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

AMBASSADOR MELISSA FOELSCH WELLS

Interviewed by: Ann Miller Morin
Initial interview date: March 27, 1984

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTERVIEW

WELLS: Melissa Foelsch Wells
ALFRED WELLS: Alfred Wells (Husband who joined discussion at end)
CHRISTOPHER WELLS: Christopher Wells (son, present for a short time)

Q: This interview is designed to complement the one done by Larry Grahl for the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe on March 27, 1984.

Melissa, I wonder if you would give me your father's name.

WELLS: First name, Kuno. Then the family name, which is my maiden name, Foelsch.

Q: And your brothers' names?

WELLS: My brothers are Ernest Foelsch and Richard Foelsch.

Q: And your mother, of course, we know [The singer and film star, Miliza Korjus.].

WELLS: Yes.

Q: You were the oldest child. Were there any serious illnesses, or was a sibling ever lost?

WELLS: No. Well, I mean, I understand that my mother miscarried once before me.

Q: What about when you were little? You moved around so much. Did you have any special playmates?

WELLS: I picked them up as I went around, yes.

Q: Mostly boys or girls, or both?

WELLS: Both, although in Mexico there was a very interesting situation. I was there from the age of eight to twelve or thirteen. I had two very close boys as friends, and we liked to do the same things, which were rough sports and bicycling and so forth. I felt very much out of sorts because I was very tall, and many of the girls my age were already much more boy-oriented that I ever was at that age. I was still climbing trees and playing cops and robbers. I was in a terrible quandary because we had to wear uniforms at our school, and because of my size, the uniform designed for my size person, but I was a child still. My size uniform included shoes with small heels and a skirt which didn't have any suspenders. I had no figure to speak of. But this uniform was made for a young woman. They didn't make them in sizes that would fit for an American child! [Laughter] I wanted to run around the playground, and I had these little heels on.

Anyway, that's it. But I'd say at that age, my closest friends were boys, and then the gardener's son, Kiko. He came from a different social background, obviously, but he was a very close friend of mine, a year younger than I. He didn't go to a fancy school the way I did, but we were buddies.

Q: How would you characterize yourself when you were little? Obviously, you didn't play with dolls.

WELLS: Early on. I lost interest in dolls probably by the time we moved to Mexico, because I couldn't take the whole collection with me. You see, it was almost a natural severance. Up to the age of eight, I liked the dolls. I liked the clothes the dolls had, and I used to dress up my kittens. I was very much into cats and kittens. We had about twenty-eight animals at one point, and I had names for all of them, like Sheherazade and Nebuchadnezzar. [Laughter] Most of them would come by name if I called them, but many of them wouldn't; they weren't even tame. We'd have these bottles and bottles of milk and stuff that we'd put out, and I'd go, "Kitty, kitty, kitty," and every one of them came jumping out of the trees. Anyway, these poor little kittens, if I could ever get my hands on them, I'd dress them in my dolls' clothes.

Q: Poor kittens!

WELLS: Those are interesting questions. I never even thought of that.

Q: What sort of books did you like? Were you an early reader?

WELLS: Again, that's very interesting, because it came about... Somehow I abandoned my dolls and we went to Mexico, and history all of a sudden became exciting. I mean, pyramids, Aztecs, human sacrifice, conquistadors! Somehow I had not really been turned on by whatever had been served up through the third grade in the U.S. It was pretty dull compared to that. My mother was very good. She would let me buy any books I wanted. I remember there was a bookstore near one of her friend's homes. I'd go in there and buy. I was reading Prescott and other historians at the age of nine and ten! Very slowly, but I loved it, absolutely loved it. I worked my way through Incas and Aztecs. I mean, that kind of reading, you see. Then I loved Treasure Island, adventure stories like that.

I did my reading in English, which is interesting. For all practical purposes, I lost the spoken use of English because I didn't speak it at home. We had lessons in English at school, but that was very simple stuff, like "Good morning." I kept up my reading in English, looking back now, at a level far beyond my vocabulary, if you're reading, for example, Prescott. I mention that because it was one of my favorite books. I used to carry it around whenever I went on trips with my mother.

Then another category that I loved, which came into my life a little later, was Haliburton and the travel books, and the Book of Marvels, with wonderful pictures. Again, I feel that having traveled with my family as a child, all of these things, life didn't make any sense in the future unless one kept moving around and discovering new worlds and peoples and so forth.

Q: Reading your transcript, it doesn't seem to have made you at all insecure, all of this moving around. You ate it up, didn't you?

WELLS: Yes. No, not insecure. The most difficult adjustment period, when I look back, was linguistically, being thrown into what was a nursery school, whatever it was, when we first came [to America] and I couldn't speak the language. The children around me were making all these strange sounds, but they were children; they didn't know any better, I figured. I walked up to the teacher. I saw her years later and she reminded me of this story. Apparently, I was there and tears were running out of my eyes, and I made this tremendous speech in German, and she couldn't understand a word of what I said. Then it was clear to me that she couldn't understand that I wanted to go home immediately.

Linguistically in Spanish it happened again, because Mother just said, "Go to that school. It's a lovely school." It was near where we lived. I picked it up, but I don't know that I would say it led to insecurity. It led to awkwardness at first in terms of dealing with it. Scholastically it was difficult, rejoining the eighth grade after having been in Mexico and not even attending school full time. I learned a lot about Mexican geography and history,

but in terms of doing fractions, I was at a total loss. But I don't say that gave me insecurity. They were sort of jolts, shocks, and eventually I pulled my socks together. I wouldn't say it was insecurity.

Q: You had enough spirit to overcome it.

WELLS: Yes.

Q: Because it can be very traumatic to a child, especially at the age of eighth grade, in that time period.

WELLS: I would not say it's insecurity. I'd say it is more shyness. As a child, and today I still think of myself as shy. Most people collapse when they hear me say I think of myself as a shy person, but I was very shy. I still think I am, because we all carry within ourselves images we have of ourselves originally. Sure, I've learned to overcome it, but basically I'm shy.

Q: It seems to have been more a spur to you than something you questioned.

WELLS: Definitely didn't question it.

Q: It's a remarkable story, it really is. It's quite unlike anybody else's.

WELLS: Really?

Q: Oh, yes. I think it's very remarkable. Were these all girls' schools you went to?

WELLS: In the U.S., the first three grades, no. Of course, it wasn't girls and boys in Mexico. We didn't go to school with boys, no, even in fourth grade or whatever it was. Back to the States, I went to parochial school, which was boys and girls. Then when I went to high school, it was all girls.

Q: What was the name of that school?

WELLS: St. Monica's. That was in Santa Monica, California. Then I went to Mount St. Mary's, which is all girls, a small college and Catholic. Then I had my show business era, jumping around the stage. We were all girls on the stage. Then I was one of a very few students who started the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, which was all predominantly male.

Q: Oh, yes, especially then. You have mentioned the fact that you enjoyed athletics. Were you outstanding in anything other than the swimming?

WELLS: Swimming was the best, yes. As a result of the swimming, when I was in high school I came to the attention of the coach, who encouraged me to go out for basketball. Not that I was an outstanding player; I was very tall. I had one job to do, which was to

run down to the basket and stand there, and when the forward missed the shot, I was supposed to get it in. All these girls were clawing me. [Laughter] That was about the extent of it. I was not brilliant. Volleyball, the same, you know, killer at the net, but that was not as well balanced. Swimming, I'd say, I was pretty good at.

Q: But you like sports?

WELLS: Yes, yes. I liked the movement, the competition. Yes, I did.

Q: Did they used to call you a tomboy?

WELLS: Yes, I'd say I was, sort of, in that high school era when you start sorting yourselves out in terms of social life and who's going with whom. You asked about being crushed. When I was crushed, it was due to my family breaking up and my parents divorcing. Again, I wouldn't say it made me feel insecure. If anything, it concentrated my energies in terms of survival and breaking out of a situation which was very difficult, because I loved everyone concerned, but to make a life of my own. At that time, there was some publicity about the divorce in the papers. I was going to a Catholic school, and I felt that everybody knew about it and was looking at me, that sort of thing. Still, I was not going out with boys. I was sort of retarded on that score, generally speaking. I made up for it later.

Q: Were you raised in the Catholic Church?

WELLS: No. I became a Catholic on my own. I became a Catholic on my own when we moved back from Mexico to New York. It was a very, very deep experience. To say it quite openly, I fell in love with God at a very young age, and that's been a very strong influence in my life ever since.

Q: That's another thing you have in common with Clare Boothe Luce.

WELLS: Really?

Q: Yes. She became a Catholic at a later age. Were you especially close to your mother?

WELLS: Yes, I was very close to my mother, I'd say more so than my father in many ways because she was more open, more affectionate. He was just a different type of person. I loved them both dearly.

Q: He was not an authoritarian figure in your life?

WELLS: Oh, no, not at all. Well, in a sense, yes. I didn't have a key to the front door. No way could you suspect me of doing anything that I shouldn't have been doing, but it was just not right that at the age of fifteen, sixteen, whatever it was, I should have a key to get in when I went out with my girlfriends, out to the movies, or whatever it was. Really, I feel this is very important for a woman to have the support of a male figure in her

background. Only looking back do I realize. At that time of my life, I was almost overwhelmed by the tensions in the family, the divorce, the separations, having to go visit one and then the other.

But the fact that both parents, especially my father, and especially in a very difficult field, which was science--he was a physicist--he had no doubt that I could do anything, that I would be the first at anything I ever tried. It was wonderful to have that background. If anything, it sort of hurt, because, "Are you going to come watch the swimming meet?" "Oh, no, I can't." Then I'd get a trophy, and there would be nobody there to watch me. My mother could not have cared less about the swimming. The last thing I wanted was to have the two of them run into each other at a swimming meet! [Laughter] But scholastically, I got my gold pins and an A- average.

Q: They set your priorities?

WELLS: Yes. Lisa Meitner was always held up to me by my father as an example, the Austrian physicist, atomic physicist, as we used to call it in those days. I knew very little about her. "Who is this woman you're always talking about?" And he would explain and say, "You could do the same; you could be first."

Q: Do you think there was a special bond because your other siblings were brothers, you were his only daughter?

WELLS: I don't know. In a way, because I had more exposure to him, shall I say. Really, the breakup of the whole thing came when they were still very small, so usually fathers and little ones, it's different. I was already speaking and reasoning and getting grades in school and so forth.

Q: Did you feel, Melissa, with having two young little brothers like that that you had to help take care of them a lot?

WELLS: Oh, yes.

Q: Did you feel this was a little unfair, maybe?

WELLS: No. I enjoyed it.

Q: Were you dressing them up instead of the kittens, maybe?

WELLS: Actually, I did that once with the first one, not the second one. But I did! He was little and I dressed him up in all these things. [Laughter]

Q: I thought you couldn't miss that opportunity.

WELLS: Oh, Ann, you're wonderful! [Laughter] It was wonderful. He must have been about eighteen months or something, and I remember dressing him all up with a hat on,

and I would make him the queen. He enjoyed it. He was quiet. He behaved himself. We both had a grand time. I was minding him for some reason or other.

No, I didn't resent it. I liked it. In fact, my stepfather--both my parents remarried--at one point said, "You know, Kiki (which is my nickname), you're not a sister. You have a mother complex with these two young boys." Because of the age difference. Of course, everything was difficult for all of us. They were too little to really know what was going on. I was the one who took the brunt of that.

Q: I suppose your mother must have confided in you to a certain extent?

WELLS: Well, both of them did. That didn't make my life easier, either, you see. It's very rough. It's very rough. You don't hold anything against your parents, but I sometimes feel both of them could have been a little more considerate of my own feelings in this case.

Q: Was your mother your role model? I know you did not want to go into her profession, but in other ways, was she, as a woman, as a mother?

WELLS: As a role model? Let's see. I don't know. You know, I've never really thought of her as a role model. I can't honestly say who is. I don't know. She's obviously had a wonderful influence on me in terms of... Now, again, looking back, she was there, earning money, she was on the stage, she got attention, she was having a career. It's the type of work that I didn't want to go into, as you know. She encouraged me in that way. But as a role model, no, maybe because it was so deeply in the artistic field, and I just didn't want to have anything to do with that.

Q: You have a very practical streak in you, I gather, from reading your story.

WELLS: Yes. I guess a good old Scorpio. [Laughter]

Q: Yes. Well, anybody who wants to home in on economics! Do you have a high energy level?

WELLS: Very high. Extremely high.

Q: I would expect you'd have to, to do what you did when you were going to Georgetown.

WELLS: And it seems to always have been. Even now--I'm going to be fifty-four--really the only way I feel my age is that sometimes I feel there's not all that much gas left in the tank. I have to think ahead a little bit.

Q: It takes a little longer to charge up?

WELLS: No. I'm always a morning person. As Christopher knows, I'm out charging! I <u>love</u> to get up in the morning! I just love it. I can't ever sleep beyond seven o'clock. Thank God my husband is that way, too. It would be the worst thing--I love him, but to

be married to him [referring to her son, Christopher], because he's, "Grrrrrrr!" sleeping late in the morning.

Q: Well, your son is a night person. Did you ever write for a school paper?

WELLS: No.

Q: You never got interested in that sort of activity?

WELLS: School activities were really just... Let's see. What was I? Vice president of the Girls Athletic Association. Early on I was the librarian as a freshman in high school, which was not exactly the most coveted job. It's just that I loved my books and I was good at organizing.

Q: You did love your books, yes.

WELLS: I loved books. I really did. At this stage, some young girls, my friends, were very self-conscious about getting good grades. The usual junk, you know, that you can't be too smart and all that stuff. But that never bothered me.

Q: When did you begin to date boys? Was this in high school?

WELLS: I was frightened off that subject by an early experience which was very unpleasant. In many ways it's interesting, the effect that had in terms of just, "I don't want to have anything to do with this subject at this time in my life." In high school, I was not really dating. It was always a problem in terms of going to a dance and so forth, because I felt very ill at ease with young men my age. There were a few young men that I went out with the first two years in college.

Then, of course, I changed completely with the whole show business era. I was just thrown into this, and it doesn't mean that your sense of values or anything changes, but--this is almost a confession--all of a sudden I realized that I am attractive. I had harbored for a long time the feeling that I was very unattractive. I was so tall and so thin, and in many ways I felt that I looked up to my mother, of course, who had the benefit of MGM and Elizabeth Arden and everything! I don't hold it against her.

Q: And who was a woman.

WELLS: And a woman!

Q: I mean, instead of a child.

WELLS: I really felt unattractive. Somehow when I came into my own and received all this attention, it was a wonderful sense of security. Not that I was necessarily insecure; maybe I was secure. You be the judge of that. But a wonderful sense of physical security as to who I am and how I hold myself in this world and so forth. It gave me a totally

different attitude in terms of dealing with men. I had confidence then in terms of if anybody wanted to start getting fussy with me, I'd tell them to get lost. I didn't have to tolerate things. When young girls are in school and they go in for the more physical side of things and say, "Do you really want to do this now? What do you want to do?" By that point it was clear in my mind as to who I was. As I say, I was a late bloomer. All of this didn't happen until my early twenties, really, which is quite late, I think.

Q: But you were a very early bloomer when it comes to knowing what you wanted to do.

WELLS: Yes.

Q: Very early.

WELLS: Very early. And yet, in terms of my relationship with the opposite sex, I would say I was a very late bloomer. There is a reason for this in terms of an unpleasant experience in a very early stage of my life. Then after that, I was fully launched for the world. It's very interesting.

Q: I should think it would have been bees around a honey pot at Las Vegas. I wonder if perhaps you weren't more at ease with older men because you were interested in serious things and young boys aren't. I notice your husband is older than you.

WELLS: That's right. He's sixteen years older. And it's true, because the serious relationships I had had up until I married my husband, they were all men at least ten years older.

Q: Makes perfect sense to me.

WELLS: Yes, it's very interesting.
Q: Knowing your background and everything. You were much more sophisticated than the average little American child.

WELLS: That's interesting, too. At Georgetown, when I was a student there, I had a lot of good friends, male friends, not one of them romantically involved. There was a little pack of four or five of us; I was the only woman. We were cramming for the history of foreign relations, and we'd spend the whole night together, sort of, asking each other questions, going to sleep on the floor, whatever it was. It was absolutely natural. There was never any funny business, nothing.

Q: That must have stood you in good stead in the Foreign Service. You learned how to work with men.

WELLS: Yes. I've often been asked that, and I've never felt any awkwardness about that.

Q: Has there been much sexism in the job? Here's an example. You couldn't go to Georgetown in the daytime the first year because they didn't let women in. Did you run

up against many of those things?

WELLS: You mean in the Foreign Service?

Q: Yes.

WELLS: I think early on. For example, the first assignment I had was in what we call Intelligence and Research, INR, as an analyst. We used to have duty that would rotate. The most junior officers of the incoming class would take on the early morning briefing, which meant getting to the Department by six o'clock in the morning or something like that, reading the cables, and then having it all battened down to give a briefing at eight o'clock, eight-thirty. This meant, of course, being out on the streets by five-thirty, five-fifteen or so! Unbeknownst to me, my male colleagues of the same rank got together and said, "Let's spare Melissa this job."

Q: Reverse sexism, in a way.

WELLS: They wanted that I need not get up and take the risk of--they knew I didn't have a car--getting to the Department by six o'clock. So they said, "We'll just rotate. We'll spare Melissa this." But at the same time, they were keeping me from a very interesting aspect of my job!

Q: Being overprotective. That is part of sexism, you know.

WELLS: But you see, I cannot in any way say that it was anything but well-intended. I found out about this, because two or three rounds went by and I said, "Hello? When's my turn?"

They said, "Look, we talked to the boss."

"No way!" Then I had to pull my way into this thing.

Q: Yes, which you had to do at several stages of your career. Well, were you ever asked to fix the coffee? Did people ask you how your typing skills were?

WELLS: No. I don't know. I don't remember that. My typing skills used to be good. They're horrible now. I come back now, sort of reentering from outer space in the U.N., you see, and everybody has a Wang and I'm even afraid to sit next to it. I don't know what to do with the damn thing.

I said, "Where's the typewriter?"

"Oh, we don't use such things anymore." [Laughter] I feel...

Q: You're obsolete!

WELLS: I'm obsolete. Really, I'm going to try to get a course for one day just to do the first thing with it.

The coffee business, no, I don't recall that. I tend to feel, even now, that serving coffee and so forth is sort of like an issue. I like to reach out to younger men. For example, at a staff meeting today I said I was the acting deputy assistant desk officer while Greg was away. They loved that!

Q: Sure!

WELLS: What am I trying to tell you? In terms of sexism, yes, there was one incident, and I just handled it. It was a running thing with a supervisor. I felt that everything was being dumped on me. I was the deputy. A lot of those remarks. I don't mind a couple of them here, and I'll throw them back, but this was too steady. I indicated that I didn't like it, and he should have known better at the time. Then I made a big fuss about it, and he gave me a very bad efficiency report, and I blasted him in the report. Eventually, the Department said, "Somebody's lying." I must say it was to their credit, because I left and got myself another assignment. An inspector came around eventually and got my side of the story, and I must say I think it worked out well, because I was on the next promotion list.

Q: Good.

WELLS: It was good.

Q: Your experiences have been very atypical.

WELLS: Atypical?

Q: Very atypical. I have talked to a lot of women who were in the [Foreign] Service and were told they had to leave because they were married. Now, you said that nobody ever asked you that.

WELLS: Nobody ever asked me.

Q: To what do you attribute that, that you were permitted to stay on? All the others were told, even when they were working here in Washington, that they had to leave.

WELLS: I know. As in the case of Elinor [Constable]. We discussed this about twelve years ago.

Q: Exactly. Elinor is a case in point.

WELLS: I didn't want to leave. I don't know; I discussed this with my supervisor at the time, saying it would be nice if I could stay on, and it all worked out that way. I was never pressured on this issue.

Q: You were never pressured?

WELLS: I was prepared. I wasn't sure that if they came around that I wouldn't say, "Where does it say so?" Because I was making inquiries at the time, being very quiet about it.
Q: It never was written, you know. It never did say so.

WELLS: Never said so! I found that out, that it didn't say so anywhere--but discreetly. I couldn't just walk into the personnel office and ask them, "Where is it written that this is the case?" I was trying to find out, "Where does it say that you have to resign?" The collective wisdom that I garnered was that the assumption was one wanted to be with one's husband and that the husband is the breadwinner, so the woman goes out.

Q: And you had to be available for duty worldwide, and you were. So maybe you just slipped through the cracks.

WELLS: Just the other day, about a week ago, I was having dinner with a young woman who came into the Foreign Service long after me, she was married [left the Service] and so forth, and she said, "Oh, I wanted to talk to you. What really happened? We feel that you got divorced just because of the Department."

[Refers to the supposition by some Foreign Service officers that the Wellses divorced each other in order that Melissa could be assigned to the same post where Al was stationed.]

I said, "No!" [Laughter] I mean, that's the myth; that's the legend. I said, "No way! There was a genuine falling-out between [Al and me]. We went our separate ways." But it was interesting to hear this.

Q: They had to make it fit in with the pattern, I suppose. I know they couldn't understand why you weren't told to get out when you married, because they all were. They were given no choice.

WELLS: Then we both went off, as you know, to separate posts. Then I was assigned to Paris. [Al was in London.] We sort of saw more of each other, and then came the question of, "This is the perfect job, the fifth year she's doing Common Market business. Have her assigned London."

"But you can't because her husband is assigned there," and so forth. The truth is, the fact that we were divorced made it possible. We did not divorce because of the Office of Personnel in the State Department.

Q: Hardly.

WELLS: Hardly! It's interesting to see these young women looking back and thinking

that one would act that way.

Q: As if you'd break up a family just for...

WELLS: No! Extraordinary! I was aghast. She said, "That's the myth. That's the legend. Some of us think this is just great." That's horrible! [Laughter]

Q: I did not think that at all when I had heard that you were permitted to stay. I thought you were a better fighter, maybe, than some of the other women.

WELLS: I honestly don't know the reason. The only thing I can think of - and I can't prove it to you - is that early on - I was aware of this, you see, before we were married - I was talking to Fritz Behr, who is now deceased, and saying, "Wouldn't it be nice? I'd like to stay on and work." And he may have done something on his own which I am unaware of, because he was the same guy who was into trying to protect me from going to the early morning briefings. I don't know.

Everybody was coming up, saying, "When are you going to resign? When are you going to resign? Are you going to resign? When are you going to resign?"

I said, "Oh, well, Fritz says I can keep on working here." And that's the way it happened.

Q: You seem to have generated a lot of good will among your colleagues.

WELLS: I'd like to think so. It's very important to me.

Q: Do you suppose they permitted you to stay on when you were in Port-of-Spain because you had a child?

WELLS: I think I've been very lucky.

Q: Do you think that's why you were permitted to stay so long in Paris, which is certainly sought after by everybody? You were there five years?

WELLS: No, London.

Q: How long in Paris?

WELLS: Two.

Q: Four years in London, though.

WELLS: Fantastic.

Q: Did you take an M.A. degree when you were back in Georgetown, when the Bolivians paid for your graduate work?

WELLS: You remember everything! Absolutely marvelous. I completed all the course work. This was for a master's in foreign service in a Latin American area of study. I took that wretched oral exam at the end, where they ask you everything under the known sun. I never completed the thesis, so I didn't get the degree. My thesis was on agrarian reform in Latin America, and all my papers for individual courses were about that, but I never got it together because I was already working in the Department and it was a little more demanding than the Bolivian Embassy at the time. And I always thought I might get it done.

Q: What got you so interested in Africa?

WELLS: You know I had two scholarships offered.

Q: Yes.

WELLS: Northwestern and Boston, back when there was no Bureau of African Affairs or anything. Obviously, that means at that point I was already interested in Africa. It's a combination of strange factors, I mean, everything from adventure stories that you hear when you're young, the films, the movies. As you grow up, you have this sense of exotic almost entirely produced by films and so forth, and you start learning more about it. It became quite clear that this enormous area of the world, all still under colonial administration, really, at the time I'm talking about, was going to become important. There were indications already that colonial empires might not be around that long. It seemed to be the least developed, most backward area, which it certainly is. That appealed to me.

Q: That appealed to you?

WELLS: Yes!
Q: That's curious.

WELLS: People still don't understand, for example, that I'm dying to go to Mozambique and so forth. I can't go into the details, but there was a possibility of something far more sophisticated, which didn't come through, and the other day I said, "I'd much rather go to this place!"

Q: And specifically, you're talking black Africa, aren't you? You weren't interested in the Maghreb?

WELLS: No. The other post wasn't even in Africa. It's a very nice place. But it's the challenge. It's the job. You know what's going on in Mozambique now. It's getting more exciting every day in terms of the scale of the job to be done. I love that.

Q: You certainly have been exposed to it. Nobody can say, "She doesn't know what she's getting into."

WELLS: [Laughter] No way! No way!

Q: I want to hear more about Uganda.

WELLS: Ah!

Q: When you were in the ambassadorial seminar, you mentioned being shot at. For the tape, could you go into that?

WELLS: Which time?

Q: Which time? Oh, I didn't know there was more than one. Tell us all the times. It was a terribly dangerous time right after [Idi] Amin had been overthrown.

WELLS: It was. It was very chaotic. It was what you call true anarchy, which is the most frightening of all situations.

Q: You mentioned how the police had all been wiped out; there weren't any police on the streets.

WELLS: That's right. You had a Liberation Army which had been recruited along the way. You had the Tanzanian Army there that, of course, was the spearhead in terms of removing Amin from power. But then there was no institutional framework with which to support an army, you see. You have to feed it, house it, clothe it, pay it!

Q: Had the others been murdered? Is that what had happened?

WELLS: The others ran away. The Amin army right there all disappeared. So you had the Tanzanian Army and you had the Uganda Liberation Army without any institutional framework to support it. What happened was that it generated into soldiers who had weapons just helping themselves, unfortunately, to the local population. You had certain areas, certain units, it depended on commanders and so forth, who disciplined the soldiers, but actually there were quite few. You had a very chaotic situation, really, which is one of the most frightening things. Even if you don't agree with the atrocious policies that somebody may be carrying out, that means that somebody is in charge, and at least you can go and talk to somebody if you're being killed, and civilians are being murdered for transistor radios, for chickens, for wristwatches. So that's where we're talking about.

Where should we start? The best known incident, actually, is a time I was not shot at, but it was the first really close encounter with a gun. I was being driven home, which was in Entebbe, from Kampala. I had actually been at the U.S. Embassy for a reception and it was late--late, like nearly seven o'clock in the evening. By that time, the curfew was in effect. The curfew came into effect later, but no one, for all practical purposes, went out on the streets after seven. It's like a twenty-five minute, half-hour drive from Kampala to Entebbe if you drive very fast.

I was aware that a car was passing us. I was sort of looking off to the left. We drive on the left there, incidentally. It was passing us, but somehow it didn't seem to get on with the job of passing us, and that made me turn my head. I could see that the car was keeping up with us.

There were three men in the car. The driver was on the other side, you see. Two men were at the windows and had pistols. They were keeping up with us, and I sort of looked, and my first reaction was, "Oh, no! Here? Me?" I mean, I'd heard about this. It was always happening to someone else, not to you.

They were saying, "Stop the car."

Of course, all this is split-second. George, the driver, still seemed unaware that this car was keeping up with us, and I said, "George, stop the car! Stop!"

"What, Madam? What?"

I said, "Stop the car!" Because they'll shoot you to get the car.

Q: Sure.

WELLS: Then by that time he realized that we were in trouble, and he started slowing down the car. Then the car pulled right in front of us, and as they got out of their car, I sort of went down on the floor of the car, because I thought they would start shooting. I remember being down there with my nose on the floor of the back seat, thinking, "Is this it? Is this the end? It's going to end here?" And then, again--you see, I'm practical--I said, "I hope they kill me, because I don't want to lie here and suffer." The last thing you want is to need medical help under those circumstances.

There was no shooting, so I came up again, and by this time they were pulling George out of the car. A guy came up to me on this side. I had the window rolled up. He said, "Get out of the car! Get out of the car!"

I remember looking at this revolver, because it was the first revolver I had seen in Uganda. I had been used to either AK47s or Lee Enfield rifles, but I'd never seen this revolver. I thought, "Is that a real gun?" Because it was so small! [Laughter]

Then I thought, "If he shoots, the glass is going to come into my face," which is a stupid thing to think about, because at this point, if you have a hole in your face, whether glass accompanies it or not is totally irrelevant. But this is what happens. Maybe it's vanity. I was not going to reach for anything, because just the week before, or two weeks before, a Canadian priest had been killed on the same road, because, apparently, someone who saw it said that as he got out of the car, he tried to reach for his briefcase. The thieves are not sure whether you're setting off the anti-theft device which will impede their progress out of this place later on or whatever.

"I can't get out of the car! I'm showing you my hands. I can't open the door!" [Laughter] It wasn't funny at that point.

Q: No, I'm sure it wasn't.

WELLS: He comes running around the side. Why I didn't open that door, I do not know. He came out this side, and he opened the door for madam, and I emerged with my hands up. "Hurry up! Hurry up!" George had been dragged across the road there. There was the other man in the driver's seat. So I got out, and then he jumped in. I don't know whether he jumped in the front seat or the back seat. Whatever it was, they turned around and got out of there.

Then I was left there on the side of the road, in the dark, and the first thing I thought was, "Where's George?" He'd been beaten up and was playing dead or wounded on the other side of the road. I got him up, and he was okay. He had a bad gash in his knee. I just put my arms around him and said, "George, we're alive!"

There weren't that many cars on the road. I'd wave and see a car go "Whoooosh!" I thought, "I'm going to be here all night waving at all these cars." I had a very full pleated skirt on, so the next set of headlights I saw, I jumped out in front and started waving my skirts. [Pantomimes the action.]

Q: [Laughter] Oh!

WELLS: That breaks everybody up. But you don't understand, Ann! You've got to get out of the situation.

Q: Of course.

WELLS: They can't see. Everybody drives very fast. I wanted them to make sure they knew this was a mazuna woman standing here. Something is <u>wrong</u>! If you can help, please help. So waving this skirt, the headlights keep coming, and I finally go, "Aaagghh!" and move away, because it was a minibus, which was actually stopping. It stopped later on, but it was going so fast, I didn't know it would stop.

Then they took the news to the hotel that there was this European woman waving her skirts around in the middle of the road. By this point, I was late and everybody called and said, "I wonder if that's Melissa?"

Then another set of headlights came. Again, I'm going this way, and I go like this [gesturing], you know, like, "Please stop the car!" I hear the brakes, "Eeeeeekkkkk!" It turned out to be somebody I knew. I said, "Please take us to the Tanzanian Army headquarters." I knew they had a radio in touch with the Ugandan Army headquarters in Kampala.

Q: This is an embassy car they'd made off with?

WELLS: It was a U.N. car that they stole, yes. That's the story that appeared in Le Monde, and a lot of people know about it. And there were other incidents.

But in terms of what I thought was my closest call was a roadblock just outside of a place called Atiak, north on the road to Nimule towards the Sudan border. I was with some Swedish disaster relief people who had come to help us on the West Nile Project. It was early in the morning, and we were trying to get to Moyo. It was the usual roadblock, and we stopped. We could see that this guy was really tanked up--drunk--and he was very aggressive, incredibly aggressive. He didn't want to see any papers. He was lurching like this. [Wells demonstrates.] I can't understand the language he's talking to the driver. I could see the driver sort of becoming paralyzed. I'm in the front seat. The driver's here. The Swedes are in back.

Then his buddy comes out and pushes him aside, and they start conversing. He looks at the papers. Apparently everything is okay, except then we look, and the drunk is standing in front, over the radiator like this. [Wells demonstrates.] He's like this with his AK47. He takes the safety catch off and he's trying to frighten us, and I can assure you, he is. I just looked and said, "Here it is." I dropped to the bottom of the floor. I had been through other experiences. "This is it."

Q: Terrible.

WELLS: Willingly or not, he's not in charge, he's got his finger right there, he's taken off the safety catch. The car is silent! The Swedes stopped saying, "We're trying to help you. We're trying to help you." They'd stopped. They were collecting their thoughts for the next world at this point, too. I just remember going like this [Wells demonstrates with head in hands.], thinking about my loved ones. By the time I looked up, nothing happened. The buddy had quietly gotten the drunk out and taken him away.

Anyway, what this means, being shot at, yes. We were caught between two trucks who were carrying Ugandan soldiers. We were trying to pass, and we got caught in the gunfire.

Q: No safety glass on the cars?

WELLS: No. There was one time we were on the road trying to get to the border to go to Kenya, and we just turned a corner and there was a Tanzanian soldier, and he had the gun like this. "Stop!" And there was a man bleeding by the side of the road. We stopped the car. Then gunfire started. The soldier jumped into the front seat--I'm sitting here--with his weapon, closed the door, and then shouted at the driver, and the driver immediately turned around and pulled away, and they were shooting at us.

Q: Oh, mercy!

WELLS: There had been an ambush there, and we just happened to arrive at that point, and he wanted to get out of there.

Q: What do all these incidents do to your nerves?

WELLS: What happens, Ann, is after the first time or two--what you have to do is realize, "What am I doing here?"

Q: I'm sure you must have asked yourself that many times.

WELLS: "Why am I here?"

Q: With your family in Nairobi.

WELLS: Exactly. Because I have to explain this to my family. I figured it out that it was necessary because of the relief operations we had. Once I had seen bodies, dead bodies, from the slow violence of starvation, about which you can do something... You can't do all that much about the atrocities... There is no way that I can just turn my back and write a report and hope for the best that somebody else will lead. I know this sounds very heroic and all that, but I've lived it. I have put my life on the line in several cases. The wonderful thing, Ann, is that others do it, too. Then you become a unit.

If anything, there were a number of people, not a lot, but some, who were genuinely very afraid in Uganda. I used to say, "If you really live with fear day in, day out, get out." Because I believe that you attract disaster. It's like dogs know when you're afraid, or something like that. There's a normal healthy level of fear, but if it becomes obsessive, if you see someone out to kill you every minute of the day, that's wrong, and I think it's very bad in terms of the total community.

But the beauty of Uganda was that we got a job done. They said we didn't solve all that many problems, but it's very easy when you're sitting back in a capital writing papers and whatever it is. But when you know that because of what you did people got something to eat, it's as simple and basic as that. They may have been killed the next day because of something else.

We used to have philosophical arguments about this. If we do this, somebody else will do that. Well, you have to live with your own conscience. But we developed a group ethic, almost, and we discussed a lot of things and took tremendous risks to get the job done. I'm so proud of having been a part of that, and I'd like to think I did lead the operation with the example that I used to go out, so other people would go out.

Q: Did you ever feel that as a woman you had to be even braver than a man?

WELLS: No.

Q: None of that entered into it? You just were doing your job.

WELLS: In terms of the practical aspects. I had a lot of women working with me, because for a while almost half the U.N. office, UNDP office, consisted of women. There was a ban on dependents, and it just so happened that a lot of women ended up coming as program officers and admin officers and so forth.

Then I had a chance to watch just the simple things of negotiating a roadblock. This is the basic thing. You see, every roadblock we encountered was a human negotiating situation. You can't just say, "Well, here I am. [Phrase in foreign language.] Here are my papers." No way. I mean, he can't read. He looks at the papers upside down, he pretends he's reading. [Laughter] You get out, you give the Liberation handshake, you negotiate your way through in terms of human contact.

I wouldn't say all, but I found that a number of men, because you're dealing with men at the roadblocks, not women. I don't know how it would have worked if they had been manned by women. It's not necessarily a sexist thing; it's just a question of reaching out and trying to understand the situation and solve it, rather than saying, "The formalities are thus and so, and this is the way it is." There were a couple of men I refused to take on trips because it was almost as if they had to prove something. They would jump out of the back of the car. I'd say, "Sit down!" The last thing you want is anybody... just sit there, they come to you, you reach. Don't start jumping around, because they think you're going to throw a grenade or something.

Q: And half the time they're scared to death.

WELLS: And it's a cover-up. I remember with Shirley Temple Black, we discussed this. It's very interesting. I think that women, because they are biologically mission-oriented, can withstand a lot of stress better than men in this kind of situation.

Q: That's very interesting.

WELLS: I can say that.

Q: You've seen it.

WELLS: I've seen enough of it. On the whole, under a continuing stressful situation, I found that women react very, very well.

Q: I have, too. I know that was discussed at the seminar, and I think Tony [Motley] said, "Well, it depends on the individual. You can't make a judgment by gender." I think you can. Women don't have to prove that they're macho.

WELLS: That's what I'm trying to tell you. These are the little faults in construction--excuse me--brought about not biologically, but by society. A man must have to prove himself. "If I don't do this, they might think I'm afraid." Women don't have to prove it.

Q: Also, don't forget, women are not a threat to men the way other men are. When you come up to that roadblock, they know they can swat you down, or at least they think they can. They don't know whether or not you know karate. [Laughter]

WELLS: That's right. But there's that picture in Time, you know, where I'm arguing with the roadblock. That was a Time photographer.

CHRISTOPHER WELLS: Do you want to see a picture of these famous roadblocks?

Q: I certainly do!

WELLS: Oh, gosh, yes. From Time magazine. I was having a hard time there, and I jumped out. By this time, I had been through it an awful lot of times. I'd been sitting there. I was still not getting anywhere. You can see in the picture, because he took the picture quietly. Afterwards, he said, "Listen. After looking at you, no wonder people get killed at roadblocks, the way you behave!"

CHRISTOPHER WELLS: Well, here is Melissa Wells' life.

WELLS: No! Oh, my God. This is more than you ever bargained for.

Q: This is terrific. You face the danger and you think you're fine, and then you kind of find your knees shaking or something. I wondered if you experienced any of that.

WELLS: Certainly, at the Atiak one. Once he got him out of the way, we had to get out of there so fast with the car. But then all of us got out, 'cause that was it. We thought we were finished. He could have just sprayed us with the machine gun. There was no question of whether I would be wounded at this point.

Q: No, that would be it.

WELLS: That would be it.

Q: Knowing that, you are fighting to go to Mozambique?

CHRISTOPHER WELLS: Mozambique is not that much anarchy.

Q: No, no. But on the other hand, one never knows in that part of the world.

WELLS: In Mozambique, the challenges, as I see them, are tremendous, being a representative of my government. Since I did this tape, of course, new events are that again I'm back with the Foreign Service, having a crack for the third time as a U.S. ambassador. The scale of the job to be done there is enormous.

Q: What do you see as the major area that you'll be involved in?

WELLS: You have a government, a country which is part of the Lusophone area. I have some experience of that from ten years ago, being our first ambassador in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. Now I have a chance to go to Mozambique, where you have a country of tremendous potential, which is working its way away from a system, a philosophy, that they adopted at first when they became independent. Some people would say, "Why don't you just change the labels?" But that's not as important as to what's happening, the fact that they have taken steps to privatize. The basic issue is not whether you're on "my side" or "their side"; it's the fact that they are part of this awareness that is going on in many parts of Africa, that the model of planning that was adopted at independence does just not work. It does not work. It's demolished anything that existed.
And what's the alternative? What do you do now? So rather than chucking off a label, exciting things are going on in terms of sale of parastatal organizations, the assets. You don't hear about this. The fact that our AID program, by legislation, is directed toward the private sector because of legislation, because we are not to be dealing with a Marxist-Leninist government, creates a cramped situation in terms of flexibility, but is very exciting. I think it has opened up all sorts of new opportunities for us that maybe would not have been there if those constraints had not been placed on it. I'm speaking very freely. I'm sure that many people within the Department now would not agree with that.

But the challenge to go, to see this transition taking place within the much larger context of regional problems in southern Africa and, of course, now the issue being apartheid in South Africa and our own sanctions, it's part of a very, very, very rich picture in terms of challenges.

Q: Do you expect you'll have a lot of challenging on that particular point?

WELLS: Oh, I expect so. This is crucial, what will South Africa's attitude be toward Mozambique, the issue being that Mozambique is a natural egress and means of transport for the landlocked countries. If Mozambique can be neutralized in terms of ability to transit, then you have a very different situation in southern Africa. Of course, the position of the government in Mozambique antedates this particular set of circumstances by several years; it goes back to '84, having signed an agreement with South Africa which was heavily criticized. It's fraught with exciting area issues.

Q: Especially at this time, I think, more than any other in its history.

WELLS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Q: Because of the way the superpowers are jockeying around the area.
WELLS: I know.

Q: Was this a post you had put in for?

WELLS: No. The chance to go had come up several years ago. At that point, I was very pleased. I had just come out of Uganda. I was then in Geneva, and I was asked. I was tracked down by senior assignments, saying could they put my name on a list to go to the

White House? Out of sight, out of mind all these times. I thought maybe somebody read about me in Uganda, but to be considered for this was wonderful.

But then I was reluctant. I said, "Look, let me call you back." As it happened, I happened to be in the U.S. when they tracked me down. I came down here and I said, "Look, I just spent two years in Uganda." I was not with the family. My son was in Nairobi with my husband because there was no possibility for family life in Uganda. And I didn't take another assignment because I wanted to see my son through high school, you know. After that, I said that I would be ready.

Q: Sure.

WELLS: The war-horse will go charging on. My gosh, it came out exactly that way! Otherwise, I would have really missed out on too many years of his life.

Q: Tell me, Melissa, would you want to discuss, for the sake of the oral history, your health problem?

WELLS: Sure.

Q: Which I believe resulted from your time in Brazil.

WELLS: Yes. It's a condition called cysticercosis. It's a condition that results from a pork tapeworm infection, and it's where the parasites, in their larval stage, invade the body tissues. They jump the traditional system, the gastrointestinal system, and invade the body tissues, and one of their favorite places to reside is the brain. What happens then is that you and the "beasties," as I've come to call them, have to learn to live together. They become encapsulated in cysts in the brain, which then have two effects. One is, they create intracranial pressure because they're there and take up space. Secondly, when they die, when the beastie dies, it sets up an infection, an inflammatory condition in the brain tissue, which then can become quite serious, depending on how many cysts you have.

I did have a tapeworm infection; I was treated for it when I was in Brazil, and life went on more or less as always. Then suddenly, without any warning... I had been having very severe headaches for over a period of about a year, and then I started having seizures. This was in '78, very suddenly. Of course, I happened to be based in New York at the time. I was in and out of hospitals for CAT scans. Nobody could find out what was wrong with me. And this went on for one year, Ann. One year! Seizures and medication. I kept on with my job, then - BOOM! - I'd have another seizure. Yet it wasn't adult epilepsy. I didn't have all the classic signs.

Finally, one CAT scan then showed up these two tiny little dots, which turned out to be calcified cysts. They called me back to the hospital and said, "We know what it is." I had been preparing myself for the worst. I made out my will; I was prepared to hear all this. I'd often wondered how people dealt with this news, and I said, "I'm going to find out." I remember there was a whole team of doctors, about five of them, who came in to see me

at New York Hospital, and I'm listening for that six-letter word, and then was told about cysts. A minute and a half goes by and I don't hear it.

I said, "What?"
"It's cysticercosis."

I said, "That sounds like a Greek nun!" [Laughter] I mean, have you ever heard of this?

The doctors were very good about how they told me about my disease, because to be told you have worms in your brain is a little unsettling. They don't put it that way, but they obviously led me to this thing slowly, made it very clear that they were not multiplying. It might as well have been the man in the moon come walking in. I mean, who's ever heard of this thing?

Then they said, "Look, there is no treatment. There is a drug that has never been tried on human beings."

Q: Oh, dear.

WELLS: Then they said, "You are very lucky, in one sense, that you have very few of these cysts that we can see, but you're very unlucky because they're located in very critical areas. They're on the visual cortex and in the speech area, so they're inoperable."

"What do I do now?" you know, because at this time I was hoping to be seconded to the U.N.; I wasn't sure. Actually, the Uganda thing had come through, and I had been free of seizures for a number of months. Then I had another seizure and everything went on hold. I couldn't get a medical clearance to get out of State; I couldn't get a medical clearance to get into the U.N. Then they come up with the worms in the brain that nobody has heard of, and there's no treatment for it. I thought, "Where do we go from here?"

Then, thank God, this wonderful doctor, Dr. Benjamin Keen, was called in as a parasitologist by the State Department. I remember meeting with him, and we went through it all, and he said, "Look, your trouble is that the last case of cysticercosis in Manhattan occurred in 1907."

Q: Oh, mercy!

WELLS: No wonder. Ever since then, I have armed myself with books on parasitology. I know, as I travel around the world, I find a neurologist who will be aware. Usually they say, "Oh, yes, I remember reading about that in medical school, but I've never met one of these cases."

Anyway, I managed to get a clearance, because Dr. Keen said to me, "How do you feel about going overseas?"

I said, "Quite honestly, Doctor, I've been in and out of hospitals, and it's taken one year to

find out what is wrong with me. I don't hold it against the medical profession, but if you don't let me go on with my career at this point... I have reached a level of experience where I feel I have a great deal to give... You are going to create problems in me if I stay here as a guinea pig." (I don't like to use the word "pig" for this thing.) "But I must get on with my life."

God bless him, he let me go. It was his say that allowed the State Department to let me go to the U.N., the U.N. took me, I lived through Uganda. I had partial seizure activity that I learned to live with. That's a totally different story in terms of how to deal with these things. I proved that I could do it, and my beasties and I got along.

Then I had a whole new set of symptoms simply explode on me in early '85. "What is this? It could only be one thing." Back to my doctors in New York. A new lesion in the brain. By this time, they had had more experience with this drug that was mentioned to me in '79, which had never been tried on human beings. I had also kept up with the literature, and I was a little wary of it because at first the fatality rate with the use of the drug was quite high. Anyway, all three of them, my neurologist, the parasitologist, Dr. Keen, and my private physician all said, "You've got to take the treatment."

Since we don't have cysticercosis in the U.S., who's going to give me this treatment? You see? So I figured, "As long as I'm going to do this, I'm going to go to the best." So I wrote to NIH [National Institutes of Health]. I said, "Look here, I'd like to think that you'd be interested in my case. I have this weird condition, but I also am in the anomalous position of having had X-Y-Z CAT scans, MNRs, arteriograms, blah, blah, blah. So in terms of tracking, I think I'm an interesting case, and could you treat me with Praziquantel?" And I am the first patient treated at NIH with Praziquantel.

Q: Is that so?

WELLS: Yes. [Wells knocks on the table.]

Q: Well, it obviously works.

WELLS: It's been marvelous. I just talked to my doctor there the other day. They've had five more cases since then. They said I was the first one. It's not that they don't know what to do, but I was at NIH for six or seven weeks.

Q: That was last year?

WELLS: Last spring. Since then, it's been absolutely marvelous. I don't have headaches anymore. The conservative approach of the medical community is, "We won't know until you probably die to be absolutely sure as to what happened." But here I am. I have my clearance to go to Mozambique, and functionally I feel well.

Q: And no more headaches.

WELLS: No! And the headaches I had were excruciating. I used to lie there with tears pouring down my face, knowing that this, too, shall pass, but will I ever make it? [Laughter] And just to be free of that, and then to look back and actually marvel--excuse me--at my own ability to cope. When you have no alternative, you just have to deal with this pain. That, to me, is the most significant feature. I've been back, of course, for the technical side, the MRIs, magnetic resonance imaging. They're very pleased when they see that everything is as is.

Q: The lesions are gone?

WELLS: The lesions are gone. The little cysts will always remain there, and they create a certain amount of pressure in the brain, but...

Q: But the beasties are gone? They're dead?

WELLS: The beasties... we think they're dead.

Q: From this medicine?

WELLS: From this medicine. It's fantastic. It's the same medicine that's used for schistosomiasis. In schistosomiasis, you use one, maybe two doses. I had seventy-two doses.

Q: My goodness! Seventy-two doses! Did you have all sorts of aftereffects?

WELLS: No. It was under very controlled conditions. First of all, you see, the reaction to the drug is that they're never sure from a CAT scan how many of these beasties are up there, because they don't show up on a CAT scan until they have calcified. So it's a little bit like Russian roulette. You don't know what you're going to trigger off. The first thing to do is, you saturate the patient with what they call convulsion suppressants, Dilantin or Phenobarbital. They tried several on me, and then they picked one out. Then you get saturated with steroids, because in case there's a tremendous inflammation of the brain, the body system can't handle it. They put the support system in place, and then you start what I call the saturation bombing.

On the whole, it's not bad at all. I had some discomforts. I had some headaches and so forth. But NIH is a superb place! I mean, I don't ever want to wish your being there, but it's not a treatment hospital, it's a research hospital, and you're treated as a collaborator. You really are. You discuss all this ahead of time, how much do you want to know. You can ask all the questions. It really makes you good about paying your taxes, I'll tell you! [Laughter]

Q: What is the future? Will your husband be with you?

WELLS: In Mozambique? Oh, yes. Al should be here by about three weeks from today, I'd say, and we're looking forward to going there.

Q: What about your two sons?

WELLS: The two boys will come and visit. They're into their own lives. One is working in Brazil. The other one is busy with his geology. They're looking forward to visiting us.

Q: Has your husband retired? I know he's an architect.

WELLS: He still keeps it up. He has been doing a few houses. He's a tropical architect. In terms of what he can involve himself with in Mozambique, I think there will be a lot to do. Exactly what form that will take, I think we'll have to wait on that.

Q: When you were at the U.N., did he not work for the City of New York?

WELLS: When I was at the U.N., he was with the City of New York, yes, with the UDC.

Q: So that particular career blends very nicely with a Foreign Service career, doesn't it?

WELLS: It does. It really does. Then, of course, when I was in Uganda, he had a job with the U.N. UNDP, in terms of housing problems all over the world. He was a housing consultant for UNDP.

Q: Just one last question. You have worked both in bilateral and in multilateral relations. Do you have to work very differently? Do you operate differently if it's multilateral than you do if it's bilateral?

WELLS: I'd say the big difference is, in the bilateral area you have instructions, you have a policy, you're in the field overseas. The discipline of the profession is that you carry out what you're told to do. You may not think this is the wisest thing to do at the moment and may hurl invectives back, but you do it within the system. You channel your criticism. And yet, when you get something done in the service of something such as the U.S. Government, it's so rewarding when it works.

On the multilateral side, this is based on my U.N. experience. The wonderful aspect of it was the opportunities to take initiatives. I don't mean to say you can never take the initiative in the U.S. Government, but it's far more difficult in a bilateral situation as opposed to a multilateral situation, particularly if you're working at a senior level and you understand the whole picture. I mean, you're not going to charge in there like a bull in a china shop and upset things. But there's so many questions, so many subjects. Take the case of Uganda, where the initiative could only be taken by something like the U.N. If it were related to a particular donor country, it gets bogged down. Take something as sensitive as police training. In Uganda, we started the first-ever U.N. police training project. Police training is a very sensitive subject, and it was clear that we had to do something in Uganda.

By the time I had the gun in my face and then I just went back to New York headquarters

at the U.N. and said, "Look, you guys back here, you're fussing around whether to do police training (because the issue had come up as to whether it was possible and whether they would train the next Savak or the Gestapo, whatever it is) and our human rights are being trampled on left and right over the simple lack of a police force!"
I used to point out and say, "Look, if four out of five policemen disappeared off the streets of New York, I wish you the best of luck with your lifestyle!" Okay? And you don't have the economic convulsions that Uganda had gone through and the fact that people had learned to accept and live with violence for years and years. It becomes... that's the way it is. It's like, it rains; okay, get wet. That's the way it is.

So we made a case for it. This was not UNDP, but it was a group outside of UNDP, a certain group of donors. I tried to get the U.S. Government involved in this. I actually asked for kitchen equipment for the police training school. No way. They couldn't contribute. It was legislatively impossible for us. We started the program, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police came down to teach, as trainers of police, and the program went on. It was very successful. It had very modest targets to start with. Then actually, I recommended against a continuation at a later stage. I don't want to go into the reasons for that, but the whole experience to me proved that if you get a multilateral backing to something as sensitive as police training and public safety--we're talking criminal violence; we're not talking political parties, one against the other, but just sheer criminality and trying to get a handle on it--you also then, if you get in there, get an insight into human rights and so forth. You are in a position to really comment if you put your money where your mouth is.

That's as much as I want to say on that, because I recommended discontinuation. This is very sensitive, what I'm telling you now, especially in view of subsequent events there. But I like to quote it as an opportunity to have gone in there, because if you had left it to any one bilateral arrangement, it's always tricky, even though the need was crystal clear. Every government says, "We shouldn't be into this. You're training instruments of oppression for the government." And people don't understand that, unfortunately, in the world in which we live, something as basic as a police force, which was non-existent in Uganda at the time, was absolutely necessary.

There are other areas, you see, where you just take the lead in relief operations and so forth. But only in the U.N. can you do it. It's almost as if people look to you, because the other side of the coin is, of course, when things go bad. I couldn't believe this! I mean, the press was after me, some of the voluntary agencies, saying, "Why haven't you repaired the road? Why haven't you done...?"

I mean, "Where am I supposed to get the wherewithal? Excuse me! I mean, who do you think we are?" And yet, that is beautiful, because it means that the people were looking to the U.N. I took that to mean that people want to solve the problems in a common way. The frustrations were that the system was not able to respond as quickly as required, which, again, I can't defend.

Q: It never is.

WELLS: It never is. But it was very exciting in that sense. In spite of that, I'm glad to be back on the Ship of State, and hopefully going to Mozambique!

Q: I'm sure you will be going.

***

[February 27, 1987]

Q: On the last tape, we talked about the reasons why multilateral diplomacy was necessary in some cases, such as building police departments and that type of thing. But what I would like to ask you is how different a style does one have to have in dealing with multinational diplomacy as opposed to bilateral diplomacy? Do you have certain skills you use in one that aren't necessary in the other? How does it affect the way you work? I should imagine your style would have to change, wouldn't it? You are after different things if it's bilateral diplomacy, aren't you?

WELLS: Oh, it's far more specific, yes.

Q: The way you deal with the local people, with the nationals, it's not the same as working in a big multinational organization?

WELLS: No. Your objectives are quite different. In a bilateral program, you are working with a government. You have policy objectives in that country. You are targeted on specific objectives. They are specific, also, in the case of the international organizations, but let me explain. The end product in a bilateral relationship could be anything from a treaty to a ship visit to a trade agreement to a consular agreement, that sort of thing.

I've had two assignments in multilateral work, and one was the OECD, which was rather highly specific, targeted in strictly economic terms of developed countries, and then the U.N. experience, which was far, far broader. In both those instances, you are not trying to get a trade agreement between two countries. You're not looking for a specific thing. You may be looking for a specific thing in terms of an agreement on international standards for grading vegetables and fruits. This is an actual thing. You get together. I don't know that much, but I learned an awful lot about judging one cauliflower against the next cauliflower to the third cauliflower when these experts started discussing this. This is an international standard.

So you're trying to reach an international agreement. You are obviously dealing with multiple partners as opposed to vis-a-vis a government which has an established policy. Then you get to know individuals within that government to some degree. They may share their views as to why their particular policy has to be this way, could be changed in some fashion. On a multilateral basis, it's much more complex because you're dealing with so many different players and you're dealing with a secretariat, which is very influential. They actually write the reports most of the time.

So you have to cultivate contacts within the secretariat who are writing the reports of whatever your meetings are all about, and you have to cultivate the different delegations who are going to these meetings. If it's something as far more narrow as the OECD is in terms of interest, there are certain subject matters that come up all the time. If it's something as wide as the U.N., then certainly my job at the U.N. was dealing with the second, third, and fifth committees, which is essentially the social, economic, and the administrative and budgetary affairs, of which the range was enormous, everything from the budget of the U.N. to rights for women, human rights, new international economic order, a code of conduct for transnationals. It was endless.

ALFRED WELLS: May I interrupt for just one second?

WELLS: Yes.

ALFRED WELLS: It seems to me when you represent one government, there's a very definite duality, a two-pronged purpose in many of your agreements. Let's say it's on an agricultural project or a treaty on patents, let's say, an international treaty. Number one, you're trying to aid the direct recipients of that, the people who are growing crops or the people who make patents. Secondly, you're trying to improve relationships with your country and their country. So you have those two. And when you're representing an international organization, that's quite different.

WELLS: It's quite different because, again, you could be trying to reach an agreement, say, on international standards, but you have to also almost reach the lowest common denominator.

ALFRED WELLS: You're trying to bring relations between your boss, the United Nations, and that country.

WELLS: And still make it worthwhile. So everybody has a different view on what constitutes the perfect apple, let's say, which hasn't been seen since the Garden of Eden, when they're all defending their own commercial interests.

Q: I should think it would be a lot more tiring to be in a multilateral situation. You have so many people you have to please or to get to work together.

WELLS: I regard my experience at the U.N. as the only assignment I've ever had in trench warfare. [Laughter]

Q: Really?

WELLS: Somebody's always shooting at you. Then you think you've got the perfect apple or whatever it is, and political issues start coming on board.
Q: Everything is political, isn't it?

WELLS: Almost, unfortunately. Much is. Sometimes you get to grips with things.

Q: Things are used politically that aren't used in the bilateral situation?

ALFRED WELLS: Do you want to give the example of the schools and Palestine, Palestinian education, your one success?

WELLS: The consensus that we achieved at the United Nations Development Program. It still stands as the one and only consensus on the Middle East on assistance to Palestinians on the West Bank. This came about in the General Assembly in 1978. There are always difficult resolutions involved with the Palestinian people, and you have many resolutions coming up about Palestinian people, but this particular one was in terms of assistance, the objective being to get the U.N. agencies to assist. It was very difficult, a very difficult resolution to get to the table.

To make a long story short, it eventually was brought to a vote, but we had negotiated with a number of delegations, to the point where when it was voted and we were soundly defeated, it was Israel, Malawi, and the U.S., and the rest of the world was all against us or abstaining or off to the bathroom or someplace. Actually, however, we had won. The delegations from other countries came up and congratulated us, because they knew that we might be able to develop the resolution into something for the UNDP governing council down the road.

Then we started the process with the State Department in Washington to figure out where we're going. Okay. Now negotiations with the PLO took place.

ALFRED WELLS: "We," meaning?

WELLS: We, the U.S. mission, but the negotiations with the PLO were done through Bradford Morse's office, the administrator of UNDP, who dealt directly with them, of course. This was already at arm's length. We came up with language which was then accepted at the governing council of the UNDP in the summer of 1979 in New York, and we were very proud. I wrote the statement when we came to this item, and we had alerted our colleagues from the Middle East earlier on that the U.S. could approve the resolution. The other delegations rewrote their statements. They didn't expect a consensus.

ALFRED WELLS: Consensus, meaning they were voting for it.

WELLS: Right. We don't vote in UNDP; this is different from the General Assembly. We don't vote. We always operate by consensus.

ALFRED WELLS: Which means 100 percent.

WELLS: Yes. Anyway, it went through, and it still stands and it's terribly successful. What this meant was that UNDP funds were used for projects on the West Bank for the Palestinians. Now, when we first started negotiating this, I think the other side had

visions of far different projects. On our side, I argued, "Look, after Camp David, if we can't prove the color of our blood by supporting chicken farms and health clinics on the West Bank, who's going to believe us?" Because our objective was to try to get started some totally apolitical projects on the West Bank. The consensus was in '79. It's gone on and increased. I forget how many millions and millions have contributed since. It's a going thing. At first, it was difficult with Israel, and Israel was not in the room when the consensus was passed, but they have been very supportive. I'm very proud of having participated in that. That was my one landmark.

Q: I gather, then, psychically it's much more gratifying to work in bilateral diplomacy?
WELLS: Yes and no. You have an opportunity. There aren't that many. You can't deal with all these opportunities. Certainly, in the atmosphere of the United Nations, the issues come up so fast and they are so numerous, it's impossible to tackle all of them satisfactorily. They gain a momentum of their own. They become a signal as opposed to actual work. When I think what we did there with that consensus was actual work, and there are people who are benefitting from our "yak-yak" and paper. So much of what goes on--and I support the U.N. system fully--is signaling, which is valid and has a purpose, but you have to draw the line at some point. And I think that's one of the great problems today, that the public--certainly in this country--perceives the United Nations as just a big talking shop.

Q: Yes. You burn out faster there, don't you?

WELLS: It's really heavy duty. It's very intensive. In a bilateral relationship, I think it's easier to master your field in a certain amount of time; you make your contacts, you know what your goals are. You win some, you lose some. The multilateral, particularly on the U.N. side, you have to keep sight of where you're trying to go, and very often it's just such a free-for-all and you try to maintain your dignity and discipline and keep on going. It is difficult, as you say. You're likely to burn out faster.

Q: I would think so, after what you were saying, working until nine at night.

ALFRED WELLS: That's when she was at the U.S. mission to U.N., but that was U.N. work.

Q: And heavy social life?

WELLS: Extremely.

Q: Is it worse than being an ambassador to another post?

WELLS: Oh, much worse.

ALFRED WELLS: I can tell you a difference. I stopped going to the cocktail parties because they did most of their work at cocktail parties. Talk was work, not social.

WELLS: At many of them; not all.

ALFRED WELLS: At many of them, the talk was a large part... I'm exaggerating. A large part of their work was carried on at these receptions, large receptions, where they would aim for each other and talk; whereas embassy ones, not so much so. I think you'll go along with that. Embassy are more social.

WELLS: Oh, yes, because there just isn't enough time. We knew who our key contacts were, say, in the Western European group, we knew that we had to talk to the group of 77, we knew that there was this reception, that reception. So we'd say, "Are you going to this one? What time are you going to be there? Are you going to that one later? What time are you going to be there?" And this is what Al is referring to, because I know exactly that it was a very intense discussion. There were about four of us, different delegations. "Okay. You're going to that one next? All right. See you there. We'll continue there. In the meantime, will you talk to 77 on this one?"

It's the only time I've really worked in my social life--constantly! One hears about this. I used to read about it, you know, when I was a very junior officer, that you did a lot of work at cocktail parties. Yes, you do some work, but not this grinding work that some of us did on the U.N. circuit. But you also had to coordinate with key delegations and your opposite number. "We're more or less on the same position. Would you sound out what his position is? Will you sound out what his position is?"
"He didn't come to this reception." [Laughter]

Q: So you have to pursue it another day.

WELLS: Well, it's coming up for a vote tomorrow, you know.

Q: Oh, I see.

WELLS: It's a hassle. You find yourself sailing into the room, saying, "How are you dong? How are you doing? Oh, there you are. Yes. Here we go. I don't want to talk to you just now because I want to talk to him first about this."

Q: You almost can't afford to miss any of these.

WELLS: Actually, some of this is fun when it gets to that stage after a while, as the General Assembly is drawing to a close and the more difficult resolutions have been put to the back burner. Nobody wants to deal with the more controversial ones in the early stages of the G.A., and then they all come up in bundles as the time is short. It's very hectic.

Q: What skills are most important in a situation like that? The ability to speak several languages?

WELLS: That helps. I'd say English certainly is. Everyone speaks English or French.

Languages always help you in trying to get to know someone. Very often I have found... I do have some language skills [Wells speaks French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese fluently] that people almost prefer to speak English for some reason. Later on I may share the fact that I've lived in a country or have worked there and I speak a little of the language, and you start speaking in that language. It sort of builds up a little bond. Then we go back into English. Language skills certainly serve two purposes, and I think one of communication and appreciation, especially in terms of expressing what you're saying and understanding what they're saying exactly. The other, which is a very important area, too, is just the human touch, where you don't have to have that level of fluency, but it's very useful.

Q: But you'd never negotiate in a foreign language anyway, would you?

WELLS: No, not in the final negotiations.

Q: Do you have to be very well organized in this sort of work? Is it fatal if you're not well organized?

WELLS: Let's say you should be able to sort out your priorities every day and review them. Don't cast them in concrete, because they change. That's true in any kind of work. I think it's important to sort out what you should do first, second, third, and fourth, and realize that while I didn't get the first or the second thing done today, I still must get this done tomorrow, that something may have overtaken that.

Q: When you're at a post, you have a residence to run, and that's run with the help of a housekeeper or something? You have your entertaining. At a chancery, you have a DCM who, if he's good, takes care of the housekeeping details there. Do you have any of that sort of thing at the U.N.? You still have a house to run.

WELLS: At the U.N., very few of us had a house. We had apartments.

Q: Do you have much of a staff that you have to oversee?

WELLS: At the U.S. mission, yes. Oh, yes, quite a large staff, because we covered three committees and the General Assembly. My section was the whole eighth floor.

Q: Do you have a deputy there to handle housekeeping details?

WELLS: Yes, I had a deputy. I wouldn't say it was housekeeping; you just share the load.

Q: So the function isn't exactly the same as a DCM?

WELLS: Certainly, I would consider the way we ran things in my office the same. There were certain issues that I wanted him to follow, mostly to keep me informed, and then there were others that I wanted to pursue. But we each had to know what the other was doing and what everybody else was doing.

Q: How many people do we have in the U.S. mission in New York?

WELLS: We have five ambassadors, as you know.

ALFRED WELLS: It's about 100.

Q: Really? That's something different. Of course, you don't have local employees in the sense that you do overseas, because if you have local employees, they're Americans.

WELLS: They're Americans, but they're staff.

Q: It isn't quite the same as dealing with other nationals who work in your chancery. There aren't too many women who have done both, you see, which is why I'm interested in this. They have either done just U.N. or they have done just bilateral.

ALFRED WELLS: Well, there are very few people, women or not, who have been seconded to the U.N. and come back and been ambassador. I don't know of anyone who has done that.

WELLS: Having been ambassador, been seconded, and come back.

ALFRED WELLS: I think she's the only one.

Q: As far as I know, she certainly is.

ALFRED WELLS: You could ask someone in the Department.

Q: Pat Byrne was ambassador at two posts overseas, and now she's up there.

WELLS: But I left the U.S. Government and was working for the United Nations. Seven years of secondment. I was a U.N. official.

ALFRED WELLS: And come back. A lot have left and not come back.

WELLS: I've had the bilateral, I've had the multilateral from a bilateral standpoint, and I've had the multilateral from inside the multilateral system and then come back.

ALFRED WELLS: She's the only one. Not the only woman; the only one who's come back as an ambassador. She left as an ambassador and came back as an ambassador. That is certain--male or female--ever.

WELLS: I think so. Usually what happens is that you've gone on secondment and then you retire from the U.S. Government. You stay at that high pay level and keep going. I took quite a pay cut coming back from the U.N., from the U.N. system back to the U.S. Government.

Q: And you were there seven years?

WELLS: I was seven years on secondment to the U.N. Let's take it from the beginning. I was at the U.S. mission to the U.N., and after two and a half years I said, "Look, I think I'm ready to change and move on." I was tired. I was burned out. Then I was having the health problems. I was looking for something but had the medical clearance problem.

Then Bradford Morse said, "Why don't you come work for us? Get a secondment. I have a great post for you."

Anyway, I ended up in Uganda on a secondment. And what happens is that you don't resign or retire. This is an activity approved by U.S. statute, the law of the land, and what happens is that you retain your reemployment rights for the State Department if you apply for reemployment within ninety days of completing your U.N. employment. Then the other link is that if you maintain your payments towards retirement, the State Department will continue to pay. The idea is that you are on a secondment, on a loan. The State Department does not pay your salary and they are not telling you what to do, but simply you are taking your experience as a U.S. Government officer and taking it to the system. I did that for seven years.

Q: That is very unusual. I've heard of a lot of people being seconded for one or two years, but seven!

WELLS: What goes against you on all of this is that you're lost in terms of the promotion system.

Q: Exactly. You've removed yourself from the promotion lists.
ALFRED WELLS: There's nobody writing efficiency reports for you to go into State Department files.

WELLS: They write reports in the U.N. system, but they're skimpy. There's nothing to it. But nevertheless, I had made FSO-1 by the time I went in, and I thought I'd moved fairly rapidly and I was not expecting to be promoted again immediately. Then within the U.N. system, it's very interesting, because people said, "Look, you went to this country." I literally ended up taking the most difficult assignment.

Q: You chose it?

WELLS: It was offered - Uganda - immediately after [Idi] Amin had left. At that point, everybody expected Uganda would again fairly quickly return to becoming the pearl of Africa. Well, it didn't, and by the time I actually started going out there, it was a very difficult situation. I was repeatedly told that "We have a lot of people who come on secondment from your government, but who don't take on the most difficult assignment that we have."

So I went there as Res Rep [Resident Representative, the chief U.N. representative in a country or area.] and then became the special representative of the U.N. Secretary General, too. Most of the time, special representatives of the Secretary General have assistant secretary general-level pay in the U.N. system, but I didn't get that. No matter. It was one fantastic experience.

Then the Uganda assignment was over, and I went to Geneva and started up this IMPACT program. Then the question came up, "Do I stay on in the U.N. system and retire or do I go back?" I started having some serious conversations with the State Department, because you can't just stay out there. They have to agree that you can stay. If they're putting in money on your retirement, they want to know is it in the national interest that you are doing this thing?

It came up to when I was supposed to be approved for a seventh year, so that means at the beginning of that year. We had talked a little earlier. My argument was, "Look, I want to come back, but I want to go into a good job. I hear about all these senior people who are walking the halls and don't have anything to do. I love what I'm doing right now. You may not understand it, but it gives me tremendous satisfaction. How can I make sure that I will have a good job?"

That's when it was agreed that my name would be submitted to the deputy secretary's committee for chiefs of mission. Again, I was delighted that this was going to happen, but I was very skeptical. I figured that this long out of the system, sure, everybody loves Melissa, but you've been out of sight, out of mind. All of a sudden there's new talent, and nobody knows you anymore, so to speak, in terms of your professional life.

Q: Not only that, but the last two or three years were a terrible time for anybody to get a post.

WELLS: In addition to that.

Q: They've been chopping heads right, left, and center.

ALFRED WELLS: Yes.

WELLS: I figured, "All right. Let's give it a try." Then I remember... I don't want to say exactly with whom I discussed it, but I said, "I don't want to be just an ambassador. I want an interesting post!" [Laughter] Here she is, out of sight, out of mind for seven years, and now she's demanding an interesting post!

So when the committee met, which was early January 1986, I had a call shortly thereafter to say that two names had been selected for Mozambique to be sent to the secretary. Then within another week or so, as I recall, the secretary decided on one name to forward to the White House for Mozambique, and that was my name.

I mean, I was just stunned. I couldn't believe this had happened. All these wonderful

emotions about having come into the State Department to begin with for the love of the service and all that. I can still do something. And there's the next hurdle, you know. Will I get through that one [Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC), at odds with the Department of State over US policy toward Mozambique, held up Wells' nomination as ambassador in an attempt to force it to extend recognition to RENAMO, a rebel group. The hold lasted over eleven months, until September 9, 1987, when Wells was confirmed by the Senate, 64 to 24.]?

Then the strange thing, as the saying is, it never rains but it pours. Within about two weeks--no, I think it was that same week. I had just had the word that I'm the name. Later on that week, I had a call from Washington saying, "We would like to have your response to the following, and that is to put your name on a short list of candidates to be submitted to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees as the Deputy U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees."

Q: My goodness!

WELLS: Now, this is as the U.S. candidate, because it's usually a U.S. national in that position. This position would have been in Geneva. I would have had to drive five more minutes to get to the office than what I was doing. Remuneration would have been considerably higher than what I was receiving at the time. I would have been at assistant secretary general level.

ALFRED WELLS: About twice as high.

WELLS: I wouldn't say twice, darling, but assistant secretary general level in the U.N. There's no guarantee that I would have been selected, but my qualifications were very good in terms of my work in Uganda and so on. I said, "I can't believe this, all in the same week. I guess you don't know what happened."

They said, "No, we don't know anything about that," about the deputy secretary's committee.

So I said, "Give me a chance to think about it for a couple of days." We talked about it and discussed it. Had I agreed to the U.N. High Commissioner short list option and had I been selected... and I'm not sure I could have straddled both, you see, whether I could run for that job and run for the White House, too. I mean, it's just not done. Excuse me! [Laughter] But had I done the U.N. High Commissioner route, I would have had to resign from the Service after a year, you see, because my secondment could not go on any longer. There was a limit to it. Faced with that, I said, "Thank you very much. I think I'll take my chances in terms of getting through the White House." And that took a little while, but it went through, and here I am on track. I am absolutely certain that I made all the right decisions.

Q: Wonderful!

WELLS: It was a very, very rewarding experience for me to feel so wanted. I mean that honestly, because I always felt that way about the Service.

Q: It's quite an accolade, Melissa. There are very few, only seventeen of my forty-forty subjects, who are career women. The rest are all non-career. And of those career women, very few get more than one embassy. Very few. They get one and that's sort of considered enough. "We've done our bit by the women this year," you know.

ALFRED WELLS: Really? You'd think they'd hold on to the few women they have.

Q: Yes. Very few go on. Roz [Rozanne] Ridgway is one exception; she's had two posts. Pat Byrne is an exception; she's had two posts and now she's at the U.N.

WELLS: Right.

Q: I'd like to know about your four houses. Where are they?

WELLS: Shall we take them in chronological order? [Laughter] One house is down in the Caribbean, a little island called Carriacou, which is a dependency of Grenada, a lovely island three miles by fifteen miles in the Grenadines between Grenada and St. Vincent. There we bought the land back in the early sixties. We planted trees, built a cistern, a water catchment, a little shack. Then Al designed and built a very nice house there.

Q: Handy to have your own architect, isn't it? [Laughter]

WELLS: Very lucky! Not just an architect. He actually physically put the whole thing up. Chronologically, the next one then is the Canaries, right? Yes. That's out of London. We bought that.

ALFRED WELLS: When we were stationed in London.

WELLS: It's in the least developed island of the Canaries. We like the least developed places.

ALFRED WELLS: No airport.

WELLS: No airport. The only one without an airport.

ALFRED WELLS: And we're not in the capital city.

WELLS: An island called La Gomera. It's a lovely old building. The walls go back 300 or 400 years.

ALFRED WELLS: It's on the town square, between the town square and the cliff falling off into the ocean, a lovely view.

WELLS: Twelve-thousand foot volcano. We face it. Gorgeous!

Q: They both sound gorgeous, both of your places.

ALFRED WELLS: Then there's a tree house up in the trees in Connecticut.

Q: A tree house in Connecticut?

ALFRED WELLS: Yes. It's a real house. There it is. [Mr. Wells referring to a photograph.]

Q: Oh, my gosh, it really is, isn't it? That's a big place.

ALFRED WELLS: Yes, just fifteen feet above the ground, held up by six trees.

Q: That's where in Connecticut?

ALFRED WELLS: Salisbury, Connecticut. The last one is in the picture below, which is our home in France.

Q: My word!

ALFRED WELLS: Near Geneva.

WELLS: In the meantime, we also had a house in Washington, which we then let go, sold.

ALFRED WELLS: To pay our debts.

WELLS: All of these are paid for at this stage.

ALFRED WELLS: We're proud of having no mortgages.

Q: I think that's marvelous. Do you rent these?

ALFRED WELLS: Yes.

Q: You don't want to leave them empty. This one in France, near Geneva, looks very large. What is the other building? A big barn?

ALFRED WELLS: A barn. There are two houses.

Q: What is that for? The help?

ALFRED WELLS: Not now. It was. Now it's our house that we're going to use for vacations.

WELLS: We have the main house rented.

ALFRED WELLS: It was being done over when that picture was taken from a helicopter. You can see the debris thrown out of the window. I was doing it over. It's gorgeous.

Q: They all are gorgeous. How do you divide your time? And then on top of that, you have an official residence to keep up.

WELLS: Well, it just goes with this feeling that the world belongs to us and we belong to the world.

Q: That's wonderful.

WELLS: How can you get there? We don't think of it that way. These places are our places, and the children feel very possessive about all of them. There's a spirit about the La Gomera place, a spirit about Carriacou, a spirit about the tree house. We're just greedy! We just want them all! [Laughter]

Q: Are you the business manager?

WELLS: Oh, absolutely.

Q: The one who makes certain that the taxes are paid and everything runs?

WELLS: That everything runs and gets rented.

Q: And that you're not renting it for the period you want to be there. I should think that would get quite confusing.

ALFRED WELLS: Yes. It's getting confusing right this moment. It looks as though I'm going to be down at this one over Easter, and I've rented it for Easter. We shall see.

Q: You sold your Washington house?

WELLS: We sold the Washington house.

Q: Is that the one that was over near Rock Creek?

WELLS: Yes.

Q: This is marvelous. My goodness, you're very good copy. [Laughter]

WELLS: [Laughter] The Caribbean and the Canary Islands, I mean, these are not great, luxurious houses, yet they're lovely and they're in beautiful, interesting places, our kind of places.

Q: Do you furnish them according to where they are? You use the local things?

WELLS: Yes, very basic and practical. We don't keep very valuable things in there, obviously, but I think they're both very attractive.

ALFRED WELLS: All our valuable things are stored up in New York State at government expense. [Laughter] That's the truth.

Q: These are your family pieces?

ALFRED WELLS: No, from the Washington house. We sold it.

WELLS: The difficulty in all of this is furniture!

ALFRED WELLS: The lovely things we had in the Washington house, we couldn't get them to France because we would have had to pay for it. So they sit here right now.

Q: Did you buy a lot of antiques when you were in Europe?

ALFRED WELLS: Yes.

Q: London and Paris?

ALFRED WELLS: Here and there.

Q: Wonderful.

Melissa, would you, on tape, please tell us about calling on the Dean of the Corps?

WELLS: In Guinea-Bissau? My call on him? Not his return call on me?

Q: That's the follow-up. We want both.

WELLS: We were really destined for each other, the Egyptian ambassador and I. [Laughter] This was in Guinea-Bissau. I started to make my calls on the members of the diplomatic corps. The Dean of the Diplomatic Corps at that point in time was the Egyptian ambassador, a charming man who had been there since shortly after they became independent.

When I got there, I lived, as did many other diplomats, in the former Portuguese officers' quarters. They had an officers' club, and this was turned into a hotel. It looked like a motel. Everything is one level. You've got to get this picture here. It's not a high rise or anything. Then all the rooms were the same. There was a little sitting room, a tiny little thing, a bedroom, and then a bath. Then a little pathway out in the road going up and down this place. I lived there, the Cuban ambassador lived there, and So-and-so lived there. We were all over the place. The cars would come with their little flags and things,

rather cute, everybody waiting for a house to become available and into which to move.

So I'm going to call on the Dean, who is the Egyptian ambassador, and he happens to live in the same place, in spite of all these years that have gone by. It was rather depressing for the rest of us that the Dean is still living in this place. But there were other reasons. He never was able to find the house that he wanted.

So the secretaries called each other and made the appointment, and I had met him very briefly. So on an appointed afternoon I'm supposed to go, and I know where he lives. He's just across on the other side of this motel arrangement, eight doors down. I thought, "Should I walk down? No! Why not take the official car?" It has a flag on it. I get into the car. "Don't go too fast. We've only got eight doors to go down."

I could see, as I'm driving down the motel here, as I climbed in, they must have been peering out the window watching my door, because the butler comes out in his starched white coat. Just as I climb into the car, the butler comes out, because it's going to be one minute later and I'm going to be there. We even turned around to take up a little more time, and then he opened the door. I got out, I walk in, and just as I approach the door, the front door opens of this little motel room, and the Egyptian ambassador is there. We shake hands and say hello, and I step inside, and it is very different from my quarters, because he has carpets like going up the walls. Oh, beautiful carpeting! Lovely carpets, much too large for this room, but he didn't fold them over because he had to put furniture in, so they were sort of going up the walls. [Laughter] Not all the way to the ceiling.

Q: Gives "wall to wall" a new meaning.

WELLS: I mean, it was like stepping into a different world. Egyptian furniture.

ALFRED WELLS: No gerbils, though.

Q: No gerbils?

WELLS: No. That's where I'm coming from. My sitting room consisted of a refrigerator. I had a sofa and a chair, but this is, I think, before you all came, Al. I didn't have the zoo in the sitting room.

Q: You mean all that zoo was in that room?

ALFRED WELLS: Five cages, one on top of the other.

WELLS: Before we found Henri, our friend out in the country, where we could park all these animals, we had all these animals in there in the front room.

ALFRED WELLS: [Mr. Wells imitating animal sounds.]

WELLS: We were setting up a post. They had no bureaus, and I remember mentioning

that I had no place to put my things, my underwear and so forth. "Could I take one of these filing cabinets?" I was very glad to have it. So in my bedroom I had a filing cabinet, and I had one drawer for my undies, stockings, and things, another drawer for my tops and slips and things, and another drawer for something else.

Back to the Egyptian Embassy. Stepping into the Arabian Nights, I could smell coffee that was being prepared, and a butler. It was incredible! He lived in exactly the same dimensions, the same place, and look what he's done! Then he was so excited because of a certain event that had taken place that morning, he said, "Before you sit down, Madam Ambassador, may I show you my bed?" The bedroom is right there. There isn't even a door; it's just an archway, you see. He took me in and he showed me the bed, and I knew why he was so excited, because there was a dearth of good mattresses in this hotel, and obviously he had been there long enough...

He knew every bed, mattress, box spring, in that compound, and he knew when somebody was moving out, and he said, "I want that."

Q: It pays to be the Dean.

WELLS: He was the Dean, and he'd been there long enough. He got the bed. He was so pleased.

Q: This bed wasn't made up?

WELLS: No, it was made up.

Q: But it was an ordinary bed?

ALFRED WELLS: A double bed.

WELLS: It was a double bed.

Q: But not an antique or anything like that?

WELLS: No. It was exactly like everybody else's bed, except...

Q: It had good springs.

WELLS: It had good springs. [Laughter] I had twin beds in my bedroom, and one of them was ghastly. I mean, the mattress was shot. It was terrible. The other one was all right. Anyway, so that was that.

Then comes the return visit, you see. The person who arrives calls on the Dean, and then the Dean comes back and returns the call. Supposedly, under this protocol system you get to know each other. His secretary called to say that he would like to make an appointment to call on Ambassador Wells.

Now the Egyptian ambassador is going to return the visit. Carol Hazzard, my secretary, made the arrangements. I remember clearly. She had heard a detailed description of my visit and she said, "Well, we have to offer coffee." We don't have fancy metal containers and all these things. You know how they do it up. But we had a nice little coffee set, cheese and crackers.

My office, for security reasons, had no windows. In Bissau, the electricity was going out fifteen times a day; no electricity, no air conditioning, no lights. The phones don't work. You just have to get used to it. On the bookcase I had a candle and matches. I had left them there; I forget why. They should have been on my desk, but they weren't.

So the ambassador comes, sits down, and we start to talk. Carol brought in the coffee and put cream in it. Then--BOOM!--pitch black. Since there's not a window in the room, it is pitch black. I said, "Oh, here it goes again. Now, don't get up. Don't get up."

I get up in the dark, because these power outages are not just two or three minutes long and because I know that Carol, next door, is in the same situation. She has a sliver of a window in her room, but she can't help me, either, in terms of opening the door and letting that sliver of light in. So I said, "Don't get up, Mr. Ambassador. Don't get up." I am going around the desk, and I figured it was safer to get down on all fours, because otherwise I would fall on top of him. I wasn't quite sure where he was. It was pitch black.

So I was down here. He feels me down here, you see, on the floor. "Ambassador, don't move! I'm going to get the candle." I bumped into him, and then I found it immediately. I lit the match, and he realized what I was doing.

ALFRED WELLS: I love it! [Laughter]

Q: But he wondered at first!

ALFRED WELLS: Don't you love the combination of first he shows her the bed and then she goes running around and brushing up against his legs in the dark?

WELLS: We became very good friends.

Q: I can see why.

WELLS: He gave me a lovely silver tray when I left, and we tried to get in touch with him in Cairo. We missed him when he was there. We kept in touch after that.

Q: That's a lovely story.

WELLS: It was really sweet.

Q: It shows how glamorous the Foreign Service is. There was also a scene you described

of sitting on the floor eating black olives.
WELLS: Gosh, you remember all these things. I wasn't on the floor; I was on the sofa of my little sitting room with the refrigerator in it.

Q: Was this your first day? When was this?

WELLS: Early on.

ALFRED WELLS: What country?

WELLS: Bissau.

Q: She was telling this at the ambassadors' course. I didn't have my machine on.

WELLS: Yes. It must have been the first week or ten days. The refrigerator just sort of came with the room. I think it was U.S. Government stock. It didn't come with the hotel management.

Q: Did that stay in your living room the whole time?

WELLS: Yes! I was very glad it was there. That was my food supply, because there was nothing to eat in the restaurants. "Ca tem. Ca tem." [Creole for "Don't have any."] Every time you'd go in, they'd tell you they don't have anything. Then we would get supplied either from Dakar, people would bring food, chocolate bars, things like that, or else you would find eggs, maybe. The refrigerator was a very important thing to have, but it was a big refrigerator and took up a lot of space.

We had just recently had the flying commissary of West Africa, where you put in your order and you order so many cans of olives and things like that. Anyway, I hadn't been there long enough to have any orders of anything, so people gave me things until I put my order in. The lights were out again and had been out for a couple of hours, and the pumps weren't working, so you couldn't take a shower; there was no water. I had a little flashlight and I got to the refrigerator, because with the window, there was a little more light than in my office, but it was dark. Then I found this can of olives, which I had opened earlier at some point. I sat there. I had opened the can, but the lid was sort of down. I remember these were big, ripe California olives, and I ate the whole can.

Q: The whole can! [Laughter]

WELLS: This is the life of an ambassador! [Laughter] Because I remember when they telephoned when I was in Rio de Janeiro to say, "Can we put your name on the list?" and I said, "Wait, wait. I want to talk about it."

I went to talk to my friend Myles Frechette, who is just now ambassador in the Cameroon. Myles happened to be there, and I told him what had just happened. We went down to have coffee, and Myles said, "You're gong to live in one of those old Portuguese

beautiful colonial buildings!" I could just see my beautiful old, rambling building, you know, with vines.

Q: Thick walls!

WELLS: And here I am, in the heat, in the dark, eating olives! [Laughter]

Q: That's a lovely story; that really is.

WELLS: But I did it, and I was very involved. I got my can of olives out, I sat down. This is the life of an ambassador! I was in the mood for playing a part! [Laughter]

Q: And you wouldn't have missed it for the world, I'm sure. One last question of you, and then I have one for your husband. How is it going with the Wang?

WELLS: I took a course.

Q: You said you were going to. You said they terrified you.

WELLS: We worked on it about four hours a day or so, and I loved it! I had all these little disks and things. I couldn't do it for you right now, but I think once I get to post and we do have the personal computers there for unclassified material, I think I can swing into it.

Q: Good!

WELLS: It's fun. It's fun.

Q: And you have a new skill.

WELLS: I wouldn't call it a skill at this point. I had enough exposure that I feel I can jump in.

Q: Do you use computers?

ALFRED WELLS: I've just begun. I was in the Library of Congress and in a search with one.

Q: Good!

ALFRED WELLS: Then I used one also in London in National Geographic to make a search.
Q: You won't have any trouble. The government provides these now?

ALFRED WELLS: I took a computer course to use in architecture.

Q: Obviously, this has been a partnership thing, and you have both been very successful. You've raised a family and everything. What is the one piece of advice you would give a young tandem couple starting out in the Foreign Service? In effect, that's what you people were.

ALFRED WELLS: Yes. Be careful picking your spouse! [Laughter] Now, let's see. Seriously, it depends so much on the character of the individuals. You can't give advice. I suppose the best advice I can give, which sounds rather ridiculous, is don't ever take vacations without your children, particularly in the Foreign Service. Make sure that the children know, from when they're one or two years old, that they're part of the group. I think it's always important, but particularly that they feel they're with you and get to enjoy Foreign Service and get the feeling of loving travel and loving different places, different people. Otherwise, you're gong to get this syndrome that you get in the Foreign Service of children feeling that they've missed something. It may not be good advice.

Q: It's difficult enough to raise a family here if you don't move, but if you're in the Foreign Service, by definition you move a lot. Added to that, you each had your careers and you weren't always in the same place. How did you do it? How were you able to give the boys this feeling of family, which they obviously have? They may be all over the globe, but they feel that where you are is home.

ALFRED WELLS: I think the easiest thing for me to do, I can't give my own example, is to watch what Melissa does. She does two things which I find are extraordinary. One is that she devotes herself to one child at a time, and when she does, it's like a sponge. She devotes herself entirely, if only for a short period, because she's working or traveling. I think that's a great trick--not a trick. It's very important, I think, to not try to devote yourself to two children at the same moment.

WELLS: I don't know about one child at a time.

ALFRED WELLS: You do, and it's good.

WELLS: I don't know how you can; it's impossible when they're little. But what I did do, even when they were very small, and I try to keep it up, is that you obviously have two of them and you deal with them both, but then you make time to be with one alone, as well.

ALFRED WELLS: That's what I meant.

WELLS: It's not all the time, you see. You take time out for a while together, like the trip I took with Gregory.

ALFRED WELLS: That's what I meant. Exactly.

Q: Yes. But you're downplaying yourself, Al, because obviously you've had a large part to play in this, too. What did you do when you were with Gregory in Nairobi and Mama was far away most of the time?

ALFRED WELLS: Nothing specific. I had work that kept me away half the time. The only thing I really did, which was on Melissa's advice, was to live in this run-down hotel, which was absolutely marvelous.

WELLS: You know what it was?

Q: No.

WELLS: Karen Blixen's first home.

Q: Oh, is that so?

WELLS: Her first home.

ALFRED WELLS: The one before the one in the movie. We had a little house on the hotel grounds and had a marvelous driver. So when I was away, Gregory could live in this house, the hotel delivered his meals to him, and he had maid service, the driver drove him to school, drove him back. You didn't have to worry about paying servants, paying for food, shopping. It ran itself. So he was all by himself quite a bit at the age of thirteen, fourteen.

Q: But he didn't feel abandoned.

WELLS: No.

ALFRED WELLS: No. He doesn't say so, but I think he was a little lonely. Melissa would come over when she could. I'd be there, I'd say, half the time. Half the time I was traveling.

Q: What kind of a school was he going to? A British school?

WELLS: The first one was a boarding school. Then he went to Hillcrest, which was a day school. Then he had the club.

ALFRED WELLS: A beautiful club. Of course, he didn't play golf, but he had tennis, squash, his friends.

WELLS: Swimming pool.

ALFRED WELLS: Very interesting. His friends were all colored skins. He never made any distinction. Neither son has. They resent any remarks that come out even by mistake sometimes. I'll make one that implies a consciousness of skin color. They don't like that.

Q: I think it's wonderful that they have those reactions growing up.

Thank you both so much for a fascinating interview.

***

[April 18, 1991]

This is a continuation of a series of interviews with Melissa Wells. The last interview, taped in 1987, left off as she was awaiting Senate confirmation to be U.S. Ambassador to Mozambique. Her confirmation had been held up by Senator Jesse Helms, who was trying to force the State Department to change its policy vis-à-vis the Mozambique government. He favored the insurgents, called RENAMO (Mozambique National Resistance), who have close ties to South Africa.

After eleven months and two days, the longest delay in U.S. diplomatic history, Mrs. Wells was finally confirmed. Secretary of State George Shultz, who supported Ambassador Wells throughout her ordeal, spoke at her swearing-in ceremony at the Department of State.

At the present time, Ambassador Wells is awaiting confirmation by the Senate to become U.S. Ambassador to Zaire. If Ambassador Wells succeeds in becoming Ambassador to Zaire, it will be her third assignment as chief of mission and she will be only the second woman in U.S. history to have achieved such a distinction. Frances Willis, who retired from the U.S. Foreign Service in 1964, was the other.

Q: It's wonderful to see you again, Melissa. In the introduction, I said that you were now awaiting confirmation on your ambassadorship to Zaire. Do you have a feeling of déjà vu about this? We seem to always meet just when you're...

WELLS: To meet at these moments. [Laughter] Well, the last time around, in terms of waiting to be confirmed to go to Mozambique, that was like nothing else. That's the only way I can describe it. Déjà vu, yes, in the sense that I am familiar with the process, because I've gone through the confirmation process several times already. I don't know that at this stage I could actually say that I'm being "held up." Maybe I'm just the perennial optimist, but at this stage I've had my hearings. At the first meeting of the committee to vote on the nominees, Senator Helms said that he had some questions. These were five questions, in this case on Angola, which we have answered. He then later asked for clarification on two of them, and that's been sent in. My hope is that at the next business meeting of the committee, I will come up for a vote and get voted out. I hope. I take nothing for granted until after it's happened. That's just the best way to react in these situations.

Q: Yes. Did you read anything into it, the fact that the nominations of the other four who went before the hearing with you were approved?

WELLS: They were voted out of committee. They were then confirmed by the full Senate and are now in the process of going to post and being sworn in and so forth. No, I

would say that... Let's look at it this way: there were five of us up. They were for the posts of Malawi, Djibouti, Niger, Senegal, and Zaire. I'm not sure whether the others even got any questions; they may have received some. I don't know. I don't think they did.

Q: Was Senator Helms present at the hearing?

WELLS: No, he was not present at the hearing.

Q: He was not the last time, either.

WELLS: I had heard that he was going to be. Everyone expected him to be. But he did not show up. Then at the end of the hearing, I was handed a letter from the senator which had five questions. It may have been that... I'm sure he was busy doing something else, that he had planned to ask those questions in person, and since he was not able to attend the hearing, he then submitted them in writing. But no, the senator certainly has an interest in Angola and I'm aware of that. Even though I'm not going to Angola. Zaire is a neighboring country. Any senator has a right to ask questions. There is a nominee now for Thailand who has [been asked] a lot of questions on Burma, for example. So I don't see anything out of order.

Q: Fine. After watching the PBS [Public Broadcasting Service] film, "Diplomatic Profiles" last evening, I have several questions of you. First of all, may I compliment you on a splendid performance, although it isn't a performance, it's just you.

WELLS: Thank you.

Q: It certainly gave us a very clear picture of what your life was like in Mozambique. I wish it had been longer. At one point--and correct me if I'm wrong--I believe you said that before you went, you pictured the war in a certain way, and that when you got there, you found that you were wrong. Could you tell me in what way the picture of the war changed when you got there?

WELLS: There's two things here. One is that, for whatever reasons, I was not aware of people traveling as much throughout the country and doing reporting--I mean people from our embassy--as when I got there. The other issue being that I personally traveled up and down. I mean, I stopped logging the miles after 10,000 or something like that. It's a big country to go from A to B in the north, for example. It's a huge country. The best way to describe it is, their coastline is the equivalent of from Maine to Florida. So to move around, you cover the miles. You log the miles.

I'm not trying to impugn anything that happened before, because that was a particular time in history, the relationship with the host government, but I made it my business to travel a great deal, to visit what they call the campos dos deslocados (these were the people who had been displaced, who are essentially refugees within their own country) and to talk to them. I talked to people who had availed themselves of amnesty, I talked to

people in hospitals, essentially to civilians. Those with amnesty obviously had been carrying weapons before, but essentially [I talked] to civilians, to try to piece together from them what happened, number one, to them. How was this attack? And two, what was their understanding of what this world is all about.

To answer the question that you put to me, it began to take shape in the following fashion: one, that there was a strong internal component to the war that I had not been aware of and which was basically rooted in the mistakes that the FRELIMO [National Front for the Liberation of Mozambique] had made when they came to power at the time of Independence. Once I learned about these and raised them with the government, they began to respond and say, "Yes, we admit we made mistakes. We made mistakes."

Q: A Marxist/Leninist slant to everything?

WELLS: Let me give you an example. Two things. Shortly after I arrived, I was, of course, making my calls and I met with one of the leaders what you would call the theoretician for the FRELIMO party; in other words, in terms of where they've been, where they're going. It was a bit of a stiff meeting at first, and he was definitely what one would call a hard-liner. As we started to talk (I had prepared this ahead of time), I said, "You know, I'd like to try out on you some of the questions that I had to answer for the Senate of the United States to be confirmed." And I trotted them out. He smiled. [Laughter] He realized. But the point I was making was that they were hanging onto language about Marxist-Leninist dogma which they weren't implementing, which they weren't using.

Eventually we became very good friends during my stay there. I remember before the FRELIMO party congress in 1989, he put the question to me, saying, "Look, Melissa. If you could write it out, what would you like to see come out of this congress?"

I came back immediately and said, "Remember the first time we met and I tried out those questions on you? Why do you need all these references in your charter to Marxism, Leninism, and all? You're not doing it. You're trying to privatize. The churches are open. Is this a monument that you need for sentimental reasons? This is your past. You're shooting yourself in the foot. It's time that you gave all this up."

Now, I cannot say that I'm personally responsible for this, because there was a general trend in this direction in any event, but I'm pleased to report that as a result of that congress, there were no further references to Marxism or Leninism in the party thinking.

Q: They've dropped it?

WELLS: They've dropped it. They've dropped it totally. Of course, at this stage they now have a new constitution. They have a new electoral law. They have several new parties registered. They're very small parties, but they are definitely committed to a multi-party system.

But again, to go back to that important question, what was different were two things. One, the fact that there was a deep involvement in terms of the local people and their dissatisfaction with many of the things that FRELIMO did. Why it had to be counteracted in such violent fashion and with the use of terror against civilians is another question.

Q: Was that by FRELIMO?

WELLS: No, I'm talking in terms of the RENAMO, the hundreds of civilians that I interviewed and the question of the children. You saw the child combatants, I mean children abducted and trained to kill. Certainly in the case of the children, this was documented by American psychologists who came out there and interviewed and did statistical work with them and worked with them in terms of psychodrama, trying to rehabilitate these children who, at the age of twelve, killed people.

Q: Did I understand correctly, Melissa, that the little boy who was mute...

WELLS: Frenisi. Yes.

Q: ...was asked to set fire to his family's home and he did it?

WELLS: This is one of many horrible stories. What happened in his case is... and people obviously will be asking, if he's mute, how do we know the story? And I'll get to that in a moment. But his story is that he went down to fetch water by the pond, the stream, wherever it was, as he did every day of his life. He came back to their hut and there were men with guns surrounding it. Then they told him to set fire to the hut. They gave him a torch. Of course, the hut is what you call a palhota, a thatched roof and so forth, so that the thing went up in flames. Immediately the parents came running out and then their heads were cut off. There are other gory parts to the whole thing.

You see, when Frenisi came to us at the Lhanguene center, I remember I reached out for him, because I used to go there several times a week to be with these children, and he just wouldn't speak to anybody, wouldn't speak to the other children, nothing. He would just always be off by himself. He would not participate in any of the activities. He'd be off in a corner, and then from time to time tears would pour from his eyes. I remember I'd go there with ice cream and Coca-Colas and with Donald Duck cartoons, and I remember taking him and putting him on my lap, and he was like a little sack. "Okay, she wants to hold me." I mean, I tried to cuddle him and so forth, but just no reaction whatsoever, except sometimes he cried.

Eventually the story came out via drawings, because the way Dr. Boothby would draw the stories out from the children was by asking them to draw. Frenisi did participate in this eventually because there were bright colors and papers and things that at first he wouldn't have anything to do with. He was simply asked, because nobody knew his story. He was there for months on end, and nobody knew. We knew something must have happened which was horrible, but we didn't understand why he didn't talk to anybody. He was asked to draw his home, and Dr. Boothby has that drawing, the first drawing. He

said, "You know, any person with minimal training in psychology, especially child psychology, can see that this child has a deep problem." At this stage, as I recall, the whole violence aspect hadn't even come into it.

So he drew him out and he asked him to draw this part and to draw that part, and then the whole story came out. The reason he wasn't speaking was because he felt guilty.

Q: Of course! Poor little thing.

WELLS: Because in his little six-year-old mind, he was the one who killed his parents because he set fire to the thing. I was there when they reenacted the psychodrama which is where the other children who've all had brutal experiences, as well, play different parts, and little Frenisi is sitting, watching. He watches a little boy playing his part and they reenact the story according to Frenisi, with killings and so forth. Frenisi sees that that there is nothing he could have done. To you, to me, hearing the story we arrive at an immediate conclusion that he was forced to do it. But Frenisi had never clicked on that. He was just beset with rage and guilt that he was responsible for the death of his parents.

Q: The poor child.

WELLS: This is just one story. There are so many.

Q: And you saw so many! The scenes where you were sitting by the side of a nine-year-old child who was, if I understood correctly, in terminal shock, your face was...

WELLS: She died before I left the hospital. She was not just moaning. I mean, she was unconscious, but there were sounds coming out of her mouth. I can tell you here--I couldn't do it on the film--that I believe in God, and what I was doing there was just holding onto her and praying and giving strength for whatever the future held, and the future held that she was dead before we left the hospital. And she was in a very good hospital.

Remember that we're traveling with a camera crew and sound equipment and so forth. When I was traveling by myself, I didn't take extraordinary risks, but with this whole gang I just did a quick and easy visit to a hospital in a war zone that was fairly close to us, as opposed to some of the areas that I was asked to go to in very difficult areas, but where I would never dream of taking other people along. Certainly people from my embassy, possibly, but not the camera crew.

Q: Had you seen this child before?
WELLS: No, I'd never seen the child before.

Q: Your face was a picture of compassion.

WELLS: I was told by the Italian doctor there that they didn't expect her to live through the day. We then went on and visited with other wounded. I often tried to find out,

preferably from their own lips (if they didn't speak Portuguese, I would simply ask a nurse to translate or something), what was their story? What happened?

Q: Did you ever find out that child's story?

WELLS: No.

Q: I suppose you have to multiply that.

WELLS: By the hundreds, and then those I never saw. Thousands.

Q: Is it true that approximately 100,000 people have been killed during this ten years?

WELLS: Yes.

Q: That's a modest estimate?

WELLS: A modest estimate. A modest estimate.

Q: You mentioned a home for children, and I could not quite get the name.

WELLS: Lhanguene. That was the one that appears in the film you saw last night, which was a hostel for out-of-town students. When we understood, this problem particularly of the child soldiers, if I may call it that, but which is only part of a much larger problem of traumatized children who may not have actually carried weapons and killed, but who have been exposed to an enormous amount of violence...

Q: Is this run by the U.S.?

WELLS: I'm very proud of that. I had a little bit of trouble getting it started. I don't want to go into all that.

Q: You started it?

WELLS: I started it. I got the U.S. Government to fund this project. We had to have a place for the children and the government made that available. We had to get it fit to live in, and Al [Wells] donated his services in terms of supervising the plumbing and making sure the toilets work and so forth.

But then the key thing was to bring the specialized talent from the States. First we had a child psychiatrist and a psychiatric social worker who came over and who did the first cut in terms of interviewing the children that were in that place at that time. Then later on, a few months later, once the idea was developed into a project, because we didn't know what to do. What do you do with children who have been taught to bayonet and to kill? Do you just treat them like any other twelve-year-old, or do you put them in prison, or do you "warehouse" them, you know, because they're unsafe for society? These were issues

that had to be discussed.

Dr. Neil Boothby from Duke University is a very well-known child psychologist who has worked in Southeast Asia and in Central America, and particularly with this problem of children and violence. The whole project was implemented under Save the Children Federation of the U.S.

Q: Who put up the original money?

WELLS: The U.S. Government. Then the project acted as a lead for Save the Children, U.K., for Redd Barna from Norway and for various others. The idea was to develop a training model, because at that stage there was not one trained psychologist or psychiatrist in all of Mozambique. They had to rely on outside talent. Obviously these people are still in training and sometime will qualify, but we can't wait that long.

So what Boothby did was to develop a model in terms of training local people, mainly people from the Ministry of Education who have a lot of experience with children, or the Ministry of Health or the National Women's Organization. He created a training course, quite sophisticated, in terms of being able to size up the children, to spot which child could possibly have what you call post traumatic stress disorder, which is the key thing that we're looking for here.
Q: They used to call that shell-shock? It comprises shell-shock?

WELLS: Yes. PTSD, as it's known, didn't even exist in World War II. I understand that some people in the world still question whether it exists or not. But certainly in the U.S. we recognize it as a real problem. Many of our Vietnam veterans have suffered and are still suffering from it, everything from nightmares to aggressive behavior, many symptoms. But how to assess it, how to draw out the child and then how to deal with it in the psychodrama?

Then in addition to that, we got into the question of reuniting the children with families, if you can find them. By the time I left Mozambique, we had reunited 2,000 children--2,000--in a country at war, where people can't read, where they have not even seen a photograph of a loved one. We managed to track down the families. I won't always say the parents, because often the parents are killed or we just don't know.

Q: How were you able to do that, since illiteracy is such a problem?

WELLS: This is going to take some time, okay? I love this project, obviously. The training model for what you would call the parapsychologists, the local people, the people being trained, would then be taken to other provinces to train others in the treatment aspect. Because there's the treatment aspect of the child, if necessary, and then there is the reunification aspect.

On the reunification aspect, we also developed a procedure which Dr. Boothby had used successfully in another part of the world, and it runs as follows: From the children that

were in the home, we got clues to identity. Of course it depended on what age they were and how much information they had, but the older they were, the better they remembered the name of the village, the name of their parents. They can give clues as to from whence they came. The younger they are, the more difficult it gets, but we don't give up. We get together all the clues, and then it becomes obvious that some children come from a certain region. Then we photographed all of the children. Then each child spoke into a tape recorder, an audio cassette, in his or her tribal language, saying, "I am Paulo, my mother's name is So-and-so," and as much as they recall of what happened to them.

Then we went out, and I went with them. I went up to the place in Gaza Province, where we first tried this, and what happened was that the people who were still in a camp or were displaced there were told to assemble at a certain point. I'd say maybe 500 people showed up. We wanted more people, so we had to wait. We said, "This concerns children, your children possibly, children of your friends." So they came. You could just see the mood was like, "Let me get on with my... I have to go get water, I have to do this, I have to do the other."

So the man spoke and said, "Look, we're going to be passing out to you sheets of photographs." It wasn't one single photograph, but there would be a sheet, quite large, like a poster size almost, and it would have six, eight, sometimes ten photographs of the children. We passed them around, and I remember watching the crowd looking at these. Remember, many of these people had never seen a photograph, and all of us change when we're photographed. So they started looking and passing, mumbling and muttering. I remember a few people come up to the desk that we had, because we had said, "If you think you might recognize someone up there, come up. You don't have to be sure. Just come up."

I remember at one point a wonderful woman came up, an elderly woman, very dignified face, and she came up and she pointed and said, "I think this is my grandson Angelo." And it was Angelo. We don't bring the children with us. So then the next step is that she comes and she sits at another table. I was sitting at the same table with her. We got the tape that Angelo had recorded, and played it for this woman. I was so moved. I mean, I don't understand the language. They were speaking Shangaan. The woman was sitting opposite me and was looking down into the tape recorder which she's never seen in her life, and a voice is coming out of the tape recorder. I remember her face was sort of crumpling up there, looking, "What is this?" I kept watching her face, and then the tears started pouring down her cheeks. I got up and I hugged her, because it was clear what was happening. She was hearing a voice. Again, your voice on a tape recorder is not the same as the one you hear with your ear. She was not sure, but what the voice was saying matched with the information she knew about Angelo.

Then she and I composed ourselves, went back, turned the tape around, and she recorded for Angelo. Got the process?

Q: I do, indeed.

WELLS: I asked someone to translate for me, because, again, it's in Shangaan. One of the most moving things. She said, "This is your grandmother." And she said, "Angelo, what you don't know is that your mother is alive. She came back to us two months ago, three months ago, and we killed a goat to celebrate." And so forth.

So then we take the tape back to Angelo, because, again, you have to be careful. Angelo has been through a terrible experience: he's been abducted. He was abducted and lived in the rebel camps for a long time. Again, we have to be very careful, because a child must want to go back to the family, because after the experience that the child has gone through, they may find the safety of Maputo and the center... Well, the child has to want to go back. You can't just say, "We've found somebody who knows Angelo. Out with Angelo."

This was another interesting part of the process because they didn't all immediately say yes. They thought about it; they thought about it. Angelo was reunited. Maybe I'm talking too long about this, but my little boy, the one that was in the film, I saw him, I said goodbye to him before I left. He's outside of Maputo, but again I don't want to say where. We never... Obviously we couldn't find any family of his. We know that his parents are dead. What we did was, because as we found homes for more and more children, the few that were left, it was very sad because they had bonded together as a group and now they're all going off. Frenisi, at this point, was saying, "Well, I want to go back to my family. I want to go back to my family."

Q: This was the child who was mute?

WELLS: Yes, the one who later spoke. He did speak once he caught up. Another time one of them was having a birthday party, a little boy who had lost both his arms, and I came with a birthday cake and we had a little celebration. There was a new child there who didn't speak much, and Frenisi kept bouncing back and forth from one end of the table to the other, you know, going to this little boy and explaining to me, saying, "You know, he's new here." Frenisi was beginning to learn Portuguese at this point, because before that he didn't speak Portuguese. "He's new here. He doesn't talk very much." And it was as if he was looking at me and saying, "I know you know me from when I didn't talk at all." [Laughter] But he was now in charge of this other little one.

Q: Isn't that remarkable!

WELLS: Trying to help him, but making sure that everybody knew that he was helping him. Anyway, he's with the family. We found family for the best friend that Frenisi had at the hostel, and we approached his family to say, "The two boys were so close. We cannot find any trace of Frenisi's family, even in the extended concept of the African family. Will you agree to take him?" And this is the wonderful thing about Africa and its concept of what a family is. They are very poor people and they said, yes, they would.

Q: Did they speak the same tribal language?

WELLS: Yes.

Q: These children who were abducted, is this because the rebels want to raise their own recruits?

WELLS: I don't know the reasons for that. The study that was done, based on dozens and dozens of interviews with children, and I've read it. It has not been published yet. I think it's going to be published at some point in some professional outlet, psychology journal or something like that. But it's difficult to understand. What do they want these little children for? Well, many of the littler ones, you know, collected firewood, collected water, did chores around the camp. But there were others, stronger ones, the bigger ones, who became part of that whole [guerilla] concept. They wanted to be one of the big boys and they could become even more brutal. They were trying to outdo each other in terms of brutality.
Q: Of course.

WELLS: These children were found firing weapons at the Army, and that was a problem in itself, to get the Army to hand over the children, because they don't see them as children; they see them as young boys carrying weapons. And you're talking about ten and eleven-year-olds.

Q: FRELIMO used children, too, did they?

WELLS: No. I remember at one point, one place I visited, this was up country, a bunch of boys had been brought in, and the person in charge there said, "What do you mean? Antonio (or whatever his name was), give up your weapon to the guard here." The guard agreed. Antonio took out the ammunition, he took out the magazine. He took that Kalashnikov apart and put it back together again, and Antonio was about eleven.

Q: Imagine!

WELLS: And he knew how to use it.

Q: You visited Lhanguene once a week?

WELLS: In the early days, at least once a week, if not more. I'd go over there every weekend.

Q: Was this for a particular reason that you went that often? This was not policy; this was humanity?

WELLS: This was me, yes. I was overwhelmed with these children and their problems. While we were putting the project together, and then when the first team came, the child psychologist and psychiatric social worker, I was there for most of the interviews. I just wanted this thing to work. I mean, I gave a lot of my time because, quite honestly, Ann, you can't just handle it in a bureaucratic way. It wouldn't work. It wouldn't fit. You see,

we're used to emergency programs where we send food, we send medical supplies, tents, blankets, you name it. But "shrinks"? That's something else.

Q: These are badly damaged children.

WELLS: Yes. What do you do with them? There's one school of thought within the Mozambique government--and I'm glad it did not prevail--that these children should be what we call "warehoused." That was the term I coined. Not lock them up. They're not in prison, but...

Q: The Romanians did that with their retarded children.

WELLS: You just keep them because they're unsafe.

Q: Yes.

WELLS: The approach that prevailed, of course, is totally different in terms of the future. Children can be rehabilitated. Some of them are damaged for the rest of their lives, obviously. Children have been reunited. One of the ringleaders who admitted in his interviews that he can remember killing six people, at least, I mean, bayonets, whatever, has gone back to live with his uncle. In his case, it was particularly sad because when they located the family, the family didn't want him. I won't say they didn't want him; they were not thrilled with bringing him back because they were afraid that they would get retribution from their neighbors because he was involved in killing, you see. He'd been seen in attacks.

We tend to forget, and this is so interesting when you get inside Africa, when you get out of the cities and into the bush and into the villages, how perceptive the people are, how they communicate with no electronic equipment at all. That bush telegraph... and that's not just Mozambique, it's happened to me in other parts of Africa. It's incredible how it works. They know what's going on.

Q: They are problems with any number of facets, aren't they?

WELLS: Yes.

Q: It seems to me this would be very valuable work in view of the number of children who are being dislocated all over the world--the Kurds, African children...

WELLS: Yes. I don't want to go into it in this interview, but within the last couple of weeks I've been in touch here in Washington to see what can be done in a more organized fashion for the "children of war". I'm not talking just about immunization and food and so forth, because that's a tremendous problem, but there are so many people focusing on that as opposed to the psychological damage. It's not just the Mozambique experience; it's the Uganda experience before that, where they had the kidogos - again, child soldiers. We know that it certainly went on in Cambodia. These are people who are alive and they are

the adults of tomorrow. They're carrying this stuff around in their heads, and we have to cope with it. We can't just lock them up. We can't just turn them loose, either, turn them loose without talking to them, without trying to relieve them of guilt feelings, which is essentially what our program does. It has to be focused, done in a more organized fashion.

Q: When you went to Mozambique, you were very enthusiastic. The interview that you did with me shows that. You had a set of goals. Did those goals change once you got there?

WELLS: No. No, they didn't. The goals were the same.

Q: You found they were all valid?

WELLS: They were all valid and they would be, obviously, in terms of enhancing the bilateral relationship, but within that, trying to bring about peace talks, which we did achieve. The peace talks have borne disappointing fruits thus far, but peace is never easy after a long war, and I'm still hopeful. We did achieve a more open political society. There's a new constitution. There is the commitment to political pluralism. Those are very important achievements. I'm glad that it happened on my watch, and I take some credit for it.

Q: Well, you certainly should! I notice in an article that I cut out referring to the PALMO, which apparently is one of the new parties out there, it is cited as being very black nationalistic and possibly a problem down the road.

WELLS: Right.

Q: Would you care to comment on that?

WELLS: His name escapes me right now, but the man who founded the party came in to see us early on at the Embassy, and while he never made clear these very strong black nationalist views that he had, he did ask for money to help him get started, because he knew from all our statements, all my statements, and TV and so forth, that we always talked about multi-parties. We said we don't give money to any parties. We just don't do that with U.S. government funds.

Then subsequently, at least two, if not three, other parties are either registered already or in formation... I'm beginning to lose touch because I'm focusing very strongly on, hopefully, my new assignment.

Q: Yes, of course.

WELLS: But there are others. There's CUNIMO, MONAMO, several groups which could be described as splinter groups of RENAMO, and mainly people who are living outside of Mozambique. I think that's wonderful. That's good. Their plans are to open offices and come back and start talking. I think that's great.

Q: I would like to read a tiny piece for the record here from the May 29, 1989 New Yorker magazine, which was about Mozambique.

The article starts out with saying, "There is also the Melissa Wells factor." Then it goes on to say, "Mrs. Wells was widely known and admired by the time she arrived. And her performance in situ seemed only to increase her local popularity. She was Portuguese-speaking, experienced in Africa, knowledgeable about Mozambique, and endlessly energetic, traveling the length of the country to see things for herself and adopting local projects. She is a tall, handsome woman with an easy manner and the steady gaze of a very good poker player."

WELLS: [Laughter] I'll have to tell you about that.

Q: "She is a serious reporter, known for personally investigating important stories, asking hard questions, and making detailed notes. And she is taken seriously by the Mozambican government."

In talking about this, it also mentioned the fact that your nomination was held up for eleven months by Jesse Helms, but that because of this, you were well known there. Do you think, in looking back, that perhaps Senator Helms did you a favor, or do you think it did not matter and you would have been as successful as you were, anyway?

WELLS: I don't want to sound like the typical Pollyanna, but I really, truly believe that everything happens for a purpose. There is no doubt in my mind that the delay in my confirmation made me a heroine by the time I stepped...
No, there is no doubt that I was a heroine by the time I arrived. I mean, this is like Joan of Arc! Children were being named after me! The first little Melissa was born the day that the Senate voted.

Q: Is that so?

WELLS: The next Melissa was born the day that I presented credentials. I kept getting pictures about little Melissas up and down Mozambique. I know of about four. Then I really didn't answer them all. I wanted to discourage this, because there's just so many little dresses that I could buy at this point. [Laughter]

But to get back to the point, had it not been for that, I would have been, I won't say just like any ambassador, because the U.S. ambassador has a special place, certainly, in most places of the world, someone to be recognized and to be dealt with. All I was doing was upholding the administration's policy; I was not doing anything else, but it turned me into a heroine and opened doors for me that--well, I have a lot of confidence; I think I would have opened them eventually, anyway, but, boy, did I get off to a running start! Now, please, please make it absolutely clear that I don't want to recommend this for any other ambassador, and once is more than enough. [Laughter]

Q: Oh, I'm sure of that.

***

April 23, 1991 - Ambassador Wells' confirmation as U.S. Ambassador to Zaire was approved by the Senate on a voice vote without debate.

[May 4, 1995]

This interview was conducted as Ambassador Wells was preparing for her assignment as consul general at Sao Paulo, Brazil and followed her tours as ambassador to Zaire and as undersecretary of administration on secondment to the United Nations.

The interview brought up the danger of cysticercosis in Brazil, from which Mrs. Wells has suffered for many years following a prior assignment in Brazil. Mrs. Wells replied that she intended to give the disease national prominence in her highly visible role as consul general at Brazil's largest city and added:

WELLS: On a very personal basis, I want to help make this a recognized problem in this country.

It's very prevalent in developing countries where you eat pork. And of course pork is the cheapest form of protein aside from fish if you're near a lake or a river or an ocean. Beef is very expensive. Chicken requires... but pork, and you feed it garbage, you feed it offal, and where they don't have inspection and so forth it's terribly prevalent. Since I was diagnosed and treated at NIH the incidence of cysticercosis in the States has just skyrocketed, particularly because of all the immigrants coming from below the border.

Q: Of course, of course.

WELLS: I find it fascinating that you bring this up.

Q: This is something that people who read your oral history take very careful note of because you went through quite a siege.

WELLS: Quite an experience.

Q: I should say it was.

WELLS: I had the good fortune to have been diagnosed early on and not been exposed... well, who knows how long? But there are people who just live on this pork meat for year after year after year and are so heavily infested with the parasite that they're irremediably...

Q: They must be in agony, too.

WELLS: What happens is you go into permanent seizure and then you die.

Q: Poor souls. It's a shame.

Now this is a different kind of agony, but would you go with me to Zaire?

WELLS: Yes.
Q: I have several clippings here from the newspapers.

WELLS: Look at you. Yes.

Q: Because I have never been there and I don't know very much about it, but it seemed to me that when you arrived there, in Zaire, you found yourself with quite a mess on your hands. The president was Mobutu and there are 35 million people. It's a very rich country, but the per capita income is $170 a year, or it was then. Now, in September 1991, apparently things blew up. Would you tell me when you arrived what your impressions?

WELLS: Well when I arrived which was in early June '91, the main challenge was to take advantage of the opening in the political scene in terms of... President Mobutu had decided that political pluralism be introduced. In other words there could be a number of parties. At first he had decided there should be only three parties. Everybody objected and then we started getting parties by the dozens. Everybody and their dog and three cats decided to form a party. But in terms of major parties, and when I arrived and started making my contacts and finding out what they were hoping to do and how this political pluralism towards democracy is supposed to evolve, I was confronted time and again with the same issue. That was, "You, the United States, put him, Mobutu, there. You get him out of here." I just confronted it head on and this is now June '91. I said, "Look, let me make one thing very clear to you. The 82nd airborne will never, ever be seen in Zaire. General Schwarzkopf has retired. Now what are we going to do next?" "You liberated Europe from Hitler, etc." "Excuse me," I said, "that was 1940s. This is 1991." "We need a peacekeeping force." I'm sort of generalizing the many, and there were a number of these encounters. "We need a peacekeeping force."

I said, "You mean like the Congo in the sixties?" This was before peacekeeping operations became a land office business just a few years ago. I said, "Look, the world has changed. You don't have a war on here to begin with. Peacekeeping operations cost money." "We'll all be killed while we're discussing all of this." I said, "That won't work." "What are we going to do?" I said, "You Zaireans have to develop a transition plan which includes President Mobutu. Nobody is going to take him out. I'm not going to carry him out. He's a bit overweight. [laughter] A transition plan which includes President Mobutu and we will support you." And after much toing and froing and trying to play the empty chair, the opposition said, "Well you know I'm not attending because they [Mobutu people] didn't do this." I finally had to shake a few of these people and said, "Do you realize what you're doing? You're so dependent on the outside world. When are you going to grow up and wear long pants?" In many ways I think it's only a woman who can talk that way. [laughter]

Q: Good point.

WELLS: But it was roughing them up and then by gum they did it. I developed very good contacts with Monsignor Monsengwo who's still one of my dearest friends, who was the archbishop of what is now called Kisangani. It used to be Stanleyville back in the Congo days of the sixties. He was elected president of what was called the National Conference, which went on for months on end. And everyone was criticizing this National Conference. That they never get anything done. But it was the first time that the Zairean people had a chance to express themselves in an open forum that was televised most of the time. Sometimes there were literally technical difficulties when it broke down, and other times President Mobutu decided that the criticism was unacceptable and so forth and closed it down, but eventually it reopened. It was a wonderful exercise in political expression which the country had never, ever experienced.

Q: This was throughout the summer of '91?

WELLS: No, this went beyond then. I'll get to the evacuation. That's right, that's what you asked me. This went into '92. Actually started after '91, the Conference. But to finish with the National Conference, and as they were putting their plan together it was clear that the President didn't like it and he started to obstruct it. And I'm telescoping here two years of living there to the point where when I said farewell, I said my good-byes to the President, I informed him, under instructions from the US government, that I was leaving and that there would not be a US ambassador until such time that there was a transitional government according to the National Conference, and as we speak as of May 4 (1995) this has still held. Other countries, the French, the Belgians and so forth have maintained their ambassadors, but we have not.

Now, going back to the troubles of '91, September '91, what happened was that with all the economic problems in Zaire, the army was very irregularly paid. They were late in being paid or only some of them were paid, but early in the morning on a day in September '91, we heard that a unit had mutinied out by the airport and that they had ransacked the international airport at Kinshasa, and that they were moving down the main road towards Kinshasa and of course the population was just joining them and looting everything in sight and burning cars and so forth. The long and short of this is that over a period of five to seven days we evacuated almost 3,000 Americans, including missionaries from the interior and so forth. Over 20,000 expatriates left Zaire, many of whom, most of whom have never come back.

Q: They were the ones who ran the businesses?

WELLS: They ran the businesses, the shops the whole lot. And Kinshasa certainly was just looted, gutted out. It was incredible. The main streets... I think it was just stolen out. Fortunately there was relatively little loss of life because when this began, while I didn't know what the outcome was going to be, certainly I felt that Washington felt, 'Oh my God, here comes another Congo crisis of the sixties.' But it was not. It was not. Yes, there

was loss of life, but the people were not targeting human beings they were targeting goods. It was as if they had taken the economic mismanagement of decades into their own hands, and this was only in Kinshasa actually, into their own hands and just looted everything in sight. Within a month, almost a month later it was the same thing, the Army was not paid in the south in the province of Shaba, the capital there, Lubumbashi, the army went on a rampage and did the same thing, looted the whole place. We evacuated and closed the consulate general there. Then you had sporadic incidents all over the country. But with the fear that we might be heading towards another Congo crisis-type situation of the sixties, thousands of people left. I must say that within a few months, certainly within six months, many of the missionaries came back.

Some of them never left because they don't leave. They just feel that their mission is to be there and I must say that in terms of the American missionaries, I want put this on the record, I was so impressed. When I was there the American Presbyterian church was celebrating its centenary in Zaire and that means that they literally followed in the footsteps of Henry Stanley.

Q: Yes, exactly.

WELLS: It was incredible. In Kananga, out in the boondocks of the Kasai, a wonderful hospital still working under the most incredibly difficult conditions. I have stayed in touch with the Presbyterians here. I went down and spoke with them, prayed with them in South Carolina a couple of months ago. The people who are supporting this mission. But what happened as a result of that evacuation was that you had all these foreigners leave. There was no interest in investment, even the type of high risk investment which was offered at the time before the looting. Our own embassy staff, we had been the largest post in Africa when I arrived, and I had instructions from the undersecretary for management to reduce the size of the post, well, with the help of the mutinous Zairean army within 48 hours we were down to 35 people.

Q: How many did you evacuate?

WELLS: As I said 3000 Americans, but that included missionaries, businessmen but also our own staff and our own dependents.

Q: How big had our mission been?

WELLS: We had over, as I recall including AID, State and all the various elements, we had over 300 people. And then full of dependents. And contractors and so forth. Then we were left with a tremendous problem because we still owned houses. We started all this back in 1960 or whatever. The beautiful buildings with furniture and everything in them and my whole staff disappeared out from under me and I kept asking for more staff in order to consolidate the government properties. First the belongings of those who had been evacuated, then the belongings of the US government, and then try to figure out what to do with all the properties we owned. They kept that ceiling in place rigidly for security reasons and I finally, I didn't send it, I alerted them. I threatened them, I said I

am in the process of sending this message in. Let me read it to you. "I am the US ambassador in Zaire. Under section blah-blah-blah I am responsible for US government properties. Now, I cannot, I refuse to accept any responsibility for US government property to the extent that we had it when you haven't given me the staff." My ceiling immediately went up by two or at least three people, general services officers, came.

Q: There was a piece about it in either the State magazine or the Foreign Service Journal about the evacuation and the evacuation of pets.

WELLS: Oh, the petevac. It was wonderful. I must tell you about this. First we got the people out.

Q: How did it feel when your husband had to get on the plane and leave you behind? He couldn't have been very happy about that.

WELLS: No, he wasn't. He went to South Africa because our son was living in South Africa. We have one son in South Africa and one in Brazil. Other than that he would have to go and live with his brothers. He has a family. So we got a special dispensation for him to go to South Africa. No, he was there. He was a great help the first few days because we had so many of the missionaries who moved into the residence. I was sleeping at the chancery. These wonderful people who came armed with their own food and everything and got themselves organized as to who was going to use which bathroom. We had close to a hundred people sleeping in the residence, on the terrace and all over the place, sleeping bags. Waiting to be picked up on which flight to get out. No, he was wonderful. He was a great help for that. I didn't see much of him, but then he took off for South Africa. I like that point in your book that you made.

Q: Reverse roles?

WELLS: The reverse roles.

Q: With a vengeance. That's the most dramatic thing that could possibly be.

WELLS: That's true.

Q: The wife had to evacuate the husband.

WELLS: But then again, this actually was the second time it happened. The first time was in Uganda with the United Nations. He had never arrived at post but after we had had two murders of UN staff, we had an evacuation and then I came back, but without the family. So Zaire was actually our second unaccompanied post. I've had it. Life is too short. I've done my stint on that.

Q: I would think. You couldn't have let him stay anyway?

WELLS: Un-un [No].

Q: Of course you had to set the example.

WELLS: I have to set the example. He couldn't stay.

Q: But that must have been awful. You did write that you were rattling around in the huge residence.

WELLS: And then later - this beautiful residence that we have there, really magnificent - and I was all alone in it, with the household staff who were wonderful, the Zairean household staff.

Q: What sort of security people did you have for yourself?

WELLS: Early on, early on we had special people come from DS [Diplomatic Security Service] in the department and they were protecting 24 hours around the clock, and then that was reduced as the situation... But actually that's what made the headlines in September '91, but we went through a much worse security problem in January of '93 where at least we figure over 300 people were killed in Kinshasa and that's when the French ambassador was killed.

Q: Oh, yes, of course.

WELLS: He had just arrived. I had just gotten to know him. He couldn't have been there more than six weeks. He was shot. His number two called one night at the height of the troubles and said, "My ambassador has been killed. Do you have a body bag?" I couldn't go over that night but as soon as it was dawn I went over with all the help that we could, because I felt very close to the French embassy there. We'd always worked very closely and I knew the previous ambassador, Henri Rethore, very, very well. He was my closest colleague in Kinshasa. But the situation has not improved that much there. There's been some movement towards improving the transition, but I'm very worried about Zaire.
Q: Is it true that Mobutu lives on his yacht on the river?

WELLS: He has a yacht and it goes... it's not a yacht; it's a river boat. It's a very attractive vessel. He loves it, and once you've been on it a couple of times you can understand why. He loves the sense of the river and he goes up, he doesn't go all the way up to Gbadolite. He doesn't go up that far. He spends a lot of time in Gbadolite. I don't think he spends much time in Kinshasa these days. He wasn't spending much time in Kinshasa. When the boat comes in, it docks there, out where you present your credentials. The name escapes me right now. I would meet with him there or else actually on the boat. Many times he asked us, me and some other ambassadors, to come and have breakfast with him or dinner, lunch, whatever it was. I flew to Gbadolite to talk to him a couple of times. I flew up river and met with him once. I had some very urgent message to deliver and he sent his helicopter for me and I took my deputy, John Yates, with me, because it was tricky. The timing. We took off in a helicopter and flew upriver and landed on the boat in a storm in the middle of the river. There was a regular place for the helicopter to land. And

then I delivered my message and then we took off.

Q: In bad weather?

WELLS: In bad weather. Yes. Actually the pilot of the helicopter was knocking on the door of the salon, where [the president] meets people. He said, "We've got to take off now otherwise we'll have to spend the night here." That's why I took the Deputy Chief of Mission with me, just in case that happened. [laughter]

Q: You have to think of those things, don't you?

WELLS: Yes.

Q: Is it true that there is really very little infrastructure left in the country?

WELLS: What is so tragic is, you see Ann, when I first arrived, and I've done this in so many of my African posts, I've collected books written in another era. It seems I'm always traveling around countries with guide books from the 1950s or something. They talked about the marvelous hotels and roads and "stop here for lunch." "Look at the animals here." And here they've all been shot. In the case of Zaire I had a very interesting book. I suppose it came out in the late forties. Very detailed, giving you travel routes and places to stay. Obviously the Belgians are still in charge. And while you don't expect all of that to still be around, you expect some of it to be around. When I started traveling in the interior, it was very clear that the country as such was really going back to the bush. What you would call major cities in the interior have no light, have no running water, no medications, no schools.

Q: No transportation?

WELLS: No transportation. There's <u>nothing</u>.

Q: I gather they don't even have the boats that used to go up and down the Congo.

WELLS: No, they have those but they run less and less frequently and in terrible condition.

Q: There was an article about that in the National Geographic. I'm sure you must have seen that and it was just appalling.

WELLS: It's appalling. It's probably worse than that now. In effect to me Zaire at this point is Kinshasa and Matadi, the port. I'd say the roads and the towns between Matadi, the port at the mouth of the Zaire river and Kinshasa and then Lubumbashi, where I had gone to visit a couple of times while I was there. Particularly when the whole sort of Shaba consciousness started up again... They refused to call themselves Shabas; they called themselves Katangans... At one point, there was a very hostile reception - people, placards.

I knew the governor was behind it because you can't come right up to an airplane at an airport. It's fine to have all your demonstrators outside or inside the terminal or something, but to be right up there as the plane lands... So, obviously the governor was in cahoots with all this. And at the time that I... very, very hostile signs about the fact that the US government had not noticed an earthquake, but that we were sending relief, assistance for all the Kasaians who were fleeing from Shaba, back to their homes. I saw this reception and I made a point of walking by slowly and reading every single sign, shaking the hand of each of them, because they were really just trying to look ferocious. They'd been put up to it and I wanted them to know that I knew they weren't really ferocious. [laughter]

Q: You terrified them.

WELLS: I had security with me at the time and [sound of growling]. And I said, "Yes, yes, and what exactly does that mean?" and "How did you get that information?" I didn't overdo it, but I didn't just walk past them. But there again, Lubumbashi, the former Elizabethville, which is the center, the heart of the copper belt and the cobalt belt, and what is so sad now, particularly after the looting. I'd gone down after the looting, after we'd closed the consulate, although I stayed in the residence there. The office of the consulate had been totally burned down. The mines weren't functioning, the smelters, and the copper processing plants weren't functioning and, if anything, they were literally being taken apart by the employees and sold as scrap across the border in Zambia.

Q: Is this because the managerial class had all fled and there was nobody there to run it? I understood there were 100,000 people put out of work.

WELLS: Because it closed down, yes.

Q: They closed down everything?

WELLS: They closed down.

Q: And is the United States to blame for this because we are no longer giving them all the aid we were giving them at the time of the Angolan war?

WELLS: Oh, yes. Because then I had some genuinely very hostile delegations who came to see me. I first met with the governor there. Then I said, "Look, I will meet with these delegations but I want to meet with those representing the Kasaians." These are the people who are being tormented and whose houses were being taken over and who were living in effect in a concentration camp around the railroad station in the Kansai.
There they made the point: [Speaking in a gruff voice] "Well, we will have to withhold our cobalt" and so forth. I just let them have it. I said, "You may not have heard, but the cold war is over. We are no longer producing bombs and we have a huge cobalt surplus pile and we're going to start selling it. You're going to have to <u>eat</u> your cobalt." I literally said, "Vous allez <u>manger</u> votre cobalte." So don't give me this nonsense. But the point of

all of this, Ann, is that they were playing games rooted in the sixties, and over and over again I said, "The world has changed. You are falling off the map." I couldn't say, "Nobody cares about you any more."

Q: But the Belgians don't, the French don't. I mean, the French had no problems with pulling out.

WELLS: They care for different reasons. We all do. In terms of the strategic role that the Congo played, and what is so sad about Zaire is that no new generation of leader has come up. If you read Madeleine Cobb's Congo Cable and so forth, they're all still there, thirty years later. A couple of them have died now, recently, since I left Papa Ileo died recently. It's stagnant. It's still rooted in expected power plays to come from the outside, as opposed to, "Okay, let's do it ourselves. Let's clean up this thing."

Q: Now, the army was pretty loyal to Mobutu, was it? How does he stay in power?

WELLS: Well, Mobutu is a brilliant politician. He has more political smarts in one little finger of his hand than the entire opposition put together. This is the tragedy. He figured this out long ago, so there isn't just one military force. I mean he has a presidential guard, there's the army, there are the gendarmes.

Q: Oh, the way Saddam Hussein does it? Various little cadres.

WELLS: Various cadres. Trusted people appointed to them, but still never relying totally. One of these could go wrong and he still has others.

Q: I see, so he doesn't have to worry about coups d'état?

WELLS: That's right. Let me tell you about one thing that I treasured very much about my experience in Zaire and that is... I must give credit to President Mobutu and the government at that time. They gave me full access on television. I mean, I was interviewed always after I met with him. I was interviewed when I met with ministers and so forth. And rarely - on some occasions they did - but rarely did they cut it, censor it, edit it. Once I realized that this was going on, I played to it; I took advantage of it, because I didn't know how long it would last. As a result, and I spoke out very frankly, I acquired a wonderful nickname, a sobriquet which I shall treasure for the rest of my life. Tantine. Auntie. Now at first I said, "Tantine? Is this because of Uncle Sam and I'm a woman, is this Auntie Sam or what does this mean?" I mean I speak French, Tante is an aunt. I said, "But why a tante?" "Oh, no, but don't you know the expression tantine. Tantine may or may not be related to you by blood as an aunt should be. A tantine is a senior woman in the family to whom you come and tell your troubles to and get good advice." And one of the most wonderful moments of my entire career was when this National Conference had reopened. It had been closed by Mobutu for some time and the US had applied an enormous amount of pressure and I made damn sure that everybody knew that we were doing this. And then the National Conference was reopening and the diplomatic corps was asked to attend and they had a special section down there at the

front and as usual, Ann, I'm late. I pull up in the official car with all the flags flying. I could see all the other ambassadors and their flags and their drivers are sitting over there and I go running up the stairs and I'm trying to figure out which door to go in. "Where is the diplomatic section?" "That way, that way, madam." I start walking, I start running almost, walking fast down this aisle to get to the front. And then I hear applause and I said, "Oh dear God, Monsengwo is coming and I'm in front of him. I start looking around and there's no Monsengwo and I see people looking at me and clapping (claps) "Tantine, Tantine, Tantine." Well, it didn't take me long, Ann, to stop running down the aisle and to absorb fully for the US government and for Melissa Wells in person. I acquired a very regal step coming down the aisle.[laughter]

Q: You see your mother's training was not for nothing.

WELLS: I sat down in my proper place. Of course, my diplomatic colleagues are saying, "My God, what an entrance you made." Never mind. Never mind. I collected that day. (laughter)

Q: That's lovely. I think that's delicious. Incidentally, you are well remembered after you leave posts. I was at an event for Rosa M. Parks and it was put on by the Episcopal church over in Alexandria. And my sister had come from California for this and I met her there. She said, "I'd like you to meet so and so who has been in Africa." I can't remember where she was but when she heard what work I was doing she said, "Do you know Melissa Wells?" And I said, "Indeed I do." And she said, "You know she's still loved." I think she was referring...

WELLS: She was from where?

Q: She was referring to Uganda, I believe.

WELLS: Uganda.

Q: I believe it went back to Uganda. And she said, "You know it's terrific, really, what she's done." So you see.

WELLS: Those are real jewels.

Q: Those are wonderful things.

WELLS: I'll tell you one more story on Zaire.

Q: Please.

WELLS: That was in February of '92 and the Conference had been suspended. That's right. Okay. Now backtrack. My royal entry here, we were going a little backwards in time. The Conference had been suspended because my grand entry was when it reopened again. The Conference had been suspended and we were aware that the société laïc, like

the non-governmental associations, but all Zaireans...

Q: The lay people, you mean.

WELLS: The lay groups, yes, were planning a major demonstration. They had come to us but we did not want to be caught in any position of fomenting demonstrations or anything. They come into the library and they read about Martin Luther King and so on. It was entirely peaceful. It was church-based. In other words the demonstrators would all collect in churches, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, whatever. On a Sunday. And they had several Sundays of rehearsals beforehand, in terms of training the people. They were going to go out and demonstrate that they wanted the National Conference to start again. They would sing hymns, they would walk arm and arm, and then if violence started they would simply drop to their knees and pray. It was all so reminiscent of our civil rights movement.

Q: Exactly, yes.

WELLS: The appointed Sunday came. We gave strict instructions to the few Americans left in Kinshasa, "Do not go to church." Because we expected that the churches would already be surrounded by guards, by the army. It was a very tense Sunday and since I was at home and I started getting calls at the residence and then I called the driver and said, "Take me to chancery." People started coming in, priests all bloodied up with torn cassocks. Phone calls. You knew something awful was going on but you didn't know exactly what. Then the political counselor was there, and about four in the afternoon, I said, "All right, put all the flags on the car, on the Cadillac, we are going to the hospital. I don't know if we're going to get in or not. But we're going. I want to see what's happening." We drove up to the hospital. I thought they might try to stop us. No, they let us in. We went into the hospital. I was overwhelmed with people. I was taken to the morgue to see the dead from the demonstrations. I talked to the wounded, those who wished to speak at all about anything. And I had my own report to make. I happened to have a meeting with - we had what we called a troika, the Belgian, French and US [ambassadors] meeting with President Mobutu the following day. But I had a first hand report of what happened, not just sitting and listening to phone calls. Then I reported to Washington. They asked me, "Did they march and so forth?" This was never carried on television, but a lot of people knew.

Q: I was going to say that word of that sort of thing gets out.

WELLS: Gets out. In April of that year, in April of 1992, in the United States, there were riots in Los Angeles and I'm sitting watching my Zairean news which is not the most exciting newscast, but anyway, you keep up with it.

Q: You watch what you're got.

WELLS: And he's delivering news about the riots in Los Angeles and the newscaster announces that the prime minister, who was Nguz Karl-i-bond at the time, that the prime

minister wishes the Zairean people to know that he has not given instructions to our ambassador in Washington to go visit hospitals in Los Angeles. I mean, this was so far off the wall. Top Mobutu supporters started calling me immediately and said, "Madame Ambassadeur, je suis très gêné." "This is terrible." I am so embarrassed and ashamed," and this sort of thing. Very clear what it was referring to. I was interviewed but it never appeared on TV, what I felt about it. But I said, "Look, if the Zairean ambassador had wanted to visit any hospital in Los Angeles he was perfectly free to do so." But it never appeared on TV. But how about that?

Q: Isn't that something? They didn't advise the Zairean ambassador! Do we have any representation at all in Zaire now?

WELLS: Chargé.

Q: A chargé. But you closed the consulate general, you said, in Lubumbashi?

WELLS: We've kept the property. We had about three or four loyal FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals] who were still running it for us. I don't know what's happening now, with the closure of posts and so forth. In effect, Lubumbashi has been closed. There's nobody there except some FSNs to guard the property.

Q: You have seen so many things in Africa, Melissa, all of the things you told us about the children and so forth, but I understand that the AIDS crisis is getting pretty bad.

WELLS: It is, yes. And that was one of the really tragic casualties of the whole evacuation, was the AIDS program that we had in Kinshasa. It was magnificent. It took me three days to visit the entire program. Because it was not just a question of training Zaireans in terms of dealing with the disease and analyzing and so on. There was... Well, it's a rather sensitive subject but let me talk about it. One of the fascinating aspects of the program was dealing with prostitutes. Increasing their awareness of the problem but recognizing that this is their livelihood. They're going to continue this profession. Now if they're going to continue this profession, they have to learn how to insist that their clients use condoms.

Q: To protect themselves, yes.

WELLS: In the first place, if one does it, insists on it, then the other one, if she doesn't insist on it, she'll get the business. So you have to get them together on this. Then actually training techniques, I'm not going to go into the details, but which were very sensitive.

Q: I can imagine.

WELLS: In terms of just saying, "You better put a condom on or..." No, but actually teaching the women how to get their customers to wear condoms, and for what reasons.

Q: I suppose they didn't even understand the physiology.

WELLS: No. But it was a beautiful program.

Q: And that had to be suspended?

WELLS: It had to be suspended because we evacuated all the expatriate personnel. We were doing wonderful research in terms of transmission of AIDS, through the milk of lactating AIDS-infected mothers to the children and babies. It was a great loss, a great loss.

Q: It sounds a terrible thing. You have been now in Uganda and you were in Mozambique.

WELLS: Zaire.

Q: You know the whole continent. What's the prognosis? Is there any hope?

WELLS: On AIDS? One of the brightest pictures is in Uganda because they have confronted it openly. It's one of the worst countries in terms of infection. But then again we don't know because... We know Uganda has a very high incidence of infection but we also are very sure that they're reporting everything that they know. You see, many countries don't.

Q: They have better statistics because they don't report it.

WELLS: Yes. They look better statistically but we all know from what we know goes on that the statistics don't reflect the true situation. Until you get over that hurdle, I suppose it's like alcoholics anonymous. You have to get up and say okay. We've got AIDS or I'm an alcoholic and this is what we're going to do. And get the entire leadership of the country behind it. In Zaire certainly we had good programs going but I never had the feeling that the political leadership was behind it the way it is in Uganda. And it was President Museveni. And in Mozambique where President Chissano... I remember when I was there, he had a wonderful speech and then he kept rephrasing it and giving it over and over again about bees going from flower to flower and eventually you know. We had some tee shirts made with Chissano and the bees. There was only one flower. [laughter]

Q: That's pretty good. It's amazing to me that you're still as cheerful and full of energy as you've always been, because I would think after the years you've spent in Africa you would be very discouraged about human beings.

WELLS: Actually it was. I was getting burnt out. And in many ways Zaire was the most difficult one. It was the most depressing one. It was stagnating and not getting anywhere. In spite of there not being any war going on, as in Mozambique or just chaos in Uganda. And I was being sort of burned out, which is the only phrase to describe it, towards the end of my second year there in Zaire.

I had always wanted to climb the mountains of the Moon, the Ruwenzori, I had hoped to do this from Uganda when I was there in the late seventies, but at that time the security was impossible in that area and they had nothing. There were no huts, there were no guides. There was nothing. This always remained a dream of mine. So I organized it from the Zaire side, and this would have been December 1992. I had made inquiries and there was a man, a Swiss national, but who'd lived in Zaire for many years. Actually he had a number of Zairean wives and lived out there. He had a base camp and took people up to the top and brought them back, for a handsome fee, but it was all right. Okay. So I made arrangements to do it in early December which was a good time to go up. There was less rain. It rains all the time up there. Then he was in radio contact with his daughter in Kinshasa and his daughter came in to see me and said, "My father just sent me a message that the army are again looting and they haven't been paid. He was a little worried." Then she came in two days later and said, "My father's packing up and leaving. He suggests we postpone the climb until next year." At that point I wasn't sure that I was going to be there in the following year because I'd asked to be curtailed to two years as I was not with my husband.

So at a moment's notice I shifted the whole trip to Uganda. I got in touch with our ambassador in Kampala, Johnny Carson, and told him I've got these few days because I've got to get down to South Africa for Christmas and would you please organize it? They helped me and they got it done.

But it was the first time that I was back in Uganda since leaving in 1981. And it was very brief. I stayed in a hotel, the Sheraton, in which I had lived for about three weeks and gave up because at that point it was still trying - this was 1979 - it was still trying to be a hotel. Squatters were moving in, chopping up the furniture, burning it to cook their food. There was no running water. I had to use the fire hose to fill my pail up once a day so that I could flush the toilet once a day. This is very healthy. Very healthy. Once you've been an ambassador you should trek up five floors with a bucket of water to flush your toilet once a day. It puts everything into scale. But, Ann, to go back! And I recognized the hotel - same place and the lobby is all nicely done and I go up to the desk and "Oh yes, Ambassador Wells," and they give me a drink with umbrellas and cherries sticking out of it, a welcome drink. I go to my room and the first thing I want to do is find that fire hose that I used to use to fill up my bucket. I go back and they seemed to have moved it and it's no longer accessible. It's sort of locked up.

And then to go out and walk up and down the streets which was inconceivable in my day. I mean, there was shooting and looting. And just to absorb Kampala one evening with little restaurants coming back and people walking around at night. I remember sitting on that balcony and thinking, "I looked out at this scene." It wasn't the same room obviously in which I stayed in 1979, and it was so different.

Then the next day I had hired a car to go to the base camp for the climb and I know the country well and I said could you take the Mubende road and then come back through Mbarara. "Oh, yes." So we took the Mubende road and passed little villages - and I literally started to cry because I could see a post office, a PTT, and people were going in

and out doing their post office business. This was inconceivable. I mean had I gone on the Mubende road in 1980, I would have had my water, my gas, my money, my food - a post office, forget it. There was nothing. It was like Captain Nemo every time you left Kampala; you had to have everything with you. Then of course topping that off was a climb of the Ruwenzori mountains. It was gorgeous. It was in Uganda that I was first exposed to the violence, the suffering, the tragedy of Africa, and it was in Uganda that I was healed. And I had the privilege of telling President Museveni that story during a visit to Kampala in 1994. I got to know Museveni quite well during that earlier period before he became president.

Q: That's very reassuring.

WELLS: I tell you too many stories.

Q: No, you don't at all. That's what this is all about your stories. They're terrific because you feel these things. It's how you feel about these things that happened. The things that happened we can read about in the paper. We don't know how they affect the people who are living through them. Do you suppose Zaire will turn a corner one of these days, one of these years?

WELLS: I don't know.

Q: They've certainly got the metals and minerals and so forth.

WELLS: They have so much wealth. And yet what worries me is that they're... I'm worried about Africa in general; it's sort of falling off the map in terms of people's interest.

Q: Well, what with Rwanda... It's terrible.

WELLS: But then subsequently becoming involved in Sudan's peace process and what worries me is if that one doesn't come through and the war continues, that there's going to be one big path of chaos which is Sudan, Zaire, the two biggest countries in Africa. Which will then suck in all these bordering countries. Zaire is very worrisome. It's very worrisome.

Q: I would think. And much of the wealth has been siphoned out, I suppose, to Swiss banks?

WELLS: Absolutely, absolutely. It's always sort of left to the foreigner to take care of the local people.

Q: How's Kenya doing these days?

WELLS: Kenya? It's quite tense there. It's quite tense there. I mean, this tribal tension that they have.

Q: You didn't have that in Zaire?

WELLS: Oh, gosh, yes. Especially in Katanga. And it was deliberately stoked up. I have kept all the speeches.

Q: Is that so?

WELLS: Oh, yes. Talk about ethnic cleansing. It was happening in Zaire just when we were getting into using that term in terms of the former Yugoslavia.

Q: Now the Hutus moved over the border into Zaire, right?

WELLS: That's now, most recently yes.

Q: That's from another country.

WELLS: That's from another country, yes.

Q: But within Zaire...

WELLS: But within Zaire between what you call the Kasaians who came from another part of Zaire to work in the mines in the Katanga province, and the local people.

Q: The Katangans you call them?

WELLS: That's what they call themselves now. Now they're supposed to be called Shabans, but then they wanted to go back to their original name, Katanga. But they were not interested in working in the mines. And the Belgians, when they came to develop this mineral wealth, they needed people to work in the mines, they brought these Kasaians in from another part of the country. The first generation was working underground in the mines and by the second generation they had some blue collar people. The Belgians established schools, the kids learned to read, so then the third generation of Kasaians were getting white collar jobs, and there it goes. And then the local people say all these foreigners come in here getting all the best jobs and the basic problem is "Look, you didn't want to work here. They brought us in here." It's a rather complex issue.

Q: Now, you asked to be curtailed after two years. Did you feel you had accomplished what you set out to do there?

WELLS: Yes, certainly in terms of support of a national process which was not focused simply on "Get Mobutu out and put me in and everything will come right." But not in terms of working out a compromise transition arrangement, which was then unacceptable to Mobutu.

Q: It's still sort of hanging the same way, isn't it?

WELLS: It's still hanging the same way, and now there's a new prime minister, a very good man, Kengo. But they're not moving towards elections. I would like to see an independent electoral commission set up, something on the order of the South African electoral with participation for the outside. And the key thing being, not to set up a chronological time table in terms of, "You have to have these elections then and you do this and this," but a conditional calendar which would look at things like "Are the governors still Mobutu people?" With a totally broken down infrastructure it's just going to be impossible to monitor elections. Next thing is the military forces, the security forces. Are they still strictly controlled by the president or is there a sharing of authority over them? Until you have those two things sorted out, you can't have really fair elections.

I can see that it would be in President Mobutu's interest to have elections as quickly as possible and then, "Come visit," anything you like - but it's impossible to get around.
Q: Obviously there's not going to be any tourism there. Or any investment.

WELLS: No.

Q: Therefore no jobs. It's terrible. Do we still give them aid?

WELLS: No, no, no. By the time I got there there was no aid, there was no foreign military assistance. The only assistance...

Q: Oh, by the time you got there there was none?

WELLS: Yes, congress had turned everything off. The only assistance was humanitarian assistance.

Q: Humanitarian, yes. Now when you came back, you were then given a special assignment...

WELLS: I was still ambassador in Zaire and it coincided with the change of administration, but I'd already indicated earlier that two years was the maximum length of time that I wanted to stay there, separated from my husband.

Q: Did you see him at any period?

WELLS: Oh, yes. We would get family visitations so I was able to get out every four months or so.

Q: He was living through exciting times himself in South Africa.

WELLS: In South Africa, yes. Our son was going to school. He was getting his master's in geology at Witwatersrand University in Joburg. He's still there. He's working as a hydrologist, a part of geology, with a South African environmental engineering firm. He's

loving it. He's coming next week to visit us.

But I had indicated that two years was just about all I could take and then I didn't know. I mean I knew there would be elections. It would coincide with our elections and the change of administration. So then I was asked whether I would like to be a candidate to become the United Nations undersecretary general for administration and management. I went for an interview with the secretary general, which was in March. I'd had seven years as a staff member with the United Nations Development Program earlier. That was the Uganda experience and then later in Geneva. I also had two and a half years with the US Mission to the UN. All in all I'd had almost ten years of experience either in the UN or around it. So he agreed to hire me and announced it the following day which happened to be International Women's Day.

Q: Now this is in March 1993.

[Note: Ambassador Wells' observations on her service at the United Nations will be added later]

End of interview