

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

AMBASSADOR PAMELA WHITE

Interviewed by: Mark Tauber

Interview date: May 17, 2017

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is May 17 and we are beginning with Ambassador Pamela White on her first interview with us. So, as we always begin, where were you born and raised?

WHITE: I was born in Lewiston, Maine, and I was raised in Maine until I joined the Peace Corps after college, so Maine born and bred.

Q: What is Lewiston like? What's the town like?

WHITE: Well, I was born in Lewiston, which is a sister city of Auburn. Actually, my parents lived in Auburn and Lewiston happened to be (where) the hospital (was), so that's why I said Lewiston, but Auburn was my hometown. I graduated with about 400 other students – so the high school was good sized. There were maybe 20 of us who “ran” the high school – we had pretty much been friends since kindergarten. We thought we were very special. (In) kindergarten (there were) probably 25 in a classroom. We walked to (school from) kindergarten through 12th grade – unless there was a blinding blizzard. And those kids that I went to school with in K-6 were this tight little group. We lived more or less in the same neighborhood. We ran everything from kindergarten to high school.

Q: Tell me a little bit about your family, number of children and so on.

WHITE: I only had one sister, 18 months older than me, still very vibrant and going strong today, and a mom and a dad. I grew up with a grandmother in the house, which was interesting because she was an interesting character, a Red Sox fan, a scrabble player, a harmonica player. Her husband died fairly young. He didn't leave her with life insurance, so she had to work, which was a highly unusual thing in the 1950s. I certainly didn't know one other grandmother other than mine that worked. She worked in a women-owned business (mother/daughter) that employed mostly women. They were paid minimum wage, but it was a decent clean workplace and the owners went to our church. So, from a very young age I had a woman role model who was a member of the workforce. My sister was much quieter, very shy. She really blossomed in collage but during her early years, she was extremely low key. Now (she) has a very successful school for young kids and is a master teacher/administrator/community leader. I always knew I was going to work outside the home, and part of that was that because of my grandmother: Nanny B. She was very smart. She taught me how to play Scrabble! I could beat most anybody, so she and I were great adversaries around the Scrabble table. And her love of language and vast vocabulary certainly translated into (my being) a journalism major at the University of Maine and having a life-long love of writing.

(At the) U. of Maine my sister was the first person to graduate (from college) in the history of our family. I was number two. Neither one of my parents (did). My grandfather went to Bates College, but he did not graduate. He went a couple of years and the reasons that he didn't graduate were always a little murky! He died before I was born, but in family folklore his family was very well off, (then) went through the depression (and) ran out of money! That is the reason he dropped out of college. His sister, who survived until I was about 20 or so--maybe a little bit older—was a TYPE triple A personality. She claimed that he met my grandmother while he was in college. His family was vacationing from Massachusetts. My grandmother at the time was 'just a pretty farmgirl' according to Aunt Helene. Aunt Helene claimed my grandmother asked her precious brother to drop out of college - a story I don't believe but... there were two very different stories put forward. But he was a Maine senator and very active in politics, his Masonic club, and an avid outdoorsman. Now that I think about it, Aunt Helene did in fact finish college at some point, was a WAC during WWII and traveled around Europe extensively. She taught Latin for over 50 years—strangely we were not close. Both my mother and grandmother did not like her at all – understandably. Aunt Helene made no secret that she felt my grandfather had married vastly under him. I remember having high tea at her house – an event I loved but that both my parents considered ridiculous.

My mom was an expert secretary and had some jobs before she had children. She then became my dad's secretary/accountant. She was an avid volunteer at the church, the hospital, wherever. (She was) a great cook, especially desserts. She's (been) dead now two years, but she was a lot of fun. My dad was a master mechanic – he could fix anything. He was also an expert skier and loved any kind of boat. Both mom and dad were very hard workers. I remember for a couple of years dad had to work a couple of jobs, seven days a week. She and my Dad were outdoors people, him more than her. For most of my childhood, in the winter we were skiing, in the summer we were tenting or boating or water skiing or some outdoor activity. Maine was a beautiful place to grow up.

Q: I imagine up in Maine there were lots of opportunities.

WHITE: There was a lake around every corner and my dad knew them all and loved them all. He loves to this day to fish, loves the outdoors. He's 95 and just gave up skiing about 10 years ago, maybe five years ago. Every weekend there was a family council about what we were going to do. And each girl had one vote, including my Mom--and he had two votes! So, if he really wanted to do something, he would just bribe one of us girls with hot fudge sundaes or whatever so he would win the vote. I pretty much always took the bribe. Note: dad died in 2018.

We were middle class, certainly not wealthy, but no one in our neighborhood was wealthy. When I was young, my dad owned a couple of gas stations and then he went into diagnostics for automobiles, which was (at) the very beginning stages, so he was busy all the time. There were no electronics back then and very limited tv, so what we talked, we went outside, and we played. We organized fairs, and hoopla hoop or hopscotch or marble contests. We rode our bicycles for miles. We played sports and had

slumber parties; most of the time with very little adult supervision. We ourselves were organizing and thinking up creative activities.

Q: Were you a big reader at that time?

WHITE: Yes, ever since I can remember. Every car ride to wherever we were going I had a book open, always. I never had a book out of my hand. Neither one of my parents were particularly big readers, nor my sister. My dad occasionally (read). But mostly (for him it was), “Where’s the biggest fish?” or How to tie a fly” ...very practical stuff. But I started with Nancy Drew and read them all 10 times and then went on to the next series. I was devouring books from a very young age. Always way, way out ahead of my class.

Q: Okay.

WHITE: On my 13th birthday or so--when I wanted a red velvet dress desperately--I got speed reading lessons, and I was furious! But my dad said this will be good for me because I so loved reading. It allowed me to consume even more books – and he was right. Although I cried at the time. I wanted that dress.

Q: And was it?

WHITE: It enhanced my whole career. When I was head of (US)AID in three countries and ambassador in two, I was reading at least 200-300 pages a day. Either you can choose to read or just use your gut, but if you like facts, chose to read. There is no other way to see the bigger picture and to analyze various points of view. Your gut may have been fed only minimum facts, so you must expand your horizons. Reading is required. I normally have at least three books going at once to this day.

Q: I remember as a kid seeing the commercials for Evelyn Woods speed reading.

WHITE: Yeah, yeah, for sure! Every time I see some of our current national leaders, who refuse to read even briefing books, I worry. When Secretary (Rex) Tillerson said, “I’m a very slow reader.” I was not only perplexed but in shock. How does someone get to his level and not read a lot? I thought, “Thank goodness that I can process a huge amount of information in very short periods of time.” President Trump also seems to be proud of the fact that he doesn’t read much. Bothersome.

Q: So, they taught you a skill or a way...

WHITE: Yes, I was just reading down the middle of the page. It sort of came because my sister was a slow reader, so she was exposed to it first and then my dad realized the benefit of it. My grandmother might very well have been the REAL force behind this whole thing – since she was also an avid reader.

Q: Also, then at that time, given that you’re in Maine and there isn’t much electronics, did you also take shorthand?

WHITE: No, I never did, but I took typing, for sure. Not everyone that was college bound took typing, but I am so glad my mother talked me into it. It was just a gift, because I was a very rapid typist. I remember my first USAID mission when I was a junior nothing, and the Mission Director said, “Leaders don’t type.” But I was always proud that I could. That mentality that only secretaries should type went on for a good decade or two-- certainly way into the ‘90s. Mission Directors would either scribble on big yellow pads or some poor secretary would take dictation. No, I did not do shorthand. My mother was a whiz. She did go to secretarial school and she could take shorthand and type faster than anyone I knew. She was really good.

Q: I met years ago both people who took shorthand and were speed typists. For that period of time in history, those were remarkable skills.

WHITE: Yes, remarkable and valuable skills. Before we kids were born, she worked at the auto parts store and they loved her because she could whip up receipts, type a million miles a minute on that old typewriter. When I used to have papers, she would help me, because she was the one who could really fly around those keys. When she worked in Texas – my dad was stationed there during the war – she would finish all her work in about two hours – they begged her to PLEASE slow down. She loved to tell that story.

Q: I learned to type but I was never a fast typist. I was always jealous of those who could. All right, well now.

WHITE: Yes, so this little group of 20 kind of ran everything from K through high school. We were buddies, but we were all in the A1 classes – so college bound. A lot of people look back on their high school and say it was the worst. I never had a spare moment. I was editor of the high school newspaper, so I got a free pass to do anything I wanted to do at any time. I have great memories to this day. Johnny Bennett was the photographer, Dr. Johnny Bennett now, and I was the editor/writer. We had free passes to get out of classes at just about any time to cover events. We’d have to go cover the golf match, the basketball game, whatever, and it was go, go, go. High school for me was great fun. My boyfriend was a football player.

But my senior year in high school, my favorite cousin on earth, Jimmy, who was four years older or so, had joined the army and...

Q: What year is this?

WHITE: I graduated in 1967, so that tells you something. He’d gone to Vietnam and he came back my senior year in high school in very bad shape. I went to the hospital to see him and he had tubes everywhere. I’d never seen anything like this, and I was scared to death. And he said, “I’m going to be all right, I’m going to be all right.”

And lo and behold, about two weeks after Jimmy came home, this fabulous team of five or six people, at least two or three of them African Americans, came to my high school.

You know Maine is the least black state in the nation, so I pretty much knew zero about the world or different cultures. This team came from the Peace Corps and they had this fabulous glitzy slide showing young people helping in other cultures. It's the first time and the last time that anyone could remember any Peace Corps team coming to my high school. They showed pictures of Africa and Latin America, and they said if you really want to make a difference in the world you don't have to go to war. At that time in Maine, if you wanted to engage in world outside the state you had two choices: the military and the Peace Corps.

And here's my cousin barely alive, and I felt I needed to try to make a difference in the world that didn't involve killing. I knew I wanted to travel but I sure as hell didn't think joining the military would be a good choice. I decided right then and there that I was going to join the Peace Corps." I pranced home - SO full of righteousness, and with the idea that I was certainly going to change the world. I went home and I said to my Marine Corps dad, "Great news - I'm going to join the Peace Corps". He said, "I don't think so. You're going to go to college like your sister and you'll find someone to marry and that will be that." I said, "You know Dad, I'm just as stubborn as you are!" And he was stubborn, but so I guess was I. I was 18 at the time!

I went off to college and was a journalism major. I sat next to Stephen King for a couple of years. Had I known he was going to be so rich; I would have paid more attention! During my senior year I applied to the Peace Corps and was accepted and never looked back.

Q: Let's not go too quickly away from college. It was always expected you would go to college and you'd seen the Peace Corps, so what sort of degree or concentration were you thinking about?

WHITE: I knew from a very young age I wanted to be a writer. A reporter, or writer, or whatever, but mostly writing. I was writing articles for my high school newspaper when I was 15 or something. I always wanted to do it. I had a wonderful mentor in high school. He was a genius, and he too had aspirations, I think, of being this wonderful journalist but he never was. But he sure knew how and taught us a lot. And one of the best memories that I had was printing the high school newspaper, which came out once a month. It was printed at the local paper offices, the *Lewiston Journal*. We could only go over after 10 o'clock at night, so my mom or dad would drive me over and I had to set up all the galleys. It was the old fashioned (method) and you had to set up the galleys and it was messy. These two master typesetters would be over there helping me and one or two other people normally, but often I would be there by myself. I loved the smell of the ink, I loved the guys, they talked like sailors and so did I.

Q: It was a real trade back then.

WHITE: It was. They were so proud of it, and they made me take pride in what I was doing. And if we had to reset it, we reset it. It was late at night. We were all alone in this big old brick building on the 2nd or 3rd floor and we did it and we did it right. The quality

was always a great pride to me, and not only the quality of the writing, but how it looked, what kind of photos we had, and how we typeset those. Yeah, it was an experience. And these old crusty guys, I don't think they got paid much extra for helping the local high school newspaper, but they treated it like we were creating *Vogue* or something. It was a wonderful experience.

Q: And that was a moment when you could imagine yourself as a journalist for your career, because who would have thought print journalism was going to go away?

WHITE: Yes, of course, of course, of course! That's what I really wanted to (do) and all through college (it was) journalism major from beginning to end.

Q: What does a journalism major do? Obviously, you take classes in writing and so on, but...

WHITE: Well, at the University of Maine we had two or three teachers that had been lifelong journalists, a couple in Boston, and they really taught us investigative journalism. What are you looking for? What are the questions you are going to ask? They would send us out with vague assignments, "We'll give you two weeks, comb the newspapers, find an interesting story. They taught us how to dig deep. Always questioning, questioning, questioning, analyzing, analyzing. They'd give us these junky newspapers written by remote journalists in the United States. They would also give us stories written by the great journalists of the day. Could we do it better? Break it down and build it better. Always have three sources. Seek truth. Steven King, who was in my classes, was doing mostly Op Eds, and so he was in kind of a different sub-major. There were maybe 15-20 of us and we were carefully coached, wonderfully mentored. Of course, as I said, I was pretty well coached and mentored in high school too because I had this former journalist who was just a terrific writer. He'd say, "it's good but not perfect. Do it again." And I would say, "Great!" Nothing that he would say to me would strike me as being a negative. And that's an interesting teaching (method): keep positive but don't accept under par material. I have lived by his example my entire life. First you can improve a person's performance by carefully pointing out the positives, but also make specific suggestions for improvements. Make your subordinates strive for their very best. Make them WANT it.

Everyone in their life has had a teacher that made a difference and I had two: that teacher that I had in high school and the teacher that I had in 6th grade who was a science guru. He really should have been teaching at much higher levels, but the only job he could find was teaching 6th grade so he just said, "Fine, we'll teach them like high schoolers!" And he had us doing things way out of our skill level. The principal who was this old battle axe--I remember her to this day--she had great big feet that were always hanging over her shoes. She'd stuff her feet into these shoes. She was always saying to this teacher, "This is not 6th grade material!" We were always asking for more and more. And he was innovative with this little group of mine. He told us if you want to learn about reproduction, we will start at point zero and we will do this in-depth, and we did. On the side, if other students weren't really into the complicated stuff, he would keep them

busy with other materials learning about trees or something. I learned as much in 6th grade about science as I learned certainly in the next three to four years combined. I got straight A's all through junior high school and never even studied. He was just one of these fabulous teachers, and it took me years before I realized just how magical he was.

I went back to look him up and he'd been killed in a car accident. Before I got a chance to say, "You were that teacher...everyone's got one, you were that teacher for me." I was a teacher myself, because that's what I did in the Peace Corps, and I suddenly realized, it's a lot harder than it looks to impart wisdom. You don't just stand up there and say, "Repeat after me..." You've got to get kids inspired and interested much like you do in almost anything else. Running embassies or (US)AID missions, you must figure out how you can best impart wisdom so that they can all be drawing together. Now that's what he did for us. How can you take these young minds and get them curious enough that they are looking up stuff all by themselves? We had that old Encyclopedia Britannica, the one really good resource my parents sprang for – I think they paid for it over a couple of years. I used it constantly starting in sixth grade because of Mr. Aspernol.

Q: Was that the moment where you also began to learn critical thinking?

WHITE: Yes, absolutely. He forced us to THINK. He would say, "Okay here are three or four facts. Now what do you think is going to happen next? We would go home, we'd call each other, "What do you think?" Let's try two things, we would experiment and not be afraid of failure. Failure was just getting a chance to try something else new. Like I said, you run into that sometimes in high school science classes, sometimes you don't, but this was 6th grade, (and it) changed my whole life. He only taught at that school for two years – the battle axe and some parents complained loud enough and got him kicked out – such a shame. He landed on his feet at a private academy, but I never saw him again.

Q: Remarkable! You're right, remarkable!

WHITE: These little gems of teachers were all over the place. My sister claims--she runs this fabulous school for young kinds-- "Back in those days the best and the brightest, women especially, chose teaching as a career because basically you had two choices: nursing and teaching". So back in the sixties, teaching had the cream of the crop-- a lot of excellent scholars became teachers. Now women's choices are so much broader that we're having a very hard time attracting the best and the brightest to the teaching profession anymore. She has a hard time finding these teachers that push that outer limit all the time. So, it's something that I was extremely lucky to have had. It allowed me to be near the top of my class for a long time.

Q: Now you had mentioned your cousin and the Vietnam War. To what extent did all of those cultural changes and the cultural ferment reach you, either in high school or in college in Maine?

WHITE: In high school I don't think I thought about it a whole hell of a lot, to tell you the truth. It was there, but in college it was a 24/7, especially in journalism class. Especially Stephen King who was up and around the campus day in and day out. It was certainly a defining part of my college years. For the first time journalists really were an integral part of stopping a war. Once they let photojournalists go over to Viet Nam, public opinion totally changed. The violence came into our living rooms and we could make up our own minds. We were also furious – this war seemed so ugly and unfair. The reporting that was done on the Vietnam War was very different from the reporting that could be done in World War II. (It) was a game changer. The access that journalists had to the actual fighting was unheard of before the late sixties.

As journalists, we were extremely proud of the role that journalists were playing, and how each one of us could--maybe not report about the Vietnam War-- expose what was happening in our own communities. There was a very big Indian (Native American) contingent in Maine who were pretty much getting screwed out of their land and their access to federal grants. Another student and I spent a lot of time going out and talking to them (about) their land, how was it secured, and how we could give voice to their concerns. I think our sensitivities were very much heightened because we knew we had a voice and that putting ugly facts in print, made decision makers sit up and take notice.

I'm a little bit disappointed, considering what I was like in college and my perception of what college kids are today. "Come on, guys, get out there! This is your country; this is your future!" We were stirring up the pot the whole time, and it kind of gets me that we didn't pass down a legacy of more community or social involvement than we did because I certainly was exposed to it for years. The things that shape your whole career, or your whole life, inside and outside the office, often happen at a young age. I never became a scientist, but I sure learned how to ask questions and to analyze responses. That came from 6th grade. I think those formative years were very important. In high school I felt that I was in charge! I had that paper in my hands. I not only wrote it, I typeset the damn thing. And my teachers or friends would say, "That's a great article," or "Powerful," but "Why didn't you talk to Junie instead of Joe?" And I would say "Okay, (I'll try to) be more inconclusive, I will dig a little deeper." We welcomed constructive criticism. I think that has been lost.

Also, confidence is such a huge part of your formative years, and mine grew from kindergarten, in part because I had this tight little group of kids that supported me. As anyone who has ever met me will tell you, self-confidence is not something I have a problem with and never have. When I walk into a room, first I'll make my presence felt (I never sit in the back row), and second I'll be positive. Everybody knows that about me. I developed that at a very young age. I think about both my sons who grew up overseas and didn't have that continuity of support. We often moved every three years, so they had to make a whole bunch of new friends. Both are incredibly social. They can talk to anybody about anything. But perhaps don't have that rock-solid confidence that I grew up with. Both have tons of friends, but it's different than having that little tight group with you for 12 years!

Q: Sure, because you know you go through all the growing together and hey, is that happening to you? This is happening to me! And you have that opportunity to...

WHITE: And it's safe, very safe.

Q: Exactly.

WHITE: Of course, there are certainly downsides. My sons speak languages, they have friends all over the world. If they go into a room and there are 50 people, probably one of them will know a little something about all 50 people by the end of the night. The other son will get to know only two but will know them well. And I'll know 50! [laughter]

Q: Speaking of that puts me in mind are these personality tests. If you ever took one, did it accurately predict?

WHITE: Extrovert off the scale, yes! "We've never seen a score like this!" Yes, absolutely correct.

Q: Okay I was just curious. Now you talked all about how the kind of social justice and social action reached you. What about the other side, the 60s, all the hippie and the other counter-culture things, did that get all the way up to Maine?

WHITE: There was certainly a fair amount of that in college. Stephen King's wife, I always remember wore these granny dresses and glasses. Not so much in my high school. My high school all the way through 12th grade, we wore angora sweaters, and were very fashion conscious--as much as you can be if you're wearing sweater sets and matching bobby socks. We thought we were sophisticated, of course. I remember my mother or even my father maybe told me I could only wear skirts that came to just above my knees. I would always buy skirts and then I would get around the corner walking toward school and start rolling down the top of my skirt – making it a mini. And I would do it religiously, every day. My mother would always say I didn't have to eat a full breakfast because I was always watching my weight, but she insisted I take a banana to school. I would take the banana and get around the corner and throw that banana into the ditch. Then I hiked up my skirt and headed for school. My mother, laughing loudly, told me days before she died, "I hope you don't think that I didn't know you were rolling up your skirt and throwing away my bananas! I expected banana groves to be growing, in huge numbers right around that corner. You're not so smart!" And so why I asked laughing right out loud, did you keep giving me the damn bananas, and she said, "Well, one day I thought maybe you would eat one!"

Q: Okay that's fine. And so, you go to college but were there were any other things in college, opportunities to travel or any or foreign language that began to put you on a path toward international things?

WHITE: It really wasn't. I took French, but it was that belief that I was going to join Peace Corps. Back then I was going to change the world, which I found out was a lot

more difficult than I thought it was going to be! But I took international courses as few as there were back in those days. Now I'm on the board of the University of Maine's international school, but we didn't have one back then. So basically, I took writing and journalism and courses that I just found interesting--New England folklore for example.

From the time I was a sophomore in high school until I graduated from college, I spent my summers in Kennebunkport – a resort town on the coast of Maine. I started as a dishwasher at the now defunct Narraganset Hotel and graduated to head waitress at the Colony Hotel—not more than a mile from the Bush compound. That job as head waitress was my first management job. I had about thirty younger men and women working for me. I put together the schedules and the dining room assignments and ran the outdoor lobster bake. I would be up at five thirty every day and party well past midnight after a full dinner service. THE ENERGY I had was unbelievable. I worked very hard. I loved every minute of it and learned the value of organization and keeping schedules and schmoozing. I was the best schmoozer of them all! A talent often used in diplomacy.

Back in the late 60s and early 70s, Africa was pretty much thought of in (terms of) what we knew in *National Geographic*. It was naked women and elephants and lions and so on. I had no idea what I was getting into, of course, except I was going to save Africa! But that was very murky thinking I must say. I was busy with my social life and writing and boyfriends and sorority, so I didn't concentrate too much. It was just interesting now that I think about it. (It wasn't like) "Now you better start studying about Africa." I didn't even know if I was going to be assigned to Africa until the last month of college.

Q: Okay. Well, so you know you're going to apply for the Peace Corps. How did that work out?

WHITE: Back in those days, Peace Corps was still young, and the process was evolving – unlike now where it is very sophisticated. I bet in the state of Maine there might (not) have been (many) of us applying to the Peace Corps. They were trying to get some modicum of diversity because a lot of people were applying from the bigger cities, and so I think I was pretty much a shoe-in. After I was accepted, they asked, "Where do you want to go?" And I just said, "Africa." I had no idea one (country) from the other. When they came back and they said, "Okay, you get Cameroon." I said, "Fine, whatever!" When I looked it up, I saw that Cameroon had an ocean and mountains so I thought I would be surrounded by things I loved (wrong). I graduated in June and two weeks later I was on my way to Philadelphia for the medical portion of the orientation. Basically, lots of shots. It was sort of bang, bang kind of like the military. Then I was put on a bus with 200 other new volunteers to Canada for two months or so of learning French and how to teach English.

Q: In Canada?

WHITE: Yeah, Canada because it's French speaking.

Q: In French.

WHITE: The first day there was the elaborate ceremony to bury the English language. Kind of creepy now I think about it with a coffin and black cloth. We had to get up to a level 3 in French in order to be sent to a country That was not very difficult for me because I'd been taking French since high school.

Q: The only interesting thing I'll say about that is, they send you to Canada where the Quebecois French is rather different and then you're going to Africa where the French again is different from Quebecois and different from Parisian.

WHITE: Yes, exactly right. So, whenever you went outside the door where you were studying, no one could understand us, and we couldn't understand them. All our teachers were West Africans.

Q: Well that's different'

WHITE: So back in those days they started with maybe 200 of us that were training and by the end of the two months there may have been 150 of us (left). Some kids dropped out, but through the whole time they were doing psychological evaluations. They were watching how people were interacting with the host country nationals that were there. They were doing a lot of cultural training and if they didn't like your interpersonal skills, if they thought you weren't going to make it, they would give you a pink slip. Every night after dinner you were to go to your little mailbox and see if you had a pink slip. If you did, you had to be out by the next morning.

There was no saying "goodbye" to your friends. It was not, "Can we talk about it?" It was, "You are out!" So, the fear of god was that you'd get one of these damned pink slips. After a couple of months 150 of us graduated and were sent home to pack for a couple of weeks. After two weeks of frantic packing – one small trunk and two suitcases for two years, we were off. Packing tip – don't leave the package on anything. Peace Corps chartered this huge Pan Am plane just for us. We all thought we had died and gone to heaven. Ninety percent of us had never been on a trans-Atlantic flight – this was an adventure. We started off in New York City with the first stop being Senegal. The great plane then worked itself across West Africa. Cameroon was the last stop. There was free everything--free drinking was especially grand --so we were all drinking like fishes, and everyone was smoking too--nasty but fun. We were so carefree – I think we thought we would party our way through two years of service.

By the time we got to Douala we were exhausted. I remember getting out in Douala and spending the night in this hotel in Douala. Up until this point I didn't really think too deeply about going to the middle of Africa, it just seemed like a good thing to do, and then the reality hits you. It's hotter than hell, humid, black people everywhere. I don't know what I was thinking--it IS Africa! But it still was a surprise (I did grow up in an all-white state), and then we got into this two-star hotel and there were bugs everywhere, little mini lizards. We didn't have any of that stuff in Maine--cockroaches, none of this. I was scared to death from point zero! We had a great group of kids in that hotel from

southern states. They couldn't get over what my problem was "Aw, it's just a cockroach." I did not sleep one wink.

After two days in Doula, eating new foods and meeting our teachers, we were off to Yaoundé – our training center for both teaching and French. We were housed in dorms at the University in Yaoundé, which had a good university back then. Half of the students learning how to teach were Americans – we peace corps volunteers. The east part of Cameroon speaks French and the west part speaks English. We were student teachers with west Cameroonians who were English speakers. Outstanding Peace Corps instructors were teaching them how to teach English right side by side with us. We had lots of very good interactions with them. One of the West Cameroonian guys (Randy) that was in my class in Yaoundé turned out to also be assigned to my same village. What great luck. He was a fabulous guy and teacher - he turned out to be a life saver, because I already knew somebody when I got to my remote village! The teaching English as a foreign language instruction that we were given in those five or six weeks in Yaoundé were simply fantastic. Lessons that stood by me for the next ten years.

Before any of us started school, they gave us a weekend to get to know our village. They gave us the equivalent of twenty dollars, just enough money to get out there and back, and buy some food. We were just on our own. I had never taken public transportation in the United States except for one or two bus rides. And there I was in a "taxi park" with no known language spoken, tons of people milling about, fried plantain cooking on every corner. The Peace Corps had given us little instruction except to keep screaming the place we wanted to go and sooner or later a kind person would point to the right "taxi". I took my stack of cash and got on one of these horrendous mammy wagons, which are broken down wagons chock full of goats and pigs and women and mamas and papas, and lots of babies screaming. Again, I knew I had to get to the village, so I just looked straight forward, sat stiffly and somehow made it to my village – alone. It wasn't until I arrived at the village that I realized I didn't have any place to spend the night. For some reason I must have thought there would be some kind of hotel.

Q: They didn't arrange something?

WHITE: No, no, no, you're on your own! Be independent, figure it out! I must say in retrospect the Peace Corps did a damn good job of teaching us to use our own resources – to push forward. I cannot imagine the Pam White in college handling this situation. But I just DID.

In every village in Africa there's something called *cas de passage*, which is the place you stay overnight. I went there, and at first it appeared completely deserted. Just some ancient guard (years younger than I am today) asleep in the front door stoop. He slowly awakened and mumbled something about finding "the manager" who was ten years older than the guard but anxious to make a buck. After they opened the wooden slats and put on fresh "sheets" – like cardboard - it turns out it wasn't too bad! And for an extra buck or two they'd fix me dinner which they claimed was chicken. I am not sure. Whatever it was (and I was a very finicky eater – in Maine we didn't experiment with food), I ate the

whole thing. I suspect it was some sort of snake. Some sort of sweet potatoes was also served. I STILL remember to this day. After a pretty good night's sleep, I looked around the village and figured out where the Peace Corps teacher's house was. I was the first woman Peace Corps volunteer assigned to my village but not the first Peace Corps volunteer. I went and visited the little house where the former volunteer had lived for two years. As I was walking around the five small rooms (two bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room and a bathroom), the self-proclaimed city "mayor" arrived. He told me in a deeply serious voice that he had decided one of his family members would be moving into "my" house. I strongly objected – this had been rented by the Peace Corps – the Peace Corps had installed a barrel on the roof so I could have "running" water. PC had purchased the dandy kerosene fridge that could hold six beers!! Well, well, well, he said PERHAPS we could come to an agreement. I gave him all my money minus the fare back to Yaoundé. He claimed he was very pleased – the house was mine! When I told this story to my Peace Corps staff in Yaoundé they howled with laughter. I had certainly been HAD. The guy probably didn't even have a position in Saa – my village. I hindsight he might have even been employed by PC to teach me a lesson.

The rest of the month, we finished up teaching, and overall it was a deeply rewarding experience. However, one of the defining moments of my entire life happened that summer. The very best teacher of us all was a young black guy from the New Orleans. He was such a dynamic teacher, and a fluent French speaker. He spoke one of those dialects from Louisiana and had the joy of music from the region. He loved to dance and sing and use his entire body to teach the English language. Students loved him. His personality had some French influence, and Creole, and black American. Big problem: he was gay. And back in those days, if you were gay, you were not welcome anywhere, not the State Department, not (US)AID, and certainly not Peace Corps.

Q: I'm sorry what year was this? Now you graduated from college, and...

WHITE: 1971. Went straight into Peace Corps from college.

Q: So, in 1971 still in Africa.

WHITE: Yep. And this handsome, young, black man and I were best buddies. We laughed a lot, we shared lesson plans – we shared acting out scenes and dialogs. He was a master. However, one night, he came into my room after midnight and he was sobbing, and he said, "Pam I have to go home." and I said, "What are you out of your mind? You're fabulous! You are my best friend". He said "Well, I did something I shouldn't have done. A Cameroonian student told me about this gay bar downtown. He said that it was very safe, that I would have a good time. I did go into the gay bar, because I'm gay and I missed meeting guys." He was the very first gay person I had knowingly ever met. And I loved him. I didn't care what the hell his sexual orientation was.

I said, "Well you know, we'll straighten this out. This is ridiculous!" So little confident me, I took his hand and we pranced our little asses right down to the director's office at

seven the next morning. I said, “This guy is fabulous, and everybody knows it. If you ask all of us who’s the best teacher without any hesitation, they would say Joe Smith.”

“Yeah, you’re absolutely right” said the Director, “but he’s going home, and there’s not anything you can do about it. He is a liability to the United States of America.”

I said “Listen, I can understand if he were in the closet and he could be blackmailed or whatever your worry is, but come on, now we all know, so what’s the worry?”

“It’s against policy, it’s against United States values, and he could be a publicity disaster”. I was furious but Joe was sent home that very day.

From that day forward I’ve always been a fighter for LGBT. It was so outrageous to me sexual orientation would be the reason to fire a fabulous teacher.

Q: But you say you stayed in contact with him.

WHITE: I am no longer, but I did for many years. And he was a very successful teacher and a community leader. But that experience with Peace Corps scarred him for years. I don’t think he EVER dared to come out publicly. Not after his treatment by the USG.

After two months of intensive training, I went out to my village and found my house in good repair – someone had cleaned it and made sure there was water in the barrel on my roof and kerosene in the fridge. The oddest part of my welcome was the fact that there were three large African women sitting in my small living room – pretty much taking up all the space. Not one of them spoke a word of French. We quickly developed our own brand of sign language. They made it quite clear that they were there to keep my “company” while I settled into the village. They would show me where to shop for fabric and flashlight batteries and oil – all essential to living in the village. They also demonstrated how to kill a chicken and cook it with onions and lemons. They also made it clear that a white woman (really any woman) living all by herself in Saa was unusual and needed to be watched – at least until they knew I was completely safe and capable of taking care of myself.

Q: Oh wow!

WHITE: I asked them, “Whoa! So, you’re going to like, here?” They responded in hand gestures, no, not all the time, but we will be here when you are here. We will help you clean and cook too. I stammered (with my hands) but “Why does it take three? I don’t think it takes three!” The house was very small after all.

You do not argue with three African mamas. Not on their turf anyway. They explained that they wanted to make sure that everyone knew that I was under their protection.

Then my friend Randy from the University arrived a couple weeks later. He didn’t speak the same local languages (over twenty at our school) either, but somehow, he managed to

piece together the story that the chief of the village had assigned these three ladies to take care of me. I don't think the chief gave them detailed instructions; they sort of had their own plan about what the role of caregivers would look like. It just drove me bananas for the first couple of weeks. Strangers were living in my tiny house watching my every move. I didn't want them. I felt like I had to "entertain them" – without a common language or even a common culture. I just wanted to get in my jammies and do my lesson plans. I kept thinking "this is my house; you are in my space". Typical American. But you know, they would fix me goodies. They would light the lamps at night, and they made sure that if it rained whatever needed to be covered was covered. They brought me precious eggs and mangoes. And one day, they just became part of the fabric of my life – and they were over the next two years. I do admit that once they left around seven at night, I would be afraid for months. Part of it was the fact that I was surrounded by strange noises (drums and bug sounds and often singing) and part of it was that I was the only white person in my village and I just wasn't sure I was safe. The only "locks" were wooden pegs that slipped over the wooden windows – no glass windows in my village.

Q: Interesting thing. They protect you during the day, but then they leave at night. Interesting. Was there a real fear?

WHITE: Yes, I was deeply afraid, although there really was NO reason to be. I now am a tad ashamed, but I don't remember really sleeping for three months – I was so sure someone was going to break into my house and steal something. Never happened.

Q: Was the presence of the women some kind of a tribal courtesy?

WHITE: Not sure so much tribal as African – every country I lived in Africans have been extremely friendly, kind. It's just what you do when new people move into the neighborhood. Africans have a deep sense of family and community. They take care of each other. You take care of neighbors and relatives, you watch over them, make sure they're fed right. They know where to buy the best bananas, at the lowest price. They taught me tough negotiating – saving a couple of cents per banana was a big deal. Believe me, the local market (outside of course) was not exactly a supermarket. They would take me shopping and stop me in my tracks if I wasn't getting a good price – or good quality. If a market woman tried to sell me five mangoes in a stack and the bottom mango was rotten, they would put on such a show of disgust that it was almost comical. I still smile at the memory. They also took me with them down to the river where they gathered to wash the clothes – and to gossip and to share tips about food and men and local leaders. It was interesting, too, because many, many years later *Whiskey, Tango, Foxtrot* the film was made, filmed in Afghanistan, I think. In the film, a team from the US army kept building a well for the women and this well kept getting blown up. The military said, "You tell the women how sorry we are about the dang terrorist men blowing up their well. We KNOW they want a well and we will just keep rebuilding it for them for as long as it takes."

The woman journalist says, "Sir, you know who's destroying the well?"

And he said, “It’s those horrible men. They don’t want the women to be comfortable.

And she said, “No it’s the women who are blowing up the well.”

He said, “Why the hell would the women blow up the well?”

She said, “Because the only time that they get away from the men folk is down at the stream. It’s been their salvation and entertainment for generations.” When I saw this scene in the movie, I clapped right out loud. We Americans are so god awful about pretending we know a damn thing about other people’s cultures. We assume everyone has the same needs and beliefs that we do. Shameful.

In my village, going to the stream every day was NOT just about washing themselves or the clothes but to share information: what’s the best recipe, which man is beating his wife, which man is a fabulous husband, which woman has got the best tomatoes. The river was THEIR place – never saw a man near it. Side note – to all the developers who want to build wells for women – ask first. Second build a water SYSTEM not just a well which will crumble or go dry in two years.

That’s the mistake that Westerners often make. We make assumptions about other people’s culture. I have seen this again and again and again. We decide what is best for them and when it turns out they don’t like our foreign ideas; we are very upset when they don’t appreciate (our efforts). “Come on, this is what’s good for you, why aren’t you singing from the rooftops?” I have seen this repeated over a hundred times in my career – about technology and democracy and education.

My village taught me so many cultural and social and bargaining skills. It was also in that small village, that I really learned how to teach. I got good at it too—but not without stumbling. When I first started teaching, I decided I had to make sure that students understood from day ONE that I was in charge. This came from not so great advice I got from a male African staff teacher during training. He told me that as a female I wouldn’t have instant respect like the male volunteer teachers would, so I better lay down the law as soon as I got to my village. From the first day and for many days after, I would stand in front of the room and I would say, “You pay attention to me” no laughing or talking or daydreaming. I was strict. I was THE big shot teacher at age 22 (many of the students were 18). With great authority I would write something on the board and say, “Repeat after me.” They droned on.

I could see that the kids were not particularly interested and there was not a lot of learning going on. The ancient wooden desks were just high benches. Lower benches were the seats. They were stuffed in those benches like sardines. After day three I think they were a little bored by my stuffy teaching demeanor. During roll call (when I would butcher their names), a couple of the guys started bang, bang, banging with their feet, which I couldn’t see because they were hidden by the desks. I realized that I was losing control, so I pointed and said in my toughest voice “It’s coming from that corner. You do that again and you’re going to go to the *surveant Générale*”.

The only reason there's a *surveant Générale* in school is discipline. The *Générale* takes his job (always a man) very seriously. That classroom had 50 students, from ages maybe 15 to 18 – mostly teenage boys who have their own sense of importance in the world. In most African rural school children start school at 7 or 8 and often they drop out due to lack of finances (it cost money to attend grades 1-12) and then they come back again when they have the funds. It is very common for one grade to have a big age spread. After tolerating the footsy performance for four or five days, I said to this one very handsome soccer star "Mohammed, if you don't stop the stomping, you're going to go to the *surveant générale* next time." Well he didn't think the lily-white teacher would ever report him to the SG so he looked me right in the eye and WINKED – kind of laughing in my face with a "Catch me if you can!" attitude. The bang, bang, banging continued so I marched down to the school administrative offices to demand the *Générale* come to my class. The HUGE SG came back with me. I pointed to Mohammed as the ringleader and the SG tucked the soccer star under his arm like he was a piece of flimsy luggage. An hour went by (no banging now) and Mohammed returned. He had been beaten to an inch of his life--that's an over exaggeration but that is what he looked like. He had welts everywhere. The *surveant Générale* had taken a whip, which he proudly showed me, and he'd given the kid a good whooping.

He said, "I don't think you'll have any problems again."

And I said, "I don't think so either, but couldn't you have he just given him a really good talking to or sat him in the corner for a couple of hours or something less violent?"

"If you call me, this is the consequence." The SG also informed me that the boy's parents had been notified and for certain the beatings for Mohammed would continue at home. Spending money on school fees was a huge sacrifice for families and they wanted that money well spent. I was devastated. What had I DONE for goodness sake????

So right then and there, I made a pact with them that that would be the last visit of the *surveant Générale*, but the banging had to stop. Agreed by all instantly. The banging did stop, and Mohammed was one of my most talented students. I took some time to reflect about why the banging started in the first place and I realized they were giving me a signal that my teaching approach was not well received. I began to loosen up a bit. I started each day with a funny story or a joke or some interesting news. I became relaxed with myself and with them. I also realized that they were learning English out of books that the French had sent decades ago. There was not one black person in any of the books and certainly no mention of Africa. The books depicted white people talking about life in France, "Let's go get some *pommes frites* and steak, and "Let's take the train to Germany and visit grandmother and her poodle..." We were living in the middle of the rain forest in the middle of central Africa where not one of my students had ever seen a train – nor a poodle.

I stopped using the books altogether. For the younger kids it was easy for me to substitute. I just started doing stick figures on the blackboard. We started making up our

own books, it was great fun. For the older ones on my first break I went to the to the Peace Corps library and picked up just anything I could get my hands on written in English about life in Africa. I kept photocopying and doing anything I could, so that they had something that was African in nature. Something they could relate to.

Then I started having them, which I learned to use later in my life, record their own stories in French that we would discuss in English. This opened wonderful dialogs. We talked about the challenges and benefits of living in remote villages. We discussed cultural nuances, and what it meant to be an African man, what it meant to be an African woman, and lots about local beliefs and traditions. They were fascinated by their own stories and each other's. They would come to the classroom anxious to learn. I turned the whole teaching experience upside down and developed my own curriculum based on their own words. I was very careful to make sure I followed the necessary points in vocabulary and grammar they would need to pass the national exams. I just made it interesting.

After I had been there for six months, the women asked if I would teach them how to read (in French). I realized that the women in the village didn't really need to know so much about reading (they were never going to read books, etc.), but they really needed to know math because they were the merchants. I said, "Okay, my school room, at the schoolhouse is empty at night. If you want to trudge over there after dark (they had to be home to cook dinner and put the children to bed), I'll teach you how to count, and if you learn a little reading on the side that's good too."

They would have none of it. No, they insisted they wanted to learn how to read! And so, we started. Two years later a few of them were good at reading – they certainly knew enough to write down market prices and short letters to their sons and daughters living away from home. They were ALL great at counting. Market women are geniuses at counting. Interestingly enough, years later, the reason that most of the illiterate women and men in Africa now want to read is to be able to communicate on their cell phones.

Q: Oh, for texting!

WHITE: For texting! "I love you," (because their sons and daughters live somewhere else and they're in the remote villages and they want to be in contact with them.) Of course, their children respond, "I love you too, send money." Same reason American kids text their parents. So now there's a real reason for learning how to read.

During my time in Saa, my parents really surprised me by visiting. When I left Maine on this journey, my Dad, the Marine who fought me for four years about my decision to join Peace Corps, said to me "well you signed up for two years, and that is a commitment you have made to the United States. You can't bail. You may get over there and find out you don't like the food or the smells or the lack of electricity, but a commitment is a commitment and that's what we do it in this family. We honor our commitments."

I left during the early summer of 1971 and I really didn't get to my village until about September. By November they started planning to visit me. They arrived at the airport

and I immediately took them to my village. My Marine dad took one look around and declared, “That’s enough you are coming home with us!”

Q: Really? That’s remarkable.

WHITE: My father said, “You’ve proven your point!” We never thought you were going to stay but now, this is crazy. We miss you; we don’t want you living in this remote location. I worked hard so you wouldn’t live in poverty”

I said, “I’m happy here, I feel valued and I certainly don’t need electricity to live comfortably. I’ve got a full-time job that I’m pretty good at AND dad what about that commitment thing that you talked to me about just a few months ago?” He sighed deeply and just nodded his head. He knew he was defeated. I took them to the school, and they watched me teach. They even joined in. We traveled all over Cameroun in rickety bush taxis. Over the years we did many trips together; we did a fancy safari in Tanzania, and many adventures in Haiti and South Africa, but that was their favorite overseas voyage by far. They always said they learned more in those ten days than they could have in ten years just reading about Africa. Until their deaths they could talk in depth about that visit to Cameroun.

Q: Now speaking of which, as you’re looking back on this experience, this is the first time you’re out of the United States. This is the first time you’re in a completely different culture. How did you adapt?

WHITE: Little by little. I thought when I first landed in Cameroun, “Alright, now I’m going to save this country! A few weeks later I thought, “Well, maybe I can improve my village.” And a few weeks after that, “Well, maybe I can help a few people in my village.” Of course, in the end, they people of my village saved me! They taught me how to teach and how to listen. They taught me all the tricks of village living – saving your lamps until really needed, finding the best fruits, market negotiating, cleaning clothes by hand. Most importantly, they taught me to value friendships and family and your health. Family’s everything in Africa. History and culture are important. Sharing and helping is too. If they have only one chicken, they share the one chicken with not only family but with anyone who stops by during the meal. I recently read that people in the poorest countries of the world have a much higher percentage of their populations who volunteer their time and money to those less fortunate. I believe this must be true because helping others is just part of their everyday existence. The United States is becoming a very “me, me, me, society” and Africa was a very “we, we, we society.”

Those lessons from my Cameroun friends have been with me my entire life. I tell young officers that one scrawny chicken shared tastes better than one fat chicken eaten by yourself. It was a lesson that I learned in the Peace Corps. I also learned to respect other people’s beliefs – be careful not to judge too quickly. A good example is that many men in my village had multiple wives, my landlord had five wives all of whom I knew. When I first heard about all these wives, I threw a feminist fit – what a horrible practice. But these five wives lived right beside me and I observed them for a long while. It turned out

at least for them, to be a pretty good system. They had babies sort of sequentially. When one was pregnant, her duties would be picked up by the others. They each had skills that they seemed to specialize in – like childcaring or marketing or cleaning so depending on the skill, they would take on each other’s tasks. Although NOT cooking – this they did for their own families. The husband (and my landlord) would spend one night at each little hut – and he told me he would rest on the weekends. They’d get a little jealous from time to time but he would soothe their egos in ingenious ways. He kept a little cache of shiny objects – costume jewelry – that was wisely used. He and I would discuss the arrangements far into the night. I grew to respect him and his ladies. They were all smart and savvy and funny. He was a pretty wealthy truck driver and proud of being able to support so many wives and children. I have told people here in the States that I didn’t really want to share my husband, but it worked for them.

Americans tend to be so judgmental about other people’s cultures. I find this extremely distasteful. Because a lot of stuff we do in our culture, African people aren’t appreciative of either. Our worship of money and fancy cars and huge houses is not something respected by most Africans. It’s not that they don’t like money, but they don’t value it above family or friends.

Although I was white and a woman and an American, those villagers welcomed me into their homes without any reservations whatsoever. In fact, I became sort of a status symbol. They couldn’t have a successful wedding or funeral or baptism or birthday party, if I wasn’t present. I was always given the best seat, and they always made sure that I had the first piece of chicken or whatever. Village life could be lonely because I was the only white person in the village and didn’t speak any of the local dialects. I was the only person who spoke English except my West Cameroonian friend Randy who spoke English. There were two other white people in the village – two old drunken Lebanese shopkeepers who kind of scared me. They weren’t very good company.

One of the great things about my Peace Corps village, about five miles from my house, was a school and church that Canadian priests ran. One day the head priest came to my house on Friday and asked, “Would you like to come and spend the weekend with us at the compound?”

I said, “Yeah, why not?”

He said, “We’ll pick you up tomorrow morning real early.”

They picked me up at seven thirty and we drove five miles inside the rain forest. The roads were terrible. But suddenly out of nowhere, we arrived at a huge gate and behind the gate an enormous compound – a school, church, housing, cows, chickens – all in perfect condition. I was shocked – couldn’t say a word. We stopped in front of a pretty little cottage – something you would find on a lake in Maine and the priest tells me this is to my accommodation for the weekend. OH JOY. It’s a beautiful little cottage with actual windows and a bed with a real mattress on it, and a lamp with an electric bulb!! Could it get any better?? The generator only ran from 6 at night until 6 in the morning, but it was

transformative – hot water! Dinner was this fabulous soup and French cheeses and smoked ham from Canada, and great wine - everything seemed to be imported. For a Peace Corps volunteer it was like heaven. I ate and ate and ate.

And that night we saw an American movie in their little movie theater, and we had popcorn. As I was eating actual meat, and drinking fabulous wine, I asked, “My god, Father, how did you get all this here?”

And he said, “You know it’s Catholic guilt, it’s all Catholic guilt. We all go home to Canada, and we ask all the wealthy parishioners, how many times did you go to church this year?”

And they look guilty, hang their heads a bit and respond, “Oh father I should have been going every week, but I just didn’t have time, I’ll do better next year.” That’s when the priests knew they had their potential donors in their pockets.

We tell them, “Well you know, if you gave 10 mattresses to our wonderful Mission in Cameroon, God would really be so appreciative of those 10 mattresses.” Father John continued, “before we go back to Canada, we make a list of all the things we really need (or want) – we are not greedy. Anyway, these items would just appear within a month of our visit. Catholic guilt is a beautiful thing.”

So that’s how they got this fabulous compound. I went out there once every couple of months and always had a delightful time.

But one other story that affected my entire life was when I was a Peace Corps volunteer was the Peace Corps doctor who was this young dashing recent graduate from Northwestern Medical School. Right away when I saw him, I said, “Yup, that guy’s going to be my husband.

He was aloof for a long time, but one day he was giving me some sort of exam and I thought I had broken the barrier when he asked, “What are you doing tonight?”

And I coyly responded, thinking I had charmed him completely, “oh not much.”

And he’d said, “Oh too bad – I have something really fun lined up.” NO invitation to join him. I went back to my village discouraged. About every three months, I would go into Yaoundé the capital city where he lived, and we would occasionally bump into one another. FINALLY, he said, “Why don’t you come over to my house for dinner.” I was thrilled and took a long time getting myself prepared – little did I know he had invited about 15 other people. I was disappointed, but I was in the door!

Over time it became evident that he was definitely interested in me, but he told me in no uncertain terms that “Staff is not supposed to date the volunteers.” He held out for about 18 months, but then invited me to dinner with NO ONE else and that was that.

I'd sneak into his house--this is at the very end of my Peace Corps time- and spend the night. By the end of our secretive "affair" I was SURE he would propose before I got on a plane to go home. Finally, it was my last day. He said, "Okay, I'm going to go with you to the airport. I've got a surprise for you." I was sure that the surprise was a ring of some sort. So, we get to the airport, and I have my fingernails all polished, and he produces two gray African parrots that he wants me to take to the United States!

First, why would I want to take two gray African parrots from Cameroun to the United States, and second, it's not a ring! On all levels I was furious! I said, "I have to change planes at Douala and that's going to be a nightmare."

And he said, "Okay, okay, I'll go to Douala with you, not to worry. I going to go right now and buy the ticket."

Then I'm thinking, he's going to propose in Douala. But NO, he didn't do it in Douala either. I went back home to Maine and I said, "I can forget him. I've got other things to do. I've said goodbye to him, and I'm going to graduate school."

Q: Did you get in with the parrots?

WHITE: I got to New York with the damned parrots--it's one of my sons' favorite stories--and they quarantined the parrots.

Q: Of course, yes!

WHITE: But I didn't care if they beheaded them. I managed to call my good doctor (Mike) and said "You said there'd be no problems, now there is a big problem. You figure it out. They're in quarantine in New York. And it's going to cost you over a thousand dollars to get them the hell out of there."

I was NOT happy. When I arrived in New York with the pesky parrots, I had been gone for two years. I wanted to see my family when this customs guy stops me at the airport and suddenly, I'm embroiled in this parrot mess. Finally, after about two hours, the quarantine people said, "Okay, we've found a place and we'll quarantine them. We're not exactly sure what to feed them."

And I said, "Don't look at me, I have no idea!" I was so glad to have them taken off my hands. When I spoke with Mike, I was not pleasant. I don't remember how we called back in those days. It was not easy that I DO know. I just said, "Here's the phone number of the place where your birds are, you deal with it." In the end, they both died in quarantine. I was not saddened by this. Mike and I didn't speak of this for many years after. Then we laughed like hyenas – but it took time to see the humor.

About a month after I started grad school at SIT, the phone rang. It was Mike calling from Cameroun and the connection was horrible. I THOUGHT he said, "You want to get

married?” But I wasn’t sure, so I had him repeat the question several times before I answered.

Q: Now, Wow!

WHITE: I responded with wonder: “Now? You are proposing over the phone? This is the best you can do?”

Q: it’s like _____

WHITE: He was the least romantic guy that ever lived BUT... He had so many wonderful traits – he was a fabulous friend, super smart, caring and loved humanity. He would share his last dime with a stranger, generous to a fault. He would often bring people home from the airport that didn’t have a place to stay, and we would feed them for a couple of days. He was just had a heart of gold. Almost twenty years after we were married, he sadly died of a brain tumor. He was beloved by so many.

Q: Oh, so sorry. A horrible story.

WHITE: Yeah, a horrible ending to a great story. BUT we did have many fabulous years together and it was lots of fun. He loved the outdoors – especially fishing. Oh, the adventures we had! He died when our boys were nine and 13, so that was a very tough period of our lives. But that was much later.

As an interesting little aside, when I said to my parents, I was going to marry someone I met in Africa, I knew that they thought, “Oh my God!” Pam is going to marry an African!” I do think they would have been extremely reluctant to bring a black son in law to Maine, but I think they would have tolerated it. Neither of them was racist – they just had never met any black people. My father later said to me, “We were so relieved to see Dr. White!” Meaning Dr. white White!

Q: Okay, but now when you get back its 1973?

WHITE: Yup.

Q: And in Cameroon you were thinking about graduate school

WHITE: Yes, I knew I wanted to go to graduate school. My grandmother had died while I was in PC and had left me a little legacy. It was enough to pay for graduate school. Two or three of my friends had gone to the School for International Training in Vermont, and it was kind of a multilayered learning experience with wonderful teachers that had actually lived overseas, knew what they were doing, had advanced degrees, and were devoted to teaching the next generation. We lived in this fabulous setting in the mountains of Brattleboro, Vermont. A place made for thinking way out of the box. We had some very practical data analysis and economic analysis courses, but also some “How do you think critically?” courses. Our professors would introduce a complex

problem (one a developing country might face) and challenge us to work together and piece together a solution.” Then they would ask tough questions. “Is it realistic? Let’s cost it out, let’s identify the barriers.” We spent a year on the campus, learning and probing and exchanging thoughts. It was tremendous. Then we were sent out to the field to write a thesis. I always thought that I chose the right school, because it was so hands on and so experiential, and they forced you to think creatively.

Q: So now, when you went out and did your field work, where and what was the topic?

WHITE: Yes, by that time I was married (December 31, 1973), and my husband Mike was the regional Peace Corps doctor based out of Abidjan in West Africa. I missed him so much and didn’t want to be separated from him any longer than necessary--we were still newlyweds. I knew I would have to do my thesis in Abidjan. I went out to the Ivory Coast without a firm plan for my thesis. Almost immediately after arriving in Abidjan I hooked up with a Ph.D. professor from Rutgers University who was doing research on women. She needed a researcher, to help her making sure that all the interviewers and the data points were handled properly. We spent many hours in the field together.

She was trying to figure out if socioeconomic factors influenced fertility. At the time Abidjan was one of the few African countries that had three distinct (classes). Treichville was very, very poor, Plateau was mostly middle class, and Cocody was wealthy. In Treichville people lived in small wooden or mud huts, in Cocody they lived in big mansions, with servants (mostly from Treichville). We would go from one geographic area to the other and do interviews with the women. We asked, “How many kids do you have? Why do you have that many or that few? What’s the good thing about having more? Or less?” We had questionnaires that maybe asked 25 questions, and we had about 20 different young African students working for us asking the questions all over these three districts. We collected (data) for about six months, and then we wrote our findings. And that was my thesis. It just so happened that I lucked out by having her there because she’d already figured out what she was going after and then she and I together refined the questionnaires and made sure that the data was reliable.

Q: Were you confident that you were getting accurate answers, or did you feel that they were answering to the things that they thought you wanted to hear?

WHITE: That’s a great question. The fact of the matter is you never really know for sure if the quality of the responses is good or not. As a new mission director, I often would go out and ask the village chief, “Is sending girls to school a good idea? And they would say always say oh yes, yes. It wasn’t until I had been doing this for a couple of years that I realized they said yes ONLY because they knew that’s what I wanted to hear. But this research was a little different, because this was young African women talking to women of the same age group. We were only asking women of reproductive age, and in their native languages, factual questions. There was really no reason to lie. We did some backup questioning mostly to verify the data, to make sure that the girls we paid to ask questions weren’t sitting in their back garden checking the boxes. In this study there really weren’t any right or wrong answers. As for the village chiefs, they knew I wanted

them to send the girls to school, so when I said, “Are you sending your girls to school?” The answer was “yes,” whether they did so or not, and they normally did NOT. But to ask someone, “How many kids do you have or want? They’ll tell you.

Q: Okay. Right.

WHITE:

What we found was that the very poor and the very rich wanted lots of kids because for the very poor, children meant everything: their social security, their insurance. They felt they had to have kids in order to carry on the family’s very existence. For the very rich, it was as simple as, “I can afford it, and so I’m going to have as many babies as I can.” But the middle class, they were restricting their family size. They were having two to three babies max, because they wanted to send them to university, they wanted to buy nice things, they wanted to live in an urban setting, in a nice apartment, and so they had to limit the number of children. I often talk about access to contraceptives as the big answer to family planning in Africa, but I think it’s about getting people into the middle class. That’s the answer. When people get to a certain level of economic status, they want to make sure that they have certain things for themselves and their children, they stop having huge families. They don’t need that insurance so much, because they can buy insurance, their income allows them to feel more comfortable and secure.

Rural Africa to this day is still producing many babies per woman. I was just reading the statistics the other day, the number of children born to a woman in Niger is seven on average and it hasn’t changed for generations. And they have a lot of children because children are still their insurance for the future. Children are wealth.

Q: and the whole issue of the land being able to support that many. The carrying capacity.

WHITE: I was just reading the other day that the population of West Africa is going to double by 2050, and then any kind of economic improvements that have been made are all going to fall by the wayside because the natural resources are not going to be able to support that many people. They are just going to run out of land, water, infrastructure (roads, schools, clinics) – on and on. This idea that we shouldn’t push family planning hard, makes no sense – socially or economically. It is so frustrating. The only President I ever served with that tackled family planning was President Martelly in Haiti. No African president wanted to tell his/her voters to limit family size. My advice is to push a recommended family size (two or three) and really sell it to both men and women. Also put family planning in the hands of the women – men don’t suffer the negative consequences of six or seven pregnancies. In fact, they often feel it proves their virility.

Q: And you learned this to some extent just from the project that you did. How long altogether were you there for the project?

WHITE: We did research for six to eight months and then we traveled to Ghana, because they had a huge library at the university. Their university was (in 1974-75) very well

known for its medical school and for work that it had done in fertility--tracking fertility rates among urban women. Not the kind of research that we were doing, but just how many survived, and how many went to university, and what happened to them. We went over there to talk with those researchers, and to dig through their library for any kind of information that they had. The survival of babies was so different from rural to urban African cities. In rural Africa at the time there was very limited health care for women. The most recurring reason for maternal deaths in the rural areas was hemorrhaging, but in the urban centers, it was often botched abortions and unsanitary birth procedures. There was also the problem that babies were very often misdiagnosed and given medicine that didn't fit the ailment. For example, back in the seventies really until very recently, if a baby had a fever, he or she was immediately given medicine for malaria. Unfortunately, the real cause of the fever might be flu or respiratory disease which would go completely untreated until the child became seriously ill. Babies died by the thousands. The great percentage of women had babies in their villages with only a traditional birth attendant with very little training. The under 5 infant and maternal mortality figures were just horrendous in West Africa. They are still not very good, but they're a lot better than they were, that's for sure. USAID can take a lot of credit for that.

We spent a lot of time just studying what women did with their time. In the poor neighborhoods, washing, looking after infants and cooking took up most of their time. Even though most of Abidjan had electricity at that time, the poor neighborhoods could not afford it. They all cooked outside over a stove. Then up in Cocody, the rich side, they had servants that did all this stuff. They also had access to electricity. Some of them were even driving, which was unheard of for most African women back in those days. The rich ladies would not leave the house without a gorgeous outfit, full makeup and high heels. They didn't work in any formal sectors but they sure their voices were heard. They started women's clubs and had political meetings too. They were volunteers at clinics and orphanages. They were literate and great fun to be around. We found such great difference between the three (communities). Not just in the number of babies but also how women used their power as women. Believe me, the wealthy women had a LOT more power in every way (economically, socially, sexually) than their poor neighbors.

It was a good job because Mike traveled, he was regional Peace Corps health officer, all over Africa. He had two or three hats, but one of the hats was figuring out what Peace Corps volunteers, health volunteers, should be doing in their villages to have some impact. That was part of his role, not just making sure Peace Corps volunteers were healthy or not. My research kept me very busy while he was on the road, reshaping Peace Corps' health interventions.

Interestingly enough, many, many years later, his second born son, years after Mike's death, turned out to be a very successful health volunteer in Senegal. Very often Kris taught the lessons that his father had initiated twenty years prior. Kris lived in this remote village near the Mauritanian border way up north in Senegal. One of the hottest places on earth. My Peace Corps village looked like downtown New York (City) compared to my son's village. I had a barrel on my roof, lots of fruits and lots of rain. His village had less than an inch of rain a year, no fruit and a hole in the ground for a toilet. My son learned

fluent Pulaar, which is a difficult African language, by using his own teaching techniques. He was taught basic Pulaar in Peace Corps training, but he couldn't carry on a conversation. But by the time I visited him, he'd been there 1½ years, he could tell jokes and carry on in-depth conversations. The villagers all knew his name and loved hearing him speak their language. Back in my Peace Corps days, they didn't teach local languages, only French, Spanish, etc. maybe Swahili. But it is true that no one speaks French outside of the capital city, so it is useless in small villages. Peace Corps figured out that teaching some of the local languages is a real important step, and God knows it has vastly improved PCVs ability to adapt to village life and increased their effectiveness (and happiness).

Peace Corps, for almost everyone that I've ever met, is life changing. I can almost tell instantaneously (if) people that I've worked with have had that Peace Corps experience. You learn patience, you learn to be able to take the time to look at problems through somebody else's eyes, and you take the time to listen because listening is such an important part of interacting. Knowing that you don't have all the answers is ok. And you know that teamwork is paramount to success. You also know you are NOT going to save the world, and that's okay.

So, the Peace Corps days influenced people's lives, certainly mine. What I learned from my Abidjan women about what African women wanted was also something that would shape my whole life in the foreign service. AND, I learned the secret to asking questions, so you got a thoughtful true answer and not a remote response. I witnessed how people would just tell you what they thought you wanted to hear. They got very good at supplying the "right" answer. When I was patient, I could get to the bottom of some troubling issues and might even be able to design programs that would HELP. Takes time to get to the bottom of issues. When I first started, I was always the busy American. I would ask three questions and get three "good" answers (that I already knew) and then I was gone. Years later I would take another approach. I would say "Chief, I've got all day. I'm going to drink teacups of your sweet tea, here under this tree, and smile. I'm not here for just an hour, so let's have some more tea and we'll talk about everything BUT the problem for the first 90 minutes – or whatever it takes. When you are ready, we will talk about the fact your girls aren't going to school."

FINALLY, we would get to a point when the chief would say, "No we really don't want the girls to go to school, we have no idea why they should go to school." This is very different from the normal answer you get from a quick visit which would be "sure we think girls should go to school. Sure." Change takes patience and time.

I would drink ANOTHER little cup of tea and ask, "well what WOULD make going to school valuable?" More tea. More thinking. Then I might offer "Okay, how about we re-do the curriculum so that what we teach at school is relevant and will help the village?" More tea. More waiting. But we would come to a mutual understanding of what the

curriculum for girls might look like. We could agree that writing down recipes handed down orally for generations might be a good idea, etc. etc.

Or I might say “Why don’t we make the curriculum about your oral history? I remember having these discussions way up northern Mali, at this wonderful meeting with the Tuareg tribes. I love the Tuareg tribal leaders. They’re tall gorgeous men with these magnificent swords. They looked like right out of a movie set when they came, they came to meet me riding on their camels.

At first, they didn’t want me anywhere near their villages, they would come to me on their camels, far away from their tents. They were suspicious of me and my staff right from the beginning. They were happy with their young girls learning from their mothers and grandmothers. No need for school. Many donors had tried to break this barrier before. But I took my time, we drank tea and talked about the weather, and camels and food. FINALLY I said to them, “Okay, I hear what you are saying, you don’t think your girls need formal education but what if we teach in your language and we throw out all the books you saw before. We are going to focus on recording your history—stories you heard from your parents and grandparents. We’re going to have these girls start writing down the recipes that have passed down for centuries so that we’ll make sure they’re not forgotten. We’re going to make sure that they can read anything that’s coming through the mail that might be informative about what you can do to improve the health and well-being of your villagers. Reading is going to be useful. It’s not going to be something we do because literacy is a good thing.” It took three months of negotiations (teachers had to be from the North of Mali, classrooms had to be in tents, women had to be able to attend if they wanted, instruction not in French) but we arrived at an agreement.

We started off my four years in Mali with maybe 10 girls in school, and when I left -the schools were in tents--and they were on their fourth or fifth tent. It was one of the great accomplishments of my career.

Oh wait, now Mali is your fourth.

WHITE: Yeah, yeah, I’m skipping some countries here.

Q: But it’s fine because what you’re doing is also, you’re showing how lessons learned in the Peace Corps...

WHITE: Yes, absolutely!

Q: You then later apply it in your career.... But before we get too deep into your USAID career, I wanted to...

After Peace Corps I did the research and then my husband Mike decided that he really wanted to work at CDC in Atlanta, and...

Q: That's what I wanted to ask, one quick question about your husband. He was an MD. Was he working for the public health service, or did he just decide, "Okay before I become a practicing physician in the United States, I want this international experience?" How did he...

WHITE: Straight out of medical school into Peace Corps, and part of that was the Vietnam War. If you were in Peace Corps, you didn't get a (draft) number. And the quality of Peace Corps volunteers was very high because a lot of people were running from the war. Although when I joined Peace Corps there were 25 of us in my particular group, there were 10 at the end of two years. It was tough. People dropped like flies. I don't know what the dropout rate is today, but back then it was over 50% every class. Part of it was a lot of people joined not because they had this burning desire to save the world but because they were running from the draft, and some just wanted to be part of something new and exciting without knowing just how challenging living in a small remote village could be! I remember Sergeant Shriver was talking to a group of people saying "If you think these military people are tough, you should talk to my Peace Corps volunteers, they are really out there in the middle of nowhere. They don't have all these support systems; they're out doing it on their own."

Mike decided after several years in the Peace Corps that he wanted to be an epidemiologist at the CDC, so we moved to Atlanta. I didn't have a job, so I went looking for a job and there was an English language training center position open at Oglethorpe University. I applied and right away got hired (again thank you Peace Corps for the excellent training). After I'd been there about six months, they needed a deputy director to take over managing the center. I was hired. My director was kind of an odd guy, not a very good manager, so he let me run the school. I had, I don't know, 20 teachers and 200 students. I was 27 or 28. The Director was in his fifties.

Q: And just once again as a milestone. You finished the School for International Training...

WHITE: Yeah, (in) 1975.

Q: And then right after that you go down to Atlanta.

WHITE: Right. Within a month of arriving in Atlanta, I had a job. I was SO enthusiastic – really my first professional job. I started training these teachers, introducing new methods and new techniques, a lot of which I'd learned in Peace Corps. The teachers were most in their forties and fifties and had taught there for two, three, four, five years. They had never really been trained in teaching English as a Second Language and they ate my instructions up. The company that ran the school had another 30 schools all over the United States. After I had been deputy--really director--for about a year, they sent evaluation teams out to every center in the United States and they measured quality of the teachers, effectiveness of the classes, the curriculum, student satisfaction, the whole 9 yards. They went and visited all these 30 schools for about a week each. After they had compiled all the data, the directors and their deputies from every school in the United

States were invited to a big shindig in California. There was this ballroom in this huge hotel where we were all seated on the final night, after a fancy dinner. There must have been at least 200-300 people in this room – all of us managers plus the executives of the company, guest speakers, and what have you. The highlight of the two days in California was the awards ceremony that followed dinner. They were going to give the big award to the highest performing school. And it turned out it was MY school. Everyone was clapping for the director whose name they called but he said, “You go up front and get the award, you earned that award!” I was 28 (years old) and 99% of them were over 50, and 90% men! The award for being the best school was to take the next year and fly around the United States to visit all these other schools and help them improve.

And so there I was, 28 years old thinking I was IT – the cat’s pajamas times two. I made my travel itinerary and set off to teach those guys how it was done properly. I bought a bunch of new outfits that I thought made me look professional and some killer shoes. Off I went with my little suits, and my big “I can do it better than anybody attitude,” which it turned out didn’t play so well with the men folk. I would fly in, ready to conquer. These male directors (most of whom were extremely sexist) would pick me up at the airport and say some variation of “You sweet little thing, before we do any work let’s go have a couple of drinks, a couple of martinis.

I’d say, “Okay, whatever, we’ll do that, but I’m going to be here only for two to three days, so let’s make it quick.”

“Oh, you must be tired, you must want to freshen up, and I really want to take you to eat at a fabulous place downtown.”

“I really think I better go to school.”

“Naw, the teachers aren’t expecting you until tomorrow.”

I said, “Okay, okay.”

So, the next morning, I would get up ready to go, and they would start again, “Well, you know, let’s go to breakfast.”

I said, “No, no, no, we’ve got to go to the school. RIGHT NOW”. You see I had not yet learned the lessons from the African chiefs – you must take it slow – drink a lot of tea or martinis or coffee – before you can jump right into action.

Q: So, you were being kept from helping the schools to improve.

WHITE: I finally realized they were not going to take me seriously as a professional unless I changed my approach. So instead of arriving like the world’s gift to education, I worked on their egos. I would tell them that I really wasn’t there to teach them anything since I knew they had so much experience that I could benefit from. Suddenly, I was, against every bone in my body, kissing their asses and telling them how great they were.

Show me what you do. What are you most proud of? How do you approach the day? All right let's have another beer. When I started the visits I would demand, "I want to see the teachers, I want to get this done, I'm going to teach you how to run your school." Then I realized NO ONE was listening. I was getting nowhere fast my friend. I had to step back and respect the fact that they've been in this business much longer than I had. I said to myself "ok, you happened to have won the prize because your teachers and the students performed really well but telling seasoned, much older men professionals how to do their jobs was a whole other kettle of fish. I bided my time. I used flattery and I did a lot of research before I ever got to their cities. I found out the one of two things they had scored high on the evaluations and where they really needed help. I praised them sky high on the good and gently circled around the negatives.

Over the course of that year, I learned a whole lot about changing behavior – including my own. I learned a lot about male-female relationships. I also learned that shoving knowledge down unwilling throats doesn't work very well – especially with men twice your age. I thought a lot about the whole business of leading and inspiring and behavior change. I surely knew at the end of that year that none of that happens by putting your foot down in anger or frustration. Checking your own ego at the door is a good thing to do also. You can coax people into change, you can inspire people, but often you must do it from behind. Sometimes you must be out in front, and you must set a vision and you have to get people to follow that vision. But pick your battles. Carefully.

Q: So here too you are using some of the skills you learned in Africa in dealing with tribal cultures.

WHITE: Certainly, certainly.

Q: And working in a different culture.

WHITE: And it was a different culture, a completely different culture. I was teaching in this small university with my namby-pamby director with my women teachers, all women except for one gay guy. We were in a pretty female world, and I was the boss lady. I could pretty much do what I wanted. But suddenly, my Little Miss Perfect teacher advice was not very welcome by the men directors. This was of course understandable considering that I was half their age and had half their experience. My first reaction was they were all sexist. But no, it was much deeper. They had great pride in what they did. Taking even constructive criticism from people that are less experienced and half your age is a very tough thing to do under any circumstances.

Some of these men, this is what they had done their entire careers. This was NOT going to be my career. But the fact that we could learn from each other, was important to both of us. They did recognize that I did have SOME talents they could use. Sharing information really became my *modus operandi*. I was there to learn as much as I was to teach. Winning that award was just a great thing for me, a HUGE turning point in my life. First it did give me great self-confidence and pride, but it put also me in situations that might have taken me YEARS to experience.

I always say that management is one thing and leadership is something else altogether. And visiting all those schools, learning how to inspire people, was the start of my self-leadership training. My mother used to say when I was in kindergarten, I would organize the class. “Time for your nap! Sit over there you are too crabby!” The kids would just take my instructions. She always claimed I started leadership around five – but I think that sounds more like management. I think some people are truly born with leadership skills, but I also think that by carefully reading people’s reactions, you can understand how you can get people motivated. That’s when leadership happens. You can make people come to work at 7:30 every morning and go home at 5 and complete a task. But it’s getting them to want to come to work at 7 and stay till 5:30 and think out of the box. That’s something else, and that’s leadership versus management.

Q: This is a great place to pause and we’ll pick up again at the next session.

Q: All right, we’re continuing the discussion with Pamela White, and the date is September 18.

*And when we left off, you were talking about your experience post-Peace Corps with the school and the school improvement. I think a heavy rift of paternalism. That’s a theme I hope that you talk about the next part of your career. You can reflect on the changes and how you saw them over the ‘70s and ‘80s—basically the acceptance that women can be professionals that and you can have professional relationships with men. *

But why don’t I turn it over to you, and take it from there?

WHITE: OK, let me try to think. What did I do after? Yeah, after I left the school, which was a fabulous learning experience, as I said before, because I did come face-to-face with sexism and how ugly it was. But also, how I could figure out a way around it. And it’s true. I am going to be super honest here. I learned how to use men’s egos and personalities to further my interests. I would shamelessly praise them in order to allow them to accept criticism, helpful tips. I would get better and better at this over time – never blatant about it but still – I have flattered many men in order to get in the front door. True.

My husband at the time, Mike White, who was a physician, finished his two years working at CDC in Atlanta and wanted to do his residency at Georgetown University where he got accepted.

We moved to DC in an ancient car full of our things – like hillbillies. Then, I was scrambling around for a job. I got a job as a kind of a special assistant at the University of Southern California, which had a little office in downtown D.C. It was very interesting because they were trying to attract foreign students. The students would come for the summer, or they would come for a special program. They were trying to get foreign students interested in USC – especially wealthy Arab students. This was in the late 70s. I remember overseeing eight deaf Kuwait students in their twenties – we spent a lot of time

at Gallaudet University. That was a complete zoo - their sign language was different from the American sign language, but they got along fine as long as they were around other deaf people. Getting them into schools that teach trades – like printing and auto mechanics, etc. – was another thing entirely. But we did it. Some lasted two months and some two years.

The University of South Carolina was really pioneering the recruitment of foreign students. We mostly had students from the Gulf States: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen. I would be in charge of herding these people around. I did that for a couple of years.

But I do remember the name, not to be disclosed, of one of my supervisors there. He took a liking to me. We were out late one night at fancy dinner in downtown D.C. with a group of bigwigs from the main campus in California and representatives from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. We were in a cab. And all the sudden I found that his hand was in a very inappropriate place. I've got to tell you; I was absolutely shocked! We just had this long, intellectual dinner. We negotiated two- and three-year contracts. We were happy driving back to the school to get my car to drive home. It was 9:30 at night. And all the sudden, his hand was in the wrong place.

I slapped his hand HARD. LOUD. I said, "If you ever touch me again, not only am I going to walk out the door, but I am going to report it to everybody from the top of your university and all over Washington." I have never been a shrinking violet.

And he said, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I just, you know, I don't know what got into me." I made no reply. Silence.

Q: Right.

WHITE: He repeated, "I don't know what got into me. It'll never happen again."

And it never did. But the easiness of our relationship: gone. Gone forever. It was very professional. We kept our distance, but to tell you the truth, it wasn't much fun.

It didn't last very much longer, because Mike got through most of his residency. And then, somebody that had known Mike really well when he was a Peace Corps doctor came and said to him, "Listen, you know, I've got this fabulous opportunity for you to go to Africa and work for USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development)."

Mike had loved Africa so much and always wanted to be involved with the international world. He said, "OK." About this time, I found out I was pregnant with our first child. And that Mike's mother was dying from lung cancer. 1978 was a turbulent, tough, but also exciting year. Great sadness and joy. His mother died in the summer of 1978 and our son; Patrick was born in November of 1978. He was born in a hospital where Mike and all the residents practiced so I was surrounded by young doctors talking more about the Redskins than my labor. I was in labor for hours and they finally extracted Patrick with forceps—painful. He was red and wrinkled with forceps marks and I thought he was the

most beautiful child ever born. Love at first sight for sure. About two weeks after Patrick was born Mike went to Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) without me and I went to Maine for Christmas with my parents and my young son. Mike came back to get us in early January, and we were off on a new adventure.

Q: Right.

WHITE: And then in Upper Volta, I was CLO (Community Liaison Officer). I was the first CLO—Community Liaison Officer—ever in Burkina, which was a wonderful job for me, because I got to meet all the families and help them to adjust to living in West Africa. Years later, people have said to me, “I would never have stayed in the Foreign Service without your help.”

Young wives who had never been in Africa were brought to this hot, isolated place where they did not speak the language. There was maybe one grocery store, and the store had tinned tomatoes and cigarettes. Nothing much you could buy back then in Ouagadougou.

So once again my Peace Corps experience saved the day. I spoke French. I knew what to expect. I knew how to get things done. How to bargain – where to find kids’ shoes, and what day the shrimp would arrive from Abidjan. I made sure we had cultural events and something to do for the kids. I even collected live turkeys in my back yard so everyone would have a turkey for thanksgiving. I lost a lot of money on that deal because I collected all the turkeys a week before Thanksgiving and had them in by backyard. I bought them by the kilo on day one. When I sold them on day five or six, they had all lost half a pound to a pound – I didn’t have a clue what to feed the damn things. And they were loud, and they were dirty. I only did that once.

Back then, spouses were 99 percent women. I could see that a spouse was ready to jump on the next plane out of there, I would go over to her house. I would take an entire morning and try to figure out what I might do to make her enjoy the place a bit more. Sometimes it was as easy as finding a group to play cards with or drink some wine. We had a very tight community. I knew every single person.

I remember the management officer at State (the U.S. Department of State) when I was first hired said to me, “This is a crappy idea. I don’t like anything about CLOs. We’ll pay you because they told me we’re going to pay you. But I don’t like it one bit”.

A year and a half or two years later when I left, he said, “Thank God, you took this job, and you’ve made my life so much easier.” Often people will point to what they THINK is the problem – like they hate the house where they have been assigned. But that is often not the real problem. People are lonely, they need things to do. They need someone to listen.

So that job was great training for me. It was training because I got inside people’s homes, and they really talked to me. Whether I was the most junior officer or the mission director

or the ambassador's wives, they really opened up. They taught me so much about human nature and how to respond to their unhappiness. Those lessons stuck with me my whole career.

Most male management officers at that time were totally unsympathetic to what they called whining. But it wasn't really whining, it was fear of a new place and a new language and a new culture. I understood this.

The men just said *tough it out*.

WHITE: The attitude back then was "Tough it out! We don't need to be holding hands. I cannot deal with a bunch of babies. We're paying people,". A lot of the management officers back then were from an all-male world or certainly a world where women adjusted or else. Lots of men had served in the Viet Nam war—zero sympathy for spouses. Get over it. But my boss who was a tough cookie and normally showed NO emotion, he understood that I had held that community together. He was literally in tears when I left. He knew that I had been a very positive force in the community—and had made the entire American presence happier, better adjusted, less "whining".

Again, you can change people's attitudes - little by little by little. Not with two-by-fours. You cannot say you will be happy or else. NO that doesn't work.

It really is true that every family in AID (USAID) or State is part of the working unit, including that spouse who is staying home. It doesn't matter. If you've got a spouse that's horribly unhappy because of whatever reason, the overall team is diminished. If you are a boss that says just take care of your family problems at home, I don't want to hear about them, you are breaking down the team.

Even when I was first a mission director, I said to people who newly arrived in Mali, "You take two weeks, and you settle in your family. Because family is so important to you having a positive experience." If you allow families to settle in for two weeks – so they know where the supermarket is and the place to buy the best cheese and bread. Let them get comfortable – you have bought two years of happiness.

I found often over the years that places like Burkina or Bamako in Mali that, if you take on a leadership role that is dedicated to pulling the whole team together, you have a very happy community. I found that community morale tended to be much higher in a place like Bamako where we all lived close to each other and supported each other. Morale was higher there than in a place where everyone "should" be happy, like South Africa. South Africa was paradise in many ways. There are raspberries on every bush and the climate is perfect and the housing's great. And yet, you don't necessarily find that the community is so close. Each family has plenty of opportunities to find fun things to do in South Africa – in more challenging posts you rely on each other for fun.

Q: And you know, it's interesting, because as I think about the leadership training that we do provide our senior staff, it doesn't really focus on that at all. And in fact, the life outside the offices is rarely mentioned.

WHITE: When the late, great Janet Ballentine was alive, I mentioned that emphasis on family was missing from our leadership training and should NOT be – the higher you go the more attention you need to put into this. And she and I agreed over a couple of margaritas her last summer, that families should be an integral part of our leadership training. People overlook it. Janet and I had many discussions about the difference between leadership and management. It's tough, often, to get people to understand the difference. Management comes so much easier. Management can be taught. You're on time, due dates are met. Managers say, "You be here at 9:00, and you do these three things." And they are done. But getting people to come at 8:45 because they love what they do AND when they get there early, they work smart. They don't do three tasks, they do five – with passion. THAT's leadership.

Q: Absolutely.

WHITE: There are so many things you can teach in these leadership courses. I thought, at the one that I went to many skills were well taught. BUT other things, like the family involvement and how to inspire people – those were never mentioned. Those are very hard to teach. I'm doing a speech on leadership that I'm putting together right now. And one of the people that I'm quoting is (former Secretary of State) Colin Powell. He describes what I am talking about – the inspirational part. He says, "Get them to get that spark!" The moment I read those words; I knew exactly what he meant – I bet ninety five percent of managers have not a clue.

Anyway, so after my first son was born, we went Ouagadougou – he was carried in a basket all the way from Maine to Ouaga. Then I just put him on my back and took him everywhere. He was an important part of a normal family life in a place that didn't resemble anything normal. Everybody knew Patrick. I was out and about all the time, pulling the community together. That grumpy old Management Officer told me, "(snarl) You've got to leave the baby at home." And I said NO, that's not going to happen. I had a perfectly good nanny. And I trained her really, well. She was super bright and great with kids. But I also wanted the American moms to know that taking a baby out and about was just fine.

Anyway, we stayed in Ouaga for two years, and then David (B.) Shear called Mike and said come to Dakar; I have a great job for you. I hated to leave – I was happy there. I had lots of great friends. I was pregnant with our second child. I did NOT want to leave but....

Q: You could've stayed there.

WHITE: Oh yes, we had another year on our tour – maybe two. BUT David Shear who was USAID Director in Senegal, called Mike and said, "Come to Senegal. The head of

the health office is open. The health portfolio is huge and growing. You would have a dynamite staff and by the way, the ocean is full of fish”. And Mike, one of his passions was fishing, immediately said, “Oh my god, we’ve got to go to Senegal.”

I can’t believe this when I look back, but I was in a tizzy. “I don’t want to leave. We have so many friends here. I love my job. I am with people all the time and I can take Patrick with me.” Mike reported back to Mr. Shear that I wanted to stay in Ouaga.

David (brilliant negotiator that he was) said, “Well just come down. It’s not that far and look around.” We went down and we saw the shining ocean, and the fabulous restaurants, and the supermarket full of French cheeses and wines and fresh fish. I folded immediately, “OK, maybe I could stand this after all.”

So, we moved to Senegal. We had only been there a few months when I started having labor pains which my doctor husband was sure were nothing to get excited about. Three hours later by water broke. Three more hours our baby was born two months prematurely. He lived two days only. There just wasn’t any equipment at all in Senegal that could cope with a premature baby. If he had been born today in the States, he most certainly would have survived.

It was a tragedy in so many ways. The death of a baby is just gut wrenching. Plus, gynecology was Mike’s specialty. And he felt that he had just let me down as a wife, as a father, and as a medical professional. He was just a wreck.

And consequently, I had to attend to him because he was dysfunctional. And this is a man that I never saw cry, ever, until this happened. And so, getting over that and having that experience so early in my life, changed me forever. The mental and physical pain of it, somehow finding the strength to help Mike and keep Patrick on a schedule, while experiencing raw grief was life changing.

I think up until then, I pretty much thought I had the world in my hands. My life was just about perfect. My husband was kind and brilliant, my son was adorable and well behaved, my friends were abundant, my parents were thriving. And suddenly, my perfect world, collapsed. Tragedy can happen to anybody. How people deal with these tragedies – that differs greatly person to person. Despite all the books, there is NO magic formula. None.

And Africans, so much more than Americans, taught me how to deal with death. That’s because Africans, unlike Americans, talk about death. And when you are suffering and your heart is crying, Americans say, “Do you want to go out to dinner?” or “Let’s play tennis.”

Q: To distract you.

WHITE: Yeah, anything to distract you. My family and friends would think “Let’s get her mind off it. Let’s not talk about it. Don’t talk about babies around Pam. It’s going to

depress her”. And of course, my milk was still running down my shirt, so it was difficult to “distract” me.

But Africans have stories and sayings that help. They don’t shy away from talking about death. For example, my African friends told me that when a baby dies, the next will have all the characteristics of the one who died PLUS its own personality. The spirit of the baby who died will live on. The soul of your dead baby is never far away.” I would ask questions and we would talk about other people losing babies and loved ones. We would talk honestly about grieving and pain and recovery. That is was OK to laugh again. It was so comforting to actual have a conversation about death and not shy away from it.

I ‘m not a particularly religious person. Spiritual, but not religious. Africans are very spiritual. Their stories and thoughts really appeal to me. They taught me how to grieve and how to think about the future at a time when I was desperately clinging to the past. Africans are very wise. We have a lot to learn from them.

After a long session with African friends, I remember saying to Mike, “You know what? We’re going to have another baby.” And he said, “Pam, do you mean it? Are you sure?”

I said, “Yes! I’m absolutely sure!” And part of it was that spirituality that the Africans know all about. They had convinced me that the next baby would great and carry on the spirit of Adam. And so, we had another son, and he is great!

Moving forward is NOT linear. Don’t let anyone tell you it is. Taking the time to grieve, taking the time to talk about your loss, all are very important. Later, when Mike became very ill, it was important lessons learned from Africans that guided us. We didn’t shy away from talking about death, especially to each other.

Kristopher, my second, was born in Maine in 1982. Extremely easy delivery and very healthy baby. Mike and I were just overjoyed. We could fully appreciate the miracle of childbirth again.

About six months after Kris was born, USAID was advertising for part time deputy executive officer position, 80 hours a month. And I thought, “I don’t know. Maybe I could do that.” Mike highly encouraged me. I had never even thought I would always be a full-time mother. I said yes and was selected for the job. I remember negotiating DOWN for my salary – a mistake I NEVER made again. Up until then my only real paying job for the USG had been CLO - at four dollars an hour or so. It didn’t matter to me at that time. I was busy. I was happy. We had free housing. Mike had a good job.

And I remember negotiating my salary, with Floyd (R.) Spears, a friend of mine, a great EXO. He said to me, “We’re going to pay you \$16,000 a year.”

I went, “Wow! (laughs) That’s great!” THEN I said, “Are you sure?”

Q: (chuckles) Great “negotiating,” right?

WHITE: (chuckles) Yeah! He still loves to tell the story. Many years later, he came to work for me when I was mission director in Liberia, and he was still talking about it.

Anyway, back to Senegal. I said, “Are you sure?”

And he said, “What do you want, less?” He told me that he had negotiated hundreds of contracts and not one person had ever asked for LESS.

I said, “No, no, no! Let me sign, let me sign!”

He taught me so much about being an EXO. The EXO is so important to the community, also an extension of the CLO. You can make people happy. You can give them an extra piece of furniture and their whole attitude changes.

Q: You've got resources.

WHITE: Floyd was a great mentor to me and a dear friend. So that was an extremely positive experience. And David Shear, who was my first mission director, was a fabulous leader also, super smart, always had new ideas that were doable. David made us all feel valued. I felt as important to that team as Mike. He was good at inclusion.

At senior staff meetings, he'd ask, “And Pam, what do you think?” I was a contract employee with one tour of experience, whatever the hell did I really know? But somehow, I felt, “OK, I'm part of this whole mission and I need to make it better, improve what I can.” And he taught me lots of lessons but that was a great one – inclusion of ALL team members in not just their duties but the greater team effort.

The most important lesson that he taught me was the in-out lesson. And that is, there's going to be all kinds of things coming to your in-box. Read the paper carefully. If you don't have the answer immediately of what should be done, research it, take a day if you must, two at the most. THEN decide and move on. Do not sit on that piece of paper. In and out. In and out. If you sit on decisions, a whole chain of reactions will not happen. The team becomes dysfunctional.

My entire life, that's been a lesson for me. Even if you make a bad decision, it's better than sitting on it for weeks. Keep that stuff moving. No matter if you're doing high level strategic thinking, as you do in ambassador work, or making lower level admin decisions (should we give a second desk to that family), you still you must keep it moving. Decide and keep it moving. An effective team depends on the leader making decisions.

Q: I imagine you're a “J”. (Myers-Briggs work preference)

WHITE: Yes! (laughs) Off the charts!

Q: Me too.

WHITE: And anyway, when I talk to young people coming into the Foreign Service, I say to them, “You cannot sit on things or twiddle with them so long that they become irrelevant. This is a lesson in good management. That is not leadership. Although some people just can’t make decisions. Or it’s very, very hard for them. They can learn to do this.

Q: some people just seem to always need more information.

WHITE: (sighs) More and more and more. In fact, Mike, my first husband, was a circular—what I call a circular thinker. They don’t make decisions easily. He would say, “All right, I have decided that X is the answer.” And then he’d go to A, then B, C, D, E. And then he would go back to A again to review ALL the options. Whereas I’m a A, B, C type. I’m a vertical thinker. He was brilliant, he had a fabulous mind. But he could drive me bananas going round and round. Arriving at that final decision was not easy for him. There were always so many more possibilities. He loved exploring all the possible outcomes. It was FUN for him – torture for me.

And I remember I was SO frustrated when we first got married. “He would be going through the long list of possible answers and I would plead to just make a decision. PLEASE. He would go through the circular process for everything such as what to eat for dinner. OR what to order at a restaurant!

After three or four years, I figured it out - he just needed space. His mind needed to exercise more than mine did. Here is an example. I would pretty much decide where we were going to go for summer vacation with the kids. But I would not tell him. I’d say, “Here are five possibilities.” And he would research each of the five through and through and through. I had already practically made the reservations. But he would order brochures and maps, talk about it at dinner. And “maybe this” and “maybe that.” The boys and I would slowly point him in the direction that we had already agreed upon. Weeks later, finally, he’d say, “We’re going to Disney World this year. This is what I found out.” It was a game with us all. Still, he felt that he had made the decision somehow.

I used a variety of this technique for a whole wide array of decisions, that’s how you work with a circular thinker. You can get him to make a decision, but he needs to be really part of a process. It is just a different way of looking at the world. One of my sons is a circular thinker like his dad. My other son is a vertical thinker – they can drive each other crazy from time to time.

Anyway, we both loved Senegal and working for David Shear. It was a great team of people there.

Q: The years would have been early ‘80s?

WHITE: Yup. '81 to '85. We left in '85, for Haiti. So yeah, we stayed there almost five years.

Q: These kids were bilingual I assume?

WHITE: Patrick spoke more African languages than he did French – but he did go to a French school. Kris didn't go to school in Senegal. He spoke a couple of African languages too.

Another important thing that I did in Senegal with a guy named Joel (E.) Schlesinger was to start an American school. We didn't like the school most American kids attended—it was a religious school with pretty low standards. Joel who was Jewish, wanted an alternative and I agreed. I didn't like the school because I didn't think the teaching—the curriculum—was very good.

Joel and I decided to start an American International School. We started with five or six students in an old house. We worked so hard and often disagreed. Joel and I would have these, I mean, screaming discussions. I would pick him up in the car for board meetings. I was the treasurer, and he was the president. He always wanted more books and more teachers.

I'd say, "You cannot just get money out of the air. We cannot afford more teachers". We would go round and round. But before we arrived at the meeting, we had reached a compromise, so we didn't have to fight in front of our neighbors and friends.

We started something fabulous out of our desire to improve our kids' education. Today the school is on a huge campus with 800 students from all over the world. It has an excellent reputation.

Q: So, you had to recruit the students?

WHITE: Everything! Everything. We did everything. We rented the first building. We recruited the teachers. We got the money from State Department. And we started from zero, nothing. An idea. Sitting around our living rooms.

Q: That's good. That's great when you see something like that.

WHITE: And seeing the school when I went back to Senegal a few years ago, it was thriving, booming. "Wow, we started this!"

Q: Yeah, it was an idea that was ready to hatch. That doesn't mean that it wasn't a lot of work.

WHITE: Oh, so much work! I remember I was on the commissary board. I was working. I was on the school board. If there was a board going around, I was on it. I came home one day from one of these board meetings, and I looked in the mirror, and I looked like I

was 100 years old. I had bags under my eyes. My husband said, “You know, we’re going to have a dinner party tonight” and I almost burst out crying.

And I said to myself, “You’ve got to stop. You can’t do everything.”

I stuck with the school and got out of all the other periphery stuff that wasn’t as important. I mean, it’s all important. But whew! You can’t do everything.

Q: That’s also an important lesson.

I

WHITE: It’s an important lesson. You cannot do everything. And pick and choose what you really want to do. And do it as best as you can. The results will be so much more satisfactory to everybody.

Q: And these kids were OK through all this?

WHITE: Thriving, thriving, yes.

Q: Sometimes children have a way of sort of yanking your chain and letting you know that you’re doing too much.

WHITE: I think they were too young to really know that. But if I had continued running myself ragged, I think they certainly would have said, “Enough already.” Because although I worked only half time, I was rarely at home—especially in the early evenings – board time. But I was also a VERY involved mom—I took them everywhere with me that I could. We had a beach house that we went to every weekend that they both adored.

Kris was three years old, and Pat was in first grade before I worked full, full time. I always was home for them after they got out of school. And you know, they had activities (horseback riding, swimming, basketball). I also helped a lot with any homework. My kids claim they never wrote an essay by themselves until they went to college. (laughs)

Another part of the family unit thing, that if the parents are positive, the children will be as well. If the parents say, “Isn’t this culture fascinating? Isn’t it great to learn another language? Isn’t it fun to do these wacky things after school?” then the kids will be enthusiastic. Positive thinking is going to rub off on them.

But if the parents are negative, the children will pick up on that very quickly.

During our time in Haiti, there were constant coups and hurricanes and electricity shortages. My kids look back at Haiti as the happiest times of their lives growing up. When we returned to Haiti many years later, my kids stepped off the plane and literally jumped with joy.

Q: Like they were home?

WHITE: Yeah! They spent five years there! They asked, “Where’s can we find that fabulous greasy pork we used to love to eat?” They immediately went in search of the best street food vendors and ate huge amounts of griot.

So, after Senegal, where I was a deputy XO and learned lots of things, I was recruited as the deputy XO in Haiti. Mike was going to be the health officer. And again, I didn’t want to move. I said, “I’m not sure I want to go.” And Phyllis Forbes (Phyllis Dichter-Forbes)—

Q: Forbes. Or Dichter, yeah.

WHITE: Dichter-Forbes, yeah. Well, Phyllis Dichter at the time. She was the deputy mission director, and she recruited Mike. She had known him for a long time. And we had already been in Senegal four and a half years. It was time to move on.

But I was still groaning/whining “Oh, I don’t know.” They flew me, not Mike from Senegal to Haiti for a week to look around. I thought maybe I wanted to go to India or Egypt.

Anyway, I went to Haiti to investigate what our next four years would look like. Of course, what I saw in that week had absolutely nothing to do with what I our actual experience turned out to be. This was 1985. Baby Doc was in power. Haiti was a tourist destination. Three or four cruise ships visited a week – maybe more. It had an industrial park that had, 15,000-20,000 people working on computer chips and Tiffany lamps and baseballs. Haiti was known as being a very secure place – no one locked their doors. You could walk anywhere night or day. No one had a generator. Not one. The electricity company was extremely well run and modern. We had electricity 24/7.

Q: Thank you, dictatorship. (chuckles)

WHITE: (chuckles) Yes indeed. I visited Haiti, and told my husband, “OK, it’s great. And it’s close to home. There are so many great restaurants and beaches and things for the kids to do. AND an hour flight to Miami. So, come on! Bring it on!”

Well we weren’t there six months when the United States decided that Baby Doc (the son of former Haiti President Jean-Claude Duvalier) had to go. In the middle of the night, the US Ambassador picked up Michèle (Duvalier’s wife Michèle Bennett) and Baby Doc. The USA with the help of France got them both out of the country. Ambassador Adams (Alvin P. Adams, Jr.) was ambassador at the time. I loved him. He was great. But I don’t think he or anyone else could have possibly predicted the consequences off removing Baby Doc. No sooner had Baby Doc’s plane left for France, then all hell broke loose. They violence was widespread. There was looting everywhere, trashing of houses, dead bodies on the streets. Port-au-Prince was just a horrible mess.

And we had to stay inside our houses for a long time. It was indeed scary. The kids only remember they didn’t have to go to school. But I remember housing nine or ten Peace

Corps Volunteers – they were on our lawn and all over our living room. We ran out of food and beer but found enough to keep going. The Peace Corps evacuated everyone eventually – which turned out to be the first of many evacuations. It was a wild time.

I DO remember going to an ALL HANDS meeting and sitting in the front row. Even though I was a junior officer, I was a mother and worried. I said to the ambassador, “What’s next?” And he said, “Well, I think we’ll have an election.”

And I said to him, “Really an election after forty plus years of dictatorship?” I keep remembering this, because I think we make this mistake a lot. How can you have an election in a country that has no political parties, no justice system, no civil society, no free press, etc. The keepers of the peace were the Ton Ton Macoutes.

Q: Very little rule of law.

WHITE: Very little rule of law.

Q: Do you need to get that?

Q: OK.

WHITE: In spite of the political and social turmoil, USAID did a lot of good work during this time. AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) was just emerging as a national and international crisis in the early to mid-80s. Haiti had a lot of USG health money, USAID as well as the CDC (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and maybe the UN (United Nations). All kinds of first-class research were being conducted by some of the best minds in the world. Cutting edge research was a tad controversial because we were doing experimental drug testing in Haiti. Later, we were accused of using citizens as guinea pigs. But in our defense, Haitians were dying in large numbers, mostly due to the enormous amount of American gay tourists that flocked to Haiti in the seventies and eighties.

Q: Right, Haitians.

WHITE: It was very controversial, true, but that research probably saved thousands of lives. Dedicated, brilliant, world-class doctors were working on AIDs from all over the world. You know, Mark (R.) Dybul was a part of that discussion. Paul (E.) Farmer was a part of it. Dr. Jean Pape worked tirelessly treating patients and working on effective drug combinations. He is still one of the most impressive professionals in Haiti. I adore him. He continues to this day to identify the cost cutting edge treatment for cholera and tuberculosis and HIV. I respect him more than any other Haitian. He’s beyond fabulous! Dr. Pape is still teaching students (many from Columbia medical school) and performing miracles. Those three doctors were part of a very small team of five that came up with the concept for President Bush’s very successful PEPFAR program that saved millions of lives – especially in Africa.

Mike just loved Haiti, because he had a great staff and the challenges were interesting. He had the chance to travel all the time, out in the hills and around. Back in those days, AID officers still went to the field (chuckles) and did things and LISTENED to people. He would go off for a week at a time or more, with a cooler full of beer and some food. He and his deputy Dave Eckerson would head off to the “wild blue yonder” with such joy and anticipation. They SO wanted to make a difference. Eckerson learned to speak fluent Creole in part because of those long trips to villages where not ONE person had ever spoken a word of French. Important note: The State Department does a pretty good job teaching official languages but at least in Africa and Haiti, official languages are rarely spoken outside the capital cities. Ten miles outside Dar Es Salam, few people speak English. Five miles outside Port-au-Prince, few speak French. We determined in Haiti that learning Creole was MUCH more useful than learning French.

I was the deputy EXO for three years in Haiti when the senior EXO decided to retire. Of course, I wanted to move up into the senior spot, but they said, “Well, you can’t be the senior EXO because you’re just a PSC (personal services contractor).”

Mike said, “Change over. Apply to be a direct hire.”

And I thought, “WHY - I’ve got everything I want. Why would I do that? It’s easier for us as a couple for me to stay a PSC because we don’t need a tandem assignment.” But Mike would not let it go. He kept insisting and insisting. Drip, drip, drip. It became an everyday thing.

Finally, he convinced me. I REALLY wanted to be the senior EXO. I said, “OK, I’ll do it.” And I had to go off for three months of training in DC. It was hard to leave the boys for three months, but in the end, it was so very fortunate that I made the decision. Just a few years later Mike would be diagnosed with a brain tumor and die. If I had not converted to direct hire status, I would not have had a job once he passed. And he was really the reason that I joined the foreign service. I would NOT have done it without his prodding.

Q: Was it hard to make the switch from PSC to—

WHITE: The hard part was leaving the boys. Other than that, I loved the training. AND the boys and Mike, they got along just fine. Lucky, Washington was close to Haiti, so we saw each other often. We spoke on the phone almost every day.

I remember them saying to me, you know, “Mom, we had vegetables for breakfast.”

I’d say, “Great. What kind of vegetables are you eating?”

“Pumpkin pie!”
(laughs)

Q: Well, that's sort of vegetables. (chuckles)

WHITE: Whatever. Their diet changed dramatically while I was in training – lots of pizza. And their timing – their bedtimes could be very flexible under Mike's rules. And if they fell asleep in our bed when he read them a story – they just spent the night in our bed. It took me about two weeks after I got back from training to put them back on a schedule and off pizza. Heck, they survived. I think they had a grand old time without the rule enforcer (me).

Q: So, were you processed as an EXO officer? Did you come in in that cone (Foreign Service career track)?

WHITE: Yes, yes. And they brought me in as a 4 (Foreign Service rank), which was, not bad. They'd bring a lot of people in as a 6. I felt fine about that. Then they let me go back to Haiti and take over as the EXO, which was great. By that time, I had been a deputy XO for five years. I had lots of training and lots of understanding of the rules and regulations. I had my CLO experience which taught me compassion and to consider the importance of spouses in building a successful mission. I felt perfectly comfortable running my own shop. I also had a couple of fabulous mentors who helped me every step of my first couple of years as senior EXO. Jim Donnelly – THANK YOU MY LOVE.

I did that for over a year. And we had constant crises in Haiti. If it wasn't a coup, it was a tropical storm or a hurricane or tires burning. My kids would say to me, "When are we going to have a coup day?" It was like having a snow day in Maine.

But they remembered it as paradise, because—

Q: Even with all the turmoil—

WHITE: Even with all that. Because we had a beach house and a boat. We would fill the van with little boys every weekend. Every weekend. The other mothers thought I was god because I took the kids for the weekend. I probably taught 20 Haitian American kids how to waterski.

We would go Friday afternoons. We'd head to the beach until after lunch on Sunday. The memory of teaching them all how to water ski and fish and snorkel is still fresh to this day. What fun we had! Patrick and I learned to SCUBA (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) dive together. He was by far the better diver – fearless.

And plus, it was the last happy time that we were together as a family since Mike got sick about a year after we left Haiti. For them, Haiti still is a magic country. That's where they spent four and a half years of their lives very happy. Daddy was healthy. And you know, Mom was also very happy and teaching them all these skills. Dad was captain of the boat – their hero. Haiti was a very special place.

It was a time when I got to be a manager of lots of people and had the chance to try out a lot of different ideas that I had about delegating and responsibility and teaching, I also took risks.

We had those old computers, whatever they were.

Q: (mocking) Wang!

WHITE: RIGHT - Wang, good for you! And I said, “We’re not going to use these. They’re horrible.” And I hired this genius IT (information technology) guy. He said, “You know, we really need to go over to IBMs. We just started selling the old things and buying new ones. Totally against the rules.

Washington said, “You cannot do that.” I looked at my brilliant IT guy and said “My god, the world’s not going to come to a stop! Let’s just do it. So, we did. I was WAY out on a limb, but I just knew it was the best for the mission. Washington moaned and groaned because they had a worldwide contract with horrible Wang for replacement parts and service, but my IT guy just negotiated all of that with IBM. We would not be stopped. I like to think we changed the entire world. When we proved how superior our computer system was, USAID started converting the entire agency. BYE bye WANG.

Q: And they were horrible.

WHITE: Yeah, they were horrible, and they were always breaking down. The servers were bigger than this room. Everybody else in the industry was downsizing and, (snapping fingers) making everything move faster.

So that decision taught me that, you don’t necessarily have to do everything that Washington tells you to do. If you’ve got a better idea, then go ahead and push it and ask forgiveness later. (chuckles) I did that my whole career.

Q: So, you were able to— I mean, the workday was stressful with all the changes that were happening. But you were able to compartmentalize so that family time and exploring Haiti could continue without your bringing that home.

WHITE: Yes, and Mike could do that too. He loved Haitian culture and paintings and artists and history. I remember taking the boys to a real Voodoo ceremony, which turned out to be so frightening that we had to run out in the middle. This was the real thing with whips and chanting. Young girls came in dancing around in a circle, with no under garments. They were all beautiful, dressed in white. At first, we just clapped and enjoyed the dancing. Then quickly, they all got possessed. They fell to the ground, with their dresses over their heads, spinning around and groaning/screaming/chanting.

We wanted to take the boys to a real Haitian cultural event. We thought the boys would love it. They were maybe six and ten. We sure got more culture than we had bargained for! The drums were exploding, the whip was cracking, the chief priest was drunk! I was

a tiny bit panicked. When the priest somehow managed to crawl up the center pole until he was parallel to the ground – we both stood up. Time to leave – NOW. The entire drive home not one of us said a word. When we finally got safely inside, we exploded with stories and laughter and shock.

Voodoo is such an integral part of every, every Haitian's life. They say it is 80 percent Catholic and 100 percent Voodoo. Every Haitian I have ever met, no matter how educated, has a Voodoo belief of some sort.

Q: I don't know if you've ever been to Cuba. But in Cuba, it's the same thing. Of course, officially, they're probably atheist. And there is a Catholic group. But they all have what is basically Voodoo beliefs.

WHITE: You would hear about these secret Voodoo ceremonies for leaders and senators and what-have-you. Supposedly, they go to their home village, and they have these ceremonies. It never stops.

Voodoo is portrayed as a nasty, crazy religion but it has many facets. When you sit down and talk to somebody who really knows all the ins and outs of Voodoo, you realize there are some very positive parts of it. Like in many religions, there are good spirits and bad spirits, and many rituals for fertility and luck and relationships.

Q: Absolutely.

WHITE: Haitians are so darn resilient. Once I compared Liberians' behavior after that horrific civil war experience to the Haitian's after the earthquake. The Liberians were shell shocked – the young men all had post war syndrome which deeply affected their ability to function, to move on. The Haitians were devastated, but they were trying to move forward with every inch of their inner and outer strength. I remember (Former assistant secretary for African affairs), Linda Thomas-Greenfield and I—she was the ambassador—would go into classrooms and say, “We're going to rebuild Liberia! We're going to help you get back on track again. We're going to make sure that Liberia is better than it was.” You'd look at these young people, and just nothing in their eyes, dead eyes. No hope, no ambition, nothing. If they had ever believed in a benevolent spirit or god, they no longer did. Of course, this can be explained by the nature of the disaster in Liberia where the violence was indescribable.

After the earthquake in Haiti, I would go into classrooms and say, “We're going to rebuild. We're going to teach you skills, let's work hard to build back better - together”. And the response was always so positive, “Yes! Yes, we will help, we see a better future.” No matter what they're faced with, somehow the Haitian people bounce back. It wasn't long, maybe a year or so after the earthquake when signs of a new beginning could be seen. The streets were lined with little girls and little boys in uniform with their hair perfectly done, studying under trees or in makeshift classrooms. They wanted so desperately to get better.

Q: They've been "blessed" with terrible governments.

WHITE: Yes! Corrupt governments that never seem to get it quite right. It's so frustrating when I think about it. But anyway, the Haitian people are inspirational – down to the youngest child.

Q: Could you just say a little bit about running programs only through non-governmental organizations, the pros and the cons?

WHITE: Yes. The pros are that you tend to get things done and that the corruption (chuckles) is less. But the fact of the matter is NGOs take 30 percent off the top, whether you like it or not – overheads are negotiated in DC. You don't give the host country any money at all. USAID gives the money to the NGOs, and they hire expensive personnel (it costs about \$500,000 a year to support one contractor overseas) and they must buy commodities made in America. In the end, maybe a third of the money will be spent in the country. The percentage of the actual money allocated that goes to development projects on the ground is not huge.

But by contrast, giving money directly to governments (which we rarely do) is complex. First, you have to watch that every dime is accounted for which is tough in countries with highly questionable accounting systems. You need a lot of oversight at the mission. You need honest host government workers who often are highly underpaid. You need exact specifications of the expected product or service. Progress will be slow because even if we give the government money, they need to adhere to our accounting standards – tough. They need to establish a complicated monitoring and evaluation system that is often completely alien to them. I CAN be done. I have done it, but not on a grand scale. Truthfully, I think we should take risks and do more of this. If the American NGO does all the work, they take all the credit. And the host government is not seen as providing services to its citizens. If governments are not providing services, they quickly become irrelevant. Citizens start questioning the worth of government officials – who are often driving fancy cars and living lavishly by host country standards. In the best of all worlds, yes, we should be building up the strength of governments – including building the skills of public civil servants and systems.

If you are giving all the money to an American NGO, then you're not building host country's capacity. You're not allowing the country to establish a tax base by charging fees for services because they are not providing services. But if you're faced with a totally corrupt host government, you cannot trust American tax dollars to people who will steal the money. A US Senator once told me that the only way that he could defend foreign aid to his constituents was to tell them 75% of every aid dollar came back to the United States. That figure might be a little lower now but not by much.

Let me give you one example of when giving money to a local government worked. In Liberia, we had this magnificent minister of health, Dr. (Walter T.) Gwengale. And he was so trustworthy and so smart. He established an accounting firm like a Deloitte (Deloitte Consulting, LLP), right in the ministry. And we trusted Deloitte to provide the

oversight of USG funds in the beginning. They started with staff from outside Liberia and set up a rigorous training program. And then, little by little, those foreigners were replaced by Liberians. These were top notch, often American educated accountants - real top-notch professionals. Over time, (3-4 years) we gave the Ministry more and more money. And, it's working to this day well.

But it was one ministry, with a man leading it that would not be corrupted. But still, when the right pieces are in place, it is a good model. What we basically did was work out a very detailed procurement plan and then gave them the funds to buy those commodities. We had detailed monitoring and evaluation systems that the ministry implemented. We also paid some health professionals extra incentives to service in remote areas. And they executed that also. That took time – paying salaries in third world countries is just full of potential hazards – like paying ghost employees. You need to have solid data collecting efforts. You must SEE every employee over time. Difficult to do in a country with very few roads in the interior like Liberia – but we did it, together. We built a lot of local capacity too. It is a challenge, but the payoffs are huge.

I've always said if I could go back, I would give much more money to economic growth, because without a tax base, no government is able to provide any services. And I would spend a whole lot more money on building host government capacity. Having an American NGO provide services is just not sustainable. It's just isn't.

I've been saying this for years, but the risks are great AND that 75% of the funds coming back to USA just wouldn't happen. Sometimes I think we don't want aid to be sustainable. We like having our hands on our own money. We don't really want to trust another country with our tax dollars. In Tanzania we had a good model that the UN established that had direct links with the host government. We would jointly establish development plans with the ministries and goals were transparent and doable. We claimed these were host government plans, but they were joint plans.

Q: And donors could buy in.

WHITE: Yes. Tanzania had to put some money in the pot also. And they had money. They had natural resources (including timber and gems), they had great agricultural farmland and of course tourism. The Serengeti National Park is in Tanzania. Other countries where I have served had a lot less to put into their own development.

When I last talked to President Sirleaf in 2017, she said, “Pam, we have very little money coming into the Treasury”. Liberia's a very rich mineral country. But after the civil war, there were no investors – and as soon as she managed to attract investors, Ebola struck. All private sector investors left. For years it was Firestone (Tire and Rubber Company) and the rubber industry that provided the lion's share of the Liberian budget. Now that's gone down to almost zero. No one's mining the ore mines. No one is exploiting anything in the country. After Ebola, pretty much every industry was bought to its knees. So sad really.

Q: The economic hit that took was extremely—

WHITE: Just horrendous. She is a wonderful woman, smart, dedicated. She was a wonderful president, but not even the most brilliant manager can do much with no money. Right after the civil war, money poured in, but donor fatigue was real after Ebola wiped out so much progress. She found herself reigning over a country that had no money. Just before Ebola, the economy was beginning to turn around, and they were having around a nine- or ten-percent growth rate. And she thought, “Wow, we’re really going to make it.” And then disaster. And she was left holding the bag once again with her hat in her hand.

She’s been criticized by her own people and outsiders that she didn’t turn around Liberia enough. But you know, she gave it her all. And her government had some fascinating programs when I served in Liberia. Very creative, innovative. Often the very things she wanted the USG to do (like massive vocational skills training) were not in our budget, but we helped her a lot. Congress pretty much dictates how we spend aid dollars. And it is based on what sells in the US not on the needs of the host countries.

Q: Right. Well, back in the ‘80s, you still had some budget flexibility—

WHITE: Yes!

Q: —so that you could do economic growth investments. I know we need to be sequential here, but when you fast-forward to many of the places where you served in a senior position, you had pennies to work with economies

WHITE: Yes, pennies. We just did. It was not my choice. Luckily in Liberia, we had lots of economic growth funds, and we used it as part of a package that included skills training. And it worked really, well. But you can’t do that anymore. In 99 percent of the countries, you tend to have lots of health money, perhaps a bit of education money for primary levels and a couple of million for economic growth and democracy/governance. It is not enough to turn around a country. In Africa, the EU is doing much more in economic growth and democracy. Of course, China is building all kinds of infrastructure.

Q: And the health funds?

WHITE: Health is what we’ve got. These days, that’s what you’ve got. HIV/AIDS is still where the big bucks are.

OK let’s go back to my Haiti time frame – I just thought of something important. It was during the eighties that I became a part of a very strong group of senior women working at USAID. All of them, single at the time. All of them, were smart, strong and would take no prisoners. They did NOT go gentle into the night – they had loud voices and used them effectively. They had to be HEARD to move ahead.

And this little group of tough women took on a group they considered the next generation of women leaders, of which I was fortunate enough to be one. These were the early days of talking via computers, but we communicated all the time. If any of us came across a situation where we felt that we were being marginalized – like being left out of important meetings or not being considered for an assignment, we would ask our senior mentors for advice. And they were just fabulous! They would first try to work quietly within the system, but if that didn't work, believe me they raised their collective voices and results followed. HOW I MISS THEM. They were all many years my senior, but we were sisters-in-arms.

Q: So, these were mentors.

WHITE: Mentors for years. They all retired long before I became a mission director. But they were certainly responsible for my successes at USAID. No doubt about that.

And they were the group that insisted—and this was in the '80s—that USAID do a study about why there weren't more women in senior leadership positions. The study was conducted and clearly found that the women were not really a part of the decision-making process.

The decision making at AID was often done over lunches, which women were not invited to. It was, "See you later. We're going out to lunch." And two hours later, they'd come back, and they'd decided who was going to be mission director to Country X. More often, the study found, decisions were made after hours. Many women were juggling home and careers. They had to leave at 5:00 or 5:30. The male bosses thought 5:30 or 6:00 was just a perfect time for a meeting on promotions and assignments.

On paper, important decisions were made in meetings with senior officers sitting around the table—which by the way were mostly men—on who was going to be mission director to X, Y, Z. And there were almost always no women on the slate anyway. But the study found that most decisions had been made over those lunches or late-night meetings long before the "official" gathering that was recorded.

The study made it clear that there weren't enough women in top positions. And the data exposed WHY there were so few women – they weren't part of the process. A small commission was put together (and many of my mentors were on it thank god) to force USAID to do something about it. First, they insisted at least one woman had to be on every slate, which happened almost immediately. Of course, the men would sometimes try to game the system by putting a woman's name down who was not really qualified and had no hope of being selected. But it did change dramatically the way USAID operated. No more decision making behind closed doors. We did see more and more women becoming mission directors. I certainly credit my being chosen as a mission director a direct consequence of my mentors and their insistence on change.

Q: And when Carol (J.) Lancaster came in (as deputy USAID administrator) in the '90s, and all of the slates came to her, she insisted—I can remember the screams— She said—

WHITE: Yes. Unfortunately, the insistence that every slate have a women sort of drifted into the sunset. Thank god, Carol brought that back. I think she asked for first time she saw a slate for candidates for mission directors she asked, “Where are the women?” cheers could be heard around the world.

Q: And minorities too.

WHITE: And minorities too. Although men minorities, in my opinion, had a better chance of being mission directors than the women, because they were part of that good old boy system. They went out to lunch. They knew what the score was on the Redskins game. They shared beers after work. The women were running home to cook dinner.

Q: Right.

WHITE: That study was a REAL eye opener. I am sure the same exact thing was happening in the private sector too – say nothing of all government agencies.

Q: So, there were more than—I can think of one tough single woman during your era. But there were more than one?

WHITE: Oh, yeah! There were at least four or five of them. Phyllis Dichter Forbes was one of them. She later was married, but at the time she was single. More importantly, they were savvy. They would not sit and smile sweetly and keep their mouths shut. Believe me many were called all sorts of names and were criticized by men in leadership positions. B----- was heard often behind closed doors. Change is never ever easy.

My approach was never as loud or as tough or as confrontational as they were. But they paved the way, so I didn't have to be. My approach wouldn't have worked if they hadn't fundamentally changed the culture in USAID to recognize the importance of putting women in leadership jobs. No doubt about that. They forced people to listen to them. Like it or not.

Anyway, so from Haiti, where I got my first EXO senior EXO job, I started playing with a lot of these leadership and management ideas. How you do give junior officers and FSNs more responsibility? How should we would reward them for taking on more responsibility and functioning way above expectations? What kind of rewards truly motivate people? I experimented with all kinds of innovative ideas – and my mentors were right behind me.

One thing I learned there that I have always practiced. Never say negative things in front of a group of people, because in Haitian or African circles, this is just unacceptable. If someone is doing something needs to be corrected, you need to bring them in your office. You quietly and professionally say, “You need to do these specific three things better,” and you give them a chance. And if they don't even try to improve, eventually you must

ask them to move on. Don't coddle under performers – it brings down the whole team. But you almost never have to fire people – they shape up.

I worked a lot on LEADERSHIP too. How do you spark somebody to come up with a great idea, and how do you reward them for that great idea? First never put down a new approach. I hate the phrase “that's not the way we do it here”. PLEASE. Let people run with a new concept and give them some resources to make sure it can succeed. It was a newly hired Haitian who convinced me to change computers. He had a great plan and I said, “OK, you convinced me. We're going to do it your way. I'm going to take the fall if I must. I've got your back. Now go, make it happen.” And he did. You always must fully support people's innovative solutions. You have their back, and you've got to be willing to take the flack if you have to. This same Haitian became a multi-millionaire many years later, using his advance technical skills in Africa. He left Haiti after his son was shot and paralyzed in a gun fight in Port-au-Prince which he had no part of. Just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

My team in Haiti was perhaps the most innovative I ever supervised. Of course, I was also trying to prove that I was a talented EXO and I worked my butt off. We had new systems for almost everything. And almost all those new systems were developed by FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals), by Haitians, not me. I was extremely supportive of new ideas. Someone would say, “I have this new way of doing X. Do you think this would work?” And I would say, “We'll make it work.”

Our weekly team meetings were mostly spent discussing new solutions to old problems. Every team member participated. Sometimes a janitor would come up with a great idea. The energy in that room was just zooming around. It was fun. We laughed a lot, we rewarded each other a lot, we clapped a lot. When you look around a room and people's faces are beaming, their brains are really engaged, you know they care. And that, to me, is when you know you're leading and you're not just managing. So, I learned those skills when I was in Haiti. At the time, I would say 90 percent of the EXOs in the world were men. And I was also trying very hard to prove women made excellent EXOs. And I did.

And how did I do that? I memorized all the rules and then I figured out how to get around them if they didn't make my clients' lives better. Some of the stuff that they teach you in EXO classes was counterproductive. For instance, they told me, “never break a set of furniture, you don't want odd pieces hanging around in the warehouse.” I thought this was bad advice, so I never followed it at post. (chuckles) If “Ann” wants another two chairs in her living room, and we've got a whole warehouse full of chairs, then go off to the warehouse, and let her have her chairs. I was always doing things a little different than what I was taught.

Later, there were women that were trying to come up through the EXO ranks that were having a hard time dealing with this “old boys club” of all old boys' clubs. First most EXOs were men and most of the decision makers in DC were also men. Some women couldn't figure out how to navigate. Luckily, some of those men were princes.

Jim (James Patrick) Donnelly (who was my super-mentor) was this fabulous EXO. Jim only had a high school education but was the best-read person I ever knew. He was for sure the most well-educated EXO in the Agency – formal education be damned. He had the ability to take almost any challenge and turn it into an interesting, intellectual game. God, he had a first-class mind. And a real people person. He was the first EXO that made it to minister counselor. He could think through problems big and small, whether they were an EXO problem concerning housing or motor pool or they concerned mission strategic choices. What can we do to better to make our programs more relevant to the country? He was my role model. He taught me that if our families and officers were well supported by EXO services, the entire mission had a better chance of meeting its programmatic goals. Being an EXO wasn't just about deciding what the new furniture should look like, it was about supporting this whole program from top to bottom. He made me not only memorize that EXO rules and regulations but taught me to get out of the office. Yes, inspect the warehouse and our vendors and the quality of our furniture. But also go into the field and know what the technical teams are trying to accomplish. In this way you can make sure your procurement decisions are linked to programmatic needs. He opened my eyes.

I became good (and interested) fixing problems in the field. If I looked at the requests for motor pool service and saw the health team, for example, seemed to never get into the field, I would try to find out why. Traveling in the host country was essential for a successful program. I might find out that the type of cars we had were not conducive to traveling over almost non-existent roads. SO, I would change the purchase order for vehicles so they could move about the country. Or, back then I realized only secretaries were really using the computer, so I insisted on computer training for all. We vastly increased inter-office communication and productivity. You must have your ear to the ground all the time. And Peter, head of AID—

Q: (Former USAID administrator M. Peter) McPherson.

WHITE: McPherson, thank you. When I was out in Senegal as a junior EXO Personal Services Contractor, I had a chance to talk with The Administrator. I had been assigned to take him to the airport because the ambassador was having a party with lots of big wigs and the senior people wanted to stay. I got the assignment. Because his plane was late, we had about two hours to just talk: the head of USAID and nobody me. But he was a great man and treated me like I was important to his mission. I have never been shy, and I posed a question. His response has guided me throughout my career. I asked, “What is the most important lesson that you’ve learned being the Administrator for the last two years?”

He didn't hesitate for a second, “Pam, the most important lesson I have learned is without exception you need the right people to get the job done.” He told me when he first took over the leadership of USAID, he had all these brilliant programmatic ideas. “We’re going to change the world of agriculture; we’re going to grow more of these and do less of that”. It took him a while to realize that to implement his “great” ideas, he needed certain skill sets, and he wasn't sure if Agency had them. They surely weren't

immediately visible. It took him the entire next year to figure out what those skill sets were and to find the people who had them.

In the end, he said that he found 90 percent of them within AID. But to get them into places where they were decision makers and could execute his ideas – that was a challenge. He felt he was constantly fighting “the rules” to accomplish his goal of assembling the strongest possible group of people who both believed in his vision and could help him implement it. Over time he did get a great team in place. His end line was “Always get the right people for the job.”

That’s a lesson I have never forgotten. He’s absolutely right. You can be the most innovative person in the world with the most brilliant ideas but if you don’t have the right people to help you accomplish the work, you will fail. If you’ve got someone on your staff that’s unwilling to push the envelope a little bit, is unwilling to think creatively, is unwilling or incapable of bringing something new to the table — you’re not going to get a lot done. Let me tell you, it might take time to put a great team together. I remember I knew of a great health officer I wanted to serve with me in Tanzania. I was told over and over that this person had already been assigned to a different post. But I fought back and got the right person for the job – finally.

There are many extremely talented people in USAID – and some not so talented. Or some technically brilliant but cannot manage budgets or people. You must be careful to identify the exact skill set you want. Sometimes it is more important to have a creative technical person than one who is great with people. It depends on what your program needs. And this will change as you move from strategic thinking to implementation.

Q: Right. Just before we leave Haiti, and then you may want a break, can you say something about the relationship between the mission and the embassy at that time?

WHITE: Yes. It was actually very close, because there was a crisis a moment. And we all had to pull together. Al Adams (Alvin P. Adams, Jr.), the ambassador, really believed that we were one team. He knew he needed USAID technical experts like the “Mike Whites” and many others, to make sure that his agenda was met. Because of his leadership and the unique circumstances presented just after Baby Doc left the country, I think, we were unusually close in Haiti. We had a fabulous DCM also – Genta Holmes.

When I was at USAID in Senegal, we had a joint housing board with the Embassy, but I truly don’t remember any interaction with the ambassador. But in Haiti, the ambassador would have frequent ALL HANDS meetings after the crisis of the day. He would first give us facts about the crisis – number of casualties, level of insecurity, reactions from State and Congress. Then he would give us a broad vision of what actions the USG was hoping to set in motion. But he would not dictate details which I thought was a great strategy. He would ask all of us, “What role can you play? Or what part of the country should we target? Or do we have the resources we need?”. He had AID—all of us—sit in on those meetings. We felt like we were very much a part of his team,

Q: And you've been to places where that was not the case?

WHITE: Yes, absolutely! I'd feel a we-they mentality. You would hear in the corridors, "They have better housing or furniture" or, "They're a different group of people than we are. The cultures are very different." When I went out to the War College, the instructions were to leave your uniform at the door. But my thinking was always to go ahead and bring in that uniform, but let's just make sure that all those uniforms are connected to a whole. I think it is important to understand and celebrate differences. It is those very differences that build great organizations. If everyone at USAID or State had the exact same skill set or personality or background, you would have a very weak institution.

And in order to pull people together, you as the leader have to be the one that sets the vision. You must be very clear about what you expect the team to accomplish. You must be very clear that you expect every person to buy into that vision. You cannot tolerate little groups of people deciding to follow their own agenda. You may have to force people out of their comfort zones, but it can be done effectively. Here's one example. The CIA (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency) and the FBI (U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation) and the DEA often operate in silos overseas. Each agency claims to have unique set of goals for the country. Which might be fine, but they all must work together to achieve maximum success in assuring US National Security. They have to share information and contacts. This does not come easily to them; they are used to operating within their own agency only. You must make sure they understand the importance of teamwork and how much better they will serve our nation by working side by side. So set the vision. Make sure you have the resources. And then work hard to make sure all the parts of the whole function at the most maximum levels. This is NOT as easy as it sounds.

To repeat, I never totally agreed with the uniform-at-the-door mentality. I thought it was better for everyone to bring their special abilities to the table to work and celebrate them. That can be said of CDC and State Department and USAID. I think it's fine that USAID has the development professionals, and State Department has the diplomacy specialists and CDC employs fantastic epidemiology skills. All three had to learn to work together under the PEPFAR initiative and believe me that was often a rocky road.

We all have preconceived notions too that often are just plain wrong. I remember going to Mali, my first deputy mission and then mission director post, and the USAID democracy officer said, "I don't like the political officer!"

I said, "Why's that?"

"Because he's never in his office!" And I thought, maybe that's what we want of a political officer. He was fabulous. In fact, he never was in his office. But the reporting he did was unbelievable. He was out having coffee in the morning and beers at night with Malians of all backgrounds – from soccer players to Ministers. No one would have opened up to him in his office which was inside the heavily guarded embassy. He shared tea with some important Malians, and they would open up to him and talk. We knew

more about the inside working of the Mali government than any other Embassy because of this one person. We knew about changes of personnel before they Malians did. Many years later when I was supervising political officers, I would tell them, “Get out of here! I don’t need you sitting at your desk!”

The USAID/STATE relationship in Haiti was very good. In fact, Al Adams came to lecture years later when I was at the War College. He made sure that he sought me out for lunch. He said, “You now, I’ll never forget you sitting in the front row at an ALL HANDS meeting, and you had this white suit on. I remember after saying that we were going to hold elections, you asked, ‘But ambassador, there are no political parties, how can we have an election?’” I asked him if I had offended him in any way and he just laughed. “No, you didn’t offend me, you helped me. I could tell you were really thinking through these issues and it was good for me. Occasionally, I would go back to my office and think to myself, you know Pam might be right.” I take great pride in Ambassador Adams telling me that.

Here’s another good example of STATE/USAID relationships. (Former U.S. Secretary of State) Hillary Clinton was at a meeting with Linda Thomas-Greenfield when she was ambassador, and I was mission director in Liberia. Linda and I could literally finish each other’s sentences. And she (Clinton) said, “This is how I want an embassy to work.” Because Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield and I had spent so much time together – in every possible setting – we were absolutely linked. We met ministers together, we ran meetings together, we travelled throughout Liberia with each other. Literally she could start a sentence and I could finish it. AND we genuinely liked each other – that was an added plus. Secretary Clinton was very impressed with how we worked together. She would mention our relationship many times in speeches.

Liberia was such a unique country. We had a woman president (of Liberia), we had a woman ambassador, we had a woman mission director, and we had a woman who was head of UN Peacekeeping. The four of us traveled together. We talked together. We found solutions together. It was just a great way to run a country. (chuckles)

Q: Which you did. But did you ever find that your staff resented that?

WHITE: No. Oh NO – they loved it. They were a part of it too. Leaders set examples.

Q: They appreciated what you were able to do.

WHITE: Yes, now I think of it, we had enormously high morale in Liberia! And both Linda and I were huge believers in entertainment and rewards ceremonies and Easter egg hunts. The entire embassy turned out for Easter. These things are important because they build a sense of community. And you’ve got to dig into your pocket every once in a while, whether you like it or not. I loved it. Some staff parties cost me \$300 or more. But I have done this my entire career – even when I was a deputy EXO. I would have the entire staff over to the house for a bar-b-que. Bringing all the staff together in an informal setting sends a powerful message: you are valued. Three hundred dollars is a

very small sum to pay for enormous rewards. Morale skyrockets, work quality improves, absences decrease.

Q: Right.

WHITE: But you know, some people guard every cent, which is an unfortunate thing. The government is not going to pay you to entertain your staff at Easter. Linda and I would figure out how much we were going to throw into the pot. People would be great at helping to organize. I remember at her house, we had 30 women—or men and women—dying Easter eggs and chit-chatting, exchanging stories about their families.

Q: It wasn't about the eggs.

WHITE: No! It was not about the eggs! Totally not about the eggs. Chatting and laughing. Linda knew that. I knew it and so did the helpers,

At Thanksgiving, always everyone on my staff that was at my house and everyone pitched in. I never left post when I was mission director or Ambassador for Thanksgiving or Christmas, because I always wanted to be there for my staff. I'd go somewhere after or before, but I'd always be there for the holidays. Everybody was always invited. I would ask everyone to bring a dish and then just have fun. If we had ten desserts and no salad, so be it. I always had two or three enormous turkeys with all the trimmings. The rest didn't matter.

Q: Right. That's great.

So, we are wrapping up Haiti.

WHITE: Right. So then, you know, we spent—

Q: That's where Mike got sick?

WHITE: No, that's our next post. The Haiti years, as controversial as they were and as disruptive as they were, were also the best years of our lives as a family. The boys had tons of friends and we had the beach house and a boat. Mike and I both loved our jobs; we were all healthy. It was a magical time.

It was also a time when, I realized I had become perhaps a bit too jaded. Military with big guns and dead bodies in the streets became the norm. We almost expected it. But you should never EXPECT dead bodies. I remember exactly when I went home and said to Mike, "It's time to leave." I had some consultants in from Washington. That morning, I picked them up at the hotel, and I drove them to work. There was this big, tall fence outside the USAID office. You had to stop, and the guards would let you in.

I stopped, looked casually outside my window and there was a dead body lying there right next to the front gate. I turned to this guy in the front seat, and I said, "God damn it! This is going to upset my whole day! I don't have time for this! I've got a meeting at two o'clock. Now I'm going to have to stop and call the police. This is just so irritating."

And these three guys were staring at me with their mouths open. I could tell they were thinking, “Who is this monster?” I did not exhibit one ounce of humanity or concern about a dead body. Those three men were shocked. I could tell by looking at them, that I had gotten too complacent about horrible things. I went home and said to Mike, “Whoo! I’ve gone to the ‘other side. It is time to leave our beloved Haiti.” Two or three months later we did leave. We left so many Haitian friends. It was such a positive over-all work experience for both of us. It was my first time as being a senior EXO. Mike had done so much good work with this group of fabulous physicians. I remember him giving his good-bye speech at one of these endless parties, and his voice cracked with emotion. We both knew we had experienced something very special in those five years.

Egypt had been in the back of our minds for years as a place we’d like to go. Positions came open. He got a job. I got a job. My job was deputy EXO again, which I wasn’t too happy about. But I figured, it would surely keep me busy.

Q: It’s a huge mission.

WHITE: It was huge. And the EXO in Egypt at the time took me to lunch in DC and convinced me that I would have all the responsibility that I wanted and needed. So off we went to Egypt.

I remember these pictures of us in the airport with 10 HUGE suitcases scattered everywhere. And a dog and fishing gear and scuba suits! And this was us just trying to get there!

The weird thing is that it seemed normal. I didn’t seem to mind it so much back then. I did realize later that I’d just about had enough of this packing and unpacking business. There came a time when I said, “Enough.” But that wasn’t the time.

Mike had a wonderful job. And the mission director was fabulous. Everything was going really, well. The children were adjusting; although that was a bit of a struggle. The culture there was amazing! We saw the Nile and the Pyramids almost every day. Every weekend, we had a spectacular family adventure – riding camels or hiring a boat or visiting ancient tombs. I remember writing a Christmas letter that year about how extraordinary it was to live in a country that talked about Cleopatra like she lived yesterday. History is very much alive in Egypt.

Then one fateful weekend we took the train up to Alexandria. Mike said, “You know, I’ve got a horrible headache, a really horrible headache.” He popped some aspirin. That was the beginning of a tragic end. For the next six weeks, he kept having these headaches. And unbeknownst to me, he kept increasing his meds.

Q: So he was controlling it?

WHITE: Yeah, he was controlling it. He was going to work. He upped the ante. I didn’t know this ‘til later, but it wasn’t aspirin he was taking. It was—I don’t know—very, very heavy stuff.

Then, in bed one night, he had a mini kind of seizure. I said, “Honey, something is really, really, really wrong.” He said don’t tell anyone, “I’m handling it. I don’t want to talk about it,” And then two nights later, he went into a full-blown seizure. His eyes rolled into the back of his head, he vomited. The embassy doctor lived right downstairs from us. I ran down and got him. He immediately took Mike to the hospital. Egypt has some fabulous hospitals and he was admitted to the best that night. They conducted some tests and said right away, “He’s got a brain tumor.”

Mike was evacuated the very next day. The kids and I stayed an extra two days to get packed. We never returned to Egypt.

I went to Egyptian hospital to see Mike and they had him sedated. I think he was pain free for the first time in months. I said I couldn't go with him on the airplane but not to worry I was right behind him. He said, "I'm going to be fine." We knew he had a brain tumor. But we don't know until after they did a biopsy how bad it is. Then there was still hope. But you know, for some reason, I just knew it was bad.

Q: Did he know it was bad?

WHITE: Yes, yes. He was a doctor, a very smart doctor. And the Egyptian doctors didn't put any pretty face on the diagnosis. They bluntly said they thought it was malignant. Here is an odd back story. We were in Maine on home leave just before we went to Cairo. At the last minute, he said, "I want to buy more life insurance." And he just had a full checkup at State Med, but he still wanted to buy more life insurance out of nowhere. Back in those days, State Department did these very thorough checkups – from heart to eyes to ears to lungs. And he was declared fully healthy. And every test was fine.

At the time I said, "I don't think we need more life insurance right now. We're healthy. We're relatively young."

And said, "No, I feel like I've just got to do this." And he went, and he bought a lot! It was interesting because, if you get sick with anything really bad within six months, it's all negated. It was seven months when he was diagnosed. He died 18 months later. After he died, one of the insurance companies announced, "We are not going to pay you. He knew he had a brain tumor."

I was beyond furious – they were trying to take advantage of his grieving widow. I said, "No, no. Do not screw with me. I have all his tests results. I had all the evidence I needed from State Department records. I've got all of this in my file. I will take you to court if you don't pay me."

This slimy guy said, "We can negotiate. You can have half. No questions asked."

I said, "No, no. We're not negotiating period." And finally, he realized he wasn't dealing with some dope. You can see some widow grieving and saying, "OK. I don't want to argue with you". I wanted to start sending out e-mails or whatever to other women to say, "Don't settle! Don't settle!" End of side bar.

SO, we went back to the States, and we had this fabulous doctor at GW (George Washington University Hospital) who had worked on former U.S. president Ronald Wilson Reagan, when he was shot. He performed the biopsy and confirmed that it was a Class Four malignant brain tumor – the same kind that killed Teddy Kennedy and John McCain. He said, "We can go in and take as much as we possibly can. But you cannot get it all. But I can buy you some time, some quality time." And he did.

From that day on, we had 18 months. The many things that I've done in my career that I'm very proud of, but the way that Mike and I, I think, handled his dying is worthy of mention. I think we handled it so well with humor and sympathy and courage. Not sure we did as well with our boys.

Q: Probably tough.

WHITE: You know, we cried AND laughed about it. We would sit in the living room and have some wine and dance together and talk about before and after. He would get to a state where he really had a hard time with peripheral vision, so I would have this mat that I would lay on the floor next to our bed. He would say to me, “Tell me this or that story. Remember when we went to Nigeria before we were married? Tell me the story from Nigeria.” And so I would over and over. He never got tired of hearing our adventures. We once drove from Maine to Alaska so that story took many nights to retell.

Slowly, he kept getting worse and worse. BUT he just could not make himself talk to the boys. For them he just wanted to be the alpha male DAD.

Q: Did the boys know?

WHITE: Oh, the boys knew he was sick. The first year, he was fully functional. He worked.

Q: I remember he came into the office.

WHITE: He came into the office. That’s what he wanted to do.

I kept pushing to talk to the boys about his illness and he kept pushing back so we went to psychiatrist. And the psychiatrist said to me, a life lesson, “Don’t you ever forget who’s sick. And it’s not you. Mike gets to choose how he handles talking to others about HIS cancer”. At that point I was thinking “My god, what am I going to do? I’ve got two young boys. Mike’s dying.” And the doctor told me bluntly to figure out a way of making Mike’s life the best I could possibly make it.” The focus was NOT to be on me. I got that.

Mike decided he wanted to go to Alaska to see his brother. At first, I was totally against it. What if he has a seizure? What if this and what if that. Then I remember what the doctor told me – let Mike make the decisions. Let him have one last memorable fishing trip with his brother.

Q: He’s doing what he wants to do.

WHITE: A lot of our decisions were well done. In hindsight, I kind of wish he had talked to the boys. When he died, they were nine and 13. So they were just at this incredibly difficult—and they worshipped him—time in their lives. But that, again, was his choice. The acknowledgement that he was dying was important. He and I never played around with the diagnosis. We knew it was a death sentence. It’s horrific watching someone you love die. And he knew every sign of deterioration. He was losing his vision. He couldn’t drive. His ability to write and think analytically declined. The signs are all there. We acknowledged the signs, but we didn’t concentrate on them. We danced, we told stories, we laughed and yes, we cried.

By the time he died, most of my grieving had come and gone. I grieved at the diagnosis, I grieved privately as the signs, and I grieved with him. But at the end, it was time. He knew it and I knew it.

Q: Piece by piece. Piecemeal.

WHITE: He could have held on longer in a catatonic state. But that was not Mike. He was taking these pills to keep his brain from swelling. And every day he would take three, morning, afternoon and night. By that time, I’d sent both the boys to visit my sister, because I didn’t want their last memories to be of him having seizures and drooling and crying. I just didn’t want that.

The hospice nurse told me the night before he died that his heart was strong. “He’s going to be around at least another month.” And I said OK we can deal with that. His brother was there, and his best buddies—his medical school friends—were there almost 24/7. They were rotating in and out. They were fabulous.

But the next morning after the nurse told me he had another month; I was trying to give him his pills. He shook his head (he couldn’t talk really) forcefully and shut his mouth tight. He was clearly saying to me, “I’m not taking that pill.”

And I said, “Honey, if you don’t take the pill, your brain’s going to swell, and you’ll die.”

And he nodded. He wanted to die while the boys were out of school to give them an adjustment period. He didn’t want to live like a vegetable. He was done. He died the next day. I was, to tell you the truth, relieved that it was over. The last month was brutal. The last 18 months were difficult but when death is looking you right in the face day after day and your husband is so young, that is brutal.

His medical school buddies were my salvation. The Foreign Service community was also supportive, pretty much at the house every other day for months. I must say, having learned some valuable lessons about grieving when our child died, I refused to just sweep his death under the table. We made a big deal of celebrating his life. Mike was a beloved character throughout USAID. At his memorial service (beer, Jimmy Buffet and burgers by his demands) people were great about telling Mike stories that highlighted his compassion and intelligence and humor. To this day, our boys never tire of a Mike story. “Tell me when Daddy or Mike did this.” Mike is very much a part of their lives today.

Kristopher was only nine. But the stories and the pictures and the fishing and the boating and our adventures all over the world live on. They have both fashioned part of their lives around his image. Mike would be very proud of them. They both are very much like him.

Q: How did you carry on?

WHITE: One step at a time. Right after Mike was diagnosed, I couldn’t stop crying. And Patrick said to me, “Mommy, who’s sick you or daddy.” It was not me. I was supposed to act as their support, and I was failing. I got tougher. Again, the psychiatrist saying, “Don’t forget who’s sick around here. Not everyone can crumble in the boys’ world.” I knew right then I could NOT be the one who was going to crumble. There was no choice. There was zero choice.

I just put one foot in front of the other. That’s how it was for at least a year afterwards. And I let a lot of the discipline slide a tad. Mike was a huge stickler for grades, but I just couldn’t find the energy to get upset over a B. With Mike, if the kids ever got less than an A on their papers, he would demand, “Well, what happened? And what will you do about it?” He was a tough cookie. But after his death I thought a B is fine. These young boys just lost their dad. B is good.

Q: Were you working at the time?

WHITE: Yeah, yeah. I took the rest of the summer off. And then school started for them, and I went back to work. USAID was extremely flexible with me, both during and after Mike’s death. Gave me all the room I needed to take care of the boys and Mike and later his estate, etc. I had those life insurance checks, so I wasn’t burdened with money worries.

A lot of widows with young children are really hit hard with the death of a spouse. The grief is so multi-dimensional. It's not just grieving because their life partner is gone, but how are they possibly going to deal with the realities of life? Especially if they don't have a profession of their own, and they have a big mortgage on their houses. The money issues are only one part – sharing parenting is a great joy – no one thinks your kids are as special as their parents do. There is no one left to talk to at night about the ups and the downs. There is no one to plan the future with and to share dreams. There is no one to take care of the kids when you are so sick you can barely stand. The list goes on and on. My appreciation of single parenting is enormous. It is tough.

We kept his ashes for a year in a discreet urn in the living room. It was comforting to have him in the house. We ended up the next summer taking him on a lobster boat with a lobsterman that adored Mike. It was just the boys and my parents and me. We all took a little bit of Mike's ashes. We all said a little something.

But the lobsterman said it best, "Mike, wherever you are, may your filament line never be tangled." We all laughed and clapped. When Mike went fishing, his lines were always caught up on a tree or some wild thing. We all thought that the lobsterman hit just the right note. (chuckles) We all thought that was perfect. Mike would have shouted with glee.

Q: Life has to go on.

WHITE: Yeah, life goes on. But certainly, for a solid year, his death was just part of who we were. It was how we defined ourselves. We took time to remember and talk about him. We were also a part of a tight circle of Mike's friends. They would come and take the boys on outings sometimes and tell Mike stories. Mike's brother became very important to them. They spent three or four weeks with him every year after Mike died and they worshipped him. He was a true Alaskan character and a tremendous fisherman. He was extremely smart and curious. He taught them a great deal about birds and fishing and Alaskan culture and music – just to name a few.

People dropping in stopped after several months. This was fine. People had other priorities. But that support was certainly an important right after Mike's death. I think the Foreign Service community does (snaps fingers) gather around its own, which is just one of the many wonderful parts of being part of the Foreign Service family. When one of the "family" gets in trouble, there is real support – both emotional and financial.

Q: And of course, you had friends from all over the world.

WHITE: Yes, indeed. Probably ten people after his death called me weekly. Many others called once a month. Letters recalling adventures with Mike kept coming for almost a year. Some of them were Mike's Northwestern friends. Some of them were my friends. Many were our friends. The FSNs—the Haitians especially—were on the phone constantly. "How you doing? What about this? What about that?"

When I went back to Haiti as ambassador many, many years later, those same Haitians were lining up at my door. I was not Ambassador White to them. They greeted me by my first name (a big no no in diplomatic circles) with great warmth. I had spent years in their houses. I had been there for a long time and our friendships counted more than my title. Exactly right.

The Boulos family, who have been the number-one health family in Haiti for decades invited me to dinner within the first couple of weeks. Mike had adored that family and they in turn were very fond of him. Papa (Carlos) Boulos was minister of health and a fine physician. Whenever we were invited to the Boulos house for dinner, the women sat in one room, and the men sat in the “inner sanctum”, as I called it.

The week before we left Haiti, they gave us a goodbye party. And I said to Papa Boulos, “Can I sit in the inner sanctum since this is our last dinner with you?” He said, “Yes!” He sat me right next to him. For some reason at the time this greatly amused everyone present – men and women alike. When we left the house, I teased his sons, all of whom were doctors, four or five of them, that I would never sit in the outer room again.

When I first got back to Haiti, they immediately said, “Come to dinner. You can sit in the inner sanctum! We still remember you saying that!” Which was a positive thing, a good thing.

Egypt didn’t last very long. We were only there for less than eight months. We had barely unpacked before we had to relocate to the United States so Mike could get the best medical care possible. We had no home or furniture or schools. It was a tad overwhelming, but we just kept going. Mike was sick and on all kinds of medicine, but he helped. He was still driving at the time. He was still working.

We finally found a house we liked, and we finally found schools that the boys would go to. Although, the school that Patty was going to in Reston (Virginia)—Langley, there was a next-door neighbor who was a creepy kid. We didn’t know but this kid was hitting Patrick every morning with his fists. One night, Patrick took his shirt off to take a shower and I saw these welts all over his upper body. At first, I thought he had a disease, this was so out of my realm of thinking. Patrick didn’t want to tell me because he thought I had enough on my plate. God he was so brave. He said, “Mommy, you’re worried enough about other things. You must worry about Daddy first. “I said, “No, no, no, no. Mommy worries about you, too. Believe me.” And I said, “Who did this to you?”

And he said, “This creepy kid that lives next door.”

And I went over and knocked on the door and said, “If your kid ever touches my kid again, I will beat him within an inch of his life. I promise you.” You cannot image the state of mind I was in! I had a husband who was dying by inches! And I had a monster living right next door who is beating up my child!

Q: Did they even know?

WHITE: No, I don’t think so. The husband was a judge. Both were sitting in the living room, with me screaming at them. The judge said, “That will never, ever happen again.” And it didn’t happen again. But I took Patrick out of the school because he was used to small international schools and this enormous school in Reston was just overwhelming. He was a straight-A student, but he couldn’t function in that school. Of course, his beloved father was dying. He just didn’t need the extra stress. I put him into a little private school, which he loved. His best friend from Haiti was there. All worked out better.

Q: Right. But it's a reminder that— We're talking about your career, but you have a life, and it's important.

WHITE: Yes! And you know, how you deal with the worst times in life reflects on how you live the best times. But it also makes you so appreciative of just everyday existence. I remember driving home with Mike during those early months he was dying. We were both thankful that we had made it through another day. Very appreciative that we had one more day together on the planet. You know, that we could be a family and that we could laugh. Because we knew something horrible was on our horizon, but that day was good.

Q: Be the last.

WHITE: Leading up to the bad. You don't have to make it dreary and horrible and crying all the time. Because that would be the last thing that Mike would want. We were married for 19 years. We met in Peace Corps and shaped our future together from that experience. We could finish each other's thoughts. He was my children's father.

I was working a series of jobs in Washington, because I got there all the sudden out of nowhere. I was supposed to be working in Egypt. I remember working with Malcolm Butler and setting up the first mission in Moscow. It was a great experience, because he was fabulous. He boosted my confidence the very first day when he told me that I had come HIGHLY recommended. Not sure if true but it was the right thing to say. They'd had an executive office before who was just getting nothing done and was not good with people.

They were just so thankful that they someone who could organize this task force that was trying to set up the mission in Moscow. At the time, it was very important to have an AID mission in Moscow.

Q: But the embassy was not keen at the time, I remember. Barbara (N.) Turner was

WHITE: RIGHT – god you have a great memory. Barbara was very much a part of this at the time. The Embassy dragged their feet on every decision. Barbara was in a constant state of emergency. We asked for volunteers from around the USAID world to staff up the mission, which means you sometimes get the dregs. If there's someone who's got a really great job, in a really great place, they tend not to volunteer for these kinds of assignments. We did get some truly excellent people, but we had some doozies too.

We did take some second stringers. I remember the Mission Director calling me and telling me that I was doing a great job but PLEASE no more like the last guy who was bordering on crazy. We both laughed like hell. But we were taking volunteers and we couldn't be too fussy. Also, a couple of the second stringers turned into top notch professionals. It was a great mission to show your stuff. But that year, the embassy—you're absolutely right—did not want to help us do anything. I was just knocking and knocking and knocking on their doors until they opened. It was fun. We got a lot done in a little amount of time.

After several months of that assignment, I moved over and worked in HR (human resources), which I was part of the recruitment team. We were just beginning to work with statistical analyses that would show us how many of what backstops we had, how many were retiring and our projections for future needs. It was also a first try at determining what our work force looked like, both in terms of men and women and diversity and skill sets.

We had a database that was, for that time, remarkable. It was hard to get managers to pay a lot of attention to it and to use it make strategic decisions, but we tried. Even though we were going through a period of limited hiring, we were trying to focus on making our workforce better meet our skill needs and to increase diversity – which was almost zero. Almost every person in USAID said they wanted to diversify the workforce, but there were very little true efforts to do so.

I established a new program to attempt to recruit more minorities in the agency, which lasted only two years. The minute I left, it stopped. But it was great. It all hinged on our summer internship program which for years had been 98 percent white college students. At the time I took over the internship program paid very minimum wages; a stipend really and no living expenses so of course we got mostly rich kids. In my program, we went to minority schools and did heavy selling. We used young African Americans to talk to them whenever possible – the few we had. Most importantly, we paid the interns a salary and some living expenses we they could afford to live in DC. When I first put the plan on paper with a \$500,000 price tag, it was returned to me with a HUGE red NO on it. It was from Larry Burns, a very controversial figure but I got along fine with him. I immediately asked to see him and told him that this was the first fresh idea EVER to increase minorities. It was only half a million dollars and it would reap HUGE rewards if I could pull it off. Right then and there he took his red pen and scratched out the NO and wrote Yes. I DANCED back to my office. It was just great, and we got all kinds of minorities to apply. We were recruiting sophomores the first year to work in DC and then bring them back between junior and senior year to live overseas. I remember one African American Mission Director told me he couldn't take any interns and I called him and read him the riot act. He agreed to take one in the end. These minority interns were top notch and they had a real interest in foreign affairs because of this program. It was so exciting. Then I left to go to South Africa and the program stopped. It took a lot of my personal energy and interest to keep it going. I really wanted to diversity our workforce, which many gave lip service to but didn't want to put in the work. Years later, somebody said, "How did you do that? We want to do it again." But they never did, which is unfortunate.

Anyway, (former USAID administrator J.) Brian Atwood gave me money to do that program. We'd talk about it years later. I'd say, "It really was incredibly successful." He said, "Yes, no one had the energy to keep it going after you left, unfortunately."

South Africa mission was greatly expanding. Nelson R. Mandela had been elected president in 1994. The USAID budget was going to go from, I don't know, maybe \$30 million to \$400 million. In 1994, USAID asked, "Do you want to go to South Africa?" I said, "I'll come out in '95. I want the boys to have one more year in the STATES." They said, "OK, we'll do an interim USPSC to cover the position. We'll wait for you for one year to come to South Africa as Supervisory EXO.

Q: So had you left the agency?

WHITE: No, no, no, I worked in DC for that additional year. From the time I was hired as a U.S. direct hire in Haiti, I stayed with USAID. The year after Mike died, I worked in this task force, which was good about making sure I could be there for the boys for whatever. If they had a tennis match, if they had a debate, if they had a hiccup, my boss would say GO GO GO. The task force was a perfect match because it was demanding and flexible. I knew I wanted to go back overseas but not before the boys were ready.

Ann Doherty – a great woman, smart, dedicated called me and said, “I want you to go to South Africa. It’s really, really important.” I said, “Give me eight months,”. And she said, “Done.”

So, we went to South Africa, which turned out to be a great move for the boys and for me too. Because school was great, the country was great. Aaron (S.) Williams was the mission director, who is my one of my best friends on earth to this day. He taught me so many lessons about leadership. He is the best example I have ever had, and I have tried to emulate him my entire career. His son Stephen and my son Kris became close in South Africa and are very good friends to this day. Plus, I met my wonderful current husband there.

We had this amazing group of people in South Africa. Paul Weisenfeld, Carleen Dei, Karen (L.) Freeman, Patrick and Susan Fine. Five or six of us became mission directors, it truly was just this amazing group of people. We worked together well.

It was intense because there was so much money, and there was so much pressure from Washington. That is what made the smooth running of that mission so astounding – it could have been a complete disaster.

Q: Did it go from a program that was almost totally “off-shore” to where you’re working with the government.

WHITE: Well we were certainly working WITH the government of SA, but we were not working through them – meaning we didn’t give money directly to the government. The big difference was the nature of the programming. Before 1994, we were working with maybe 250 little, tiny, anti-apartheid organizations that were trying to make a difference here or there. At the time before Mandela was elected there were no big effective NGOs operating in SA, so you HAD to work through the small, almost underground organizations. One of the FSNs whom I’m still in touch with—Faruk—liked it that way. He said, “This is the way we should work. We should work with small groups who are close to the people, who have their ears on the ground.”

These small organizations were critical to USG involvement at one time because they really were our only way to influence civil society during apartheid. BUT you can’t do that when you have a \$400 million program. It is the correct choice when have a \$25 million program. You try to spread USG influence as far and as deep as you can with little money. AND there were many small but important success stories. Faruk hopefully is writing some of these down. Faruk was always fighting to keep the money going to all these little organizations. He was a fierce fighter against apartheid, so we totally respected his opinion and his guts – unbelievably courageous man.

I told Faruk and Aaron told him also “We have to change direction. There is no way we can have proper oversight of hundreds of local organizations.” None of them had proper accounting procedures – nothing really written down. Before 1994, we learned one way or another they were doing good work and we would give them small grants. Pretty much no strings attached.

The nature of the program completely turned around. In 1994, USAID had—I don’t know—maybe 25 FSNs, and we needed 200 FSNs by the end of 1995. When you have a 25-million-dollar program, Washington (the Hill, the Sec of State, the USAID Administrator, etc., etc.) doesn’t demand reporting and oversight BUT when that jumps to \$400 million and Nelson Mandela has just become President – the ENTIRE game changes. We had to quadruple the Controllers’ Office and the EXO and the Contracting offices – plus all the technical offices needed staff as well. I was in charge of all the recruiting – both American and local – although

god knows Aaron was on the phone too attracting the best USG talent. Putting all that together was great fun. It was difficult. We lost some great talent and we also recruited some of the best of the best.

We were not very good to South Africa for years during their fight against apartheid. We had these little pots of money all over the place. It wasn't until VERY late in the game that the USG imposed sanctions on SA. Many powerful politicians were against sanctions right to the very end. One of the great fighters of apartheid was Libya not Europe and NOT USA. Unfortunately, the USG for years covered our eyes and said, "Well, whatever's going on out there, it's fine with us. We're not going to get into it." Truly so embarrassing.

Many of course made a lot of noise, thankfully, like the Black Caucus. The U.S. Congressional Black Caucus voices got louder and louder. The situation in SA became worse and worse. Black South Africans were not tolerating this great injustice anymore. They were in the streets daily. Finally, several private businesses also agreed that we needed to boycott," which is what we did. But the United States of America's part in the fight against apartheid is nothing to be very proud of, which Mandela of course knew.

Wonderful Administrator Brian Atwood was coming out all the time. Al Gore (former U.S. vice president Albert Arnold Gore, Jr.) was coming out every six months, and (former South African president Thabo Mvuyelwa) Mbeki was going to the States every other six months. SA and USG had established a Binational Commission which required two meetings a year. And both—whether Gore was going to SA or Mbeki was going to the USA, required endless preparations. It seemed for two years we NEVER stopped preparing briefing materials.

On top of the there was a constant flow of CODELs and other VIP visitors (movie stars and businesspeople and AAs from every USG branch). I was trying to keep on top of all the logistics for a while but realized that I desperately needed more staff. We finally hired two or three people doing nothing but visits. Of course, I still had to keep an eye on logistics – everything was stretched to the limits – the motor pool, hotel space, rental cars. Back then SA was not a huge tourist destination like it is today. They did have SA airlines though and that was hugely helpful since every visitor wanted to visit both Pretoria and Cape Town. I sometimes flew back and forth twice or more a week.

Q: Were you EXO at that point?

WHITE: Yeah, I was the supervisory EXO, but I also knew the programs very well. This is in many ways thanks to Aaron – he didn't want me to just organize the logistical side, he wanted to make sure I had an in-depth knowledge of the programs as well. I spent a lot of time with our VIPs and it was important that I could support our programs, explain them, cheerlead if needed. We were doing four of five briefings a week. Briefing books started out as over 100 pages, but we knew NO ONE was going to read the details, so we began to HIGHLY edit our materials. Karen Freeman and Aaron and I would tell the technical teams to get their briefings down to two pages; HARD to do. I am an excellent editor (journalism major) so I did a lot of the editing myself. I was doing the EXO job on top of this other job. I was busy, but I loved it.

Aaron— And Henry Reynolds was the deputy. They were both great people. It was unusual to have a black-black team at the head of a USAID mission; just having ONE black was unusual. But Brian and Aaron knew how important it was to send a message that the USG supported black leaders. By appointing Aaron and Henry the USG got that message across. Both were very

talented managers. They laid out the priorities and then gave us responsibility for execution and let us run with it.

Aaron was on the phone to DC sometimes ten or more hours a DAY. It was crazy. Everyone in DC seemed to want to micromanage our mission but Aaron would have none of it. We got to this place where no one could take an international phone call except Aaron because we didn't want to be sending anything but one message. We all knew the message, but Aaron wanted to be crystal clear articulating it. Take note: Aaron was not controlling how we did our jobs – he gave us full leeway to do that. He was tightly controlling the MESSAGING. He was protecting everybody's behind.

Q: I'm sure there was pressure about making sure about how money was distributed

WHITE: Everybody wanted a piece of the pie. There is no doubt in my mind that at this time, South Africa USAID Mission was THE most interesting and intensely followed location in the world. We had ALL the pieces of a great story: a spellbinding new President (Mandela); a LOT of money (over 400 million a year); a dynamite success story (the end of apartheid) that was on the front pages of every newspaper and magazine around the world for months. It was a fascinating time. Of course, that much scrutiny and money bring huge challenges as well. I must say we were ALL caught up in the history that we were making/living. You could NOT be unaware that you were so darn lucky to be in South Africa at a time of such amazing transition and you were a tiny part of its success.

We started hiring left and right to keep up with the workload. For the first time, the majority of the staff were BLACK South Africans. This posed a specific problem – pay grades. Before I got there, they were using salary histories for the basis of paying FSNs – which worked just fine for white South Africans but of course was totally unacceptable for black or colored South Africans who has never been paid on the same scale as whites.

I found, for example, USAID paid a black voucher examiner half what the white voucher examiner was making. There were at least 100 FSNs who had been wrongly graded on the FSN scale. I immediately said, “No, no, no. USAID doesn't pay people on the color of their skin, or what they earned under the apartheid system. That's not what we do. We pay them for the job they're doing. So, if a black is filling an FSN-9 position, he/she will be paid at that FSN-9 level.” Aaron of course backed me up one thousand percent, but it wasn't easy straightening this all out. We also wanted to pay back wages for those who had wrongly been started at low grades. This was NOT something Washington immediately agreed to, believe me.

I remember Tim Beady who was the KING of FSN classifications agreed to come out and help us. He was there initially for at least a month and set out all the correct ground rules. We then spent almost four or five months tearing up all these unfair contracts and re-writing them, so everyone was on an even playing field. That was a huge morale booster, for most everyone. A few of the white South Africans who had been with USAID for a few years were not so happy, but they really had nothing to say in the matter. The fact that under apartheid a black was paid two dollars an hour for doing the same thing a white was paid 15 dollars an hour to do, did NOT mean we at USAID should continue such an unfair practice. And we didn't.

There was a lot of working with the staff to grow it in a manner that wasn't just helter-skelter. In the beginning the learning curve was steep for all new FSN recruits. Even if you are a skilled controller, you need to learn USAID's special rules and regulations. This was true of all the support offices. I held weekly training sessions for EXO staff on a wide manner of professional

topics from managing time to how to write a job description. We all had to make sure that the new staff had the tools that they needed. There was a lot going on. Just finding enough housing for all the Americans was a huge challenge, because not only was the USDH hire staff growing but contractors were also flooding the place. The Embassy was expanding like crazy too. Luckily the Management Officer at the Embassy was one of my very best friends and we worked hand in hand. It was tough but I do admit compared to other places that had grown rapidly overnight SA had a MUCH better pool of houses to choose from.

Q: Say, in Moscow.

WHITE: Oh, yeah!

Q: But it was a time when other donors were trying to grow their programs.

WHITE: It was competitive. Every other country certainly was also flocking to SA and some had big teams, but I would say the American presence was the biggest in terms of personnel and money. That did not necessarily mean we had the most influence. Mandela was extremely loyal to his friends, those that had fought apartheid with him.

I remember that Mandela decided his first international trip was going to be to Libya. It was announced in the papers and on television. Of course, Washington had a fit! The State Department started sending messages that the Ambassador (who was beyond fabulous) should tell Mandela that if he went to Libya on his first international trip, the entire USAID budget would be frozen. Aaron and the Ambassador, both very savvy pros, realized that this was NOT a message that would go over well with a very independent and determined president like Mandela.

I am not sure exactly how it happened (I have always suspected a VERY private phone call from the Ambassador), but Mandela was told about the threat from the USG. Nothing was ever announced publicly, but Mandela had outstanding informants everywhere. Word got to him—Mandela—quickly - that he was risking 400 million dollars a year if he carried out his plans to visit Libya. Without hesitation, Mandela went on TV that night and said, “If anybody thinks they can tell me where I can go or whom SA can befriend—especially the people who have been supporting us for the last 25 years— they can think again. If ANY government thinks it can tell us how to behave or threaten us with money—dollars—then please be advised, we will not listen.”

You could hear the gasp from Washington right in SA. At least Washington recognized we needed SA a lot more than SA needed us – the entire world was fawning over Mandela’s miracle. Immediately, word came that the trip to Libya was just fine. STAND DOWN. Luckily, the Ambassador and Aaron had never uttered a word to the press about this threat so not a lot of damage was done. But surely Mandela let the USG know exactly where he stood and where the USG stood. He was a fierce fighter. No one was every going to push him around again – and I don’t think any person or government every did. I was so proud of Mandela and of Aaron and the Ambassador too. Well played, all three. Mandela is the only leader that I have ever witnessed that had fierce respect from such a wide variety of people – all colors, all nationalities, all genders – everyone. He was NOT color blind as some have said – he was intensely aware of color. That is what made him so extraordinary. He made every person regardless of color bring their best to his table, South Africa’s table. He could enter a stadium of a 100,000 cheering people and silence them with one movement of his hand. Remarkable. I don’t think there will ever be anyone like him again; maybe ever.

Because I was enjoying so much the work that I was doing that was not strictly executive officer focused, I decided I wanted a change of gears. I had been an EXO since 1983 and I didn't think I was ever going to get another EXO job any more exciting and demanding than the one in SA. I decided that I wanted to change my career path while I was serving in SA. Aaron was partly responsible – he encouraged all of us to climb the corporate ladder so to speak. I realized that if I wanted to get into AID management that I had better do something completely different. I thought that by attending one of the War Colleges, I could pivot to another direction and prove I was a strategic thinker and great analyst. In those days, it was extremely unusual to have an executive officer go to the War College. I don't think it had ever been done before.

Q: Or someone mid-career.

WHITE: Yes, mid-career. A lot of people were in my corner, and that included Brian Atwood (and Aaron), who made it happen. I spent that next year at ICAF, which I loved. I loved the thinking. I loved the analysis. I loved working with the military, which I didn't think I was going to. But it turned out that the military was a lot more forward-thinking than I thought they were going to be. They were almost all colonels or lieutenant colonels, getting ready to move up to that level. Most were truly gifted thinkers AND doers. Many were not so high on development because they didn't know much about it. It was great fun to present that part of the three Ds to them. I think I really had them believing at the end of the year.

For nine months I had the rare opportunity to think strategically and to write thoughtfully. The teachers were excellent and always pushing, pushing. They would present a problem and get us in small groups (maybe one Navy, one Marine, one Coast Guard, two civilians, a foreign student from an army overseas) to solve it. We constantly were encouraged to think way out of the box as a team. I was a journalism major in college and had always loved writing. But I really hadn't put down my ideas in long think pieces for years. The entire year was eye-opening. GREAT.

And following that year, I went to work with Sally (former USAID assistant administrator Sally Shelton-Colby), who ran the Global Bureau. Sally had been married to William Colby, the former director of the CIA (U.S. Central Intelligence Agency), which is a great love story. But that's a story for another time. He was a Republican. She is a fierce Democrat. She was twenty years his junior at least. Didn't matter, they adored each other. She was a remarkable boss – she could do anything – manage ten balls with one hand with a beautiful smile on her face. She was just a remarkable fire, you know. She was one of the best speakers I ever saw. She could pull off a technical speech with two minutes of preparation. I have never seen anything like it since.

Q: What was your role?

WHITE: I was her specialist, and Barbara Turner was her deputy. Talk about good cop, bad cop – that was the two of them. The three of us were together constantly. The Bureau was huge, and the workload was intense. Sally was just one of these remarkable personalities and super bright, super great with people, knew everybody on the Hill on a first name basis.

The best of the AAs (USAID Assistant Administrators) are political appointees who know everybody. That is important. That is the single greatest asset they bring to the table. Now, everyone celebrates when we have an insider become an AA. But I don't because what we need is a political player who can pick up the phone and talk to the power brokers – and career folks just don't know them.

Believe me, Sally did talk - to everybody. She knew everybody on both sides of the aisle. Her worth at the agency was huge. I LOVED to see her working the phones when we needed some extra support. Working for her was great. She really looked out for me. But I knew that being her special assistant, as fun as it was and as dynamic as she was, was probably not going to get me where I wanted to go in my career. I started interviewing for other jobs and became the deputy director for East Africa. I knew that I really wanted to go back overseas. By this time, I didn't have to worry about the kids' schooling. They were in college, and they were doing well. I remember begging to be sent out as a deputy. The higher ups were a tad hesitant – I still had only served as an EXO overseas. They dithered, “Well, where are we going to send her? We're not sure she's ready, etc. etc.” Finally, they said they would send me as deputy to Mali, which just happened to be a perfect fit for me. I love West Africa. I had been a Peace Corps volunteer in West Africa. And Mali is what they call adult Africa. South Africa is baby Africa. That was the real thing. Looking back over my career, Mali ranks number one in terms of people, culture, history, dynamite staff and gorgeous dessert venues. Malians are still some of my best friends to this day.

Paul Tuebner was my director. He was only going to be there for a year, and they were desperately looking for a director. Paul, to his credit, said, “Pam is fabulous. Make her director. She will be great.” Washington replied “Well, we don't like to do that. We don't like to make deputies director.” And so around and around we went again. Finally, out of nowhere, they said, “OK.” It was just wonderful, because I was in my element. I had Vicky (J. Huddleston), as my Ambassador. And she was THE BEST.

She and I bonded right away. We are still friends. I was able to take that AID mission which was staffed mostly with very young officers and make it dynamic and creative with their help. We wrote our own ten-year strategy the first year I was mission director. We did it right with lots of research and experts coming out from Washington and tons of input from Malians – both in and outside government. We really listened to people from the ground up. Now no one puts a year into shaping a strategy – someone decided it took too much time and cost too much money, but I totally disagree. USAID programs need to be fully vetted and changed every decade at least – not every three years, but certainly every decade

We developed a new 10-year strategy. We also carefully considered what skill sets we needed to carry out that strategy and made sure we had the people that we needed to run those programs. Once Washington approved the strategy and we had the right people in place, we started implementation and traveled all over the country to make sure we were making progress, having an impact. I tell young mission directors all the time—you cannot do your job behind a desk—cannot be done. I would spend hours sitting with Malians sometimes under trees just listening to their compliments and challenges. After several trips north with Ambassador Huddleston, we realized that we had made a major mistake by not focusing USAID programs more on the north. Even back then, we knew the north was vulnerable to infiltration by extremists. We weren't taking care of the north at all. All our money was in the south, because that's where the population was – and that is where ninety percent of the decision makers came from too. But we realized back then that trouble was brewing up north.

Q: Yeah, you saw the Islamic—

WHITE: Things were changing for the worse, and we needed to get resources up there quickly. She and I started traveling to the north to figure out where we could best put our resources. I was working with this group of Tuareg warriors. Tuaregs are one of these tribes that have one of the highest infant mortality rates on earth. But if they get past five, they live well into their 80s. It

seems that their diet is mostly goat milk and camel meat—I don't know, but whatever it is, it keeps them fit for a long time, especially by African standards. Of course, the women do NOT live into their 80s. That is only men.

Q: It's pretty "paleo". (chuckles)

WHITE: (chuckles) Whatever it is, it keeps them going.

After many asks and several trips, the Tuaregs agreed to meet with me. I had to go to them, they would not yet invite me into their tents. That first visit was held on a dune in the middle of the Sahara Desert. This group of warriors arrived on camel in full regalia—swords and knives hanging from their waists. They were covered from head to toe in dark indigo robes—which is why they are called the blue men of the desert – their skin takes on a blue hue. After consuming endless cups of tea and talking about the weather and how to feed camels, I said, “I want you to do two things. I want you to educate your girls. And I want you to wear condoms, because your wives are having babies almost every year. You have very high maternal and infant mortality rates. I'm not saying that you can't have babies. I'm saying, space them every two or three years.” At that meeting they just stared straight ahead much of the time.

Everything was done through a translator. They don't speak French, they speak Tuareg. And that first meeting was very still. Finally, when I couldn't stand the silence any longer, I said to these five or six warriors with solemn looks on their faces. “OK, so do you want to send your girls to school? Isn't that a good idea?” They slightly moved their heads in a maybe gesture. Perhaps more a “no” than “maybe”. I said, “Can we try getting together a small school in a tent for your girls?” Again, I got the maybe gesture. I knew not to push too hard that first time. I said, “All right, let's stop. Let's have more tea.” Hours go by. We chit chat about the lack of rain and the mining of salt. We all take naps. We drink more. We find a “bathroom” in the sand. We wait. You cannot force these things. Finally, I said, “Well, have you sent your girls to school before?”

One warrior admitted, “Well, yes. Some of them went to school.”

I said, “Well, was it good or was it bad?”

“Bad”

And I said, “Well, what happened?”

“They didn't learn anything.”

“They didn't learn anything?”

“No. And the teachers were from the south. We didn't like them. They don't speak our language. When they speak it, they speak it funny? And we don't want them teaching our girls. They have a different culture. Their dresses are also too short. One wore pants.”

My mind is going a hundred miles an hour wondering if I can find Tuareg teachers. But to stall for more time I asked what these teachers taught the girls. They said, “Well, first they had white people in their books.” I knew immediately what they were talking about because when I first went to my village in Peace Corps all the books were written in France and donated by some big hearted but clueless French organization. All the pictures were of white people. I had hated those books. I ended that first meeting by saying we will send you Tuareg teachers and we will not send

you any books with white people. I had no idea how we were going to pull that off, but they really did nod this time, so I had hope.

I went back to Bamako, and I started thinking about recruiting Tuareg teachers and new textbooks. I knew we had to throw out all the French textbooks. I decided we would dramatically change the curriculum. We would teach only certain subjects that directly related to their lifestyle.

Q: Their experience.

WHITE: Their culture and lifestyle. We decided to teach them to write recipes of their grandmothers. And to record both ancient and current history. We wanted them to be able to capture stories that had been told for centuries but never written down. We wanted them to be able to describe in simple words their gorgeous camel festivals, including the women's clothing and their jewelry. We wanted to record lessons from mothers on bringing up children and being a good wife. After many weeks I returned and told the warriors, 'Let's write all these traditions down. Let's make sure your culture lives on. That's our end goal. And let's start with recipes that your mothers can share.' More nodding, more laughter, acceptance.

We recruited not really teachers but young women from high school in the north that could read and write. We hired someone to come up with very simple workbooks that these young women teachers used to just teach simple literacy. Nothing fancy. We recorded on simple machines oral histories and recipes and life lessons. God, I wonder what happened to all those recordings. We used them for several years. Everyone was extremely happy with the program. It was a lot of work, but also extremely successful. We made learning relevant.

Q: Well, you're talking about literacy.

WHITE: Over many months, they invited me into their tents, those warriors were not my friends perhaps, but we certainly learned to trust each other and to enjoy each other's company. The girls attendance skyrocketed at our little tent schools. It was gratifying.

Oh, and each time that I went to visit them perhaps three times a year during the four years I was in Mali, I always brought with me this huge Santa Claus bag full of condoms and say, "please use these condoms, please do it for your wives and for your babies." I always had some health person there who spoke Tuareg, going over the benefits. Again, the maybe nod was present.

Q: Explaining, yeah.

WHITE: They would sit outside of these tents making sure we were teaching the girls the right things: how to be a good bride, how to cook. We had no judgment about whether it was a good thing or a bad thing, some of these traditional things they were doing. Just write it down.

We started off with 10 girls or so, and by the time I left, we had about almost 300 girls that were in school. And we were ALL so proud of these girls. The women were so proud of these girls because they were showing them such respect by recording their words of wisdom. I was so proud of these girls because they were such eager learners. I was always bringing them these trinkets. Any time I went to the States, I would bring back costume jewelry or whatever I thought they would like. They would squeal with delight. I SO looked forward to my visits and I think they did too.

Then it was time for me to leave Mali and I went for my very last visit with these amazing people.

Q: This would be what, 2003?

WHITE: I left in 2005. Got there in 2001.

They had this wonderful farewell ceremony, camel races and dancing and even roasted beef! It was fabulous. The drumming and music and haunting singers were magical out there on the dunes without any electricity.

When it came time (many hours later) to give speeches, the head warrior said, “You know, you really made a difference here in our community. Our women are excited, and they’re learning to read too. They’re learning because they saw the little girls recording our culture and they wanted to be a part of that. He then paused and looked around with kind of an embarrassed smirk on his face. Then came the bad news. He said “you know all those sacks and sacks and sacks of condoms—”

I said, “Yeah, yeah. Of course, what a great gift that was, don’t you agree?” Must have saved lots of lives I thought to myself. He bluntly admitted, “We didn’t use them. Not one. We don’t like them. They feel horrible on our skin. Our wives hate them. We don’t want to have fewer children. They are our history. They’re our future. There’s nothing we like about your condoms.” He didn’t say “cheap”, but they were definitely not high quality, although I don’t really think that would have made a difference.

I asked, “What did you do with them, all these condoms?” They took me out to their camels and showed me between the saddle and the traditional blanket, they’d sewn together hundreds of condoms into a padding! Very clever. I could only laugh and hope the American taxpayer didn’t learn that they had paid for NOT lowering the Tuareg birth rate but US dollars had made the warriors’ bums more comfortable.

Q: (laughs) Ray Raymond (unintelligible) is turning in his grave!

WHITE: Yeah, right! But it taught me a lifelong lesson about birth control. If you’re going to push condoms, you better damn well figure out how to do it so that somebody might use one.

Q: Right.

WHITE: Later, I would go into groups of men to talk to about using condoms. “Listen now. I know not one of you has used condoms in the last 15 years. Have you?” They would chuckle and shake their heads NO. The fact of the matter is that African men hate condoms because they don’t like the way they feel. Having children makes them feel like a man. And there’s no negative consequences to men having kids. The women do 100 percent of the work with small children and then when they grow up and can work, the men take over.

Q: They need something that women can control. Because I suspect they were much more interested than their husbands.

WHITE: There you go. It taught me an invaluable lesson. If you want to talk about birth control, talk to the women. Because they want to space their children. They want to have a break from childbearing. So, talk to the people who are affected the most by producing children.

But these Tuareg warriors, God, I loved them. They were wonderful men – honest, trustworthy, kind.

Q: Do you have pictures? They're all about seven feet tall, right?

WHITE: Yes, I do. I look like an anemic child next to them. They are SO black and regal. Of course, their camels are huge too – and nasty. Both the men and the women are simply gorgeous.

They also taught me another thing. The UN had this program of paying the Tuareg to turn in their weapons. One day when we were just chatting and drinking tea, I asked them how many of them had turned in weapons. Every one of them raised their hands.

I said, “Wow! That’s fabulous! Good for you!”

They sort of sat there in silence, and this time I was getting pretty good at reading the expressions on their faces. I KNEW I had not heard the full story. After several minutes I asked a follow-on question about how many of them still had some kind of weapons in their possession. They all looked at each other with that embarrassed grin. One hundred percent raised their hands! They’d just given the UN some old piece of crap and got paid 20 bucks or whatever the going rate was at the time. The UN had a great celebration for this turning in of the firearms. Of course, the Tuaregs were WARRIORS, they were never ever going to give the UN or anyone else ALL their weapons. GOD we Westerners can be so naïve.

You know now I think about it, we should have worked more with the Tuareg men. They would have made excellent allies in the war against terrorism. Even then, we saw that the north was becoming more and more radicalized. I think we absolutely did the right thing of moving more money up there. There probably should have been a lot more, but we did a lot.

Even knowing what we knew, both Vicky and I we were still surprised when later radicals had gotten organized enough to come into those villages that were so peaceful and created such chaos. Malians tend to be so calm and thoughtful. Our military tried to train them for years. The US military advisors told me Malians tended not to be topnotch soldiers because, unlike the Chadians who are fierce, they didn’t like violence. Today, that entire part of Mali has been taken over by terrorist groups. The whole northern part of Mali is a mess. The US Ambassador said he cannot even travel there anymore (in 2018).

Ambassador Huddleston also loves to tell the story to this day of the village we adopted in the north (not Tuaregs). We had all three D’s working in this one village. USAID bought a new water pump for them to replace the one they had received from the UN twenty years earlier. STATE bought seeds and fertilizer with the Ambassador’s small project funds, the military installed radio equipment. The very first meeting that we had was a very hot day. The men were all sitting in the shade of a tent with fans. The women were all sitting directly under the hot sun. We talked to them for about an hour about what they wanted and what they could contribute to the project. They would give us free labor and organize a committee to oversee all aspects of the project. We were all set. Then I said “USAID is excited to be working with such a dynamic community. I think we will get a lot done together. BUT the women have to be part of the oversight committee. The women MUST be invited inside the tent next time we visit or there will be no more talk of any pump from the USG”. At first there was silence. Then the mayor slowly nodded his head, and everyone smiled. Next visit, the women were inside the tent!

Q: And so, what happened to your girls?

WHITE: I don't know. I am so sad to say that I believe there are almost NO USAID activities in northern Mali except perhaps a few concerning combatting and tracking terrorism. I think we pulled out completely from the education sector.

Q: You can't get in there.

WHITE: USAID is still trying to do what they call CVE—Counter-violent Extremism—in the north. But the travel is very, very limited.

Q: A lot of the weapons programs. Libya flew in there— (Former Libyan president Muammar) Gaddafi was very popular in West Africa— Before he got through.

WHITE: Yeah. Once again, we took out a bad guy – no doubt Gaddafi was no prince – with no Plan B. Really, can't we get this right—ever. We take out these dictators and think we can force an election, and everything will be just FINE. It never ever happens that way. NEVER. There are so many experiences to draw on. You'd think the USG would be so much better at regime change but we are not.

Back to Mali. I was very, very good friends with the first lady (Touré Lobbo Traoré) in Mali. When I first got to Mali, she had just become the First Lady since her husband ATT (Amadou Toumani Touré) had just been elected president. She really had zero idea what her role should be as First Lady. She had been trained as a midwife, but she had no training whatsoever in politics or public speaking or even entertaining big crowds. I thought she was incredibly beautiful and elegant and smart. I began visiting her and talking to her about what she might do for women in Mali. Over time, she would be a great help to me, because we were trying to encourage family planning. She was a big believer in it. She understood the issues.

I said to her, “I really need your help in explaining to Malian women the importance of family planning and malaria prevention. And I need your voice.” She spoke several of the languages in Mali. She really wanted to help but she was scared of public speaking because she had a speech impediment which made her very nervous and embarrassed. It wasn't noticeable when she was talking one on one, but when she got in front of people she was hard to understand.

Q: In all the languages she spoke?

WHITE: Yes. She told me she wanted to help but simply could not do so because of this problem with speaking in public.

There was a fabulous woman in Mali who was a speech therapist. I asked if she would help the First Lady because it was going to be impossible for us to do a lot of radio messages if people couldn't understand what she was saying. At first, she wasn't sure, sometimes you can correct speech impediments and sometimes you cannot.

Q: The wiring that's there.

WHITE: The wiring. She went over and did an evaluation of Lobo. And she said, “I can help her.” Lobo and this volunteer worked so hard for many months. At the end of six months, Lobo would read the scripts my team had written almost perfectly. She was a natural. She and I traveled all over the country of Mali together and she became a great public speaker. Later the

next year, she was asked to speak on women's issues at the UN. She and I went together. She stood in the Great Hall of the UN and gave a speech with perfect delivery.

Q: Oh, wow!

WHITE: And both of us were just—

Q: Crying.

WHITE: Crying. Well I certainly was crying; she was just very proud and happy. Even today it makes me weep. Because she was so terrific, she WOWED them.

Q: What a victory.

WHITE: Yes, because she wanted to do it so badly, and she worked so hard at it. And so, we became very close friends. We, she and I, went to Washington two or three times together. In 2018 I was in Senegal and we saw each other at their house in Dakar where they lived in exile. We hugged and hugged. It was SO great to see her after all those years. We talked about how she grew into the First Lady role, and she became a role model more and more, not only for Malian women but for African women. I loved her.

Q: Right. What a wonderful ally to have, a wonderful experience.

WHITE: Yes.

And then I went from Mali to Tanzania. It was Steve's choice. He had been following me around. I said, "All right, which country do you want to go to? I pretty much have my choice."

And he said, "I really want to go to Tanzania,." He'd been there on a TDY (temporary duty assignment) and had loved it. It all worked out. I hated to leave Mali, but I'd been there for a long time.

In Tanzania we had a beautiful mission director house, a great mission. I had a political ambassador. I liked him a lot – funny and smart and RICH. He never could get over how dysfunctional the USG systems were. They drove him crazy. He would have a great idea on how to showcase USG activities in Tanzania and I would explain all the rules and regulations about this and that. He would go (nicely) bonkers.

Q: Did he have a missionary background?

WHITE: No, no. Mark (Andrew) Green did. He came after Retzer (Michael Lynn Retzer, Sr.). But Retzer was very smart, crafty and charming. He knew enough to ask the right questions and we did a lot of great work together. On the Embassy side, if he said he was going to do something (like improve the gym or build a pool) he would go fight for it. I respected that.

Tanzania was SO completely different in every way from Mali. Culture was different, languages were different, right on the ocean with fantastic game parks. Huge efficient supermarkets and fabulous restaurants. They had a fabulous international school too. You can be in the Serengeti game park in an hour from Dar. You can go to Zanzibar in a half an hour. Wonderful place for families.

Just before I got on a plane to go to Tanzania (I was on home leave in the US) Linda Morse who was head of the health bureau at USAID and had been a friend for many years called me. She said, “Pam, we want you to meet with Dr. Mark Dybul (former U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Mark R. Dybul, M.D., now executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria) in New York (City), because he is very upset about the way the PEPFAR (U.S. President’s Emergency Program for AIDS Relief) program is going in Tanzania.” She had told him that I would get the program back on track. He was skeptical that ANYONE could.

She said, “We’ll pay for you to go to a cocktail party.” She knew I LOVED cocktail parties. I told her I had NOTHING to wear. All my little black dresses were on their way to Tanzania. She bluntly told me to buy something NOW. Within an hour, I had a cute black dress and a train ticket to New York.

Just as I was waiting for the train, Linda frantically called me back and told me that I was not to swear in front of Mark. She told me that he is very religious and very polite. He would NOT appreciate my colorful language. I mumbled something and hung up. It was hard for me to believe that Mark could be THAT goody two shoes.

Dr. Mark Dybul met me in the lobby of this fancy New York apartment building. He looked just gorgeous, tan and fit. He had on a perfectly cut tuxedo. It must have been tailored just for him. I had my little black dress on, so we were quite the snazzy couple. We shook hands and said a couple of words. Then I immediately remarked, “I’ve been told that I must be really careful around you. I was given instructions to keep my colorful language to myself. I am certainly not supposed to say anything with four letters around you.”

And he said, “Don’t believe a word those people tell you. That’s a bunch of sh%#.” We both burst out laughing. AND became instant friends and are to this day. He is one of the smartest, kindest, toughest people I know. LOVE him.

Me in my little black dress and he in his elegant tuxedo went all the way up to the penthouse, where they were holding this very fancy AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) benefit. And you know, everyone’s dressed to the nines. Everyone has a crystal champagne glass and caviar *hors d’oeuvres*. It was mostly made up of AIDS activists. A lot of BIG personalities there. The Secretary General’s wife was one of the hostesses. The party had a great vibe. People were happy to be raising money for such a great cause. It was fun.

Mark and I talked almost for an hour about what was going on in Tanzania. He was very unhappy that personalities were getting in the way of progress. Certain parts of the PEPFAR team were not talking to each other. CDC (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and AID were fighting. There was no leadership from the embassy or not enough leadership, and on and on and on. By the end of the hour we had certainly identified the problem and had some concrete solutions as well that I could try to implement over the next several weeks.

Mark introduced me to a group of the best of his friends who were the doctors, all of them gay, all of them dynamites. They had been the movers and shakers during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Seattle. Every single one of them was super intelligent, super funny. After about 90 minutes, Mark had to leave for another event. He left me with his friends, saying I would be in good hands. WHEW—he had NO idea. I think I finally left them around three am. We visited several establishments and I loved every one of them. One of the most interesting nights of my life.

Mark Dybul and I really bonded in New York. When I went out to Tanzania, it was so fortunate that I'd had that meeting, because I had his full weight behind me. Right from the first PEPFAR meeting I laid out the plan we had hatched in New York. When I said that Mark and I had come up with this plan together, heads snapped to attention. The players might have attempted to go against me, but they sure as heck were not going to take on Dr. Dybul. I told them all the petty infighting had to stop immediately. I reminded them that a year ago, there was almost NO money for HIV/aids programs. They were fighting over NEW money. The development world almost NEVER gets new money. We should not be fighting over it; we should be celebrating. I told them instead of just pulling in ten different directions, let's try to distribute money based on facts. Every agency brings special skill sets to this fight. First thing I did was to insist that each team identified their strengths and weaknesses. ON paper, so we could discuss. And we did. It wasn't perfect, but it surely was a thousand times better than it had been. Mark and I spoke often by phone, he was a happy camper. Three years later, the Tanzania team won the worldwide award for most effective team.

Mark plus this wonderful new woman who arrived as the AIDS coordinator and I completely turned that program around. I think Mark would tell you that. He certainly has told me that many times.

We also had a hugely successful malaria program in Zanzibar – it is too bad we cannot replicate the model everywhere, but we don't have endless funding. BUT in Zanzibar we had every single input we needed for success: ample monetary resources, dedicated and smart government officials, a great implementing team that really knew their technical stuff, outstanding leadership from Washington. We had enough money to buy bed nets for every woman and child, to spray every house and every pond of standing water, to train personnel, to establish testing sites and enough drugs to treat all the patients as necessary. We also ran a first-class public information campaign. The Minister of Health and I were invited to the White House because of our success. We KNOW how to achieve real results, but we do not have the perfect combination of money and skills and WILL very often. We did in Zanzibar. In two years, the incidence of malaria cases was decreased from 40 to 10 percent. I think it is even lower today.

Q: Leadership.

WHITE: Leadership yes. Leadership needs to be clear and set priorities. You need to set program priorities but also articulate exactly what you expect from people. Their behavior impacts progress, so behavior is KEY to success. You must set the example too. If you are a screamer, the team will be screaming within weeks. Guaranteed. Mark is not a screamer. It was so fortunate that I had that early meeting with him. I had that mandate from him that team dynamics would have to dramatically improve, or we would have to change team members. I never said this directly, but I sure let people know that Mark was watching, and I was talking to him often. I had his trust and his ear. It was hard but fun – and so very rewarding. It took the entire PEPFAR team to win that prestigious award, but I do take some credit for it.

Q: As you should. As you should. And maybe that's a good place to stop.

WHITE: ONE more leadership story please. The great Dr. Jeffrey Sacks would often come to Tanzania because Tanzania housed one of his infamous Millennium Villages. These villages were supposed to be the answer to transformational development. Dr. Sacks believed that if he gave enough "things" to villages like seeds and wheelbarrows and fertilizer that they would miraculously vastly improve their quality of lives. This theory was big on inputs and not so big on oversight and training and paid no attention really at all to sustainability. Most of the

development professionals that I knew were highly skeptical of Dr. Sack's grand ideas. This one week he had flown into Tanzania on a private plane and stayed at the fanciest hotel in Dar Es Salam. He had taken an entourage out to his village where the villagers danced and sang and praised his name. Someone told me after he left, they cleaned up the mess caused by the celebration and went on with their normal lives. Some of the tools he bought were not even used. After this triumphant visit to the village he came to a meeting at UN headquarters and started to lecture 60 or 70 development professionals from twenty or so nations who had been summoned to meet the great man. He went on and on, basically telling us how fabulous HE was and calling into question our collective efforts. After what seemed like forever, he took a breath and according to a journalist in the room the following ensued. I quote from the book *THE IDEALIST* by Nina Monk. There was a moment of silence then Pamela White, USAID Director said "I don't want to argue with you Jeff, because I don't want to be called ignorant or unprofessional. I have worked in Africa for 30 years, my colleagues combined have worked in the field for well over one hundred years. We don't like your tone. We don't like you preaching to us. We are not your students. We do not work for you." My fellow professionals called me all day and half the night. I was their hero for the day – maybe two or three. It's important to stand up and be proud of what we do. I have been called a tough cookie. I was very proud of my dough that day.

Q: Today is December 15. We're resuming our interview with Pamela White as she prepares to go to Liberia.

So Pamela, how was it decided that you would go to Liberia as mission director?

WHITE:

We were in Tanzania for over two years. I loved it. We had a beautiful house. We had a dynamic PEPFAR program. We had Zanzibar and the Ngorongoro crater and wonderful friends. The social life was just fantastic. THEN the woman who ran the African Bureau, Kate, called me up and said, "Pam, we really need someone to go to Sudan. I said, "I really don't want to go there. That's not on my list at all. I've only been here a couple of years and it's a four-year post." I was thinking we were going to stay for all four years. She didn't push too hard; she knew I had spent almost five years in Mali and that Tanzania was a special place. I must say I DID feel a little guilty because a couple of years prior, I had turned down a request to consider being Mission Director in Iraq. I knew I could do the work, but I did not like the idea of not being able to visit the projects. To me that is the most exciting part of the work of a MD.

SOOOOOOO about six months after this call about Sudan, I happened to be in DC on annual leave. I had recently landed on the yearly list that USAID sends to STATE telling them which mission directors they believe would be excellent ambassadors. My name had been on that list for four or five years. Nothing had ever happened, so I thought I needed to push the system a tad. I went to see the number-two person in the Africa Bureau at State Department to state my case. And that person was Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

After chatting for about thirty minutes, I said to her, please be honest, "Do I have a chance of making ambassador?" And she said, "Frankly, this year, probably not. But I am going out as ambassador to Liberia. And I'm looking for a great mission director. And I hear you are really great." I said, "Well, I'm flattered, and thank you but no." She replied, "And if you come, I will do everything that I possibly can to make you an ambassador." Hmmm I thought, no other ambassador had made me such an offer. She was a very influential person. And I liked her immediately. We clicked from the minute I sat down with her. I believed that she would teach me a great deal and I believed she would push my candidacy if all worked out in Liberia – which I

thought it would. I had one last question about my husband. He was happily engaged as the regional EXO in Tanzania and he loved living in Tanzania. We had a good life there so I couldn't just change countries without inquiring about his work possibilities. Linda immediately said she might have a solution to that problem as well. Turns out the Management Officer at the Embassy was leaving, and she thought she could get permission to hire my husband since no one had bid on the job. She assured me she would do almost anything to get me to Liberia. I walked directly from her office back to Kate's office, who was the head of the (USAID) Africa Bureau. And I said, "I won't go to Sudan, but if you want, I'll go to Liberia."

And she said, "You're kidding me. That's even better in lots of ways. It's such a hard place to fill, and we're desperate to have someone as good as you. If I thought you'd even consider it, I would have asked you myself." I told her we were possibly looking at a year to get me cleared by internal committees and move, etc. etc.

She said, "No, no, no. (chuckles) you shouldn't have offered if you weren't serious. You'll be out there in another six months or so at the least." She was happy, and Linda was happy. I agreed that I had made a good choice. Note: State did approve the Management Officer position for my husband. I think Steve enjoyed that job more than any other in his career. He really made USAID and STATE partners in all administrative matters. He worked directly for a wonderful ambassador and he made significant improvements in the quality of life for both Americans and FSNs, including the establishment of a health unit for FSNs.

I think all the approvals for me to be nominated for Liberia took a week – perhaps a bureaucratic record. Kate didn't want me changing my mind. We left beautiful Tanzania and moved to war-torn Liberia. Everything in Liberia was, frankly speaking—a mess. All the streets, all the buildings were dirty. There were bullet holes everywhere. Not any kind of organized garbage collection. Very few, if any, animals. During the war, Liberians were forced to eat everything that moved during the war—cats, dogs, to say nothing of mice and other rodents.

The place that we were assigned to live was an apartment that was on the fifth floor. We had to walk up five flights to get home. We missed our gorgeous house on this big piece of land in Tanzania. The quality of life certainly changed dramatically. There were no game parks, and just a few good restaurants and even fewer things to do on the weekends. But for me professionally, it was the greatest challenge of my career, and in some ways the most rewarding.

Liberia had just been through 10, 12 horrific years of a civil war. Thousands of boys ages 10-12 were used as boy soldiers. Adult soldiers literally opened their veins and put drugs in them. Then with minimum training, they would be given AK-47s and told to kill anyone or anything in the enemy camps. They would cut open women who were pregnant and boil the embryos for "power soup". I've seen documentation of all of this. They would cut out hearts and eat them while they were still pumping. Vicious, vicious stuff.

Every single person in Liberia who stayed through the war had seen nothing but horror for 10 years. We were not dealing with normal development problems. The entire population was mentally and physically suffering. We knew it was going to take a least two generations to get the general population's mental state to a place one might describe as normal.

The ambassador, Thomas-Greenfield, and I would go visit schools and groups of young people. She and I observed that you'd almost see a dead look in their faces, because they had gotten to a point where no hope existed. When your entire existence is surrounded by extreme violence for YEARS, it is difficult to recover. Linda Thomas-Greenfield is the finest Foreign Service Officer

that I've ever served with. She is incredibly smart and strategic. She has a keen sense of history and culture. She deeply cares about people and insists they live to their full potential. This was true inside the Embassy family and in the Liberian countryside.

The head of the UN special forces was a woman—a Dutch woman. She was fabulous! And then of course Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was the president. The four of us, we four women, had our hands on just about every single diplomatic and development and defense program of any consequence in Liberia. The USAID budget was around \$400 million. The American ambassador in Liberia is by FAR the most important diplomat in the country. Liberia was founded by American slaves and Liberians look first to the United States for just about everything including money, advise, protection. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is American educated, highly motivated, highly intelligent. The head of the UN security forces was also a decorated foreign service officer in her own right.

To have the ability to run around the country with these three great women and strategize about the future of Liberia was just an exciting, fabulous opportunity. We talked all the time, we worked hand in glove and pulled in ONE direction. President Sirleaf had a clear vision of what Liberia could and should look like ten years out. She knew where she wanted the country to go and she laid out her priorities clearly for us all. We really did start things moving tremendously well in the right direction. There was NO doubt who was in charge. President Sirleaf is the only President that I ever worked with that took on donor coordination directly. Once a month she would get us all together and we would have to report to her what progress or lack thereof had been made on her established priorities. These were very tough and informative meetings – the most effective that I have ever attended. Presidents or the number two in government SHOULD coordinate donors. Coordinating should not consist of just having each donor tell what they are doing in the country. This is the norm and doesn't work well. President Sirleaf told the donors what to do and where to do it. This is an excellent model.

Together we designed some extremely innovative programs that, when I went back just last year, some of them—a couple of them—were still ongoing and were showing real results. So that was a fabulous thing for me to see with my own eyes.

I was there for about a year and a half when Secretary Clinton (former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton) came to visit with her chief of staff Cheryl (D.) Mills. The two of them had intensive talks with the ambassador and me. It was just the four of us in a room for over two hours going over our policies and programs. I don't think either the Ambassador or I had any notes – we knew our programs by heart. We lived and breathed them every day. Linda and I were so in sync we could finish each other's sentences.

The Secretary listened intently and was extremely pleased with our results to date. She remarked Linda and I had the kind of relationship she wanted to see in every country where USAID and STATE worked together. The Secretary said, "I just don't understand why when I go to other embassies there seems to be knocking of heads between the two agencies. We are all ONE team." She mentioned the close USAID/State relation in Liberia often in meetings after that. Liberia was an example that she wanted to see all over the world.

At the end of that visit, I was in a van with Cheryl, and the ambassador was with the Secretary of State. We were going to the airport which is about an hour from downtown Monrovia. She and I were talking a million miles a minute. We both move fast. Just before she got out of the van Cheryl said, "You know, we're going to make you an ambassador. We promise."

I said, "Well thank you for your support, but frankly, I've been on lists for years (to be considered for an ambassadorship) and nothing ever happens." And she said, "Well you'll see." I said, "OK, thank you so much." The year before or maybe two years before, I had said to my husband, "When they nominate me on the short list, I'm not going to fill out all the papers." He still has that email to this day. No one had even given me a nibble. I didn't think STATE had any intention of making me an ambassador. It just wasn't worth me getting my hopes up again and again and again." It takes a lot of work and thinking and sitting in front of the computer on your own time. Then you hear NOTHING. I'd sort of given up. Cheryl said, "No, no, no. Don't give up."

Q: Let's not get too far ahead, because I know that you will be moving on to an ambassadorship. But before we leave Liberia, can you talk a little bit about the programs that you did work out?

WHITE: Yes of course. Here is a great example. When I got there, they said that USAID had this simply amazing literacy program. I decided to go see what this literacy hype was all about. I said to my driver, "I just want you and me. I don't want to tell them in advance." He quietly figured out where the literacy centers were located but kept a low profile. He was a wise man.

One night, we quietly went to a center in the heart of Monrovia. There were a lot of people in the room. They were all talking and drinking coffee and laughing. I went immediately to the front of the room and asked for someone to tell me what they were learning. One brave soul said "Oh, we've already had the lesson." I said, "You already had the lesson? It's 5:15. When did you have the lesson?" Silence. I asked the teacher just how much progress had been made over the past two years in numeracy and literacy. He told me it had been very slow but was progressing. I did not take him at his word.

Q: And these were schools or—

WHITE: No, these were centers. We had established centers. They were often in churches or a spare room in an office building. Wherever we could do it relatively cheaply. We hired teachers and trained them. We gave them lesson plans and workbooks but none of these materials were being used. It had gotten to the point if Liberians would commit to showing up three or four nights a week, they would be counted as literacy students. The teachers would serve some tea and coffee.

I immediately realized there was no learning going on. There was a lot of socializing occurring, but the United States Government wasn't supposed to be funding social clubs. The next day I asked the Chief of Party to come to my office. I told him that I had not observed any teaching being done in the center. It didn't appear they were learning anything. He was adamant that I had just not seen a good class. He assured me great strides were being made. He kept repeating enrollment was over projections by eight thousand students!!!

I told him that I was going to have a rapid assessment team come out to Liberia as soon as humanly possible. This program had been going on for two years and I didn't think we should wait until the three-year mid-term evaluation to try to understand what was going on. He thought for a while and told me that he would certainly work with any team that came out to Liberia to assess progress, but he added that it might be a good idea for me to read the terms of the contract. He told me that none of the measurables in the contract had any mention of literacy or numeracy goals. All the milestones had to do with number of teachers trained, number of centers established, number of students attending the classes. He told me that the goal of 5,000 students

had been surpassed by eight thousand. Therefore, the contract had to be considered a great success.

I told him that the big numbers of students meant nothing if they weren't learning anything. He didn't seem too worried. I asked the contracting officer to send me a copy of the contract and the COP was correct!! There was not a word in there about what levels of literacy and numeracy needed to be reached. I was dumbfounded. What a horrible contract. Although I am sorry to say this has happened over and over with USAID contracts. We like to count things and not results. But I didn't care that the measurables weren't in the contract. Everyone understood the goal of the money being spent was to increase literacy and numeracy. I bought a rapid assessment team out to Liberia and within two weeks I had the dismal news that almost no progress whatsoever had been made. No one could count beyond ten.

I said, you know, "This entire program has to change. We're going to tie literacy to skills. We're going to set up vocational training so we can rebuild Liberia. There's going to be a reason to learn to read and count. It was nice that people had come together to share stories and drink some tea, but that simply would not do. They were not helping to build Liberia. At first the contractor was extremely reluctant to change course. He told me that his company didn't get paid to link literacy to vocational training. He said it wasn't in the contract. Period.

I was blunt with him. I have always felt that as a Mission Director I had to get the US taxpayers the most for their money. I wanted them to take pride in USAID's work. I didn't think the US people or Congress would be impressed with what had been achieved so far. I told the contractor he could keep leaning on an exact reading of the contract or he could agree with the intent and change course. I said I was returning to DC very soon and would be happy to tell a great success story (we had a problem we turned it around, success is on the way) or I could do just the opposite and give them the facts of how little learning had taken place in a country that screamed for education. I told him that I was good at spreading news in DC. I know lots of staffers, I know all the power people in USAID and STATE, I have a huge network. He could come to the table and negotiate, or I would have to quietly use the power of words and truth. Finally, the president of the company came out and he knew immediately that the contract would have to be redesigned. It took us a year, but we did it. And it was a fabulous program. Parts of it are still going today I believe.

Q: Let me just ask you a question here. You have the group that is an implementing partner. Are they— It's an American contractor?

WHITE: Yes.

Q: We don't need to name who it is, but if I were out there conducting the program, and I was seeing that I am not getting any literacy out of these people, I would certainly report back up my chain. What happens when the honest program officer, who's really conducting this thing, says, "It's not working, and we need to make a change"?

Because had I been the program officer, I would have been mortified that I'm not getting anything accomplished. And the reason I say this, as a public affairs officer in other countries, I did get small amounts of money to conduct English language training. Small amounts. And I had a sub-contractor in the country. We would go out every once in a while and sit in the class. And yes, some kids didn't learn. But some kids did.

WHITE: Yes.

Q: So, we did have a success rate. It may not have been perfect. But it wasn't zero. And had it been zero, I would have said this is— You know, at the end of this semester, the program's over.

WHITE: Yes, you're right.

Q: So, what I'm trying to understand, why are they insisting?

WHITE: They got so wrapped up in the numbers game. And they were so proud of that, you know, 13,000 and not 5,000. There were an equal number of girls and boys which everyone applauded. They were bragging about it. It was just insanity. But I repeat this is common. We put in a contract that X number of nurses have to be trained in family planning and Y number of mothers have to be given information on safe births and Z number of condoms have to be distributed but those contracts never have metrics about infant or maternal mortality – or even if birth rates are falling. It is a huge problem. We are getting much better at it, but not great. In the case of my literacy contract I don't think anyone had visited the centers in two years!

Q: Aha.

WHITE: Linda—Ambassador Greenfield—and I made a pact with each other right from day one that we were getting out of the office. She and I were traveling constantly. We were overseeing projects and we were telling people about what the USG was doing to help Liberia. I tell mission directors often, “Your job is not to sit in your fancy office—” And believe me, my office was not fancy. It was fancy in Tanzania but not in Liberia. It was a little, tiny, cramped thing. But it doesn't matter. You know, whether your office is gorgeous or a closet, you can do quality work. Get out of your office, ask tough questions, that's your job.

You must understand the USAID program in Liberia grew so big so fast after the war ended. For many years, it was all about refugees and food distribution. There weren't enough people to have good oversight. There were lots of vacancies. The minute I got there, and I started saying to my people, “We're not growing anymore programs until you go out and see how they're doing.” You must monitor, monitor, monitor. I said, “I want to see those trip reports. I want to make me see through words what you saw in real life. I want to have the same reporting data sheet for every trip. How many people did you see? Were they meeting the goals of the program? Did you see any impact?”

We started a new evaluation contract. I did this in Tanzania too. So, the contractor hired people to be our eyes and ears on the ground. I had a computer set up on my desk that allowed me to review progress every day if I so chose. If I saw no field trips and no mini evaluations, I would immediately go and find out the problem. Again, we owe oversight to the US taxpayers.

Q: (scoffs)

WHITE: When I got to Haiti, when I was ambassador there, I started looking at USAID contracts. Again, for the most part they were only measuring inputs. You can measure how many teachers you trained. But what happened? You've got to have a ‘so what’ every time. I did get people to buy in, but it was not easy.

Q: Right.

WHITE: We did it right finally in Liberia. We redesigned the literacy program, which is one of the best ones I have seen. They sent an experienced chief of party out to manage the new contract. Right away he told me that he thought the project was too ambitious. He told me he had been around a long time, but he had never seen literacy linked to skills training and the skills training linked to real jobs. He didn't think it could be done but he worked his heart out. So did his team. AND they came away with many great results. Very impressive. Young people were learning to read so they could study simple plumbing or electricity and those young people were being hired at the end of the training.

It barely got off the ground when I was there, but it was successful. It's at iteration two at this point. It's still ongoing. And they've done a hell of a job.

Q: What are the types of fields that you recall?

WHITE: We did mechanics. We did basic electricity. Everything that we could think of that would rebuild Liberia. President Sirleaf wanted vocational training quadrupled. The World Bank and other donors including the Chinese were building hospitals and schools and roads, but all the workers were imported from neighboring countries like Ivory Coast and Ghana. No one had been trained at all in Liberia for 15 years so there was no local talent. During the war all types of education stopped completely from K to University.

Q: *Wow.*

WHITE: Post war education was a huge challenge. Training takes time. Especially training that Liberia needed and they needed it all – nurses, doctors, brick layers, mechanics, sanitation workers. Every single skill was needed. The Chinese were building huge infrastructure projects with no planning for sustainability whatsoever. Private sector and many governments were still so afraid of investing in Liberia. But the Chinese are not afraid. The Chinese are investing in countries for the long run. They know they're going to need natural resources like diamonds, gold, iron ore, timber. You name it, they know they're going to need it. If not tomorrow, 50 years from now. How about 100 years? The Chinese are outthinking the USG in Africa. That is my honest opinion. Lots of people think that Africans don't trust the Chinese. I am not an expert in that. I don't know. I DO know Africans will take their money.

The Chinese go to Presidents of countries and LISTEN. They ask the governments what they want accomplished in their country. We tend to tell governments what we want to do in their countries, not the other way around. Both African presidents and the Chinese are big on doing things that can be seen like buildings and roads. The big problem is what happens after the structures are built? There are almost no sustainability plans ever with Chinese projects. When I was in Liberia, I thought perhaps that USAID might partner with the Chinese. I was told that the Chinese don't partner with any other governments, period. BUT I am stubborn.

The American and Chinese ambassadors started to exchange hosting dinners. About once a month, we would go to the Chinese compound where all the Chinese diplomats lived and the next month, they would all come to the American ambassador's residence. The Chinese ambassador spoke perfect English. He was a wonderful host and a delightful person. I was always invited to these dinners because the Chinese were really interested in what we were doing and vice versa. They did not exchange a lot of information but over many months, we realized both countries were interested in improving the Liberia's state university. USAID had decided that we wanted to invest in a program that would lead to an engineering degree. This was a high priority for

President Sirleaf. The Chinese were building an entire new university. After many meetings, it was decided the Chinese would concentrate on constructing a state-of-the-art science building. We told them of our interest in promoting engineering and they agreed to equip an entire floor of the new building to engineering. After the structure was complete, the USG completely equipped it and designed a plan so that guest instructors would go to Liberia while we were training Liberian professors in the States.

Q: If I could ask a quick question here. Infrastructure projects, fine. You can build it. Was the thought given to electricity, existing buildings— You know, all the things to keep it going?

WHITE: No. Sometimes they would give some kind money for follow-on maintenance for a year or two. Very often you will see infrastructure projects that the Chinese financed just sitting there empty. Roads are another example. Roads take a huge amount of maintenance which is costly. I remember a road that USAID built was pretty much useless by year three. The rainy season just wiped out most of our road. So, the Chinese aren't the only ones with problems of sustainability.

Q: Absolutely.

WHITE: Everywhere I go now in Africa, there are Chinese. Tens of thousands of them are across the continent. That's what really scares me about the USG pulling out of the international world. If there is a void in the developing world, the Chinese and the Russians are ready to leap into the gaps. In the meantime, the Chinese are buying up vast amounts of natural resources and increasing trade.

In 2018 the trade from Africa to China was something like \$200 billion. And it's just going up, my friend. In the meantime, we're not concentrating on trade, we put very little money towards trade these days. This is a huge mistake. Africa has the fastest growing middle class in the world. Africa will have a billion people in ten years. And we ought to be negotiating deals twenty years out like the Chinese are.

Any deal that can be made, they're on it. They're manufacturing cars and manufacturing tractors in Africa. The Chinese love trading with Africa. They see the opportunities. They adapt. The Africans said that they didn't need huge tractors like we manufacture in the United States. They said wanted smaller, more fuel-efficient tractors, so the Chinese came up with a new design and built small tractor factories. Now they're all over the place! Chinese cars are all over the place. You know, they have a factory in South Africa.

They're smart, strategic. The more we retreat, the more they go forward. The Russians are right behind them. They're smiling all the way to the bank with both influence and cash. The Russian presence in Africa is booming.

In Liberia, we had this parallel partnership with the Chinese. They agreed to accommodate the engineering school, but we didn't pool our resources. They built the building and we equipped it and arranged for teachers. Shortly after we got this joint adventure started, a cable came out from the State Department asking, "Are there any joint AID-Chinese projects anywhere around the world?" And I don't remember about the other one, but we were one of two in the world that had a joint venture.

USAID sent us to China—me and the wonderful economic growth officer Homer McDonald to describe our partnership in Liberia and see if we could replicate it in other countries. It was very

interesting, because that was in 2009, and that was at the very beginning that China was really looking to expand their aid to Africa.

It has been interesting to see Chinese “aid” develop over time. In the beginning, it was pretty much all about infrastructure that was mostly tied to economic growth. Their international division was not run out of their State Department but out of the treasury department. This has recently changed. They were very proud that their money came with no strings attached, no conditionalities. They were very popular in Africa and I think still are. Do not be fooled, they’re not altruistic. They want something to come out of the relationship – like increased trade and access to natural resources for a long time in the future.

USAID at that time trained every primary teacher in Liberia. We were training about 200 a year. We did everything. We fully financed the teacher training school. We bought the food. We purchased the fuel for the generators. We gave them textbooks. During the war which lasted 14 years, there were no teachers trained whatsoever. There were no schools. We found that most of the teachers from 14 years ago had fled the country and there were no replacements. We were taking young people who had finished eighth or ninth grade and training them to be primary school teachers. We had to be (laughs) very creative on who we were using for teachers.

I would say 20 percent of the trainees had to be let go. They just weren’t interested in teaching. Or they got other jobs. STILL many thousands of children were educated thanks to the American people. MOST unfortunately five years later, Ebola struck and many of those teachers died, putting the education system once again back to nearly nothing.

When I went back in 2016, I spent a fair amount of time with President Sirleaf. And she said they were almost starting from point zero with the teacher training. The teacher program was huge when I was there. Now, there is very little USG money compared to the time I was there. So of course, not as much can be done. It is so sad. We were SO proud of that program.

When I served in Liberia, there was an enormous amount of donor money in the country. And the government also had some income from rubber and timber and iron ore. But Sirleaf told me after Ebola, there was hardly any money coming into the country at all. She said, “all sources of income have pretty much dried up.”

We also had an interesting program that was put in place to stop corruption for which Liberia is notorious. In every ministry that handled money such as the Ministry of the Interior that dealt with all the mines, USAID hired a topnotch American accountant to oversee all expenses and incoming funds. We paid them crazy amounts of money, more than I was making, plus a house and a car. They were very experienced accountants. Not a dime could go in or out of those ministries without the American accountant signing off.

Sirleaf said of that program, “It infringes on our sovereignty a bit. It is a necessary evil”. Corruption had been so widespread, so deep, that she didn’t see any other way around it. We had these super advisors in 13 ministries. While this person was in place, we put in computerized accounting systems and trained Liberians how to use them. We handpicked the people who would replace the high-powered accountants as they left.

Not all ministries graduated at the same time, it took well over three years for all the American accountants to be replaced. As each American left, there would be a huge celebration that the ministry had reached independence. AND, it worked for a while. But someone was telling me the

corruption is now taking over again. I don't know, I am not on the ground. I do know that the initial program kept corruption at an absolute minimum while it was in place.

Q: The problem with corruption in these very poor countries is that it takes generations before the concept even develops into an expectation.

WHITE: Yes, and the pie is so small, and elected leaders know their access to the pie is short-lived. People in power in African know they might never have another opportunity to enrich their families, so they take what they should not. An American businessman said, "Pam, you know I'd love to do business in Liberia. I know you're promoting doing business here. But just to get a license to do some research on establishing a factory, four or five people said, 'Give me some money.'" (laughs)

In Liberia, they call it "give me the envelope," and in other countries it's, "Give me a gift," or "give me a nice gesture." But it's a bribe, that's what it is. And it's everywhere, up and down the ministries. We counted five bribes needed just to get a driver's license. It was ten to twenty to get a building permit.

Q: So, you had the education program, literacy for vocational training, the basic literacy program, teacher training for elementary school.

WHITE: Yep, yes.

Q: And then the students of the government structural training for accountability.

WHITE: Yes, and we had an enormous, impactful health program also.

Q: Ah!

WHITE: And we paid the salaries of probably 50 percent of the medical professionals in the country, especially in the rural areas as an incentive to keep them in the rural areas. We had a fabulous Minister of health—Dr. (Walter) Gwenigale—was a saint. He operated his hospital about two hours outside Monrovia during the entire war. He was one of the few medical professionals, doctors, who stayed through the entire war. Thank god they made him a minister.

He was honest. No one ever doubted that. We used his ministry as an experimental lab to see how we might be able to give money directly to the government which a lot of people were talking about, but no one was doing. In the beginning, we hired with another donor, an accounting contractor firm to work within the ministry. In the beginning the staff was 80 percent offshore hires, but over two, two and a half, three years, all of them moved out, and Liberians were trained to take their places. The USG had agreed to pay rural doctors premium pay as an incentive and we eventually gave this money directly to the ministry and they paid the rural medical staff. USAID Washington was a great partner and worked with us extensively to establish the required controls.

The Minister of Health was delighted. He was personally involved in overseeing the budget and ensuring there was no corruption. His deputy, a talented doctor also, later replaced him as Minister of Health (Bernice T. Dahn). She was also a great partner with the USG and urged us to increase our government to government spending.

We were one of the very first USAID missions in the world that gave money directly to a ministry. It was a creative, dynamite program that would not have been possible without the right players – most importantly Dr. Gwenigale. It's still going on, although there's a lot less money going into Liberia. But they did a fabulous job.

The most important health intervention was the basic training of health workers throughout the whole country. We established health systems from drug distribution to preventive medicine. A major focus was on pregnant women. We did a lot of extremely innovative programming that brought health care to the villages. The program was multifaceted and included malaria, HIV/aids, family planning, vaccinations. Both infant and maternal mortality were extremely high, so we concentrated on bringing those numbers down. And we did. We were making noteworthy progress on all fronts. The Liberian health workers were superb.

Health programs can make a real difference when you have a good plan, and enough money to fund the plan for multiple years. Development programs take time – lots of time. It is also critical that the Chief of Party is committed and intelligent – both technically and culturally. When you have good government people to work with it makes all the difference. In Liberia, we had a team at the ministry of health that was extraordinary.

Q: I have no doubt that there were some good medical people in Liberia that you could at least begin working with. Were you able to keep the doctors in the rural areas?

WHITE: Yes, because we paid them 50 percent more than (chuckles) we were paying doctors in the city. Of course, all the good doctors in the city all had private practices and had clients who could pay. The incentive money was enough to keep doctors and highly skilled nurses at decent rural clinics. There were also a few, very few, decent county hospitals. We used those county hospitals as regional training hubs.

President Sirleaf had a fantastic ability to go to topnotch American medical schools and get them to send their finest students to Liberia to work as interns. Harvard (University) and John Hopkins medical interns were out there. Young doctors would come out for four months, six months. Many who initially signed up for one month, stayed for a year. They told me they were treating everything under the sun and learning so much. No one ever asked them for their credential or how much experience they had. The Liberians were so very thankful to have American doctors at the hospitals.

The main hospital called JFK (John F. Kennedy Medical Center) was destroyed during the war. Donors were rebuilding wing by wing. The USG took over establishing a first-class emergency room and obstetrics ward. It was slow going, but those American volunteers worked under any conditions. We built a rather simple dorm for them where they could at least shower and get a decent meal, nothing fancy whatsoever. They never complained and worked twenty hours a day.

And so, people's dedication was amazing. Liberia is a tough place to live, the toughest of my career, but we all so desperately wanted to make Liberia function again. President Sirleaf was such a presence, such an inspiration. She would go anywhere, talk to her people one on one. She would sometimes travel 16-17 hours a day and not even stop for lunch. We learned when travelling with her to pack our own lunches and bring toilet paper.

Q: Were the supply chains to the doctors for the stuff they needed and the electricity, the basic plumbing, was that able to be maintained?

WHITE: The medical supply chains ran all over the country, but electricity was only in parts of the capital city. When I was there in 2017, they were opening the Mount Coffee dam, which had been destroyed during the war. Can you imagine? Why would you destroy the hydro-electric plant? It makes no sense whatsoever. Before the war all of Monrovia and much of the countryside had electricity. After the war the only electricity came from generators that were extremely expensive to run. Most people couldn't afford them.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation rebuilt the dam in 2017. It certainly could produce enough electricity to light up Monrovia and well beyond. It was extraordinarily impressive. But the problem even after the new construction was distribution. Generating the electricity is one thing, getting it to the people was another challenge. Once it has been linked up to customers, how do you collect the bills? How do you stop corruption? Producing electricity seems like a simple, basic right but it is an extremely complex undertaking. Believe me, the USG tried to sort out the electrical sector in Haiti for five years and we didn't get very far.

And when I was in Haiti the first time in the '80s, everybody had electricity. No one thought that they needed a generator. It was one of the best run utilities anywhere in the Caribbean. It was totally non-corrupt. It worked. If my electricity didn't work for some reason, it was repaired in a day. No one even worried about it.

When I went back 25 years later, every single person had a generator. The residence had two generators, the Embassy also. If you could get electricity in Haiti two hours a day from the state-run electricity company, you were overjoyed. People were stealing it from their neighbors. The faster we put up lines, the faster the people would steal. It was just unbelievable.

And this same kind of thing was happening in Liberia. In 2017, I was staying at the Mamba Point Hotel, which is one of the nicest hotels and certainly the best food in Liberia. The owner was doing the catering for the big hoopla to open the reconstructed dam and he invited me to ride out with him to the festivities which I did.

I bluntly asked him if he hooked up to the new grid. I wanted to know because if you can't get the restaurants and the supermarkets and hotels paying for electricity, the electrical company will go bankrupt. The best hope to establish a legitimate utility is to get the paying "biggies" on board.

And he said, "I just can't trust it. And I'm running a business. I cannot have my guests waking up at, you know, one o'clock in the morning, and there's no electricity for the next 10 hours. There goes my business. I've got a reputation. I've got a sushi restaurant. You can't let that go down for hours at a time." He also reminded the cost to run his generator and the cost for the hydro was about the same. Eventually, the price of the hydro will go down, but establishing honest, efficient utilities is still a challenge. I DO have hope. In 2018, I saw real progress being made in Africa and some countries have even gotten to the stage where they can sell excess energy to their neighbors. The West African power grid which will eventually service all West Africa should be finished by 2050. This will be a true game changer to the economies in West Africa. ATT, the former President of Mali was always asking me why the top ranked Malian cotton was being shipped to China to make tee shirts. He wanted to manufacture them in Mali. And of course, the answer was cost. It cost five times more to manufacture a tee shirt in Mali than in China because of the energy costs.

When you see pictures of Liberia in the '50s and the '60s, it looks like Miami. Everyone's dressed in fancy clothes. You see Cadillacs and convertibles. The downtown looks clean and modern. There were movie theaters. The international school was renowned all over Africa.

People wanted to send their kids there from neighboring countries. The JFK hospital had the best burn unit on the continent. Linda—Ambassador Greenfield, said she remembered going to Monrovia when she was a graduate student to relax and party. She remembers people flocking to Monrovia from all over West Africa and beyond for vacation. They had fancy hotels and great bands,

How devastating it must be to see your country totally destroyed like Liberia was. Just unimaginable really to most of us.

[interruption]

Q: So, of the programs in Liberia, it sounds like the only one that really had sustainability was the education, the vocational education and the literacy training that went with vocations.

WHITE: I think some of our health and economic growth programs did some long term good. And the engineering school is still there. Any time you do professional training or vocational training, it will have long term positive effects. We trained thousands of Liberians.

Q: Ah, OK.

WHITE: Amazingly enough.

[interruption]

Q: OK, so—

WHITE: And some of the teachers, I'm sure, are still around. And some of the materials, I'm sure, are still being used. But, like President Sirleaf said, Ebola took a huge, huge hit out of the health program.

Q: Did you— Were you involved at all in the Ebola relief?

WHITE: No, not personally. I was not. Some of the health strengthening programs are still functioning at the ministry of health, and we're still giving money to them. So that's a long-term sustainable system that survived.

Considering how much the country has been through since I left, the fact that some of these programs are still ongoing, I think says a lot about the quality of the people that we left them with— the Liberians. On the downside, President Sirleaf was telling me about how—when I was visiting in 2017—how she really did see that corruption is coming back in all its nasty forms. Whenever you have a huge influx of money like they had after the Ebola or a major hurricane or an earthquake, there's corruption. You just can't get around it.

Q: So now, you had begun mentioning earlier the potential for being considered for ambassadorships.

WHITE: Right, right, right.

Q: Because it sounds like now you are—your period in Liberia comes to a close, it sounds like there had been more serious indicators that you were, this time— This was your turn.

WHITE: Well, I'd signed up for Liberia for three years. I'd been there for a year and a half when this visit came from Secretary Clinton and Cheryl Mills. A couple of weeks before the visit, someone from STATE HR sent me an email to fill in the papers AGAIN to be considered for an ambassadorship. Although I had sworn, I would never fill in those forms again, I did because of the Secretary's visit. I went to Ambassador Greenfield too and reminded her she had promised to help me. She said of course she would support me. And then nothing much happened.

Later, I got a phone call late at night from the number two in the Africa Bureau. He told me they had made decisions of every ambassadorship in Africa except The Gambia. He asked me if I would consider being nominated to be ambassador to The Gambia.

I didn't hesitate for even a second. I remember saying "Yes. If you're going to call me 'Madame Ambassador', I'll go anywhere."

And he said, "Well, I want you to know there's not an AID program there. And that's kind of your field of expertise. You can pretty much have your choice of any AID program in the world. We have been told that by the highest levels in USAID. We know you're an excellent mission director. If you chose a large USAID mission and not the ambassadorship in The Gambia, you would surely control a much larger staff and a lot more money. So, don't say yes so quickly. I want you to think about it". He politely said good-bye and hung up. I think that what he was truly trying to tell me was the Africa Bureau did not want me to have an ambassadorship. STATE didn't really want any USAID person to fill one of their top jobs. BUT obviously they must have been getting pressure from Secretary Clinton. They did their best to discourage me, but I wasn't buying it. I had worked a long time for this offer. I didn't think I would ever get another one. Ambassador Greenfield agreed with me.

He called back in a couple of days and asked for me for my decision. I told him I had been a mission director since 2002 in three countries. I thought the change would be great for me. He said fine.

I went off to The Gambia in 2010. The Gambia, like I said, had no AID program there. There was a huge Peace Corps program. But I learned the basics of how to be an ambassador in The Gambia. I had a tiny staff, but I had all the pieces of a normal Embassy minus the Marines. There was a fully staffed GSO. There was a management officer. There was a public relations officer—a public diplomacy officer. I had a great DCM and a fabulous young political/econ officer. Their staffs were small, two or three Gambians. But they were young and eager. They worked hard. There was a regional, out of Dakar, CIA, FBI and DEA (U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency). CDC and USAID both had programs in the Gambia that were supervised from Dakar.

Being an ambassador in a small post taught me how all these different elements worked together or could work together if you were smart enough to make sure you knew how to make them see how they fit. Because as much as publicly the FBI and the DEA and the CIA like to say that they're all on the same page, it takes some persuasion to make sure they really are! They're not so great at sharing the dirty details. The ambassador gets briefings from each national security agency, one by one. And then you get them in a secure room all together and ask them to share with each other what they told you – often there is more silence than communication. You must be clever in order to make sure they understand why sharing is good for all. They need to agree they are all working together for one goal. This can be done, but it cannot be forced.

A lot of people seem to think that standing behind and promoting American values and priorities is something new, but it is not. Development professionals and diplomats have been doing this for

decades. That's what we're doing around the world. We're hoping to spread American values, American policy, what we hold as Americans to be sacred. And it's not just true for development and diplomacy, it's true for the DEA and CIA as well.

Before I became an ambassador, I thought I knew what the CIA, FBI and DEA did. I must tell you I didn't. Each organization emphasizes priorities a tad differently. Their staffs have skills sets that are incredibly specialized. Still, they are all protecting us from the bad guys and are dedicated to USG's ideals. I have met a few (very few) real cowboys but most are serious, intelligent, passionate. Every agency is a part of our national security apparatus.

In the Gambia, I had this fabulous public diplomacy officer. She was on her first tour, like most of my officers. To have someone of their second or third tour was unusual. She was brilliant. She had ideas about Black History Month that were to this day the best I have ever seen. She had Gambians coming in from all over the country to dance and sing and recite poetry for absolutely no money. These spectacular performances would last all day and would draw HUGE crowds. I still don't know how she did it. She was something else. She had a budget of \$5,000, but she did more than somebody with \$10,000 or \$50,000. I think she left the State Department a few years later which is a great loss.

The biggest challenge of the country BY FAR was dealing with the president. He was Yahya Jammeh, who had been president since the mid- '90s. He was in his late 40s, Muslim, married to a stunning Moroccan woman who he had met in his younger days. She had been visiting The Gambia to enjoy their gorgeous, beautiful beaches, and he had seen her on the beach.

He was a character, both loved and loathed. On one level, it appeared to me, he really did care about his population. The fact is that The Gambia had the highest vaccination rate in Africa, one of the lowest infant mortality rates, one of the lowest maternal mortality rates, one of the highest rates of money spent on education, one of the highest number of girls in school, if not the highest. A lot of the indicators that reflect the quality of life for your normal Gambian were very high. The Gambia received green marks on all the MCC quality of life indicators when I was there. When I would travel around the country, and I would sit under a tree with a bunch of Gambian women and ask, "How's life?" They would always say they were happy, satisfied with the Gambian government.

I realized they could have been lying because they were afraid of Jammeh's hitmen, but I just didn't get that vibe. Their children had access to schools. No one appeared hungry. They had decent healthcare. There was a clinic where they could walk to within, you know, four or five miles max (maximum)."

So that was the good side of him. On the other side, you have a nasty paranoid monster who beat people for minor offenses and used the vile prisons as his personal revenge destinations. The United States was constantly calling me about what a bad guy he was because he was a human rights disaster. He hated gays, hated them. He would talk publicly about cutting off their appendages. He hated journalists. If somebody in the press remarked they didn't like his lifestyle, they were imprisoned. It didn't have to be the press. It could be anybody. There was no freedom of speech.

He had a firm hand and a squad of thugs that would go around the country digging up dirt. He treated his military well which was smart since they were protecting him. The military had very good housing. They had decent salaries, which was not true in a lot of African countries. He was always giving them medals and dinners. He treated them well because his power base depended

on it. There were four or five political parties that had minimal US funding, but they were not strong.

At least once a week, someone from the Africa Bureau or the Hill would call me to complain. Washington was especially upset about his antigay stance and his hard tactics with journalists. Both were extremely legitimate concerns. I was concerned too. But I also tried to paint a balanced picture to Washington. It was true that the Gambia had horrible human rights abuses – mostly led by Yaya BUT to the women tending their gardens who have full bellies and healthy children in school, the view is different. Washington was always saying that the elections were rigged but I am not sure. I think many people did vote for him based on their personal quality of lives. As time went on, the abuse got worse and the good programs went unfunded. Gambians grew tired of YaYa's abuses.

I needed to have access to President Jammeh so publicly I would often praise the positive indicators. I would say on national radio, "Do you know that you Gambians have the highest infant vaccination rates in all of Africa? It's 95 or 96 percent, that's crazy good." It just so happened in my initial flight into the country, I was sitting next to the head of GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization). She said, "The Gambia is the best country we work in."

I said, "Really?"

"Yeah, absolutely. The people know what they're doing. When we say, 'You've got to go out and cover, do canvassing,' they know what we're talking about. The grids are perfect." Who knew?

My strategy was to say really good things publicly—which were true. I did this so I could tell the President not so positive truths privately. I wanted to get inside his inner sanctum. And I did. His inner sanctum was fascinating. It was the top floor of about three stories. To get up to the third floor, you first had to go up this little flight of stairs, and then there was an old-fashioned elevator with of metal grates on it. The kind of elevator from the sixties. I was not allowed to bring anyone with me—not a bodyguard, not a secretary, not a note taker. No, it was me and only me.

Somebody dressed in a military uniform would close the gates, and I would go up a floor. Another military person opened the grates on the other side, and I got out. Then I would walk a few steps to a locked door. The door would be opened, and I would step in what looked like a closet except it had a door directly on the other side. Once I stepped the door behind me would be locked and a couple of minutes later (maybe less) the door facing me would open. By the time I was in his office, I had been in and out of three cage-like spaces that had double locks. It really was scary although I was either too dumb or too intrigued to be frightened. Some nasty things I am sure DID go on during that journey to some people, but certainly never to me. Jammeh never stood when I entered. He would be sitting in a huge golden chair, wearing a white boubou and a small white hat. He would always be waving a lion tail switch in one hand and Muslim worry beads in the other. I would be very formal upon entering and go to him and say how nice it was to see him. NO SHAKING HANDS. And he would say in his odd whispery voice (which I did not expect because he was imposing) for me to sit down across the room – maybe twenty feet from him. He had a couple of huge bodyguards in the room and sometimes his Minister of Foreign Affairs, but not usually. Normally, he was the only one who spoke. After some pleasantries about his health and his family, I would ask him what was bothering him, because he never called me to the palace if something wasn't on his mind.

I so clearly remember one time he began our discussion telling me about his interview with BBC (which I had listened to). It has occurred right after his big electoral victory. He told me that he was expecting to be congratulated and instead they insulted him, they were nasty. I told him I had listened to the interview and the reason they were nasty was that the first question they asked was about homosexuals and he went off the deep end, saying how immoral homosexuality is and how he would cut off body parts if he found anyone in a compromising position. He said he didn't understand why they insisted on talking about "homos" when he had just been reelected and that was the big story. I told him he let BBC embarrass him. Truly I told him, dear Mr. President, it was his fault.

My advice was the next time he was asked a question about homosexuality his answer should be: 'I have the highest vaccination rate in Africa.' I told him to not be goaded into answering any question that put him in a bad light. American politicians had learned this trick decades ago. He thought for a long time, prayer beads going around and round. He finally said "Pam, being gay is not natural."

"I know that's your point of view. But you've got a good story to tell, Mr. President. So, tell it."

At that particular meeting, he had two advisors in the room who had been educated in the United States. I was making them extremely nervous. NO ONE spoke to Jammeh like this. I could see them, sighing and gulping. But I could also see they were grateful. The only reason they were working with him is because they thought the good Jammeh did in the country outweighed the bad. They too were trying to convince him to be a better leader.

He reluctantly thanked me for my insights. Then I went after what I wanted and told him I had to visit the two Americans in prison. I told him to please right then and there call someone to give me permission to do this. He nodded to one of the aids who immediately left the room. Permission was granted.

So little by little, I was getting a little closer to his thinking, to his inner circle. I walked very carefully, I publicly tiptoed around because I knew once that inner door slammed, I was not getting inside again. I knew there was no way I could make a real difference without getting into the inner sanctum. If the door to the palace is slammed shut, you might as well go home. There's no point of having an American representative in that country if you can't have good discussions with the President of the country. You need that access. That is diplomacy. That is what they pay ambassadors to do.

There was this wonderful gay Gambian hairdresser that had been around for a very long time. Cut all of our hair. He was the interior decorator for the president's own personal residence as well as the palace. This was extremely interesting given the President's views on homosexuality. He was amazing. One day when he was cutting my hair, he said he had just returned from the palace and had run into Jammeh. He said Jammeh talks about you and your discussions all the time. You are the first ambassador that he has ever really listened to. I am not sure if this is true or not, but I was pleased. I was not easy on the President.

Two days before I left, it happened to be the president's birthday. I was invited to his big party under enormous white tents. There was dancing and music and mountains of food. Suddenly Jammeh stopped the festivities and brought me up on this stage. There must have been a thousand people there. He spoke to the crowd about what a great ambassador I had been and what progress we had made together (drugs, girls' education, vaccination). He was well prepared. He had

lovely, thoughtful gifts too: a painting of a dove, a nice Agadez silver cross and the highest award given to foreigners. I still have all of them.

Everyone was clapping, and cheering. I thanked him and all Gambians for allowing me to live in their delightful country and started to exit the stage. He gestured to me a little bit frantically to come close to him behind the huge screen that was showing successful agriculture projects. He leaned over to me and whispered in that odd voice: “Thank you for telling me the truth.”

I felt good about myself, because I did tell him the truth. I don’t think even his own closest aides dared to tell him the same kinds of things.

So it was, a balancing act all the time. I was told a rumor that for years after I left, they would try to get *agrément* for new ambassadors, and he would cross out the name, and he would put my name down, just to play with them.

Q: (laughs)

WHITE: In 2017 Jammeh was defeated in an election. In the very beginning he conceded defeat and said he would leave. Then he changed his mind and refused to step down. The entire international community was upset. About a week into this standoff I got a call from the US Ambassador to the UN asking me to call him and ask him to step down. They had been told by prominent Gambians that I was the only American he would trust. They gave me a direct line which I tried for hours.

And I never actually talked to him personally, but I talked to his aide. I said, “Tell him to go. Tell him to go quickly and quietly. There’s no way he’s going to win this one. If I thought that he could, I’d let you know. He still has a legacy. You know, he trusts me. He knows I speak the truth.” He eventually went. But it was interesting that his aides were telling the UN, “Call Ambassador White,” all these years later. Let me be clear, he did NOT leave because of my intervention—he left due the leadership of President Sirleaf and many powerful African presidents. They gave him a deal to live Sierra Leone with no indictments. He took it.

The Peace Corps in The Gambia was incredibly big, very well organized. The Peace Corps director at the time was fabulous and is still a good friend of mine. President Jammeh loved the Peace Corps. For their 50th anniversary, he took every single one of them that we could herd in—and it was most of them; it was over 200—out to his farm. He fed them this fabulous dinner. He put on this show of dancing and stayed for hours at the gala celebrating Peace Corps. He gave each one of them an elegant African outfit, and he handed the outfits to them one by one by one. It was something else. Many of them spent the night there on his farm, in buildings all around his big farmhouse. It was a memorable night. None of them will forget it.

Q: For you as an AID director and someone with, you know, all background in AID, were the Peace Corps sort of a “USAID Light”?

WHITE: No. I was Peace Corps myself. No, they’re not USAID light anywhere, certainly not in the Gambia. PCVs live simply in the villages. Their job is to make a difference wherever they are with very little monetary resources. Shriver sent young Americans out into the world to represent the best of the US. He wanted peace corps volunteers to interact one on one with local populations and exchange ideas, cultures, languages. He stressed the human connection. That’s the important thing.

My son was a Peace Corps volunteer in the remote part of Senegal, way in the north. He was a health volunteer, and he managed to help get their little health clinic a new birthing bed and some new equipment for the doctor who came around once a week. That contribution was vital to the women in the community, he worked very hard and loved doing it.

He learned to speak Pular. He started a radio talk program with another volunteer to talk about health issues. He became very popular and well known in that remote part of the world. His living conditions were ten times worse than mine. His replacement lasted less than a month. He was very close to his host family. They spent hours sitting in a circle, talking about their lives. That kind of exchange can be life-changing for both the volunteers and their hosts in many ways. My son's experience and mine as well was exactly what Peace Corps was talking about with the slogan *The Hardest Job You Will EVER LOVE*. It was hard living without water and electricity and friends in a remote village where no one knew your culture and didn't speak one word of English. But we connected. In both Liberia and the Gambia almost every minister and educator that I spoke to had been taught at one point by a Peace Corps volunteer. PCVs are by far the best bang for the buck in the entire American government.

And so, yeah, I don't think it's "AID Light". No.

Q: OK. The reason I asked is because sometimes their programs have a similar goal in terms of development. But, you know, again I see what you're saying.

WHITE: Peace Corps is definitely a key part of the overall US foreign policy, part of the development picture. But they're very, very special. They have their own areas of expertise that NO other US government agency has. They teach. They work in the fields. They build small schools and help furnish clinics. They learn local languages. It's very hands-on. Peace Corps is all about communication and understanding – the very foundation of relationships.

Q: But now, although you had no AID program in The Gambia, were you able in any other way to take on any development tasks?

WHITE: We had a couple of USAID-funded programs in the country that were contracted in Senegal. One was excellent, actually. It was about working with cashew farmers. Cashews in The Gambia are a key commodity. This program reached thousands of farmers, many of them women. It was very successful, and I think it's still ongoing. The woman that ran it was fabulous. She was an American married to a Gambian.

The number one foreign currency provider was tourism in The Gambia. And their hotels were pristine and beautiful and well-run. As bad as the government could be especially in the human rights indicators, that country knew enough to keep the tourist areas pristine, crime free and welcoming. Now that I think about it, the countries that sent the most tourists probably could have done a better job intervening in some of the worst cases of abuse like jailing of journalists. The US did send tourists especially after the series *Roots* came out on television, but a small amount compared to Europe. Entire plane loads would come in from Germany and Norway and England. For \$75 a night, they could stay in fabulous hotels and drink themselves silly for very little money. They had a wonderful time. But none of those countries really made a big deal of the human rights abuses and should have been more vocal. Of course, that is 20/20 vision.

I didn't work 24/7 like I did in Haiti, but I learned a LOT about power, politics and policies – both US and foreign. It was a real eye opener.

Q: OK. You were there two years.

WHITE: Right. And then again, the phone rings. And this time, it's Cheryl Mills, who was Secretary Clinton's chief of staff. And she said, "Do you speak French?"

And I said, "Yep. I have a 3+/3."

And she said, "Well, that's good, because the Secretary and I want you to be ambassador to Haiti. Would you like to do that?" Cheryl never ever minces words – she just comes straight to the point.

And I said, "Yes, I would like to do that."

And she said, "Well, then we're going to make that happen."

And I said, "Well, that's pretty exciting!"

It was a one-minute phone call. I hung up the phone and was just stunned, speechless. I finally figured out I would go from a staff of 40 to one of 1,500. And from NO USAID budget, to a budget of over two billion. I thought maybe I should have thought for at least one minute before I said yes to Cheryl. BUT I was very happy and excited.

A week later, my phone rang, and it was Cheryl again. She told me she was in Liberia for President Sirleaf's swearing in as President, second term. She told me Secretary Clinton was sitting on one side of her and President Sirleaf was on the other side. Ambassador Greenfield was in the room as well. With very little fanfare she told me that President Sirleaf had asked Secretary Clinton if she would assign me to come back to Liberia as ambassador.

Cheryl went on to say that Secretary Clinton would assign me wherever I wanted to go. She said that she and the Secretary had a preference, but that it was truly up to me. She told me I didn't have to decide right then and that I would be given 24 hours to think about it. I told Cheryl that I would get back to her the next day. I really didn't have to think about it, but out of respect for Sirleaf, I said that I would. I felt that returning to Haiti was the right move for me. I felt that it would be the perfect assignment to end my career. She called a couple of days later, and I said, "I want to go to Haiti."

She admitted that both she and Secretary Clinton wanted me to go to Haiti but Sirleaf was really being insistent about it. Out of their great respect for President Sirleaf, they wanted to give me the opportunity. I KNEW that Sirleaf would be disappointed. We respected each other and trusted each other. Plus, I was and still am extremely fond of her. The next time I saw Sirleaf in Washington, she said, "You didn't want to be my ambassador."

I assured her that I really did. I would really have loved to work with her again. But I explained to her that Liberia had her as their wonderful, honest, super smart president. And Haiti was having a hard time with corruption and rebuilding after the earthquake. I thought Haiti needed my development knowledge and a strong voice. I frankly told her that although it would have been fantastic working with her, I thought my talents could be used to greater effect in Haiti. She had a clear vision of where Liberia was going and at that time, Liberia was progressing well on the path she had created. I started my career in Haiti. It was my first Foreign Service post, and now it was going to be my last. That's such nice book ends.

President Sirleaf said she understood but she was still mad at me – with that twinkle in her eye that I so love. I told her I was sure she would get a fabulous ambassador which she did. I have seen her several times since and we remain friends.

Back in The Gambia, I went over to tell President Jammeh that I was leaving early. And he was NOT pleased. He said, you know, “Every time they give me a good ambassador, they pull them out of here, because they don’t like me. I know you don’t want to go. Why would you want to go to that horrible country when you could be here on my beautiful beaches in this gorgeous country? You must have done something bad to those people in Washington.”

And I said, “Well, you know, when my country asks me to do something, I must do it.” He grunted and growled but there wasn’t much he could do.

Q: So, this is March 12, and we’re resuming our interview with Pamela White. And she’s preparing to go as ambassador to Haiti. Of course, the interesting— The first interesting question is, “How did that come about?”

WHITE: Right. As I said in the last interview, Secretary Clinton was my supporter and my mentor. My first tour as a US Direct Hire was in Haiti where I served for over four years. I knew Haiti. I had many friends there already—Haitian friends. And the challenge was huge after the earthquake—two years after the earthquake. Although, Liberia had its own challenges also.

I admit that I was flattered with TWO ambassadorship choices. It was such a shame to disappoint President Sirleaf whom I adored—adored and adore. But I really had my heart set on Haiti. I remember telling my two sons that I was going to be ambassador to Haiti. They went a little crazy – with happiness. Some of the very best years of their lives were spent in Haiti when they were young. They were so excited. My older son immediately asked if I was going to live in the same residence the ambassador had lived when we were in Haiti in the 1980s. He distinctly remembered we would go to the “palace on the hill” for special occasions—on Easter and on Christmas for family parties. We would all get dressed up and go to the ambassador’s house in Haiti. It was built in the ‘50s. It’s this big, rambling, beautiful, old house, which my whole family adored since when we first visited in 1985. On my maiden trip, my older son flew down. We couldn’t get matching flights to Haiti, so he flew down and got to the residence about three hours ahead of me. Although the entire staff was lined up to meet me, he was the first person that greeted me at the residence. That was so darn special that my own son, my firstborn son was there to welcome me.

At my swearing in, Hillary Clinton officiated. Cheryl gave a great talk. The USAID Administrator, Raj Shah, said in his speech that when he asked USAID Mission Directors when he first took over, who would give him the most honest advice. He was a tad surprised that so many mentioned my name - including ME. I had 200 of my best buddies from decades at USAID and at State plus family and friends. So that was a great, fun occasion. People flew in from all over the place. Let me take just a minute to also say that Hillary Clinton is one of the most intelligent, warm, funny and compassionate people I

have ever met. I respect her with every ounce of my body. She comes across as a little hard, edgy on television, but that is not her. I sometimes think she just cares so much. She is serious about making the world a better place. This should be a positive, but sometimes she gets dinged for being overly serious. Sad comment really about who we are as a country. Appears we need to be entertained more than led to greatness.

Q: And it's also important to note that USAID as a rule doesn't get many opportunities to nominate ambassadors.

WHITE: Very few, very few. And the last three years, there's been none. There's often one at any given time. So yeah, it was a great privilege.

I arrived in Haiti, and as it turned out, President Martelly's wife's mother had been the mission director's secretary when I had been there in the 1980s. The First Lady, Sophia Martelly had worked for CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere) during that same time. I had known them both off and on for four years. The First Lady was always over at AID, because of her mom and, CARE was one of USAID's partners.

Patrick (my older son) and I arrived at the Presidential compound for me to present my credentials and as my car drove up, Sophia came flying across the compound. She exclaimed, "Pam! Pam! We're so excited you're here!" So right away, I had a really great contact in the highest place. I knew the First Lady.

The US Embassy tradition always was that, after you've presented your papers to the President, the new ambassador hosts a reception that night at the residence. Four ambassadors presented that same day, but the Americans were the only one that had a reception. Everybody in government and the private sector and all the donors turned out to that reception. There must have been five or six hundred people at this event. The whole grounds were flooded.

Q: So just one quick question about your credential's presentation. The earthquake had pretty much destroyed the presidential palace. Where did you present the credentials? Was the palace ready?

WHITE: No. There was no palace. The palace was all in shambles. Right behind the palace, which used to be sort of the administrative offices, they had set up the President's office. It was very modest. The President's office was probably twice as big as this room: a big desk, two sofas. The USA had done some remodeling of the offices post-earthquake, but it was always intended to be temporary. President Martelly kept it that way. He said he didn't want to spend money on fancy offices. He very much thought that he should be spending money on the country. He kept it simple, which sent a good message to donors and the Haitian people.

About twenty minutes after I presented my papers and had a nice conversation with President Martelly, I left his office and went into the outside circular drive. Much to my delight I was stopped by the wonderful chief of protocol, so the Haitian national band

could play first the Haitian anthem and then the United States anthem. It was an image I will never forget. It was a beautiful day, sun shining, white puffy clouds bouncing in the clear air. Both national flags were blowing in the slight wind. The dramatic backdrop was the once stately presidential palace, now nothing but rubble. The majesty of the music and the flags with the devastation of the earthquake in such plain sight was simply overwhelming. Both my son and I were spellbound. And my son, who was standing next to me, said, “Wow. I’ll never forget this moment.”

Was there a plan to rebuild it, or are they—

WHITE: There was a plan to replace the palace, but it was going to cost millions. Sean Penn agreed to use his teams to get rid of all the rubble. His organization had a lot of machinery that they used to clear the sites where they were rebuilding. They did level the palace, so it wasn’t quite so depressing. I did see sketches of what the new palace would look like when it was rebuilt, but at least when I was there, not a single brick had been laid in place. They were building other ministries at the time with Venezuelan money. But I don’t know how many of those have been completed. None of them had been completed before I left. I was completely against building those mega buildings since there was NO way they could ever be maintained.

Q: All right, then you have your big reception.

WHITE: At that first reception, I was reading the speech my staff had written which had some French and some English and even some Haitian creole. Normally I like to write my own speeches, or at least big parts of them, but since I had only been in Haiti for a few days, this one was written for me. As I was standing on that gorgeous back veranda of the residence in front of hundreds of people, I realized that I had really bitten off a HUGE piece of diplomatic pie this time! I was certainly not in The Gambia anymore.

I realized looking at all those expectant faces, it was not me but the United States of America that offered hope to both American taxpayers and Haitian people. I knew I represented the USG and had a huge responsibility to both nations. That is why I pretty much worked 24/7 for three years. Before I arrived, I thought I had a lot of money and it appeared that way. But it turns out two billion isn’t so much money when you are facing the HUGE challenges that Haiti was facing at the time. Even rebuilding after a major hurricane costs a lot of money. In New Orleans, we put \$50 billion into reconstruction. And that was only a city. Two billion for a country that has suffered a major earthquake, it is just not enough. You are forced to make very strategic choices. What do you do? What don’t you do? Very difficult, gut wrenching as well.

The slogan that everyone was throwing around was, “Build back better,” which sounded nice. But to build back better would have taken 100 billion dollars. It’s expensive to build infrastructure that also needed on-going funding to ensure sustainability. Not only were buildings and roads and ports and hospitals destroyed but so many of the trained people that worked in those places were killed. It wasn’t just a matter of building brick and mortar structures which can be done (with enough bucks) quickly, it was a matter of

retraining thousands of employees from doctors to sanitation workers. Daunting doesn't begin to describe it.

Q: Sure.

WHITE:

American elected official visited often from both parties. Wonderful Senators like Leahy from Vermont and Nelson from Florida and marvelous Senator Dick Durbin came often. Marco Rubio came, and I found him to be super smart and engaging. California Congresswoman Maxine Waters and from Florida, Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen also showed great interest. I would also often visit the Hill. They all asked the same question, "What's happened with our \$2 billion?"

I said, "The first billion went to get them off their—not their knees but their stomachs, because everything was ruined. Everything. The airport. The port. The schools. The hospitals. All the ministry buildings. The congressional buildings. The roads. Everything had been wiped out. The 18 months after the earthquake was devoted to emergency aid – food, medicine, temporary housing, treatment of wounds, depositing of bodies.

Just the enormity of the 250,000 dead in five minutes is more than the human mind can comprehend. When I say that to most human beings, they say, "Oh, that's horrible." And then they're on to the next thought, because it's too big. The number's too big to properly internalize.

Three thousand died in 9/11 (the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States), and we Americans still can't get over that. And this was 250,000 people. What do you do with 250,000 dead people? There was another million people injured. More than a million Haitians were homeless. When you have that enormity of this earthquake, just getting people off their stomachs onto their knees is a huge undertaking. This is not something that makes DC political actors very happy. Getting a nation to a kneeling position (figuratively speaking) doesn't make anybody very happy. Donors want to see people standing. That's going to cost a lot more than a billion dollars. Probably somewhere between 30-100 million is realistic. But we only had 2 billion. So how are we going to build back better?"

Right after the earthquake, I had been called in from Liberia to head the Haiti earthquake task force for about six weeks. We had donations coming in from 50 percent of every American household. The military was there. The NGOs were there. The religious communities were there. It seemed that the entire USA was trying to help Haiti.

The outpouring of love and emotion was unbelievable. These groups working together DID make progress. They did rebuild the airport. They did rebuild parts of the port. They did rebuild some roads. They did rebuild schools and houses and clinics. Little by little, despite the devastation and the challenges, the country started to function again. Generators were installed, training was conducted, the rubble was removed.

Q: By the time you arrived, had most of the rubble been removed?

WHITE: I would say eighty percent. If you put dump trucks end to end from Key West (Florida) to Bangor, Maine, that's how many dump trucks of rubble had to be moved. And a lot of it had been removed by people with wheelbarrows. Haitians with wheelbarrows, going to the ocean and dumping the rubble one little load at a time. Some of it was done by front loaders, but the vast majority was the Haitians, those marvelous Haitians, who never gave up hope, who believed in themselves and a better Haiti. Post earthquake was a horrible time, but a year after, hope was in the air. I am afraid we never delivered on our many promises. Still never ever forget right after the earthquake it was the USA that provided tents for the homeless, medicine to the sick, food for the hungry, doctors for the maimed and HOPE to millions.

The Haitians who worked for me at the embassy had all lost a loved one – every single person knew someone who had died in the earthquake. Keeping up morale was extremely important. I did a whole series of events at the residence and in the Embassy to make sure morale stayed high. I had this lottery, and all the employees had a piece of paper in the hat. At the end of every two weeks, I would pick out six to eight names and take them to lunch. Only rule was we could not talk about work. They had to be Haitian, not American. They would tell me their stories about the earthquake often.

I heard devastating stories: “I lost four or five children. I lost both my parents. My entire house was destroyed”. I always left those lunches deeply touched and determined to work even harder on behalf of the Haitian people. They also told me that they had to go on, no matter how shattered they were. “Five people still depend on me. Or I've adopted three or four kids.” Haitians are generous, giving people.

Those stories and those I heard outside the embassy (and I got out as much as I could) just made me work harder. I think they made my staff work harder too. They felt listened to, cared about. There is a famous Colin Powell quote “the day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership”. I totally agree with him. I was working 17, 18 hours a day—five, six seven days a week. I never stopped. I didn't realize it either because the needs were great, and I enjoyed solving problems. Someone said to me, “Are you stressed out?”

I said, “No, I'm fine.” But, a month or two after I left Haiti for good, when I was finally relaxing, I thought, “Maybe I was a little stressed out.” (chuckles)

Anyway, the challenges were great. I was constantly on the go outside my office. I told everyone that worked for me —no matter what organization they worked for—CIA, USAID, CDC—it doesn't matter. You can't do your work sitting in your office. You've got to get out there and see what's going on. Go ask questions and look at the quality of the work the US taxpayers are giving their hard-earned money to support. Are we getting

our money's worth? Is it what we wanted? Is it in the right place? DO we have the right people? You've got to just keep asking those questions over and over and over again.

Q: Speaking of, about how big was the mission?

WHITE: Total number of people was about 1,400 people working at the embassy. The vast majority of those were Haitians. But there was at least 300+ Americans.

Q: *OK, so it's a good size.*

WHITE: Yeah, it was a very good size. And that doesn't count the hundreds of contractors that were working all over the country, of course. There were a lot of moving parts and a lot of key players. Cheryl Mills shared with me the development plan for Haiti, and I said, "It's a wonderful plan," and it was a wonderful plan. But I said, "It's going to take 12, 15 years."

And she said, "Pam, we've got to get things done in three years."

It was a HUGE challenge in a place that had been so completely broken as Haiti had been. The plans were to build an industrial park in the north of Haiti, a huge electrical plant to go with the industrial park, roads leading in, training people to work in the centers, constructing housing and a new port as well. It was overly ambitious for sure. I loved the hope and optimism that plan brought but perhaps it was just too much to consider given the constraints. Finding contractors and even USAID and STATE qualified staff was difficult to say the least.

We DID indeed make progress. We were still creating jobs for thousands of people, and we were building homes. A Korean company established a garment factory. Other private companies were beginning to buy space in the warehouse.

By the time I left, the 1.1 million people that were in tents—tent cities—had found more permanent housing. The number living in tents was down to about 5,000.

When I first got there, everywhere you drove in Port-au-Prince, from one end to the other, you would see thousands of these tents. Little by little, people were being moved into permanent housing.

In Liberia, after the civil war, which was so violent and lasted for 14 years, practically the entire country had post traumatic syndrome. When you went and talked to young people, you'd see blank looks, no soul was there. Linda Thomas-Greenfield and I were always trying to just light a spark, not a fire.

But in Haiti, you would go and talk to people: young people, school-age children, young adults. They were enthusiastic, "Yes! We are going to help rebuild our country. Yes, we want to do this." So, it was inspiring. And it made you want to help them help themselves.

Q: So, you mentioned that there was a plan. What was the basic approach to it?

WHITE: It was to build an economy that would employ thousands. The core of the plan was about building up the private sector. And I believe in that. I say often, if I had to do my career over again, I would do much more on the economic growth side. Most development money these days is health money. We get little bits of economic growth and even smaller amounts for governance. I think this is a huge mistake. If a country cannot establish an economic base, then they have no money to provide services which is critical. Also, the USG needs to spend a lot more money building democracies from the ground level – civil society and justice systems. We spend too much money on elections which are often bought, and corrupt leaders are elected. BUT if we had a strong civil society, even bad presidents could be contained. They could keep the institutions alive and functioning and non-corrupt.

If we created more jobs, there might be enough money to make the government function. Governments need to give services to their populations or there is no need for governments. They must answer to the people. In many of these countries where I have served when you'd say to people, "Who provides your healthcare?" They would say USAID or CARE or Red Cross or another NGO. Or, "Who's educating you?" They would often answer some religious group. It is not services that are being provided by the country. If services are not being provided by the country, citizens rightly ask why they need a government at all. That is when the population tends to hit the streets.

In Rwanda, Rwandan president Paul Kagame is not considered the most democratic president in the world BUT Rwanda has grown a huge tax base under his leadership. He has attracted all kinds of businesses to Rwanda and consequently, he does provide assistance to his people. He's really grown the health sector, for example. He's also grown the economic side. He's training thousands in tech jobs. Consequently, Rwandans see that their government is providing services to them.

Q: Speaking of which, did— So you have the two billion in development in this instance through USAID. Was Haiti also eligible for Millennium Challenge Corporation funding?

WHITE: No. No, they were not. When I first got to Liberia, the minister of plan—later the minister of finance—one of my best friends and I sat down, and I said, "Amara (Mohamed Konneh), you know, let's get Liberia into MCC." And he said, "Pam, I don't know how we're going to do that. We just came through 14 years of civil war."

And I said, "Listen, we're going to look at the criteria and see how we can get Liberia to check enough green boxes to qualify. You and I will come up with a plan that is going to get those boxes checked."

He said, "OK! Let's do it." We worked together. We came up with a plan.

Then we got the relevant ministers (the education minister, the health minister, all the ministers that we needed) and said, "All right, these are the boxes that we're going to

need to check in order to get MCC. This is how we are going to get there. We have specific actions for each of you”. In a year and a half, we’d qualified for the MCC threshold program. We worked long hours. We knew every indicator and how to put the right resources into the right places to make change happen. I must admit, we were proud of ourselves.

And then, a year or so after that, Liberia qualified for the regular MCC program. By that time, I had already left Liberia, but Amara called me up. He said, “You know, we did this together.” We really, really did. He told me “this never would’ve happened without you, because you knew how the system worked.” That was true because I had helped Mali and Tanzania with their MCC programs as well. I knew the MCC inside and out and many of the major players back in DC.

So overall, I had been a key player in getting MCC for three countries, Mali, Tanzania, and then Liberia. Liberia was by far the biggest challenge because they’d been through such hell.

Six months after I arrived in Haiti, I said to the prime minister, who was smart, “Listen, I did this with the Minister of Plan in Liberia. We started from point zero too. And we can make this happen in Haiti if we have a good plan and hold people really responsible.” He nodded and said all the right things, but I just couldn’t get them cracking like I did in Liberia. The prime minister said he thought it was a good idea, but he just could not seem to make sure the resources were put in the right places to make change happen. At the time, he also had millions coming in from Venezuela so perhaps the MCC money wasn’t quite as essential. I think it could have been done, but you cannot accomplish real change without committed individuals that follow a detailed plan. If they don’t follow the plan, there must be some sort of consequences. In Liberia, the Minister took the MCC very seriously. Of course, Sirleaf was right on top of it too. If one of the ministries was not making progress, she would be on the phone demanding accountability. She knew everything that we were doing. Could never get that kind of leadership in Haiti.

The president of Haiti was very concerned with the homeless and the tent cities, roads, schools, etc., but he did not pay particular attention to the fight for MCC, partly because he gave that to his prime minister. The prime minister said all the right things but just didn’t hold the whip as Amara did. Of course, the Venezuelan money did not have conditions, the MCC has lots of strings. Liberia respected that, Haiti did not.

Haiti wasn’t so desperate at the time because they were rolling in Petro Caribe money. There’s one category for MCC called investing in people. You have to get at least three or four of those six boxes green. This category is about investing in education and health systems. And they could never get more than two. Sometimes they would get one in a year and not the next. There was a decent plan of how we were going to check the boxes but no discipline. We just never got there unfortunately. Now I think they’re farther away than they ever were.

Q: But OK, to go back to the plan you had, so it's jobs. I guess there were still efforts at the replacement of housing. Before you go into the specific programs, you were there with UN. Who else were the big ones that you worked with, the big donors or development actors?

WHITE: I was going to say World Bank. But it was the UN. They had a huge operation and lots of money. Plus, they had the peacekeeping force there, which is always a double-edged sword. Liberia had one too. It's a mixed bag, because they're unwieldy. They have thousands of troops from all over the world. There's maybe 500-1000 from each nation. They're Sri Lankan; they're Chinese; they're Brazilian, they're Nigerian. None of them speak the same language. They're trained differently from one nation to the next. To get them to the point of acting as a single unit is impossible. I was going to say nearly impossible but forget the nearly. It is just impossible. And they're far from home. They are lonely, many have never been around black people before and are racist. Most have no idea how to interact with the host nation. They tend to be men although in Liberia, there was one delegation from Bangladesh that was all women. But in any case, they tend to be all men, and they tend to get in trouble. There are rumors of rape and misconduct that are always swirling around.

Q: In fact, you're right. Not too long ago, there was a scandal about sexual harassment, sexual predation among the UN soldiers against the Haitians.

WHITE: We had many alleged rapes. A recent study says hundreds if not thousands of Haitian children were born during the UN presence many to very young girls. A deadly cholera epidemic was caused by the UN. After three years, the UN finally admitted that it was indeed spread by UN troops. The UN attempted to make some reparations by establishing a very ambitious anti-cholera campaign, but the UN needs to raise money from member states to support such a campaign and the donors weren't really interested. Before this outbreak, Haiti had never had a case of cholera, so they were really caught with no resources to combat it. They did a hell of a job with the help of such fabulous doctors as Dr. Pape, but they were running against time.

UN forces are messy. Don't get me wrong, they can make a huge difference in the safety for the citizens, but it's a model that is fraught with problems in every country. They're organized as a peacekeeping force. They're not fighting forces. In Haiti, they were authorized to use force under very strict guidelines. If riots broke out as they did often, the peacekeepers were there but they never fired any ammunition. Overall, I think this is a good thing. They're valuable in the keeping the peace. In addition, they contribute to development goals. In Haiti they did a tremendous amount of work rebuilding roads and getting rid of rubble. They had incredible assets: trucks, helicopters and clinics and heavy equipment. In Liberia for many years they operated the only nationwide radio station which was invaluable. But they're also incredibly expensive. The GREAT Brazilian general who oversaw all the UN troops in Haiti and was a genius told me that they system was flawed in many ways because of the language and training barriers. He only truly trusted his own Brazilian troops. Of course, citizens of the countries where they are assigned often dislike them as do heads of government. They tend to take away any sense

of sovereignty. No country wants to see soldiers from another country patrolling the streets. Just think how Americans would react to seeing Nigerian soldiers on our streets.

Just before I left Haiti, Samantha Powers the US Ambassador to the UN came down to discuss pulling most of the UN troops out of Haiti. I made a formal and vocal plea to let the troops remain in Haiti until after the election for president. An election that was scheduled for the next four to six months. All the ambassadors felt that leaving the troops there was essential since we knew there was bound to be violence surrounding the elections, there always is. I felt especially the huge investments made by US taxpayers should be protected through the elections. Ambassador Powers had very different ideas and she also vocally expressed her belief that it was time to pull the plug on UN troops in Haiti. When I publicly stated my opinion (which did not match hers) she was very upset with me and took me aside in a private room and read me the riot act. I told her she looked at the UN troops question through a world lens, but my lens was Haiti and my job was to express as clearly as I could what I thought was in the best interests of the USA in Haiti. She was NOT pleased but I stuck to my guns. By the time I left, the troops were drawing down sharply. Now there's only a few hundred left, if that.

The UN had a huge development operation as well. Hundreds of staff were in PAP working in Quonset huts. They were spread over acres. They had some education and health money, a huge justice budget. They were working through the justice system with some small successes. The World Bank was very active, lots of money. Hundreds of NGOs, maybe thousands of them were active if you counted all the religious groups.

There was a lot of money going into Haiti. Everywhere you looked, there was evidence of it. Donors were building schools, roads, government offices and clinics. The United States of America and France had agreed to build a new hospital, which when I left, they had just started pouring the foundation. But certainly, progress was being made. The French were very active, as were the Germans. The IMF was there too and engaged.

It was complicated. We had a small donors group that was very active. However, the larger donor group was not well coordinated. I told the prime minister (which he tried to do to varying degrees of success) that real donor coordination should not be done by donors. It should be done by the government. In the best of all possible worlds, the host government should get the donors in the room and tell the donors the host government's priorities. That is how it should work but almost never does. The only country that this ever worked in was Liberia because Sirleaf made sure of it. SHE had the master plan and got all the donors to buy into it and then held us accountable. If USAID had not accomplished what we said we would by an agreed upon deadline, she would call me out. I loved it.

Q: (laughs)

WHITE: Haiti was one of the original 13 PEPFAR countries, so they had a lot of HIV money.

The streams of money flowing in from the USG were better rounded in Haiti than they are in most countries. There was education and economic growth money. There was also governance money, which we spent a lot on working with the parliament and the justice system and prison reform. All three DG targets were uphill battles because the needs were so great, and the corruption was so deep. We wanted to give training and workshops and they wanted new computers and cars.

We were always bumping our heads against the wall, for example, trying to get a more systemized approach to writing laws for the country. It was a tough, tough environment. At one point we just stopped the program all together. We could see that NO progress was being made in updating the codes while all the lawmakers were travelling to the States with so-called administrative aids.

The minister of justice was one of my best friends, just fabulous guy. A very bright lawyer trained in Canada. He took me out to lunch the week before I left, and he said, “You know, Pam, truthfully of all the judges in this country, there are maybe two that I trust that won’t take a bribe”. Corruption in Haiti was everywhere —probably one of the most discouraging things that I had to deal with. There were many encouraging aspects as well, but that was discouraging. Although for every discouraging aspect, there was always a ray of sunshine. The minister of Health, Florence (Duperval Guillaume) and I, worked very well together. She and my late husband who passed away many years ago were both doctors, and they knew each other back in the ‘80s. She and I were very close. She was tireless, did great work. We did see some key indicators changing under her. But she needed a lot more money to establish health systems and to train mid wives and nurses. The prime minister focused the Petro Caribe money on huge buildings that could never be maintained, and she didn’t get much from that pot.

There were so many heroes in Haiti. In 2018, I was in New York at this gala celebrating the achievements of Dr. William Papp. And he ran—runs to this day HIV, tuberculosis and cholera centers around the country. He has established maybe the finest TB clinic in the world. He never gets discouraged. He’s world-renowned. He’s just one of these heroes that make it bearable. He’s always optimistic. Whenever he could see I was getting discouraged he would say “Pam, we’re making progress. Come over here. I want to introduce you to my students who are down here for six months. They’re from Cornell or Harvard. They love it here. They’re doing all this great work in my clinic.” And he was right, they DID love it and they were making a difference.

I could see the changes that were coming about in people’s lives because of people like Florence and Bill and Paul Farmer and many hundreds of others who are dedicated and not corrupt and never give up.

Q: So, let’s go back for a second to the top priority, which is jobs. How did that work out?

WHITE: It worked out. You know, USG did a lot. In the short term, before I got there, USAID paid for thousands of day jobs. We would pay in cash for people to pick up the

garbage or the rubble or put up tents. But by the time I got there in August of 2012 (the earthquake happened in January 2010) the program was closed. It wasn't a bad program because right after the earthquake those skills were needed, and we also wanted to get some quick cash into the economy. It was a much better program than teaching women how to make bead necklaces like we have done in some other countries after a tragedy. At least they were employed doing something useful BUT these were not long-term employment jobs that were sustainable. We were not teaching skills that could be used in the future to rebuild Haiti. We just needed to get some money in the pockets of those without any access to cash and were mostly homeless. I'm not real big on short-term solutions to problems. But in that case, I thought that was necessary.

When I arrived, most of our training was targeted to Haitians we had targeted to work in the manufacturing sector: garment factories, sewing together jeans and T-shirts, underwear, etc. The idea was to build an industrial park in the north and draw people away from Port-au-Prince, which was so overcrowded and with little housing. USAID also had hundreds of projects that spent between five to twenty thousand dollars all over the country that were long-term but without high impact. One of my favorite projects was building recreations parks that gave children a safe place to play. Those also improved the morale of the communities. We did similar projects in Liberia after the war. The do feel good, they are popular with both the host country and American taxpayers because you can SEE progress. HOWEVER, I would much rather spend US tax dollars on projects that have some potential for long-term change and sustainability – like skills training. Would not show immediate results, but the impact I think would be much greater over time.

We were hoping that at the end of three years, by the time I left in 2015, that there would be 20,000 jobs. There about 8,000. Right now, there's about 11,000. So little by little, it grew. Everything was harder than we thought it was going to be. We built housing but the contractor used substandard materials, so we had leaking during the rainy season. We trained women, but many dropped out due to family responsibilities. We built a compound but didn't build a school or a recreation center or place to worship. Providing adequate housing is a lot more than just building houses.

Q: Now before you even get to the rebuilding, was there a center that sent out what the actual titles were and where land, you know, claims were. Had that been settled?

WHITE: Yes and no. It was always controversial. The USG claimed they paid everyone who had lived on the land where the houses were eventually built three or four times what the land was worth. I am not sure exactly to this day. It seems at the time the money was paid, everyone was happy, but when the farmers realized they didn't have a new place to plant their crops, they grew dissatisfied. For years after the houses were built, those farmers were still insisting they were treated unfairly and wanted more money. The deeds to the houses were originally given to the Haitian government as I remember it. The inhabitants would pay a minimum rent over five years and then they would own the house. By the time I had left no deeds had been transferred to individuals because five years had not passed since they had moved into the houses. Every time I visited the

compound there were many requests for improvements including lowering or eliminating the rent. Frankly, I am not a fan of the USG building permanent housing in third world countries. USAID built hundreds of houses. They were small houses, maybe 900 square-foot or so with very small back yards and originally no school or community center or church. The question of who would live in the houses was very complex and negotiations went on for months. It had been done by the time I got there.

The houses were built with a lot of input I was told from the community, but the grumbling started as soon as the first twenty were built. Many said they wanted three bedrooms, or a bigger kitchen or living room. None of this surprised me because I had gone through the exact same thing when we built housing in South Africa. The South Africans complained they didn't have enough land to dry their clothes or plant small gardens. Haitians said the same thing. The system that was used to choose people to live in the houses was also flawed. It was quite complex with lots of criteria, including the ability to pay a small amount of rent. What was not taken into consideration was community structures. People and families who had lived side by side their entire lives were separated because many families did not meet the qualifications. The people selected said they had to have a school (the Koreans finally built one) and an activity center and a church. All reasonable requests that were just not thought about in the original planning. These houses were built outside the city and it was true the young people didn't have a lot to do out there and they didn't have the money to go into town. The housing compound was not popular at all with the young, unmarried people.

In another community where we started a housing project, the complaining started before people even moved into the houses. They had the same list of complaints. Although the houses we built appeared to be better than what an average Haitian lived in, they really were not. Neighbors were alienated, the locations were too far from work or social activities, the parcels didn't allow for any outside activities, and on and on. Even the design of the houses looked dandy to Americans, but not "normal" to Haitians (SAME THING IN SOUTH AFRICA). After about two years of building houses, I said, "Let's stop doing this. We are forcing people to live next door to someone they might not like (in the north we were choosing the inhabitants based on who was working in the factory or could pay a little rent, not who was related or a good neighbor). This concept is not working. People resent having housing forced on them. They want communities not just houses. There is a big difference". The minister of plan and one of USAID's superstars (Chris Ward) agreed with me. We three decided we would invest in building the required systems that would support housing – like sanitation and access to water and electricity connections. Let them build their own houses, because this is a losing battle. No two people want the same house. No two families are alike. We're not building communities. We're building sterile environments and people just do not like it. So that is what we did going forward. We did this in a new community (Connan) that grew up after the earthquake. It isn't perfect, but it's still going strong today. That community has barber shops and small grocery stores and churches – a vibrant feeling exists. It just goes to prove you cannot just build houses out in the middle of nowhere and think the inhabitants will be happy. Decent housing means a lot more than simple structures. I just heard from Chris (December 2019) and he said attacking the housing problems of Haiti with me and the Minister of Plan was one of

the great memories (and successes) of his entire career. He calls it inspirational. I call it common sense based on lessons I had learned way back in South Africa.

If I took you to visit Connan, you'd say, "Wow, this looks like another slum." But it really isn't. It's much better planned. It's much cleaner. They have established committees to maintain the canals and the water supply. In the end, we stopped building housing and went for the city planning side of it, which turned out to be much more effective and a better use of taxpayer money.

Q: OK.

WHITE:

In the north industrial park, we were hoping to have more than just the garment factories. And in the end, we did. We had a paint company that moved up there. We had somebody that was making specialty soaps. By the time I left, there were maybe six or seven other vendors that had moved into the industrial park.

One of the early problems we had was attracting established garment factories from Port au Prince to expand up north. I asked many of the factory workers in Port-au-Prince, "Would you be willing to move up to a factory in the north?"

And almost 100 percent said, "Absolutely not. What am I going to do up there? My family's down here." Saturday night, my favorite night club is next door. Sunday, my church is a mile away and all my friends attend. I adore the priest." It was like asking them to go to another country almost.

And so, we had to train all the workers for the north. USAID paid for this training for the first three years, then the Korean owners paid. USAID was interested in offering incentives for factories to establish bases in the north, but it was a hard sell. There wasn't a good port, there wasn't good local transport and the industrial park was a long way from restaurants and night clubs. On paper, it was an interesting concept. A famous economist named Paul Collier, basically wrote most of the plan and he thought of most things like housing and electricity and warehousing and a new port. He didn't take into consideration that he was writing a plan for Haiti and how extremely difficult it is to execute even simple plans in such a complex country with a very little skilled labor. I don't think he really thought through either the relative isolation of the park. The basic idea was that to make a society function, people must have decent jobs. If they have decent jobs, they can pay taxes. Taxes go into creating a budget that can provide essential services like education and health care and security. He is right, but that path in a country like Haiti is very long and winding to say the least.

Q: Was there any thought, was there any value in the potential creation of solar, given the fact that they're in the Caribbean, and they get a lot—

WHITE: Some people were doing solar. The power plant that we put up had a fair amount of solar as part of it. The problem with solar is it's a lot trickier than you think to maintain correctly. In Haiti, we were having some luck with it. It's also somewhat delicate. We were experimenting with solar in Mali when I was there. We even had a little solar factory in Mali. The panels need to be secure. In one village the panels that were supposed to be connected to a pump for a well and a garden hose were taken by the mayor to power his television. They also need to be clean. In Mali the minute the Harmattan came (the sandstorms that blow across the Sahara Desert), the panels stopped functioning.

I'd been talking about solar when I was first in Haiti in the '80s. I said, "Let's do solar. Let's do solar." But back then, it was so expensive. You'd have to do a 20-year turnaround in order to pay for the cost. I said, "In the end, it'll still be worth it." But I couldn't get Washington to agree. The costs have now come down enough to give solar serious consideration although a strong storm or certainly a hurricane will rip those tiles right off a house.

And wind, too, they were experimenting with wind. I always thought wind had more potential, but people don't like it. They don't like the big windmills because they are not visually appealing. But there's a lot of wind in Haiti. Some creative businessmen were thinking about putting some windmills way out in the sea. There's now potential to do that. Not sure what is happening, but great strides are being made.

In fact, at the University of Maine, where I teach, they're doing a lot of experiments in that right now. It looks very hopeful.

Q: Right. OK, so you're (unintelligible) the infrastructure. And oh, what about reforestation, or at least ground cover.

WHITE: Yes, we were doing some of that. When I was there in the '80s, we were planning 10 million trees a year, and we were losing the battle. Because they would grow the trees two feet high, and then they'd use them for charcoal. We did have, finally, a really good alternative stove that we were pushing in 2015, especially for commercial use. Meaning that if you cook for more than your family, like an outdoor restaurant, we would supply an efficient cookstove for very little money. The women who ran these restaurants were smart businesswomen, they wanted to cut back on their wood costs. They didn't care so much about conservation, but they cared about profits.

The women would use them because they were a lot less expensive for them. But the fact of the matter is that women are judged on how well their cooking tastes in Haiti—same as in Africa. It doesn't taste the same if it is cooked with a charcoal brick made of some synthetic material as it does with a charcoal log. The flavor is very important to the women. You must develop a product that makes them proud of the food that they produce for their families. That's still a rough one. The larger cooking stoves we were selling to the commercial cooks were mostly used to boil water for rice and potatoes and soup, so

the taste wasn't so critical. They also used charcoal not synthetics, just more efficiently. We supplied little cookstoves to all the families in one small housing complex we built. We gave them a month's worth of free propane, but they didn't use it. The day I visited, the little propane tank sat on a lonely shelf. The charcoal fire was burning bright.

Any alternative must be affordable. Most women buy charcoal by the day or every other day as that is all they can afford. If they work selling vegetables or trinkets or griot, they get paid by the day. They don't have the cash to buy even a small propane tank. In all the countries where I served most people buy small amounts of consumables. Trevor Noah talks about this in his book *Born a Crime*. Cigarettes are sold one by one, the tiniest liquor bottles are the most popular, gasoline is sold by the pint in tin cans.

Q: Wow.

WHITE: Yeah.

Q: Was this the era of the clean cook stoves?

WHITE: Hillary Clinton was a huge supporter of clean cook stoves. The concept of wood stoves is excellent: they save women labor from collecting wood, they save trees and they are more economical. The problem is that most of them are hated by the women. They cook too fast; the smell is terrible, and the flavor of the food is worse. There were several cook stoves already in use all through Haiti which many different donors funded. USAID tested them all. And the one that we came up with was very practical – especially for use in small restaurants and roadside eateries. It still used wood, so the taste was there, but it used a lot less wood. I was optimistic at first. But just like every other time I have experimented with wood stoves over the past 25 years, the beginning goes like gangbusters and then the sales slow, then stop.

I admit USAID managed to distribute many cook stoves in Haiti to women who were both cooks and businesswomen because they realized they could save real money by cutting down on wood costs. After a year, sales slowed but definitely progress was made.

In order to discourage people from cutting down trees as soon as they grew to two feet, we decided to plant acres and acres of fruit trees in the belief that perhaps they would not cut down the fruit trees because they could sell the fruit. We also connected these farmers with supermarkets and other vendors in Port au Prince so they would have some place to sell their produce. Again, we had some success, BUT people still needed charcoal to heat during the cool season and to cook. We also had some challenges with storage and decent transportation to market. TOUGH.

Q: You know, this is a stupid question, but I must ask. Is there any way to change the food acceptability? In other words, to introduce different kinds of food that are good that people like but that don't use the forest for cooking.

WHITE: USAID has done more and more of that over the last ten years. Donors have pushed the importance of eating bananas and mangoes, even raw vegetables like carrots and cucumbers. We were making SOME progress there too, but you are not going to wean Haitians off traditional and delicious hot food any time soon. Good thought though. Let me tell you a little side story. Once a month at the Embassy, I would have meetings for the entire staff which I would give in English. I noticed that all the higher graded Haitian staff and all the American staff would attend but not the janitors, drivers, mechanics, plumbers, etc. And I really wanted them to feel part of the team. I asked a lot of questions and was told two things: they were working during this monthly meeting and they could not follow the English. I decided to have a special meeting, early in the day, just for them. Each month I would have a different topic and guest speakers in Creole. They LOVED those meetings and so did I. I often bought in the most famous Haitian mimes and they would put on hilarious but meaningful plays. They put on one about family planning and safe sex which was hilarious. They were both men, but one dressed up as women with BIG everything. You laughed before they even began. But they got the message across that too many babies were unhealthy for their wives and their children. Those mimes were VERY suggestive, sex was not a taboo topic in their plays. Another discussion (no comics) was about how to lower your blood pressure (we had two nurses taking their blood pressure in a side room) and it was based on changing their diets. They nodded and agreed but I don't think they changed their eating habits too drastically. I remember asking how many had eaten a banana in the past week and perhaps two hands out of 100 went up. Once the meeting was about how to be a better spouse. I still laugh just thinking about how the mime dressed as a woman would gesture for her lazy husband to please help her cut the vegetables or wash the dishes and how he would react so negatively. Finally, through gestures and grimaces and smiles, the "woman" convinced her spouse that he had to help or be cut off from her loving nature. Their message was clear: help me around the house or no sex. We all laughed so hard, because they were indeed funny. But then I got serious and I would ask what they had learned and to name ONE thing they could change. That the US Ambassador was sitting with them, talking about personal issues was simply a HOOT to them. And they loved it. After two or three of these meetings, the people who weren't even invited would start coming, because they could hear the laughter all through the embassy.

Q: Yeah, sure. I understand. Creole French is actually now Haitian? It's its own language.

WHITE: Yes.

Q: Was there value in sort of beginning to put everything into Creole?

WHITE: Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. I had to be down there by August, so I only took a month of Creole at FSI. And it's very easy. There are no verb tenses. I could do a simple interview in it, but I wish I'd taken it for four or five months. When I was in Tanzania, I wished I'd taken Swahili. Because if you go outside the capital city in Port-au-Prince, no one speaks French. Everyone speaks Creole. If you go outside Dar (Dar-es-Salaam), no one speaks English. They all speak Swahili. If you are going to be in the public eye all

the time and you are lucky enough to live in a place that has one unifying language, you must learn that language.

In Tanzania, everyone speaks Swahili. And in Haiti, everyone speaks Creole. If you want to go on the radio and really get a message across, you've got to do it in the language everyone speaks. If I really wanted to kick off, say, the national vaccination day with the minister of health, I would definitely do it in Creole. There was no sense in doing it in French. You would get nowhere. My wonderful staff would have great, big phonetic signs for me to read if I was in public. If I was doing it on the radio, no one could see my big clumsy signs.

I said to AID when I left Tanzania, "Don't send anybody out here again without five months of Swahili. Of course, they did. I tried to teach myself. I bought Rosetta Stone. But I was so busy. I said over and over, "I swear to god, I'm going to spend an hour a day learning Swahili." But I just didn't. My top priority was to get out of the office and SEE the country and the projects and ask questions. And on the road, it is nearly impossible to study a new language. STILL I would have been a better representative of the American people if I had learned both Swahili and Creole. It is VERY important.

Q: At this point, I learned that when I was trying to get my certification for teaching English as a second language, that Creole now—Creole-Haitian—is the language and in fact at this point, there are a few people who are beginning to write literature in it. So, it's a real language, and it's no longer a "Creole-French". It has developed so far that it's its own organic language, and it's now beginning to develop as an individual language. So, I guess, the more that we can communicate with them in what their native language is now is going to help as well.

WHITE: Yes, of course.

Q: But the other kind of general question that I had for you, looking out at trying to create the development—all the different development things—were there first-time actors who were leaders? Were you able to find people who were able to say, "Yeah, I can sort of take this over and have an impact on my community"?

WHITE: Yes, there were a lot of young people, especially in their early 20s to their mid-30s, who would stand up and say they wanted to make a difference. And you know, a lot of it did happen at the community level, the real changes. Young people in Haiti were just like young people everywhere—they wanted a better life than their parents.

But everything takes money. They were not afraid of working hard. Absolutely not. Haitians have a wonderful reputation in the United States of being very hard workers. And they are. However, it turns out development is complex. It not only takes money but time and expertise. For example, if you want to improve the bottom line for farmers you may give them better seeds and fertilizer. OK, that's easy. But you need more than one kind of seeds and you need training. You may need insecticides and you certainly need tools to plant and sow and warehouses to store. You need markets and means to access

those markets, including transport. You need skilled labor. We did a wonderful job of establishing farming associations in the US that employed extension agents who had great expertise and access to funding. It takes YEARS to train an outstanding extension agent. And they need access to funding and inputs and transportation and expertise. What we tend to do in USAID is to take up several pieces of the development spectrum, but we are not good at covering the entire network needed for success including the sustainability piece. We talk a lot about sustainability of our efforts, but it is so very difficult. When I first took over the directorship of the USAID program in Liberia, I sent someone to do research on the hundreds of signs that said USAID. Of the 100 signs we looked at, two or three had any evidence that USAID had ever been there. A lot of this was because the projects were implemented right after the war and were designed to have instant impact, not necessarily make a long-term difference. I still thought our money even after the war would have been better spent training the young men to be electricians or brick layers or whatever needed to rebuild Liberia. In Haiti, we did have a good plan that was intended to encompass the whole chain needed to establish a new industrial park. Some of it was realized, but many of the key pieces turned out to be extremely challenging. We never built the port, so exporting was difficult and expensive. Skilled labor was hard to train and hard to retain. Corruption was ever present.

Habitat for Humanity—you know, President Carter’s (former U.S. president James Earl “Jimmy” Carter, Jr.) organization—hired and trained many young people to run their communities who would blow your socks off. So, did many of the religious groups and NGOs. There was a huge amount of hope in Haiti right after the earthquake and for four or five years after. Sean Penn’s organization truly was impressive. He was dedicated to his NGO and did a lot of good. Before I ever met him, some young officer in DC came running up to me telling me that the GREAT Sean Penn was in Haiti and I HAD to meet him. I don’t have a lot of patience with celebrities. I tend to think they take up way too much time and accomplish little. I was not impressed. After I had been in Haiti for a month, Penn’s staff called the US embassy and said he MUST see me soon. I set up at meeting the following night at the residence. I told my bartender to serve us both gin and tonics but to serve him REALLY strong drinks and me very weak drinks. Sean and I and his director of operations talked for three hours. The drinks kept coming. It was obvious to me how committed and compassionate he was about rebuilding Haiti. He was smart, funny, knowledgeable. I told him straight out that I had had no interest really in meeting him (except that he was one of my favorite actors ever) but I had changed my mind. He really was making a difference. As he slightly staggered to the door he remarked “I “WOVE” you madam ambassador.” And I said, “well I sure hope you wove me in the morning’. He did. He invited me to Hollywood to give a keynote speech to all his actor friends at a big fundraiser. I received a standing ovation from Anderson Cooper and Julia Roberts and Michael Douglas, etc. etc. etc. Both my sons and their wives and my husband were with me. A magical night indeed. Yet another night that I will never forget was in a small village about two hours outside Port au Prince. President and First Lady Jimmy Carter were in Haiti for three days to participate in putting the final touches on 75 houses the Habitat for Humanity was building for earthquake victims. When I arrived at the site that morning, I was immediately given a painting coverup and a paint brush and assigned a number that designated the house that I was to paint that day. I was a teamed

with a Haitian man who would eventually live in that house. The construction was done but painting inside and out had to be completed that day. The house was small, but I was still a tad overwhelmed. I donned my outfit and began painting the inner walls. About an hour later a supervisor came by and asked if I was afraid of heights and I responded in the negative. Five minutes later I found myself standing on a somewhat shaky scaffold, painting the outside eaves. Around one o'clock President Carter wandered by and yelled out a greeting. I said it was great to see him. He said he would like to have lunch with me, but I had to finish the house first. I was literally covered in light blue paint. I laughed and said he might have to wait a while. He said he would, and he did. We had a wonderful lunch talking about all the political hot topics of the day. We agreed 100 percent of the time. Later just after sunset the crew set up a makeshift stage and who appeared out the shadows but perhaps my most favorite singer in the world, Garth Brooks and his wife, Trisha Yearwood. The two of them with only their guitars for accompaniment sang for well over an hour under the stars. Jimmy Carter sang every song right along with them. When asked if he had a request, he said "friends in low places". We all joined in the chorus with great enthusiasm. I was sitting right in the front row next to Jimmy Carter on one side and Rosalyn on the other. Garth was maybe ten feet in front of us. It was one of the best nights of my life.

When money started to wind down (especially the money from Venezuela), and the UN pulled out, hope started waning also. In December of 2019, the same 25 Haitian families still own 80 percent of more of the wealth. The justice system is still corrupt. The political system is dysfunctional. Children haven't been in school for months. SIGH.

Q: What about the American Diaspora? Were they at all—

WHITE: Huge. They put something like \$800 million a year into the Haiti budget. I just pray that DACA is extended. I met with maybe 50 Haitian Americans in Boston. I met with them in New York and Florida. They are great groups, very social. They say they want to get more involved in perhaps pooling their money for greater effect, but I wonder. Their families left in Haiti are counting on that money. They don't want it in some black hole. I DO think they would like to be more involved in political issues, but they sure don't want to move back in order to do it. They visit Haiti for two or three weeks a year, and they go see their families. They visit, and eat, and catch up on politics and family gossip. Then they go right back to their homes in the US because they are Americans.

After every meeting the leader of these groups I would visit would tell me the USG didn't listen to them enough. I would say that I was all ears. I would write my official email in big letters on the blackboard or wall. I bet I heard from five of them and all five wanted help with visas for family members. BUT they were serious about sending money back to Haiti and they did and still do. The temporary status (post-earthquake 2010 U.S. Temporary Protected Status) has been expanded. It's going to stop in 2020 for Haitians. I have spoken out loudly that returning 50,000 Haitians who are sending huge remittances back to Haiti is going to have a HUGE impact on the stability of Haiti – say nothing of

the poverty levels. Those remittances add up to more money per year than the USG is giving. Maybe all the donors combined are giving.

The biggest form of aid—or whatever you want to call it—is coming from the Diaspora. And like you said, they’re an interesting group. I haven’t met every last one. But I met lots of groups.

I went to a rally in New York with President Martelly where he sang. He was there to give a speech to rally the troops, to show the Haitian flag and tell them he was doing a lot for Haiti. He is a gifted showman. They loved the show. They enthusiastically sang and cheered loudly for the national anthem. They danced and chanted. Everything’s great. Of course, in the end, they all went back to their apartments and went back to work the next day.

Q: Yeah, it’s not that different from any other—

WHITE: That’s right. They’re very good people. Incredible people.

There is no doubt whatsoever that progress was made in Haiti. No doubt whatsoever. But so much is yet to be done. The Haitian people including the diaspora get discouraged. They go down to visit and say, “My god, why hasn’t more been done?”

ME: “There was an earthquake here! Wiped out 250,000 people!”

THEY: “Yeah, but wow, the streets are so filthy and crowded.”

ME: “Yes, there’s an enormous amount of people in Port-au-Prince, because that’s where the jobs are.”

It’s hard to quantify the informal sector. All those vendors on the street who are selling everything from underpants to food to tires to tasty food. We think they make a decent living. They work very hard. They’re out there when you go to work in the morning. At 6:30 in the morning, they’re lining the streets. They’re there when you go home at night. They don’t pay taxes, unfortunately. There should be a better way.

In Africa, we were trying to build big market structures so we would get them off the street and put them in a covered clean marketplace. They didn’t want to be inside. “No, thank you. We want to be on the street! Anyone who is going to buy our goods is walking outside, not in some dark market.”

We would drag them to the new site before we built anything. “Look at this beautiful park. You will have plenty of space, you can have access to water and a toilet. You can have your own stall.”

“Nope. No, thank you. Don’t like it.” (laughs)

Q: (laughs)

WHITE: Yeah, not everything you think is a superb concept is necessarily going to work. I remember years ago in Senegal; we had this wonderful new stove that used briquettes that were very efficient. You only needed two or three briquettes every other day. We all thought we had the magic bullet. We were sure all the women were going to love it. We put this whole campaign together. When we finally gave them to the women in the villages, they were immediately suspicious. In loud voices we told them how much they were going to enjoy using these new stoves. They would cook so much faster and prepare more food for their families. They wouldn't have to spend all their time gathering wood. They could save their forests.

The women said in louder voices "We're not using that thing. It smells horrible. The three rocks that we have out here in the back yard where our kitchens are located have been passed down for generations. They bring good luck. We are NOT going to give them up. Our men won't eat food that isn't cooked over charcoal. You will make us look like bad wives". So that was the end of that great idea. Looking back, I think we development experts were inept. We didn't do our research. We didn't ask the very people we were trying to help if our ideas were valid.

We HAVE learned things from our early failures, but we haven't learned enough. I said to the last few (USAID) Administrators, "We haven't learned enough from our failures. Stop writing success stories, document our failures." All experienced USAID professionals have been involved in a project that just didn't work. We need to make sure we pass down that knowledge. I don't think we do this well.

Being ambassador to Haiti was truly an enormous challenge. Yet, there could not have been a better way for me to end my career. I worked very hard and I did a difficult job well. You know, I'm still working, still consulting. But I don't feel any desire to ever work that hard again, although I would've worked for Hillary if she'd been elected.

Q: Are you still working on development issues?

WHITE: Yes. What I'm really studying a lot right now in working with my students at university—my grad (graduate) students—at University of Maine is extremism in the Sahel. And these extremist groups, of which there are 10, 12, 14 different kind of rogue groups—some of them don't have more than 500 members, if that. Others are much more highly developed like Boko Haram in Nigeria. But these terrorist extremist groups are driving people out of their communities in droves.

Europe is very, very concerned about terrorism in the entire continent. The EU (European Union) just recently committed a billion dollars to the Sahel over four or five years. The World Bank has almost that much money being invested there. We have much less, which I think is short sighted. We've got some of our troops all over West Africa right now. Most Americans don't know it, but they're in many countries. They're in Mali. They're in Niger. They're in Nigeria.

Population growth is truly worrisome. Population growth is still exploding in some countries like Niger, which has the highest population growth on Earth—6.5 babies per woman to this day. If the USA doesn't take Chinese and Russian expansion into all of Africa seriously, if we don't have a long-term vision on how to combat terrorism and control population growth, I see problems ahead. If we don't confront all three issues, all hell is going to break loose in the next 20 years.

It is also shortsighted to not invest in Africa. They have the fastest growing middle class in the world. USAID should be giving incentives to American private sector to invest. I truly believe it will pay huge rewards in the long run. In the meantime, both China and Russia are establishing businesses and factories throughout the continent.

Q: Right, I mean the current capacity is already probably beyond where—

WHITE: Already there are shortages of water and food. Usable land is shrinking daily. I am not exaggerating. What are they going to do with their livestock? I foresee civil wars over access to land and water. We need a billion dollars for family planning in the Sahel—yesterday. We need a more aggressive stance. We need to say, “You should only have three kids.” We can't continue to say they can have as many children as they want, just space them. That is not aggressive enough. No, that shouldn't be the message. The message should be, “Three is perfect. Stop at three.” We need a stronger message.

It is hard to get political will behind family planning. Even Ellen Johnson Sirleaf used to tell me, talking about family planning is political suicide, because people have children because they're their social security. That's their insurance.

I understand that mentality, especially in countries where infant mortality is high. But it's going to be their death knell if this keeps up. If they're having seven kids, those seven are having seven more. It doesn't take long to deplete all the natural resources. And there's not all that much land that can be farmed in the Nigers and the Malis of the world.

I was having lunch with the (U.S.) ambassador in Mali, and I said, “When I was head of USAID here in Mali, the ambassador then, and I used to get in a Land Cruiser and just take off for the north. No guards, no nothing. She might have had a bodyguard but very minimal security. We would go flying across the Sahel. We would tent on the dunes. We would have feasts with the Tuaregs at dusk. We never thought a damn thing about it.”

And now, the current ambassador can barely drive outside of Bamako. When he flies up north, he's got to have an armored car and bodyguards. He said, “It makes me so sad, because while you had that wonderful experience, no one on my staff is ever going to be able to replicate it, not even me. It's done. The extremists have taken over.” It's sad. It's sad.

Q: Then, at the end of your USAID career, you obviously have insights, lessons learned. What would you recommend now for USAID in two ways? One, in terms of recruitment and retention of talent. And the other, in just basic approach.

WHITE: I've talked a lot about this. The fact of the matter is that the Congress of the United States of America appropriates money, and they say, "This is health money. This is education money. This is economic growth money. And this is governance money." It's even more complicated than that. They say, "This is HIV money. This is malaria money. This is cholera money."

If you see that the big problem in your country is family planning and not malaria, it doesn't matter. Family planning money is so small and malaria money is plentiful, so you get malaria money. There is some primary education money but not much. We have none for secondary or higher education—almost none. We need more. If we're not training people up further than fifth or sixth grade, we're not doing transformational anything. USAID budgets just must be more flexible if they are going to be transformative. Congress needs to step back.

The key word is always, to me, what does this transform? Is this transformative? Are our investments going to truly change (in a sustainable way) the quality of people's lives? When George (W.) Bush dedicated \$15 billion to PEPFAR, he literally saved millions of lives. That effort was transformational.

I am afraid with the decrease in aid funding, our ability to truly deliver sustainable aid programs is dwindling. Mark Green, the current Administrator of AID, is saying, "The name of the game is to get out of aid." And I think it's the right sentiment. But to do that, you need to have countries that have some economic base. To achieve this, we are going to have to grow economies. You can see in a couple of countries in Africa that they really are changing. Ghana is booming. New buildings (schools, hospitals, supermarkets, office space) are everywhere. They're exporting all kinds of goodies to the neighboring countries and to Europe. Ivory Coast is booming again. They've got cocoa, and they've got coffee, and they've got gold. They are even selling electricity.

You can see that those countries do have hope because they have an economic base that they can provide services to their own people. So that's fabulous. The other key ingredient is the governance part of it. People must be able to have a say in their own government. It does not have to be our democracy, which I don't think even works here all that well. But it has to be a democracy where people's voices are heard, however you want to do that.

In my village in Cameroon, every Friday afternoon every villager would meet around three o'clock in the village square. And they would come with their complaints. "I had the best place in the market, and she took it over."

"She's sleeping with my husband."

“I didn’t get seeds from the guy, and he promised.”

All was out in the open. The village elders would hold discussions that all could hear, and all could question. To me, it was the purest form of democracy. This council would get together, and they’d discuss, and they’d say, “OK, you must give her the seeds. And if you sleep with her husband, no one’s going to let you go to the best place on the river where we do the washing (and gossiping). You’re going to have to do the washing up stream.” Whatever the punishment was, everyone would say, “OK.” There were almost never any arguments of disagreements. There weren’t any fisticuffs. Everyone was waiting for Friday afternoon, which was also a form of entertainment. There were lots of laughing, lots of guffawing, lots of, “I don’t know why she’s sleeping with him. He’s got a small penis.”

Q: (laughs)

WHITE: (laughs) It was great fun! You didn’t want to miss this. But it was also democracy at work.

And so, you know, whatever works, then fine.

We should stop trying to sell American democracy around the globe. Let them develop their own systems to ensure civil society is involved and there is a justice system that functions in the best interests of the people. We should work with whatever institutions that exist to serve the people. For example, train the professionals in the ministries, so that those institutions exist regardless of political turnovers or deaths or coups. But the way that Congress allocates the money, the people on the ground don’t have much room to design effective programs built on a country’s specific needs. Like I said, I agree that our job is to get out of aid. But you’re not going to do it if you don’t grow the economies and if you don’t have institutions that have the people’s best interest in mind. Corruption is also a HUGE problem that must be addressed. Those three things are critical. It takes decades to implement solutions to address these key areas.

Q: From when you went to USAID ‘til today, are the skills and the talents and abilities still the same, or are there different ones now that new development officers need?

WHITE: Twenty-five years ago, USAID officers actually implemented programs themselves. My husband’s dad, who was at one point one of the one or two foremost malaria experts in AID, would go on field trips for weeks at a time. He would train people how to drain the swamps, effectively use beds nets and how to test. He told me once he spent at least 50 percent of his time outside the capital city developing capacity. No one does that anymore. The contractors do it all. I feel this is sad, but it is the reality.

We still need our technical experts. We need to know enough so that we are asking the right questions. But the skill area that is really very important today and missing I am afraid is good management skills. I am not saying LEADERSHIP which is entirely different. I am saying we need people that can juggle ten balls at once without getting

overstressed. We still need MPHs (Master of Public Health degrees), and educators and economists, etc. etc. But really, what we're doing is pushing a lot of buttons and making sure that the trains roll on time. This means you have to be highly organized and able to prioritize. You cannot sit on decisions and you must be crystal clear as to your expectations. These are skills that are rare.

The passion is still there. USAID people care desperately. All the people I worked with were fabulous and really cared what they were doing. But I often felt the office directors were poorly instructed on basic management – you must talk to your people. You have to tell them the three things that are the top priorities for the week and the month. You must cheerlead when needed and counsel when required. The new office chiefs really wanted to be successful, but many were struggling. You must set the best example you can of a person who cares deeply about your staff AND their families.

A whole new skill set is concerned with violent extremism office. We never had that 20 years ago. We never thought about it. Most of the people working on extremism are former DG officers so they're learning a lot as they go. The USG is doing studies, more and more research. The UN and the World Bank too. But everyone agrees we are still in the dark about much of the motivation and retention issues. USAID IS or can be a learning organization. When I first joined, no one hardly knew what HIV was. In Haiti we used to talk about it, since it was one of the first places that had a severe outbreak. No one else was talking about it. Now USAID has HIV specialists around the globe.

The key skill sets have changed. But I think the most important thing is that the passion has not changed. The hiring right now has slowed or stopped. That is horrible, horrific. Five years from now, the foreign affair budgets will go up again, and we won't have the skills we need. I'm very worried about that, and at State too. One last thought about skill sets. In the future I believe we will need more contracting officers and economic officers. We need to plan on that immediately. We also need to hire anthropologists. We used to have one at every mission so we would avoid stupid cultural mistakes. We no longer have any at all. Time to do a very in-depth study on what the Agency will look like in twenty years and what skills do we need to get there.

Q: Well, all right. I've come to the end of my questions. Unless you have other parting thoughts, I think we'll end the interview.

WHITE: I am so proud of my colleagues and the foreign service in general. We are the point of the spear. United States foreign policy depends on our judgement and our ability to carry out USG foreign policy. We are good at it, very good. Right now, morale is way down and recruitment is suffering, but this too shall pass. I hope young people don't turn away from joining the foreign service because it is a fascinating career, the truly makes a difference in the world. I have served in some of the toughest countries in the world such as Liberia and Haiti and Mali. I have good friends to this day from every one of those countries. I had great challenges, and failures and successes. I wouldn't change a day. That is the truth. A week ago, my fourth grandchild was born – perfect in every way. I

have a loving husband, two amazing sons married to wonderful women who have produced four precious grandchildren. I take great pride in having served my country for over 40 years. But my real legacy is not the fancy titles or awards or decorations. My true legacy is those four little miracles whom hopefully will one day be proud of their grandmother.

Q: Thank you.

End of interview