so we had much in common. We made friends and built a wonderful working relationship. We both spoke the language pretty well. One way in the Peace Corps you earn trust and confidence in country and with the local staff and volunteers is by speaking the language well. And we continued to develop those language skills.

Also, in African posts, agriculture and agricultural engineering are important sectors. Yonis and I shared those skills and experiences. We grew the program to place volunteers on 10 of the 11 islands. On a couple of these islands, Sal and Maio, it had not rained for some ten years. There were acute needs for systems to desalinate water and develop groundwater. It was remarkable that we could keep volunteers working in some of these sites.

We worked in sectors where the Cape Verdeans defined the most needs. This tended to be in teacher education, engineering and municipal/community development. The community development often included improving the food supply and economic

development. The education sector was technical and engineering teacher education, as well as English teacher training. We trained teachers to work in trade, tech and high schools teaching engineering, computer science and English. These were solid development experiences as we built the post with astounding local staff even though it was a remote place to live and work.

Q: Now describe what you mean by remote place to live because I think very few people know anything about Cape Verde.

WEISS: In Cape Verde about half of the islands are leeward and these islands can be extremely dry. In about four of these islands, it rarely rained. One of them, I mentioned, was called the Island of Sal, which means salt in Portuguese and Spanish. It hadn't rained on that island for some ten years. Yet the major airport for refueling large jets was on Sal. For these islands water was the issue.

To give you an idea of how remote some of our sites were, we had volunteers who had to fly from one airport to another island airport, then take an ocean freighter to another island, then take a smaller boat to their site island. Then get a pickup truck to take them to their site inside of their island. When the road stopped, some would have to walk into their sites. For some of the volunteers, it could be a two or three-day trip to the embassy or to the hospital from their sites. This remoteness was evident the first time you made the trip. However, in training many of the younger PCVs don't realize how remote they are until they travel to their site to work.

They're in language training for 12 weeks, but at about six weeks, once they get the basics down, we send them out to these remote sites as an experiential learning experience. They observe what it's going to be like to live and work way out there, on your own, in a foreign language, in a small village, on a remote island out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean for two years!

Then most would come back with a more realistic, safer and motivated outlook towards learning how to be successful volunteers and get the most out of the training program.

Q: So, all of the volunteers were in ten of the Cape Verde islands and we no longer had anything in Guinea-Bissau.

WEISS: We evacuated the post in Guinea-Bissau. There were exploratory visits, but unfortunately some quite violent incidents prevented the Peace Corps from returning to Guinea-Bissau. During the nearly four years I was in Cape Verde and for the ten years since I left, the embassy and Peace Corps have decided the risks are too high in Guinea-Bissau.

We expanded our work to ten islands in Cape Verde. One thing I was proud of, was our program had the best retention rate in the world. We held the record as the only African post to achieve that for two years in a row! That is the value of good quality training and programming and building a remarkable team with our local staff. We had a great team

with a mix from Guinea-Bissau, the various islands, two Cape Verdean – Americans and my deputy Yonis. We understood the Cape Verdean-American tradition from the time of the whale boats going from there to Boston. This Cape Verdean-American maritime tradition goes back to the revolutionary war and that rich history came together. We had remarkable teachers, Dr. Yonis Reyes, Neusa Araujo, Ana Lisa Silva-Santos, Joanna Balde and Debbie Jefferson. I was blessed to see that happen.

Upon encountering difficult or challenging situations, deep motivation can come from the satisfaction and joy inherent when we see that our actions are helping others. I observed this in many Volunteers as they saw examples of this with our Peace Corps teachers during their PC Volunteer service.

Q: Were you able to take any of the lessons from Cape Verde to other regional countries?

WEISS: The US had a close relationship with Cape Verde. The nation was a leading example of a good governance country in Africa. They had good government, were honest and executed fairly well. We had a small USAID program, but a sizable Millennium Challenge and Peace Corps Programs.

Yearly, the Peace Corps holds an Africa-wide director's conference. HQ asks for the topics and sets the agenda. I was asked to facilitate sessions on good governance and donor coordination as we had that good experience in Cape Verde. The feedback from the other directors at the Africa conference confirmed this importance of good governance and donor coordination.

In Cape Verde, participation in donor coordination meetings was nearly mandatory in order to get things done at a national level. Donors met at the United Nation's in-country office. These donor coordination meetings were done in the neutral territory of the United Nations. This was key since when donor coordination was conducted at the UN offices, all the partners were on the similar footing. Each donor or partner had the opportunity to show their evidence to support their logic and positions. The Cape Verdean ministries had the right to refusal on specific goals but donor coordination was still more effective and productive than in many other countries.

We shared those experiences in Cape Verde as well as Albania with the other posts in Africa. For two years in a row, we used the Treaty of Paris for donor coordination as the model for the Africa Directors annual conference. In that time PC improved impact and success through applying this type of donor coordination.

Cape Verde, a small nation with a small budget became the "tail that wagged the dog" for good results in Africa. We at Peace Corps also had outstanding interagency working relations with the Millennium Challenge. The Millennium Challenge director, Dr. Stahis Panagides was a five-star diplomat and professional. The economic development and sustainability indicators used by his team at the Millennium Challenge and the UN, showed priorities and how development goals were being met. Progress was real, measurable, and based on data and evidence. It was rewarding to share these donor

coordination practices with other posts and directors as we had the track record to show better results.

Q: Were there any unique donors you worked with in Cape Verde that really stood out? In other words, the U.S. is well known for Peace Corps and USAID. A lot of other countries have smaller organizations that can be, especially in particular sectors, very effective. What others stood out in your mind?

WEISS: That's an interesting observation. Cape Verde is one of the most water stressed countries in the world. Water is a huge issue in most of Cape Verde. The institutions that I came to have a great respect for, and shows what smaller donors can do included;

- the Israelis in water development with drip irrigation, water conservation and efficiency;
- the GTZ, (German development) for their education and post-harvest programs
- Brazil in public health
- and the Japanese, JICA for education and agriculture.

All four had effective, productive programs with high impact.

But then the Chinese approach was an eye opener! The Chinese embassy was actually much larger than our US embassy. The Chinese presence, projects and development programming was larger than ours too. When we visited the Chinese embassy, they had many more engineers and scientific/technical officials than us. In part they were copying some techniques brought by the Japanese, the Israelis and the Germans for good programming and project management, albeit on a larger scale but with less donor coordination.

It was also the start of their Belt and Road, China Strategy in Africa. Which shows solid science with sound technical solutions eventually make their way across the globe. Belt and Road was a mixed experience but showed that it doesn't matter what flag an idea or project has? If it's a good idea, based on sound design, theory of change, technology and execution; infrastructure projects help people, and everyone's going to support that.

It's a shame sometimes this Belt and Road Strategy takes solid western development projects and sort of copies them. That’s how the Chinese get more and more influence in Africa. The locals are okay with the Belt and Road Strategy since many nations in Africa desperately need better infrastructure and public services. On the surface, the Belt and Road offers some of this. Based on my four years in Africa from 2007 to 2011, our US foreign policy would be well served to add tools to compete or when beneficial, coordinate with the Belt and Road Strategy.

Two recent examples of how to do this are Power Africa and YALI (Young African Leaders Initiative.) The Build Act, which just passed in the fall of 2019 gives congress a tool to fund and staff these programs to compete or when beneficial, co-ordinate.

Q: Your family there, how did they like it? Was your wife working?

WEISS: We had three good ambassadors. One of the ambassadors, Roger Pierce, right out of the shoot said, "We need a Community Liaison Officer (CLO). Why doesn't Bea apply to be the CLO?" Bea had never been a CLO, but ambassador Pierce and his wife knew that in a remote post in Africa, a solid CLO program is important. HR told Bea of a great course for CLOs and sent her to the CLO course that the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) does in Germany. Bea got great training to set up a solid CLO program. Bea loved it and did an outstanding job as CLO for almost four years. The post as well as the locals and diplomatic community from the other embassies also loved her. She won awards and started charity efforts, local language training and culture programs. She volunteered at the only school for special needs children in all of Cape Verde at that time, called "Lem Cachoro." There she worked as a volunteer and teacher and the Cape Verdeans loved her too. All these children had handicaps, learning disabilities and were really under served. She brought in volunteers from the US and other embassies. They raised money, added programs and got more care and teachers.

My wife, Bea was a great partner, who did so much good work in Africa. In fact, shoot, if you ask somebody who they remember most in Cape Verde, they probably remember my wife way more than they remember me, the director of the Peace Corps! (Laughter) Bea had a wonderful experience. Our sons were blessed to see this and learn from their mom's example that much of the joy in life comes from helping others.

Q: Were you sons also educated on the island?

WEISS: No, there was no accredited high school so our sons went to boarding school, Henry for three and Frank for four years. They came in the summers to work in the GSO or consular sections of the embassy. When time allowed, we all got to visit some Peace Corps volunteers. It was a beautiful experience for us all. We were fortunate because they had summer work and got to see some projects in Africa. Also, to see their mother do wonderful volunteer and CLO work was a real blessing for our sons. I hope these memories serve them well throughout their lives.

THE STATE DEPARTMENT

Q: Now, usually the Peace Corps doesn't keep you more than two terms as the director, but was there an exception in your case? What were you thinking about doing after this directorship in Cape Verde?

WEISS: We time out in the Peace Corps after five years. I hit my five years and was fortunate. I loved the program and PC let us stay on past the limit but the clock's ticking and you've got to move on to something else. About the time my clock was running out in West Africa I had another angel type event. I was going on my seventh year in PC and a foreign service officer friend, Dwight Rhoades, happened to email me a job

announcement for the State Department recruiting engineers, facility and construction managers.

Dwight and I have been close friends since the mid - 90s, when we served in El Salvador. We played softball, poker, fished and even coached a national championship baseball team together. So I had confidence and interest in what he sent me. I began the application process, which, as you know, is long, detailed and has many phases and steps.

Just as I am getting a bit discouraged with how long and slow HR works at State, another messenger comes into our lives. In Praia, Cape Verde, the embassy is an old, legacy building with all the problems; electrical, roof leaks, overcrowding, old pipes, you know the story. OBO (the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations) from the State Department sent two former Sea- Bees (personnel from U.S. Naval Construction Battalion). Both of them, Jeff and Dave were retired, highly-skilled men, I've been friends with ever since. Jeff was very helpful and told me how to apply to State/OBO and to add you've been a director in Africa since AF experience was in need. Jeff told me about the program and how it worked.

So, I took all the written tests and initial interviews. Then HR called me to DC for another set of tests and the interview panel. I actually went with our younger son Frank in DC which helped me during this process.

A couple of months later, sure enough, I got the job and transferred. The day my clock ticked out with the Peace Corps, Bea and I departed Africa. The very next day I transferred to the new position at OBO in the State Department. Not as a director but as an engineer and Facility Management Specialist (FMS) in the Foreign Service.

Q: What year was that?

WEISS: This was 2010 to 2011, when I turned 56.

Q: Alright. It's great to get into the State Department. Where did the department put you for your first assignment?

WEISS: On that first assignment, the OBO office director and their engineering supervisor sent me where I would learn the systems fast. State/OBO was building new embassy compounds (NECs), which often are the most sophisticated and technologically complex buildings in a country. OBO just finished a new embassy compound in Belmopan, Belize, in the middle of the bush. I was the first facility manager engineer to do a tour of duty there. It was a great experience. Again, I was lucky and/or blessed. We had a great staff with a top-notch local engineer. He taught me much about the new systems. I'm grateful to the State Department, for some outstanding training. I learned how these new embassies worked both on the technical side and organizationally. It was a post where you learn everything fast. Again, I had a great ambassador and my DCM

Nini and management officer, Phil Wilson were both from Illinois, where I was born. It was a wonderful experience.

Q: Now, you're going from a Lusophone country to a basically an English-speaking country?

WEISS: They spoke Spanish in the Guatemalan border area and English on the Caribbean Sea coast area and much of the local staff could speak both languages as well as some Garifuna and Creole.

Q: How long did you stay there?

WEISS: A two-year tour of duty and since I had to ensure our local staff learned these very complex systems my training days from Peace Corps and electric utilities served me well. We had good experiences because we all learned the systems together. We had a safe, reliable post with solid training and know how.

My wife got her first POL-ECON job there. Then she was later working as an OMS (Office Management Specialist) and administrative assistant. She had a nice experience there too. Our sons were in the States but got to visit and Frank worked at the embassy in the summer.

Q: Now, your goal, when you got there, was to complete the building of the new embassy compounds?

WEISS: The close out of the punch list, the final acceptance and training of all the staff, including myself and the transition to full standard operations for this NEC.

Q: So it's a pretty big job!

WEISS: It was and I was well trained in this area. The State Department and OBO have some outstanding training. The Foreign Service Institute gave us additional training. Again, I learned the lesson of how important good training is and having a team that understands how things work.

Q: Was the building completed while you were there?

WEISS: Yes. Everything worked pretty well. All systems were operational and accepted. We had a couple longer term issues in restricted areas but we worked those out too. I learned a lot from that experience and with my local staff. As you know local staff may only work in the unclassified parts of the embassy. With the classified parts of the embassy, the American engineer / facility manager is pretty much on his own. I was fortunate to have a solid team with sound engineering judgement. I did not worry much about the unclassified part of that embassy.

Q: Wow. But you had someone—Seabees or—

WEISS: Absolutely. One crew helped me for a few days and we found ways to keep everything working. It's a rewarding experience to work in a very modern embassy.

Q: What was it like to live in Belize? What impressed you or what do you recall from it, given all of your development experience and your background?

WEISS: Even though Belize City and many outlying villages were quite poor, we never saw homeless people or beggars. Somehow the culture learned or evolved to take care of each other and assimilate people into an extended family culture. Though there was a good deal of poverty, there were few marginalized people, due to either physical incapacities or inability to earn a living. That was one of the lessons I think I learned from the Belizeans.

Q: Besides your job with the physical construction, punch list, move and operations, did you also—because in a small embassy, so many people do so many different things to do—were you also engaged in other aspects of the mission?

WEISS: As you know in a small place, sometimes you may be acting everything—I was duty officer, acting GSO, acting contracting officer, acting post security, post safety officer. I opened, then locked and closed the embassy at 5 PM, as it was a lock and leave NEC. We played some social tennis, poker, golf and had dip events. Life was fine, even though we were in the middle of the bush. Bea also wore many hats. They asked her to also wear many hats, from vetting, to admin assistant, to commissary manager, TDY as the ambassador's OMS, contracting, events etc. She managed the commissary and helped wherever asked, she even took care of the COM's dog when he was on travel 😊.

We lived in a compound where you have to get along with everyone. We all are neighbors, and everyone has to pull together. We were fortunate that we had good leadership, a great management officer, DCM and ambassador, a great team. To the State Department's credit, they know when they put people in these small, remote, compounds, you've got to have good teamwork. We delivered solid diplomacy for the American people with projects that were foreseeing the issues including the waves of migration. We had programs in place addressing key issues and were building robust programming.

Q: Did you get involved or brought in at times because of issues related to drug transportation?

WEISS: To put this in context, when we looked out of our bedroom window, all we saw was jungle. We could not see even one roof. There were no houses within view of our windows. It was a smuggler's paradise. Post had programs with diplomatic security, INL (Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs) and the defense attaché, to strengthen local law enforcement and immigration officials and their facilities. I had all the electricians, plumbers, masons, carpenters and the only engineer at post besides myself. We'd get out sometimes to a remote police station or outpost and were asked to help modernize these buildings? We'd help with the design, cost estimates or

quotes and at times with the quality assurance. We did security improvements to the school, local law enforcement, border and immigration facilities.

Q: Fascinating. During that time did you make contacts who are then useful in other aspects of your work? Because when you work that closely with the local people, sometimes that overlaps for you and they assist in other things.

WEISS: As you know diplomacy is about making friends and contacts with input into ministries and key aspects of a country. I had a great contact at the Ministry of Public Works, another contact at the Ministry of Education and contacts in the Chamber of Commerce. I got to reconnect with two old friends of mine, who were local engineers I met back in the 1980's. Edgar Puga was the retired Chief Engineer at the Ministry of Public Works and Francis Burns was my counterpart in 1983-84. Francis was my counterpart engineer representing the Gov. of Belize during a project I worked on in 1984. Later when I was back in 2011 with the Dept of State, Francis actually helped my son on his college break. Our son, who is now a construction engineer in the US, worked with Francis in the summer and got great experience.

One of the things I'll never forget is the brother of my dearest local colleague at the embassy, passed away in sad circumstances. Unexpectedly, a young man, probably in his forties. I was the only American invited to the Anglican church where the funeral service was held. My wife said, "I'll go with you." She and I were the only Americans in this church. It was a most memorable experience in a very spiritual venue.

What came out of some little huts in a marginalized community near Belize City was amazing. A beautiful choir singing all the love and goodwill upon the family. It was a remarkable service in the old Anglican church right next to the sea. What a cultural, humanitarian and relationship building experience. When FSOs are encouraged to get outside of the wire and of the security walls, good things can happen, really good things.

Q: Did we—the U.S.—take interest in the environmental aspects of Belize, principally the reef?

WEISS: One of the main causes for OBO moving our embassy from the capital city, Belize City, inland to Belmopan, was the destruction caused by Hurricane Hattie. The main risks, danger and damage was not from the hurricanes alone but from the destruction of the reef and the marshlands. What actually happened is, when the reef was in its protected state and marshlands were not destroyed and a hurricane brings high waters, the flooding cannot get too far inland. This is because the reefs and marshlands protect the coastal areas from floods.

However, during Hurricane Hattie, much of this marshland had worn away. The reefs were damaged when the marshland wood was cut down, so the flood water came farther inland. It reached so far inland, that the water in the Bay of Belize went way down in level. There were a lot of fish laying in plain view on the bottom of the empty bay. Hundreds of people came out into the shallow bay, just like in a biblical story, they came

out to harvest the fish. Then it was just a matter of time and all this flood water came back to the Bay and drowned hundreds of people. Destroyed everything in its path. The lesson learned was the importance of maintaining the environmental balance of the marshlands and the reef. We had some solid programs to assist Belizeans reestablish their marshlands and reefs.

Q: You're now in the Foreign Service and you're under the foreign service discipline. Two years in and you're beginning to think of where you're going to be ordered next. At this point, how old are your children? Are they reaching college age?

WEISS: Our older son, Henry whose nickname is Hanco, was graduating in biology/pre-med at a Jesuit university, Xavier in Cincinnati, Ohio. Our younger son, Frank was in his third year of civil engineering/construction management at another Jesuit university, Marquette in Milwaukee. They had Foreign Service work opportunities overseas during some of the summers while we all were at the embassies in Cape Verde and Belize. Both sons helped pay for college by obtaining financial aid and some scholarship funds. Money was tight with two in college at the same time.

Both of our sons have emotional intelligence and have seen quite a bit for their age. They observed life and development in Central America, Africa, and in Albania, a Muslim majority post. They were with us after the civil war, during the hurricanes and earthquakes in Salvador, so they know what disasters can do and have practical skills that come with those types of experiences.

Q: Fantastic. Now where are you about to be ordered for your next job and tour of duty?

WEISS: In terms of the Foreign Service, your first two tours are ordered, directed tours. It's wise even though some people may not like it. Bea thought it would be nice not to go back to places we've been before because we'd worked for many years in Central America. We knew Central America well and hoped we would be sent someplace new.

I had been in Honduras before and we knew Honduras can be a very challenging place. The country has extreme violence, crime and from the embassy facility standpoint, the embassy is old and overloaded. The Tegucigalpa, Honduras, embassy had the worst facility condition index in the Western Hemisphere. It's a challenging place for an engineer. In the wisdom of the Foreign Service, they said, "you speak Spanish, you've been there before, and we need you to go to Honduras." So Bea and I were not the happiest, but those are the rules. You have to obey orders. What do they call it, what's the term now where everybody shares the hardship post?

Q: Fair share.

WEISS: Yes, that is it - Fair share. They said, "No, Hank, you need to go to Honduras." My wife and I packed up and we went to Honduras. That again turned into another remarkable event that brought a spiritual aspect into our lives.

When I first was in Honduras, it was 1982. I was working on a development project with USAID, which was located next to the US embassy. I lived in a little apartment next to the USAID building in front of the US embassy. I would get up every morning and look at that old US embassy—and this was in 1982.

The US Embassy back then had only about thirty or so foreign service officers and maybe 80 local staff in the old embassy. USAID had a six-story building across the street. In 1982, I looked at the US embassy, every day from my apartment, but I never went inside the embassy since I went to AID, where we had our projects.

Now imagine this! I looked at the Embassy main gate almost every day and had this feeling of déjà vu, back in 1982. I often said to myself, “there's something about that embassy."

Now picture this! Unbelievably, when I came back for my tour to Honduras, 30 years later, in 2013; the security configuration at this embassy changed. The very first morning when I reported to duty at the embassy—now in 2013—on my first day of work as the US engineer in the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa. When I drove in the entrance road and in front of the main gate at Post One, what do I see? I saw the exact opposite end of the view I used to see in the morning from the little apartment I lived in during 1982. Now in 2013, over thirty years later, I am looking down into the exact same apartment window and room where I used to look out and see the embassy main gate. I am now getting ready to go into and report for duty on my first day on the job in 2013!

This was a strong spiritual déjà vu experience. I could feel the bones down my back shake.

So many times, in 1982, I would look from my apartment window at that US embassy. Now I'm on the other end, in 2013 at the embassy main gate, post one, looking down into my old apartment window from 1982.

I felt like the good Lord was shaking me, saying "Pay attention to this, pay attention." That was my day one experience, starting at to work at the US Embassy in Tegucigalpa in 2013.

Inside much had changed, instead of the 30 US officers we had in 1983, we have over 130 US officials. We have a total of over 500 staff. There are another 900 at the military air base in Soto Cano. The US footprint has increased by more than a factor of four, but we're still in the same old US embassy building, on the same old footprint and it's busting loose.

The way you measure facility condition is with an engineering standard called the facility condition index. The US embassy in Tegucigalpa from 2012 through 2016 had the worst facility condition index in the Western Hemisphere. There were many challenges: electrical systems were overloaded, water systems leaked and were overloaded, sewage system overloads, the roofs leaked badly. There was not enough space for all the people.

The fire system was old and obsolete. Post was trying to convince HQ to speed up approvals for a new embassy NEC, which starting in 2018 was approved and is now being built as we speak.

If we fast forward to 2018, the new embassy compound (NEC) in Honduras was the embassy design featured worldwide at the annual industry meeting of the architects and engineering firms at State and OBO. The new embassy in Honduras, once completed, will be a much better place. I feel good knowing our challenges with that old, overloaded embassy lead to a better future. The US is going to have a beautiful new embassy in Honduras with a great design to make people proud. It'll display US architectural design, the American construction industry, engineers and our diplomatic mission, at its best.

Q: So, you were involved in the process, to get to the approval for this NEC?

WEISS: During my last year, we had the pre-feasibility, conceptual design, permitting, utilities and public services coordination, initial cost estimates, budget and mobilization plans.

Q: Okay, you know you were part of the process. How did you manage to make the old building work to be more livable?

WEISS: It was a challenging technical experience. I was blessed again. The same colleague, Jeff Brock, who was with me back when we were in Cape Verde West Africa, was now semi-retired. He came back to work when needed. Our post in Honduras requested him and he came and helped us tremendously. By grace and another messenger, I got to work with Jeff since I could not have done all that work alone. Jeff was in his seventies and we got a lot done and became close friends. Sadly, Jeff passed away in 2019. I was honored to offer a eulogy at his military service in South Carolina "may God bless Jeff Brock and his family."

Now imagine this! My only sister, Sharon lives outside Missoula, MT. One day at work, I learned that Jeff was raised near the gate of Glacier National park, not far from Missoula. Jeff offered me his family cabin to use anytime. After our tour in Honduras, Sharon, our son Hanco and I got to have a great vacation at that cabin. It was the first time our oldest son Hanco and Sharon got to meet. What another incredible event that happened through Jeff, my messenger when we meet in Africa.

Q: Did you have to use trailers or temporary facilities in Honduras and Belize?

WEISS: You bet, we had to use trailers for many temporary facilities, mail security and converted storage areas to office space. We converted part of a warehouse to office space and tried many things. We knocked out walls for open spaces, so more people would fit and squeezed in more cubicles.

As we chatted earlier, in 1982, the embassy had about 30 US officers. By 2013, there were 130 officers plus many TDYers. We had congressional delegations often, which are

a challenge. Good thing for teamwork in the Foreign Service and retired pros like Jeff, who were willing to come back, share their experience and help us all meet these challenges.

Q: Now, you were right there in 2013 and it's a two-year tour. You also must have had a lot of local employees working for you. How did they describe and talk about their lives in Honduras? Since at this point there are a lot of political difficulties; drugs and gangs and so on. What were you hearing from them?

WEISS: During our tour, Honduras had the highest homicide rate in the world. Many of our local staff lived in marginal neighborhoods. They told me to “be very careful about calling us in to work at night in case of an emergency."

Crime was high and it was dangerous for them to come in to work at night. The few staff living somewhat close to the embassy were mostly the Americans. I was the only US engineer. As much as possible if things went wrong at night, I would try to fix it. There were a few local staff not living in dangerous neighborhoods. When I really needed help, I'd only call only the one man in, who lived close enough to come in safely. That was my commitment. I would not bring our local staff in from dangerous neighborhoods, at night.

If something went wrong, I would go in first. When fire alarms went off, water or roof leaks, power and/or computers failed, the marine guards would call me. Our local staff appreciated that the US engineer went in first to assess the situation. I would only call the Honduran in at night, if I could not fix it by myself.

At times I just jerry-rigged stuff to get it to work until the next morning so as not to call in the local staff. I think that got me some credibility with the local staff. They knew I cared about them, their families and their safety.

Q: Did you see any change in Honduras during your time there?

WEISS: Our USAID and INL (International Narcotics and Law) programs were effective. The programs aligned, coordinated and built relationships, critical to move the fairly corrupt Honduran government towards good governance, rule of law, honesty and integrity. Both AID and INL had good systems for evaluating impact and vetting.

Vetting is complex work to assure the due diligence of foreign officials, prior to being approved for US programs with benefits like education or training. The word got out that to work with the US embassy required integrity, ethics and honesty. This was during a period when in some upper levels of Honduran society, corruption and even narco-trafficking existed. Through sound programs, execution and vetting; the message was clear. Our US embassy only works with honest leaders. This had an impact and was a message that got results.

Q: Then once again, how was your wife employed and how did the tour work out for her?

WEISS: I think she had a tough job but a pretty good experience. Bea is bilingual and did important, interesting work that included a tremendous amount of this critical vetting. Bea, to her extreme credit, vetted over 10,000 people one year. She was the vetting coordinator for critical items that had to be done in Spanish.

As you know, vetting must be done with very accurate and precise language skills. Can you imagine leading the vetting, when you're learning the people, the post and the systems. In the first year Bea arrived, she was tasked to vet over 10,0000 human beings, in one year! Bea contributed greatly to the mission's success. Her extensive vetting helped to deliver solid programming with the correct officials, Hondurans that were honest. Locals with questionable histories, ethics and records didn't get into US programs, in good measure, due to Bea's contributions of vetting excellence.

Q: Oh, awesome. Aside from these experiences, embassies have to host various VIP visits. What do you have as recollections of how that went?

WEISS: The value of effective public official visits are important learning experiences for posts as well as in our careers and life. We tried to get VIP staffers to do their homework to understand the situation on the ground, in Honduras before they actually visited. I can share a good example and a bad one.

Let's begin with effective VIP visits to Honduras. One was General Kelly's team. At the time he was the commander of SOUTHCOM. Another was Senator Tim Kaine from Virginia. Tim had taught at a trade school in Honduras, many decades before. He came in knowing Spanish, the situation on the ground, the challenges to deliver on foreign policy priorities and how to promote our foreign policy priorities within the Honduran society and government.

The bad visits were these committee type CODELs. Once we had eight congressional representatives in unison for one visit. None did their homework prior to the visit. They didn't understand the situation in the country and none of them spoke the language. They restricted their meetings to within the embassy and did not communicate well with the host government or the local press. At the end of this high cost committee type, CODEL visit, many resources were dedicated for no outcome, no results. Small, well-planned visits with one or two congressmen that do their homework are more effective than committee-type CODELs where no one is responsible for results. They appear to be "junkets" for congressmen.

Small CODELs based on real outcomes and objectives, when they understand the country's situation, work best. Large fact-finding committees from congress are often wasteful and ineffective. That's a diplomatic career lesson I learned. Good CODELs have a significant impact on relevant foreign policy goals in country. Committee type, big CODELs look like junkets from both inside and outside of the embassies.

Q: And once again, even though you were the facilities manager-engineer, did your work overlap with any of the other elements of the embassy?

WEISS: When the commander of SOUTHCOM visits, the logistics and facilities involved are fairly extensive; the spaces, support, moving around with computer grade power quality and office resources. It must be high quality power, reliable water, safe food and shelter with secure spaces are all critical needs. Generals bring a significant footprint that is closely scheduled. Their missions, time, safety and security are critical. They're meeting with key contacts and officials at the very top levels of the government and society.

Q: Another sort of general question, as you moved along from developing countries to somewhat more developed, did the internet and the rapid ability to communicate change the way you did this? Or influence how you did business?

WEISS: Fascinating question. I was part of a program that brought the first personal IBM computer to Belize in 1984. The Belize national fair located us with that IBM computer in the front booth. Everyone crowded around, we put the entire national road network mapped out on the screen. People couldn't believe it. It was the national transportation system map, plan and budget. Just what computers do well; collect, analyze and report data.

Now over 35 years later, the breakthrough is phenomenal in both foreign assistance and diplomatic work, not to mention in engineering and operations. The systems we have today are better. However, a difficult aspect is many systems are not integrated and don't talk to one another. With so many systems, we need to learn to better manage all this data because often related data is not integrated, so we do not “connect the dots.” Better system integration is a critical need since foreign operations come with some complex data sets where there is often a need to see the patterns and the trends.

Social media is a two-edged sword, here is an example from the Peace Corps. When I first came to Peace Corps, nobody would ever dream of calling their congressman because they had a bad day in, say, West Africa. Nowadays, if a Peace Corps volunteer is well-connected and knows how, they can call their congressman's office and complain about the Peace Corps Program for something that maybe 20 years ago would have been, a band aid and a trip to the nurse's office. We have this both in the Peace Corps and the Foreign Service. Some Foreign Service Officers are a little too quick and brash to air their views on social media, when a calm, collected and thoughtful approach is more productive.

Q: That also leads to another general question, which is, at this point you've been supervising lots of people, some Americans, but probably mostly locals. How did you handle difficult personnel situations as you went along?

WEISS: What surprised me in the Foreign Service is more personnel issues were related to behavior than performance. A behavior or performance issue is pretty simple to discern. The old saying is; when they do not know how, it is a training problem. When

it’s insubordination or they just do not want to do it, is it a behavior issue? Behavior issues in the Foreign Service were the most difficult personnel issues.

The Foreign Service has a system to train and improve performance. It's an up or out system with that, as an incentive to perform. There are ways to help you perform; training programs at the Foreign Service Institute, first tour programs, mentoring, coaching and these things work. What surprised me is how some people get into the Foreign Service to represent our country overseas? They're the face of America and yet have behavioral issues. It surprised me, that behavioral issues could take up an inordinate amount of time. We are better served when we spend our time on training, coaching and mentoring performance but the reality is too many of our HR issues are behavioral.

A challenge for the foreign service is how to devise a better application and interview process, with early filters to identify behavioral issues before the US swears in new FSOs? In the Foreign Service, you're the face of America 24/7. If an FSO goes out and embarrasses the Department by behaving badly, there is a high price for that bad press. This surprised me because I saw all the housing and at times we had to deal with challenging, personnel behavioral issues--the way people behaved in their house and in the communities. Not widespread, but more than I would have expected. Poor judgement with respect to appropriate behavior while we are guests in a foreign nation. This took up more time and resources than I expected.

As the saying goes, one bad apple….

TO MAIN STATE HQ - RETURNING TO WASHINGTON (AFTER 40 YEARS AWAY)

Q: It's remarkable, so now we're approaching the end of your tour in Honduras. Are there any other recollections that you want to share that really stand out in your mind?

WEISS: So again, the thread of listening to a divine messenger, karma or our spiritual values comes back. I had the good fortune to work with an outstanding Foreign Service officer in Africa. It was his third or so tour in Africa. He'd been a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa. He was the counselor general and counselor officer in Cape Verde. There we once had a situation when we both were the duty officers and we saved a man's life. This man was not an American citizen, but we still saved his life. He was a sailor out at sea. He would've died. We helped him get into the best hospital in Cape Verde and saved his life.

Long story short, this was published in Reader's Digest. The article was called "True Blue Diplomats" and it was published all over India because it was an Indian citizen who lived. One Sunday his wife called me as the duty officer and said, "Can you help me, we don't have an embassy in Cape Verde, so can you help us?" I called this good Foreign Service officer, Bob Dahlke and he teamed up to help him. He and I basically brought this sailor to the hospital, got him taken care of until his wife arrived there from India and helped save his life. It was read about widely as it was printed in the India national version of Reader's Digest.

Then, five years later, I'm at the end of my tour in Honduras and my CDO says, "Hank, it's time to come back to the US, come back to headquarters. I said, "Jeez, headquarters,"--I'd never worked at Main State.

Also, I had a heart operation in 2014, while I was in Honduras and knew this was time to go home. However, I was nervous about taking a new job in D.C. I was concerned due in part to the complicated workings at the regional and global level in HQ at the State Department.

While looking at the jobs on the bid list, one of the more interesting jobs was in the office of Foreign Assistance (F). F is under the Office of the Secretary of State (S). And, lo and behold, who's the incumbent? It's the same foreign service officer, Bob Dahlke who I worked with in West Africa when we saved that man’s life! He was holding the job that I found the most interesting at HQ. It was the end of his tour too, so I reached out to him.

Bob let me shadow him, alleviated my fears and showed me most everything I needed to know about this job at F. By then, I was ready to start my first tour at headquarters. Once again, a spiritual connection with the messenger, whatever you want to call this, put an opportunity in my life to be open to and to pay attention.

One thing I wished I learned earlier in life, is to pay attention to these things. Bob, the same foreign service officer from five years ago in West Africa, changed my life then,

and now would once again, but this time, at HQ in Washington, D.C. Five years later he came back as my messenger at just about a perfect time in my life.

When Bea and I started our trek back to the United States to Main State headquarters, we were blessed to have our old friends Bob and Dwight there for us.

Q: All right. That is where we'll pick up next time. Today is August 26th, 2019 resuming our interview with Hank Weiss and he's completing his tour in Honduras in 2015 and beginning to transition. Where are you going next?

WEISS: Again, that theme of divine messages in our lives with important past events that a divine hand puts in our lives, came again as I transitioned to the Main State headquarters in DC. As you know, our CDOs are career development officers. I had a good career development officer, an outstanding, caring professional with solid experience. He told me, "Hank you've been overseas 28 years and never done a domestic assignment." He said, "It's time to come back to the US." I was coming off a heart operation in Honduras, so I listened to him.

As I mentioned, I looked at different opportunities on the bid list where it'd be a good fit and the job that jumped out at me was where Bob, my former colleague, the foreign service officer who I had served with in West Africa was the incumbent. Bob is just a wonderful person and great foreign service officer, outstanding language skills, dedicated, ethical. As I mentioned, we saved the life of a man together while we were duty officers in Cape Verde. The man was a sailor out at sea, we saved the man's life and it was all written up in Reader's Digest.

Q: This is off the coast of Cape Verde?

WEISS: Yes, off the coast of Cape Verde in West Africa. As Bob's name popped out at me, I said, "Here is a very good person." If Bob is working there, it was worthwhile, impactful work. When Bob told me about what his work was at F, it was fascinating. Bob served as the lead for the Young African Leadership Initiative, the YALI Global conference. He was working on the formulation, execution, review and evaluation of the foreign assistance budgets for the entire State Department. His specialty was Africa, just where we worked together and which is the largest part of the foreign assistance budget.

I emailed Bob, his full name is Robert Dahlke. (BTW, he's now the council general in Montreal). He wrote me back with a most gracious and helpful note. I replied, "Bob, I've never worked at headquarters. What would you suggest?" He guided me through the process to transition back to headquarters better than my best expectations.

Then I met another important person in my life. I'd worked for ambassadors and DCMs, and management officers at posts with a few million dollars but now I work with the director of an office with a $7 Billion dollar budget!

The person in charge of that office retired, so when I arrived, there was competition to replace her and the two officers with PhDs applied. In the end, the PhD who happened to be from the same place I was born, south of Chicago, got the job. She was another wonderful human being who also guided me through the HQ learning process. I got some great training, absolute professionalism. Just like my friend Bob, they both made a supportive, productive and effective transition to headquarters. I was happy to serve there.

My first HQ assignment was to assist to formulate the FA budget for 10 South African countries and serve as back-up for another 10 West African countries. Twenty countries in two sub regions, each with a total budget of about $2 billion.

My director, Tracy and I were responsible for this budget process of some $4 billion. I got to follow up some of the work on the Power Africa initiative. A fantastic experience, among the most productive programs, I'd seen after nearly two decades work in infrastructure.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. Take one second, what's your official title and where you were located etc.

WEISS: I'm sorry, I was a country coordinator and budget analyst in the office of foreign assistance (F) which reports to the secretary of State, through the director of the F. My team in F, rolled up the $7 billion African budget which was added to the global US foreign assistance budget of about $37 billion total. Then with the other budget offices and OCO (overseas contingency ops) develop the $50 billion budget for the entire State Department. I reported to the Africa budget team lead and then as the evaluation contract officer's rep (COR) for the Department wide, global evaluations of US foreign assistance.

Q: And part of your job was to program or provide funding to USAID programs as well?

WEISS: Yes, foreign assistance includes all USAID programs, input into the Millennium Challenge, Peace Corps, the Department of Commerce and the 150 account. My team lead Dr. Tracy Carson is now the managing director of F. She guided us effectively, we formed a good team that won awards.

Q: I'm sorry, one more question. In your job, in doing the analysis, could you take a moment to describe the process? Were you working on an interagency basis and how did you arrive at your figures?

WEISS: Just about everything hangs on the budget and human resources. There is an integrated country strategic plan (ICS). The bureau strategic plan informs the bureau resource request (BRR) which is part of the joint strategic plan (JSP). These inform the mission level requests (MRR) and each country defines the ICS strategy to align, integrate and work with our foreign policy goals. We facilitated sessions with experts to validate the basis for mission resource request and country strategic plan and the alignment with our overall foreign policy.

This means, does it really align and integrate at the functional, sub-regional and higher levels and are the cost estimates reasonable? We'd review the numbers with experts and verify they made sense based on the data and evidence. Then clarify what was the basis for the estimates. The other alignment is does the post budget resource allocation line up with strategy? We provide additional data and our feedback, then go back and forth with an iterative process and to agree on the optimized resource allocation budget, given the strategic goals at all levels.

A key issue often is how do the country strategies align with regional strategy. Also is the regional strategy aligned with the programs and global strategies in the functional bureaus. Are all key parts of the budget optimized and aligned to work together in a cohesive strategy?

The key issues were defined and discussed with the Africa bureaus in both State and AID. Then roundtables that F lead with the interagency ranked and prioritized programs by country. I was fortunate and blessed to see this process come to fruition and positively impact our programs.

Q: Now in funding foreign assistance programs, did you also, under your authority, fund a building or permanent assets?

WEISS: The capital budget is formulated under the BP part of the budget at the State Dept. In F we focused on the foreign assistance budget. There's an interesting synergy that must happen so everything works together. As you know, our global operations need well designed footprints with facilities that are right sized to match human resources as required for posts and programs to work well. In BP, the diplomatic operations side of the budget was about $15 billion. That includes capital assets; facilities O & M, construction, building modernizations, real estate, code issues, fire, safety, health and environmental compliance. All that is required to support and execute Diplomatic and Foreign Assistance operations.

BP leads on this operating and capital budget by reviews of the footprint, human resources and ops budget to support programming and policy, by country and region. The budget process can be a fascinating area with significant impacts. In 2015, Africa was the region with the most program budget but with the lowest ratio of officers to budget as evidenced for example, by budget per officer. This challenge becomes how to leverage the substantial human resources based in Europe to support the significant shortfalls in much of Africa. The regional programs like Frankfurt developed hubs in Africa to support African posts. There was continued prior to my retirement to optimize support closer to Africa.

These types of challenges require world class analytics to optimize regional support centers like this. What is the optimized size and locations for regional support in eastern, central, south and west Africa? There's great potential but as you know, it can be slow to change big things like this at a large, global Department like State.

Q: The other, piece of the puzzle, is the integration of facilities with programs. Where and how does the Office of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) contribute towards this?

WEISS: OBO is under the Management (M) bureau. A challenging point is OBO has the long-range plan, based on many variables of which just a few include; risk, real estate and cost analysis. A complex problem is the optimization of where, when and how to design and build new embassies in a fast-changing world. Events happen and quick changes are needed to a five- or ten-year plan, as in for example in the case of Afghanistan or Iraq. These complex plans then must be adjusted quickly or it can be challenging to adequately respond.

The example I lived through recently was Honduras. When I started in Honduras, first was in 1982. Then the US only had 30 officers at the embassy. When I went back 30 years later in 2013, the US now had over 130 officers. The US had quadrupled in size but was still in the same footprint in a 70-year-old embassy building with the same Ambassador's residence and it was not a sustainable situation.

State and OBO are one of the largest capital asset managers in the world. There are embassies and facilities in some 290 different places. To respond to all the events and changes; natural disasters, immigration, climate, civil war and conflict; issues of strategic importance in a country, is quite a challenge. A key factor is doing good engineering and design. This requires a full bench of qualified, experienced engineering and technical staff. Also, this is simpler without too many big changes, five or 10 years out. However, our world can change a lot in five to ten years and OBO has lost many qualified, experienced engineers to be able to respond to all these dynamics.

The F office director was a PhD in math. He and the other budget directors are quite smart with budgeting. To optimize for the unexpected events, the bumps and black swans, requires sharing and optimized reprogramming of limited resources to respond to these unexpected events.

My takeaway was it's challenging for bureaus like OBO because the big old Department of State often won't change that fast. While the planning, design and building process of an embassy can be a seven to 10-year process. Find and buy the right location, based on the right proof of concept to partial design, then bridging documents, complete design, design and build bid process with specs, cost estimates, contracting, logistics, security, and all the needed support. Then there are design adjustments even during the construction and quality control process. Then commissioning, punch list, warranty, turning over the facility then moving into a new embassy as well as decommissioning the old one. A long process which is more challenging when changing events or conditions on the ground need to be considered. As change accelerates there are more challenges for global enterprises like the State Department. OBO going forward, will need to be able to attract the best American firms, contractors and staff.

Q: I have interrupted you with all these questions while you were explaining how your job operated in the department.

WEISS: I am grateful to have experiences like seeing the $50 billion budget for worldwide operations planned, formulated, rolled up, approved and executed. I saw this under quite different types of national administrations. First, Secretary Kerry, then under Secretary Tillerson and now with Secretary Pompeo. Once my boss kindly said to me, "Hank, you have more experience overseas than most in this office. Why don't you get involved in the branch that does evaluations of our budget, strategy and the alignment? The evaluation branch would be a good place for you."

I interviewed and again, God put a messenger in my path. Can you believe this? It turned out that the chief of the global evaluation section and I used to work together for years in Africa! And we knew each other fairly well. What is the chance of something like this happening? The person that I worked with in Africa, many years ago is now the chief of the evaluation branch in Washington D.C. in a large organization like the State Dept. that has some 75,000 employees?

The last time I saw her was over eight years ago, when we were both sitting on a piece of wood, eating lunch in an open-air market in Ghana during our work in West Africa! I recalled once again, my father and Albert Einstein's words that "God does not play dice with the universe!" The mathematical probability of this many "coincidences" happening randomly seem just too small to me. My 65 years of life have taught me that some of these incredible coincidences must be a divine hand, acting anonymously!

To say the least, I got this very cool job and became a certified member of the American Evaluation Association. I worked with two highly experienced evaluators on a team at the Department of State headquarters. We did some rewarding things that we all were proud of.

The evaluation of foreign programs improves results due to the fact that evaluations, done properly, influence better project design. This includes how to get feedback to continually improve and take corrective actions. Many complex global issues addressed with our programs have a five or more-year horizon, in order to achieve the desired outcomes, results and success.

For example, the US has been promoting democracy and human rights for 30 years in some countries. Also, trade, commerce and economic development for many years. It's important to have an evaluation process for feedback so that adjustments are made earlier, which is less costly, less risky and traumatic when done in time.

Our team also started a community of practice (CoP) to improve evaluations globally. This CoP had some 450 practitioners world-wide. Each month an example evaluation was selected to be shared, so that posts and programs, worldwide could share best practices and learn together.

The CoP was a great experience. I'd never seen this done on a global scale like this before. I'd seen regional and sub-regional level, virtual meetings, but I'd never seen a global community of practice and the effect that can have. I observed how a project in EAP (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs) shared a design or lesson learned that applied to a project or situation on the other side of the globe like, WHA (Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs). This synergy to address unexpected events opened our thinking up, which is important for a global perspective, to design thinking and fast learning.

Another example was meta-evaluations. I was asked to be the Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), for meta-evaluations, which review the programs and evaluations done over the past five years in the State Department. This stressed the importance of doing random, unbiased evaluations of the highest priority, strategically important programs and not to allow natural biases favor which projects or programs got evaluated. These outcomes also resulted in better program design and budget decisions.

Q: So that how's it followed up? In other words, what were these new evaluation processes?

WEISS: An Act of Congress and a FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual) policy, came out for evaluations that included all posts, sub regions and all bureaus. Key programs now had to be evaluated, as well as all projects with funding above the mean. The evaluations helped projects align with strategically critical foreign policy objectives and programs.

State and Department of Defense (DOD) evaluation policies were put in place and are now functioning. There's better data and evidence to show what programs get the results and outcomes to achieve US foreign policy and strategies.

Q: Now, the person or the organization that evaluates—is it the embassy, the post or the bureau; how exactly does it work?

WEISS: There needed to be a mechanism in place to facilitate these types of evaluations. There were at least two sticky problems with a post, country or program level evaluation. One is the natural bias inherent to keep your post funded and your programs going. The other is—let's be honest, in parts of Africa, the Middle East and the America there can be corruption and it can be complex and sophisticated.

Also, in some posts we have a thin bench and officers are wearing two or three hats. Africa, for example, is a bureau with scarce human resources. It's not unusual to have an officer running many programs, doing outreach and a lot of other things. We realized a need for evaluations to be free of some of these biases and competing priorities.

The Performance Management and Evaluation Service (PMES), Interagency Agreement (IAA) was a new mechanism meant to lessen this bias in evaluations and promote faster contracting. Some contracting is done outside of the State Department. We worked with the interagency, the Department of Interior and USAID. We wanted good evaluation expertise with sufficient capability that is free of the insider bias that can occur when officers evaluate projects within their span of control.

We structured a streamlined IAA approach. Let's say you are in Africa and need to evaluate a critical program, project or initiative, quickly. Our team would work with you on a scope of work with an SME (subject matter expert) to review and improve the spec and design that same week. The Department of Interior’s contract office uses a list of pre-qualified, professional evaluation SMEs, from organizations specialized in seven different strategic areas. This provides nonbiased experts fast. This interagency agreement included an IDIQ with the capacity to evaluate most of our programs, on time, worldwide.

Bids were out and awarded within a month, which is unusual for complex professional services like this. For instance, an evaluation of a security program in a local African or

Arab dialect can be complicated, specialized and would take much longer to execute than using this new PMES approach.

LESSONS LEARNED IN LIFE AND WORK

Q: Is there any other example you can use?

WEISS: Sure, here is one example of the value add of the State Department's mission and what good diplomacy can do? High value missions keep peace in the world and alleviate human suffering. One outcome of the meta-evaluation mechanism within the Performance Management Evaluation Service Interagency Agreement is the capacity to apply evaluative thinking to large-scale issues, trends and/or key events. An issue or key event that can become a global crisis is how and when fragile states slip into conflict and violence. On a global basis, this is one of the larger challenges facing mankind. If the global community does not address fragile states before they slip into conflict and/or violent extremism, the world becomes less stable and sustainable. None of us want to leave these conflicts on future generations.

These evaluations identified the dominant factors in fragile states that need fast monitoring and feedback processes to prevent or reduce extremism and conflict. With timely and accurate feedback, decision makers in local government and at all levels including the international levels can then make better informed, effective moves. This influences better outcomes at the local, national and regional levels. And when our bilateral partners share this data, multilaterals like the United Nations, NATO, African Union, all the regional development bank, the IMF and the World Bank, all the different stakeholders can better coordinate in a country to align on the key issue(s). This leads to stronger political will based on timely, up to date and situationally accurate information. Mitigation needs the political will that good data and evidence provides in order to get the right things funded, especially conflict prevention.

Data from evaluations, done jointly with the Department of Defense proved that the resources spent in well-designed programs with this evaluative feedback loop in fragile states lead to better outcomes. The Departments of Defense and State documented a $16 to $17 reduction in military budgets for each dollar invested to set up these evaluative feedback loops. Then acting on the data to find the appropriate program response to further reduce the risks of conflict and violence.

An example, one program to increase access to modern education with Muslim women included good evaluation data with a feedback loop, to improve and optimize programming. This $16 to $1 dollar ratio of savings in military expenses was in provinces where this evaluative thinking and learning to improve and optimize programs was applied and violent extremism was reduced.

We learned the added value of the three Ds; that is diplomacy, DOD and US AID in coordinated development programs by including evaluative thinking with these feedback

loops for data-based decisions in fragile places. For me, this was one of the more rewarding things I worked on.

There's nothing more important than alleviating the human suffering that comes with war, conflict and violence. This was a path to minimize the possibilities of conflict and to focus on better ways to promote a more peaceful and hopeful world.

Q: Did the evaluations also include programs to reduce death, infection and various diseases? Since we're talking about Africa, there are several health risks— certainly PEPFAR and USAID comes to mind right away, but there are many out there.

WEISS: The public health sector, PEPFAR which started with HIV, led this approach and contributed to better results and public health systems. This sector made incredible progress with monitoring and evaluations using biostatistics and related data for optimizing public health challenges in places with quite limited resources. These public health sector programs work with PEPFAR and the Office of Foreign Assistance (F). This smart use of data, evidence and M & E, leveraged and optimized investments and greatly improved public health delivery and outcomes.

A key question is where do you spend marginal dollars for the highest impact on the most important public health risks? This effort also led to better health indicators and data-based decision making. I'm out of my field and not a biostatistics or public health expert, but one of the things I'll never forget was how this worked, during the Ebola crisis.

There were a few Ebola cases in the United States via air traffic. Voters and the American public were reacting with panic and strong emotions. The politicians in Congress were trying to react quickly to the voters and at times, without the measured analysis required to figure out what is the right thing to do in a new complex global outbreak. As you know, when voters panic, Congress has been known to just "throw money at a problem."

Lt. General and Ambassador, Dr. Debra Birx, was a former military medical officer and in charge of our largest public health initiative, PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief). Dr. Birx is a remarkable leader, life scientist and medical doctor. She was called before Congress and the congressional inquiries pressured her terribly and were difficult since they were often without logic, data or reason on the part of Congress. I remember a televised event and some blow hard Congressman basically said to Dr. Birx, fix this Ebola problem.

She and her team had developed a strategy with public health and biostatistical feedback loops to improve the forecasting models over many years in really tough places in Africa. The evaluations by her team, learned to use the right data to identify hot spots, causes and effects and then where to deploy the marginal resources available in Africa to slow and then stop the spread of Ebola. And, of course to alleviate all the suffering from Ebola.

Someone else in Congress said something like this, "Ambassador Birx, if we follow your analysis and plan, can you guarantee that Ebola will not spread to the rest of the United States?" She said something to the effect: "If you approve the plan and budget, based on this data, scientific analysis and evaluations, our modeling and feedback loops will help us all to determine how to slow and then stop Ebola so it will not be widespread from Africa to the US."

That was one of the gutsiest things I've ever seen. In the end, history showed that Dr. Birx and her team were correct. This is one area, public health where it is so important to apply good evaluation and scientific analysis of data, long before the crisis stage. The beauty of this approach in public health is that the feedback loop and indicators are developed before the risk mobilizes and grows. This was a great example of the value add of solid international development, with M & E (monitoring and evaluations) and scientific data analysis for better outcomes for global public health.

Now again in 2020, this is true. Dr. Birx, and her team again made great contributions to the White house task force for the national response to the COVID – 19 Virus, during spring, 2020. How many American lives were saved due to her and her team's logic, evaluative thinking, experience and data driven decisions? What contributions!

Q: Did any of the evaluations shut down a program found to be ineffective?

WEISS: There is a strong tendency in government (and other workplaces) that good news is shared but bad news is buried. Several programs with poor results and/or lack of valid data and evaluations got haircuts, some were closed down. These cases are not highly publicized. As you know that type of news doesn't sell well and doesn't do the department much good with Congress and the voters. I am confident evaluations show which programs are not contributing to strategic policy priorities. To be precise, some projects in Somalia, IO and ECA were closed.

I've been away from that work for a while but suspect the programs that are not set up with proper design, monitoring and evaluation do not perform. If they do not include a realistic theory of change, an important part of good program design, programs should be cut, but that's a bit too far in the weeds, perhaps.

Q: ECA being the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and most of those programs being like visitors or exchange programs?

WEISS: Congress passed an Act and the Department a policy (18 FAM 300) that requires evaluations. There were areas that lack evidence and data to establish a credible theory of change, with costs, benefits and a relationship between causes and effects.

Basically, some of this was throwing money at initiatives without a well-defined theory of change. The evaluations showed the importance of having strategy based on a credible theory of change that aligns the budget with the strategy and goal(s). Before spending a lot of money, there is a need for well-defined, key performance indicators and the realistic theory of change. In some parts of the world this can be difficult.

For long-term programs to promote cultural or educational changes in a country, that ability to articulate a credible theory of change and how to measure it, is quite important. In the absence of that, we're basically throwing money at a perceived outcome. When the theory of change is not accurate or logically framed, how can we measure, evaluate and continue to drive better results and improve impact? Good evaluations provide the data

and feedback for a more realistic theory of change that can improve the accuracy of models and execution, based on this feedback. Then we're acting on the reality on the ground, the facts for results in order to positively impact the respective foreign policy or other goals.

The theory of change and design were not well developed in programs that were cut. To improve outcomes requires accurate models that can improve with real time data and feedback .This comes with good design, monitoring and evaluation. Dr. Birx proved that to be true during the Ebola crisis and again during the COVID – 19 public health national emergency, here in the US and all over the world.

Q: Were you were ever required to defend a program that office management and budget wanted to get rid of?

WEISS: To my director's credit, we did. Our F director was a mathematician with a master's degree in public health and business. He was a strong analytical and logical leader. His managing director had a Ph.D. and specialized in Africa. She'd worked in Africa, knew Africa and was solid. Our team had experienced, qualified professionals up and down the chain of command. At one point, during the change of administration, there were programs that came into question like the Young African Leaders Initiative, Power Africa and Democracy.

Our team lead and the office director worked to validate data, evidence and verify that the theories of change were realistic. They proved this with good data, evidence and analytics. It showed why some of these programs were strategically important to our foreign policy and others were not. Our team supported, with data analytics based on statistics from many sources not only the World Bank, the Foreign Assistance Dashboard and ForeignAssistance.gov, to pull data sets from all the key sources. Our team merged this into strategic dashboards with key indicators to inform decisions to prioritize investments in the programs that aligned with strategy and yielded the more cost-effective outcomes.

We also developed risk-reward based plans into the African elections season, to focus on the elections that were most critical. Without well run elections, the world can get another fragile state in a hurry. That was proven dramatically, with data as well as an election simulator developed at FSI to train new officers who were headed to Africa. I give credit to the leadership in 2015-2016, they knew where to focus on high stake priorities.

Some of this made it back to Congress, the National Security Council and the executive branch. When the facts and data are accurate, relevant and logically analyzed, this impacts how evidence may save a good program, under review. Examples include democracy support for fair and free elections and a great program like Power Africa, which were not eliminated but also still have to be evaluated periodically.

I observed the importance of having qualified, experienced, logical leadership that knows their subject and region well. Another lesson learned is the chain of command must

understand the logic for the relevant evidence and data to inform decision makers for timely decisions. That's the lesson Dr. Debra Birx and the outstanding work her team spearheaded in the health sector demonstrated so well.

Q: The criteria used for these evaluations, is public or basically a State Department-only approach?

WEISS: Unclassified program work is public and subject to FOIA (Freedom of Information Act). Some can be viewed on public facing sites and others require a security clearance and / or more work to find. As you probably have experienced, there can be a tendency for over classification, when information may not be favorable to certain stakeholders.

There can be difficult dialogue in the evaluation process regarding the issue of classification level. One of the things that some bureaus, USAID and F do effectively, is have experienced staff, with the clearance levels required to challenge over classifications. This is part of good governance. It is also part of the due diligence that comes with having a team with experience and credibility that has the guts and is willing to challenge over classifications.

What's the old saying? Sunlight is the best disinfectant! Evaluative thinking means complex and/or priority programs get a qualified audience with the relevant experience to review with rigor and thoroughness. We worked closely with the Department of Defense on evaluations. Both DOD and State as most of the executive branch Department have their own OIGs (Offices of Inspector Generals). There is also the Council of all the Inspector General's (CIGIE).

Some of the F and B/P teams worked hand in hand with DOD. I had close colleagues detailed to the Pentagon and DOD. DOD had Lieutenant Colonels, (the military rank equal to FSO- 01) working with us at Main State. We did the same with USAID as inter-agency collaboration is very important to foreign policy and program success. One of my colleagues, the women from Chicago that I worked with in Africa, is now the world-wide director of all evaluations for the entire U.N.

Q: Then the last piece is, did you find that Congress or congressional staffers were peeking in with inquiries or advice? What was their role as you moved along to conclusions?

WEISS: I credit having an experienced and qualified chain of command both overseas and at HQ. I had solid Ambassadors and office directors. Dr. Tracy Carson, Assistant Secretary Ziman, and former F director, Hari Sastry. F sent me for training at Congress on congressional operations and relations. I saw how Pentagon staffers worked with Congress. We learned that foreign assistance (FA)has few congressional aids and even less with the experience required to understand global issues and FA well. FA issues can be quite complex and short-term staffers do not grasp these complexities well.

It is challenging enough to try and figure out what to do in your own country on a complex issue like a pandemic. Imagine on a global basis, with countries that can be inaccessible or in ungovernable areas. Many in Congress do not understand the challenge or complexity of issues like these in Africa, Asia or the Americas. F learned to focus on

the few congressional staffers with enough experience to understand the complexity of foreign policy issues and how these affect the US and our domestic policy interests.

Unfortunately, an awful lot of staffers in Congress have short longevity. They're not paid that much and change jobs often and quickly. Some of the key people are the legislative assistants (LAs). The LAs are often the ones doing the heavy lifts on legislation. An example is when Congress passed the law called the Foreign Assistance Transparency and Accountability Act (FATAA) which now requires that foreign assistance be evaluated. This was mainly due to the dedicated work of one staffer, one LA and two congressional offices.

It had to be painstakingly re-written many times and was passed into law in 2017 after over three years of hard work. This was the direct result of effective leadership from the State Department. It's important for an executive department like State to have leaders that know how to work with Congress. These decisions are often not quick nor easy. Congress does not move without compelling evidence, solid data and proven cause and effects to show how an issue is a priority and will impact or affect voters.

I'm grateful I worked with some competent leaders and good people along my way. It was a rewarding experience because I saw a few issues that were passed into law, codified in the FAM/FAH (Foreign Affairs Manual and Handbook) and made a difference.

Q: The office also evaluated funding for USAID; did this create problems for USAID sometimes? At least based on my interviews with now retired USAID officers that is mentioned. What's your view of how F integrated USAID's objectives and how to carry them out?

WEISS: That's a perceptive question. There is history to this that was prior to my time in DC. While I was posted overseas from 2005 to 2015, there were questions about USAID and State coordination and alignment on budget and execution. To be accurate, I should read some of that history. What I do recall involved a fight over who the Chief Officer at USAID would report to? There was an idea to have the Chief Officer at USAID report to F, under the State Department. USAID fought hard against that. As a result of that political battle, USAID remained an independent agency not under State. Now USAID employees occupy many key positions at F, inside of Main State.

I can share my experience being posted at Main State, from 2015 to 2019. As you know, F (the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance Resources) is structured with three types of staff; State Department foreign service officers, USAID foreign service officers and civil service from both. F also has military officers detailed from DOD.

The team at F is not balanced and has a few more USAID than State Department officers. This helps USAID see that their equities get into the budget process and ready if another fight ever comes up over who the Chief Officer at USAID reports to?

Another driver in this, seems to be a difference in strategy and ultimately the theory of change in some international development environments. The mechanism for USAID's position is the fact that USAID has a more extensive history of evaluating foreign assistance than State. However, State has a longer history on design and execution from the Marshall Plan with audits, inspections, monitoring, reviews and investigations but not the evaluative thinking that is a more recent improvement.

USAID saw itself as being deeper in the field, with a more extensive historical record, evidence and data to inform FA decisions based on evaluations, which for the most part, was true. However, the State Department has an overall deeper bench, rigorous structure and procedures for running posts abroad. This includes audits, inspections, review and analysis that goes with an overall integrated country strategy (ICS) for foreign policy at both the nation state, mission level (MRR) and the regional level (BRR).

Another difference is USAID had more elaborate, deep evaluations with a wordy communication style. At times it could seem, the lead data may be hidden in this wordy but nuanced reporting style. Like I was told in my A-100 (FSO orientation) class, "Don't bury the lead!"

As you know the State Department has a disciplined history of writing and clearing cables that require a clear, concise writing style. MINIMIZE CONSIDERED—don't overuse adverbs and adjectives. It seemed to me some recent evaluation work at the State Department makes it easier to find the key data, evidence, dominant variables and logic to inform decisions.

Merging these two styles, as well as DOD's, helped all the team learn from the others. I learned from my counterparts, the importance of understanding the practice, logic and history of evaluations. The practice of evaluation evolved and improved greatly since 2010. USAID officers learned from the DOD and State Department officers, to have less fluff, less studies and lengthy reporting style. DOD and State got to the point in order to provide decision makers with concise, actionable, data-driven decision making, based on the evidence. State uses a more concise reporting style to reach decisions and inform leadership.

In practice, the merging of the three styles in F, helped us all learn. We grew together with some collaborative experiences. Where the collaboration could break down is when people who built an entire career in one agency, were unwilling to be open to change and objective. There are many more USAID people at State than State folks at AID. In the future it may be beneficial for State to have more inter-agency exchange and cross-training with USAID, DOD and the MCC for the inter-agency to learn from each other.

Overall, my experience working at the Main State from 2015 to 2019 was collaborative. I worked overseas for over 25 years before coming to Main State and suspect my field experience also helped me collaborate effectively.

Q: Is the F Bureau's role still the same, or has it evolved into something else?

WEISS: With a change of administration comes some changes in policy and ops. It seemed that Secretary Tillerson was interested in the efficiency and organization of the Department as well as the budget process. The office of the secretary interactions with F were detail oriented. They understood the importance of accurate data and budget discipline for the efficient and strategic alignment with policy goals. The director of F was a math Ph.D. and supported innovative budget analytics. When Secretary Tillerson departed, the F also director moved on to serve in a prestigious academic position. It was sad that much of the good work done in the "redesign" efforts were not followed up. The new F director understood the political aspects of the budget. Parts of the FA budget are controversial and political savvy is often required or key items may not be correctly budgeted.

At this point in time, F had more than 10 years of solid mathematical, budget analytics and business casework and now had a politically savvy director. This new F leadership gained Congressional support for some new directions. One proof is the fact that the second director at F, while I was there, as of 2019 went from F to working for the chief of staff of the President. I saw that director go from F to the White House.

This combination of budget and overseas experience with data analytics for decision-making plus politically savvy in F office leadership was positive. It allowed F gain experience about how policy and budgets are negotiated with Congress.

Some of the deputies in F, had over 12 years of experience, since the beginning of F. That's a good depth of knowledge and management experience that is not that common in the State Dept. My team lead is now the managing director. F had solid leadership but was at times, understaffed. I suspect when foreign affairs challenges become complicated, the importance of the working relationships among the Department of Defense, US AID and the State Department with F convoking the inter-agency to align strategy may need to be worked on.

There is a greater shared strategy now because the AID-State interface at F is well-defined now. It's been in place for 12 years. The more challenging interfaces are among the three Ds; the Departments of Defense, State Diplomacy and USAID. Especially when we look at the data and evidence on fragile states. Working on the frontier, the boundary spaces when a nation could move toward becoming a fragile state. This issue may be one of the more important things we prioritize to make the world a safer, better place.

Q: What was the relationship, if any, between F and the Office of the Inspector General?

WEISS: As my next job after retirement is at the Office of Inspector General (OIG), I am glad you asked (Laughter). I am new to it but it seems that relationships are guided at the DAS or PDAS level with the mid - level officers in the Bureaus executing compliance.

When the Office of Inspector General completes an inspection and an issue requires further due diligence, audit or investigation, there may be higher risks of waste, fraud or abuse. As you can imagine, with some $6 billion in the Africa FA budget plus another $6 billion in PEPFAR; F/Africa and the AF Bureau leadership has compliance work fairly often.

I think the goal now is to inspect all posts on about a 5 to 7-year cycle. It seems, the OIG with a high level in State, uses a risk approach to decide which posts, programs and activities are higher risk and/or urgent? The OIG uses the risk model combined with the experience of the Bureaus. That's where the benefit of skilled, experienced experts, data analytics and data-driven decisions becomes apparent.

From my brief experience, it seems when budget and resources do not align with strategy, these are areas of concern. An important future issue may be the risk of focusing on the wrong fragile states when others, that we do not focus on, slip into armed conflict or even war. Think of the consequences when those types of decisions are not made properly. These are critical questions that require dynamic resource alignment to strategy. To mitigate those risks requires solid M & E data and feedback from evaluations. Interestingly, one of my first tasks at the OIG, once I retired, was to be on a team to inspect the FA grant process with the Africa Bureau.

Q: How long altogether, then, did you spend in F?

WEISS: Four years from 2015 to 2019.

Q: During that time did you go out to some of the places that you were evaluating?

WEISS: I worked overseas for over twenty-five years in many of the places evaluated. What F told me seemed to be a smart use of resources. "Hank, you've been there. We're sending the young officers, brief them, share context, references and contacts." When they returned, we would debrief or do after action reviews.

I loved doing that because I worked in over 40 countries over 25 years overseas. When we'd have someone going to Africa, WHA or Eastern Europe, I'd consult with the younger officers. I hope this was valuable because F used their limited travel budget for the next generation of officers to gain overseas experience. F leadership was smart about the use of limited resources and opportunities for travel. F, much like the OIG, needs to systematically select the posts to visit, taking into account risks versus rewards, budget and resource alignment with strategy.

The longer-term benefits from an entry or mid-level officer gaining field experience and getting coached by older FSOs, was probably a better investment than sending a final tour FSO like me, out on another trip. (Laughter)

Q: Did F have special and different kinds of evaluation programs for Afghanistan and Iraq?

WEISS: Yes. The nature of that is similar with the type of OIG inspections and audits done in Afghanistan and Iraq and with a special unit for those countries?

As the COR for FA evaluations I saw some reporting. Based on my time in posts with conflicts or civil war, I knew some factors for working outside of the wire with safeguards that must be put into place. For special evaluations this can include; how to handle personal information (PII), safeguard interviews and protect witnesses. Informants have to be coded so they cannot be identified. The level of experience needed, language and cultural skills as well as clearances are high. Interagency collaboration is critical. The role of the regional security officers and the military role within the interagency is also greater.

An in-demand skill is the ability to facilitate diplomatic, interagency as well as international, multilateral teamwork in fragile states and conflict zones. It's the rare person who can lead an evaluation team like that because you need an experienced and brave team lead that often also has language, diplomatic, military and cultural skills. It's a very challenging area to work in.

I hope we can continue to groom this future cadre of diplomats, AID and military officers with the skill set to work in these fragile state situations. This potentially has one of the highest returns to not just our missions but for all of humanity.

As we chatted, one of the outcomes of the meta-evaluation, which is an evaluation of all the foreign assistance evaluations, is how to get better results, in fragile places by preventing violence from growing and conflict from spreading.

Q: With Afghanistan, Iraq—I'm also curious about the wiring diagram—in other words, who all was involved besides F. It was quite different from the rest of the evaluations for the rest of the world.

WEISS: That was never my particular area of expertise. F sent staff to DOD (Department of Defense), we embedded folks in the Pentagon. DOD officers embedded with us. In this formulation were long exchanges among DOD, the Department of State and AID on how to get the scopes right, based on realistic theories of change. If not perfect, at least well enough defined for the field work to show how to reduce hostilities. Evaluative thinking offers the chance to improve based on a theory of change that is continually learning how to be more accurate. This was true even in extremely complex, dynamically changing situations with difficult access to good data and feedback. This makes for difficult operations with actionable approaches for establishing these feedback loops. One thing our leadership did was exchange staff and reviewers among the three Ds; Department of Defense, Department of State and US AID. One of the results was the work done on Conflict Prevention in Fragile States.

Q: Just to go back to the evaluation of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau and their exchange programs, you mentioned that these were among programs that

demonstrated less results based on evaluation tools available. What was the response from ECA to, "not enough data to demonstrate these exchange programs are actually effective?

WEISS: It's a difficult question. It's almost like trying to prove a negative or the third goal of the Peace Corps. I'm not in my field here, but what I saw as a neutral person crunching numbers, are some exchanges that have long term outcomes that are difficult to predict. The second, third or even fourth degree effects that potentially may happen when someone might change someone else who maybe changes something else is a difficult set of data to measure and document with some degree of confidence. Many programs were well designed for the exchange aspect, but not set up for the long-term data set and evidence.

Then there was no long-term proof of concept. A theory of change could not be validated with statistically significant data. One response was, "If we would have known, we would be asked for this evidence ten or twenty years ago, we could have incorporated that into the designs." Now, ten or 20 years later, good work is being done but there is no proof the benefits outweigh the costs. The design and theory of change did not include proof of basic assumptions like did the benefits really outweigh the costs?

This goes back to why it's important to get the fragile state issue right. If a cut is made to an ECA program, then an important diplomatic contact may be lost. However even when a program is funded, it may not cultivate the key contacts who make changes that affect foreign policy.

Now if a mistake is made in a cut to a fragile state program, the potential impact to security and human suffering could be massive. It is critical to get strategy and funding right in areas where countries are fragile. Budgets can't fund all programs and the evaluation process helps prove which programs are higher priority based on value added, impact and alignment to strategy and policy.

Q: In the four years you were there, how would you describe the change in the way that the Department approached these things?

WEISS: The F leadership is under the office of the Secretary and tasked to provide data and analytics decision makers request. In the transition from Secretary Kerry to Secretary Tillerson, it was a data-driven environment. S wanted valid data based on the facts and evidence. Both administrations seemed to know what they wanted and F worked hard to provide digestible, accurate reporting, often to the specifications of S.

The Foreignassistance.gov site, the FA and country dashboards, managing for results, key performance indicators, were built in that 2014-2018 period. It was a productive time. The deputy secretary for management, Heather Higginbottom, was very data-oriented. She was a Silicon Valley professional that knew how to specify and use big data to inform decisions.

At that time, big data was actionable on the 7th floor. In the time between Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Pompeo, there was no M (Undersecretary for Management) nor a Deputy Secretary for Management Resources for quite some time. When H. Higginbottom and long time Under Secretary, Patrick Kennedy left, there was an absence of top leadership for a long time.

When top positions are vacant for nearly a year, the ability to use data is less because just keeping the trains running on time takes more effort. Now with new leaders in M, there is more capacity to prepare for the unforeseen, black swan events in the world that continue to be out there. We all hope to avoid another Syria or Benghazi, another Ebola or SARS, or another Iraq or Afghanistan. A challenge for an office like F or BP (Budget and Planning) is getting the appropriate analysis and reporting to the correct level of leadership up to the Secretary, so the Department prioritizes the right issues and allocates the resources in time, worldwide.

I believe one of the most impactful things that we did was the work done to prevent violence in fragile states and borderline fragile places. The potential to alleviate human suffering and leverage limited resources effectively in fragile states has great potential. When we use real time feedback to inform evaluative thinking and programming, that potential may be greater than we realized.

Q: Now, as you're approaching then the end of your career at the Department of State, are they talking about retirement or are they talking about giving you another or a different assignment?

WEISS: Thank you for asking. Again, a guardian angel comes back into my life. I've seen how at key times in life, important things happen for a reason. As I look back on my nearly 30 years overseas and 65 years of life, the hand of God has acted in my life. One of the patterns in my life has been for angels, saints and special people to share these key messages to teach me a life skill or lesson. I had to learn to recognize these moments.

I'm also very grateful for the honor it has been to serve my country in the Foreign Service. I am in my last week of official duty as an FSO (Foreign Service Officer). Thank you for helping me to reflect on my life and foreign service.

This month, I have been at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), completing this wonderful oral history and the JSP, (retiree out brief program) and another messenger showed up. Two weeks ago, we did an exercise to review our life and learn how our experiences might be employed into retirement. After this exercise with eight FSOs in my retirement group, Ambassador Karen Stanton did me a favor. Just after the session, she and I were reviewing the highlights of that morning. We had our lunch at a small table in that FSI classroom.

The Ambassador was completing a 39-year long career but was kind enough to take time to chat over lunch. She explained that her last tour of duty was in the Office of the Inspector General, the OIG. She shared with me OIG insights I did not have.

Next thing I know, I followed up to learn the OIG had a need for a recently retired FSO. I applied, interviewed and it was a fit. I start next month assigned to the OIG as a REA (a retired FSO). working when needed. Again, another messenger angel appeared in my life at the just right time. This one lunch, shared with the Ambassador, led me to a great opportunity in my new life as a retiree, to contribute.

As I look back, the honor to serve as a foreign service officer has been a great satisfaction. We work for a more peaceful, stable world to alleviate human suffering. I hope to contribute to that, for as long as the good Lord gives me the strength.

I feel so blessed now this is my last day as an FSO. Tomorrow starts a new adventure in my life. I'm very grateful for the work the State Department, the United States and the good Lord allowed me to do. I’m also grateful I have a chance to contribute as a retired FSO.

GOD PUTS THE MESSENGERS INTO OUR LIVES…IT'S UP TO US TO LISTEN

Q: As you're now closing, are there recommendations you would offer to aspiring diplomats or aspiring specialists who are interested in a career like yours? What sort of recommendations would you give someone today who's looking to do the same things you did?

WEISS: Well, thanks for asking. Keep learning with an open mind and to better ourselves and improve at all we do. These are complex jobs in complicated settings, it's more rewarding when you continue to learn to keep improving.

Take time to smell the roses. We are sent to many places few have seen, get out of the embassy to see it and make friends. There is so much beauty in the world if we only take the time to see it. Learn the power of silence when in new countries, cultures and languages. When we listen and learn especially from facial expressions and body language, we deepen our understanding. We earn a lot through our silence. By respectfully listening to others when we enter into new cultural paradigms the silence of being in a foreign land can teach us to better connect the dots in life. Observe carefully and respectfully listen.

Now, perhaps, allow me to add a couple technical details. The embassy is an interdisciplinary team that must work together in foreign lands. There's one team.

At times dichotomy can exist, between the role of the specialist and that of the generalist. A specialist must understand how the technical systems and things work. A specialist is called on if and when these systems become unreliable or fail. Hence a specialist needs to understand how things work.

However, a gifted specialist understands not only the technical systems, but also the human and cultural aspects of the country they are posted to. We need to understand how the culture works in both the embassy and the foreign country. We represent the United States better as we respectfully try our best to learn more about the cultures and languages of the foreign countries that we are sent to.

For the generalist, perhaps the shoe is more on the other foot. A generalist brings a different set of skills. A generalist writes, reports and analyzes other systems well. They understand how to interpret political – economic, consular and diplomatic work in a foreign land. A generalist knows how to "work the room" and make contacts to do diplomacy and establish working relationships with key contacts. Their language skills need to be superior.

However, a gifted generalist also must realize that reliable embassy operations hang on the technical systems inside and outside of the wire. Our technical, physical systems must work well for the team to deliver diplomacy. For that to happen, a generalist needs clear

communications to work with the specialists in a team who understands collectively how all the systems work in the foreign land they have been posted to.

Like me dad told me, the world is getting smaller and technology is becoming more complex and changing faster. Each member of the team must understand that and be empathetic. To work together as one team, helping each other to deliver world class foreign policy. The three Ds; diplomacy, development and defense together can make the world a better place to live. This empathy and teamwork make our missions more collaborative, effective centers of the three Ds for the common good. I hope this continues to be stressed during foreign service officer formation and trade craft training throughout entire careers.

Q: The last question I have for you is to think more broadly for the State Department. Are there recommendations or suggestions you would have for how to make the State Department better able to do its job in the 21st century?

WEISS: I worked in the area of budgets, planning and operations as both a specialist and a generalist and observed that resource allocation seems to be getting more important. I define this as the intersection in a Venn diagram of three subsets. The strategy subset must be based on a realistic theory of change and goals properly prioritized. A risk versus rewards type subset must be properly measured and assessed for decision making so strategy, goals and objectives are well defined and prioritized. Then resources may be allocated in alignment with our foreign policy and strategic priorities .

We've chatted about a couple of examples how imbalances among bureaus in both financial and human resources can really affect outcomes. More attention to the optimization of resource allocation could serve us well around the world.

I would be remiss if I left out the importance of management to build world class, future leaders. Leaders that are team builders and facilitate collaboration with an open, honest and ethical but realistic approach to solve problems. Leaders that get the entire team on all the three D's pulling in the same direction to make the world a better place. When our three Ds. deliver quality multilateral diplomacy in the global community as well bilateral work in our embassies, we contribute to making the world a more peaceful and sustainable with a better quality of life for everyone. To me that also means leaders who realize that God puts messengers, angels and saints into our lives and it's up to us all to pay attention.

Q: Good. That's a good place to end. I want to thank you for allowing us to record your oral history, your history of service with the U.S. government. We'll end the interview here. I'll be in touch with you shortly about completing your transcript.

WEISS: Thanks to you for the chance to reflect and look back on my life and work. Now, I better understand the words of TS Elliot; "to come back to the place you started and to know it for the first time." I mentioned on my first night in Washington D.C., I worried so much, I could not sleep. Now over 40 years later with nearly 30 years of work

overseas, I look back gratefully. I think how blessed I have been to have a great wife, sons and extended family that stood by me in all these places. To have the opportunity to work with the State Department, the Peace Corps, the Agency for International Development and the National Rural Electrical Co-operative Association. Places where we actually did something about important issues. I'm so proud of my entire family and my colleagues for helping me be able to add little grains of sand for a world that is more peaceful, stable and fair.

As my dear old dad and Albert Einstein said "God does not play dice with the universe!" The mathematical probability of all the times, when a good person, guardian angel or saint shared a message that helped me find a better path in life, is too small to have all been just random events. My 65 years of age have taught me that some of these incredible coincidences in life must indeed be God acting anonymously! I've seen how at key times in life, things happen for a reason. As you helped me to look back on my life and nearly 30 years of work overseas, I see how some important dots were connected by some of these incredible messages that I now can see was the divine hand with guardian angels and messengers, acting in my life.

God puts these messengers and holy moments into our lives, it's up to us to pay attention to them! I recall the last words my father spoke to me prior to his death, "son, I am ready to meet my Maker." Sincere thanks for sharing your time and interest in my history. It sums up what I believe I have learned in my life.

End of interview